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*MY NEIGHBOUR
THE UNIVERSE*
*A STUDY IN PRACTICAL
ETHICS*

L.P. JACKS, D.D., LL.D.

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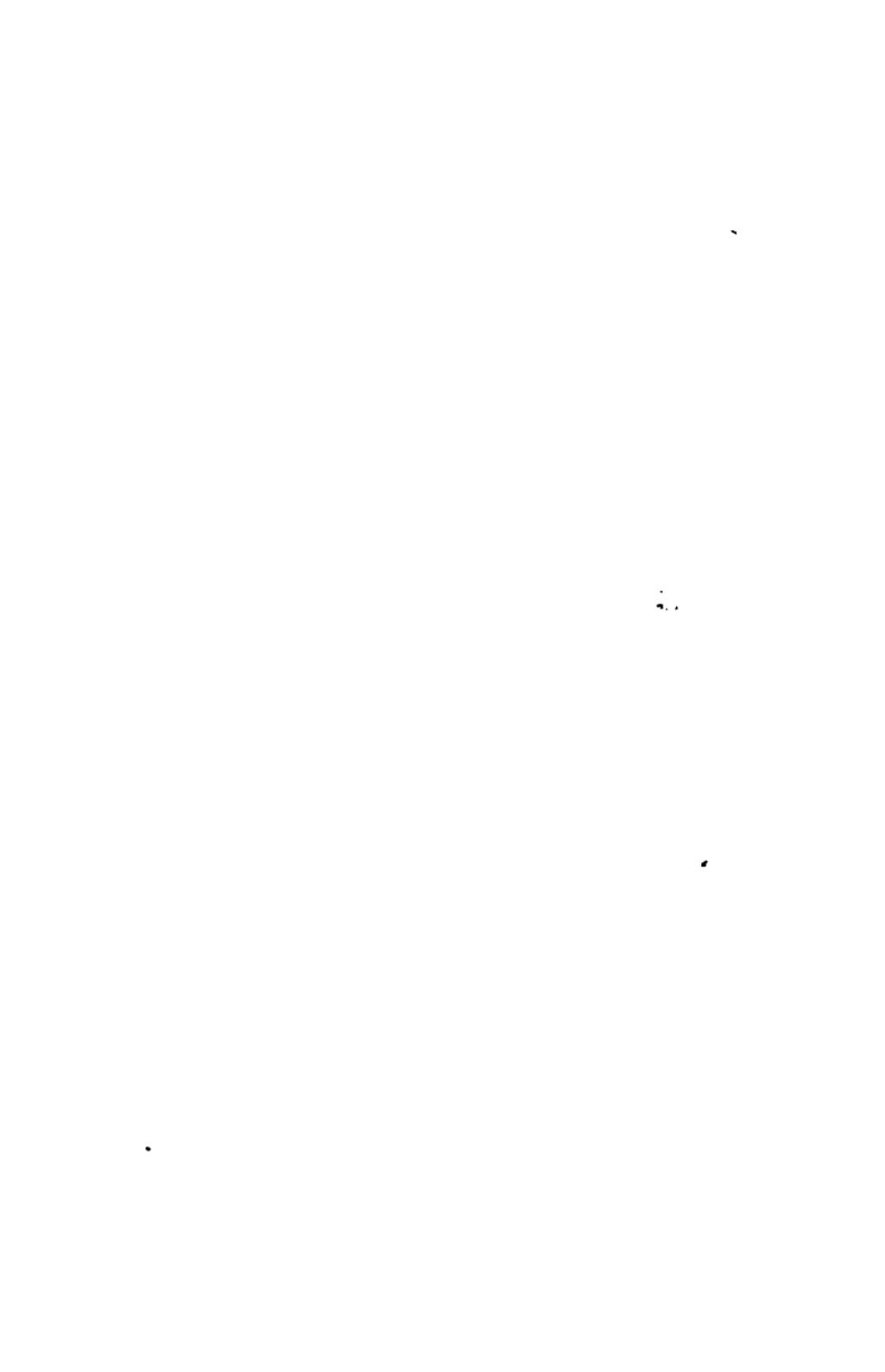
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MY NEIGHBOUR THE UNIVERSE

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My Neighbour The Universe

A STUDY OF HUMAN LABOUR

By

L. P. JACKS, D.D., LL.D.

Author of "Constructive Citizenship," etc.



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CONTENTS

	PAGE
I. THE SCOPE OF RIGHT AND WRONG . . .	7
II. THROUGH THINGS TO PERSONS . . .	24
III. THE BEGINNING OF DUTY . . .	34
IV. THE PRACTICAL OUTCOME . . .	51



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A STUDY OF HUMAN LABOUR

I

THE SCOPE OF RIGHT AND WRONG

IT is customary to discuss the nature of right and wrong as though these terms referred exclusively to the relationships of *human beings with one another* and to the transactions that go on between them. A right action, on this view, is regarded as one that in some way—which philosophers define differently—promotes the interest of *human beings*, their material interests or their spiritual interests or both, including the like interests of the doer himself; a wrong action is one which works in the contrary manner, by doing harm to oneself or to others, or to both. A good man, in like manner, is regarded as one whose presence in the universe is in some way (again differently defined) beneficent to the society of which he and other men are members; while an evil man is one whose presence is maleficent. Morality, in other words, is an affair *between man and man* or, as one might say, a social affair. Human society defines the limits within which morality (and immorality) function, the area within which right and wrong are done. If

you do right, as a human being living in society along with other human beings you are moral; if wrong, you are immoral—so far at least as your actions reveal the kind of man you are.

Thus we often hear it said that our duty is summed up in the command to love our neighbour as ourselves—our neighbour, of course, being a generalized term for other human beings of like nature with our own; and love a general name for the right principle of dealing with them. Our neighbour is always a human person, never a mere thing either big or little. The trees, the stars, the material universe in general are not counted as our neighbours; anybody who commanded us to love *them*, or any one of them, as we love ourselves, would certainly expose himself to ridicule; nor would he fare much better if he brought in the animals without distinction. Some people indeed would be quite willing to have certain noble animals, such as dogs and horses, included in the list of “neighbours” whom we ought to love and perhaps to love as we love ourselves; but even the most devoted of animal lovers would hesitate about poisonous reptiles, parasites and vermin—such as rats, mice and fleas. With exception made for the protest of the animal lover—who usually make further exceptions of his own—right and wrong are popularly conceived of as an affair *between man and man*. Most of the books that are written about ethics take that view.

Now the first point to which I shall try to win assent from the reader of this little book is, that the above notion of morality is far too narrow. Morality, I shall try to persuade him, is much more than an affair between man and man; the scope of right and wrong extends far beyond the boundaries of human society. Though it is

of the utmost importance that men should learn to deal rightly with one another in their social relationships, and though the principles of such right dealing must always form the spear-point of ethics, they are not the whole spear. Our knowledge of right and wrong cannot be separated from the rest of our knowledge; nor can our duty to human beings be separated from our duty to the non-human world. The meaning of right and wrong covers a man's relations to the entire universe and not merely his relations to his brother man in society. A human being has duties to the whole universe in which he finds himself living. Of these duties the chief is to get to understand as much of the universe as he can, and then, in the strength of that knowledge, to do his utmost towards making it a *better* universe than it would have been if he had not happened to be born, by creating some bit of new value, though it be only making two blades of grass grow where one grew before, or mending the broken leg of a sparrow—in other words, by bringing to bear all that he knows about the universe on the guidance of his own conduct as a citizen of it.

Man, of course, is a social being; the individual is nothing apart from society, and society nothing apart from the individual—some of us have heard all that so often that we are getting a little tired of it, having made the discovery that, taken as it stands, it leads us nowhere. But man is much more than a social being in the human sense; he is a cosmic being, and it is only by understanding himself as a cosmic being—or child of the universe—that he can ever understand himself as a social being, or son of man, and learn to behave himself rightly towards the sons of men in general.

Or, which is saying the same thing in another way, the *society* to which man belongs includes not only all the other members of the human race, but the animals, the plants, the sun, moon and stars and the whole realm of inorganic matter. With all these things, animate and inanimate, the life of every one of us is linked, just as it is linked with the lives of our fellows. We depend upon them, just as we depend on our fellows, and they reciprocally depend on us. Men and things form a single interrelated world, from the whole of which—and not from any railed-off enclosure within it—duty derives its meaning and authority. On no other terms can we speak of morality as “universal.”

It is on this universal field that we go wrong or go right; do wrong or do right; are wrong or are right. If we go wrong or do wrong, or are wrong in these universal relationships, the chances are millions to one against our going right or doing right, or being right in the railed-off enclosure of humanity. We cannot be right in the one and wrong in the other.

I suppose it would be agreed by moralists of all schools and by plain men in general, that unqualified selfishness is a vice. There is, indeed, a moral theory called Egoism which puts up a kind of defence for selfishness, but always with qualifications, explanations and refinements, which take the sting out of it and show that the selfishness defended is not the genuine article—not the selfishness of a man who shuts his eyes to the interests of other people and pursues his own irrespective of the damage he inflicts on his fellows. Him nobody defends.

And yet there exists among us, flourishing mightily

and disastrously, a corporate, social, or racial selfishness which is just as indefensible from the moral point of view, but which, notwithstanding, most moralists seem disposed rather to bless than to condemn. I allude to the notion almost universal in these days that the human race is entitled to pursue its own interests irrespective of the damage thereby inflicted on the rest of the creation. We have come to regard it as a kind of axiom, which all good men must acknowledge, that the only thing that really matters in the universe—the only thing we have any duty to concern ourselves with—is what we are pleased to call “the welfare of society.” From the infinity of facts and values that make up the world we have cut out *one* fact, *one* value, or one group of such, named it human society, set it upon a pedestal and decreed that anybody who refuses to “serve” this solitary object picked out from the immensity of being, devote himself to promoting its welfare, and even, in certain teachings, to bow down and worship it, shall be condemned forthwith as a person without morality.

This is the corporate, social, or racial selfishness I have just spoken of. If we look into it narrowly we shall find that it corresponds at all essential points with the personal selfishness we agree in condemning, the only difference being that the “selfish brute” is no longer an individual man, but “society,” or the race at large. In fact, we have allowed ourselves to become infected, in recent times especially, with what I can only describe as a kind of human “class consciousness” in presence of the rest of the universe. Human beings are supposed to form a class apart, isolated, privileged and independent, their class consciousness and their moral consciousness being the same. Within the

limits of that class (a mere speck in the totality of things, facts, and values) we do right or we do wrong; all our rights and duties are there; beyond those limits nothing has any right and nobody has any duties. Of all the phenomena to which human conceit has ever given rise, I count this the most ridiculous. And yet I find it implied in many books on morality that fall into my hands. To get rid of a notion so absurd should be the first effort of everyone who would learn to think sanely about right and wrong.

Historically considered, this notion has had no great success, not even on its own terms and from its own point of view. The kind of welfare that society achieves by concentrating attention on its own welfare, as the only thing that really matters, is bound to be second-rate and poverty-stricken. That individual selfishness is self-defeating nobody needs to be told. Social selfishness is self-defeating for precisely the same reason. No human society has ever prospered, or ever can prosper, by concentrating exclusive attention on its own welfare. Without a certain indifference to its own welfare, without a certain heroic capacity for forgetting all about it in the pursuit of something greater, the life of society, even if international, is bound to be shallow and miserable; while society itself, considered as having no function but to exploit the universe for its own advantage, stands out in colours which can only be described as morally despicable.

The best things human society enjoys at this moment are the result of efforts which have *not* had the welfare of society for their object; while of the worst evils not a few can be directly traced to its corporate selfishness—to its lack of reverence for anything but itself. Social

selfishness in morality, like institutional selfishness in religion, acts as a deadly stranglehold on the spirit of man.

Of the goods possessed by society the best are religion, philosophy, science, and art. These are not the products of the human class consciousness, absorbingly concentrated on the welfare of society. The human class consciousness is fatal to them all. They flourish only in minds which have risen above it. All three obstinately refuse to be tamed, domesticated, broken to the yoke of social welfare, and defy the efforts men are now making so to break them. Religion most distinctly of all:

“Though earth and man were gone,
And suns and universes ceased to be,
And Thou wert left alone—
Every existence would exist in Thee.”

As to philosophy, I will only say that the human class consciousness yields none of it, but only an inferior thing called psychology which, so far as it deepens man's absorption in himself, makes a fool of him. As to art, the roots of it clearly lie in that reverent perception of value in *things*, which leads the artist to love things for their own sake and to mould them by his art into more significant relationships, without thought of whether or not his doing so will promote the welfare of society.

Of the evils that accrue from the human class consciousness, I could mention hundreds, but one must serve as a specimen of all. I allude to the progressive destruction of the country-side in the interests

of industrial prosperity—an evil that brings in its train innumerable others. In most industrial countries it seems to be an accepted rule of action that on Nature you can inflict what damage you like, hew down her forests, pollute her waters, clothe her fair spaces with ugliness and squalor, exterminate her wild creatures, blot out her sunlight with smoke, load her sweet winds with noxious gases, affront her silence with hideous noises, poison her sanctuaries with stinking odours, throw the filthy products of combustion in her face, provided always you can make out a case that you are thereby promoting the “welfare of society”—which, of course, you are *not* doing. It is a creed for devils. Man has duties to Nature as sacred as any he owes to society, and it may be said with confidence that if he violates the first he will rise to no great height in performing the second. Even if we knew that the human race was doomed to perish next year, it would still be a crime to pollute a river, to cover a fair hill-side with jerry-built houses or to scatter paper bags on Hampstead Heath.

That right and wrong have a scope wider than the limits of society—ininitely wider than they—is of course no new proposition. It has been expressed in many ways, of which the most familiar is the saying that we have duties to God as well as duties to man. To this mode of expression I would myself most willingly subscribe. But as this little book has to do with ethics, and not specifically with religion, I shall use another form of expression which theistically-minded people can easily translate into their own language, but which others, who are not prepared to call themselves theists, can still accept and find meaning in.

My proposition is that the object of our duty, service, and love, can never be anything less than the entire universe to which we owe our existence and of which we are living and thinking parts. Nothing within the circle of the universe as we experience it, whether it be material or spiritual, can be so small or insignificant as not to present us with the alternative of dealing with it rightly or dealing with it wrongly; nothing can be so vast, majestic, or excellent, as not to present us with the same alternative.

This is the answer I would give to the question, "Who is my neighbour?" My neighbour is the organized totality of existence. This it is that claims my duty, my service, my love; this it is that I am to love as I love myself. My human neighbour claims my duty because he, like myself, is a child of the universe and a living representative of it; and if my duty to him is more significant than my duty to animals, to plants, and to material things in general, it is only because the universe speaks to me more clearly and compendiously through him than through them. But he is not alone in being its representative. Everything is so in some degree and according to its kind; and being so, calls upon me to deal with it intelligently, valiantly and reverently. Any attempt to circumscribe the field of right and wrong within narrower limits than this, such as human society, has the effect of distorting, impairing, and finally destroying the meaning of right and wrong. Such limitations render the distinction ineffective even within the limits laid down.

I submit then, that no moral theory can be true which rests on the assumption that human interests, material or spiritual, individual or social, are the only values

that matter, the only "ends" morality has to concern itself with. What *matters*—I am not attempting a pun—is the totality of *matter* organized as a universe of infinitely various forms, conscious or unconscious, animate or inanimate, men, animals, plants, minerals, earth, sun, stars, spaces, and times, every part of which total is connected by organic filaments with every other part, and no part or member of which, not even the most accomplished saint, no man, angel, or god, would be what he is, or it is, unless the other parts were what they are. Whoever admits a duty to God admits a duty to *all that*. God, if there be a God, expects us to deal righteously with the whole universe.

This is not to deny the importance, nor even the supremacy, of the duties we owe to our fellow inhabitants of this tiny speck of a planet. I am not denying, but affirming. I affirm that until we see our human duties in the vast perspective of their cosmic setting we can never understand the nature of duty nor realize the full significance of a moral act. So long as our moral consciousness is identified with our human class consciousness—which is done whenever we interpret man as a social being only and forget his roots in Nature and the universe—there will be nothing "universal" in our morality.

The objection, of course, will be advanced that this view of morality makes it too vast and vague for the plain man to understand or take interest in. I hope to convince the plain man of the contrary before I have done. I shall try to show that an immense simplification is effected by approaching morality from the cosmic end. The effect will not be, as the objector might think, to send morality away into the distant

spaces and diffuse it over areas so vast that no man can comprehend or deal with them. The effect will be *to lodge morality right in the centre of the day's work*, to make the day's work into the focus where all our relationships to the universe at large sum themselves into the one demand that we shall do that work in the best manner it admits of. We shall see, further, that within this one duty, which the universe lays upon us, of doing the day's work as well as it can be done, both as to technical excellence and good temper, all the duties we owe to our fellowman stand comprised, including the duty of loving him as ourselves; that the way of morality lies inside the day's work and not outside; through it and not round it; and that, *per contra*, the neglect of the day's work inevitably carries with it the betrayal of social responsibility and violation of every duty we owe to our neighbour; the claim to "love" him under those conditions being nothing better than a damnable hypocrisy.

If the reader likes to have his ethics supported by the New Testament, he can find support for what I have just stated. The ethics of the New Testament are by no means so completely dominated by the human class consciousness as some of our philanthropists would make out. To begin with, there runs through the New Testament the notion of "a new heaven and a new earth"—not, be it observed, a new *earth* only, which seems to be all that present reformers are concerned with, but a new *heaven* also—earth and heaven making up between them the entire universe. Next there is St. Paul, who speaks quite explicitly, in a very notable passage, about "the *whole creation* groaning and travailing in pain until now" and as crying out to be "delivered

into the glorious liberty of the sons of God." And, lastly, there is the Sermon on the Mount, where we are introduced to the kingdom of *heaven* and given to understand that the flowers of the field are dear to the heart of the universe, that the sparrows are objects of divine solicitude, and a terrible doom pronounced on those who cause the little ones to stumble.

In this book I plead for the same comprehensive way of looking at morality. I shall argue that the creation of a new earth is impossible unless we undertake it as part of a much vaster operation which includes the heaven as well; that our duties to man are all of a piece with our duties to Nature—to flowers, sparrows, and country-sides; that the "little ones," which we had better have millstones hanged about our necks and be cast into the sea than misuse, include every atom or other minute constituent of the material universe that we are called upon to handle or make use of, such as a nail, a bit of putty, a lock of our sweetheart's hair, a drop of ink on our pen or an empty paper bag when we happen to be picnicking on Hampstead Heath. The summary duty of man is to do his best *all round*. Only thus will his duty to his human neighbour ever get duly done.

This doing his best begins, and has its foundation, in doing his best to *understand the world in which he lives*, by the help of science, philosophy, history, and literature, but most of all by the exercise of his own common sense; to understand his relation to that world, as a member of it and a child of it, bone of its bone, and flesh of its flesh. This I hold to be the beginning of *duty*, an obligation and a responsibility laid on every son of man, not to be escaped from, nor passed on to

anybody else, so long as he remains in possession of his normal faculties. All educational efforts should be based upon it. Furthermore, I would maintain that unless our morality rests upon that universal foundation, and begins there, the odds are desperate against that small, but immensely significant patch of duty which lies within a railed-off enclosure of human relationships ever getting itself effectually done.

This doctrine I would have taught to children from their earliest years in forms suitable to their comprehension. I would have them taught to reverence *things*. As one of the things they use oftenest, I would pitch upon their mother tongue, and connect their duty to that with their duty to speak the truth. How can the truth be spoken, I would ask them, if people cannot hear and understand what they are saying. I would tell them that it is *wrong* to misuse the mother tongue, as so many of them and of their elders are in the habit of doing, by the ugly and indistinct articulation of it; because, in that case, the truth is not *spoken* at all, but only hissed, muttered, mumbled, tainted, perverted, distorted, and so rendered unintelligible, unattractive, and, therefore, untruthful. To every word we speak we have a duty, as though the very word were an "end in itself." Our duty is to make it effective as a vehicle of the truth by the clearness of its articulation, by the attractiveness of its sound—not unlike the soldier's duty to keep his weapons clean and his powder dry. Has not the beauty of our speech something to do with the truth of what we have to say? And is not a lie far less dangerous when we can all hear it distinctly? Reverence for the truth and reverence for the vehicle that conveys it go together. A truthful mutterer

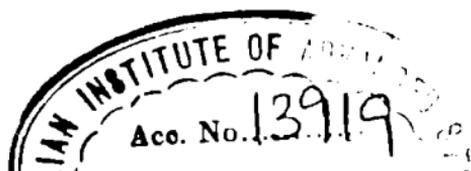
is a combination of opposites not easy to believe in. Soothsayers *mutter* their oracles; most of us know why. Whenever such speech is current the odds are great that nonsense and lying are the subjects of discourse. No man can have anything to say that is worth hearing, either for its truth, beauty, or goodness, who makes a practice, as I observe, many now do, of keeping a cigarette or a tobacco pipe in his mouth when conversing with his fellow mortals. How can the truth be spoken, the moralist may well ask, when it has to force its way between teeth clenched on a tobacco pipe or lips closed round a cigarette and the language of it comes out into the audible world as a mere hobble-gobble of mutilated words? Among the idle words for which account will have to be given, those surely must be reckoned which we have been too idle to pronounce distinctly, and if the judge should happen to be indoctrinated with the ethic of work, they will not be lightly let off. There is value in the well-spoken word and morality in him who speaks it well. Among innumerable things that claim our reverent treatment these "winged words" (as Homer calls them) stand very high. Only when morality has sunk to a low ebb will men think themselves entitled to treat such things, just because they are things, "as they damned like." I suggest that a new reverence for their mother tongue, expressed in an audibly better usage of it, is a moral reform much needed among the English in these days. It would promote the cause of truth—and other moral causes not less august. For it is a law in these things that any form of excellence we may practise, no matter within how limited a sphere, has the effect of stimulating the pursuit of excellence throughout the whole range of our activi-

ties. And the pursuit of excellence, through the conquest of difficulty, is the proper vocation of man.

The example just given is one chosen, almost at random, out of thousands. But were thousands to be considered, the underlying principle would be the same. The principle is that we must find duty everywhere if we would find it anywhere. To limit duty to a special field of relationships, such as those which exist between man and man, is to obscure the nature of it and to weaken the practice of it. Duty is either universal or nothing.

There remains a point of great difficulty, opening out into questions too vast for discussion in this little book. I will only glance at them so far as may be needful to show that the difficulty weighs heavier on those who claim to be respecters of persons (which God is said not to be), but have no reverence for things, than on those whose reverence for persons is only their respect for things raised to a higher power, as the ethic of work teaches it should be.

Our duty to things sometimes requires us to preserve them; sometimes, and not infrequently, to destroy them. Nature does both on an enormous scale, operating as freely by destruction and death as by their contraries. But there is an immeasurable difference between destroying a thing because it stands in the way of a better thing than itself and destroying it through ignorance of its nature, through contempt for its rights (like the destruction of the English country-side), through blindness to its values. There is an immeasurable difference between killing flies for sport, like wanton boys, and exterminating the mosquitoes in Panama for the sake of the canal. Some of the fiercest tensions of



his moral life, as defined by the ethic of work, arise at this point. But, like all moral tension, they are generating sources of moral energy.

Nature, in her ceaseless drive towards the perfection of the whole, has no compunction in putting an end to her unpromising experiments (for she is making an experiment, not solving a problem) in getting rid of her faulty particulars. They come into existence in millions; they serve their turn; are good so long as nothing better is forthcoming, but would be evil were they suffered to usurp the room a better thing is waiting to occupy.

Nature's respect for things is shown in three ways; first, by her skill and patience in producing them; next, by giving them time to try themselves out; lastly, by swiftly destroying them when they are no longer worth keeping and have become mere cumberers of the ground on which she is sowing a better harvest. We call this the "survival of the fittest."

Some deem it a ruthless process; and ruthless men have often invoked it to justify their deeds. But the merciful may invoke it too, and perhaps with better reason. "Fit" and "unfit" are relative terms. The "fittest" thing that survives becomes unfit the moment it obstructs the way of a better thing than itself. Now the unfit (or the less fit) that perish, were themselves the fittest till a better than they thrust them out. They, too, have had their innings. And the fittest that now survives can claim no more and will be given no more. It survives—but for *how long*? For ever? By no means; but only so long as the creative ingenuities of the universe have devised nothing better than it.

All things, we may say, are thus placed on their good behaviour. Either their value must increase or they

must perish. There is no absolute "fittest" save the eternal whole which perpetually remakes itself in each of its transient parts. The ruthless people who invoke the survival of the fittest to justify their deeds think there is. They identify the "fittest" with themselves. Clearly they are wrong. The meek are more likely to inherit the earth than they. But even the meek are on their good behaviour. They must not count the earth as theirs in fee-simple, in perpetuity and without conditions. They must make it a better earth; by their skill and by their fidelity they must improve the earth's value as a *thing*; they must be obedient to the "ethics of work." *They must be valiant as well as meek.* They will survive only so long as they continue to be so. When they cease to be valiant the inheritance will be taken away from them and given to them who are worthier of it, or returned to the silent keeping of its original Possessor—the "Fittest" who eternally survives.

II

THROUGH THINGS TO PERSONS

THERE is a kind of morality which consists of acting in accordance with principles which the experience of the race has proved to be sound—such as those contained in the Ten Commandments. This a wise man will always endeavour to do, even though he may be conscious that doing so will not carry him far on the road to perfection. Neglect of the moral experience of mankind is the shortest cut that any of us can take to making fools of ourselves: and that is what none of us have the right to do. For the man who makes a fool *of himself* is unquestionably a knave.

But this acting according to principles attested as sound by the experience of the race is not always as easy as the bare form of words might suggest. Take, for example, the rule which forbids us to steal. We may be satisfied with the attestation of it in human experience, though some persons might question even that. But we cannot always be sure that our own action in given cases falls under the rule. What is stealing? Do not men sometimes steal when they think they are appropriating what is rightly their own? Do the poor steal when they vote for expropriating the wealth of the rich? Do the rich steal when they become rich through the labours of the poor! Was Drake stealing when he sacked the Spanish galleons? He did not

think so, nor did the men who were under him, nor did the age in which he lived. But he accepted the Ten Commandments and carried a minister with him to read them out every Sunday.

That was a bold man who, when the Ten Commandments were recited to him, declared that he had kept them all from his youth up. I wonder if he had. The Person who heard him say so evidently thought he had not. Does not the order to sell all that he had and give the proceeds to the poor contain a subtle suggestion that *some of it had been stolen*? Or take the rule which bids us honour our father and our mother. In a sense I can claim to have done that. But did I honour them *enough*? Alas, I have my doubts, and perhaps the reader, asking himself the same question, has his. We need to think twice before claiming to have kept the Ten Commandments, or any one of them, from our youth up.

Sometimes these principles, attested as sound by the experience of the race, take summary forms which cover the whole field of morality at a single sweep, such as: "act according to conscience" or "act according to reason." These again are principles which every wise man will accept as valid. But the dangers attending their application are even greater than in the cases just cited. Conscience and reason: yes, but do we always know what the conscience and reason of a given matter precisely are? Do we always recognize them infallibly when they speak to us? Do we never call that conscience which is not conscience, and that reason which is folly? Is the voice of conscience always so clear that we can pick it out, with no risk of error, from the other voices that happen to be calling at the

moment? Does the voice of conscience never get mixed up with the whispers of self-interest? I find in myself that it often does. I perceive in myself a great liability to error in identifying that voice and disentangling the sound of it from that of the others. And so with reason. Many acts of mine, which I fondly attributed at the time I did them to the guidance of reason, I have found by subsequent experience to have been irrational.

Let us then be prepared for difficulties in applying the ethic of work to the practical concerns of life. No form of ethic, certainly not the Ten Commandments, is free from them. The good life, in whatever form you conceive it, is essentially difficult. Courage and skill are the factors of it: courage to face the risk of error; skill in the handling of opportunities. The good life is a business for heroes. The essence of it, one might say, is a brave and skilful confronting of difficulties—the true “end” of man.

Between matter and spirit there is no absolute distinction, no radical schism, no opposition. Matter is the first stage in our apprehension of spirit; spirit is matter fully apprehended. We reach a spiritual conception of the universe not by denying the material or going round it but by adopting it and going through it.

It follows that the universe which, as we have seen, is both the source of our duty and the object of it, is neither material alone nor spiritual alone. Considered as a mere thing (which it is *not*) it can be explained in terms of matter and mechanism. Considered as a *known* thing (which it is) the vocabulary of matter is

inadequate to its explanation and the vocabulary of spirit has to be introduced. Has to be introduced, not however, so as to abolish what has previously been said in terms of matter, but only so as to interpret and complete it. The spiritual interpretation of the universe arrives on the scene "not to destroy but to fulfil" the material.

Putting the point rather differently, we may say that matter is the medium which spirit requires to express itself. Spirit cannot get on without matter, any more than thought can get on without speech. If you are to have a human mind you must have something of the nature of a human body and brain for its working expression. If you are to have a moral order you will need a mechanical order for giving it effect. If you are to have a spiritual universe there must be a material universe as its vehicle. If you are to have an ideal, a business-like way of going to work is essential to its realization.

I am engaged at the present moment in what may be called a spiritual operation—that of communicating my thought to the mind of the reader. How impossible it would be without the aid of matter and mechanism—the words I use, the pen and ink I write them with, the printer's press and the rest of it. Deprive me of all this "matter and mechanism" and I could neither think myself nor communicate my thought to others. Nor could the reader understand what I am writing. If he happens to be reading this book after dark, let him try the experiment of switching off the electric light, and he will find that the transaction between him the reader and me the writer comes promptly to an end. Is not matter and mechanism the

medium through which you, reader, and I are at this moment dealing spiritually with one another?

Or consider a moral situation like that in which the good Samaritan found himself. Observe his dependence on matter at every point. Deprive him of his oil, his wine, his ass, his inn, his twopence for the host, a practicable road between the inn and the scene of the outrage, and the general use of his hands and feet—all matter and mechanism—and what becomes of his good deed? In a universe which furnished us with none of these things, how could you and I obey the precept to “go and do likewise.”

From these considerations we may pass to another of great importance to our present subject. In the world, as we know it, there is no *direct* action of spirit upon spirit: all action or influence of one spirit upon another is operation through the medium of material things. This is not, of course, to deny the reality of spiritual actions or influence. It calls attention to the obvious yet immensely significant fact that the action or influence of human beings upon one another is materially mediated and always *indirect* in that sense.

Let the reader consider the example I have just given. At this moment I am trying to interest him in his Neighbour the Universe—a proceeding fraught with great moral responsibilities on my side and involving corresponding responsibilities on his. Indeed there are no greater moral responsibilities than those involved in writing and reading books about morality. But observe how indirect it all is. If I fail in expressing myself (as perhaps I am doing), if I use the wrong words for saying what I mean, if the printers print my manuscript in illegible type, if the publisher charges a price

so high that nobody will buy my book, if the light goes out while the reader is reading it—what becomes of my venturesome attempt to do him good, to make him a wiser man? Clearly, if I would do the reader any good morally or spiritually by what I have to say, I must concentrate all my energies on making this a good *book* and run the risk of him declaring it to be a bad one. If I think of myself as a “spiritual” force acting directly on other spiritual forces—my readers—this book will never get itself written. I must not think of myself at all, but fix attention on what I am doing and try to make it as good a book of its kind as I can. Of course, I must do a lot of *thinking* to begin with—believe me, I have done it; but when it comes to the question of getting my thought through to you I must consider my *book*, for that is the medium through which I propose to operate, and only so far as there is excellence in the medium can I entertain the hope that I may be doing you any good. To suppose that the thing can be done by any sort of spiritual affinity between you and me; by any kind of direct action of my spirit on yours, is nonsense. Unless I succeed in giving you a good book you are entitled to say “this fellow is doing us no good”—and no doubt many of you will say it. “By their fruits ye shall know them.” An honest man does not wish to be known by anything else, though of course, in inviting people to know him in that way he is taking tremendous risks. Such is the ethic of work.

We now begin to see the practical outcome of this way of thinking. So long as we made the universe in general the object of our duty there was no practical outcome but only a theoretical basis. The universe in general is an object too vast to be manageable by our

faculties of intelligence and will. But a practical outcome began to disclose itself from the moment we saw that the universe in general is reflected and represented in each particular thing and particular person belonging to it. Each is related to the universe as a mikrocosm to a makrokosm. In thinking about the particulars we are thinking about the whole; in understanding them we are understanding it; in operating upon them we are operating upon it. Whatever is good for them is good for it; whatever is bad for them is bad for it.

Our practical outcome became clearer when the next step in our thought revealed that the *things* and the *persons* composing the universe are closely related. Persons, of course, stand vastly higher in the scale of values than things, but so intimate is the relation between them that you cannot improve or damage a thing without finding in the long run that you have improved or damaged a person; nor can you improve or damage a person without finding in the long run that things are all the better or all the worse.

This is acknowledged in the established imagery we apply to such matters. In our dreams of Utopia or heaven we always make a correspondence between the goodness of the persons we imagine living there and the goodness of the things by which they are surrounded. The beautiful souls live in a beautiful world. If they are the saints of heaven they live in a golden city with gates of pearl; if they are dwellers in Utopia (as in William Morris's "News from Nowhere") they have soft voices and handsome faces; the country round them is smiling and unspoilt; the rivers are unpolluted; their clothes woven by skilled craftsmen; the meals prepared by intelligent cooks;

their house planned by gifted architects and made of irreproachable bricks and mortar. The right persons and the right things necessarily go together. So, too, with that abode of bad persons which is commonly known as hell. The furniture of hell, the *things* in it, are all abominable. Everything is ugly, noisy, nasty, foul, stinking, dark; the scenery appalling, the weather intolerable, the houses red-hot sepulchres, the food blood and tears—a world of vile things to correspond with the vile inhabitants, as we find it described in Dante's "Inferno," and often encounter, in significant specimens, in the streets of our great cities. By such imagery the intimate relationship and interdependence of things and persons in the moral world has been fully acknowledged. There is nothing novel in the idea of it.

The interdependence of things and persons once acknowledged, the question arises: On which of the two should moral action begin? I am all for beginning with things, for *beginning* there precisely because I want to *end* somewhere else. I want to end with *persons*. But, I observe, that while persons are unquestionably the more important, things are unquestionably the more *accessible*; and it is *through* them and not *round* them that I hope to reach my ultimate objective in the persons I would influence and improve. There is, in fact, no other way of getting at them; the direct action of spirit upon spirit being, as we have seen, an impossibility. Once and for all, then, I abandon the method of *frontal attack* on the lives, minds, characters, souls, and spirits of my brother and sister persons. I propose from henceforth to work round *by the flank*: or, abandoning metaphor, to do my duty as a moral being

through the medium of *things*—visible, audible, or otherwise sensible, as the case may be—striving to make each one of them as true, good and beautiful in its kind as I can, and knowing well that whatever success I have with the things will inevitably be reflected in some corresponding success with the persons who stand at the top of the scale, and through them passed on to the entire universe. In the moral world, if you get in anywhere you get in everywhere. The ethic of work gets in at the point indicated by the word “things.”

The practical outcome of our deliberations is now coming into full view. Expressed in the most summary form, it would run somewhat thus: *the spiritual excellence of persons is most effectively promoted by improving the material excellence of things*. Recognizing that persons represent the highest values in the universe (“an honest man the noblest work of God,” etc.), and that things have no values in themselves apart from their relation to persons (though infinitely valuable in that relation), we nevertheless abandon the impracticable effort to make persons honest or otherwise excellent by direct operations performed upon their souls, and concentrate our moral energies on the practicable effort of making the *things* honest (or otherwise excellent) which they and we have to do with.

This, I contend, is the most effectual method for the promotion of honesty or any other form of excellence in persons that we may happen to desire. The actual effect of adopting it would no doubt be to diminish the number and vociferousness of institutions where virtue is preached; but it would increase the institutions (such as workshops) where honest goods are made and sold, while gradually eliminating the others where profitable

impostures are the articles dealt in. The result would be a gain to the honesty of mankind such as the direct method of producing that virtue has not achieved and never can achieve.

There are degrees of reality in things. A city well built is more of a thing than a city ill-built; the music of a great composer is more of a thing than an ugly noise. A good test of the reality of a thing is its lastingness, and it will be found that the best things are always those that last longest. Works of art are among the most real things I know of, the most worthy to be called things at all, so that, in urging the reader to begin his moral operation on things the ethic of work is, in effect, urging him to go as he can towards making everything he operates upon into a work of art—even though he can go but a little way. It does not ask him to be content with things as he finds them. It asks him to take them in hand and to change them by putting value into them. By so doing he will put value into himself and into other persons.

I will venture a definition of a thing conceived on these lines: *a thing is that into which value can be put by the action of intelligence.* Every thing we come in contact with invites us to put value into it, and may even be said to exist for that very purpose. Is not the dung of animals made precious by being turned into manure; is not the country-side more beautiful when you have read "Il Penseroso?" Does not clay become more honourable when you bake it into sound bricks, and is it not dishonoured when you half-bake them? Is not the bible itself a *thing*? What do we not owe to the men who made it? The reader may call me a materialist if he will; but my withers are unwrung.

III

THE BEGINNING OF DUTY

THE importance of the ethic of work lies in the fact that work is pre-eminently the function by which our civilization "earns its living" or maintains itself as a going concern from day to day. We express this in the phrase, "industrial civilization." The phrase indicates that industry, or work, is the source of all the values, material or spiritual, which mankind is achieving, or hopes to achieve, by such civilization as he now enjoys.

No doubt it has always been so. But now, more clearly than in any previous age, we have become *conscious* that it is so. We are beginning to see that the characters of men and the satisfactions they find in life are determined, primarily, by the kind of work they do and by the motives that enter into the doing of it. If their work is evil, their lives cannot be good and their civilization cannot be satisfactory. May we not say that industrial civilization, if not ethical in its work, is little likely to be ethical in anything else—certainly not in its play? On the other hand, when ethical principles have struck their roots into the work of the world, are they not likely to spread their branches over the whole of its life, play included?

In such an age the right approach to ethic in general lies, obviously, through the ethic of work. I say the

approach. For it will be found—and I hope the sequel will make this clear—that theoretically, the ethic of work is not a departmental study, while its application, practically, is by no means limited to certain hours of the day, beginning when men take off their coats and ending when they put them on again. The ethic of work is, equally, the ethic of play; the same law of excellence being prescribed for both, so that the best work and the best play tend to become indistinguishable. Playing the *fool* in the hours of leisure, which is the counterpart to playing the rogue in the hours of work, is indeed forbidden by our ethic, but only that the ground may be cleared for the summary business of life, which is playing the *man*, the most delightful and satisfying of all the fine arts. Courageous, intelligent, and beautiful play; courageous, intelligent, and beautiful work; either of these phrases may be taken as defining the criterion, standard, or governing ideal of our ethics. They come to the same thing.

The principles of this ethic are thus universal, both in theory and application. But they are easiest to apprehend and least likely to be forgotten when we begin our acquaintance with them as principles of *work*—the function our civilization is most familiar with and most deeply engaged in. Once apprehended in that form, they can be readily translated or expanded, so as to cover all human relationships and duty—even that which is known as our duty to God.

Morality may be defined as the art of manhood, and moral science as the technique of that art. A perfectly moral man would be, simply, a *man* in the full sense of the term. A perfectly moral society would be, in like manner, a society in the full sense of the

term. The man would be perfectly humanized, the society perfectly socialized.

We draw too sharp a distinction between the man and his acts, speaking of the latter as though they were products or by-products thrown off by his personality which, meanwhile, we think of as lying hidden in the background. This is not so. The man and his acts are not two, but one. If his acts are truly his own, and if he knows what he is doing, the *whole man* is present in each one of them. This does not hold, of course, when his acts are performed under external compulsion, for then, though he may know what *is being done to him*—a very different thing from knowing what *he is doing*—the act is not *his*, but that of the compelling power. Otherwise *all of him* is there, visibly or audibly expressed, in the deed that he does. A brave act is not well described when we call it the act *of* a hero, nor a dastardly act when we call it the act *of* a coward—as though the doer were one thing and the deed another. The brave act would be better described as a hero in action; the dastardly act as a coward in action. In each of them the whole man is present.

Nor can he divide himself into parts, reserving one for the business of his vocation, another for intercourse with his friends and neighbours; one for work, another for play; one for the hours when he is on duty and one for the hours when he is off. His intercourse with friends and neighbours will inevitably be qualified by the way he conducts the business of his vocation: the character of his play will be influenced by the character of his work; what he does when he is off duty will be found (when examined) to be all of a piece with what he does when he is on duty; and *vice versa*. He may

divide his employments under catalogued heads, assigning this part of the time-table to one, that to another; but he cannot divide himself. He is *all* there *all* the time, whether he knows it or not.

This makes it impossible to accept Matthew Arnold's definition of conduct as "three fourths of life." For that implies a remaining fourth where the art of manhood had no place and the technique of morals no application. A dangerous definition in any case, because any man who wished to escape from moral responsibility could always plead that the action he is called to account for belongs to that remaining "fourth" where the laws of conduct do not obtain. But the definition is not true. Not true, that is, if "life" be taken to mean that we know what we are doing and that our acts are our own; the two are the same; for to know what I *am doing* is, of course, to know that I am doing it—i.e., that the act is my own. Understanding "life" in that way, conduct is not three-fourths of it, nor ninety-nine-hundredths of it, but the whole of it up to the last tittle. To a being who knows what he is doing, there is a better and a worse way of doing everything. A single exception is enough to ruin the whole structure of morality. Such exceptions have often proved ruinous.

The moral world is so constituted that action at any point affects it at every point. The whole is present in each of the parts. He who enters it anywhere, enters it everywhere. Aristotle expresses the same truth in his doctrine that the nature of virtue is *one*, so that if you practise any one of the virtues all the others will, in some measure, be represented in your conduct and reinforced by it. The various virtues, such as justice, benevolence, courage, temperance, are not the

names of separate and independent principles. They are the names of the same principle as acting in different directions and as called out by different circumstances. They describe the whole man in different attitudes.

Other philosophers have presented the point in a more striking form by the saying that a man may attain the fulness of moral perfection in a single act and in an instant of time. Every virtue you can think of might be expressed, and perfectly expressed, by the act of giving a cup of cold water to a thirsty fellow-man; it might involve you in risking life; it did so for the three mighty men who brought a draught of water for David from the well at Bethlehem that was by the gate. By doing our best in the minutest corner of the universe we do our best for the universe as a whole, the reason being that in the universe there are, strictly speaking, no corners, just as there are none in the human body, everything being united by organic filaments with everything else in the one as in the other.

The truth that if you get in anywhere you get in everywhere, holds equally of knowledge as of morality. Indeed, it would not be true of morality unless it were true of knowledge as well. All knowledge is one. True knowledge of anything opens out into the knowledge of everything; and unless everything were known by somebody, nothing would be known by anybody—there would, in fact, be no such thing as knowledge at all.

The science of morals has, in fact, been defined as "the application of the sum total of knowledge to the guidance of conduct." Such a definition is formidable enough to frighten us all out of our wits had we not good reasons to believe (Plato stated them long ago)

that the idea of the *best*, which forms the living centre of our consciousness and which every one of us can apply to the business of life, gives us a clue to the nature of *all* knowable truth, summarizes *all* that omniscience itself could tell us about the universe, and is, in fact, the "sum total" of all knowledge reduced to its purest and perfectly intelligible essence. With the idea of the best to guide us we can go to work as though we were gods.

This clue, without which, of course, we should be utterly lost and every "system of morality" would dissipate immediately into self-contradiction and nonsense, we can apply with complete confidence to every situation that confronts us—even to the simplest, such as driving a nail home into a board. There is a *best* way of doing that; and the man who has done it in that way, or *tried* to do it in that way, may rest confident that the "sum total of all knowledge" has guided him, that he has driven the nail as omniscience itself might have driven it; that the essence of all virtue has received due homage in his act and been adequately expressed as the conditions of the moment required it to be, and that the whole universe (to which his duty is owed) is the better for his deed. We can say of the nail-driver, as we could say of any hero or saint caught in the act of highest achievement, that the whole moral law may be fulfilled in the driving of a single nail and the fulness of moral perfection attained at that moment. The *best* has asserted itself. Such is the ethic of work.

Another example. A neighbour of mine earns his living by growing cabbages (and such-like things) for the market. How shall we set about the moral instruction of our cabbage grower according to the principles of

the ethic of work? We shall begin by pointing to his cabbages and, as a lever is poised on its fulcrum, we shall poise the whole moral law upon them.

Doubtless the good man has many duties—to his wife and children, to the city and to the State, to mankind, to the universe, and to God, each of which we could describe in language, more or less eloquent, without once mentioning the word “cabbages” or seeming to refer to them. But, inasmuch as he *earns his living* by growing that vegetable, it has for him, morally, a central significance which no other object in the universe can claim; it is the object in which the whole universe as he, the cabbage grower, has to deal with it, stands most fully represented and comes to a focus. Does he not earn his living by growing it, and does not this mean that without his cabbages to sustain him he would have no “living” and, therefore, no life to make use of, morally or otherwise? If he neglects his cabbages, if he leaves them to perish for want of due cultivation, or to be eaten up by rabbits and snails, what sort of a posture will he be in for performing his duties to his wife and children, to his neighbours, to the State and to mankind in general? He will go on the dole and become a charge on those whose hold on the ethic of work is firmer than his. There need be no hesitation. His cabbages indicate the growing points of his virtues; in the field where they grow lies the centre of gravity of his moral life. If his morality fails there, is not the whole fabric of it in danger of coming to grief? If it succeeds there, have not his other duties a better chance of getting themselves fulfilled?

Let us examine the doings of our cabbage grower more closely.

He might conceivably be growing his vegetables as an amusement, a pastime, a hobby, though, as a matter of fact, he is not. Many persons do actually amuse their leisure time in that way, and it may be said in passing that such amusement compares very favourably with greyhound racing, the dullest, meanest, and stupidest form of "sport" ever invented for the exploitation of fools. It may also be added that your amateur grower of cabbages, he who grows them, as we say, "for fun," often succeeds in producing a better article than your professional. To do a thing "for fun" is one of the most cogent reasons for doing it at all—provided the fun be good. The best work of artists is done "for fun" in that sense. This, however, belongs to another chapter of philosophy.

Our man, then, is growing cabbages not for his amusement, but as a serious occupation, a means of earning his *living*. Perhaps the contrast is not as sharp as it looks. Whoever earns his living, by cabbage growing or anything else, will find that the greater part of his living (i.e., of his life) and, perhaps the best part of it, has to be spent in the process of earning it, so that only a bare remnant remains over for amusement or enjoyment when the day's work or the year's work is done. It follows that if our worker gets no enjoyment (or amusement) out of the means he takes to earn his living, his opportunities for getting enjoyment out of anything else are narrowly limited. His living being spent, as to its major part, in doing something which he doesn't enjoy and, as to its minor part, in doing something which he does enjoy, it can hardly be a very enjoyable or amusing affair on the whole. Ruling out the obvious exceptions, or what seem to be such, may we

not say this: that unless a man enjoys the means he takes to earn his living, it can be at best but a poor sort of living that he earns—certainly not an amusing one? And is it not strange that a truth so self-evident should be so widely overlooked, and stranger still that we should be trying to reform society in almost total forgetfulness of it?

What can be the origin of an oversight so disastrous? Perhaps the origin lies in that deep-rooted habit of our modern minds which leads us to think of everything in mechanical terms, so that we come to talk about a man's "living" as though it were a kind of manufactured product which comes out of the economic machine when the process of earning it is complete—much as one of Mr. Ford's motor-cars is thrown off finished and driven away under its own power when his revolving belt comes to the end of one of its revolutions. Perhaps, also, we have drawn a false distinction between *life* and *living*—just as we draw false distinctions between knowledge and knowing, will and willing, love and loving, and many other such-like things—which false distinction has caused us to forget that the life we set so much treasure by as a thing to be earned is *living and exhausting itself all the time we are busy in earning it*. No form of work can be satisfactory to the worker unless there be room in it, somewhere, for an element of play or, if you like, of genuine amusement, the most satisfying forms of it being unquestionably those which lead up to beautiful play as the consummating stage of its accomplishment. But that again belongs to another chapter in philosophy. Enough for the present that the "living" we earn cannot be separated from the process of earning it. Let us then return to our cabbage grower.

Like the rest of us he is, unless we suppose him entirely brutish, a natural metaphysician, probably without knowing it and in some respects happier if he knows it not; his moralities, if he has any, spring from his metaphysics; and his immoralities, of which doubtless he has some, are all sins against the metaphysical light which he brought with him into the world.

It comes about in this way. Let us suppose that among the other desires that actuate him there mingles some sort of hunger and thirst after righteousness; in other words, that the "living" he is bent on earning is the living of a decent and self-respecting human being. His "living," as he is anxious to earn it, shall be the "living" of such a man; not the living of one at whose habitation his neighbours will point and say, "there lives a cheat, a liar, a humbug, a coward, a blackguard." His conception of a "living" shall be framed on those lines. It includes not only the idea of being alive, but the further and far more significant idea of being alive *as a man*. In shipwrecked mariners, reduced to the last extremity of famine, the desire for a "living" may reduce itself to the bare form of a desire to continue alive anyhow, and they may kill and eat one another as a means of satisfying it; but our cabbage grower means something more than continuing to be alive when he talks of earning his "living." He has in him the elements of self-respect.

This is precisely what makes a metaphysician of him, happily unconscious of the fact though he be. It reveals him as a person who has had his introduction to the eternal values, commonly classified as goodness, truth, and beauty; as one who has had a glimpse of them at some stage of his existence, possibly ante-natal, and

who has never quite forgotten it. This, I say, is the metaphysical element in his make-up which no amount of physics will ever explain. If he examines himself closely he will find that strangely mingled with his desire for a "living," and as an essential part of it, there goes a hunger and thirst, faint, perhaps, but still perceptible, for righteousness. He desires to live *as a man*. He has seen the Platonic "best." So much we may assume before considering him further.

Now this process of living as a man, simple as the words are, is a highly-complicated and many-sided affair. It involves questions of the man's relations to the race, to the State, to the city, to the neighbourhood, to the family—and last, but not least, to cabbages. It includes duties to all these, all of which duties are connected with and interpenetrate one another. And the great question is *where to begin*.

I observe that books written about morality throw very little light on this. Most of them overlook it entirely. They reveal the infinite complexity of our duties, but leave us to find our *starting-point* as best we may, irrespective of the manifest truth that success or failure in morality largely depends on making a right start. The consequence is that many of us begin at the wrong end and come miserably to grief. Some of the most lamentable moral failures arise from this cause. Dickens has painted an immortal picture of one of them in the character of Mrs. Jellaby. She began with the natives of Borrioboolagha instead of beginning with her own children. Nobody denies that we have duties to the natives of Borrioboolagha. But to *begin* with them is, for the most of us, to begin at the wrong end, and to make a sad mess of our lives in consequence.

Now it is true in morality, as we have seen, that if you get in anywhere you get in everywhere, which is only another way of stating what I have just said—that all our duties are connected with and interpenetrate one another. Get in at any point—say at your duty to humanity at large—and if you are clever enough you can find your way by intelligible paths to every other point until at last you find yourself confronted with your duty to cabbages, or to whatever else you may be growing or making as a means of earning your “living.”

But nature has ordained a certain sequence in these things which we do well to follow—the sequence, namely, of beginning with what is nearest and then working our way step by step to what is farthest. All our wisdom is attained in that manner. It is highly dangerous to begin our attack on morality too high up in the scale of duties, partly because we need a much greater degree of cleverness to find our way from the high to the low than to find our way from the low to the high; and still more, because if we begin too high up we become so conceited with ourselves and so inflated by the grandiose language which belongs to the higher stages of morality that we see the moral world upside down and degenerate into mere eloquent talkers about goodness. I am inclined to think that the cause of good morals has suffered immensely from our ignorance of where to begin and from the general indifference of moralists to that vital question.

In an ideal state of society the starting-point of morality would be clearly defined for every man by the nature of his vocation, that is, by the nature of the work he does to earn his living. His initial duty, leading on and opening out into all the others, would be expressed

in the formula "Do the work which has fallen to thee, as the means of earning thy living with the utmost excellence it admits of."

I say it would be so in an ideal state of society. For I am fully aware that under existing conditions there are vast multitudes who follow vocations where the possibilities of excellence are so narrow as to deprive the formula of all interest and all attractiveness for them—I shall return to the point in a later section. Fortunately, however, there are multitudes of others in whose vocations the possibilities of excellence are sufficiently great to give a wide scope for the application of our formula.

Meanwhile, as a way of approach to the ideal conditions where all men shall have the opportunity of applying the formula to their vocations, the one thing needful is that those who can apply it now should do so forthwith. To which may be added the following as a sound ethical rule for the young to bear in mind: "Seek vocations which promise to furnish your passion for excellence (another name for the hunger and thirst after righteousness) with reasonable scope, as the only means of satisfying the metaphysical part of you and so earning a 'living' worthy of a man." If the rising generation could be induced to throw its weight in that direction—and I observe that many are doing so—the vocations which promise no scope for excellence would gradually find themselves without applicants, and so disappear.

Returning once more to our cabbage grower, of whom we are continually tending to lose sight, we are now in a position to tell him where to begin. *He must begin with his cabbages.* For him, being what

he is, all categorical imperatives come to a focus at that point—his duties to mankind, to the State, to the city, to the family, to himself. He must regard himself as commissioned by the universe to grow the best cabbages the circumstances permit of. *That*, and for the time being, nothing else. All, for the time being, is concentrated there. By adding to the real value of his cabbages—to their food value, let us say—he is adding to all the value there is; he is promoting goodness, beauty and truth in the way he is commissioned to promote them. By cultivating his cabbages scientifically, by watering them when water is what they need, by feeding them duly, he is satisfying the universal hunger and the universal thirst, and the whole universe whispers in his ear “inasmuch as you did it unto one of these cabbages you did it unto me.”

Our cabbage grower is now doing the deed which *begins* his morality. “In the beginning was the deed” (*im anfang war die that*), says Goethe. He is holding “infinity in the palm of his hand and eternity in an hour,” which is William Blake’s way of putting it. He is doing his duty to a *thing*, but a thing in whose excellence the whole universe and all the persons contained within it, whether divine or human, have an interest. By the excellence of his work, performed upon that thing, he wins his opening into the moral world, establishes his footing there, makes good his claim to be a citizen of the universe. He has laid his foundations on the rock.

Persons are things become conscious of themselves. Now Immanuel Kant has laid it down as the summary rule of morality, that every person is to be treated as an

end in himself, and never as a means to an end. A good rule if rightly understood. But not good if taken to mean, as it sometimes is, that things have no claims upon us, that we may use things as we please, provided we treat persons as "ends." For things, too, have their rights.

In the first place they have the *right to be understood*. Science in all its branches represents the effort of man to do his duty to the things which surround him by understanding their nature so far as he is able. This unquestionably stands first *in order* among the duties laid upon man—the duty of understanding the world in which he lives. No ethical system, however wise about persons, can be based on ignorance of the nature of *things*. No man can do right in the midst of things which he misunderstands. No man can love his neighbour to any good purpose under those conditions. Every fact, or group of facts, that challenges the mind to understand it is an "end in itself," and is actually so treated by science. Taking science as a whole, may we not say that in nothing so far accomplished by man has he so signally justified his existence or done his duty to a universe which claims, before all else, and as the foundation of all else, to be *intelligently understood*. I rank science as one of the greatest *moral* achievements standing at present to the credit of man. It will be reckoned to him for righteousness in the resurrection of the just.

When things are understood, but not till then, we are in a position to satisfy the second claim they have upon us—their claim to any truth, goodness or beauty that our intelligent action can endow them with. As they are "ends in themselves" to the man of science who seeks to understand them, so they are "ends in them-

selves" of another, and perhaps higher, kind to the artist, the craftsman, the workman who, by means of the skill that is in him, endeavours to change, mould, fashion, re-arrange, transform them according to some pattern "shown him in the mount." Such a worker looks upon things not as recalcitrant to the ideal, but as responsive to it, as inviting, nay, challenging, him to infuse new goodness into their substance, new truth into their intention, new beauty into their form. In each one of them the universe stands represented and speaks as a whole, saying to the worker, "make me better."

But in so performing his duty to things he is by no means neglecting his duty to persons; nay, rather, he is serving them with the truest service. For the world of persons and the world of things are one world, not two. No thing can be made better in its own nature by the skill of man without all persons in the universe getting the benefit of that betterment—as surely as the ripples caused by a stone thrown into a pond affect the equilibrium of forces in the nebula of Orion. To do what is best for the citizens must we not do what is best for the city; reverencing it as a *thing*; planning it wisely; building it beautifully; ordering its traffic; keeping it clean? What else do we mean when we call for "better conditions," and say that without better conditions there can be no better men? Are we not asking for better *things*—for better houses, better clothing, better food? And are not these, one and all, the products of human labour reverently devoted to its object? How can better things, better conditions, come into being if we are agreed that persons only are to be revered and things despised?

"Every creature is only a note, a shade, in one vast symphony which we must study in the whole and in all its vastness unless everything is to become a dead and meaningless letter."

"Man knows himself only in so far as he knows the world; and he becomes acquainted with that only in himself and with himself only in it."

"He who cannot get into his head the truth that spirit and matter, soul and body, thought and space, were, are, and will be the necessary two-fold elements of the universe, *both claiming equal rights*, and, therefore, both able to stand together in the plan of God; he who cannot rise to the height of this thought ought long ago to have given up thinking."¹

These are the words of Goethe. The ethic of work stands founded on the truth they express. The beginnings of duty are with things. Let no man despise them; it were better that a millstone were hanged about his neck and he cast into the sea. The universe is a thing. And man is a fellow worker with the universe in the effort to make it perfect.

¹ Quoted in an article on "Goethe's View of Nature," by F. Melian Stowell and G. Lowes Dickinson, in the *Hibbert Journal*, April, 1928. (The italics are mine.)

IV

THE PRACTICAL OUTCOME

THE foregoing considerations come to a spear-point in a practical maxim at once simple in form, pregnant in meaning, and difficult in application. The maxim is: *Do thy best within the limits of thy vocation.*

As to the simplicity of its form little need be said. The words are plain, the compass short, the address direct.

As to the pregnancy of meaning, volumes might be written. For the words have a mystic significance. They imply that the worker is *called* to his work; not merely that he has a profession or trade to follow, but that a *voice* (indicated in the word *vocation*) has summoned him to follow it, has commanded him to do his best within the limits of it. Our maxim does, in fact, equate the business of the secular worker (surgeon or navy) with the business of the priest. As the latter alleges, or should be able to allege, that he has received a calling from on high to take up his sacred task, so must the surgeon or the navy hear our maxim as spoken by a voice whose command she is bound to reverence. Whose voice? What voice? Shall we name it the voice of society? Or the voice of the universe? Or the voice of God? For my own part I would name it all three,

with the proviso added that the three names are three modes of indicating the same reality. But for our present purpose it matters little how this vocation be named so long as it be heard as the utterance of a *voice* whose authority is acknowledged.

I pass to the difficulty of application, and on this I have more to say.

If we survey the occupations by which human beings can earn their living in a civilized society, we are immediately struck by the immense variety of them. A catalogue of them would swell this book to the size of a post office directory. And corresponding to this vast variety of occupations we should find an equally vast variety of human character, for a man's daily occupation is always the determining factor in making him the kind of man he is, equally so whether he hate it or love it (as many do), and perhaps more clearly so when he hates than when he loves it. Many other influences contribute to making the man what he is—such as religion, philosophy, schooling, parentage, family upbringing; but none of these factors will have their full effect on his character; and some may have none at all, unless his daily occupations give him an opportunity for putting them into action; unless, that is, he practises them *there*. It follows that every human occupation has its own moral type—sometimes distinct and sharp, sometimes indistinct and subtle—stamped on the character—often stamped on the face—of him who follows it. To the immense variety of human occupations, there correspond an immense variety of moral types.

If next we try to classify human occupations according to the effect they have upon character we shall find

that they fall into two clearly distinguishable groups: (1) those whose value to the worker lies mainly in the work he does; (2) those whose value to the worker lies mainly in some extraneous reward (such as money) that he gets for doing the work. An artist is a typical example of the first class; a process worker, who has become a mere "cog on the machine," is a typical example of the second. In industrial society as we now know it, the second class is far more numerous than the first. The ethic of work demands the reversal of that proportion.

Morally considered, the first type of occupation is more beneficial to human character than the second. This is not to deny that some process workers are better men than some artists. I am stating a general rule which anybody who will take the trouble can verify for himself, namely this—that the best human types are to be found among those who do their work mainly for its own sake and not among those who do it mainly for the sake of extraneous reward. In the latter class one would look rather for the least satisfactory types, though not to condemn them when found, but to compassionate them in their misfortune and to get busy with means to deliver them from it.

If this be admitted, our first maxim, "Do thy best within the limits of thy vocation," immediately throws off another quite as important as itself: "Help thy neighbour to do likewise."

Into the general question why we should help our neighbour at all I shall not enter. This book is intended for intelligent readers, and I am not going to assume that any reader of it is such a blockhead as to ask for reasons why he should help his neighbour.

But how can we help our neighbour in this matter?

We can do it in the first place by acting out our original maxim. We distinctly help our neighbour to do *his* best within the limits of his vocation by doing *our* best within the limits of ours. We certainly help him by doing this. For example, the man who made my fountain pen—which happens to be an excellent one—by doing his best as a maker of fountain pens, helps me to do my best in writing this book with the pen he made for me, and I enrol him without hesitation among my moral benefactors. Many of my spiritual advisers have done me less good than he, and I should be glad indeed, if the book I am now writing were to help the pen maker in his vocation as effectually as he is now helping me in mine by putting on the market so excellent a pen. Parallel injuries, inflicted on us by those who have *not* done their best and which hinder us from doing ours, are suffered by most of us every day. If the reader happens to live in a jerry-built house he will know what I mean.

In the second place we can help him—negatively this time—by *not* asking him to furnish us with goods, or to do us service, into the furnishing or doing of which his best can by no means be put. In a community awake to its social responsibilities, such abstentions would be reckoned among the primary obligations. It is hard, and under existing conditions perhaps impossible, for any of us to arrange his life in such a way as not to involve some kind of debasing service on the part of his fellow men—service into which no man can put his best. There are many points in the lives of all of us, rich and poor, where inexorable necessity leaves us no option but

to inflict this kind of injury on others. The food on our tables, the fuel on our fires, have a history behind them over which we are wont to draw a veil; if the veil were lifted and the whole process revealed which has placed these things, and scores of such, at our service, we should realize that we were accomplices in dooming millions of human beings to live inadequate lives. A painful reflection—but salutary—especially for those with a tendency to self-righteousness. We cannot altogether escape from this. We are all stockholders in human misery and degradation.

But something of great significance will be gained by our becoming *conscious* of the tragedy in which we are all thus involved together. There is no doubt that the scope of the evil might be immensely reduced by intelligent self-control, especially in the use we make of our leisure time—for it is there that most of the evil is done. For example, there is no need for people to spend their leisure time in patronizing exhibitions where young women earn their living by displaying themselves virtually naked to the public gaze. In the matter of the fuel on my fire and the food on my table I seem to be under an inexorable necessity, though even there I might be more considerate than I am; but nothing compels me to encourage women to make a vocation of degrading themselves for my amusement. So much Puritanism the ethic of work distinctly enjoins. If the reader will consider the matter for himself—it has too many aspects to be dealt with here—he will find that by restricting his own desires within reasonable compass he is at the same time restricting the range of degrading occupations for his fellow men. He will find also—and this is the positive side of the matter—

that the higher the quality he puts into his own work—"doing my best within the limits of my vocation"—the higher will be the quality of the work he demands of other people in furnishing him with what he needs to keep him alive and efficient while he is at work and amused when he is off duty. Thus, by doing his best in his own vocation, he will be helping others to do likewise.

But the difficulties of our doctrine are by no means at an end. In society as it now exists a vast proportion of the occupations by which human beings earn their living are not *vocations* at all. A vocation, as we have seen, denotes an employment to which a man feels himself *called*, either because it attracts him for its own sake, or because he recognizes a duty to take it up. It would be mockery to apply such a term indiscriminately to the day-to-day work of a modern society. Most of the work it offers to its members—not all by any means—is done under the pressure of sheer necessity. Much of it has no attraction to those who do it, either for its own sake, or for the sake of any benefit which they feel it confers on society. It is done without any sense of its value (except for the "money" it brings in), and if the workers could avoid doing it, would not get done at all. "It tires the body without interesting the mind."

How can our maxim be applied to a situation like this? How can we meet the challenge of the process worker; of the woman who has spent thirty years of her life in pouring boiling jam into pots—I know one such—when they ask: "What room is there in my vocation for the best that I can do?" The challenge is nothing less than tremendous. But that is a reason for taking it up. How can we meet it?

A few pages farther back I wrote, deliberately choosing the words, that I would not insult the reader by supposing him so benighted as to stand in need of reasons why he should help his neighbour, nor will I now assume that he is such a knave as not to help him when a clear opportunity for so doing presented itself. We have now come to the point where the call for mutual helpfulness and the opportunity for it are equally clear. *Of all the forms of social service demanded by the present conditions of the world, the most urgently needed, the most widely beneficent, and the most certainly fruitful, is that which consists in effort directed and sacrifice endured for the purpose of raising the quality of labour in all varieties of human occupation.* The ethic of work is summarized in that.

By improving the quality of labour, I mean, primarily and essentially, increasing the element of *skill* required in the performance of it. The transformation of all workers into *skilled* workers might serve as a summary definition of the ideal which the reformer who operates on these lines will make his own and steadfastly pursue, undeterred by frustrations, defeats and seeming impossibilities. Or, if something with a metaphysical flavour may be ventured, the perfectibility of man as a being born for the exercise of skill, happy only when his life stands rooted in a skilful occupation; miserable, otherwise, as one half-grown and deprived of his birth-right.

To bring this ideal to the practical application we must consider the members of the community in their double capacity of producers and consumers; of workers and worked for.

Let us take the latter first. As consumers and

worked-for our general aim must be to stimulate and increase, in all ranks of the community, the demand for high quality in the goods consumed and in the services rendered. The rising generation should be trained and educated, not to suppress their desires, but *to concentrate them on quality*; to restrict the ranges of desire for things that are worthless, but only in order that the strength of desire may fall upon their contraries; to be niggardly only in respect of the former, but in respect of the latter, to be generous, expensive and bold. I know a man who became insolvent through the encouragement he gave to a group of poor but gifted craftsmen whose work an ill-educated public would not buy. He went too fast, but he went in the right direction; we may adopt his spirit without following his example. I am not suggesting that education should devote itself to the cultivation of what is called "taste," though perhaps it would be better employed in doing that than in pursuing some of its present courses. But I do suggest that the creation of an increasing pressure in favour of the skill-made article and against the contrary is among the greatest of the social services which education can render to an industrial age.

Turning now to the individual considered as worker and producer, the general aim of his education should be to train him for an active occupation which shall have the double and easily united qualities of being socially valuable and personally satisfying. Skilled occupations alone conform to this double requirement; and the more fully the double requirement is met the higher is the degree of skill implied in the individual who meets it. Remembering the immense variety of

socially valuable occupations where skilled performance, manual, intellectual, and moral is possible, there need be no hesitation in saying that the production of skilled individuals should be the summary aim of education. Knowledge, as the aim of education, is not enough, unless it be clearly understood that knowledge in the full sense of the term does *not exist until it completes itself by a skilful performance of what, till performed, is at best but half-known*. Nor is it enough to say that all education should be vocational, unless it be clearly understood *that the vocation for which the individual is trained is of a kind to continue and complete his education*. With that immensely significant addition the plea for vocational training is sound; but unsound without it. For it cannot be insisted on too often that the principal factor in forming the character of human beings lies in the nature of the occupations by which they earn their living. Apart from this, the utmost that schools, colleges and universities can effect in modifying the character of a people is relatively small; the work of the world is the great "continuation school" into which all of us sooner or later pass. Unless there is a real continuity between the earlier education and the latter it is certain that the efforts of the former will be mainly thrown away. Education is fatally misconceived when we think of it as a kind of make-weight or counteracting influence to the deadening influence of the life that is to follow. The two stages of life must be viewed in the closest union: the first made into a preparation for the second, and the second made into the completion of the first.

The demand for skill on the part of the producer and the supply of it on the part of the producer naturally

go together and imply each other. An example recently came under my notice. I was visiting a small town which is fortunate in being the seat of a skilled industry—that of high-class cabinet making. A prominent inhabitant, being good enough to show me the sights of the place; I was greatly struck by the superiority of the workmen's houses recently erected, both as to structural soundness and architectural beauty. I commented on this to my guide and received the following explanation: "You see, our people know what good furniture is, because they make it; the consequence is they know what good houses are and demand them. If you put these people into jerry-built houses, there would be trouble." But, alas! for the contrast. In another town, not far from the former, immense factories have recently sprung up for an industry of the mass-production type. There are thousands of operatives, well paid, but machine-minders for the most part. To accommodate them eight hundred houses have been erected in the neighbourhood. They are all jerry-built and as ugly as sin; official requirements superficially satisfied by camouflage and eyewash; the material bad; the workmanship unsound; beginning to fall to pieces as soon as they are inhabited; a slum in the making. No voice is raised in protest. The unskilled worker is content to be unskilfully worked-for; he expects nothing else. The two things are of a piece.

I offer these examples as illustrating an ethical law. No man can "do the best within the limits of his vocation" without exerting a silent pressure on other men to do the best in theirs; skill exercised in one form throws off inevitably a demand for skill in other forms.

If one man makes good furniture, another man will sooner or later find himself building a good house to put it in. All varieties of human skill materially interpenetrate, support and stimulate each other. Whatever form of skill a human being acquires implies sound judgment and self-control in the exercise of it; and the effects of it are by no means conferred to its possessor.

This holds true of the malefactor's skill no less than of the benefactor's; the performances of the former, abundantly illustrated in these days, being a pointed reminder that education has failed in its primary task of training the individual for a socially valuable occupation and suffered skill to run wild. The benefactor has much to learn from the malefactor at this point. It is humiliating to reflect how much of the skill which good men use in the practice of the social arts has been learnt by taking a leaf out of the bad man's book. The saints have much to learn from the sinners. For is it not written that the children of this world are wiser in their day and generation than the children of light?

Man is a being born for the exercise of skill; he has a natural hunger for skilful occupation, and if skill is denied him on lines that are socially valuable he will either relapse into a stupid and brutish lethargy or assert his birthright in anti-social activity—perhaps in skilful crime. Hence the admiration of the young for the skilful criminal, fostered by picture shows and penny dreadfuls—a form of admiration rendered possible, and perhaps inevitable, by the fact that so little is being done in the schools to equip the young with skill of their own. Much of the crime that darkens the world is nothing

else than a perverted assertion of man's birthright—the right to skill.

The ethic of work gives no promise of a sudden leap into the earthly paradise, either for the individual or for the community. Nay, more. If the earthly paradise means the reign of happiness, and if "happiness" means a continuous flow of agreeable sensations, our ethic teaches that the search for it should be definitely abandoned. It is a thing altogether beyond the range of possibility in a working universe; impossible and, even if possible, unworthy of our search.

The ethic of work does not advertise good conduct as though its rules were a set of magic formulæ for bringing God and the universe entirely over to the side of the righteous man! "Safety first" is not its watchword; if the choice had to be made, it would put safety last rather than first. The ethical worker wins his way valiantly in the teeth of opposition. When the difficulties are surmounted, and the work done, he gives the name of God to the opponent who has challenged him and lays the thing he has created as an offering on the altar of the Highest.

The ethic of work is not a method of luring men into the practice of virtue by the offer of bribes, openly professed under the term "happiness," or ingeniously disguised as "self-realization." It does not profess to guide men as we guide donkeys—by holding carrots before their noses, with the only difference that the carrots, when held before the noses of men, are called by some finer name. Men, just because they are men, are certain sooner or later to see through the trick that is being played upon them, as even donkeys do when the

trick has been played often enough; a discovery which often leads them, whether men or donkeys, to kick over the traces and become unmanageable. This is sometimes expressed by saying that those who consciously pursue happiness (and the same surely holds true of self-realization) never attain it.

The creed of happiness, in the soft sense of the word, is a creed for imbeciles; turned into a cult, as many have tried to turn it, it becomes a social danger of the first magnitude. The only thing to be said in its favour is that it represents a reaction against the *misery* of the world. What those who profess it—at least the best of them—are really after is not “the creation of a sum of pleasure,” nor any such-like fool’s enterprise, but the deliverance of mankind from its manifest wretchedness—and the alleviation of its enormous suffering. To that extent it may be reckoned to them for righteousness. All the same, the ethic of work refuses to adopt happiness on a watchword, if only because of the inevitable perversion that attends application of it by the foolish and the weak.

The one “promise” our ethic has to offer the worker is that his work, well done at one stage, shall become more creative at the next, until it reaches the stage of a fine art and, arrived there, becomes the mother of arts more wonderful than itself; and so on for ever and ever. There is no “end.” And therein lies the only happiness our ethic has dealings with—the happiness of *endless* attaining; the happiness of inexhaustible transfigurations into higher forms of activity; the happiness of a vocation that calls *for ever*—all other “ends” being synonymous with death. This kind of happiness is mingled with pain and salted with fire, so that it becomes a food fit

for heroes, with the flavour in it that the hero loves. Or, if another figure be preferred, it may be compared to a shining fabric, a bright weft of joy woven on a dark warp of suffering. In such a garment the heroic worker may fitly clothe himself and walk abroad in his majesty, recognizable by all men.

“Joy and woe are woven fine,
A clothing for the soul divine.”

