
Title: The Road to Wigan Pier
Author: George Orwell

PART ONE

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The first sound in the mornings was the clumping of the mill-girls' clogs down the cobbled street. Earlier than that, I suppose, there were factory whistles which I was never awake to hear.

My bed was in the right-hand corner on the side nearest the door. There was another bed across the foot of it and jammed hard against it (it had to be in that position to allow the door to open) so that I had to sleep with my legs doubled up; if I straightened them out I kicked the occupant of the other bed in the small of the back. He was an elderly man named Mr Reilly, a mechanic of sorts and employed 'on top' at one of the coal pits. Luckily he had to go to work at five in the morning, so I could uncoil my legs and have a couple of hours' proper sleep after he was gone. In the bed opposite there was a Scotch miner who had been injured in a pit accident (a huge chunk of stone pinned him to the ground and it was a couple of hours before they could lever it off), and had received five hundred pounds compensation. He was a big handsome

man of forty, with grizzled hair and a clipped moustache, more like a sergeant-major than a miner, and he would lie in bed till late in the day, smoking a short pipe. The other bed was occupied by a succession of commercial travellers, newspaper-canvassers, and hire-purchase touts who generally stayed for a couple of nights. It was a double bed and much the best in the room. I had slept in it myself my first night there, but had been manoeuvred out of it to make room for another lodger. I believe all newcomers spent their first night in the double bed, which was used, so to speak, as bait. All the windows were kept tight shut, with a red sandbag jammed in the bottom, and in the morning the room stank like a ferret's cage. You did not notice it when you got up, but if you went out of the room and came back, the smell hit you in the face with a smack.

I never discovered how many bedrooms the house contained, but strange to say there was a bathroom, dating from before the Brookers' time. Downstairs there was the usual kitchen living-room with its huge open range burning night and day. It was lighted only by a skylight, for on one side of it was the shop and on the other the larder, which opened into some dark subterranean place where the tripe was stored. Partly blocking the door of the larder there was a shapeless sofa upon which Mrs Brooker, our landlady, lay permanently ill, festooned in grimy blankets. She had a big, pale yellow, anxious face. No one knew for certain what was the matter with her;

I suspect that her only real trouble was over-eating. In front of the fire there was almost always a line of damp washing, and in the middle of the room was the big kitchen table at which the family and all the lodgers ate. I never saw this table completely uncovered, but I saw its various wrappings at different times. At the bottom there was a layer of old newspaper stained by Worcester Sauce; above that a sheet of sticky white oil-cloth; above that a green serge cloth; above that a coarse linen cloth, never changed and seldom taken off. Generally the crumbs from breakfast were still on the table at supper. I used to get to know individual crumbs by sight and watch their progress up and down the table from day to day.

The shop was a narrow, cold sort of room. On the. outside of the window a few white letters, relics of ancient chocolate advertisements, were scattered like stars. Inside there was a slab upon which lay the great white folds of tripe, and the grey flocculent stuff known as 'black tripe', and the ghostly translucent feet of pigs, ready boiled. It was the ordinary 'tripe and pea' shop, and not much else was stocked except bread, cigarettes, and tinned stuff. 'Teas' were advertised in the window, but if a customer demanded a cup of tea he was usually put off with excuses. Mr Brooker, though out of work for two years, was a miner by trade, but he and his wife had been keeping shops of various kinds as a side-line all their lives. At one time they had had a pub, but they had lost their licence for

allowing gambling on the premises. I doubt whether any of their businesses had ever paid; they were the kind of people who run a business chiefly in order to have something to grumble about. Mr Brooker was a dark, small-boned, sour, Irish-looking man, and astonishingly dirty. I don't think I ever once saw his hands clean. As Mrs Brooker was now an invalid he prepared most of the food, and like all people with permanently dirty hands he had a peculiarly intimate, lingering manner of handling things. If he gave you a slice of bread-and-butter there was always a black thumb-print on it. Even in the early morning when he descended into the mysterious den behind Mrs Brooker's sofa and fished out the tripe, his hands were already black. I heard dreadful stories from the other lodgers about the place where the tripe was kept. Blackbeetles were said to swarm there. I do not know how often fresh consignments of tripe were ordered, but it was at long intervals, for Mrs Brooker used to date events by it. 'Let me see now, I've had in three lots of froze (frozen tripe) since that happened,' etc. We lodgers were never given tripe to eat. At the time I imagined that this was because tripe was too expensive; I have since thought that it was merely because we knew too much about it. The Brookers never ate tripe themselves, I noticed.

The only permanent lodgers were the Scotch miner, Mr Reilly, two old-age pensioners, and an unemployed man on the P.A.C. named Joe--he was the kind of person who has no surname. The Scotch miner

was a bore when you got
to know him. Like so many unemployed men he spent too
much time reading
newspapers, and if you did not head him off he would
discourse for hours
about such things as the Yellow Peril, trunk murders,
astrology, and the
conflict between religion and science. The old-age
pensioners had, as
usual, been driven from their homes by the Means
Test. They handed their
weekly ten shillings over to the Brookers and in
return got the kind of
accommodation you would expect for ten shillings;
that is, a bed in the
attic and meals chiefly of bread-and-butter. One of
them was of'superior'
type and was dying of some malignant disease--cancer,
I believe. He only
got out of bed on the days when he went to draw his
pension. The other,
called by everyone Old Jack, was an ex-miner aged
seventy-eight who had
worked well over fifty years in the pits. He was
alert and intelligent, but
curiously enough he seemed only to remember his
boyhood experiences and to
have forgotten all about the modem mining machinery
and improvements. He
used to tell me tales of fights with savage horses in
the narrow galleries
underground. When he heard that I was arranging to go
down several coal
mines he was contemptuous and declared that a man of
my size (six feet two
and a half) would never manage the 'travelling'; it
was no use telling him
that the 'travelling' was better than it used to be.
But he was friendly to
everyone and used to give us all a fine shout of
'Good night, boys!' as he
crawled up the stairs to his bed somewhere under the
rafters. What I most

admired about Old Jack was that he never cadged; he was generally out-of tobacco towards the end of the week, but he always refused to smoke anyone else's. The Brookers had insured the lives of both old-age pensioners with one of the tanner-a-week companies. It was said that they were overheard anxiously asking the insurance-tout 'how long people lives when they've got cancer'.

Joe, like the Scotchman, was a great reader of newspapers and spent almost his entire day in the public library. He was the typical unmarried unemployed man, a derelict-looking, frankly ragged creature with a round, almost childish face on which there was a naively naughty expression. He looked more like a neglected little boy than a grown-up man. I suppose it is the complete lack of responsibility that makes so many of these men look younger than their ages. From Joe's appearance I took him to be about twenty-eight, and was amazed to learn that he was forty-three. He had a love of resounding phrases and was very proud of the astuteness with which he had avoided getting married. He often said to me, 'Matrimonial chains is a big item,' evidently feeling this to be a very subtle and portentous remark. His total income was fifteen shillings a week, and he paid out six or seven to the Brookers for his bed. I sometimes used to see him making himself a cup of tea over the kitchen fire, but for the rest he got his meals somewhere out of doors; it was mostly slices of bread-and-marg and packets of fish and chips, I suppose.

Besides these there was a floating clientele of commercial travellers of the poorer sort, travelling actors--always common in the North because most of the larger pubs hire variety artists at the week-ends--and newspaper-canvassers. The newspaper-canvassers were a type I had never met before. Their job seemed to me so hopeless, so appalling that I wondered how anyone could put up with such a thing when prison was a possible alternative. They were employed mostly by weekly or Sunday papers, and they were sent from town to town, provided with maps and given a list of streets which they had to 'work' each day. If they failed to secure a minimum of twenty orders a day, they got the sack. So long as they kept up their twenty orders a day they received a small salary--two pounds a week, I think; on any order over the twenty they drew a tiny commission. The thing is not so impossible as it sounds, because in working-class districts every family takes in a twopenny weekly paper and changes it every few weeks; but I doubt whether anyone keeps a job of that kind long. The newspapers engage poor desperate wretches, out-of-work clerks and commercial travellers and the like, who for a while make frantic efforts and keep their sales up to the minimum; then as the deadly work wears them down they are sacked and fresh men are taken on. I got to know two who were employed by one of the more notorious weeklies. Both of them were middle-aged men with families to support, and one of them was a grandfather. They were on their feet ten

hours a day, 'working' their appointed streets, and then busy late into the night filling in blank forms for some swindle their paper was running-- one of those schemes by which you are 'given' a set of crockery if you take out a six weeks' subscription and send a two-shilling postal order as well. The fat one, the grandfather, used to fall asleep with his head on a pile of forms. Neither of them could afford the pound a week which the Brookers charged for full board. They used to pay a small sum for their beds and make shamefaced meals in a corner of the kitchen off bacon and bread-and-margarine which they stored in their suit-cases.

The Brookers had large numbers of sons and daughters, most of whom had long since fled from home. Some were in Canada 'at Canada', as Mrs Brooker used to put it. There was only one son living near by, a large pig-like young man employed in a garage, who frequently came to the house for his meals. His wife was there all day with the two children, and most of the cooking and laundering was done by her and by Emmie, the fiancee of another son who was in London. Emmie was a fair-haired, sharp-nosed, unhappy-looking girl who worked at one of the mills for some starvation wage, but nevertheless spent all her evenings in bondage at the Brookers' house. I gathered that the marriage was constantly being postponed and would probably never take place, but Mrs Brooker had already appropriated Emmie as a daughter-in-law, and nagged her in that peculiar watchful, loving way that invalids have. The rest of the housework was

done, or not done, by Mr Brooker. Mrs Brooker seldom rose from her sofa in the kitchen (she spent the night there as well as the day) and was too ill to do anything except eat stupendous meals. It was Mr Brooker who attended to the shop, gave the lodgers their food, and 'did out' the bedrooms. He was always moving with incredible slowness from one hated job to another. Often the beds were still unmade at six in the evening, and at any hour of the day you were liable to meet Mr Brooker on the stairs, carrying a full chamber-pot which he gripped with his thumb well over the rim. In the mornings he sat by the fire with a tub of filthy water, peeling potatoes at the speed of a slow-motion picture. I never saw anyone who could peel potatoes with quite such an air of brooding resentment. You could see the hatred of this 'bloody woman's work', as he called it, fermenting inside him, a kind of bitter juice. He was one of those people who can chew their grievances like a cud.

Of course, as I was indoors a good deal, I heard all about the Brookers' woes, and how everyone swindled them and was ungrateful to them, and how the shop did not pay and the lodging-house hardly paid. By local standards they were not so badly off, for, in some way I did not understand, Mr Brooker was dodging the Means Test and drawing an allowance from the P.A.C., but their chief pleasure was talking about their grievances to anyone who would listen. Mrs Brooker used to lament by the hour, lying on her sofa, a soft mound of fat and

self-pity, saying the same
things over and over again.' We don't seem to get no
customers nowadays. I
don't know 'ow it is. The tripe's just a-laying there
day after day--such
beautiful tripe it is, too! It does seem 'ard, don't
it now ?' etc., etc.,
etc. All Mrs Brookers' laments ended with' It does
seem 'ard, don't it now?'
like the refrain of a ballade. Certainly it was true
that the shop did
not pay. The whole place had the unmistakable dusty,
flyblown air of a
business that is going down. But it would have been
quite useless to
explain to them why nobody came to the shop, even if
one had had the face
to do it; neither was capable of understanding that
last year's dead
bluebottles supine in the shop window are not good
for trade.

But the thing that really tormented them was the
thought of those two
old-age pensioners living in their house, usurping
floor-space, devouring
food, and paying only ten shillings a week. I doubt
whether they were
really losing money over the old-age pensioners,
though certainly the
profit on ten shillings a week must have been very
small. But in their eyes
the two old men were a kind of dreadful parasite who
had fastened on them
and were living on their charity. Old Jack they could
just tolerate,
because he kept out-of-doors most of the day, but
they really hated the
bedridden one, Hooker by name. Mr Brooker had a queer
way of pronouncing
his name, without the H and with a long U--'Uker'.
What tales I heard
about old Hooker and his fractiousness, the nuisance

of making his bed, the
way he 'wouldn't eat' this and 'wouldn't eat' that,
his endless ingratitude
and, above all, the selfish obstinacy with which he
refused to die! The
Brookers were quite openly pining for him to die.
When that happened they
could at least draw the insurance money. They seemed
to feel him there,
eating their substance day after day, as though he
had been a living worm
in their bowels. Sometimes Mr Brooker would look up
from his potato-
peeling, catch my eye, and jerk his head with a look
of inexpressible
bitterness towards the ceiling, towards old Hooker's
room. 'It's a b-,
ain't it?' he would say. There was no need to say
more; I had heard all
about old Hooker's ways already. But the Brookers had
grievances of one
kind and another against all their lodgers, myself
included, no doubt. Joe,
being on the P.A.C., was practically in the same
category as the old-age
pensioners. The Scotchman paid a pound a week, but he
was indoors most of
the day and they 'didn't like him always hanging
round the place', as they
put it. The newspaper-canvassers were out all day,
but the Brookers bore
them a grudge for bringing in their own food, and
even Mr Reilly, their
best lodger, was in disgrace because Mrs Brooker said
that he woke her up
when he came downstairs in the mornings. They
couldn't, they complained
perpetually, get the kind of lodgers they
wanted--good-class 'commercial
gentlemen' who paid full board and were out all day.
Their ideal lodger
would have been somebody who paid thirty shillings a
week and never came

indoors except to sleep. I have noticed that people who let lodgings nearly always hate their lodgers. They want their money but they look on them as intruders and have a curiously watchful, jealous attitude which at bottom is a determination not to let the lodger make himself too much at home. It is an inevitable result of the bad system by which the lodger has to live in somebody else's house without being one of the family.

The meals at the Brookers' house were uniformly disgusting. For breakfast you got two rashers of bacon and a pale fried egg, and bread-and-butter which had often been cut overnight and always had thumb-marks on it. However tactfully I tried, I could never induce Mr Brooker to let me cut my own bread-and-butter; he would hand it to me slice by slice, each slice gripped firmly under that broad black thumbs For dinner there were generally those threepenny steak puddings which are sold ready-made in tins--these were part of the stock of the shop, I think--and boiled potatoes and rice pudding. For tea there was more bread-and-butter and frayed-looking sweet cakes which were probably bought as 'stales' from the baker. For supper there was the pale flabby Lancashire cheese and biscuits. The Brookers never called these biscuits biscuits. They always referred to them reverently as 'cream crackers'--'Have another cream cracker, Mr Reilly. You'll like a cream cracker with your cheese'--thus glozing over the fact that there was only cheese for supper. Several bottles of Worcester Sauce

and a half-full jar of marmalade lived permanently on the table. It was
usual to souse everything, even a piece of cheese, with Worcester Sauce,
but I never saw anyone brave the marmalade jar, which was an unspeakable
mass of stickiness and dust. Mrs Brooker had her meals separately but also
took snacks from any meal that happened to be going, and manoeuvred with
great skill for what she called 'the bottom of the pot', meaning the
strongest cup of tea. She had a habit of constantly wiping her mouth on one
of her blankets. Towards the end of my stay she took to tearing off strips
of newspaper for this purpose, and in the morning the floor was often
littered with crumpled-up balls of slimy paper which lay there for hours.
The smell of the kitchen was dreadful, but, as with that of the bedroom,
you ceased to notice it after a while.

It struck me that this place must be fairly normal as lodging-houses
in the industrial areas go, for on the whole the lodgers did not complain.
The only one who ever did so to my knowledge was a little black-haired,
sharp-nosed Cockney, a traveller for a cigarette firm. He had never been in
the North before, and I think that till recently he had been in better
employ and was used to staying in commercial hotels. This was his first
glimpse of really low-class lodgings, the kind of place in which the poor
tribe of touts and canvassers have to shelter upon their endless journeys.
In the morning as we were dressing (he had slept in the double bed, of
course) I saw him look round the desolate room with a

sort of wondering
aversion. He caught my eye and suddenly divined that I was a fellow-
Southerner. 'The filthy bloody bastards!' he said feelingly. After that he
packed his suit-case, went downstairs and, with great strength of mind,
told the Brookers that this was not the kind of house he was accustomed to
and that he was leaving immediately. The Brookers could never understand
why. They were astonished and hurt. The ingratitude of it! Leaving them
like that for no reason after a single night! Afterwards they discussed it
over and over again, in all its bearings. It was added to their store of
grievances.

On the day when there was a full chamber-pot under the breakfast table
I decided to leave. The place was beginning to depress me. It was not only
the dirt, the smells, and the vile food, but the feeling of stagnant
meaningless decay, of having got down into some subterranean place where
people go creeping round and round, just like blackbeetles, in an endless
muddle of slovened jobs and mean grievances. The most dreadful thing about
people like the Brookers is the way they say the same things over and over
again. It gives you the feeling that they are not real people at all, but a
kind of ghost for ever rehearsing the same futile rigmarole. In the end Mrs
Brooker's self-pitying talk--always the same complaints, over and over,
and always ending with the tremulous whine of 'It does seem 'ard, don't it
now?'--revolted me even more than her habit of wiping her mouth with bits

of newspaper. But it is no use saying that people like the Brookers are just disgusting and trying to put them out of mind. For they exist in tens and hundreds of thousands; they are one of the characteristic by-products of the modern world. You cannot disregard them if you accept the civilization that produced them. For this is part at least of what industrialism has done for us. Columbus sailed the Atlantic, the first steam engines tottered into motion, the British squares stood firm under the French guns at Waterloo, the one-eyed scoundrels of the nineteenth century praised God and filled their pockets; and this is where it all led --to labyrinthine slums and dark back kitchens with sickly, ageing people creeping round and round them like blackbeetles. It is a kind of duty to see and smell such places now and again, especially smell them, lest you should forget that they exist; though perhaps it is better not to stay there too long.

The train bore me away, through the monstrous scenery of slag-heaps, chimneys, piled scrap-iron, foul canals, paths of cindery mud criss-crossed by the prints of clogs. This was March, but the weather had been horribly cold and everywhere there were mounds of blackened snow. As we moved slowly through the outskirts of the town we passed row after row of little grey slum houses running at right angles to the-embankment. At the back of one of the houses a young woman was kneeling on the stones, poking a stick up the leaden waste-pipe which ran from the sink inside

and which I suppose
was blocked. I had time to see everything about
her--her sacking apron,
her clumsy clogs, her arms reddened by the cold. She
looked up as the train
passed, and I was almost near enough to catch her
eye. She had a round pale
face, the usual exhausted face of the slum girl who
is twenty-five and
looks forty, thanks to miscarriages and drudgery; and
it wore, for the
second in which I saw it, the most desolate, hopeless
expression I have
ever-seen. It struck me then that we are mistaken
when we say that' It
isn't the same for them as it would be for us,' and
that people bred in the
slums can imagine nothing but the slums. For what I
saw in her face was not
the ignorant suffering of an animal. She knew well
enough what was
happening to her--understood as well as I did how
dreadful a destiny it
was to be kneeling there in the bitter cold, on the
slimy stones of a slum
backyard, poking a stick up a foul drain-pipe.

But quite soon the train drew away into open country,
and that seemed
strange, almost unnatural, as though the open country
had been a kind of
park; for in the industrial areas one always feels
that the smoke and filth
must go on for ever and that no part of the earth's
surface can escape
them. In a crowded, dirty little country like ours
one takes defilement
almost for granted. Slag-heaps and chimneys seem a
more normal, probable
landscape than grass and trees, and even in the
depths of the country when
you drive your fork into the ground you half expect
to lever up a broken

bottle or a rusty can. But out here the snow was untrodden and lay so deep that only the tops of the stone boundary-walls were showing, winding over the hills like black paths. I remembered that D. H. Lawrence, writing of this same landscape or another near by, said that the snow-covered hills rippled away into the distance 'like muscle'. It was not the simile that would have occurred to me. To my eye the snow and the black walls were more like a white dress with black piping running across it.

Although the snow was hardly broken the sun was shining brightly, and behind the shut windows of the carriage it seemed warm. According to the almanac this was spring, and a few of the birds seemed to believe it. For the first time in my life, in a bare patch beside the line, I saw rooks treading. They did it on the ground and not, as I should have expected, in a tree. The manner of courtship was curious. The female stood with her beak open and the male walked round her and appeared to be feeding her. I had hardly been in the train half an hour, but it seemed a very long way from the Brookers' back-kitchen to the empty slopes of snow, the bright sunshine, and the big gleaming birds.

The whole of the industrial districts are really one enormous town, of about the same population as Greater London but, fortunately, of much larger area; so that even in the middle of them there is still room for patches of cleanness and decency. That is an encouraging thought. In spite

of hard trying, man has not yet succeeded in doing his dirt everywhere. The earth is so vast and still so empty that even in the filthy heart of civilization you find fields where the grass is green instead of grey; perhaps if you looked for them you might even find streams with live fish in them instead of salmon tins. For quite a long time, perhaps another twenty minutes, the train was rolling through open country before the villa-civilization began to close in upon us again, and then the outer slums, and then the slag-heaps, belching chimneys, blast-furnaces, canals, and gaso-meters of another industrial town.

2

Our civilization, pace Chesterton, is founded on coal, more completely than one realizes until one stops to think about it. The machines that keep us alive, and the machines that make machines, are all directly or indirectly dependent upon coal. In the metabolism of the Western world the coal-miner is second in importance only to the man who ploughs the soil. He is a sort of caryatid upon whose shoulders nearly everything that is not grimy is supported. For this reason the actual process by which coal is extracted is well worth watching, if you get the chance and are willing to take the trouble.

When you go down a coal-mine it is important to try and get to the coal face when the 'fillers' are at work. This is not easy, because when the mine is working visitors are a nuisance and are not encouraged, but if you go at any other time, it is possible to come away with a totally wrong impression. On a Sunday, for instance, a mine seems almost peaceful. The time to go there is when the machines are roaring and the air is black with coal dust, and when you can actually see what the miners have to do. At those times the place is like hell, or at any rate like my own mental picture of hell. Most of the things one imagines in hell are if there-- heat, noise, confusion, darkness, foul air, and, above all, unbearably cramped space. Everything except the fire, for there is no fire down there except the feeble beams of Davy lamps and electric torches which scarcely penetrate the clouds of coal dust.

When you have finally got there--and getting there is a in itself: I will explain that in a moment--you crawl through the last line of pit props and see opposite you a shiny black wall three or four feet high. This is the coal face. Overhead is the smooth ceiling made by the rock from which the coal has been cut; underneath is the rock again, so that the gallery you are in is only as high as the ledge of coal itself, probably not much more than a yard. The first impression of all, overmastering everything else for a while, is the frightful, deafening din from the conveyor belt which carries the coal away. You cannot

see very far, because
the fog of coal dust throws back the beam of your
lamp, but you can see on
either side of you the line of half-naked kneeling
men, one to every four
or five yards, driving their shovels under the fallen
coal and flinging it
swiftly over their left shoulders. They are feeding
it on to the conveyor
belt, a moving rubber, belt a couple of feet wide
which runs a yard or two
behind them. Down this belt a glittering river of
coal races constantly. In
a big mine it is carrying away several tons of coal
every minute. It bears
it off to some place in the main roads where it is
shot into tubs holding
half a tun, and thence dragged to the cages and
hoisted to the outer air.

It is impossible to watch the 'fillers' at work
without feelling a
pang of envy for their toughness. It is a dreadful
job that they do, an
almost superhuman job by the standard of an ordinary
person. For they are
not only shifting monstrous quantities of coal, they
are also doing, it in
a position that doubles or trebles the work. They
have got to remain
kneeling all the while--they could hardly rise from
their knees without
hitting the ceiling--and you can easily see by trying
it what a
tremendous effort this means. Shovelling is
comparatively easy when you are
standing up, because you can use your knee and thigh
to drive the shovel
along; kneeling down, the whole of the strain is
thrown upon your arm and
belly muscles. And the other conditions do not
exactly make things easier.
There is the heat--it varies, but in some mines it is

suffocating--and
the coal dust that stuffs up your throat and nostrils
and collects along
your eyelids, and the unending rattle of the conveyor
belt, which in that
confined space is rather like the rattle of a machine
gun. But the fillers
look and work as though they were made of iron. They
really do look like
iron hammered iron statues--under the smooth coat of
coal dust which
clings to them from head to foot. It is only when you
see miners down the
mine and naked that you realize what splendid men,
they are. Most of them
are small (big men are at a disadvantage in that job)
but nearly all of
them have the most noble bodies; wide shoulders
tapering to slender supple
waists, and small pronounced buttocks and sinewy
thighs, with not an ounce
of waste flesh anywhere. In the hotter mines they
wear only a pair of thin
drawers, clogs and knee-pads; in the hottest mines of
all, only the clogs
and knee-pads. You can hardly tell by the look of
them whether they are
young or old. They may be any age up to sixty or even
sixty-five, but when
they are black and naked they all look alike. No one
could do their work
who had not a young man's body, and a figure fit for
a guardsman at that,
just a few pounds of extra flesh on the waist-line,
and the constant
bending would be impossible. You can never forget
that spectacle once you
have seen it--the line of bowed, kneeling figures,
sooty black all over,
driving their, huge shovels under the coal with
stupendous force and speed.
They are on the job for seven and a half hours,
theoretically without a

break, for there is no time 'off'. Actually they, snatch a quarter of an hour or so at some time during the shift to eat the food they have brought with them, usually a hunk of bread and dripping and a bottle of cold tea.
The first time I was watching the 'fillers' at work I put my hand upon some dreadful slimy thing among the coal dust. It was a chewed quid of tobacco.
Nearly all the miners chew tobacco, which is said to be good against thirst.

Probably you have to go down several coal-mines before you can get much grasp of the processes that are going on round you. This is chiefly because the mere effort of getting from place to place; makes it difficult to notice anything else, In some ways it is even disappointing, or at least is unlike what you have, expected. You get into the cage, which is a steel box about as wide as a telephone box and two or three times as long. It holds ten men, but they pack it like pilchards in a tin, and a tall man cannot stand upright in it. The steel door shuts upon you, and somebody working the winding gear above drops you into the void. You have the usual momentary qualm in your belly and a bursting sensation in the cars, but not much sensation of movement till you get near the bottom, when the cage slows down so abruptly that you could swear it is going upwards again. In the middle of the run the cage probably touches sixty miles an hour; in some of the deeper mines it touches even more. When you crawl out at the bottom you are perhaps four hundred yards

underground. That is to say you
have a tolerable-sized mountain on top of you;
hundreds of yards of solid
rock, bones of extinct beasts, subsoil, flints, roots
of growing things,
green grass and cows grazing on it--all this
suspended over your head and
held back only by wooden props as thick as the calf
of your leg. But
because of the speed at which the cage has brought
you down, and the
complete blackness through which you have travelled,
you hardly feel
yourself deeper down than you would at the bottom of
the Piccadilly tube.

What is surprising, on the other hand, is the immense
horizontal
distances that have to be travelled underground.
Before I had been down a
mine I had vaguely imagined the miner stepping out of
the cage and getting
to work on a ledge of coal a few yards away. I had
not realized that before
he even gets to work he may have had to creep along
passages as long as
from London Bridge to Oxford Circus. In the
beginning, of course, a mine
shaft is sunk somewhere near a seam of coal; But as
that seam is worked out
and fresh seams are followed up, the workings get
further and further from
the pit bottom. If it is a mile from the pit bottom
to the coal face, that
is probably an average distance; three miles is a
fairly normal one; there
are even said to be a few mines where it is as much
as five miles. But
these distances bear no relation to distances above
ground. For in all that
mile or three miles as it may be, there is hardly
anywhere outside the main
road, and not many places even there, where a man can

stand upright.

You do not notice the effect of this till you have gone a few hundred yards. You start off, stooping slightly, down the dim-lit gallery, eight or ten feet wide and about five high, with the walls built up with slabs of shale, like the stone walls in Derbyshire. Every yard or two there are wooden props holding up the beams and girders; some of the girders have buckled into fantastic curves under which you have to duck. Usually it is bad going underfoot--thick dust or jagged chunks of shale, and in some mines where there is water it is as mucky as a farm-yard. Also there is the track for the coal tubs, like a miniature railway track with sleepers a foot or two apart, which is tiresome to walk on. Everything is grey with shale dust; there is a dusty fiery smell which seems to be the same in all mines. You see mysterious machines of which you never learn the purpose, and bundles of tools slung together on wires, and sometimes mice darting away from the beam of the lamps. They are surprisingly common, especially in mines where there are or have been horses. It would be interesting to know how they got there in the first place; possibly by falling down the shaft--for they say a mouse can fall any distance uninjured, owing to its surface area being so large relative to its weight. You press yourself against the wall to make way for lines of tubs jolting slowly towards the shaft, drawn by an endless steel cable operated from the surface. You creep through sacking curtains and thick wooden doors

which, when they are
opened, let out fierce blasts of air. These doors are
an important part of
the ventilation system. The exhausted air is sucked
out of one shaft by
means of fans, and the fresh air enters the other of
its own accord. But if
left to itself the air will take the shortest way
round, leaving the deeper
workings unventilated; so all the short cuts have to
be partitioned off.

At the start to walk stooping is rather a joke, but
it is a joke that
soon wears off. I am handicapped by being
exceptionally tall, but when the
roof falls to four feet or less it is a tough job for
anybody except a
dwarf or a child. You not only have to bend double,
you have also got to
keep your head up all the while so as to see the
beams and girders and
dodge them when they come. You have, thehefore, a
constant crick in the
neck, but this is nothing to the pain in your knees
and thighs. After half
a mile it becomes (I am not exaggerating) an
unbearable agony. You begin to
wonder whether you will ever get to the end--still
more, how on earth you
are going to get back. Your pace grows slower and
slower. You come to a
stretch of a couple of hundred yards where it is all
exceptionally low and
you have to work yourself along in a squatting
position. Then suddenly the
roof opens out to a mysterious height--scene of and
old fall of rock,
probably--and for twenty whole yards you can stand
upright. The relief is
overwhelming. But after this there is another low
stretch of a hundred
yards and then a succession of beams which you have

to crawl under. You go
down on all fours; even this is a relief after the
squatting business. But
when you come to the end of the beams and try to get
up again, you find
that your knees have temporarily struck work and
refuse to lift you. You
call a halt, ignominiously, and say that you would
like to rest for a
minute or two. Your guide (a miner) is sympathetic.
He knows that your
muscles are not the same as his. 'Only another four
hundred yards,' he says
encouragingly; you feel that he might as well say
another four hundred
miles. But finally you do somehow creep as far as the
coal face. You have
gone a mile and taken the best part of an hour; a
miner would do it in not
much more than twenty minutes. Having got there, you
have to sprawl in the
coal dust and get your strength back for several
minutes before you can
even watch the work in progress with any kind of
intelligence.

Coming back is worse than going, not only because you
are already
tired out but because the journey back to the shaft
is slightly uphill. You
get through the low places at the speed of a
tortoise, and you have no
shame now about calling a halt when your knees give
way. Even the lamp you
are carrying becomes a nuisance and probably when you
stumble you drop it;
whereupon, if it is a Davy lamp, it goes out. Ducking
the beams becomes
more and more of an effort, and sometimes you forget
to duck. You try
walking head down as the miners do, and then you bang
your backbone. Even
the miners bang their backbones fairly often. This is

the reason why in
very hot mines, where it is necessary to go about
half naked, most of the
miners have what they call 'buttons down the
back'--that is, a permanent
scab on each vertebra. When the track is down hill
the miners sometimes fit
their clogs, which are hollow under-neath, on to the
trolley rails and
slide down. In mines where the 'travelling' is very
bad all the miners
carry sticks about two and a half feet long, hollowed
out below the handle.
In normal places you keep your hand on top of the
stick and in the low
places you slide your hand down into the hollow.
These sticks are a great
help, and the wooden crash-helmets--a comparatively
recent invention--
are a godsend. They look like a French or Italian
steel helmet, but they
are made of some kind of pith and very light, and so
strong, that you can
take a violent blow on the head without feeling it.
When finally you get
back to the surface you have been perhaps three hours
underground and
travelled two miles, and you, are more exhausted than
you would be by a
twenty-five-mile walk above ground. For a week
afterwards your thighs are
so stiff that coming downstairs is quite a difficult
feat; you have to work
your way down in a peculiar sidelong manner, without
bending the knees.
Your miner friends notice the stiffness of your walk
and chaff you about
it. ('How'd ta like to work down pit, eh?' etc.) Yet
even a miner who has
been long away front work--from illness, for
instance--when he comes
back to the pit, suffers badly for the first few days.

It may seem that I am exaggerating, though no one who has been down an old-fashioned pit (most of the pits in England are old-fashioned) and actually gone as far as the coal face, is likely to say so. But what I want to emphasize is this. Here is this frightful business of crawling to and fro, which to any normal person is a hard day's work in itself; and it is not part of the miner's work at all, it is merely an extra, like the City man's daily ride in the Tube. The miner does that journey to and fro, and sandwiched in between there are seven and a half hours of savage work. I have never travelled much more than a mile to the coal face; but often it is three miles, in which case I and most people other than coal-miners would never get there at all. This is the kind of point that one is always liable to miss. When you think of the coal-mine you think of depth, heat, darkness, blackened figures hacking at walls of coal; you don't think, necessarily, of those miles of creeping to and fro. There is the question of time, also. A miner's working shift of seven and a half hours does not sound very long, but one has got to add on to it at least an hour a day for 'travelling', more often two hours and sometimes three. Of course, the 'travelling' is not technically work and the miner is not paid for it; but it is as like work as makes no difference. It is easy to say that miners don't mind all this. Certainly, it is not the same for them as it would be for you or me. They have done it since childhood, they have the right muscles hardened, and they can move to and fro

underground with a startling
and rather horrible agility. A miner puts his head
down and runs, with a
long swinging stride, through places where I can only
stagger. At the
workings you see them on all fours, skipping round
the pit props almost
like dogs. But it is quite a mistake to think that
they enjoy it. I have
talked about this to scores of miners and they all
admit that the
'travelling' is hard work; in any case when you hear
them discussing a pit
among themselves the 'travelling' is always one of
the things they discuss.
It is said that a shift always returns from work
faster than it goes;
nevertheless the miners all say that it is the coming
away after a hard
day's work, that is especially irksome. It is part of
their work and they
are equal to it, but certainly it is an effort. It is
comparable, perhaps,
to climbing a smallish mountain before and after your
day's work.

When you have been down in two or three pits you
begin to get some
grasp of the processes that are going on underground.
(I ought to say, by
the way, that I know nothing whatever about the
technical side of mining: I
am merely describing what I have seen.) Coal lies in
thin seams between
enormous layers of rock, so that essentially the
process of getting it out
is like scooping the central layer from a Neapolitan
ice. In the old days
the miners used to cut straight into the coal with
pick and crowbar--a
very slow job because coal, when lying in its virgin
state, is almost as
hard as rock. Nowadays the preliminary work is done

by an electrically-
driven coal-cutter, which in principle is an
immensely tough and powerful
band-saw, running horizontally instead of vertically,
with teeth a couple
of inches long and half an inch or an inch thick. It
can move backwards or
forwards on its own power, and the men operating it
can rotate it this way
or that. Incidentally it makes one of the most awful
noises I have ever
heard, and sends forth clouds of coal dust which make
it impossible to see
more than two to three feet and almost impossible to
breathe. The machine
travels along the coal face cutting into the base of
the coal and
undermining it to the depth of five feet or five feet
and a half; after
this it is comparatively easy to extract the coal to
the depth to which it
has been undermined. Where it is 'difficult getting',
however, it has also
to be loosened with explosives. A man with an
electric drill, like a rather
small version of the drills used in street-mending,
bores holes at
intervals in the coal, inserts blasting powder, plugs
it with clay, goes
round the corner if there is one handy (he is
supposed to retire to twenty-
five yards distance) and touches off the charge with
an electric current.
This is not intended to bring the coal out, only to
loosen it.
Occasionally, of course, the charge is too powerful,
and then it not only
brings the coal out but brings the roof down as well.

After the blasting has been done the 'fillers' can
tumble the coal
out, break it up and shovel it on to the conveyor
belt. It comes out first

in monstrous boulders which may weigh anything up to twenty tons. The conveyor belt shoots it on to tubs, and the tubs are shoved into the main road and hitched on to an endlessly revolving steel cable which drags them to the cage. Then they are hoisted, and at the surface the coal is sorted by being run over screens, and if necessary is washed as well. As far as possible the 'dirt'--the shale, that is--is used for making the roads below. All what cannot be used is sent to the surface and dumped; hence the monstrous 'dirt-heaps', like hideous grey mountains, which are the characteristic scenery of the coal areas. When the coal has been extracted to the depth to which the machine has cut, the coal face has advanced by five feet. Fresh props are put in to hold up the newly exposed roof, and during the next shift the conveyor belt is taken to pieces, moved five feet forward and re-assembled. As far as possible the three operations of cutting, blasting and extraction are done in three separate shifts, the cutting in the afternoon, the blasting at night (there is a law, not always kept, that forbids its being done when other men are working near by), and the 'filling' in the morning shift, which lasts from six in the morning until half past one.

Even when you watch the process of coal-extraction you probably only watch it for a short time, and it is not until you begin making a few calculations that you realize what a stupendous task the 'fillers' are performing. Normally each o man has to clear a space

four or five yards
wide. The cutter has undermined the coal to the depth
of five feet, so that
if the seam of coal is three or four feet high, each
man has to cut out,
break up and load on to the belt something between
seven and twelve cubic
yards of coal. This is to say, taking a cubic yard as
weighing twenty-seven
hundred-weight, that each man is shifting coal at a
speed approaching two
tons an hour. I have just enough experience of pick
and shovel work to be
able to grasp what this means. When I am digging
trenches in my garden, if
I shift two tons of earth during the afternoon, I
feel that I have earned
my tea. But earth is tractable stuff compared with
coal, and I don't have
to work kneeling down, a thousand feet underground,
in suffocating heat and
swallowing coal dust with every breath I take; nor do
I have to walk a mile
bent double before I begin. The miner's job would be
as much beyond my
power as it would be to perform on a flying trapeze
or to win the Grand
National. I am not a manual labourer and please God I
never shall be one,
but there are some kinds of manual work that I could
do if I had to. At a
pitch I could be a tolerable road-sweeper or an
inefficient gardener or
even a tenth-rate farm hand. But by no conceivable
amount of effort or
training could I become a coal-miner, the work would
kill me in a few
weeks.

Watching coal-miners at work, you realize momentarily
what different
universes people inhabit. Down there where coal is
dug is a sort of world

apart which one can quite easily go through life without ever hearing about. Probably majority of people would even prefer not to hear about it.

Yet it is the absolutely necessary counterpart of our world above. Practically everything we do, from eating an ice to crossing the Atlantic, and from baking a loaf to writing a novel, involves the use of coal, directly or indirectly. For all the arts of peace coal is needed; if war breaks out it is needed all the more. In time of revolution the miner must go on working or the revolution must stop, for revolution as much as reaction needs coal. Whatever may be happening on the surface, the hacking and shovelling have got to continue without a pause, or at any rate without pausing for more than a few weeks at the most. In order that Hitler may march the goose-step, that the Pope may denounce Bolshevism, that the cricket crowds may assemble at Lords, that the poets may scratch one another's backs, coal has got to be forthcoming. But on the whole we are not aware of it; we all know that we 'must have coal', but we seldom or never remember what coal-getting involves. Here am I sitting writing in front of my comfortable coal fire. It is April but I still need a fire.

Once a fortnight the coal cart drives up to the door and men in leather jerkins carry the coal indoors in stout sacks smelling of tar and shoot it clanking into the coal-hole under the stairs. It is only very rarely, when I make a definite mental-effort, that I connect this coal with that far-off labour in the mines. It is just 'coal'--something

that I have got to
have; black stuff that arrives mysteriously from
nowhere in particular,
like manna except that you have to pay for it. You
could quite easily drive
a car right across the north of England and never
once remember that
hundreds of feet below the road you are on the miners
are hacking at the
coal. Yet in a sense it is the miners who are driving
your car forward.
Their lamp-lit world down there is as necessary to
the daylight world above
as the root is to the flower.

It is not long since conditions in the mines were
worse than they are
now. There are still living a few very old women who
in their youth have
worked underground, with the harness round their
waists, and a chain that
passed between their legs, crawling on all fours and
dragging tubs of coal.
They used to go on doing this even when they were
pregnant. And even now,
if coal could not be produced without pregnant women
dragging it to and
fro, I fancy we should let them do it rather than
deprive ourselves of
coal. But-most of the time, of course, we should
prefer to forget that they
were doing it. It is so with all types of manual
work; it keeps us alive,
and we are oblivious of its existence. More than
anyone else, perhaps, the
miner can stand as the type of the manual worker, not
only because his work
is so exaggeratedly awful, but also because it is so
vitally necessary and
yet so remote from our experience, so invisible, as
it were, that we are
capable of forgetting it as we forget the blood in
our veins. In a way it

is even humiliating to watch coal-miners working. It raises in you a momentary doubt about your own status as an 'intellectual' and a superior person generally. For it is brought home to you, at least while you are watching, that it is only because miners sweat their guts out that superior persons can remain superior. You and I and the editor of the Times Lit. Supp., and the poets and the Archbishop of Canterbury and Comrade X, author of Marxism for Infants--all of us really owe the comparative decency of our lives to poor drudges underground, blackened to the eyes, with their throats full of coal dust, driving their shovels forward with arms and belly muscles of steel.

3

When the miner comes up from the pit his face is so pale that it is noticeable even through the mask of coal dust. This is due to the foul air that he has been breathing, and will wear off presently. To a Southerner, new to the mining districts, the spectacle of a shift of several hundred miners streaming out of the pit is strange and slightly sinister. Then- exhausted faces, with the grime clinging in all the hollows, have a fierce, wild look. At other times, when their faces are clean, there is not much to distinguish them from the rest of the population. They have a very upright square-shouldered walk, a reaction from the constant bending underground,

but most of them are shortish men and their thick ill-fitting clothes hide the splendour of their bodies. The most definitely distinctive thing about them is the blue scars on their noses. Every miner has blue scars on his nose and forehead, and will carry them to his death. The coal dust of which the air underground is full enters every cut, and then the skin grows over it and forms a blue stain like tattooing, which in fact it is. Some of the older men have their foreheads veined like Roquefort cheeses from this cause.

As soon as the miner comes above ground he gargles a little water to get the worst of the coal dust out of his throat and nostrils, and then goes home and either washes or does not wash according to his temperament. From what I have seen I should say that a majority of miners prefer to eat their meal first and wash afterwards, as I should do in their circumstances. It is the normal thing to see a miner sitting down to his tea with a Christy-minstrel face, completely black except for very red lips which become clean by eating. After his meal he takes a largish basin of water and washes very methodically, first his hands, then his chest, neck, and armpits, then his forearms, then his face and scalp (it is on the scalp that the grime clings thickest), and then his wife takes the flannel and washes his back. He has only washed the top half of his body and probably his navel is still a nest of coal dust, but even so it takes some skill to get pass-ably clean in a single basin of water. For

my own part I found I
needed two complete baths after going down a
coal-mine. Getting the dirt
out of one's eyelids is a ten minutes' job in itself.

At some of the larger and better appointed collieries
there are
pithead baths. This is an enormous advantage, for not
only can the miner
wash himself all over every day, in comfort and even
luxury, but at the
baths he has two lockers where he can keep his pit
clothes separate from
his day clothes, so that within twenty minutes of
emerging as black as a
Negro he can be riding off to a football match
dressed up to the nines. But
it is only comparatively seldom because a seam of
coal does not last for
ever, so that it is not necessarily worth building a
bath every time a
shaft is sunk. I can-not get hold of exact figures,
but it seems likely
that rather less than one miner in three has access
to a pithead bath.
Probably a large majority of miners are completely
black from the waist
down for at least six days a week. It is almost
impossible for them to wash
all over in their own homes. Every drop of water has
got to be heated up,
and in a tiny living-room which contains, apart from
the kitchen range and
a quantity of furniture, a wife, some children, and
probably a dog, there
is simply not room to have a proper bath. Even with a
basin one is bound to
splash the furniture. Middle-class people are fond of
saying that the
miners would not wash themselves properly even if
they could, but this is
nonsense, as is shown by the fact that where pithead
baths exist

practically all the men use them. Only among the very old men does the belief still linger that washing one's legs 'causes lumbago'. Moreover the pithead baths, where they exist, are paid for wholly or partly by the miners themselves, out of the Miners' Welfare Fund. Sometimes the colliery company subscribes, some-times the Fund bears the whole cost. But doubtless even at this late date the old ladies in Brighton boarding-houses are saying that 'if you give those miners baths they only use them to keep coal in'.

As a matter of fact it is surprising that miners wash as regularly as they do, seeing how little time they have between work and sleep. It is a great mistake to think of a miner's working day as being only seven and a half hours. Seven and a half hours is the time spent actually on the job, but, as I have already explained, one has got to add on to this time taken up in 'travelling', which is seldom less than an hour and may often be three hours. In addition most miners have to spend a considerable time in getting to and from the pit. Throughout the industrial districts there is an acute shortage of houses, and it is only in the small mining villages, where the village is grouped round the pit, that the men can be certain of living near their work. In the larger mining towns where I have stayed, nearly everyone went to work by bus; half a crown a week seemed to be the normal amount to spend on fares. One miner I stayed with was working on the morning shift, which was from six in the morning till

half past one. He had to be out of bed at a quarter to four and got back somewhere after three in the afternoon. In another house where I stayed a boy of fifteen was working on the night shift. He left for work at nine at night and got back at eight in the morning, had his breakfast, and then promptly went to bed and slept till six in the evening; so that his leisure time amounted to, about four hours a day--actually a good deal less, if you take off the time for washing, eating, and dressing.

The adjustments a miner's family have to make when he is changed from one shift to another must be tiresome in the extreme. If he is on the night shift he gets home in time for breakfast, on the morning shift he gets home in the middle of the afternoon, and on the afternoon shift he gets home in the middle of the night; and in each case, of course, he wants his principal meal of the day as soon as he returns. I notice that the Rev. W. R. Inge, in his book England, accuses the miners of gluttony. From my own observation I should say that they eat astonishingly little. Most of the miners I stayed with ate slightly less than I did. Many of them declare that they cannot do their day's work if they have had a heavy meal beforehand, and the food they take with them is only a snack, usually bread-and-dripping and cold tea. They carry it in a flat tin called a snap-can which they strap to their belts. When a miner gets back late at night his wife waits up for him, but when he is on the morning shift it seems to

be the custom for him to get his breakfast for himself. Apparently the old superstition that it is bad luck to see a woman before going to work on the morning shift is not quite extinct. In the old days, it is said, a miner who happened to meet a woman in the early morning would often turn back and do no work that day.

Before I had been in the coal areas I shared the wide-spread illusion that miners are comparatively well paid. One hears it loosely stated that a miner is paid ten or eleven shillings a shift, and one does a small multiplication sum and concludes that every miner is earning round about L2 a week or L150 a year. But the statement that a miner receives ten or eleven shillings a shift is very misleading. To begin with, it is only the actual coal 'getter' who is paid at this rate; a 'dataller', for instance, who attends to the roofing, is paid at a lower rate, usually eight or nine shillings a shift. Again, when the coal 'getter' is paid piecework, so much per ton extracted, as is the case in many mines, he is dependent on the quality of the coal; a breakdown in the machinery or a 'fault'--that is, a streak of rock running through the coal seam--may rob him of his earnings for a day or two at a time. But in any case one ought not to think of the miner as working six days a week, fifty-two weeks a year. Almost certainly there will be a number of days when he is' laid off'. The average earning per shift worked for every mine-worker, of all ages and both sexes, in Great Britain in 1934, was 9s. 1 3/4d. [From the

Colliery Tear Book
and Coal Trades Directory for 1935.] If everyone were in work all the
time, this would mean that the mine-worker was earning a little over L142 a
year, or nearly L2 15s. a week. His real income, however, is far lower than
this, for the 9s. 1 3/4d. is merely an average calculation on shifts
actually worked and takes no account of blank days.

I have before me five pay-checks belonging to a Yorkshire miner, for
five weeks (not consecutive) at the beginning of 1936. Averaging them up,
the gross weekly wages they represent is L2 15s. 2d.; this is an average of
nearly 9s. 2 1/2d. a shift. But these pay-checks are for the winter, when
nearly all mines are running full time. As spring advances the coal trade
slacks off and more and more men are 'temporarily stopped', while others
still technically in work are laid off for a day or two in every week. It
is obvious therefore that L150 or even L142 is an immense over-estimate for
the mine-worker's yearly income. As a matter of fact, for the year 1934 the
average gross earnings of all miners through-out Great Britain was only
L115 11s. 6d. It varied consider-ably from district to district, rising as
high as L133 2s. 8d. in Scotland, while in Durham it was a little under
L105 or barely more than L2 a week. I take these figures from The Coid
Scuttle, by Mr Joseph Jones, Mayor of Barnsley, Yorkshire. Mr Jones adds:

  These figures cover the earnings of youths as well as adults and of
the higher- as well as the lower-paid grades... any

particularly high earning would be included in these figures, as would the earnings of certain officials and other higher-paid men as well as the higher amounts paid for overtime work.

The figures, being averages, fail... to reveal the position of thousands of adult workers whose earnings were substantially below the average and' who received only 30s. to 40s. or less per week.

Mr Jones's italics. But please notice that even these wretched earnings are gross earnings. On top of this there are all kinds of stoppages which are deducted from the miner's wages every week. Here is a list of weekly stoppages which was given me as typical in one Lancashire district:

	s.	d.
Insurance (unemployment and health)	1	5
Hire of lamp		6
For sharpening tools		6
Check-weighman		9
Infirmary		2
Hospital		1
Benevolent Fund		6
Union fees		6
Total	4	5

Some of these stoppages, such as the Benevolent Fund and the union fees, are, so to speak, the miner's own responsibility, others are imposed by the colliery company. They are not the same in all

districts. For instance, the iniquitous swindle of making the miner pay for the hire of his lamp (at sixpence a week he buys the lamp several times over in a single year) does not obtain everywhere. But the stoppages always seem to total up to about the same amount. On the Yorkshire miner's five pay-checks, the average gross earning per week is L2 15s. 2d.; the average net earning, after the stoppages have come off, is only L2 11s. 4d.--a reduction of 3s. 10d. a week. But the pay-check, naturally, only mentions stoppages which are imposed or paid through the colliery company; one has got to add the union fees, bringing the total reduction up to something over four shillings. Probably it is safe to say that stoppages of one kind and another cut four shillings or thereabouts from every adult miner's weekly wage. So that the L115 11s. 6d. which was the mine-worker's average earning throughout Great Britain in 1934 should really be something nearer L105. As against this, most miners receive allowances in kind, being able to purchase coal for their own use at a reduced rate, usually eight or nine shillings a ton. But according to Mr Jones, quoted above, 'the average value of all allowances in kind for the country as a whole is only fourpence a day'. And this fourpence a day is offset, in many cases, by the amount the miner has to spend on fares in getting to and from the pit. So, taking the industry as a whole, the sum the miner can actually bring home and call his own does not average more, perhaps slightly less, than two

pounds a week.

Meanwhile, how much coal is the average miner producing?

The tonnage of coal raised yearly per person employed in mining rises steadily though rather slowly. In 1914 every mine-worker produced, on average, 253 tons of coal; in 1934 he produced 280 tons.[The Coal Scuttle. The Colliery Yew Book end Coal Trades Directory gives a slightly higher figure.] This of course is an average figure for mine-workers of all kinds; those actually working at the coal face extract an enormously greater amount--in many cases, probably, well over a thousand tons each. But taking 280 tons as a representative figure, it is worth noticing what a vast achievement this is. One gets the best idea of it by comparing a miner's life with somebody else's. If I live to be sixty I shall probably have produced thirty novels, or enough to fill two medium-sized library shelves. In the same period the average miner produces 8400 tons of coal; enough coal to pave Trafalgar Square nearly two feet deep or to supply seven large families with fuel for over a hundred years.

Of the five pay-checks I mentioned above, no less than three are rubber-stamped with the words 'death stoppage'. When a miner is killed at work it is usual for the other miners to make up a subscription, generally of a shilling each, for his widow, and this is collected by the colliery company and automatically deducted from their wages.

The significant detail here is the rubber stamp. The rate of accidents among miners is so high, compared with that in other trades, that casualties are taken for granted almost as they would be in a minor war. Every year one miner in about nine hundred is killed and one in about six is injured; most of these injuries, of course, are petty ones, but a fair number amount to total disablement. This means that if a miner's working life is forty years the chances are nearly seven to one against his escaping injury and not much more than twenty to one against his being killed outright. No other trade approaches this in dangerousness; the next most dangerous is the shipping trade, one sailor in a little under 1300 being killed every year. The figures I have given apply, of course, to mine-workers as a whole; for those actually working underground the proportion of injuries would be very much higher. Every miner of long standing that I have talked to had either been in a fairly serious accident himself or had seen some of his mates killed, and in every mining family they tell you tales of fathers, brothers, or uncles killed at work. ('And he fell seven hundred feet, and they wouldn't never have collected t'pieces only he were wearing a new suit of oil-skins,' etc., etc., etc.) Some of these tales are appalling in the extreme. One miner, for instance, described to me how a mate of his, a 'dataller', was buried by a fall of rock. They rushed to him and managed to uncover his head and shoulders so that he could breathe, and he was alive and spoke to

them. Then they saw that the roof was coming down again and had to run to save themselves; the 'dataller' was buried a second time. Once again they rushed to him and got his head and shoulders free, and again he was alive and spoke to them. Then the roof came down a third time, and this time they could not uncover him for several hours, after which, of course, he was dead. But the miner who told me the story (he had been buried himself on one occasion, but he was lucky enough to have his head jammed between his legs so that there was a small space in which he could breathe) did not think it was a particularly appalling one. Its significance, for him, was that the 'dataller' had known perfectly well that the place where he was working was unsafe, and had gone there in daily expectation of an accident.

'And it worked on his mind to that extent that he got to kissing his wife before he went to work. And she told me afterwards that it were over twenty years since he'd kissed her.'

The most obviously understandable cause of accidents is explosions of gas, which is always more or less present in the atmosphere of the pit. There is a special lamp which is used to test the air for gas, and when it is present in at all large quantities it can be detected by the flame of an ordinary Davy lamp burning blue. If the wick can be turned up to its full extent and the flame is still blue, the proportion of gas is dangerously high; it is, nevertheless, difficult to detect, because it does not distribute itself evenly throughout the atmosphere

but hangs about in
cracks and crevices. Before starting work a miner
often tests for gas by
poking his lamp into all the corners. The gas may be
touched off by a spark
during blasting operations, or by a pick striking a
spark from a stone, or
by a defective lamp, or by 'gob fires'--spontaneously
generated fires
which' smoulder in the coal dust and are very hard to
put out. The great
mining disasters which happen from time to time, in
which several hundred
men are killed, are usually caused by explosions;
hence one tends to think
of explosions as the chief danger of mining.
Actually, the great majority
of accidents are due to the normal every-day dangers
of the pit; in
particular, to falls of roof. There are, for
instance, 'pot-holes'--
circular holes from which a lump of stone big enough
to kill a man shoots
out with the promptitude of a bullet. With, so far as
I can remember, only
one exception, all the miners I have talked to
declared that the new
machinery, and 'speeding up' generally, have made the
work more dangerous.
This may be partly due to conservatism, but they can
give plenty of
reasons. To begin with, the speed at which the coal
is now extracted means
that for hours at a time a dangerously large stretch
of roof remains
unpropped. Then there is the vibration, which tends
to shake everything
loose, and the noise, which makes it harder to detect
signs of danger. One
must remember that a miner's safety underground
depend largely on his own
care and skill. An experienced miner claims to know
by a sort of instinct

when the roof is unsafe; the way he puts it is that he 'can feel the weight on him'. He can, for instance, hear the faint creaking of the props. The reason why wooden props are still generally preferred to iron girders is that a wooden prop which is about to collapse gives warning by creaking, whereas a girder flies out un-expectedly. The devastating noise of the machines makes it impossible to hear anything else, and thus the danger is increased.

When a miner is hurt it is of course impossible to attend to him immediately. He lies crushed under several hundred-weight of stone in some dreadful cranny underground, and even after he has been extricated it is necessary to drag his body a mile or more, perhaps, through galleries where nobody can stand upright. Usually when you talk to a man who has been injured you find that it was a couple of hours or so before they got him to the surface. Sometimes, of course, there are accidents to the cage. The cage is shooting several yards up or down at the speed of an express train, and it is operated by somebody on the surface who cannot see what is happening. He has very delicate indicators to tell him how far the cage has got, but it is possible for him to make a mistake, and there have been cases of the cage crashing into the pit-bottom at its very maximum speed.
This seems to me a dreadful way to die. For as that tiny steel box whizzes through the blackness there must come a moment when the ten men who are locked inside it know that something has gone wrong;

and the remaining
seconds before they are smashed to pieces hardly bear
thinking about. A
miner told me he was once in a cage in which
something went wrong. It did
not slow up when it should have done, and they
thought the cable must have
snapped. As it happened they got to the bottom
safely, but when he stepped
out he found that he had broken a tooth; he had been
clenching his teeth so
hard in expectation of that frightful crash.

Apart from accidents miners seem to be healthy, as
obviously they have
got to be, considering the muscular efforts demanded
of them. They are
liable to rheumatism and a man with defective lungs
does not last long in
that dust-impregnated air, but the most
characteristic industrial disease
is nystagmus. This is a disease of the eyes which
makes the eyeballs
oscillate in a strange manner when they come near a
light. It is due
presumably to working in half-darkness, and sometimes
results in total
blindness. Miners who are disabled in this way or any
other way are
compensated by the colliery company, sometimes with a
lump sum, sometimes
with a weekly pension. This pension never amounts to
more than twenty-nine
shillings a week; if it falls below fifteen shillings
the disabled man can
also get something from the dole or the P.A.C. If I
were a disabled miner I
should very much prefer the lump sum, for then at any
rate I should know
that I had got my money. Disability pensions are not
guaranteed by any
centralized fund, so that if the colliery company
goes bankrupt that is the

end of the disabled miner's pension, though he does figure among the other creditors.

In Wigan I stayed for a while with a miner who was suffering from nystagmus. He could see across the room but not much further. He had been drawing compensation of twenty-nine shillings a week for the past nine months, but the colliery company were now talking of putting him on 'partial compensation' of fourteen shillings a week. It all depended on whether the doctor passed him as fit for light work 'on top'. Even if the doctor did pass him there would, needless to say, be no light work available, but he could draw the dole and the company would have saved itself fifteen shillings a week. Watching this man go to the colliery to draw his compensation, I was struck by the profound differences that are still made by status. Here was a man who had been half blinded in one of the most useful of all jobs and was drawing a pension to which he had a perfect right, if anybody has a right to anything. Yet he could not, so to speak, demand this pension--he could not, for instance, draw it when and how he wanted it. He had to go to the colliery once a week at a time named by the company, and when he got there he was kept waiting about for hours in the cold wind. For all I know he was also expected to touch his cap and show gratitude to whoever paid him; at any rate he had to waste an afternoon and spend sixpence in bus fares. It is very different for a member of the bourgeoisie, even such a down-at-heel

member as I am. Even when I am on the verge of starvation I have certain rights attaching to my bourgeois status. I do not earn much more than a miner earns, but I do at least get it paid into my bank in a gentle-manly manner and can draw it out when I choose. And even when my account is exhausted the bank people are passably polite.

This business of petty inconvenience and indignity, of being kept waiting about, of having to do everything at other people's convenience, is inherent in working-class life. A thousand influences constantly press a working man down into a passive role. He does not act, he is acted upon. He feels himself the slave of mysterious authority and has a firm conviction that 'they' will never allow him to do this, that, and the other. Once when I was hop-picking I asked the sweated pickers (they earn something under sixpence an hour) why they did not form a union. I was told immediately that 'they' would never allow it. Who were 'they'? I asked. Nobody seemed to know, but evidently 'they' were omnipotent.

A person of bourgeois origin goes through life with some expectation of getting what he wants, within reasonable limits. Hence the fact that in times of stress 'educated' people tend to come to the front; they are no more gifted than the others and their 'education' is generally quite useless in itself, but they are accustomed to a certain amount of deference and consequently have the cheek necessary to a commander. That they will

come to the front seems to be taken for granted, always and everywhere. In Lissagaray's History of the Commune there is an interesting passage describing the shootings that took place after the Commune had been suppressed. The authorities were shooting the ringleaders, and as they did not know who the ringleaders were, they were picking them out on the principle that those of better class would be the ringleaders. An officer walked down a line of prisoners, picking out likely-looking types. One man was shot because he was wearing a watch, another because he 'had an intelligent face'. I should not like to be shot for having an intelligent face, but I do agree that in almost any revolt the leaders would tend to be people who could pronounce their aitches.

4

AS you walk through the industrial towns you lose yourself in labyrinths of little brick houses blackened by smoke, festering in planless chaos round miry alleys and little cindered yards where there are stinking dust-bins and lines of grimy washing and half-ruinous w.c.s. The interiors of these houses are always very much the same, though the number of rooms varies between two or five. All have an almost exactly similar living-room, ten or fifteen feet square, with an open kitchen range; in the larger ones there is a scullery as well, in the smaller ones the sink and copper are in the

living-room. At the back there is the yard, or part of a yard shared by a number of houses, just big enough for the dustbin and the w.c.s. Not a single one has hot water laid on. You might walk, I suppose, through literally hundreds of miles of streets inhabited by miners, every one of whom, when he is in work, gets black from head to foot every day, without ever passing a house in which one could have a bath. It would have been very simple to install a hot-water system working from the kitchen range, but the builder saved perhaps ten pounds on each house by not doing so, and at the time when these houses were built no one imagined that miners wanted baths.

For it is to be noted that the majority of these houses are old, fifty or sixty years old at least, and great numbers of them are by any ordinary standard not fit for human habitation. They go on being tenanted simply because there are no others to be had. And that is the central fact about housing in the industrial areas: not that the houses are poky and ugly, and insanitary and comfortless, or that they are distributed in incredibly filthy slums round belching foundries and stinking canals and slag-heaps that deluge them with sulphurous smoke--though all this is perfectly true --but simply that there are not enough houses to go round.

'Housing shortage' is a phrase that has been bandied about pretty freely since the war, but it means very little to anyone with an income of

more than L10 a week, or even L5 a week for that matter. Where rents are high the difficulty is not to find houses but to find tenants. Walk down any street in Mayfair and you will see 'To Let' boards in half the windows.

But in the industrial areas the mere difficulty of getting hold of a house is one of the worst aggravations of poverty. It means that people will put up with anything--any hole and corner slum, any misery of bugs and rotting floors and cracking walls, any extortion of skinflint landlords and blackmailing agents--simply to get a roof over their heads. I have been into appalling houses, houses in which I would not live a week if you paid me, and found that the tenants had been there twenty and thirty years and only hoped they might have the luck to die there. In general these conditions are taken as a matter of course, though not always. Some people hardly seem to realize that such things as decent houses exist and look on bugs and leaking roofs as acts of God; others rail bitterly against their landlords; but all cling desperately to their houses lest worse should befall. So long as the housing shortage continues the local authorities cannot do much to make existing houses more livable. They can 'condemn' a house, but they cannot order it to be pulled down till the tenant has another house to go to; and so the condemned houses remain standing and are all the worse for being condemned, because naturally the landlord will not spend more than he can help on a house which is going to be demolished sooner or later. In a town like Wigan, for instance,

there are over two thousand houses standing which have been condemned for years, and whole sections of the town would be condemned en bloc if there were any hope of other houses being built to replace them. Towns like Leeds and Sheffield have scores of thousands of 'back to back' houses which are all of a condemned type but will remain standing for decades.

I have inspected great numbers of houses in various mining towns and villages and made notes on their essential points. I think I can best give an idea of what conditions are like by transcribing a few extracts from my notebook, taken more or less at random. They are only brief notes and they will need certain explanations which I will give afterwards. Here are a few from Wigan:

1. House in Wallgate quarter. Blind back type. One up, one down. Living-room measures 12 ft by 10 ft, room upstairs the same. Alcove under stairs measuring 5 ft by 5 ft and serving as larder, scullery, and coal-hole. Windows will open. Distance to lavatory 50 yards. Rent 4s. 9d., rates 2s. 6d., total 7s. 3d.

2. Another near by. Measurements as above, but no alcove under stairs, merely a recess two feet deep containing the sink--no room for larder, etc. Rent 3s. 2d., rates 2s., total 5s. 2d.

3. House in Scholes quarter. Condemned house. One up, one down. Rooms 15 ft by 15 ft. Sink and copper in living-room,

coal-hole under
stairs. Floor subsiding. No windows will open. House
decently dry. Landlord
good. Rent 3s. 8d. rates 2s. 6d., total 6s. 2d.

4. Another near by. Two up, two down, and
coal-hole. Walls falling
absolutely to pieces. Water comes into upstairs rooms
in quantities. Floor
lopsided. Downstairs windows will not open. Landlord
bad. Rent 6s., rates
3s. 6d., total 9s. 6d.

5. House in Greenough's Row. One up, two down.
Living-room 13 ft by
8 ft. Walls coming apart and water comes in. Back
windows will not open,
front ones will. Ten in family with eight children
very near together in
age. Corporations are trying to evict them for
overcrowding but cannot find
another house to send them to. Landlord bad. Rent
4s., rates 2s. 3d., total
6s. 3d.

So much for Wigan. I have pages more of the same
type. Here is one
from Sheffield--a typical specimen of Sheffield's
several score thousand
'back to back' houses:

House in Thomas Street. Back to back, two up, one
down (i.e. a
three-storey house with one room on each storey).
Cellar below. Living-room
14 ft by 10 ft, and rooms above corresponding. Sink
in living-room. Top
floor has no door but gives on open stairs, Walls in
living-room slightly
damp, walls in top rooms coming to pieces and oozing
damp on all sides.

House is so dark that light has to be kept burning all day. Electricity estimated at 6d. a day (probably an exaggeration). Six in family, parents and foul children. Husband (on P.A.C.) is tuberculous. One child in hospital, the others appear healthy. Tenants have been seven years in this house. Would move, but no other house available. Rent 6s. 6d., rates included.

Here are one or two from Barnslcy:

1. House in Wortley Street. Two up, one down. Living-room 12 ft by 10 ft. Sink and copper in living-room, coal-hole under stairs. Sink worn almost flat and constantly overflowing. Walls not too sound. Penny in slot gas-light. House very dark and gas-light estimated 4d. a day. Upstairs rooms are really one large room partitioned into two. Walls very bad-- wall of back room cracked right through. Window-frames coming to pieces and have to be stuffed with wood. Rain comes through in several places. Sewer runs under house and stinks in summer but Corporation 'says they can't do nowt'. Six people in house, two adults and four children, the eldest aged fifteen. Youngest but one attending hospital--tuberculosis suspected. House infested by bugs. Rent 5s. 3d., including rates.

2. House in Peel Street. Back to back, two up, two down and large cellar. Living-room loft square with copper and sink. The other downstairs room the same size, probably intended as par-lour but

used as bedroom.
Upstairs rooms the same size as those below.
Living-room very dark.
Gas-light estimated at 4 1/2d. a day. Distance to lavatory 70 yards. Four
beds in house for eight people--two old parents, two adult girls (the
eldest aged twenty-seven), one young man, and three children. Parents have
one bed, eldest son another, and remaining five people share the other two.
Bugs very bad--'You can't keep 'em down when it's 'ot.' Indescribable
squalor in downstairs room and smell upstairs almost unbearable. Rent 5s.
7 1/2d., including rates.

3. House in Mapplewell (small mining village near Barnsley). Two
up, one down. Living-room 14 ft by 13 ft. Sink in living-room. Plaster
cracking and coming off walls. No shelves in oven. Gas leaking slightly.
The upstairs rooms each 10 ft by 8 ft. Four beds (for six persons, all
adult), but 'one bed does nowt', presumably for lack of bedclothes. Room
nearest stairs has no door and stairs have no banister, so that when you
step out of bed your foot hangs in vacancy and you may fall ten feet on to
stones. Dry rot so bad that one can see through the floor into the room
below. Bugs, but 'I keeps 'em down with sheep dip'. Earth road past these
cottages is like a muck-heap and said to be almost impassable in winter.
Stone lavatories at ends of gardens in semi-ruinous condition. Tenants have
been twenty-two years in this house. Are L11 in arrears with rent, and have
been paying an extra 1s. a week to pay this off. Landlord now refuses this

and has served orders to quit. Rent 5s., including rates.

And so on and so on and so on. I could multiply examples by the score --they could be multiplied by the hundred thousand if anyone chose to make a house-to-house inspection throughout the industrial districts. Meanwhile some of the expressions I have used need explaining. 'One up, one down' means one room on each storey--i.e. a two-roomed house. 'Back to back' houses are two houses built in one, each side of the house being somebody's front door, so that if you walk down a row of what is apparently twelve houses you are in reality seeing not twelve houses but twenty-four. The front houses give on the street and the back ones on the yard, and there is only one way out of each house. The effect of this is obvious. The lavatories are in the yard at the back, so that if you live on the side facing the street, to get to the lavatory or the dust-bin you have to go out of the front door and walk round the end of the block--a distance that may be as much as two hundred yards; if you live at the back, on the other hand, your outlook is on to a row of lavatories. There are also houses of what is called the 'blind back' type, which are single houses, but in which the builder has omitted to put in a back door--from pure spite, apparently. The windows which refuse to open are a peculiarity of old mining towns. Some of these towns are so undermined by ancient workings that the ground is constantly subsiding and the

houses above slip sideways.
In Wigan you pass whole rows of houses which have slid to startling angles, their windows being ten or twenty degrees out of the horizontal. Sometimes the front wall bellies outward till it looks as though the house were seven months gone in pregnancy. It can be refaced, but the new facing soon begins to bulge again. When a house sinks at all suddenly its windows are jammed for ever and the door has to be refitted. This excites no surprise locally.
The story of the miner who comes home from work and finds that he can only get indoors by smashing down the front door with an axe is considered humorous. In some cases I have noted 'Landlord good' or 'Landlord bad', because there is great variation in what the slum-dwellers say about their landlords. I found--one might expect it, perhaps--that the small landlords are usually the worst. It goes against the grain to say this, but one can see why it should be so. Ideally, the worst type of slum landlord is a fat wicked man, preferably a bishop, who is drawing an immense income from extortionate rents. Actually, it is a poor old woman who has invested her life's savings in three slum houses, inhabits one of them, and tries to live on the rent of the other two--never, in consequence, having any money for repairs.

But mere notes like these are only valuable as reminders to myself. To me as I read them they bring back what I have seen, but they cannot in themselves give much idea of what conditions are like in those fearful

northern slums. Words are such feeble things. What is the use of a brief phrase like 'roof leaks' or 'four beds for eight people'? It is the kind of thing your eye slides over, registering nothing. And yet what a wealth of misery it can cover! Take the question of overcrowding, for instance. Quite often you have eight or even ten people living in a three-roomed house. One of these rooms is a living-room, and as it probably measures about a dozen feet square and contains, besides the kitchen range and the sink, a table, some chairs, and a dresser, there is no room in it for a bed. So there are eight or ten people sleeping in two small rooms, probably in at most four beds. If some of these people are adults and have to go to work, so much the worse. In one house, I remember, three grown-up girls shared the same bed and all went to work at different hours, each disturbing the others when she got up or came in; in another house a young miner working on the night shift slept by day in a narrow bed in which another member of the family slept by night. There is an added difficulty when there are grown-up children, in that you cannot let adolescent youths and girls sleep in the same bed. In one family I visited there were a father and mother and a son and daughter aged round about seventeen, and only two beds for the lot of them. The father slept with the son and the mother with the daughter; it was the only arrangement that ruled out the danger of incest. Then there is the misery of leaking roofs and oozing walls, which in winter makes some rooms almost uninhabitable. Then there are bugs. Once

bugs get into a house
they are in it till the crack of doom; there is no
sure way of
exterminating them. Then there are the windows that
will not open. I need
not point out what this must mean, in summer, in a
tiny stuffy living-room
where the fire, on which all the cooking is done, has
to be kept burning
more or less constantly. And there are the special
miseries attendant upon
back to back houses. A fifty yards' walk to the
lavatory or the dust-bin is
not exactly an inducement to be clean. In the front
houses--at any rate
in a side-street where the Corporation don't
interfere--the women get
into the habit of throwing their refuse out of the
front door, so that the
gutter is always littered with tea-leaves and bread
crusts. And it is worth
considering what it is like for a child to grow up in
one of the back
alleys where its gaze is bounded by a row of
lavatories and a wall.

In such places as these a woman is only a poor drudge
muddling among
an infinity of jobs. She may keep up her spirits, but
she cannot keep up
her standards of cleanliness and tidiness. There is
always something to be
done, and no conveniences and almost literally not
room to turn round. No
sooner have you washed one child's face than
another's is dirty; before you
have washed the crocks from one meal the next is due
to be cooked. I found
great variation in the houses I visited. Some were as
decent as one could
possibly expect in the circumstances, some were so
appalling that I have no
hope of describing them adequately. To begin with,

the smell, the dominant
and essential thing, is indescribable. But the
squalor and the confusion! A
tub full of filthy water here, a basin full of
unwashed crocks there, more
crocks piled in any odd corner, torn newspaper
littered everywhere, and in
the middle always the same dreadful table covered
with sticky oilcloth and
crowded with cooking pots and irons and half-darned
stockings and pieces of
stale bread and bits of cheese wrapped round with
greasy newspaper! And the
congestion in a tiny room where getting from one side
to the other is a
complicated voyage between pieces of furniture, with
a line of damp washing
getting you in the face every time you move and the
children as thick
underfoot as toadstools! There are scenes that stand
out vividly in my
memory. The almost bare living-room of a cottage in a
little mining
village, where the whole family was out of work and
everyone seemed to be
underfed; and the big family of grown-up sons and
daughters sprawling
aimlessly about, all strangely alike with red hair,
splendid bones, and
pinched faces ruined by malnutrition and idleness;
and one tall son sitting
by the fire-place, too listless even to notice the
entry of a stranger, and
slowly peeling a sticky sock from a bare foot. A
dreadful room in Wigan
where all the furniture seemed to be made of packing
cases and barrel
staves and was coming to pieces at that; and an old
woman with a blackened
neck and her hair coining down denouncing her
landlord in a Lancashire-
Irish accent; and her mother, aged well over ninety,
sitting in the

background on the barrel that served her as a commode and regarding us
blankly with a yellow, cretinous face. I could fill up pages with memories
of similar interiors.

Of course the squalor of these people's houses is some-times their own
fault. Even if you live in a back to back house and have four children and
a total income of thirty-two and sixpence a week from the P.A.C., there is
no need to have unemptied chamber-pots standing about in your living-room.
But it is equally certain that their circumstances do not encourage self-
respect. The determining factor is probably the number of children. The
best-kept interiors I saw were always childless houses or houses where
there were only one or two children; with, say, six children in a three-
roomed house it is quite impossible to keep anything decent. One thing that
is very noticeable is that the worst squalors are never downstairs. You
might visit quite a number of houses, even among the poorest of the
unemployed, and bring away a wrong impression. These people, you might
reflect, cannot be so badly off if they still have a fair amount of
furniture and crockery. But it is in the rooms upstairs that the gauntness
of poverty really discloses itself. Whether this is because pride makes
people cling to their living-room furniture to the last, or because bedding
is more pawnable, I do not know, but certainly many of the bedrooms I saw
were fearful places. Among people who have been unemployed for several
years continuously I should say it is the exception

to have anything like a full set of bedclothes. Often there is nothing that can be properly called bedclothes at all--just a heap of old overcoats and miscellaneous rags on a rusty iron bedstead. In this way overcrowding is aggravated. One family of four persons that I knew, a father and mother and two children, possessed two beds but could only use one of them because they had not enough bedding for the other.

Anyone who wants to see the effects of the housing shortage at their very worse should visit the dreadful caravan-dwellings that exist in numbers in many of the northern towns. Ever since the war, in the complete impossibility of getting houses, parts of the population have overflowed into supposedly temporary quarters in fixed caravans. Wigan, for instance, with a population of about 85,000, has round about 200 caravan-dwellings with a family in each--perhaps somewhere near 1000 people in all. How many of these caravan-colonies exist throughout the industrial areas it would be difficult to discover with any accuracy. The local authorities are reticent about them and the census report of 1931 seems to have decided to ignore them. But so far as I can discover by inquiry they are to be found in most of the larger towns in Lancashire and Yorkshire, and perhaps further north as well. The probability is that throughout the north of England there are some thousands, perhaps tens of thousands of families (not individuals) who have no home except a fixed caravan.

But the word 'caravan' is very misleading. It calls up a picture of a cosy gypsy-encampment (in fine weather, of course) with wood fires crackling and children picking blackberries and many-coloured washing fluttering on the lines. The caravan-colonies in Wigan and Sheffield are not like that. I had a look at several of them, I inspected those in Wigan with considerable care, and I have never seen comparable squalor except in the Far East. Indeed when I saw them I was immediately reminded of the filthy kennels in which I have seen Indian coolies living in Burma. But, as a matter of fact, nothing in the East could ever be quite as bad, for in the East you haven't our clammy, penetrating cold to contend with, and the sun is a disinfectant.

Along the banks of Wigan's miry canal are patches of waste ground on which the caravans have been dumped like rubbish shot out of a bucket. Some of them are actually gypsy caravans, but very old ones and in bad repair. The majority are old single-decker buses (the rather smaller buses of ten years ago) which have been taken off their wheels and propped up with struts of wood. Some are simply wagons with semi-circular slats on top, over which canvas is stretched, so that the people inside have nothing but canvas between them and the outer air. Inside, these places are usually about five feet wide by six high (I could not stand quite upright in any of them) and anything from six to fifteen feet long. Some, I suppose, are

inhabited by only one person, but I did not see any that held less than two persons, and some of them contained large families. One, for instance, measuring fourteen feet long, had seven people in it--seven people in about 450 cubic feet of space; which is to say that each person had for his entire dwelling a space a good deal smaller than one compartment of a public lavatory. The dirt and congestion of these places is such that you cannot well imagine it unless you have tested it with your own eyes and more particularly your nose. Each contains a tiny cottage kitchener and such furniture as can be crammed in--sometimes two beds, more usually one, into which the whole family have to huddle as best they can. It is almost impossible to sleep on the floor, because the damp soaks up from below. I was shown mat-tresses which were still wringing wet at eleven in the morning. In winter it is so cold that the kitcheners have to be kept burning day and night, and the windows, need-less to say, are never opened.

Water is got from a hydrant common to the whole colony, some of the caravan-dwellers having to walk 150 or 200 yards for every bucket of water.

There are no sanitary arrangements at all. Most of the people construct a little hut to serve as a lavatory on the tiny patch of ground surrounding their caravan, and once a week dig a deep hole in which to bury the refuse.

All the people I saw in these places, especially the children, were unspeakably dirty, and I do not doubt that they were lousy as well. They could not possibly be otherwise. The thought that

haunted me as I went from caravan to caravan was, What can happen in those cramped interiors when anybody dies? But that, of course, is the kind of question you hardly care to ask.

Some of the people have been in their caravans for many years. Theoretically the Corporation are doing away with the caravan-colonies and getting the inhabitants out into houses; but as the houses don't get built, the caravans remain standing. Most of the people I talked to had given up the idea of ever getting a decent habitation again. They were all out of work, and a job and a house seemed to them about equally remote and impossible. Some hardly seemed to care; others realized quite clearly in what misery they were living. One woman's face stays by me, a worn skull-like face on which was a look of intolerable misery and degradation. I gathered that in that dreadful pigsty, struggling to keep her large brood of children clean, she felt as I should feel if I were coated all over with dung. One must remember that these people are not gypsies; they are decent English people who have all, except the children born there, had homes of their own in their day; besides, their caravans are greatly inferior to those of gypsies and they have not the great advantage of being on the move. No doubt there are still middle-class people who think that the Lower Orders don't mind that kind of thing and who, if they happened to pass a caravan-colony in the train, would immediately assume that the people lived

there from choice. I never argue nowadays with that kind of person. But it is worth noticing that the caravan-dwellers don't even save money by living there, for they are paying about the same rents as they would for houses. I could not hear of any rent lower than five shillings a week (five shillings for 200 cubic feet of space!) and there are even cases where the rent is as high as ten shillings. Somebody must be making a good thing out of those caravans! But dearly their continued existence is due to the housing shortage and not directly to poverty.

Talking once with a miner I asked him. when the housing shortage first became acute in his district; he answered, 'When we were told about it', meaning that till recently people's standards were so low that they took almost any degree of overcrowding for granted. He added that when he was a child his family had slept eleven in a room and thought nothing of it, and that later, when he was grown-up, he and his wife had lived in one of the old-style back to back houses in which you not only had to walk a couple of hundred yards to the lavatory but often had to wait in a queue when you got there, the lavatory being shared by thirty-six people. And when his wife was sick with the illness that killed her, she still had to make that two hundred yards' journey to the lavatory. This, he said, was the kind of thing people would put up with 'till they were told about it'.

I do not know whether that is true. What is certain is that nobody now

thinks it bearable to sleep eleven in a room, and that even people with comfortable incomes are vaguely troubled by the thought of 'the slums'.

Hence the clatter about 'rehousing' and 'slum clearance' which we have had at intervals ever since the war. Bishops, politicians, philanthropists, and what not enjoy talking piously about 'slum clearance', because they can thus divert attention from more serious evils and pretend that if you abolish the slums you abolish poverty. But all this talk has led to surprisingly small results. So far as one can discover, the congestion is no better, perhaps slightly worse, than it was a dozen years ago. There is certainly great variation in the speed at which the different towns are attacking their housing problem. In some towns building seems to be almost at a standstill, in others it is proceeding rapidly and the private landlord is being driven out of business. Liver-pool, for instance, has been very largely rebuilt, mainly by the efforts of the Corporation.

Sheffield, too, is being torn down and rebuilt pretty fast, though perhaps, considering the unparalleled beastliness of its slums, not quite fast enough.[The number of Corporation houses in process of construction in Sheffield at the beginning of 1936 was 1398. To replace the slum areas entirely Sheffield is said to need 100,000 houses.]

Why rehousing has on the whole moved so slowly, and why some towns can borrow money for building purposes so much more easily than others, I do not know. Those questions would have to be answered

by someone who knows
more about the machinery of local government than I
do. A Corporation house
costs normally somewhere between three and four
hundred pounds; it costs
rather less when it is built by 'direct labour' than
when built by
contract. The rent of these houses would average
something over twenty
pounds a year not counting rates, so one would think
that, even allowing
for overhead expenses and interest on loans, it would
pay any Corporation
to build as many houses as could be tenanted. In many
cases, of course, the
houses would have to be inhabited by people on the
P.A.C., so that the
local bodies would merely be taking money out of one
pocket and putting it
into another--i.e. paying out money in the form of
relief and taking it
back in the form of rent. But they have got to pay
the relief in any case,
and at present a proportion of what they pay is being
swallowed up by
private landlords. The reasons given for the slow
rate of building are lack
of money and the difficulty of getting hold of
sites--for Corporation
houses are not erected piecemeal but in 'estates',
sometimes of hundreds of
houses at a time. One thing that always strikes me as
mysterious is that so
many of the northern towns see fit to build
themselves immense and
luxurious public buildings at the same time as they
are in crying need of
dwelling houses. The town of Barnsley, for instance,
recently spent close
on L150,000 on a new town hall, although admittedly
needing at least 2000
new working-class houses, not to mention public
baths. (The public baths in

Barnsley contain nineteen men's slipper baths--this in a town of 70,000 inhabitants, largely miners, not one of whom has a bath in his house!) For L150,000 it could have built 350 Corporation houses and still had L10,000 to spend on a town hall. However, as I say, I do not pretend to understand the mysteries of local government. I merely record the fact that houses are desperately needed and are being built, on the whole, with paralytic slowness.

Still, houses are being built, and the Corporation building estates, with their row upon row of little red houses, all much liker than two. peas (where did that expression come from? Peas have great individuality) are a regular feature of the outskirts of the industrial towns. As to what they are like and how they compare with the slum houses, I can best give an idea by transcribing two more extracts from my diary. The tenants' opinions of their houses vary greatly, so I will give one favourable extract and one unfavourable. Both of these are from Wigan and both are the cheaper 'non-parlour type' houses:

1. House in Beech Hill Estate.

Downstairs. Large living-room with kitchener fireplace, cup-boards, and fixed dresser, composition floor. Small hallway, largish kitchen. Up to date electric cooker hired from Corporation at much the same rate as a gas cooker.

Upstairs. Two largish bedrooms, one tiny one--suitable only for a boxroom or temporary bedroom. Bathroom, w.c., with hot and cold water.

Smallish garden. These vary throughout the estate, but mostly rather smaller than an allotment.

Four in family, parents and two children. Husband in good employ. Houses appear well built and are quite agreeable to look at. Various restrictions, e.g. it is forbidden to keep poultry or pigeons, take in lodgers, sub-let, or start any kind of business with-out leave from the Corporation. (This is easily granted in the case of taking in lodgers, but not in any of the others.) Tenant' very well satisfied with house and proud of it. Houses in this estate all well kept. Corporation are good about repairs, but keep tenants up to the mark with regard to keeping the place tidy, etc.

Rent 11s. 3d. including rates. Bus fare into town 2d.

2. House in Welly Estate.

Downstairs. Living-room 14 ft by 10 ft, kitchen a good deal smaller, tiny larder under stairs, small but fairly good bathroom. Gas cooker, electric lighting. Outdoor w.c.

Upstairs. One bedroom 12 ft by 10 ft with tiny fireplace, another the same size without fireplace, another 7 ft by 6 ft. Best bedroom has

small wardrobe let into wall. 'Garden about 20 yards by 10.

Six in family, parents and four children, eldest son nineteen, eldest daughter twenty-two. None in work except eldest son. Tenants very discontented. Their complaints are: 'House is cold, draughty, and damp. Fireplace in living-room gives out no heat and makes room very dusty-- attributed to its being set too low. Fireplace in best bedroom too small to be of any use. Walls upstairs cracking. Owing to uselessness of tiny bedroom, five are sleeping in one bedroom, one (the eldest son) in the other.'

Gardens in this estate all neglected.

Rent 10s. 3d., inclusive. Distance to town a little over a mile-- there is no bus here.

I could multiply examples, but these two are enough, as the types of Corporation houses being built do not vary greatly from place to place. Two things are immediately obvious. The first is that at their very worst the Corporation houses are better than the slums they replace. The mere possession of a bathroom and a bit of garden would out-weigh almost any disadvantage. The other is that they are much more expensive to live in. It is common enough for a man to be turned out of a condemned house where he is paying six or seven shillings a week and given a Corporation house where he has to pay ten. This only affects those who are in

work or have recently
been in work, because when a man is on the P.A.C. his rent is assessed at a
quarter of his dole, and if it is more than this he gets an extra
allowance; in any case, there are certain classes of Corporation houses to
which people on the dole are not admitted. But there are other ways in
which life in a Corporation estate is expensive, whether you are in work or
out of it. To begin with, owing to the higher rents, the shops in the
estate are much more expensive and there are not so many of them. Then
again, in a comparatively large, detached house, away from the frowsy
huddle of the slum, it is much colder and more fuel has to be burnt. And
again there is the expense, especially for a man in work, of getting to and
from town. This last is one of the more obvious problems of rehousing. Slum
clearance means diffusion of the population. When you rebuild on a large
scale, what you do in effect is to scoop out the centre of the town and
redistribute it on the outskirts. This is all very well in a way; you have
got the people out of fetid alleys into places where they have room to
breathe; but from the point of view of the people themselves, what you have
done is to pick them up and dump them down five miles from their work. The
simplest solution is flats. If people are going to live in large towns at
all they must learn to live on top of one another. But the northern working
people do not take kindly to flats; even where fiats exist they are
contemptuously named 'tenements'. Almost everyone will tell you that he

'wants a house of his own', and apparently a house in the middle of an unbroken block of houses a hundred yards long seems to them more 'their own' than a flat situated in mid-air.

To revert to the second of the two Corporation houses I have just mentioned. The tenant complained that the house was cold, damp, and so forth. Perhaps the house was jerry-built, but equally probably he was exaggerating. He had come there from a filthy hovel in the middle of Wigan which I happened to have inspected previously; while there he had made every effort to get hold of a Corporation house, and he was no sooner in the Corporation house than he wanted to be back in the slum. This looks like mere captiousness but it covers a perfectly genuine grievance. In very many cases, perhaps in half the cases, I found that the people in Corporation houses don't really like them. They are glad to get out of the stink of the slum, they know that it is better for their children to have space to play about in, but they don't feel really at home. The exceptions are usually people in good employ who can afford to spend a little extra on fuel and furniture and journeys, and who in any case are of 'superior' type. The others, the typical slum-dwellers, miss the frowsy warmth of the

slum. They complain that 'out in the country', i.e. on the edge of the town, they are 'starving' (freezing). Certainly most Corporation estates are pretty bleak in winter. Some I have been through, perched on treeless

clayey hillsides and swept by icy winds, would be horrible places to live in. It is not that slum-dwellers want dirt and congestion for their own sakes, as the fat-bellied bourgeoisie love to believe. (See for instance the conversation about slum-clearance in Galsworthy's Swan Song, where the rentier's cherished belief that the slum-dweller makes the slum, and not vice versa, is put into the mouth of a philanthropic Jew.) Give people a decent house and they will soon learn to keep it decent. Moreover, with a smart-looking house to live up to they improve in self-respect and cleanliness, and their children start life with better chances. Nevertheless, in a Corporation estate there is an uncomfortable, almost prison-like atmosphere, and the people who live there are perfectly well aware of it.

And it is here that one comes on the central difficulty of the housing problem. When you walk through the smoke-dim slums of Manchester you think that nothing is needed except to tear down these abominations and build decent houses in their place. But the trouble is that in destroying the slum you destroy other things as well. Houses are I' desperately needed and are not being built fast enough; but in so far as rehousing is being done, it is being done--perhaps it is unavoidable--in a monstrously inhuman 'manner. I don't mean merely that the houses are new and ugly. All houses have got to be new at some time, and as a matter of fact the type of Corporation house now being built is not at all

offensive to look at. On the outskirts of Liverpool there are what amount to whole towns consisting entirely of Corporation houses, and they are quite pleasing to the eye; the blocks of workers' flats in the centre of the town modelled, I believe, on the workers' flats in Vienna, are definitely fine buildings. But there is something ruthless and soulless about the whole business. Take, for instance, the restrictions with which you are burdened in a Corporation house. You are not allowed to keep your house and garden as you want them --in some estates there is even a regulation that every garden must have the same kind of hedge. You are not allowed to keep poultry or pigeons. The Yorkshire miners are fond of keeping homer pigeons; they keep them in the back yard and take them out and race them on Sundays. But pigeons are messy birds and the Corporation suppresses them as a matter of course. The restrictions about shops are more serious. The number of shops in a Corporation estate is rigidly limited, and it is said that preference is given to the Co-op and the chain stores; this may not be strictly true, but certainly those are the shops that one usually sees there. This is bad enough for the general public, but from the point of view of the independent shopkeeper it is a disaster. Many a small shopkeeper is utterly ruined by some rehousing scheme which takes no notice of his existence. A whole section of the town is condemned en bloc; presently the houses are pulled down and the people are transferred to some housing estate miles

away. In this way all the small shopkeepers of the quarter have their whole clientele taken away from them at a single swoop and receive not a penny of compensation. They cannot transfer their business to the estate, because even if they can afford the move and the much higher rents, they would probably be refused a licence. As for pubs, they are banished from the housing estates almost completely, and the few that remain are dismal sham-Tudor places fitted out by the big brewery companies and very expensive.
For a middle-class population this would be a nuisance--it might mean walking a mile to get a glass of beer; for a working-class population, which uses the pub as a kind of club, it is a serious blow at communal life. It is a great achievement to get slum-dwellers into decent houses, but it is unfortunate that, owing to the peculiar temper of our time, it is also considered necessary to rob them of the last vestiges of their liberty. The people themselves feel this, and it is this feeling that they are rationalizing when they complain that their new houses--so much better, as houses, than those they have come out of--are cold and uncomfortable and 'unhomelike'.

I sometimes think that the price of liberty is not so much eternal vigilance as eternal dirt. There are some Corporation estates in which new tenants are systematically de-loused before being allowed into their houses. All their possessions except what they stand up in are taken away from them, fumigated, and sent on to the new house.

This procedure has its points, for it is a pity that people should take bugs into brand new houses (a bug will follow you about in your luggage if he gets half a chance), but it is the kind of thing that makes you wish that the word 'hygiene' could be dropped out of the dictionary. Bugs are bad, but a state of affairs in which men will allow themselves to be dipped like sheep is worse. 'Perhaps, however, when it is a case of slum clearance, one must take for granted a certain amount of restrictions and inhumanity. When all is said and done, the most important thing is that people shall live in decent houses and not in pigsties. I have seen too much of slums to go into Chestertonian raptures about them. A place where the children can breathe clean air, and women have a few conveniences to save them from drudgery, and a man has a bit of garden to dig in, must be better than the stinking back-streets of Leeds and Sheffield. On balance, the Corporation Estates are better than the slums; but only by a small margin.

When I was looking into the housing question I visited and inspected numbers of houses, perhaps a hundred or two hundred houses altogether, in various mining towns and villages. I cannot end this chapter without remarking on the extraordinary courtesy and good nature with which I was received everywhere. I did not go alone--I always had some local friend among the unemployed to show me round--but even so, it is an impertinence to go poking into strangers' houses and asking to see the cracks in the

bedroom wall. Yet everyone was astonishingly patient and seemed to understand almost without explanation why I was questioning them and what I wanted to see. If any unauthorized person walked into my house and began asking me whether the roof leaked and whether I was much troubled by bugs and what I thought of my landlord, I should probably tell him to go to hell. This only happened to me once, and in that case the woman was slightly deaf and took me for a Means Test nark; but even she relented after a while and gave me the information I wanted.

I am told that it is bad form for a writer to quote his own reviews, but I want here to contradict a reviewer in the Manchester Guardian who says apropos of one of my books:

> Set down in Wigan or Whitechapel Mr Orwell would still exercise an unerring power of closing his vision to all that is good in order to proceed with his wholehearted vilification of humanity.

Wrong. Mr Orwell was 'set down' in Wigan for quite a while and it did not inspire him with any wish to vilify humanity. He liked Wigan very much --the people, not the scenery. Indeed, he has only one fault to find with it, and that is in respect of the celebrated Wigan Pier, which he had set his heart on seeing. Alas! Wigan Pier had been demolished, and even the spot where it used to stand is no longer certain.

When you see the unemployment figures quoted at two millions, it is fatally easy to take this as meaning that two million people are out of work and the rest of the population is comparatively comfortable. I admit that till recently I was in the habit of doing so myself. I used to calculate that if you put the registered unemployed at round about two millions and threw in the destitute and those who for one reason and another were not registered, you might take the number of underfed people in England (for everyone on the dole or thereabouts is underfed) as being, at the very most, five millions.

This is an enormous under-estimate, because, in the first place, the only people shown on unemployment figures are those actually drawing the dole--that is, in general, heads of families. An unemployed man's dependants do not figure on the list unless they too are drawing a separate allowance. A Labour Exchange officer told me that to get at the real number of people living on (not drawing) the dole, you have got to multiply the official figures by something over three. This alone brings the number of unemployed to round about six millions. But in addition there are great numbers of people who are in work but who, from a financial point of view, might equally well be unemployed, because they are not drawing anything

that can be described as a living wage.[For instance, a recent census of the Lancashire cotton mills revealed the fact that over 40,000 full-time employees receive less than thirty shillings a week each. In Preston, to take only one town, the number receiving over thirty shillings a week was 640 and the number receiving wider thirty shillings was 3113.] Allow for these and their dependants, throw in as before the old-age pensioners, the destitute, and other nondescripts, and you get an underfed population of well over ten millions. Sir John Orr puts it at twenty millions.

Take the figures for Wigan, which is typical enough of the industrial and mining districts. The number of insured workers is round about 36,000 (26,000 men and 10,000 women). Of these, the number unemployed at the beginning of 1936 was about 10,000. But this was in winter when the mines are working full time; in summer it would probably be 12,000. Multiply by three, as above, and you get 30,000 or 36,000. The total population of Wigan is a little under 87,000; so that at any moment more than one person in three out of the whole population--not merely the registered workers --is either drawing or living on the dole. Those ten or twelve thousand unemployed contain a steady core of from four to five thousand miners who have been continuously unemployed for the past seven years. And Wigan is not especially badly off as industrial towns go. 'Even in Sheffield, which has been doing well for the last year or so because of wars and rumours of

war, the proportion of unemployment is about the same--one in three of registered workers unemployed.

When a man is first unemployed, until his insurance stamps are exhausted, he draws 'full benefit', of which the rates are as follows:

	per week
Single man	17s.
Wife	9s.
Each child below 14	3s.

Thus in a typical family of parents and three children of whom one was over fourteen, the total income would be 32s. per week, plus anything that might be earned by the eldest child. When a man's stamps are exhausted, before being turned over to the P.A.C. (Public Assistance Committee), he receives twenty-six weeks' 'transitional benefit' from the U.A.B. (Unemployment Assistance Board), the rates being as follows:

	per week
Single man	15s.
Man and wife	24s.
Children 14-18	6s.
Children 11-14	4s. 6d.
Children 8-11	4s.
Children 5-8	3s. 6d.
Children 3-5	3s.

Thus on the U.A.B. the income of the typical family of five persons would be 37s. 6d. a week if no child was in work. When a man is on the U.A.B. a quarter of his dole is regarded as rent, with a minimum of 7s. 6d. a week. If the rent he is paying is more than a quarter of his dole he receives an extra allowance, but if it is less than 7s. 6d., a corresponding amount is deducted. Payments on the P.A.C. theoretically comes out of the local rates, but are backed by a central fund. The rates of benefit are:

	per week
Single man	12s. 6d.
Man and wife	23s.
Eldest child	4s.
Any other child	3s.

Being at the discretion of the local bodies these rates vary slightly, and a single man may or may not get an extra 2s. 6d. weekly, bringing his benefit up to 15s. As on the U.A.B., a quarter of a married man's dole is regarded as rent. Thus in the typical family considered above the total income would be 33s. a week, a quarter of this being regarded as rent. In addition, in most districts a coal allowance of 1s. 6d. a week (1s. 6d. is equivalent to about a hundredweight of coal) is granted for six weeks before and six weeks after Christmas.

It will be seen that the income of a family on the dole normally

averages round about thirty shillings a week. One can write at least a quarter of this off as rent, which is to say that the average person, child or adult, has got to be fed, clothed, warmed, and otherwise cared-for for six or seven shillings a week. Enormous groups of people, probably at least a third of the whole population of the industrial areas, are living at this level. The Means Test is very strictly enforced, and you are liable to be refused relief at the slightest hint that you are getting money from another source. Dock-labourers, for instance, who are generally hired by the half-day, have to sign on at a Labour Exchange twice daily; if they fail to do so it is assumed that they have been working and their dole is reduced correspondingly. I have seen cases of evasion of the Means Test, but I should say that in the industrial towns, where there is still a certain amount of communal life and everyone has neighbours who know him, it is much harder than it would be in London. The usual method is for a young man who is actually living with his parents to get an accommodation address, so that supposedly he has a separate establishment and draws a separate allowance. But there is much spying and tale-bearing. One man I knew, for instance, was seen feeding his neighbour's chickens while the neighbour was away. It was reported to the authorities that he 'had a job feeding chickens' and he had great difficulty in refuting this. The favourite joke in Wigan was about a man who was refused relief on the ground that he 'had a job carting firewood'. He had

been seen, it was said,
carting firewood at night. He had to explain that he
was not carting
firewood but doing a moonlight flit. The 'firewood'
was his furniture.

The most cruel and evil effect of the Means Test is
the way in which
it breaks up families. Old people, sometimes
bedridden, are driven out of
their homes by it. An old age pensioner, for
instance, if a widower, would
normally live with one or other of his children; his
weekly ten shillings
goes towards the household expenses, and probably he
is not badly cared
for. Under the Means Test, however, he counts as a
'lodger' and if he stays
at home his children's dole will be docked. So,
perhaps at seventy or
seventy-five years of age, he has to turn out into
lodgings, handing his
pension over to the lodging-house keeper and existing
on the verge of
starvation. I have seen several cases of this myself.
It is happening all
over England at this moment, thanks to the Means Test.

Nevertheless, in spite of the frightful extent of
unemployment, it is
a fact that poverty--extreme poverty--is less in
evidence in the
industrial North than it is in London. Everything is
poorer and shabbier,
there are fewer motor-cars and fewer well-dressed
people; but also there
are fewer people who are obviously destitute. Even in
a town the size of
Liverpool or Manchester you are struck by the fewness
of the beggars.
London is a sort of whirlpool which draws derelict
people towards it, and
it is so vast that life there is solitary and

anonymous. Until you break
the law nobody will take any notice of you, and you
can go to pieces as you
could not possibly do in a place where you had
neighbours who knew you. But
in the industrial towns the old communal way of life
has not yet broken up,
tradition is still strong and almost everyone has a
family--potentially,
therefore, a home. In a town of 50,000 or 100,000
inhabitants there is no
casual and as it were unaccounted-for population;
nobody sleeping in the
streets, for instance. Moreover, there is just this
to be said for the
unemployment regulations, that they do not discourage
people from marrying.
A man and wife on twenty-three shillings a week are
not far from the
starvation line, but they can make a home of sorts;
they are vastly better
off than a single man on fifteen shillings. The life
of a single unemployed
man is dreadful. He lives sometimes in a common
lodging-house, more often
in a 'furnished' room for which he usually pays six
shillings a week,
finding himself as best he can on the other nine (say
six shillings a week
for food and three for clothes, tobacco, and
amusements). Of course he
cannot feed or look after himself properly, and a man
who pays six
shillings a week for his room is not encouraged to be
indoors more than is
necessary. So he spends his days loafing in the
public library or any other
place where he can keep warm. That keeping warm--is
almost the sole
preoccupation of a single unemployed man in winter.
In Wigan a favourite
refuge was the pictures, which are fantastically
cheap there. You can

always get a seat for fourpence, and at the matinee at some houses you can even get a seat for twopence. Even people on the verge of starvation will readily pay twopence to get out of the ghastly cold of a winter afternoon. In Sheffield I was taken to a public hall to listen to a lecture by a clergyman, and it was by a long way the silliest and worst-delivered lecture I have ever heard or ever expect to hear. I found it physically impossible to sit it out, indeed my feet carried me out, seemingly of their own accord, before it was half-way through. Yet the hall was thronged with unemployed men; they would have sat through far worse drivel for the sake of a warm place to shelter in.

At times I have seen unmarried men on the dole living in the extreme of misery. In one town I remember a whole colony of them who were squatting, more or less illicitly, in a derelict house which was practically falling down. They had collected a few scraps of furniture, presumably off refuse-tips, and I remember that their sole table was an old marble-topped wash-hand-stand. But this kind of thing is exceptional. A working-class bachelor is a rarity, and so long as a man is married unemployment makes comparatively little alteration in his way of life. His home is impoverished but it is still a home, and it is noticeable everywhere that the anomalous position created by unemployment--the man being out of work while the woman's work continues as before--has not altered the relative status of the sexes. In a

working-class home it is the man who is the master and not, as in a middle-class home, the woman or the baby. Practically never, for instance, in a working-class home, will you see the man doing a stroke of the housework. Unemployment has not changed this convention, which on the face of it seems a little unfair. The man is idle from morning to night but the woman is as busy as ever--more so, indeed, because she has to manage with less money. Yet so far as my experience goes the women do not protest. I believe that they, as well as the men, feel that a man would lose his manhood if, merely because he was out of work, he developed into a 'Mary Ann'.

But there is no doubt about the deadening, debilitating effect of unemployment upon everybody, married or single, and upon men more than upon women. The best intellects will not stand up against it. Once or twice it has happened to me to meet unemployed men of genuine literary ability; there are others whom I haven't met but whose work I occasionally see in the magazines. Now and again, at long intervals, these men will produce an article or a short story which is quite obviously better than most of the stuff that gets whooped up by the blurb-reviewers. Why, then, do they make so little use of their talents? They have all the leisure in the world; why don't they sit down and write books? Because to write books you need not only comfort and solitude--and solitude is never easy to attain in a working-class home--you also need peace of mind. You can't settle to

anything, you can't command the spirit of hope in which anything has got to be created, with that dull evil cloud of unemployment hanging over you.

Still, an unemployed man who feels at home with books can at any rate occupy himself by reading. But what about the man who cannot read without discomfort? Take a miner, for instance, who has worked in the pit since childhood and has been trained to be a miner and nothing else. How the devil is he to fill up the empty days? It is absurd to say that he ought to be looking for work. There is no work to look for, and everybody knows it. You can't go on looking for work every day for seven years. There are allotments, which occupy the time and help to feed a family, but in a big town there are only allotments for a small proportion of the people. Then there are the occupational centres which were started a few years ago to help the unemployed. On the whole this movement has been a failure, but some of the centres are still flourishing. I have visited one or two of them. There are shelters where the men can keep warm and there are periodical classes in carpentering, boot-making, leather-work, handloom-weaving, basket-work, sea-grass work, etc., etc.; the idea being that the men can make furniture and so forth, not for sale but for their own homes, getting tools free and materials cheaply. Most of the Socialists I have talked to denounce this movement as they denounce the project--it is always being talked about but it never comes to anything--to give the unemployed small-holdings. They say that the

occupational centres are simply a device to keep the unemployed quiet and give them the illusion that something is being done for them. Undoubtedly that is the underlying motive. Keep a man busy mending boots and he is less likely to read the Daily Worker. Also there is a nasty Y.M.C.A. atmosphere about these places which you can feel as soon as you go in. The unemployed men who frequent them are mostly of the cap-touching type--the type who tells you oilily that he is 'Temperance' and votes Conservative. Yet even here you feel yourself torn both ways. For probably it is better that a man should waste his time even with such rubbish as sea-grass work than that for years upon end he should do absolutely nothing.

By far the best work for the unemployed is being done by the N.U.W.M.--National Unemployed Workers' Movement. This is a revolutionary organization intended to hold the unemployed together, stop them blacklegging during strikes, and give them legal advice against the Means Test. It is a movement that has been built out of nothing by the pennies and efforts of the unemployed themselves. I have seen a good deal of the N.U.W.M., and I greatly admire the men, ragged and underfed like the others, who keep the organization going. Still more I admire the tact and patience with which they do it; for it is not easy to coax even a penny-a-week subscription out of the pockets of people on the P.A.C. As I said earlier, the English working class do not show much capacity for

leadership, but they have a wonderful talent for organization. The whole trade union movement testifies to this; so do the excellent working-men's clubs--really a sort of glorified cooperative pub, and splendidly organized--which are so common in Yorkshire. In many towns the N.U.W.M. have shelters and arrange speeches by Communist speakers. But even at these shelters the men who go there do nothing but sit round the stove and occasionally play a game of dominoes. If this move-met could be combined with something along the lines of the occupational centres, it would be nearer what is needed. It is a deadly thing to see a skilled man running to seed, year after year, in utter, hopeless idleness. It ought not to be impossible to give him the chance of using his hands and making furniture and so forth for his own home, with-out turning him into a Y.M.C.A. cocoa-drunkard. We may as well face the fact that several million men in England will--unless another war breaks out--never have a real job this side the grave. One thing that probably could be done and certainly ought to be done as a matter of course is to give every unemployed man a patch of ground and free tools if he chose to apply for them. It is disgraceful that men who are expected to keep alive on the P.A.C. should not even have the chance to grow vegetables for their families.

To study unemployment and its effects you have got to go to the industrial areas. In the South unemployment exists, but it is scattered and queerly unobtrusive. There are plenty of rural

districts where a man out of work is almost unheard-of, and you don't anywhere see the spectacle of whole blocks of cities living on the dole and the P.A.C. It is only when you lodge in streets where nobody has a job, where getting a job seems about as probable as owning an aeroplane and much less probable than winning fifty pounds in the Football Pool, that you begin to grasp the changes that are being worked in our civilization. For a change is taking place, there is no doubt about that. The attitude of the submerged working class is profoundly different from what it was seven or eight years ago.

I first became aware of the unemployment problem in 1928. At that time I had just come back from Burma, where unemployment was only a word, and I had gone to Burma when I was still a boy and the post-war boom was not quite over. When I first saw unemployed men at close quarters, the thing that horrified and amazed me was to find that many of them were ashamed of being unemployed. I was very ignorant, but not so ignorant as to imagine that when the loss of foreign markets pushes two million men out of work, those two million are any more to blame than the people who draw blanks in the Calcutta Sweep. But at that time nobody cared to admit that unemployment was inevitable, because this meant admitting that it would probably continue. The middle classes were still talking about 'lazy idle loafers on the dole' and saying that 'these men could all find work if they wanted to', and naturally these opinions percolated

to the working class
themselves. I remember the shock of astonishment it
gave me, when I first
mingled with tramps and beggars, to find that a fair
proportion, perhaps a
quarter, of these beings whom I had been taught to
regard as cynical
parasites, were decent young miners and
cotton-workers gazing at their
destiny with the same sort of dumb amazement as an
animal in a trap. They
simply could not understand what was happening to
them. They had been
brought up to work, and behold! it seemed as if they
were never going to
have the chance of working again. In their
circumstances it was inevitable,
at first, that they should be haunted by a feeling of
personal degradation.
That was the attitude towards unemployment in those
days: it was a disaster
which happened to you as an individual and for which
you were to blame.

When a quarter of a million miners are unemployed, it
is part of the
order of things that Alf Smith, a miner living in the
back streets of
Newcastle, should be out of work. Alf Smith is merely
one of the quarter
million, a statistical unit. But no human being finds
it easy to regard
himself as a statistical unit. So long as Bert Jones
across the street is
still at work, Alf Smith is bound to feel himself
dishonoured and a
failure. Hence that frightful feeling of impotence
and despair which is
almost the worst evil of unemployment--far worse than
any hardship, worse
than the demoralization of enforced idleness, and
Only less bad than the
physical degeneracy of Alf Smith's children, born on

the P.A.C. Everyone
who saw Greenwood's play Love on the Dole must
remember that dreadful
moment when the poor, good, stupid working man beats
on the table and cries
out, 'O God, send me some work!' This was not
dramatic exaggeration, it was
a touch from life. That cry must have been uttered,
in almost those words,
in tens of thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands
of English homes,
during the past fifteen years.

But, I think not again--or at least, not so often.
That is the real
point: people are ceasing to kick against the pricks.
After all, even the
middle classes--yes, even the bridge dubs in the
country towns--are
beginning to realize that there is such a thing as
unemployment. The 'My
dear, I don't believe in all this nonsense about
unemployment. Why, only
last week we wanted a man to weed the garden, and we
simply couldn't get
one. They don't want to work, that's all it is!'
which you heard at every
decent tea-table five years ago, is growing
perceptibly less frequent. As
for the working class themselves, they have gained
immensely in economic
knowledge. I believe that the Daily Worker has
accomplished a great deal
here: its influence is out of all proportion to its
circulation. But in any
case they have had their lesson well rubbed into
them, not only because
unemployment is so widespread but because it has
lasted so long. When
people live on the dole for years at a time they grow
used to it, and
drawing the dole, though it remains unpleasant,
ceases to be shameful. Thus

the old, independent, workhouse-fearing tradition is undermined, just as the ancient fear of debt is undermined by the hire-purchase system. In the back streets of Wigan and Barnsley I saw every kind of privation, but I probably saw much less conscious misery than I should have seen ten years ago. The people have at any rate grasped that unemployment is a thing they cannot help. It is not only Alf Smith who is out of work now; Bert Jones is out of work as well, and both of them have been 'out' for years. It makes a great deal of difference when things are the same for everybody.

So you have whole populations settling down, as it were, to a lifetime on the P.A.C. And what I think is admirable, perhaps even hopeful, is that they have managed to do it without going spiritually to pieces. A working man does not disintegrate under the strain of poverty as a middle-class person does. Take, for instance, the fact that the working class think nothing of getting married on the dole. It annoys the old ladies in Brighton, but it is a proof of their essential good sense; they realize that losing your job does not mean that you cease to be a human being. So that in one way things in the distressed areas are not as bad as they might be. Life is still fairly normal, more normal than one really has the right to expect. Families are impoverished, but the family-system has not broken up. The people are in effect living a reduced version of their former lives. Instead of raging against their destiny they have made things

tolerable by lowering their standards.

But they don't necessarily lower their standards by cutting I out luxuries and concentrating on necessities; more often it is the other way about--the more natural way, if you come to think of it. Hence the fact that in a decade of unparalleled depression, the consumption of all cheap luxuries has in-creased. The two things that have probably made the greatest difference of all are the movies and the mass-production of cheap smart clothes since the war. The youth who leaves school at fourteen and gets a blind-alley job is out of work at twenty, probably for life; but for two pounds ten on the hire-purchase he can buy himself a suit which, for a little while and at a little distance, looks as though it had been tailored in Savile Row. The girl can look like a fashion plate at an even lower price. You may have three halfpence in your pocket and not a prospect in the world, and only the corner of a leaky bedroom to go home to; but in your new clothes you can stand on the street corner, indulging in a private daydream of yourself as dark Gable or Greta Garbo, which compensates you for a great deal. And even at home there is generally a cup of tea going--a 'nice cup of tea'--and Father, who has been out of work since 1929, is temporarily happy because he has a sure tip for the Cesarewitch.

Trade since the war has had to adjust itself to meet the demands of underpaid, underfed people, with the result that a luxury is nowadays

almost always cheaper than a necessity. One pair of plain solid shoes costs as much as two ultra-smart pairs. For the price of one square meal you can get two pounds of cheap sweets. You can't get much meat for threepence, but you can get a lot offish-and-chips. Milk costs threepence a pint and even 'mild' beer costs fourpence, but aspirins are seven a penny and you can wring forty cups of tea out of a quarter-pound packet. And above all there is gambling, the cheapest of all luxuries. Even people on the verge of starvation can buy a few days' hope ('Something to live for', as they call it) by having a penny on a sweepstake. Organized gambling has now risen almost to the status of a major industry. Consider, for instance, a phenomenon like the Football Pools, with a turnover of about six million pounds a year, almost all of it from the pockets of working-class people. I happened to be in Yorkshire when Hitler re-occupied the Rhineland. Hitler, Locarno, Fascism, and the threat of war aroused hardly a flicker of interest locally, but the decision of the Football Association to stop publishing their fixtures in advance (this was an attempt to quell the Football Pools) flung all Yorkshire into a storm of fury. And then there is the queer spectacle of modern electrical science showering miracles upon people with empty bellies. You may shiver all night for lack of bedclothes, but in the morning you can go to the public library and read the news that has been telegraphed for your benefit from San Francisco and Singapore.

Twenty million people are underfed but literally

everyone in England has
access to a radio. What we have lost in food we have
gained in electricity.
Whole sections of the working class who have been
plundered of all they
really need are being compensated, in part, by cheap
luxuries which
mitigate the surface of life.

Do you consider all this desirable? No, I don't. But
it may be that
the psychological adjustment which the working class
are visibly making is
the best they could make in the circumstances. They
have neither turned
revolutionary nor lost their self-respect; merely
they have kept their
tempers and settled down to make the best of things
on a fish-and-chip
standard. The alternative would be God knows what
continued agonies of
despair; or it might be attempted insurrections
which, in a strongly
governed country like England, could only lead to
futile massacres and a
regime of savage repression.

Of course the post-war development of cheap luxuries
has been a very
fortunate thing for our rulers. It is quite likely
that fish-and-chips,
art-silk stockings, tinned salmon, cut-price
chocolate (five two-ounce bars
for sixpence), the movies, the radio, strong tea, and
the Football Pools
have between them averted revolution. Therefore we
are some-times told that
the whole thing is an astute manoeuvre by the
governing class--a sort of
'bread and circuses' business--to hold the unemployed
down. What I have
seen of our governing class does not convince me that
they have that much

intelligence. The thing has happened, but by an un-conscious process--the quite natural interaction between the manufacturer's need for a market and the need of half-starved people for cheap palliatives.

6

When I was a small boy at school a lecturer used to come once a term and deliver excellent lectures on famous battles of the past, such as Blenheim, Austerlitz, etc. He was fond of quoting Napoleon's maxim 'An army marches on its stomach', and at the end of his lecture he would suddenly turn to us and demand, 'What's the most important thing in the world?' We were expected to shout 'Food!' and if we did not do so he was disappointed.

Obviously he was right in a way. A human being is primarily a bag for putting food into; the other functions and faculties may be more godlike, but in point of time they come afterwards. A man dies and is buried, and all his words and actions are forgotten, but the food he has eaten lives after him in the sound or rotten bones of his children. I think it could be plausibly argued that changes of diet are more important than changes of dynasty or even of religion. The Great War, for instance, could never have happened if tinned food had not been invented. And the history of the past four hundred years in England would have been immensely different if it had not been for the introduction of root-crops and

various other vegetables at the end of the Middle Ages, and a little later the introduction of non-alcoholic drinks (tea, coffee, cocoa) and also of distilled liquors to which the beer-drinking English were not accustomed. Yet it is curious how seldom the all-importance of food is recognized. You see statues everywhere to politicians, poets, bishops, but none to cooks or bacon-curers or market-gardeners. The Emperor Charles V is said to have erected a statue to the inventor of bloaters, but that is the only case I can think of at the moment.

So perhaps the really important thing about the unemployed, the really basic thing if you look to the future, is the diet they are living on. As I said earlier, the average unemployed family lives on an income of round about thirty shillings a week, of which at least a quarter goes in rent. It is worth considering in some detail how the remaining money is spent. I have here a budget which was made out for me by an unemployed miner and his wife. I asked them to make a list which represented as exactly as possible their expenditure in a typical week. This man's allowance was thirty-two shillings a week, and besides his wife he had two children, one aged two years and five months and the other ten months. Here is the list:

	s. d.
Rent	9 0 1/2
Clothing Club	3 0

Coal	2 0
Gas	1 3
Milk	0 10 1/2
Union Fees	0 3
Insurance (on the children)	0 2
Meat	2 6
Flour (2 stone)	3 4
Yeast	0 4
Potatoes	1 0
Dripping	0 10
Margarine	0 10
Bacon	1 2
Sugar	1 9
Tea	1 0
Jam	0 7 1/2
Peas and cabbage	0 6
Carrots and onions	0 4
Quaker oats	0 4 1/2
Soap, powders, blue, etc.	0 10
Total	L1 12 0

In addition to this, three packets of dried milk were sup-plied weekly for the baby by the Infants' Welfare Clinic. One or two comments are needed here. To begin with the list leaves out a great deal--blacking, pepper, salt, vinegar, matches, kindling-wood, raeor blades, replacements of utensils, and wear and tear of furniture and bedding, to name the first few that come to mind. Any money spent on these would mean reduction on some other item. A more serious charge is tobacco. This man happened to be a small smoker, but even so his tobacco would hardly cost less than a shilling a week, meaning a further reduction on food. The 'clothing clubs' into which unemployed people pay so much a week are

run by big drapers in
all the industrial towns. Without them it would be
impossible for
unemployed people to buy new clothes at all. I don't
know whether or not
they buy bedding through these clubs. This particular
family, as I happen
to know, possessed next to no bedding.

In the above list, if you allow a shilling for
tobacco and deduct this
and the other non-food items, you are left with
sixteen and fivepence
halfpenny. Call it sixteen shillings and leave the
baby out of account--
for the baby was getting its weekly packets of milk
from the Welfare
Clinic. This sixteen shillings has got to provide the
entire nourishment,
including fuel, of three persons, two of them adult.
The first question is
whether it is even theoretically possible for three
persons to be properly
nourished on sixteen shillings a week. When the
dispute over the Means Test
was in progress there was a disgusting public wrangle
about the minimum
weekly sum on which a human being could keep alive.
So far as I remember,
one school of dietitians worked it out at five and
ninepence, while another
school, more generous, put it at five and ninepence
halfpenny. After this
there were letters to the papers from a number of
people who claimed to be
feeding themselves on four shillings a week. Here is
a weekly budget (it
was printed in the New Statesman and also in the News
of the World) which I
picked out from among a number of others:

s. d.

3 wholemeal loaves	1 0
1/2 lb. margarine	0 2 1/2
1/2 lb. dripping	0 3
1 lb. cheese	0 7
1 lb. onions	0 1 1/2
1 lb. carrots	0 1 1/2
1 lb. broken biscuits	0 4
2 lb. dates	0 6
1 tin evaporated milk	0 5
10 oranges	0 5
Total	3 11 1/2

Please notice that this budget contains nothing for fuel. In fact, the writer explicitly stated that he could not afford to buy fuel and ate all his food raw. Whether the letter was genuine or a hoax does not matter at the moment. What I think will be admitted is that this list represents about as wise an expenditure as could be contrived; if you had to live on three and elevenpence halfpenny a week, you could hardly extract more food-value from it than that. So perhaps it is possible to feed yourself adequately on the P.A.C. allowance if you concentrate on essential foodstuffs; but not otherwise.

Now compare this list with the unemployed miner's budget that I gave earlier. The miner's family spend only tenpence a week on green vegetables and tenpence half-penny on milk (remember that one of them is a child less than three years old), and nothing on fruit; but they spend one and nine on sugar (about eight pounds of sugar, that is) and a

shilling on tea. The
half-crown spent on meat might represent a small
joint and the materials
for a stew; probably as often as not it would
represent four or five tins
of bully beef. The basis of their diet, therefore, is
white bread and
margarine, corned beef, sugared tea, and potatoes--an
appalling diet.
Would it not be better if they spent more money on
wholesome things like
oranges and wholemeal bread or if they even, like the
writer of the letter
to the New Statesman, saved on fuel and ate their
carrots raw? Yes, it
would, but the point is that no ordinary human being
is ever going to do
such a thing. The ordinary human being would sooner
starve than live on
brown bread and raw carrots. And the peculiar evil is
this, that the less
money you have, the less inclined you feel to spend
it on wholesome food. A
millionaire may enjoy breakfasting off orange juice
and Ryvita biscuits; an
unemployed man doesn't. Here the tendency of which I
spoke at the end of
the last chapter comes into play. When you are
unemployed, which is to say
when you are underfed, harassed, bored, and
miserable, you don't want to
eat dull wholesome food. You want something a little
bit 'tasty'. There is
always some cheaply pleasant thing to tempt you.
Let's have three pennorth
of chips! Run out and buy us a twopenny ice-cream!
Put the kettle on and
we'll all have a nice cup of tea! That is how your
mind works when you are
at the P.A.C. level. White bread-and-marg and sugared
tea don't nourish you
to any extent, but they are nicer (at least most
people think so) than

brown bread-and-dripping and cold water. Unemployment is an endless misery that has got to be constantly palliated, and especially with tea, the English-man's opium. A cup of tea or even an aspirin is much better as a temporary stimulant than a crust of brown bread.

The results of all this are visible in a physical degeneracy which you can study directly, by using your eyes, or inferentially, by having a look at the vital statistics. The physical average in the industrial towns is terribly low, lower even than in London. In Sheffield you have the feeling of walking among a population of troglodytes. The miners are splendid men, but they are usually small, and the mere fact that their muscles are toughened by constant work does not mean that their children start life with a better physique. In any case the miners are physically the pick of the population. The most obvious sign of under-nourishment is the badness of everybody's teeth. In Lancashire you would have to look for a long time before you saw a working-class person with good natural teeth. Indeed, you see very few people with natural teeth at all, apart from the children; and even the children's teeth have a frail bluish appearance which means, I suppose, calcium deficiency. Several dentists have told me that in industrial districts a person over thirty with any of his or her own teeth is coming to be an abnormality. In Wigan various people gave me their opinion that it is best to get shut of your teeth as early in life as possible. 'Teeth is just a misery,' one woman said to

me. In one house where I stayed there were, apart from myself, five people, the oldest being forty-three and the youngest a boy of fifteen. Of these the boy was the only one who possessed a single tooth of his own, and his teeth were obviously not going to last long. As for the vital statistics, the fact that in any large industrial town the death rate and infant mortality of the poorest quarters are always about double those of the well-to-do residential quarters--a good deal more than double in some cases-- hardly needs commenting on.

Of course one ought not to imagine that the prevailing bad physique is due solely to unemployment, for it is probable that the physical average has been declining all over England for a long time past, and not merely among the unemployed in the industrial areas. This cannot be proved statistically, but it is a conclusion that is forced upon you if you use your eyes, even in rural places and even in a prosperous town like London. On the day when King George V's body passed through London on its way to Westminster, I happened to be caught for an hour or two in the crowd in Trafalgar Square. It was impossible, looking about one then, not to be struck by the physical degeneracy of modern England. The people surrounding me were not working-class people for the most part; they were the shopkeeper--commercial-traveller type, with a sprinkling of the well-to-do. But what a set they looked! Puny limbs, sickly faces, under the weeping

London sky! Hardly a well-built man or a decent-looking woman, and not a fresh complexion anywhere. As the King's coffin went by, the men took off their hats, and a friend who was in the crowd at the other side of the Strand said to me afterwards, 'The only touch of colour anywhere was the bald heads.' Even the Guards, it seemed to me--there was a squad of guardsmen marching beside the coffin--were not what they used to be.

Where are the monstrous men with chests like barrels and moustaches like the wings of eagles who strode across my child-hood's gaze twenty or thirty years ago? Buried, I suppose, in the Flanders mud. In their place there are these pale-faced boys who have been picked for their height and consequently look like hop-poles in overcoats--the truth being that in modern England a man over six feet high is usually skin and bone and not much else. If the English physique has declined, this is no doubt partly due to the fact that the Great War carefully selected the million best men in England and slaughtered them, largely before they had had time to breed.

But the process must have begun earlier than that, and it must be due ultimately to un-healthy ways of living, i.e. to industrialism. I don't mean 'the habit of living in towns--probably the town is healthier than the country, in many ways--but the modern industrial technique which provides you with cheap substitutes for everything. We may find in the long run that tinned food is a deadlier weapon than the machine gun.

It is unfortunate that the English working class--the English nation generally, for that matter--are exception-ally ignorant about and wasteful of food. I have pointed out elsewhere how civilized is a French navvy's idea of a meal compared with an Englishman's, and I cannot believe that you would ever see such wastage in a French house as you habitually see in English ones. Of course, in the very poorest homes, where everybody is unemployed, you don't see much actual waste, but those who can afford to waste food often do so. I could give startling instances of this. Even the Northern habit of baking one's own bread is slightly wasteful in itself, because an overworked woman cannot bake more than once or, at most, twice a week and it is impossible to tell beforehand how much bread will be wasted, so that a certain amount generally has to be thrown away. The usual thing is to bake six large loaves and twelve small ones at a time. All this is part of the old, generous English attitude to life, and it is an amiable quality, but a disastrous one at the present moment.

English working people everywhere, so far as I know, refuse brown bread; it is usually impossible to buy whole-meal bread in a working-class district. They sometimes give the reason that brown bread is 'dirty'. I suspect the real reason is that in the past brown bread has been confused with black bread, which is traditionally associated with Popery and wooden shoes. (They have plenty of Popery and wooden shoes in Lancashire. A pity they haven't the black bread as well!) But the

English palate, especially
the working-class palate, now rejects good food
almost automatically. The
number of people who prefer tinned peas and tinned
fish to real peas and
real fish must be increasing every year, and plenty
of people who could
afford real milk in their tea would much sooner have
tinned milk--even
that dreadful tinned milk which is made of sugar and
corn-flour and has
UNFIT FOR BABIES on the tin in huge letters. In some
districts efforts are
now being made to teach the unemployed more about
food-values and more
about the intelligent spending of money. When you
hear of a thing like this
you feel yourself torn both ways. I have heard a
Communist speaker on the
platform grow very angry about it. In London, he
said, parties of Society
dames now have the cheek to walk into East End houses
and give shopping-
lessons to the wives of the unemployed. He gave this
as an instance of the
mentality of the English governing class. First you
condemn a family to
live on thirty shillings a week, and then you have
the damned impertinence
to tell them how they are to spend their money. He
was quite right--I
agree heartily. Yet all the same it is a pity that,
merely for the lack of
a proper tradition, people should pour muck like
tinned milk down their
throats and not even know that it is inferior to the
product of the cow.

I doubt, however, whether the unemployed would
ultimately benefit if
they learned to spend their money more economically.
For it is only the
fact that they are not economical that keeps their

allowances so high. An English-man on the P.A.C. gets fifteen shillings a week because fifteen shillings is the smallest sum on which he can conceivably keep alive. If he were, say, an Indian or Japanese coolie, who can live on rice and onions, he wouldn't get fifteen shillings a week--he would be lucky if he got fifteen shillings a month. Our unemployment allowances, miser-able though they are, are framed to suit a population with very high standards and not much notion of economy. If the unemployed learned to be better managers they would be visibly better off, and I fancy it would not be long before the dole was docked correspondingly.

There is one great mitigation of unemployment in the North, and that is the cheapness of fuel. Anywhere in the coal areas the retail price of coal is about one and sixpence a hundredweight; in the South of England it is about half a crown. Moreover, miners in work can usually buy coal direct from the pit at eight or nine shillings a ton, and those who have a cellar in their homes sometimes store a ton and sell it (illicitly, I suppose) to those who are out of work. But apart from this there is immense and systematic thieving of coal by the unemployed. I call it thieving because technically it is that, though it does no harm to anybody. In the 'dirt' that is sent up from the pits there is a certain amount of broken coal, and unemployed people spend a lot of time in picking it out of the slag-heaps. All day long over those strange grey mountains you see people wandering to

and fro with sacks and baskets across the sulphurous smoke (many slag-heaps are on fire under the surface), prising out the tiny nuggets of coal which are buried here and there. You meet men coming away, wheeling strange and wonderful home-made bicycles--bicycles made of rusty parts picked off refuse-tips, without saddles, without chains and almost always without tyres--across which are slung bags containing perhaps half a hundredweight of coal, fruit of half a day's searching. In times of strikes, when everybody is short of fuel, the miners turn out with pick and shovel and burrow into the slag-heaps, whence the hummocky appearance which most slag-heaps have. During long strikes, in places where there are outcrops of coal, they have sunk surface mines and carried them scores of yards into the earth.

In Wigan the competition among unemployed people for the waste coal has become so fierce that it has led to an extraordinary custom called' scrambling for the coal', which is well worth seeing. Indeed I rather wonder that it has never been filmed. An unemployed miner took me to see it one afternoon. We got to the place, a mountain range of ancient slag-heaps with a railway running through the valley below. A couple of hundred ragged men, each with a sack and coal-hammer strapped under his coat-tails, were waiting on the 'broo'. When the dirt comes up-from the pit it is loaded on to trucks and an engine runs these to the top of another slag-heap a quarter of a mile away and there leaves them. The

process of 'scrambling
for the coal' consists in getting on to the train
while it is moving; any
truck which you have succeeded in boarding while it
is in motion counts as
'your' truck. Presently the train hove in sight. With
a wild yell a hundred
men dashed down the slope to catch her as she rounded
the bend. Even at the
bend the train was making twenty miles an hour. The
men hurled themselves
upon it, caught hold of the rings at the rear of the
trucks and hoisted
themselves up by way of the bumpers, five or ten of
them on each truck. The
driver took no notice, He drove up to the top of the
slag-heap, uncoupled
the trucks, and ran the engine back to the pit,
presently returning with a
fresh string of trucks. There was the same wild rush
of ragged figures as
before. In the end only about fifty men had failed to
get on to either
train.

We walked up to the top of the slag-heap. The men
were shovelling the
dirt out of the trucks, while down below their wives
and children were
kneeling, swiftly scrabbling with their hands in the
damp dirt and picking
out lumps of coal the size of an egg or smaller. You
would see a woman
pounce on a tiny fragment of stuff, wipe it on her
apron, scrutinize it to
make sure it was coal, and pop it jealously into her
sack. Of course, when
you are boarding a truck you don't know beforehand
what is in it; it may be
actual 'dirt' from the roads or it may merely be
shale from the roofing. If
it is a shale truck there will be no coal in it, but
there occurs among the

shale another inflammable rock called cannel, which looks very like ordinary shale but is slightly darker and is known by splitting in parallel lines, like slate. It makes tolerable fuel, not good enough to be commercially valuable, but good enough to be eagerly sought after by the unemployed. The miners on the shale trucks were picking out the cannel and splitting it up with their hammers. Down at the bottom of the 'broo' the people who had failed to get on to either train were gleaning the tiny chips of coal that came rolling down from above--fragments no bigger than a hazel-nut, these, but the people were glad enough to get them.

We stayed there till the train was empty. In a couple of hours the people had picked the dirt over to the last grain. They slung their sacks over shoulder or bicycle, and started on the two-mile trudge back to Wigan. Most of the families had gathered about half a hundredweight of coal or carmel, so that between them they must have stolen five or ten tons of fuel. This business of robbing the dirt trains takes place every day in Wigan, at any rate in winter, and at more collieries than one. It is of course extremely dangerous. No one was hurt the afternoon I was there, but a man had had both his legs cut off a few weeks earlier, and another man lost several fingers a week later. Technically it is stealing but, as everybody knows, if the coal were not stolen it would simply be wasted. Now and again, for form's sake, the colliery companies prosecute somebody for

coal-picking, and in that morning's issue of the local paper there was a paragraph saying that two men had been fined ten shillings. But no notice is taken of the prosecutions--in fact, one of the men named in the paper was there that afternoon--and the coal-pickers subscribe among themselves to pay the fines. The thing is taken for granted. Everyone knows that the unemployed have got to get fuel somehow. So every afternoon several hundred men risk their necks and several hundred women scrabble in the mud for hours--and all for half a hundredweight of inferior fuel, value ninepence.

That scene stays in my mind as one of my pictures of Lancashire: the dumpy, shawled women, with their sacking aprons and their heavy black clogs, kneeling in the cindery mud and the bitter wind, searching eagerly for tiny chips of coal. They are glad enough to do it. In winter they are desperate for fuel; it is more important almost than food. Meanwhile all round, as far as the eye can see, are the slag-heaps and hoisting gear of collieries, and not one of those collieries can sell all the coal it is capable of producing. This ought to appeal to Major Douglas.

7

As you travel northward your eye, accustomed to the South or East, does not notice much difference until you are beyond Birmingham. In Coventry you

might as well be in Finsbury Park, and the Bull Ring in Birmingham is not unlike Norwich Market, and between all the towns of the Midlands there stretches a villa-civilization indistinguishable from that of the South. It is only when you get a little further north, to the pottery towns and beyond, that you begin to encounter the real ugliness of industrialism-- an ugliness so frightful and so arresting that you are obliged, as it were, to come to terms with it.

A slag-heap is at best a hideous thing, because it is so planless and functionless. It is something just dumped on the earth, like the emptying of a giant's dust-bin. On the outskirts of the mining towns there are frightful landscapes where your horizon is ringed completely round by jagged grey mountains, and underfoot is mud and ashes and over-head the steel cables where tubs of dirt travel slowly across miles of country. Often the slag-heaps are on fire, and at night you can see the red rivulets of fire winding this way and that, and also the slow-moving blue flames of sulphur, which always seem on the point of expiring and always spring out again. Even when a slag-heap sinks, as it does ultimately, only an evil brown grass grows on it, and it retains its hummocky surface. One in the slums of Wigan, used as a playground, looks like a choppy sea suddenly frozen; 'the flock mattress', it is called locally. Even centuries hence when the plough drives over the places where coal was once mined, the sites of ancient slag-heaps will still be distinguishable

from an aeroplane.

I remember a winter afternoon in the dreadful environs of Wigan. All round was the lunar landscape of slag-heaps, and to the north, through the passes, as it were, between the mountains of slag, you could see the factory chimneys sending out their plumes of smoke. The canal path was a mixture of cinders and frozen mud, criss-crossed by the imprints of innumerable clogs, and all round, as far as the slag-heaps in the distance, stretched the 'flashes'--pools of stagnant water that had seeped into the hollows caused by the subsidence of ancient pits. It was horribly cold. The 'flashes' were covered with ice the colour of raw umber, the bargemen were muffled to the eyes in sacks, the lock gates wore beards of ice. It seemed a world from which vegetation had been banished; nothing existed except smoke, shale, ice, mud, ashes, and foul water. But even Wigan is beautiful compared with Sheffield. Sheffield, I suppose, could justly claim to be called the ugliest town in the Old World: its inhabitants, who want it to be pre-eminent in everything, very likely do make that claim for it. It has a population of half a million and it contains fewer decent buildings than the average East Anglian village of five hundred. And the stench! If at rare moments you stop smelling sulphur it is because you have begun smelling gas. Even the shallow river that runs through the town is-usually bright yellow with some chemical or other. Once I halted in the street and counted the factory chimneys I could see; there were

thirty-three of them,
but there would have been far more if the air had not
been obscured by
smoke. One scene especially lingers in my mind. A
frightful patch of waste
ground (somehow, up there, a patch of waste ground
attains a squalor that
would be impossible even in London) trampled bare of
grass and littered
with newspapers and old saucepans. To the right an
isolated row of gaunt
four-roomed houses, dark red, blackened by smoke. To
the left an
interminable vista of factory chimneys, chimney
beyond chimney, fading away
into a dim blackish haze. Behind me a railway
embankment made of the slag
from furnaces. In front, across the patch of waste
ground, a cubical
building of red and yellow brick, with the sign
'Thomas Grocock, Haulage
Contractor'.

At night, when you cannot see the hideous shapes of
the houses and the
blackness of everything, a town like Sheffield
assumes a kind of sinister
magnificence. Sometimes the drifts of smoke are rosy
with sulphur, and
serrated flames, like circular saws, squeeze
themselves out from beneath
the cowls of the foundry chimneys. Through the open
doors of foundries you
see fiery serpents of iron being hauled to and fro by
redlit boys, and you
hear the whizz and thump of steam hammers and the
scream of the iron under
the blow. The pottery towns are almost equally ugly
in a pettier way. Right
in among the rows of tiny blackened houses, part of
the street as it were,
are the 'pot banks'--conical brick chimneys like
gigantic burgundy

bottles buried in the soil and belching their smoke almost in your face.
You come upon monstrous clay chasms hundreds of feet across and almost as
deep, with little rusty tubs creeping on chain railways up one side, and on
the other workmen clinging like samphire-gatherers and cutting into the
face of the cliff with their picks. I passed that way in snowy weather, and
even the snow was black. The best thing one can say for the pottery towns
is that they are fairly small and stop abruptly. Less than ten miles away
you can stand in un-defiled country, on the almost naked hills, and the
pottery towns are only a smudge in the distance.

When you contemplate such ugliness as this, there are two questions
that strike you. First, is it inevitable? Secondly, does it matter?

I do not believe that there is anything inherently and unavoidably
ugly about industrialism. A factory or even a gasworks is not obliged of
its own nature to be ugly, any more than a palace or a dog-kennel or a
cathedral. It all depends on the architectural tradition of the period. The
industrial towns of the North are ugly because they happen to have been
built at a time when modem methods of steel-construction and smoke-
abatement were unknown, and when everyone was too busy making money to
think about anything else. They go on being ugly largely because the
Northerners have got used to that kind of thing and do not notice it. Many
of the people in Sheffield or Manchester, if they smelled the air along the

Cornish cliffs, would probably declare that it had no taste in it. But since the war, industry has tended to shift southward and in doing so has grown almost comely. The typical post-war factory is not a gaunt barrack or an awful chaos of blackness and belching chimneys; it is a glittering white structure of concrete, glass, and steel, surrounded by green lawns and beds of tulips. Look at the factories you pass as you travel out of London on the G.W.R.; they may not be aesthetic triumphs but certainly they are not ugly in the same way as the Sheffield gasworks. But in any case, though the ugliness of industrialism is the most obvious thing about it and the thing every newcomer exclaims against, I doubt whether it is centrally important. And perhaps it is not even desirable, industrialism being what it is, that it should leam to disguise itself as something else. As Mr Aldous Huxley has truly remarked, a dark Satanic mill ought to look like a dark Satanic mill and not like the temple of mysterious and splendid gods. Moreover, even in the worst of the industrial towns one sees a great deal that is not ugly in the narrow aesthetic sense. A belching chimney or a stinking slum is repulsive chiefly because it implies warped lives and ailing children. Look at it from a purely aesthetic standpoint and it may, have a certain macabre appeal. I find that anything outrageously strange generally ends by fascinating me even when I abominate it. The landscapes of Burma, which, when I was among them, so appalled me as to assume the qualities of nightmare, afterwards stayed so hauntingly in my mind

that I was obliged to write a novel about them to get rid of them. (In all novels about the East the scenery is the real subject-matter.) It would probably be quite easy to extract a sort of beauty, as Arnold Bennett did, from the blackness of the industrial towns; one can easily imagine Baudelaire, for instance, writing a poem about a slag-heap. But the beauty or ugliness of industrialism hardly matters. Its real evil lies far deeper and is quite uneradicable. It is important to remember this, because there is always a temptation to think that industrialism is harmless so long as it is clean and orderly.

But when you go to the industrial North you are conscious, quite apart from the unfamiliar scenery, of entering a strange country. This is partly because of certain real differences which do exist, but still more because of the North-South antithesis which has been rubbed into us for such a long time past. There exists in England a curious cult of Northemness, sort of Northern snobbishness. A Yorkshireman in the South will always take care to let you know that he regards you as an inferior. If you ask him why, he will explain that it is only in the North that life is 'real' life, that the industrial work done in the North is the only 'real' work, that the North is inhabited by 'real' people, the South merely by rentiers and their parasites. The Northerner has 'grit', he is grim, 'dour', plucky, warm-hearted, and democratic; the Southerner is snobbish, effeminate, and lazy --that at any rate is the theory. Hence the

Southerner goes north, at any rate for the first time, with the vague inferiority-complex of a civilized man venturing among savages, while the Yorkshireman, like the Scotchman, comes to London in the spirit of a barbarian out for loot. And feelings of this kind, which are the result of tradition, are not affected by visible facts. Just as an Englishman five feet four inches high and twenty-nine inches round the chest feels that as an Englishman he is the physical superior of Camera (Camera being a Dago), so also with the Northerner and the Southerner. I remember a weedy little Yorkshireman, who would almost certainly have run away if a fox-terrier had snapped at him, telling me that in the South of England he felt 'like a wild invader'. But the cult is often adopted by people who are not by birth Northerners themselves. A year or two ago a friend of mine, brought up in the South but now living in the North, was driving me through Suffolk in a car. We passed through a rather

beautiful village. He glanced disapprovingly at the cottages and said:

'Of course most of the villages in Yorkshire are hideous; but the Yorkshiremen are splendid chaps. Down here it's just the other way about-- beautiful villages and rotten people. All the people in those cottages there are worthless, absolutely worthless.'

I could not help inquiring whether he happened to know anybody in that

village. No, he did not know them; but because this was East Anglia they were obviously worthless. Another friend of mine, again a Southerner by birth, loses no opportunity of praising the North to the detriment of the South. Here is an extract from one of his letters to me:

> I am in Clitheroe, Lanes. ... I think running water is much more attractive in moor and mountain country than in the fat and sluggish South. 'The smug and silver Trent,' Shakespeare says; and the South-er the smugger, I say.

Here you have an interesting example of the Northern cult. Not only are you and I and everyone else in the South of England written off as 'fat and sluggish', but even water when it gets north of a certain latitude, ceases to be H2O and becomes something mystically superior. But the interest of this passage is that its writer is an extremely intelligent man of 'advanced' opinions who would have nothing but con-tempt for nationalism in its ordinary form. Put to him some such proposition as 'One Britisher is worth three foreigners', and he would repudiate it with horror. But when it is a question of North versus South, he is quite ready to generalize. All nationalistic distinctions--all claims to be better than somebody else because you have a different-shaped skull or speak a different dialect-- are entirely spurious, but they are important so long as people believe in

them. There is no doubt about the Englishman's inbred conviction that those who live to the south of him are his inferiors; even our foreign policy is governed by it to some extent. I think, therefore, that it is worth pointing out when and why it came into being.

When nationalism first became a religion, the English looked at the map, and, noticing that their island lay very high in the Northern Hemisphere, evolved the pleasing theory that the further north you live the more virtuous you become. The histories I was given when I was a little boy generally started off by explaining in the naivest way that a cold climate made people energetic while a hot one made them lazy, and hence the defeat of the Spanish Armada. This nonsense about the superior energy of the English (actually the laziest people in Europe) has been current for at least a hundred years. 'Better is it for us', writes a Quarterly Reviewer of 1827, 'to be condemned to labour for our country's good than to luxuriate amid olives, vines, and vices.' 'Olives, vines, and vices' sums up the normal English attitude towards the Latin races. In the mythology of Garlyle, Creasey, etc., the Northerner ('Teutonic', later 'Nordic') is pictured as a hefty, vigorous chap with blond moustaches and pure morals, while the Southerner is sly, cowardly, and licentious. This theory was never pushed to its logical end, which would have meant assuming that the finest people in the world were the Eskimos, but it did involve admitting that the people who lived to the north of us were

superior to ourselves.
Hence, partly, the cult of Scotland and of Scotch things which has so deeply marked English life during the past fifty years. But it was the industrialization of the North that gave the North-South antithesis its peculiar slant. Until comparatively recently the northern part of England was the backward and feudal part, and such industry as existed was concentrated in London and the South-East. In the Civil War for instance, roughly speaking a war of money versus feudalism, the North and West were for the King and the South and East for the Parliament. But with the increasing use of coal industry passed to the North, and there grew up a new type of man, the self-made Northern business man--the Mr Rouncewell and Mr Bounderby of Dickens. The Northern business man, with his hateful 'get on or get out' philosophy, was the dominant figure of the nineteenth century, and as a sort of tyrannical corpse he rules us still. This is the type edified by Arnold Bennett--the type who starts off with half a crown and ends up with fifty thousand pounds, and whose chief pride is to be an even greater boor after he has made his money than before. On analysis his sole virtue turns out to be a talent for making money. We were bidden to admire him because though he might be narrow-minded, sordid, ignorant, grasping, and uncouth, he had 'grit', he 'got on'; in other words, he knew how to make money.

This kind of cant is nowadays a pure anachronism, for the Northern

business man is no longer prosperous. But traditions are not killed by facts, and the tradition of Northern' grit' lingers. It is still dimly felt that a Northerner will 'get on', i.e. make money, where a Southerner will fail. At the back of the mind of every Yorkshireman and every Scotchman who comes to London is a sort of Dick Whittington picture of himself as the boy who starts off by selling newspapers and ends up as Lord Mayor. And that, really, is at the bottom of his bumptiousness. But where one can make a great mistake is in imagining that this feeling extends to the genuine working class. When I first went to Yorkshire, some years ago, I imagined that I was going to a country of boors. I was used to the London Yorkshireman with his interminable harangues and his pride in the sup-posed raciness of his dialect (' "A stitch in time saves nine", as we say in the West Riding'), and I expected to meet with a good deal of rudeness. But I met with nothing of the kind, and least of all among the miners. Indeed the Lancashire and Yorkshire miners treated me with a kindness and courtesy that were even embarrassing; for if there is one type of man to whom I do feel myself inferior, it is a coal-miner. Certainly no one showed any sign of despising me for coming from a different part of the country. This has its importance when one remembers that the English regional snobberies are nationalism in miniature; for it suggests that place-snobbery is not a working-class characteristic.

There is nevertheless a real difference between North

and South, and there is at least a tinge of truth in that picture of Southern England as one enormous Brighton inhabited by lounge-lizards. For climatic reasons the parasitic divi-dend-drawing class tend to settle in the South. In a Lancashire cotton-town you could probably go for months on end without once hearing an 'educated' accent, whereas there can hardly be a town in the South of England where you could throw a brick without hitting the niece of a bishop. Consequently, with no petty gentry to set the pace, the bourgeoisification of the working class, though it is taking place in the North, is taking place more slowly. All the Northern accents, for instance, persist strongly, while the Southern ones are collapsing before the movies and the B.B.C. Hence your 'educated' accent stamps you rather as a foreigner than as a chunk of the petty gentry; and this is an immense advantage, for it makes it much easier to get into contact with the working class.

But is it ever possible to be really intimate with the working class? I shall have to discuss that later; I will only say here that I do not think it is possible. But undoubtedly it is easier in the North than it would be in the South to meet working-class people on approximately equal terms. It is fairly easy to live in a miner's house and be accepted as one of the family; with, say, a farm labourer in the Southern counties it probably would be impossible. I have seen just enough of the working class

to avoid idealizing them, but I do know that you can leam a great deal in a working-class home, if only you can get there. The essential point is that your middle-class ideals and prejudices are tested by contact with others which are not necessarily better but are certainly different.

Take for instance the different attitude towards the family. A working-class family hangs together as a middle-class one does, but the relationship is far less tyrannical. A working man has not that deadly weight of family prestige hanging round his neck like a millstone. I have pointed out earlier that a middle-class person goes utterly to pieces under the influence of poverty; and this is generally due to the behaviour of his family--to the fact that he has scores of relations nagging and badgering him night and day for failing to 'get on'. The fact that the working class know how to combine and the middle class don't is probably due to their different conceptions of family loyalty. You cannot have an effective trade union of middle-class workers, be-cause in times of strikes almost every middle-class wife would be egging her husband on to blackleg and get the other fellow's job. Another working-class characteristic, disconcerting at first, is their plain-spokenness towards anyone they regard as an equal. If you offer a working man something he doesn't want, he tells you that he doesn't want it; a middle-class person would accept it to avoid giving offence. And again, take the working-class attitude towards 'education'.

How different it is from ours, and how immensely sounder! Working people often have a vague reverence for learning in others, but where 'education' touches their own lives they see through it and reject it by a healthy instinct. The time was when I used to lament over quite imaginary pictures of lads of fourteen dragged protesting from their lessons and set to work at dismal jobs. It seemed to me dreadful that the doom of a 'job' should descend upon anyone at fourteen. Of course I know now that there is not one working-class boy in a thousand who does not pine for the day when he will leave school. He wants to be doing real work, not wasting his time on ridiculous rubbish like history and geography. To the working class, the notion of staying at school till you are nearly grown-up seems merely contemptible and unmanly. The idea of a great big boy of eighteen, who ought to be bringing a pound a week home to his parents, going to school in a ridiculous uniform and even being caned for not doing his lessons! Just fancy a working-class boy of eighteen allowing himself to be caned! He is a man when the other is still a baby. Ernest Pontifex, in Samuel Butler's Way of All Flesh, after he had had a few glimpses of real life, looked back on his public school and university education and found it a 'sickly, debilitating debauch'. There is much in middle-class life that looks sickly and debilitating when you see it from a working-class angle.

In a working-class home--I am not thinking at the moment of the

unemployed, but of comparatively prosperous homes--you breathe a warm, decent, deeply human atmosphere which it is not so easy to find elsewhere. I should say that a manual worker, if he is in steady work and drawing good wages--an 'if which gets bigger and bigger--has a better chance of being happy than an 'educated' man. His home life seems to fall more naturally into a sane and comely shape. I have often been struck by the peculiar easy completeness, the perfect symmetry as it were, of a working-class interior at its best. Especially on winter evenings after tea, when the fire glows in the open range and dances mirrored in the steel fender, when Father, in shirt-sleeves, sits in the rocking chair at one side of the fire reading the racing finals, and Mother sits on the other with her sewing, and the children are happy with a pennorth of mint humbugs, and the dog lolls roasting himself on the rag mat--it is a good place to be in, provided that you can be not only in it but sufficiently of it to be taken for granted.

This scene is still reduplicated in a majority of English homes, though not in so many as before the war. Its happiness depends mainly upon one question--whether Father is in work. But notice that the picture I have called up, of a working-class family sitting round the coal fire after kippers and strong tea, belongs only to our own moment of time and could not belong either to the future or the past. Skip forward two hundred years into the Utopian future, and the scene is totally

different. Hardly one of
the things I have imagined will still be there. In
that age when there is
no manual labour and everyone is 'educated', it is
hardly likely that
Father will still be a rough man with enlarged hands
who likes to sit in
shirt-sleeves and says 'Ah wur coomin' oop street'.
And there won't be a
coal fire in the grate, only some kind of invisible
heater. The furniture
will be made of rubber, glass, and steel. If there
are still such things as
evening papers there will certainly be no racing news
in them, for gambling
will be meaningless in a world where there is no
poverty and the horse will
have vanished from the face of the earth. Dogs, too,
will have been sup-
pressed on grounds of hygiene. And there won't be so
many children, either,
if the birth-controllers have their way. But move
backwards into the Middle
Ages and you are in a world almost equally foreign. A
windowless hut, a
wood fire which smokes in your face because there is
no chimney, mouldy
bread, 'Poor John', lice, scurvy, a yearly
child-birth and a yearly child-
death, and the priest terrifying you with tales of
Hell.

Curiously enough it is not the triumphs of modem
engineering, nor the
radio, nor the cinematograph, nor the five thousand
novels which are
published yearly, nor the crowds at Ascot and the
Eton and Harrow match,
but the memory of working-class interiors--especially
as I sometimes saw
them in my childhood before the war, when England was
still prosperous--
that reminds me that our age has not been altogether

a bad one to live in.

PART TWO

8

The road from Mandalay to Wigan is a long one and the reasons for taking it
are not immediately clear.

In the earlier chapters of this book I have given a rather fragmentary
account of various things I saw in the coal areas of Lancashire and
Yorkshire. I went there partly because I wanted to see what mass-
unemployment is like at its worst, partly in order to see the most typical
section of the English working class at close quarters. This was necessary
to me as part of my approach to Socialism, for before you can be sure
whether you are genuinely in favour of Socialism, you have got to decide
whether things at present are tolerable or not tolerable, and you have got
to take up a definite attitude on the terribly difficult issue of class.
Here I shall have to digress and explain how my own attitude towards the
class question was developed. Obviously this involves writing a certain
amount of autobiography, and I would not do it if I did not think that I am
sufficiently typical of my class, or rather sub-caste, to have a certain
symptomatic importance.

I was born into what you might describe as the

lower-upper-middle class. The upper-middle class, which had its heyday in the eighties and nineties, with Kipling as its poet laureate, was a sort of mound of wreckage left behind when the tide of Victorian prosperity receded. Or perhaps it would be better to change the metaphor and describe it not as a mound but as a layer--the layer of society lying between L2000 and L300 a year: my own family was not far from the bottom. You notice that I define it in terms of money, because that is always the quickest way of making yourself understood. Nevertheless, the essential point about the English class-system is that it is not entirely explicable in terms of money.

Roughly speaking it is a money-stratification, but it is also interpenetrated by a sort of shadowy caste-system; rather like a jerrybuilt modem bungalow haunted by medieval ghosts. Hence the fact that the upper-middle class extends or extended to incomes as low as L300 a year--to incomes, that is, much lower than those of merely middle-class people with no social pretensions. Probably there are countries where you can predict a man's opinions from his income, but it is never quite safe to do so in England; you have always got to take his traditions into consideration as well. A naval officer and his grocer very likely have the same income, but they are not equivalent persons and they would only be on the same side in very large issues such as a war or a general strike--possibly not even then.

Of course it is obvious now that the upper-middle class is done for. In every country town in Southern England, not to mention the dreary wastes of Kensington and Earl's Court, those who knew it in the days of its glory are dying, vaguely embittered by a world which has not behaved as it ought. I never open one of Kipling's books or go into one of the huge dull shops which were once the favourite haunt of the upper-middle class, without thinking 'Change and decay in all around I see'. But before the war the upper-middle class, though already none too prosperous, still felt sure of itself. Before the war you were either a gentleman or not a gentleman, and if you were a gentleman you struggled to behave as such, whatever your income might be. Between those with L400 a year and those with L2000 or even L1000 a year there was a great gulf fixed, but it was a gulf which those with L400 a year did their best to ignore. Probably the distinguishing mark of the upper-middle class was that its traditions were not to any extent commercial, but mainly military, official, and professional.

People in this class owned no land, but they felt that they were landowners in the sight of God and kept up a semi-aristocratic outlook by going into the professions and the fighting services rather than into trade. Small boys used to count the plum stones on their plates and foretell their destiny by chanting, 'Army, Navy, Church, Medicine, Law'; and even of these 'Medicine' was faintly inferior to

the others and only
put in for the sake of symmetry. To belong to this
class when you were at
the L400 a year level was a queer business, for it
meant that your
gentility was almost purely theoretical. You lived,
so to speak, at two
levels simultaneously. Theoretically you knew all
about servants and how to
tip them, although in practice you had one, at most,
two resident servants.
Theoretically you knew how to wear your clothes and
how to order a dinner,
although in practice you could never afford to go to
a decent tailor or a
decent restaurant. Theoretically you knew how to
shoot and ride, although
in practice you had no horses to ride and not an inch
of ground to shoot
over. It was this that explained the attraction of
India (more recently
Kenya, Nigeria, etc.) for the lower-upper-middle
class. The people who went
there as soldiers and officials did not go there to
make money, for a
soldier or an official does not want money; they went
there because in
India, with cheap horses, free shooting, and hordes
of black servants, it
was so easy to play at being a gentleman.

In the kind of shabby-genteel family that I am
talking about there is
far more consciousness of poverty than in any
working-class family above
the level of the dole. Rent and clothes and
school-bills are an unending
nightmare, and every luxury, even a glass of beer, is
an unwarrantable
extravagance. Practically the whole family income
goes in keeping up
appearances. It is obvious that people of this kind
are in an anomalous

position, and one might 'be tempted to write them off as mere exceptions and therefore unimportant. Actually, however, they are or were fairly numerous. Most clergymen and schoolmasters, for instance, nearly all Anglo-Indian officials, a sprinkling of soldiers and sailors, and a fair number of professional men and artists, fall into this category. But the real importance of this class is that they are the shock-absorbers of the bourgeoisie. The real bourgeoisie, those in the L2000 a year class and over, have their money as a thick layer of padding between themselves and the class they plunder; in so far as they are aware of the Lower Orders at all they are aware of them as employees, servants, and tradesmen. But it is quite different for the poor devils lower down who are struggling to live genteel lives on what are virtually working-class incomes. These last are forced into close and, in a sense, intimate contact with the working class, and I suspect it is from them that the traditional upper-class attitude towards 'common' people is derived.

And what is this attitude? An attitude of sniggering superiority punctuated by bursts of vicious hatred. Look at any number of Punch during the. past thirty years. You will find it everywhere taken for granted that a working-class person, as such, is a figure of fun, except at odd moments when he shows signs of being too prosperous, whereupon he ceases to be a figure of fun and becomes a demon. It is no use wasting breath in denouncing this attitude. It is better to consider

how it has arisen, and
to do that one has got to realize what the working
classes look like to
those who live among them but have different habits
and traditions.

A shabby genteel family is in much the same position
as a family of
'poor whites' living in a street where everyone else
is a Negro. In such
circumstances you have got to cling to your gentility
because it is the
only thing you have; and meanwhile you are hated for
your stuck-up-ness and
for the accent and manners which stamp you as one of
the boss class. I was
very young, not much more than six, when I first
became aware of class-
distinctions. Before that age my chief heroes had
generally been working-
class people, because they always seemed to do such
interesting things,
such as being fishermen and blacksmiths and
bricklayers. I remember the
farm hands on a farm in Cornwall who used to let me
ride on the drill when
they were sowing turnips and would sometimes catch
the ewes and milk them
to give me a drink; and the workmen building the new
house next door, who
let me play with the wet mortar and from whom I first
learned the word
'b----'; and the plumber up the road with whose
children I used to go out
bird-nesting. But it was not long before I was
forbidden to play with the
plumber's children; they were 'common' and I was told
to keep away from
them. This was snobbish, if you like, but it was also
necessary, for
middle-class people can-not afford to let their
children grow up with
vulgar accents. So, very early, the working class

ceased to be a race of
friendly and wonderful beings and became a race of
enemies. We realized
that they hated us, but we could never understand
why, and naturally we set
it down to pure, vicious malignity. To me in my early
boyhood, to nearly
all children of families like mine, 'common' people
seemed almost sub-
human. They had coarse faces, hideous accents, and
gross manners, they
hated everyone who was not like themselves, and if
they got half a chance
they would insult you in brutal ways. That was our
view of them, and though
it was false it was understandable. For one must
remember that before the
war there was much more overt class-hatred in England
than there is now. In
those days you were quite likely to be insulted
simply for looking like a
member of the upper classes; nowadays, on the other
hand, you are more
likely to be fawned upon. Anyone over thirty can
remember the time when it
was impossible for a well-dressed person to walk
through a slum street
without being hooted at. Whole quarters of big towns
were considered unsafe
because of' hooligans' (now almost an extinct type),
and the London gutter-
boy everywhere, with his loud voice and lack of
intellectual scruples,
could make life a misery for people who considered it
beneath their dignity
to answer back. A recurrent terror of my holidays,
when I was a small boy,
was the gangs of' cads' who were liable to set upon
you five or ten to one.
In term time, on the other hand, it was we who were
in the majority and the
'cads' who were oppressed; I remember a couple of
savage mass-battles in

the cold winter of 1916-17. And this tradition of open hostility between upper and lower class had apparently been the same for at least a century past. A typical joke in Punch in the sixties is a picture of a small, nervous-looking gentleman riding through a slum street and a crowd of street-boys closing in on him with shouts ''Ere comes a swell! Let's frighten 'is 'oss!' Just fancy the street boys trying to frighten his horse now! They would be much likelier to hang round him in vague hopes of a tip.

During the past dozen years the English working class have grown servile with a rather horrifying rapidity. It was bound to happen, for the frightful weapon of unemployment has cowed them. Before the war their economic position was comparatively strong, for though there was no dole to fall back upon, there was not much unemployment, and the power of the boss class was not so obvious as it is now. A man did not see ruin staring him in the face every time he cheeked a 'toff', and naturally he did cheek a 'toff' whenever it seemed safe to do so. G. J. Renier, in his book on Oscar Wilde, points out that the strange, obscene burst of popular fury which followed the Wilde trial was essentially social in character. The 'London mob had caught a member of the upper classes on the hop, and they took care to keep him hopping. All this was natural and even proper. If you treat people as the English working class have been treated during the past two centuries, you must expect them to resent it. On the other hand the children of shabby-genteel families could not be

blamed if they grew up
with a hatred of the working class, typified for them
by prowling gangs of
'cads'.

But there was another and more serious difficulty.
Here you come to
the real secret of class distinctions in the
West--the real reason why a
European of bourgeois upbringing, even when he calls
himself a Communist,
cannot without a hard effort think of a working man
as his equal. It is
summed up in four frightful words which people
nowadays are chary of
uttering, but which were bandied about quite freely
in my childhood. The
words were: The lower classes smell.

That was what we were taught--the lower classes
smell. And here,
obviously, you are at an impassable barrier. For no
feeling of like or
dislike is quite so fundamental as a physical
feeling. Race-hatred,
religious hatred, differences of education, of
temperament, of intellect,
even differences of moral code, can be got over; but
physical repulsion
can-not. You can have an affection for a murderer or
a sodomite, but you
cannot have an affection for a man whose breath
stinks--habitually
stinks, I mean. However well you may wish him,
however much you may admire
his mind and character, if his breath stinks he is
horrible and in your
heart of hearts you will hate him. It may not greatly
matter if the average
middle-class person is brought up to believe that the
working classes are
ignorant, lazy, drunken, boorish, and dishonest; it
is when he is brought

up to believe that they are dirty that the harm is done. And in my childhood we were brought up to believe that they were dirty. Very early in life you acquired the idea that there was something subtly repulsive about a working-class body; you would not get nearer to it than you could help. You watched a great sweaty navvy walking down the road with his pick over his shoulder; you looked at his discoloured shirt and his corduroy trousers stiff with the dirt of a decade; you thought of those nests and layers of greasy rags below, and, under all, the unwashed body, brown all over (that was how I used to imagine it), with its strong, bacon-like reek. You watched a tramp taking off his boots in a ditch--ugh! It did not seriously occur to you that the tramp might not enjoy having black feet. And even 'lower-class' people whom you knew to be quite clean--servants, for instance--were faintly unappetizing. The smell of their sweat, the very texture of their skins, were mysteriously different from yours.

Everyone who has grown up pronouncing his aitches and in a house with a bathroom and one servant is likely to have grown up with these feelings; hence the chasmic, impassable quality of class-distinctions in the West. It is queer how seldom this is admitted. At the moment I can think of only one book where it is set forth without humbug, and that is Mr Somerset Maugham's On a Chinese Screen. Mr Maugham describes a high Chinese official arriving at a wayside inn and blustering and calling everybody names in

order to impress upon them that he is a supreme dignitary and they are only worms. Five minutes later, having asserted his dignity in the way he thinks proper, he is eating his dinner in perfect amity with the baggage coolies. As an official he feels that he has got to make his presence felt, but he has no feeling that the coolies are of different clay from himself. I have observed countless similar scenes in Burma. Among Mongolians--among all Asiatics, for all I know--there is a sort of natural equality, an easy intimacy between man and man, which is simply unthinkable in the West. Mr Maugham adds:

> In the West we are divided from our fellows by our sense of smell. The working man is our master, inclined to rule us with an iron hand, but it cannot be denied that he stinks: none can wonder at it, for a bath in the dawn when you have to hurry to your work before the factory bell rings is no pleasant thing, nor 'does heavy labour tend to sweetness; and you do not change your linen more than you can help when the week's washing must be done by a sharp-tongued wife. I do not blame the working man because he stinks, but stink he does. It makes social intercourse difficult to persons of sensitive nostril. The matutinal tub divides the classes more effectually than birth, wealth, or education.

Meanwhile, do the 'lower classes' smell? Of course, as a whole, they are dirtier than the upper classes. They are bound to

be, considering the
circumstances in which they live, for even at this
late date less than half
the houses in England have bathrooms. Besides, the
habit of washing
yourself all over every day is a very recent one in
Europe, and the working
classes are generally more conservative than the
bourgeoisie. But the
English are growing visibly cleaner, and we may hope
that in a hundred
years they will be almost as clean as the Japanese.
It is a pity that those
who idealize the working class so often think it
necessary to praise every
working-class characteristic and therefore to pretend
that dirtiness is
somehow meritorious in itself. Here, curiously
enough, the Socialist and
the sentimental democratic Catholic of the type of
Chesterton sometimes
join hands; both will tell you that dirtiness is
healthy and 'natural' and
cleanliness is a mere fad or at best a
luxury.[According to Chesterton,
dirtiness is merely a kind of 'discomfort' and
therefore ranks as
self-mortification. Unfortunately, the discomfort of
dirtiness is chiefly
suffered by other people. It is not really very
uncomfortable to be
dirty--not nearly so uncomfortable as having a cold
bath on a winter
morning.] They seem not to see that they are merely
giving colour
to the notion that working-class people are dirty
from choice and
not from necessity. Actually, people who have access
to a bath will
generally use it. But the essential thing is that
middle-class people
believe that the working class are dirty--you see
from the passage

quoted above that Mr Maugham himself believes it--and, what is worse, that they are some-how inherently dirty. As a child, one of the most dreadful things I could imagine was to drink out of a bottle after a navvy.

Once when I was thirteen, I was in a train coming from a market town, and the third-class carriage was packed full of shepherds and pig-men who had been selling their beasts. Somebody produced a quart bottle of beer and passed it round; it travelled from mouth to mouth to mouth, everyone taking a swig. I cannot describe the horror I felt as that bottle worked its way towards me. If I drank from it after all those lower-class male mouths I felt certain I should vomit; on the other hand, if they offered it to me I dared not refuse for fear of offending them--you see here how the middle-class squeamishness works both ways. Nowadays, thank God, I have no feelings of that kind. A working man's body, as such, is no more repulsive to me than a millionaire's. I still don't like drinking out of a cup or bottle after another person--another man, I mean; with women I don't mind --but at. least the question of class does not enter. It was rubbing shoulders with the tramps that cured me of it. Tramps are not really very dirty as English people go, but they have the name for being dirty, and when you have shared a bed with a tramp and drunk tea out of the same snufftin, you feel that you have seen the worst and the worst has no terrors for you.

I have dwelt on these subjects because they are

vitally important. To get rid of class-distinctions you have got to start by understanding how one class appears when seen through the eyes of another. It is useless to say that the middle classes are 'snobbish' and leave it at that. You get no further if you do not realize that snobbishness is bound up with a species of idealism. It derives from the early training in which a middle-class child is taught almost simultaneously to wash his neck, to be ready to die for his country, and to despise the 'lower classes'.

Here I shall be accused of being behind the times, for I was a child before and during the war and it may be claimed that children nowadays are brought up with more enlightened notions. It is probably true that class-feeling is for the moment a very little less bitter than it was. The working class are submissive where they used to be openly hostile, and the post-war manufacture of cheap clothes and the general softening of manners have toned down the surface differences between class and class. But undoubtedly the essential feeling is still there. Every middle-class person has a dormant class-prejudice which needs only a small thing to arouse it; and if he is over forty he probably has a firm conviction that his own class has been sacrificed to the class below. Suggest to the average unthinking person of gentle birth who is struggling to keep up appearances on four or five hundred a year that he is a member of an exploiting parasite class, and he will think you are mad. In perfect sincerity he will

point out to you a dozen ways in which he is worse-off than a working man.
In his eyes the workers are not a submerged race of slaves, they are a sinister flood creeping upwards to engulf himself and his friends and his family and to sweep all culture and all decency out of existence. Hence that queer watchful anxiety lest the working class shall grow too prosperous. In a number of Punch soon after the war, when coal was still fetching high prices, there is a picture of four or five miners with grim, sinister faces riding in a cheap motor-car. A friend they are passing calls out and asks them where they have borrowed it. They answer, 'We've bought the thing!' This, you see, is 'good enough for Punch'; for miners to buy a motor-car, even one car between four or five of them, is a monstrosity, a sort of crime against nature. That was the attitude of a dozen years ago, and I see no evidence of any fundamental change. The notion that the working class have been absurdly pampered, hopelessly demoralized by doles, old age pensions, free education, etc., is still widely held; it has merely been a little shaken, perhaps, by the recent recognition that unemployment does exist. For quantities of middle-class people, probably for a large majority of those over fifty, the typical working man still rides to the Labour Exchange on a motor-bike and keeps coal in his bath-tub: 'And, if you'll believe it, my dear, they actually get married on. the dole!'

The reason why class-hatred seems to be diminishing is that nowadays

it tends not to get into print, partly owing to the mealy-mouthed habits of our time, partly because newspapers and even books now have to appeal to a working-class public. As a rule you can best study it in private conversations. But if you want some printed examples, it is worth having a look at the obiter dicta of the late Professor Saintsbury. Saintsbury was a very learned man and along certain lines a judicious literary critic, but when he talked of political or economic matters he only differed from the rest of his class by the fact that he was too thick-skinned and had been born too early to see any reason for pretending to common decency.

According to Saintsbury, unemployment insurance was simply 'contributing to the support of lazy ne'er-do-weels', and the whole trade union movement was no more than a kind of organized mendicancy:

> 'Pauper' is almost actionable now, is it not, when used as a word? though to be paupers, in the sense of being wholly or partly supported at the expense of other people, is the ardent, and to a considerable extent achieved, aspiration of a large proportion of our population, and of an entire political party.
>
> (Second Scrap Book)

It is to be noticed, however, that Saintsbury recognizes that unemployment is bound to exist, and, in fact, thinks

that it ought
to-.exist, so long as the unemployed are made to
suffer as much as
possible:

> Is not 'casual' labour the very secret and
> safety-valve of a safe
> and sound labour-system generally?
>
> ... In a complicated industrial and commercial
> state constant
> employment at regular wages is impossible; while
> dole-supported
> unemployment, at anything like the wages of
> employment, is demoralizing to
> begin with and ruinous at its more or less quickly
> arriving end.

(Last Scrap Book)

What exactly is to happen to the 'casual labourers'
when no casual
labour happens to be available is not made clear.
Presumably (Saintsbury
speaks approvingly of 'good Poor Laws') they are to
go into the work-house
or sleep in the streets. As to the notion that every
human being ought as a
matter of course to have the chance of earning at
least a tolerable
livelihood, Saintsbury dismisses it with contempt:

> Even the 'right to live' ... extends no further
> than the right to
> protection against murder. Charity certainly will,
> morality possibly may,
> and public utility perhaps ought to add to this
> protection supererogatory
> provision for continuance of life; but it is

questionable whether strict
justice demands it.

As for the insane doctrine that being born in a country gives some
right to the possession of the soil of that country, it hardly requires
notice.

(Last Scrap Book)

It is worth reflecting for a moment upon the beautiful implications of
this last passage. The interest of passages like these (and they are
scattered all through Saintsbury's work) lies in their having been printed
at all. Most people are a little shy of putting that kind of thing on
paper. But what Saintsbury is saying here is what any little worm with a
fairly safe five hundred a year thinks, and therefore in a way one must
admire him for saying it. It takes a lot of guts to be openly such a skunk
as that.

This is the outlook of a confessed reactionary. But how about the
middle-class person whose views are not reactionary but 'advanced'? Beneath
his revolutionary mask, is he really so different from the other?

A middle-class person embraces Socialism and perhaps even joins the
Communist Party. How much real difference does it make? Obviously, living
within the framework of capitalist society, he has got to go on earning his
living, and one cannot blame him if he clings to his

bourgeois economic
status. But is there any change in his tastes, his
habits, his manners, his
imaginative background--his 'ideology', in Communist
jargon? Is there any
change in him except that he now votes Labour, or,
when possible, Communist
at the elections? It is noticeable that he still
habitually associates with
his own class; he is vastly more at home with a
member of his own class,
who thinks him a dangerous Bolshie, than with a
member of the working class
who supposedly agrees with him; his tastes in food,
wine, clothes, books,
pictures, music, ballet, are still recognizably
bourgeois tastes; most
significant of all, he invariably marries into his
own class. Look at any
bourgeois Socialist. Look at Comrade X, member of the
C.P.G.B. and author
of Marxism for Infants. Comrade X, it so happens, is
an old Etonian. He
would be ready to die on the barricades, in theory
anyway, but you notice
that he still leaves his bottom waistcoat button
undone. He idealizes the
proletariat, but it is remarkable how little his
habits resemble theirs.
Perhaps once, out of sheer bravado, he has smoked a
cigar with the band on,
but it would be almost physically impossible for him
to put pieces of
cheese into his mouth on the point of his knife, or
to sit indoors with his
cap on, or even to drink his tea out of the saucer. I
have known numbers of
bourgeois Socialists, I have listened by the hour to
their tirades against
their own class, and yet never, not even once, have I
met one who had
picked up proletarian table-manners. Yet, after all,
why not? Why should a

man who thinks all virtue resides in the proletariat still take such pains to drink his soup silently? It can only be because in his heart he feels that proletarian manners are disgusting. So you see he is still responding to the training of his childhood, when he was taught to hate, fear, and despise the working class.

9

When I was fourteen or fifteen I was an odious little snob, but no worse than other boys of my own age and class. I suppose there is no place in the world where snobbery is quite so ever-present or where it is cultivated in such refined and subtle forms as in an English public school. Here at least one cannot say that English 'education' fails to do its job. You forget your Latin and Greek within a few months of leaving school--I studied Greek for eight or ten years, and now, at thirty-three, I cannot even repeat the Greek alphabet--but your snobbishness, unless you persistently root it out like the bindweed it is, sticks by you till your grave.

At school I was in a difficult position, for I was among boys who, for the most part, were much richer than myself, and I only went to an expensive public school because I happened to win a scholarship. This is the common experience of boys of the lower-upper-middle class, the sons of clergymen, Anglo-Indian officials, etc., and the

effects it had on me were
probably the usual ones. On the one hand it made me
cling tighter than ever
to my gentility; on the other hand it filled me with
resentment against the
boys whose parents were richer than mine and who took
care to let me know
it. I despised anyone who was not describable as a
'gentleman', but also I
hated the hoggishly rich, especially those who had
grown rich too recently.
The correct and elegant thing, I felt, was to be of
gentle birth but to
have no money. This is part of the credo of the
lower-upper-middle class.
It has a romantic, Jacobite-in-exile feeling about it
which is very
comforting.

But those years, during and just after the war, were
a queer time to
be at school, for England was nearer revolution than
she has been since or
had been for a century earlier. Throughout almost the
whole nation there
was running a wave of revolutionary feeling which has
since been reversed
and forgotten, but which has left various deposits of
sediment behind.
Essentially, though of course one could not then see
it in perspective, it
was a revolt of youth against age, resulting directly
from the war. In the
war the young had been sacrificed and the old had
behaved in a way which,
even at this distance of time, is horrible to
contemplate; they had been
sternly patriotic in safe places while their sons
went down like swathes of
hay before the German machine guns. Moreover, the war
had been conducted
mainly by old men and had been conducted with supreme
incompetence. By 1918

everyone under forty was in a bad temper with his elders, and the mood of anti-militarism which followed naturally upon the fighting was extended into a general revolt against orthodoxy and authority. At that time there was, among the young, a curious cult of hatred of 'old men'. The dominance of 'old men' was held to be responsible for every evil known to humanity, and every accepted institution from Scott's novels to the House of Lords was derided merely because 'old men' were in favour of it. For several years it was all the fashion to be a 'Bolshie', as people then called it. England was full of half-baked antinomian opinions. Pacifism, internationalism, humanitarianism of all kinds, feminism, free love, divorce-reform, atheism, birth-control--things like these were getting a better hearing than they would get in normal times. And of course the revolutionary mood extended to those who had been too young to fight, even to public schoolboys. At that time we all thought of ourselves as enlightened creatures of a new age, casting off the orthodoxy that had been forced upon us by those detested 'old men'. We retained, basically, the snobbish outlook of our class, we took it for granted that we could continue to draw our dividends or tumble into soft jobs, but also it seemed natural to us to be 'agin the Government'.

We derided the O.T.C., the Christian religion, and perhaps even compulsory games and the Royal Family, and we did not realize that we were merely taking part in a world-wide gesture of

distaste for war. Two incidents stick in my mind as examples of the queer revolutionary feeling of that time. One day the master who taught us English set us a kind of general knowledge paper of which one of the questions was, 'Whom do you consider the ten greatest men now living?' Of sixteen boys in the class (our average age was about seventeen) fifteen included Lenin in their list. This was at a snobbish expensive public school, and the date was 1920, when the horrors of the Russian Revolution was still fresh in everyone's mind. Also there were the so-called peace celebrations in 1919. Our elders had decided for us that we should celebrate peace in the traditional manner by whooping over the fallen foe. We were to march into the school-yard, carrying torches, and sing jingo songs of the type of 'Rule Britannia'. The boys--to their honour, I think--guyed the whole proceeding and sang blasphemous and seditious words to the tunes provided. I doubt whether things would happen in quite that manner now. Certainly the public schoolboys I meet nowadays, even the intelligent ones, are much more right-wing in their opinions than I and my contemporaries were fifteen years ago.

Hence, at the age of seventeen or eighteen, I was both a snob and a revolutionary. I was against all authority. I had read and re-read the entire published works of Shaw, Wells, and Galsworthy (at that time still regarded as dangerously 'advanced' writers), and I loosely described myself as a Socialist. But I had not much grasp of what

Socialism meant, and no notion that the working class were human beings. At a distance, and through the medium of books--Jack London's The People of the Abyss, for instance --I could agonize over their sufferings, but I still hated them and despised them when I came anywhere near them. I was still revolted by their accents and infuriated by their habitual rudeness. One must remember that just then, immediately after the war, the English working class were in a fighting mood. That was the period of the great coal strikes, when a miner was thought of as a fiend incarnate and old ladies looked under their beds every night lest Robert Smillie should be concealed there. All through the war and for a little time afterwards there had been high wages and abundant employment; things were now returning to something worse than normal, and naturally the working class resisted. The men who had fought had been lured into the army by gaudy promises, and now they were coming home to a world where there were no jobs and not even any houses. Moreover, they had been at war and were coming home with the soldier's attitude to life, which is fundamentally, in spite of discipline, a lawless attitude. There was a turbulent feeling in the air. To that time belongs the song with the memorable refrain:

> There's nothing sure but
> The rich get richer and the poor get children;
> In the mean time,
> In between time,
> Ain't we got fun?

People had not yet settled down to a lifetime of unemployment
mitigated by endless cups of tea. They still vaguely expected the Utopia
for which they had fought, and even more than before they were openly
hostile to the aitch-pronouncing class. So to the shock-absorbers of the
bourgeoisie, such as myself, 'common people' still appeared brutal and
repulsive. Looking back upon that period, I seem to have spent half the
time in denouncing the capitalist system and the other half in raging over
the insolence of bus-conductors.

When I was not yet twenty I went to Burma, in the Indian Imperial
Police. In an 'outpost of Empire' like Burma the class-question appeared at
first sight to have been shelved. There was no obvious class-friction here,
because the all-important thing was not whether you had been to one of the
right schools but whether your skin was technically white. As a matter of
fact most of the white men in Burma were not of the type who in England
would be called 'gentlemen', but except for the common soldiers and a few
nondescripts they lived lives appropriate to 'gentlemen'--had servants,
that is, and called their evening meal 'dinner'--and officially they were
regarded as being all of the same class. They were 'white men', in
contradistinction to the other and inferior class, the 'natives'. But one
did not feel towards the 'natives' as one felt to-wards the 'lower classes'
at home. The essential point was that the 'natives',

at any rate the
Burmese, were not felt to be physically repulsive.
One looked down on them
as 'natives', but one was quite ready to be
physically intimate with them;
and this, I noticed, was the case even with white men
who had the most
vicious colour prejudice. When you have a lot of
servants you soon get into
lazy habits, and I habitually allowed myself, for
instance, to be dressed
and undressed by my Burmese boy. This was because he
was a Burman and
undisgusting; I could not have endured to let an
English manservant handle
me in that intimate manner. I felt towards a Burman
almost as I felt
towards a woman. Like most other races, the Burmese
have a distinctive
smell--I cannot describe it: it is a smell that makes
one's teeth tingle
--but this smell never disgusted me. (Incidentally,
Orientals say that we
smell. The Chinese, I believe, say that a white man
smells like a corpse.
The Burmese say the same--though no Burman was ever
rude enough to say so
to me.) And in a way my attitude was defensible, for
if one faces the fact
one must admit that most Mongolians have much nicer
bodies than most white
men. Compare the firm-knit silken skin of the Burman,
which does not
wrinkle at all till he is past forty, and then merely
withers up like a
piece of dry leather, with the coarse-grained,
flabby, sagging skin of the
white man. The white man has lank ugly hair growing
down his legs and the
backs of his arms and in an ugly patch on his chest.
The Burman has only a
tuft or two of stiff black hair at the appropriate
places; for the rest he

is quite hairless and is usually beardless as well. The white man almost always goes bald, the Burman seldom or never. The Burman's teeth are perfect, though generally discoloured by betel juice, the white man's teeth invariably decay. The white man is generally ill-shaped, and when he grows fat he bulges in improbable places; the Mongol has beautiful bones and in old age he is almost as shapely as in youth. Admittedly the white races throw up a few individuals who for a few years are supremely beautiful; but on the whole, say what you will, they are far less comely than Orientals.

But it was not of this that I was thinking when I found the English 'lower classes' so much more repellant than Burmese 'natives'. I was still thinking in terms of my early-acquired class-prejudice. When I was not much past twenty I was attached for a short time to a British regiment. Of course I admired and liked the private soldiers as any youth of twenty would admire and like hefty, cheery youths five years older than himself with the medals of the Great War on their chests. And yet, after all, they faintly repelled me; they were 'common people' and I did not care to be too close to them. In the hot mornings when the company marched down the road, myself in the rear with one of the junior subalterns, the steam of those hundred sweating bodies in front made my stomach turn. And this, you observe, was pure prejudice. For a soldier is probably as inoffensive, physically, as it is possible for a male white person to be. He is generally young, he is nearly always healthy from

fresh air and exercise,
and a rigorous discipline compels him to be clean.
But I could not see it
like that. All I knew was that it was lower-class
sweat that I was
smelling, and the thought of it made me sick.

When later on I got rid of my class-prejudice, or
part of it, it was
in a roundabout way and by a process that took
several years. The thing
that changed my attitude to the class-issue was
something only indirectly
connected with it--something almost irrelevant.

I was in the Indian Police five years, and by the end
of that time I
hated the imperialism I was serving with a bitterness
which I probably
cannot make clear. In the free air of England that
kind of thing is not
fully intelligible. In order to hate imperialism you
have got to be part of
it. Seen from the outside the British rule in India
appears--indeed, it
is--benevolent and even necessary; and so no doubt
are the French rule in
Morocco and the Dutch rule in Borneo, for people
usually govern foreigners
better than they govern themselves. But it is not
possible to be a part of
such a system without recognizing it as an
unjustifiable tyranny. Even the
thickest-skinned Anglo-Indian is aware of this. Every
'native' face he sees
in the street brings home to him his monstrous
intrusion. And the majority
of Anglo-Indians, intermittently at least, are not
nearly so complacent
about their position as people in England believe.
From the most unexpected
people, from gin-pickled old scoundrels high up in
the Government service,

I have heard some such remark as: 'Of course we've no right in this blasted country at all. Only now we're here for God's sake let's stay here.' The truth is that no modem man, in his heart of hearts, believes that it is right to invade a foreign country and hold the population down by force. Foreign oppression is a much more obvious, understandable evil than economic oppression. Thus in England we tamely admit to being robbed in order to keep half a million worthless idlers in luxury, but we would fight to the last man sooner than be rilled by Chinamen; similarly, people who live on unearned dividends without a single qualm of conscience, see clearly enough that it is wrong to go and lord it in a foreign country where you are not wanted. The result is that every Anglo-Indian is haunted by a sense of guilt which he usually conceals as best he can, because there is no freedom of speech, and merely to be overheard making a seditious remark may damage his career. All over India there are Englishmen who secretly loathe the system of which they are part; and just occasionally, when they are quite certain of being in the right company, their hidden bitterness overflows. I remember a night I spent on the train with a man in the Educational Service, a stranger to myself whose name I never discovered. It was too hot to sleep and we spent the night in talking. Half an hour's cautious questioning decided each of us that the other was 'safe'; and then for hours, while the train jolted slowly through the pitch-black night, sitting up in our bunks with

bottles of beer handy, we damned the British Empire--damned it from the inside, intelligently and intimately. It did us both good. But we had been speaking forbidden things, and in the haggard morning light when the train crawled into Mandalay, we parted as guiltily as any adulterous couple.

So far as my observation goes nearly all Anglo-Indian officials have moments when their conscience troubles them. The exceptions are men who are doing something which is demonstrably useful and would still have to be done whether the British were in India or not: forest officers, for instance, and doctors and engineers. But I was in the police, which is to say that I was part of the actual machinery of despotism. Moreover, in the police you see the dirty work of Empire at close quarters, and there is an appreciable difference between doing dirty work and merely profiting by it. Most people approve of capital punishment, but most people wouldn't do the hangman's job. Even the other Europeans in Burma slightly looked down on the police because of the brutal work they had to do. I remember once when I was inspecting a police station, an American missionary whom I knew fairly well came in for some purpose or other. Like most Nonconformist missionaries he was a complete ass but quite a good fellow. One of my native sub-inspectors was bullying a suspect (I described this scene in Burmese Days). The American watched it, and then turning to me said thoughtfully, 'I wouldn't care to have your job.' It made me horribly

ashamed. So that was the kind of job I had! Even an ass of an American missionary, a teetotal cock-virgin from the Middle West, had the right to look down on me and pity me! But I should have felt the same shame even if there had been no one to bring it home to me. I had begun to have an indescribable loathing of the whole machinery of so-called justice. Say what you will, pur criminal law (far more humane, by the way, in India than in England) is a horrible thing. It needs very insensitive people to administer it. The wretched prisoners squatting in the reeking cages of the lock-ups, the grey cowed faces of the long-term convicts, the scarred buttocks of the men who had been flogged with bamboos, the women and children howling when their menfolk were led away under arrest--things like these are beyond bearing when you are in any way directly responsible for them. I watched a man hanged once; it seemed to me worse than a thousand murders. I never went into a jail without feeling (most visitors to jails feel the same) that my place was on the other side of the bars. I thought then--I think now, for that matter--that the worst criminal who ever walked is morally superior to a hanging judge. But of course I had to keep these notions to myself, because of the almost utter silence that is imposed on every Englishman in the East. In the end I worked out an anarchistic theory that all government is evil, that the punishment always does more harm than the crime and that people can be trusted to behave decently if only you will let them alone. This of

course was sentimental nonsense. I see now as I did not see then, that it is always necessary to protect peaceful people from violence. In any state of society where crime can be profitable you have got to have a harsh criminal law and administer it ruthlessly; the alternative is Al Capone. But the feeling that punishment is evil arises inescapably in those who have to administer it. I should expect to find that even in England many policemen, judges, prison warders, and the like are haunted by a secret horror of what they do. But in Burma it was a double oppression that we were committing. Not only were we hanging people and putting them in jail and so forth; we were doing it in the capacity of unwanted foreign invaders. The Burmese themselves never really recognized our jurisdiction. The thief whom we put in prison did not think of himself as a criminal justly punished, he thought of himself as the victim of a foreign conqueror. The thing that was done to him was merely a wanton meaningless cruelty. His face, behind the stout teak bars of the lock-up and the iron bars of the jail, said so clearly. And unfortunately I had not trained myself to be indifferent to the expression of the human face.

When I came home on leave in 1927 I was already half determined to throw up my job, and one sniff of English air decided me. I was not going back to be a part of that evil despotism. But I wanted much more than merely to escape from my job. For five years I had been part of an

oppressive system, and it had left me with a bad conscience. Innumerable remembered faces--faces of prisoners in the dock, of men waiting in the condemned cells, of subordinates I had bullied and aged peasants I had snubbed, of servants and coolies I had hit with my fist in moments of rage (nearly everyone does these things in the East, at any rate occasionally: Orientals can be very provoking)--haunted me intolerably. I was conscious of an immense weight of guilt that I had got to expiate. I suppose that sounds exaggerated; but if you do for five years a job that you thoroughly disapprove of, you will probably feel the same. I had reduced everything to the simple theory that the oppressed are always right and the oppressors are always wrong: a mistaken theory, but the natural result of being one of the oppressors yourself. I felt that I had got to escape not merely from imperialism but from every form of man's dominion over man. I wanted to submerge myself, to get right down among the oppressed, to be one of them and on their side against their tyrants. And, chiefly because I had had to. think everything out in solitude, I had carried my hatred of oppression to extraordinary lengths. At that time failure seemed to me to be the only virtue. Every suspicion of self-advancement, even to 'succeed' in life to the extent of making a few hundreds a year, seemed to me spiritually ugly, a species of bullying.

It was in this way that my thoughts turned towards the English working class. It was the first time that I had ever been

really aware of the
working class, and to begin with it was only because
they supplied an
analogy. They were the symbolic victims of injustice,
playing the same part
in England as the Burmese played in Burma. In Burma
the issue had been
quite simple. The whites were up and the blacks were
down, and therefore as
a matter of course one's sympathy was with the
blacks. I now realized that
there was no need to go as far as Burma to find
tyranny and exploitation.
Here in England, down under one's feet, were the
submerged working class,
suffering miseries which in their different way were
as bad as any an
Oriental ever knows. The word 'unemployment' was on
everyone's lips. That
was more or less new to me, after Burma, but the
driyel which the middle
classes were still talking ('These unemployed are all
unemployables', etc.,
etc.) failed to deceive me. I often wonder whether
that kind of stuff
deceives even the fools who utter it. On the other
hand I had at that time
no interest in Socialism or any other economic
theory. It seemed to me then
--it sometimes seems to me now, for that matter--that
economic injustice
will stop the moment we want it to stop, and no
sooner, and if we genuinely
want it to stop the method adopted hardly matters.

But I knew nothing about working-class conditions. I
had read the
unemployment figures but I had no notion of what they
implied; above all, I
did not know the essential fact that 'respectable'
poverty is always the
worst. The frightful doom of a decent working man
suddenly thrown on the

streets after a lifetime of steady work, his agonized struggles against
economic laws which he does not under-stand, the disintegration of
families, the corroding sense of shame--all this was outside the range of
my experience. When I thought of poverty I thought of it in terms of brute
starvation. Therefore my mind turned immediately towards the extreme cases,
the social outcasts: tramps, beggars, criminals, prostitutes. These were
'the lowest of the low', and these were the people with whom I wanted to
get in contact. What I profoundly wanted, at that time, was to find some
way of getting out of the respectable world altogether. I meditated upon it
a great deal, I even planned parts of it in detail; how one could sell
everything, give everything away, change one's name and start out with no
money and nothing but the clothes one stood up in. But in real life nobody
ever does that kind of thing; apart from the relatives and friends who have
to be considered, it is doubtful whether an educated man could do it if
there were any other course open to him. But at least I could go among
these people, see what their lives were like and feel myself temporarily
part of their world. Once I had been among them and accepted by them, I
should have touched bottom, and--this is what I felt: I was aware even
then that it was irrational--part of my guilt would drop from me.

I thought it over and decided what I would do. I would go suitably
disguised to Limehouse and Whitechapel and such places and sleep in common

lodging-houses and pal up with dock labourers, street hawkers, derelict people, beggars, and, if possible, criminals. And I would find out about tramps and how you got in touch with them and what was the proper procedure for entering the casual ward; and then, when I felt that I knew the ropes well enough, I would go on the road myself.

At the start it was not easy. It meant masquerading and I have no talent for acting. I cannot, for instance, disguise my accent, at any rate not for more than a very few minutes. I imagined--notice the frightful class-conscious-ness of the Englishman--that I should be spotted as a 'gentleman' the moment I opened my mouth; so I had a hard luck story ready in case I should be questioned, I got hold of the right kind of clothes and dirtied them in appropriate places. I am a difficult person to disguise, being abnormally tall, but I did at least know what a tramp looks like. (How few people do know this, by the way! Look at any picture of a tramp in Punch. They are always twenty years out of date.) One evening, having made ready at a friend's house, I set out and wandered eastward till I landed up at a common lodging-house in Limehouse Cause-way. It was a dark, dirty-looking place. I knew it was a common lodging-house by the sign 'Good Beds for Single Men' in the window. Heavens, how I had to screw up my courage before I went in! It seems ridiculous now. But you see I was still half afraid of the working class. I wanted to get in touch with them, I even wanted to become one of them, but I still thought of

them as alien and dangerous; going into the dark doorway of that common lodging-house seemed to me like going down into some dreadful subterranean place--a sewer full of rats, for instance. I went in fully expecting a fight. The people would spot that I was not one of themselves and immediately infer that I had come to spy on them; and then they would set upon me and throw me out--that was what I expected. I felt that I had got to do it, but I did not enjoy the prospect.

Inside the door a man in shirt-sleeves appeared from somewhere or other. This was the 'deputy', and I told him that I wanted a bed for the night. My accent did not make him stare, I noticed; he merely demanded ninepence and then showed me the way to a frowsy firelit kitchen underground. There were stevedores and navvies and a few sailors sitting about and playing draughts and drinking tea. They barely glanced at me as I entered. But this was Saturday night and a hefty young stevedore was drunk and was reeling about the room. He turned, saw me, and lurched towards me with broad red face thrust out and a dangerous-looking fishy gleam in his eyes. I stiffened myself. So the fight was coming already! The next moment the stevedore collapsed on my chest and flung his arms round my neck. ''Ave a cup of tea, chum!' he cried tear-fully; ''ave a cup of tea!'

I had a cup of tea. It was a kind of baptism. After that my fears vanished. Nobody questioned me, nobody showed

offensive curiosity;
everybody was polite and gentle and took me utterly
for granted. I stayed
two or three days in that common lodging-house, and a
few weeks later,
having picked up a certain amount of information
about the habits of
destitute people, I went on the road for the first
time.

I have described all this in Down and Out in Paris
and London (nearly
all the incidents described there actually happened,
though they have been
rearranged) and I do not want to repeat it. Later I
went on the road for
much longer periods, sometimes from choice, sometimes
from necessity. I
have lived in common lodging-houses for months
together. But it is that
first expedition that sticks most vividly in my mind,
because of the
strangeness of it--the strangeness of being at last
down there among 'the
lowest of the low', and on terms of utter equality
with working-class
people. A tramp, it is true, is not a typical
working-class person; still,
when you are among tramps you are at any rate merged
in one section--one
sub-caste--of the working class, a thing which so far
as I know can
happen to you in no other way. For several days I
wandered through the
northern outskirts of London with an Irish tramp. I
was his mate,
temporarily. We shared the same cell at night, and he
told me the history
of his life and I told him a fictitious history of
mine, and we took it in
turns to beg at likely-looking houses and divided up
the proceeds. I was
very happy. Here I was; among 'the lowest of the

low', at the bedrock of
the Western world! The class-bar was down, or seemed
to be down. And down
there in the squalid and, as a matter of fact,
horribly boring sub-world of
the tramp I had a feeling of release, of adventure,
which seems absurd when
I look back, but which was sufficiently vivid at the
time.

10

But unfortunately you do not solve the class problem
by making friends with
tramps. At most you get rid of some of your own
class-prejudice by doing
so.

Tramps, beggars, criminals, and social outcasts
generally are very
exceptional beings and no more typical of the working
class as a whole
than, say, the literary intelligentsia are typical of
the bourgeoisie. It
is quite easy to be on terms of intimacy with a
foreign 'intellectual', but
it is not at all easy to be on terms of intimacy with
an ordinary
respectable foreigner of the middle class. How many
Englishmen have seen
the inside of an ordinary French bourgeois family,
for instance? Probably
it would be quite impossible to do so, short of
marrying into it. And it is
rather similar with the English working class.
Nothing is easier than to be
bosom pals with a pickpocket, if you know where to
look for him; but it is
very difficult to be bosom pals with a bricklayer.

But why is it so easy to be on equal terms with social outcasts? People have often said to me, 'Surely when you are with the tramps they don't really accept you as one of themselves? Surely they notice that you are different--notice the difference of accent?' etc., etc. As a matter of fact, a fair proportion of tramps, well over a quarter I should say, notice nothing of the kind. To begin with, many people have no ear for accent and judge you entirely by your clothes. I was often struck by this fact when I was begging at back doors. Some people were obviously surprised by my 'educated' accent, others completely failed to notice it; I was dirty and ragged and that was all they saw. Again, tramps come from all parts of the British Isles and the variation in English accents is enormous. A tramp is used to hearing all kinds of accents among his mates, some of them so strange to him that he can hardly understand them, and a man from, say, Cardiff or Durham or Dublin does not necessarily know which of the south English accents is an 'educated' one. In any case men with 'educated' accents, though rare among tramps, are not unknown. But even when tramps are aware that you are of different origin from themselves, it does not necessarily alter their attitude. From their point of view all that matters is that you, like themselves, are 'on the bum'. And in that world it is not done to ask too many questions. You can tell people the history of your life if you choose, and most tramps do so on the smallest provocation, but you are under no compulsion to tell it and whatever

story you tell will be
accepted without question. Even a bishop could be at
home among tramps if
he wore the right clothes; and even if they knew he
was a bishop it might
not make any difference, provided that they also knew
or believed that he
was genuinely destitute. Once you are in that world
and seemingly of it, it
hardly matters what you have been in the past. It is
a sort of world-
within-a-world where everyone is equal, a small
squalid democracy--
perhaps the nearest thing to a democracy that exists
in England.

But when you come to the normal working class the
position is totally
different. To begin with, there is no short cut into
their midst. You can
become a tramp simply by putting on the right clothes
and going to the
nearest casual ward, but you can't become a navvy or
a coal-miner. You
couldn't get a job as a navvy or a coal-miner even if
you were equal to the
work. Via Socialist politics you can get in touch
with the working-class
intelligentsia, but they are hardly more typical than
tramps or burglars.
For the rest you can only mingle with the working
class by staying in their
houses as a lodger, which always has a dangerous
resemblance to 'slumming'.
For some months I lived entirely in coal-miners'
houses. I ate my meals
with the family, I washed at the kitchen sink, I
shared bedrooms with
miners, drank beer with them, played darts with them,
talked to them by the
hour together. But though I was among them, and I
hope and trust they did
not find me a nuisance, I was not one of them, and

they knew it even better
than I did. However much you like them, however
interesting you find their
conversation, there is always that accursed itch of
class-difference, like
the pea under the princess's mattress. It is not a
question of dislike or
distaste, only of difference, but it is enough to
make real intimacy
impossible. Even with miners who described themselves
as Communists I found
that it needed tactful manoeuvrings to prevent them
from calling me 'sir';
and all of them, except in moments of great
animation, softened their
northern accents for my benefit. I liked them and
hoped they liked me; but
I went among them as a foreigner, and both of us were
aware of it.
Whichever way you turn this curse of class-difference
confronts you like a
wall of stone. Or rather it is not so much like a
stone wall as the plate-
glass pane of an aquarium; it is so easy to pretend
that it isn't there,
and so impossible to get through it.

Unfortunately it is nowadays the fashion to pretend
that the glass is
penetrable. Of course everyone knows that
class-prejudice exists, but at
the same time everyone claims that he, in some
mysterious way, is exempt
from it. Snob-bishness is one of those vices which we
can discern in every-
one else but' never in ourselves. Not only the
croyant et pratiquant
Socialist, but every 'intellectual' takes it as a
matter of course that he
at least is outside the class-racket; he, unlike his
neighbours, can see
through the absurdity of wealth, ranks, titles, etc.,
etc. 'I'm not a snob'

is nowadays a kind of universal credo. Who is there who has not jeered at the House of Lords, the military caste, the Royal Family, the public schools, the huntin' and shootin' people, the old ladies in Cheltenham boarding-houses, the horrors of 'county' society, and the social hierarchy generally? To do so has become an automatic gesture. You notice this particularly in novels. Every novelist of serious pretensions adopts an ironic attitude towards his upper-class characters. Indeed when a novelist has to put a definitely upper-class person--a duke or a baronet or whatnot--into one of his stories he guys him more or less instinctively.

There is an important subsidiary cause of this in the poverty of the modern upper-class dialect. The speech of 'educated' people is now so lifeless and characterless that a novelist can do nothing with it. By far the easiest way of making it amusing is to burlesque it, which means pretending that

every upper-class person is an ineffectual ass. The trick is imitated from novelist to novelist, and in the end becomes almost a reflex action.

And yet all the while, at the bottom of his heart, every-one knows that this is humbug. We all rail against class-distinctions, but very few people seriously want to abolish them. Here you come upon the important fact that every revolutionary opinion draws part of its strength from a secret conviction that nothing can be changed.

If you want a good illustration of this, it is worth

studying the
novels and plays of John Galsworthy, keeping one eye
on their chronology.
Galsworthy is a very fine specimen of the
thin-skinned, tear-in-the-eye,
pre-war humanitarian. He starts out with a morbid
pity-complex which
extends even to thinking that every married woman is
an angel chained to a
satyr. He is in a perpetual quiver of indignation
over the sufferings of
overworked clerks, of under-paid farm hands, of
fallen women, of criminals,
of prostitutes, of animals. The world, as he sees it
in his earlier books
(The Man of Property, Justice, etc.), is divided into
oppressors and
oppressed, with the oppressors sitting on top like
some monstrous stone
idol which all the dynamite in the world cannot
overthrow. But is it so
certain that he really wants it overthrown? On the
contrary, in his fight
against an immovable tyranny he is upheld by the
consciousness that it is
immovable. When things happen unexpectedly and the
world-order which he has
known begins to crumble, he feels somewhat
differently about it. So, having
set out to be the champion of the underdog against
tyranny and injustice,
he ends by advocating (vide The Silver Spoon) that
the English working
class, to cure their economic ills, shall be deported
to the colonies like
batches of cattle. If he had lived ten years longer
he would quite probably
have arrived at some genteel version of Fascism. This
is the inevitable
fate of the sentimentalist. All his opinions change
into their opposites at
the first brush of reality.

The same streak of soggy half-baked insincerity runs through all 'advanced' opinion. Take the question of imperialism, for instance. Every left-wing 'intellectual' is, as a matter of course, an anti-imperialist. He claims to be outside the empire-racket as automatically and self-righteously as he claims to be outside the class-racket. Even the right-wing 'intellectual', who is not definitely in revolt against British imperialism, pretends to regard it with a sort of amused detachment. It is so easy to be witty about the British Empire. The White Man's Burden and 'Rule, Britannia' and Kipling's novels and Anglo-Indian bores--who could even mention such things without a snigger? And is there any cultured person who has not at least once in his life made a joke about that old Indian havildar who said that if the British left India there would not be a rupee or a virgin left between Peshawar and Delhi (or wherever it was)?

That is the attitude of the typical left-winger towards imperialism, and a thoroughly flabby, boneless attitude it is. For in the last resort, the only important question is. Do you want the British Empire to hold together or do you want it to disintegrate? And at the bottom of his heart no Englishman, least of all the kind of person who is witty about Anglo-Indian colonels, does want it to disintegrate. For, apart from any other consideration, the high standard of life we enjoy in England depends upon our keeping a tight hold on the Empire, particularly the tropical portions of it such as India and Africa. Under the capitalist

system, in order that
England may live in comparative comfort, a hundred
million Indians must
live on the verge of starvation--an evil state of
affairs, but you
acquiesce in it every time you step into a taxi or
eat a plate of
strawberries and cream. The alternative is to throw
the Empire overboard
and reduce England to a cold and unimportant little
island where we should
all have to work very hard and live mainly on
herrings and potatoes. That
is the very last thing that any left-winger wants.
Yet the left-winger
continues to feel that he has no moral responsibility
for imperialism. He
is perfectly ready to accept the products of Empire
and to save his soul by
sneering at the people who hold the Empire together.

It is at this point that one begins to grasp the
unreality of most
people's attitude towards the class question. So long
as it is merely a
question of ameliorating the worker's lot, every
decent person is agreed.
Take a coal-miner, for example. Everyone, barring
fools and scoundrels,
would like to see the miner better off. If, for
instance, the miner could
ride to the coal face in a comfortable trolley
instead of crawling on his
hands and knees, if he could work a three-hour shift
instead of seven and a
half hours, if he could live in a decent house with
five bedrooms and a
bath-room and have ten pounds a week wages--splendid!
Moreover, anyone
who uses his brain knows perfectly well that this is
within the range of
possibility. The world, potentially at least, is
immensely rich; develop it

as it might be developed, and we could all live like princes, supposing
that we wanted to. And to a very superficial glance the social side of the
question looks equally simple. In a sense it is true that almost everyone
would like to see class-distinctions abolished. Obviously this perpetual
uneasiness between man and man, from which we suffer in modern England, is
a curse and a nuisance. Hence the temptation few scoutmasterish bellows of
good-will. Stop calling me 'sir', you chaps! Surely we're all men? Let's
pal up and get our shoulders to the wheel and remember that we're all
equal, and what the devil does it matter if I know what kind of ties to
wear and you don't, and I drink my soup comparatively quietly and you drink
yours with the noise of water going down a waste-pipe--and so on and so
on and so on; all of it the most pernicious rubbish, but quite alluring
when it is suitably expressed.

But unfortunately you get no further by merely wishing class-
distinctions away. More exactly, it is necessary to wish them away, but
your wish has no efficacy unless you grasp what it involves. The fact that
has got to be faced is that to abolish class-distinctions means abolishing
a part of yourself. Here am I, a typical member of the middle class. It is
easy for me to say that I want to get rid of class-distinctions, but nearly
everything I think and do is a result of class-distinctions. All my notions
--notions of good and evil, of pleasant and unpleasant, of funny and
serious, of ugly and beautiful--are essentially

middle-class notions; my
taste in books and food and clothes, my sense of
honour, my table manners,
my turns of speech, my accent, even the
characteristic movements of my
body, are the products of a special kind of
upbringing and a special niche
about half-way up the social hierarchy. When I grasp
this I grasp that it
is no use clapping a proletarian on the back and
telling him that he is as
good a man as I am; if I want real contact with him,
I have got to make an
effort for which very likely I am unprepared. For to
get outside the class-
racket I have got to suppress not merely my private
snobbishness, but most
of my other tastes and prejudices as well. I have got
to alter myself so
completely that at the end I should hardly be
recognizable as the same
person. What is involved is not merely the
amelioration of working-class
conditions, nor an avoidance of the more stupid forms
of snobbery, but a
complete abandonment of the upper-class and
middle-class attitude to life.
And whether I say Yes or No probably depends upon the
extent to which I
grasp what is demanded of me.

Many people, however, imagine that they can abolish
class-distinctions
without making any uncomfortable change in their own
habits and 'ideology'.
Hence the eager class-breaking activities which one
can see in progress on
all sides. Everywhere there are people of goodwill
who quite honestly
believe that they are working for the overthrow of
class-distinctions. The
middle-class Socialist enthuses over the proletariat
and runs 'summer

schools' where the proletarian and the repentant bourgeois are supposed to fall upon one another's necks and be brothers for ever; and the bourgeois visitors come away saying how wonderful and inspiring it has all been (the proletarian ones come away saying something different). And then there is the outer-suburban creeping Jesus, a hangover from the William Morris period, but still surprisingly common, who goes about saying 'Why must we level down? Why not level up?' and proposes to level the working class 'up' (up to his own standard) by means of hygiene, fruit-juice, birth-control, poetry, etc. Even the Duke of York (now King George VI) runs a yearly camp where public-school boys and boys from the slums are supposed to mix on exactly equal terms, and do mix for the time being, rather like the animals in one of those 'Happy Family' cages where a dog, a cat, two ferrets, a rabbit, and three canaries preserve an armed truce while the showman's eye is on them.

All such deliberate, conscious efforts at class-breaking are, I am convinced, a very serious mistake. Sometimes they are merely futile, but where they do show a definite result it is usually to intensify class-prejudice. This, if you come to think of it, is only what might be expected. You have forced the pace and set up an uneasy, unnatural equality between class and class; the resultant friction brings to the surface all kinds of feelings that might other-wise have remained buried, perhaps for ever. As I said apropos of Galsworthy, the opinions

of the sentimentalist
change into their opposites at the first touch of
reality. Scratch the
average pacifist and you find a jingo. The
middle-class I.L.P.'er and the
bearded fruit-juice drinker are all for a classless
society so long as they
see the proletariat through the wrong end of the
telescope; force them into
any real contact with a proletarian--let them get
into a fight with a
drunken fish-porter on Saturday night, for
instance--and they are capable
of swinging back to the most ordinary middle-class
snobbishness. Most
middle-class Socialists, however, are very unlikely
to get into fights with
drunken fish-porters; when they do make a genuine
contact with the working
class, it is usually with the working-class
intelligentsia. But the
working-class intelligentsia is sharply divisible
into two different types.
There is the type who remains working-class--who goes
on working as a
mechanic or a dock-labourer or whatever it may be and
does not bother to
change his working-class accent and habits, but who
'improves his mind' in
his spare time and works for the I.L.P. or the
Communist Party; and there
is the type who does alter his way of life, at least
externally, and who by
means of State scholarships succeeds in climbing into
the middle class. The
first is one of the finest types of man we have. I
can think of some I have
met whom not even the most hidebound Tory could help
liking and admiring.
The other type, with exceptions--D. H. Lawrence, for
example--is less
admirable.

To begin with, it is a pity, though it is a natural result of the scholarship system, that the proletariat should tend to interpenetrate the middle class via the literary intelligentsia. For it is not easy to crash your way into the literary intelligentsia if you happen to be a decent human being. The modem English literary world, at any rate the high-brow section of it, is a sort of poisonous jungle where only weeds can flourish.

It is just possible to be a literary gent and to keep your decency if you are a definitely popular writer--a writer of detective stories, for instance; but to be a highbrow, with a footing in the snootier magazines, means delivering yourself over to horrible campaigns of wire-pulling and backstairs-crawling. In the highbrow world you 'get on', if you 'get on' at all, not so much by your literary ability as by being the life and soul of cocktail parties and kissing the bums of verminous little lions. This, then, is the world that most readily opens its doors to the proletarian who is climbing out of his own class. The 'clever' boy of a working-class family, the sort of boy who wins scholarships and is obviously not fitted for a life of manual labour, may find other ways of rising into the class above--a slightly different type, for instance, rises via Labour Party politics--but the literary way is by far the most usual. Literary London now teems with young men who are of proletarian origin and have been educated by means of scholarships. Many of them are very disagreeable people, quite unrepresentative of their class, and it

is most unfortunate
that when a person of bourgeois origin does succeed in meeting a
proletarian face to face on equal terms, this is the type he most commonly
meets. For the result is to drive the bourgeois, who has idealized the
proletariat so long as he knew nothing about them, back into frenzies of
snobbishness. The process is sometimes very comic to watch, if you happen
to be watching it from the outside. The poor well-meaning bourgeois, eager
to embrace his proletarian brother, leaps forward with open arms; and only
a little while later he is in retreat, minus a borrowed five pounds and
exclaiming dolefully, 'But, dash it, the fellow's not a gentleman!'

The thing that disconcerts the bourgeois in a contact of this kind is
to find certain of his own professions being taken seriously. I have
pointed out that the left-wing opinions of the average 'intellectual' are
mainly spurious. From pure imitativeness he jeers at things which in fact
he believes in. As one example out of many, take the public-school code of
honour, with its 'team spirit' and 'Don't hit a man when he's down', and
all the rest of that familiar bunkum. Who has not laughed at it? Who,
calling himself an 'intellectual', would dare not to laugh at it? But it is
a bit different when you meet somebody who laughs at it from the outside;
just as we spend our lives in abusing England but grow very angry when we
hear a foreigner saying exactly the same things. No one has been more
amusing about the public schools than 'Beachcomber'

of the Express. He laughs, quite rightly, at the ridiculous code which makes cheating at cards the worst of all sins. But would 'Beachcomber' like it if one of his own friends was caught cheating at cards? I doubt it. It is only when you meet someone of a different culture from yourself that you begin to realize what your own beliefs really are. If you are a bourgeois 'intellectual' you too readily imagine that you have somehow become unbourgeois because you find it easy to laugh at patriotism and the G. of E. and the Old School Tie and Colonel Blimp and all the rest of it. But from the point of view of the proletarian 'intellectual', who at least by origin is genuinely outside the bourgeois culture, your resemblances to Colonel Blimp may be more important than your differences. Very likely he looks upon you and Colonel Blimp as practically equivalent persons; and in a way he is right, though neither you nor Colonel Blimp would admit it. So that the meeting of proletarian and bourgeois, when they do succeed in meeting, is not always the embrace of long-lost brothers; too often it is the clash of alien cultures which can only meet in war.

I have been looking at this from the point of view of the bourgeois who finds his secret beliefs challenged and is driven back to a frightened conservatism. But one has also got to consider the antagonism that is aroused in the proletarian 'intellectual'. By his own efforts and sometimes with frightful agonies he has struggled out of his own class into another

where he expects to find a wider freedom and a greater intellectual refinement; and all he finds, very often, is a sort of hollowness, a deadness, a lack of any warm human feeling--of any real life whatever. Sometimes the bourgeoisie seem to him just dummies with money and water in their veins instead of blood. This at any rate is what he says, and almost any young highbrow of proletarian origin will spin you this line of talk.

Hence the 'proletarian' cant from which we now suffer. Everyone knows, or ought to know by this time, how it runs: the bourgeoisie are 'dead' (a favourite word of abuse nowadays and very effective be-cause meaningless), bourgeois culture is bankrupt, bourgeois 'values' are despicable, and so on and so forth; if you want examples, see any number of the Left Review or any of the younger Communist writers such as Alee Brown, Philip Henderson, etc. The sincerity of much of this is suspect, but D. H. Lawrence, who was sincere, whatever else he may not have been, expresses the same thought over and over again. It is curious how he harps upon that idea that the English bourgeoisie are all dead, or at least gelded. Mellors, the gamekeeper in Lady Chatterley's Lover (really Lawrence himself), has had the opportunity to get out of his own class and does not particularly want to return to it, because English working people have various 'disagree-able habits'; on the other hand the bourgeoisie, with whom he has also mixed to some extent, seem to him half dead, a race of eunuchs. Lady Chatterley's husband, symbolically, is impotent in the actual

physical sense. And then
there is the poem about the young man (once again
Lawrence himself) who
'got up to the top of the tree' but came down saying:

> Oh you've got to be like a monkey
> if you climb up the tree!
> You've no more use for the solid earth
> and the lad you used to be.
> You sit in the boughs and gibber
> with superiority.
> They all gibber and gibber and chatter,
> and never a word they say
> comes really out of their guts, lad,
> they make it up half-way. ...
> I tell you something's been done to 'em,
> to the pullets up above;
> there's not a cock bird among 'em, etc., etc.

You could hardly have it in plainer terms than that.
Possibly by the
people at 'the top of the tree' Lawrence only means
the real bourgeoisie,
those in the L2000 a year class and over, but I doubt
it. More probably he
means everyone who is more or less within the
bourgeois culture--everyone
who was brought up with a mincing accent and in a
house where there were
one or two servants. And at this point you realize
the danger of the
'proletarian' cant--realize, I mean, the terrible
antagonism that it is
capable of arousing. For when you come to such an
accusation as this, you
are up against a blank wall. Lawrence tells me that
because I have been to
a public school I am a eunuch. Well, what about it? I
can produce medical
evidence to the contrary, but what good will that
do? Lawrence's

condemnation remains. If you tell me I am a scoundrel I may mend my ways,
but if you tell me I am a eunuch you are tempting me to hit back in any way
that seems feasible. If you want to make an enemy of a man, tell him that
his ills are incurable.

This then is the net result of most meetings between proletarian and
bourgeois: they lay bare a real antagonism which is intensified by the
'proletarian' cant, itself the product of forced contacts between class and
class. The only sensible procedure is to go slow and not force the pace. If
you secretly think of yourself as a gentleman and as such the superior of
the greengrocer's errand boy, it is far better to say so than to tell lies
about it. Ultimately you have got to drop your snobbishness, but it is
fatal to pretend to drop it before you are really ready to do so.

Meanwhile one can observe on every side that dreary phenomenon, the
middle-class person who is an ardent Socialist at twenty-five and a
sniffish Conservative at thirty-five. In a way his recoil is natural enough
--at any rate, one can see how his thoughts run. Perhaps a classless
society doesn't mean a beatific state of affairs in which we shall all go
on behaving exactly as before except that there will be no class-hatred and
no snobbishness; perhaps it means a bleak world in which all our ideals,
our codes, our tastes--our 'ideology', in fact--will have no meaning.
Perhaps this class-breaking business isn't so simple as it looked! On the

contrary, it is a wild ride into the darkness, and it may be that at the
end of it the smile will be on the face of the tiger. With loving though
slightly patronizing smiles we set out to greet our proletarian brothers,
and behold! our proletarian brothers--in so far as we understand them--
are not asking for our greetings, they are asking us to commit suicide.
When the bourgeois sees it in that form he takes to flight, and if his
flight is rapid enough it may carry him to Fascism.

11

Meanwhile what about Socialism?

It hardly needs pointing out that at this moment we are in a very
serious mess, so serious that even the dullest-witted people find it
difficult to remain unaware of it. We are living in a world in which nobody
is free, in which hardly anybody is secure, in which it is almost
impossible to be honest and to remain alive. For enormous blocks of the
working class the conditions of life are such as I have described in the
opening chapters of this book, and there is no chance of those conditions
showing any fundamental improvement. The very best the English-working
class can hope for is an occasional temporary decrease in unemployment when
this or that industry is artificially stimulated by, for instance,
rearmament. Even the middle classes, for the first time in their history,

are feeling the pinch. They have not known actual hunger yet, but more and more of them find themselves floundering in a sort of deadly net of frustration in which it is harder and harder to persuade yourself that you are either happy, active, or useful. Even the lucky ones at the top, the real bourgeoisie, are haunted periodically by a consciousness of the miseries below, and still more by fears of the menacing future. And this is merely a preliminary stage, in a country still rich with the loot of a hundred years. Presently there may be coining God knows what horrors-- horrors of which, in this sheltered island, we have not even a traditional knowledge.

And all the while everyone who uses his brain knows that Socialism, as a world-system and wholeheartedly applied, is a way out. It would at least ensure our getting enough to eat even if it deprived us of everything else. Indeed, from one point of view, Socialism is such elementary common sense that I am sometimes amazed that it has not established itself already. The world is a raft sailing through space with, potentially, plenty of provisions for everybody; the idea that we must all cooperate and see to it that every-one does his fair share of the work and gets his fair share of the provisions seems so blatantly obvious that one would say that no one could possibly fail to accept it unless he had some corrupt motive for clinging to the present system. Yet the fact that we have got to face is that Socialism is not establishing itself. Instead of

going forward, the
cause of Socialism is visibly going back. At this
moment Socialists almost
everywhere are in retreat before the onslaught of
Fascism, and events are
moving at terrible speed. As I write this the Spanish
Fascist forces are
bombarding Madrid, and it is quite likely that before
the book is printed
we shall have another Fascist country to add to the
list, not to mention a
Fascist control of the Mediterranean which may have
the effect of
delivering British foreign policy into the hands of
Mussolini. I do not,
however, want here to discuss the wider political
issues. What I am
concerned with is the fact that Socialism is losing
ground exactly where it
ought to be gaining it. With so much in its
favour--for every empty belly
is an argument for Socialism--the idea of Socialism
is less widely
accepted than it was ten years ago. The average
thinking person nowadays is
not merely not a Socialist, he is actively hostile to
Socialism. This must
be due chiefly to mistaken methods of propaganda. It
means that Socialism,
in the form of which it is now presented to us, has
about it something
inherently distasteful--something that drives away
the very people who
ought to be nocking to its support.

A few years ago this might have seemed unimportant.
It seems only
yesterday that Socialists, especially orthodox
Marxists, were telling me
with superior smiles that Socialism was going to
arrive of its own accord
by some mysterious process called 'historic
necessity'. Possibly that

belief still lingers, but it has been shaken, to say the least of it. Hence the sudden attempts of Communists in various countries to ally themselves with democratic forces which they have been sabotaging for years past. At a moment like this it is desperately necessary to discover just why Socialism has failed in its appeal. And it is no use writing off the current distaste for Socialism as the product of stupidity or corrupt motives. If you want to remove that distaste you have got to understand it, which means getting inside the mind of the ordinary objector to Socialism, or at least regarding his viewpoint sympathetically. No case is really answered until it has had a fair hearing. Therefore, rather paradoxically, in order to defend Socialism it is necessary to start by attacking it.

In the last three chapters I tried to analyse the difficulties that are raised by our anachronistic class-system; I shall have to touch on that subject again, because I believe that the present intensely stupid handling of the class-issue may stampede quantities of potential Socialists into Fascism. In the chapter following this one I want to discuss certain underlying assumptions that alienate sensitive minds from Socialism. But in the present chapter I am merely dealing with the obvious, preliminary objections--the kind of thing that the person who is not a Socialist (I don't mean the 'Where's the money to come from?' type) always starts by saying when you tax him on the subject. Some of these objections may appear

frivolous or self-contradictory, but that is beside the point; I am merely discussing symptoms. Anything is relevant which helps to make clear why Socialism is not accepted. And please notice that I am arguing for Socialism, not against it. But for the moment I am advocatus diaboli. I am making out a case for the sort of person who is in sympathy with the fundamental aims of Socialism, who has the brains to see that Socialism would 'work', but who in practice always takes to flight when Socialism is mentioned.

Question a person of this type, and you will often get the semi-frivolous answer: 'I don't object to Socialism, but I do object to Socialists.' Logically it is a poor argument, but it carries weight with many people. As with the Christian religion, the worst advertisement for Socialism is its adherents.

The first thing that must strike any outside observer is that Socialism, in its developed form is a theory confined entirely to the middle classes. The typical Socialist is not, as tremulous old ladies imagine, a ferocious-looking working man with greasy overalls and a raucous voice. He is either a youthful snob-Bolshevik who in five years' time will quite probably have made a wealthy marriage and been converted to Roman Catholicism; or, still more typically, a prim little man with a white-collar job, usually a secret teetotaller and often with vegetarian leanings, with a history of Nonconformity behind him,

and, above all, with
a social position which he has no intention of
forfeiting. This last type
is surprisingly common in Socialist parties of every
shade; it has perhaps
been taken over en bloc from. the old Liberal Party.
In addition to this
there is the horrible--the really
disquieting--prevalence of cranks
wherever Socialists are gathered together. One
sometimes gets the
impression that the mere words 'Socialism' and
'Communism' draw towards
them with magnetic force every fruit-juice drinker,
nudist, sandal-wearer,
sex-maniac, Quaker, 'Nature Cure' quack, pacifist,
and feminist in England.
One day this summer I was riding through Letchworth
when the bus stopped
and two dreadful-looking old men got on to it. They
were both about sixty,
both very short, pink, and chubby, and both hatless.
One of them was
obscenely bald, the other had long grey hair bobbed
in the Lloyd George
style. They were dressed in pistachio-coloured shirts
and khaki shorts into
which their huge bottoms were crammed so tightly that
you could study every
dimple. Their appearance created a mild stir of
horror on top of the bus.
The man next to me, a commercial traveller I should
say, glanced at me, at
them, and back again at me, and murmured
'Socialists', as who should say,
'Red Indians'. He was probably right--the I.L.P. were
holding their
summer school at Letchworth. But the point is that to
him, as an ordinary
man, a crank meant a Socialist and a Socialist meant
a crank. Any
Socialist, he probably felt, could be counted on to
have something

eccentric about him. And some such notion seems to exist even among Socialists themselves. For instance, I have here a prospectus from another summer school which states its terms per week and then asks me to say 'whether my diet is ordinary or vegetarian'. They take it for granted, you see, that it is necessary to ask this question. This kind of thing is by itself sufficient to alienate plenty of decent people. And their instinct is perfectly sound, for the food-crank is by definition a person willing to cut himself off from human society in hopes of adding five years on to the life of his carcase; that is, a person but of touch with common humanity.

To this you have got to add the ugly fact that most middle-class Socialists, while theoretically pining for a class-less society, cling like glue to their miserable fragments of social prestige. I remember my sensations of horror on first attending an I.L.P. branch meeting in London. (It might have been rather different in the North, where the bourgeoisie are less thickly scattered.) Are these mingy little beasts, I thought, the champions of the working class? For every person there, male and female, bore the worst stigmata of sniffish middle-class superiority. If a real working man, a miner dirty from the pit, for instance, had suddenly walked into their midst, they would have been embarrassed, angry, and disgusted; some, I should think, would have fled holding their noses. You can see the same tendency in Socialist literature, which, even when it is not openly

written de haut en bos, is always completely removed from the working class in idiom and manner of thought. The Coles, Webbs, Stracheys, etc., are not exactly proletarian writers. It is doubtful whether anything describable as proletarian literature now exists--even the Daily Worker is written in standard South English--but a good music-hall comedian comes nearer to producing it than any Socialist writer I can think of. As for the technical jargon of the Communists, it is as far removed from the common speech as the language of a mathematical textbook. I remember hearing a professional Communist speaker address a working-class audience. His speech was the usual bookish stuff, full of long sentences and parentheses and 'Notwithstanding' and 'Be that as it may', besides the usual jargon of 'ideology' and 'class-consciousness' and 'proletarian solidarity' and all the rest of it. After him a Lancashire working man got up and spoke to the crowd in their own broad lingo. There was not much doubt which of the two was nearer to his audience, but I do not suppose for a moment that the Lancashire working man was an orthodox Communist.

For it must be remembered that a working man, so long as he remains a genuine working man, is seldom or never a Socialist in the complete, logically consistent sense. Very likely he votes Labour, or even Communist if he gets the chance, but his conception of Socialism is quite different from that of the, book-trained Socialist higher up. To the ordinary working man, the sort you would meet in any pub on Saturday

night, Socialism does
not mean much more than better wages and shorter'
hours and nobody bossing
you about. To the more revolutionary type, the type
who is a hunger-marcher
and is blacklisted by employers, the word is a sort
of rallying-cry against
the forces of oppression, a vague threat of future
violence. But, so far as
my experience goes, no genuine working man grasps the
deeper implications
of Socialism. Often, in my opinion, he is a truer
Socialist than the
orthodox Marxist, because he does remember, what the
other so often
forgets, that Socialism means justice and common
decency. But what he does
not grasp is that Socialism cannot be narrowed down
to mere economic
justice' and that a reform of that magnitude is bound
to work immense
changes in our civilization and his own way of life.
His vision of the
Socialist future is a vision of present society with
the worst abuses left
out, and with interest centring round the same things
as at present--
family life, the pub, football, and local politics.
As for the philosophic
side of Marxism, the pea-and-thimble trick with those
three mysterious
entities, thesis, antithesis, and synthesis, I have
never met a working man
who had the faintest interest in it. It is of course
true that plenty of
people of working-class origin are Socialists of the
theoretical bookish
type. But they are never people who have remained
working men; they don't
work with their hands, that is. They belong either to
the type I mentioned
in the last chapter, the type who squirms into the
middle class via the

literary intelligentsia, or the type who becomes a Labour M.P. or a high-up trade union official. This last type is one of the most desolating spectacles the world contains. He has been picked out to fight for his mates, and all it means to him is a soft job and the chance of 'bettering' himself. Not merely while but by fighting the bourgeoisie he becomes a bourgeois himself. And meanwhile it is quite possible that he has remained an orthodox Marxist. But I have yet to meet a working miner, steel-worker, cotton-weaver, docker, navvy, or whatnot who was 'ideologically' sound.

One of the analogies between Communism and Roman Catholicism is that only the 'educated' are completely orthodox. The most immediately striking thing about the English Roman Catholics--I don't mean the real Catholics, I mean the converts: Ronald Knox, Arnold Lunn et hoc genus--is their intense self-consciousness. Apparently they never think, certainly they never write, about anything but the fact that they are Roman Catholics; this single fact and the self-praise resulting from it form the entire stock-in-trade of the Catholic literary man. But the really interesting thing about these people is the way in which they have worked out the supposed implications of orthodoxy until the tiniest details of life are involved. Even the liquids you drink, apparently, can be orthodox or heretical; hence the campaigns of Chesterton, 'Beachcomber', etc., against tea and in favour of beer. According to Chesterton, tea-drinking' is

'pagan', while beer-drinking is 'Christian', and coffee is 'the puritan's opium'. It is unfortunate for this theory that Catholics abound in the 'Temperance' movement and the greatest tea-boozers in the world are the Catholic Irish; but what I am interested in here is the attitude of mind that can make even food and drink an occasion for religious intolerance. A working-class Catholic would never be so absurdly consistent as that. He does not spend his time in brooding on the fact that he is a Roman Catholic, and he is not particularly conscious of being different from his non-Catholic neighbours. Tell an Irish dock-labourer in the slums of Liverpool that his cup of tea is 'pagan', and he will call you a fool. And even in more serious matters he I does not always grasp the implications of his faith. In the I Roman Catholic homes of Lancashire you see the crucifix I on the wall and the Daily Worker on the table. It is only the 'educated' man, especially the literary man, who knows how to be a bigot. And, mutatis mutandis, it is the same with Communism. The creed is never found in its pure form in a genuine proletarian.

It may be said, however, that even if the theoretical book-trained Socialist is not a working man himself, at least he is actuated by a love of the working class. He is endeavouring to shed his bourgeois status and fight on the side of the proletariat--that, obviously, must be his motive.

But is it? Sometimes I look at a Socialist--the

intellectual, tract-
writing type of Socialist, with his pullover, his
fuzzy hair, and his
Marxian quotation--and wonder what the devil his
motive really is. It is
often difficult to believe that it is a love of
anybody, especially of the
working class, from whom he is of all people the
furthest removed. The
underlying motive of many Socialists, I believe, is
simply a hypertrophied
sense of order. The present state of affairs offends
them not because it
causes misery, still less because it makes freedom
impossible, but because
it is untidy; what they desire, basically, is to
reduce the world to
something resembling a chessboard. Take the plays of
a lifelong Socialist
like Shaw. How much understanding or even awareness
of working-class life
do they display? Shaw himself declares that you can
only bring a working
man on the stage 'as an object of compassion'; in
practice he doesn't bring
him on even as that, but merely as a sort of W. W.
Jacobs figure of fun--
the ready-made comic East Ender, like those in Major
Barbara and Captain
Brassbound's Conversion. At best his attitude to the
working class is the
sniggering Punch attitude, in more serious moments
(consider, for instance,
the young man who symbolizes the dispossessed classes
in Misalliance) he
finds them merely contemptible and disgusting.
Poverty and, what is more,
the habits of mind created by poverty, are something
to be abolished from
above, by violence if necessary; perhaps even
preferably by violence. Hence
his worship of 'great' men and appetite for
dictatorships, Fascist or

Communist; for to him, apparently (vide his remarks apropos of the Italo-Abyssinian war and the Stalin-Wells conversations), Stalin and Mussolini are almost equivalent persons. You get the same thing in a more mealy-mouthed form in Mrs Sidney Webb's autobiography, which gives, unconsciously, a most revealing picture of the high-minded Socialist slum-visitor. The truth is that, to many people calling themselves Socialists, revolution does not mean a movement of the masses with which they hope to associate themselves; it means a set of reforms which 'we', the clever ones, are going to impose upon 'them', the Lower Orders. On the other hand, it would be a mistake to regard the book-trained Socialist as a bloodless creature entirely incapable of emotion. Though seldom giving much evidence of affection for the exploited, he is perfectly capable of displaying hatred--a sort of queer, theoretical, in vacua hatred--against the exploiters. Hence the grand old Socialist sport of denouncing the bourgeoisie. It is strange how easily almost any Socialist writer can lash himself into frenzies of rage against the class to which, by birth or by adoption, he himself invariably belongs. Sometimes the hatred of bourgeois habits and 'ideology' is so far-reaching that it extends even to bourgeois characters in books. According to Henri Barbusse, the characters in the novels of Proust, Gide, etc., are 'characters whom one would dearly love to have at the other side of a barricade'. 'A barricade', you observe. Judging from Le Feu, I should have thought Barbusse's

experience of barricades had left him with a distaste for them. But the imaginary bayoneting of 'bourgeois', who presumably don't hit back, is a bit different from the real article.

The best example of bourgeois-baiting literature that I have yet come across is Mirsky's Intelligentsia of Great Britain. This is a very interesting and ably-written book, and it should be read by everyone who wants to understand the rise of Fascism. Mirsky (formerly Prince Mirsky) was a White Russian emigre who came to England and was for some years a lecturer in Russian literature at London University. Later he was converted to Communism, returned to Russia, and produced his book as a sort of 'show-up' of the British intelligentsia from a Marxist standpoint. It is a viciously malignant book, with an unmistakable note of 'Now I'm out of your reach I can say what I like about you' running all through it, and apart from a general distortion it contains some quite definite and probably intentional misrepresentation: as, for instance, when Conrad is declared to be 'no less imperialist than Kipling', and D. H. Lawrence is described as writing 'bare-bodied pornography' and as having 'succeeded in erasing all clues to his proletarian origin'--as though Lawrence had been a pork-butcher climbing into the House of Lords! This kind of thing is very disquieting when one remembers that it is addressed to a Russian audience who have no means of checking its accuracy. But what I am thinking of at

the moment is the effect of such a book on the English public. Here you have a literary man of aristocratic extraction, a man who had probably never in his life spoken to a working man on any-thing approaching equal terms, uttering venomous screams of libel against his 'bourgeois' colleagues. Why? So far as appearances go, from pure malignity. He is battling against the British intelligentsia, but what is he battling for? Within the book itself there is no indication. Hence the net effect of books like this is to give outsiders the impression that there is nothing in Communism except hatred. And here once again you come upon that queer resemblance between Communism and (convert) Roman Catholicism. If you want to find a book as evil-spirited as The Intelligentsia of Great Britain, the likeliest place to look is among the popular Roman Catholic apologists. You will find there the same venom and the same dishonesty, though, to do the Catholic justice, you will not usually find the same bad manners. Queer that Comrade Mirsky's spiritual brother should be Father---! The Communist and the Catholic are not saying the same thing, in a sense they are even saying opposite things, and each would gladly boil the other in oil if circumstances permitted; but from the point of view of an outsider they are very much alike.

The fact is that Socialism, in the form in which it is now presented, appeals chiefly to unsatisfactory or even inhuman types. On the one hand you have the warm-hearted un-thinking Socialist, the

typical working-class
Socialist, who only wants to abolish poverty and does not always grasp what
this implies. On the other hand, you have the intellectual, book-trained
Socialist, who understands that it is necessary to throw our present
civilization down the sink and is quite willing to do so. And this type is
drawn, to begin with, entirely from the middle class, and from a rootless
town-bred section of the middle class at that. Still more unfortunately, it
includes--so much so that to an outsider it even appears to be composed
of--the kind of people I have been discussing; the foaming denouncers of
the bourgeoisie, and the more-water-iri-your-beer reformers of whom Shaw is
the prototype, and the astute young social-literary climbers who are
Communists now, as they will be Fascists five years hence, because it is
all the go, and all that dreary tribe of high-minded' women and sandal-
wearers and bearded fruit-juice drinkers who come nocking towards the smell
of 'progress' like bluebottles to a dead cat. The ordinary decent person,
who is in sympathy with the essential aims of Socialism, is given the
impression that there is no room for his kind in any Socialist party that
means business. Worse, he is driven to the cynical conclusion that
Socialism is a kind of doom which is probably coming but must be staved off
as long as possible. Of course, as I have suggested already, it is not
strictly fair to judge a movement by its adherents; but the point is that
people invariably do so, and that the popular conception of Socialism is

coloured by the conception of a Socialist as a dull or disagreeable person. 'Socialism' is pictured as a state of affairs in which our more vocal Socialists would feel thoroughly at home. This does great harm to the cause. The ordinary man may not flinch from a dictatorship of the proletariat, if you offer it tactfully; offer him a dictatorship of the prigs, and he gets ready to fight.

There is a widespread feeling that any civilization in which Socialism was a reality would bear the same relation to our own as a brand-new bottle of colonial burgundy, bears to a few spoonfuls of first-class Beaujolais. We live, admittedly, amid the wreck of a civilization, but it has been a great civilization in its day, and in patches it still flourishes almost undisturbed. It still has its bouquet, so to speak; whereas the imagined Socialist future, like the colonial burgundy, tastes only of iron and water. Hence the fact, which is really a disastrous one, that artists of any consequence can never be persuaded into the Socialist fold. This is particularly the case with the writer whose political opinions are more directly and obviously connected with his work than those of, say, a painter. If one faces facts one must admit that nearly everything describable as Socialist literature is dull, tasteless, and bad. Consider the situation in England at the present moment. A whole generation has grown up more or less in familiarity with the idea of Socialism; and yet the higher-water mark, so to speak, of Socialist

literature is W. H. Auden,
a sort of gutless Kipling,[Orwell somewhat retracted
this remark later.
See 'Inside the Whale', England Your England, p. 120
(Seeker & Warburg
Collected Edition).] and the even feebler poets who
are associated
with him. Every writer of consequence and every book
worth reading is on
the other side. I am willing to believe that it is
otherwise in Russia--
about which I know nothing, however--for presumably
in post-revolutionary
Russia the mere violence of events would tend to
throw up a vigorous
literature of sorts. But it is certain that in
Western Europe Socialism has
produced no literature worth having. A little while
ago, when the issues
were less clear, there were writers of some vitality
who called themselves
Socialists, but they were using the word as a vague
label. Thus, if Ibsen
and Zola described themselves as Socialists, it did
not mean much more than
that they were 'progressives', while in the case of
Anatole France it meant
merely that he was an anticlerical. The real
Socialist writers, the
propagandist writers, have always been dull, empty
windbags--Shaw,
Barbusse, Upton Sinclair, William Morris, Waldo
Frank, etc., etc. I am not,
of course, suggesting that Socialism is to be
condemned because literary
gents don't like it; I am not even suggesting that it
ought necessarily to
produce literature on its own account, though I do
think it a bad sign that
it has produced no songs worth singing. I am. merely
pointing to the fact
that writers of genuine talent are usually
indifferent to Socialism, and

sometimes actively and mischievously hostile. And this is a disaster, not only for the writers themselves, but for the cause of Socialism, which has great need of them.

This, then, is the superficial aspect of the ordinary man's recoil from Socialism. I know the whole dreary argument very thoroughly, because I know it from both sides. Every-thing that I say here I have both said to ardent Socialists who were trying to convert me, and had said to me by bored non-Socialists whom I was trying to convert. The whole thing amounts to a kind of malaise produced by dislike of individual Socialists, especially of the cocksure Marx-quoting type. Is it childish to be influenced by that kind of thing? Is it silly? Is it even contemptible? It is all that, but the point is that it happens, and therefore it is important to keep it in mind.

However, there is a much more serious difficulty than the local and temporary objections which I discussed in the last chapter.

Faced by the fact that intelligent people are so often on the other side, the Socialist is apt to set it down to corrupt motives (conscious or unconscious), or to an ignorant belief that Socialism would not 'work', or to a mere dread of the horrors and discomforts of the

revolutionary period
before Socialism is established. Undoubtedly all
these are important, but
there are plenty of people who are influenced by none
of them and are
nevertheless hostile to Socialism. Their reason for
recoiling from
Socialism is spiritual, or 'ideological'. They object
to it not on the

ground that it would not 'work', but precisely
because it would 'work' too
well. What they are afraid of is not the things that
are going to happen in
their own lifetime, but the things that are going to
happen in a remote
future when Socialism is a reality.

I have very seldom met a convinced Socialist who
could grasp that
thinking people may be repelled by the objective
towards which Socialism
appears to be moving. The Marxist, especially,
dismisses this kind of thing
as bourgeois sentimentality. Marxists as a rule are
not very good at
reading the minds of their adversaries; if they were,
the situation in
Europe might be less desperate than it is at present.
Possessing a
technique which seems to explain everything, they do
not often bother to
discover what is going on inside other people's
heads. Here, for instance,
is an illustration of the kind of thing I mean.
Discussing the widely held
theory--which in one sense is certainly true--that
Fascism is a product
of Communism, Mr N. A. Holdaway, one of the ablest
Marxist writers we
possess, writes as follows:

> The hoary legend of Communism leading to Fascism. ... The element of truth in it is this: that the appearance of Communist activity warns the ruling class that democratic Labour Parties are no longer capable of holding the working class in check, and that capitalist dictatorship must assume another form if it is to survive.

You see here the defects of the method. Because he has detected the underlying economic cause of Fascism, he tacitly assumes that the spiritual side of it is of no importance. Fascism is written off as a manoeuvre of the 'ruling class', which at bottom it is. But this in itself would only explain why Fascism appeals to capitalists. What about the millions who are not capitalists, who in a material sense have nothing to gain from Fascism and are often aware of it, and who, nevertheless, are Fascists? Obviously their approach has been purely along the ideological line. They could only be stampeded into Fascism because Communism attacked or seemed to attack certain things (patriotism, religion, etc.) which lay deeper than the economic motive; and in that sense it is perfectly true that Communism leads to Fascism. It is a pity that Marxists nearly always concentrate on letting economic cats out of ideological bags; it does in one sense reveal the truth, but with this penalty, that most of their propaganda misses its mark. It is the spiritual recoil from Socialism, especially as it manifests itself in sensitive people, that I want to discuss in this chapter. I shall

have to analyse it at some length, because it is very widespread, very powerful, and, among Socialists, almost completely ignored.

The first thing to notice is that the idea of Socialism is bound up, more or less inextricably, with the idea of machine-production. Socialism is essentially an urban creed. It grew up more or less concurrently with industrialism, it has always had its roots in the town proletariat and the town intellectual, and it is doubtful whether it could ever have arisen in any but an industrial society. Granted industrialism, the idea of Socialism presents itself naturally, because private ownership is only tolerable when every individual (or family or other unit) is at least moderately self-supporting; but the effect of industrialism is to make it impossible for anyone to be self-supporting even for a moment. Industrialism, once it rises above a fairly low level, must lead to some form of collectivism. Not necessarily to Socialism, of course; conceivably it might lead to the Slave-State of which Fascism is a kind of prophecy. And the converse is also true. Machine-production suggests Socialism, but Socialism as a world-system implies machine-production, because it demands certain things not compatible with a primitive way of life. It demands, for instance, constant intercommunication and exchange of goods between all parts of the earth; it demands some degree of centralized control; it demands an approximately equal standard of life for all human beings and probably a certain

uniformity of education. We may take it, therefore, that any world in which Socialism was a reality would be at least as highly mechanized as the United States at this moment, probably much more so. In any case, no Socialist would think of denying this. The Socialist world is always pictured as a completely mechanized, immensely organized world, depending on the machine as the civilizations of antiquity depend on the slave.

So far so good, or so bad. Many, perhaps a majority, of thinking people are not in love with machine-civilization, but everyone who is not a fool knows that it is nonsense to talk at this moment about scrapping the machine. But the unfortunate thing is that Socialism, as usually presented, is bound up with the idea of mechanical progress, not merely as a necessary development but as an end in itself, almost as a kind of religion. This idea is implicit in, for instance, most of the propagandist stuff that is written about the rapid mechanical advance in Soviet Russia (the Dneiper dam, tractors, etc., etc.). Karel Capek hits it off well enough in the horrible ending of R.U.R., when the Robots, having slaughtered the last human being, announce their intention to 'build many houses' (just for the sake of building houses, you see). The kind of person who most readily accepts Socialism is also the kind of person who views mechanical progress, as such, with enthusiasm. And this is so much the case that Socialists are often unable to grasp that the opposite opinion exists. As a rule the most

persuasive argument they can think of is to tell you that the present mechanization of the world is as nothing to what we shall see when Socialism is established. Where there is one aeroplane now, in those days there will be fifty! All the work that is now done by hand will then be done by machinery: everything that is now made of leather, wood, or stone will be made of rubber, glass, or steel; there will be no disorder, no loose ends, no wilder-nesses, no wild animals, no weeds, no disease, no poverty, no pain--and so on and so forth. The Socialist world is to be above all things an ordered world, an efficient world. But it is precisely from that vision of the future as a sort of glittering Wells-world that sensitive minds recoil. Please notice that this essentially fat-bellied version of 'progress' is not an integral part of Socialist doctrine; but it has come to be thought of as one, with the result that the temperamental conservatism which is latent in all kinds of people is easily mobilized against Socialism.

Every sensitive person has moments when he is suspicious of machinery and to some extent of physical science. But it is important to sort out the various motives, which have differed greatly at different times, for hostility to science and machinery, and to disregard the jealousy of the modem literary gent who hates science because science has stolen literature's thunder. The earliest full-length attack on science and machinery that I am acquainted with is in the third

part of Gulliver's
Travels. But Swift's attack, though brilliant as a
tour de force, is
irrelevant and even silly, because it is written from
the standpoint--
perhaps this seems a queer thing to say of the author
of Gulliver's Trawls
--of a man who lacked imagination. To Swift, science
was merely a kind of
futile muckraking and the machines were non-sensical
contraptions that
would never work. His standard was that of practical
usefulness, and he
lacked the vision to see that an experiment which is
not demonstrably
useful at the moment may yield results in the future.
Elsewhere in the book
he names it as the best of all achievements 'to make
two blades of grass
grow where one grew before'; not 'seeing, apparently,
that this is just
what the machine can do. A little later the despised
machines began
working, physical science increased its scope, and
there came the
celebrated conflict between religion and science
which agitated our
grandfathers. That conflict is over and both sides
have retreated and
claimed a victory, but an anti-scientific bias still
lingers in the minds
of most religious believers. All through the
nineteenth century protesting
voices were raised against science and machinery (see
Dickens's Hard Times,
for instance), but usually for the rather shallow
reason that industrialism
in its first stages was cruel and ugly. Samuel
Butler's attack on the
machine in the well-known chapter of Erewhon is a
different matter. But
Butler himself lives in 'a less desperate age than
our own, an age in which

it was still possible for a first-rate man to be a dilettante part of the time, and therefore the whole thing appeared to him as a kind of intellectual exercise. He saw clearly enough our abject dependence on the machine, but instead of bothering to work out its consequences he preferred to exaggerate it for the sake of what was not much more than a joke. It is only in our own age, when mechanization has finally triumphed, that we can actually feel the tendency of the machine to make a fully human life impossible. There is probably no one capable of thinking and feeling who has not occasionally looked at a gas-pipe chair and reflected that the machine is the enemy of life. As a rule, however, this feeling is instinctive rather than reasoned.

People know that in some way or another 'progress' is a swindle, but they reach this conclusion by a kind of mental shorthand; my job here is to supply the logical steps that are usually left out. But first one must ask, what is the function of the machine? Obviously its primary function is to save work, and the type of person to whom machine-civilization is entirely acceptable seldom sees any reason for looking further. Here for instance is a person who claims, or rather screams, that he is thoroughly at home in the modem mechanized world. I am quoting from World Without Faith, by Mr John Beevers. This is what he says:

> It is plain lunacy to say that the average L2 10s. to L4 a week man

of today is a lower type than an eighteenth-century farm labourer. Or than the labourer or peasant of any exclusively agricultural community now or in the past. It just isn't true. It is so damn silly to cry out about the civilizing effects of work in the fields and farmyards as against that done in a big locomotive works or an automobile factory. Work is a nuisance. We work because we have to and all work is done to provide us with leisure and the means of spending that leisure as enjoyably as possible.

And again:

> Man is going to have time enough and power enough to hunt for his own heaven on earth without worrying about the super-natural one. The earth will be so pleasant a place that the priest and the parson won't be left with much of a tale to tell. Half the stuffing is knocked out of them by one neat blow. Etc., etc., etc.

There is a whole chapter to this effect (Chapter 4 of Mr Beevers's book), and it is of some interest as an exhibition of machine-worship in its most completely vulgar, ignorant, and half-baked form. It is the authentic voice of a large section of the modem world. Every aspirin-eater in the outer suburbs would echo it fervently. Notice the shrill wail of anger ('It just isn't troo-o-o!', etc.) with which Mr Beevers meets the suggestion that his grandfather may have been a

better man than himself;
and the still more horrible suggestion that if we returned to a simpler way
of life he might have to toughen his muscles with a job of work. Work, you
see, is done 'to provide us with leisure'. Leisure for what? Leisure to
become more like Mr Beevers, presumably. Though as a matter of fact, from
that line of talk about 'heaven on earth', you can make a fairly good guess
at what he would like civilization to be; a sort of Lyons Comer House
lasting in saecula saeculorum and getting bigger and noisier all the time.
And in any book by anyone who feels at home in the machine-world--in any
book by H. G. Wells, for instance--you will find passages of the same
kind. How often have we not heard it, that glutinously uplifting stuff
about 'the machines, our new race of slaves, which will set humanity free',
etc., etc., etc. To these people, apparently, the only danger of the
machine is its possible use for destructive purposes; as, for instance,
aero-planes are used in war. Barring wars and unforeseen disasters, the
future is envisaged as an ever more rapid march of mechanical progress;
machines to save work, machines to save thought, machines to save pain,
hygiene, efficiency, organization, more hygiene, more efficiency, more
organization, more machines--until finally you land up in the by now
familiar Wellsian Utopia, aptly caricatured by Huxley in Brave New World,
the paradise of little fat men. Of course in their day-dreams of the future
the little fat men are neither fat nor little; they are Men Like Gods. But

why should they be? All mechanical progress is towards greater and greater efficiency; ultimately, therefore, towards a world in which nothing goes wrong. But in a world in which nothing went wrong, many of the qualities which Mr Wells regards as 'godlike' would be no more valuable than the animal faculty of moving the ears. The beings in Men Like Gods and The Dream are represented, for example, as brave, generous, and physically strong. But in a world from which physical danger had been banished--and obviously mechanical progress tends to eliminate danger--would physical courage be likely to survive? Could it survive? And why should physical strength survive in a world where there was never the need for physical labour? As for such qualities as loyalty, generosity, etc., in a world where nothing went wrong, they would be not only irrelevant but probably unimaginable. The truth is that many of the qualities we admire in human beings can only function in opposition to some kind of disaster, pain, or difficulty; but the tendency of mechanical progress is to eliminate disaster, pain, and difficulty. In books like The Dream and Men Like Gods it is assumed that such qualities as strength, courage, generosity, etc., will be kept alive because they are comely qualities and necessary attributes of a full human being. Presumably, for instance, the inhabitants of Utopia would create artificial dangers in order to exercise their courage, and do dumb-bell exercises to harden muscles which they would never be obliged to use. And here you observe the

huge contradiction which
is usually present in the idea of progress. The
tendency of mechanical
progress is to make your environment safe and soft;
and yet you are
striving to keep yourself brave and hard. You are at
the same moment
furiously pressing forward and desperately holding
back. It is as though a
London stockbroker should go to his office in a suit
of chain mail and
insist on talking medieval Latin. So in the last
analysis the champion of
progress is also the champion of anachronisms.

Meanwhile I am assuming that the tendency of
mechanical progress is to
make life safe and soft. This may be disputed,
because at any given moment
the effect of some recent mechanical invention may
appear to be the
opposite. Take for instance the transition from
horses to motor vehicles.
At a first glance one might say, considering the
enormous toll of road
deaths, that the motor-car does not exactly tend to
make life safer.
Moreover it probably needs as much toughness to be a
first-rate dirt-track
rider as to be a broncho-buster or to ride in the
Grand National.
Nevertheless the tendency of all machinery is to
become safer and easier to
handle. The danger of accidents would disappear if we
chose to tackle our
road-planning problem seriously, as we shall do
sooner or later; and
meanwhile the motor-car has evolved to a point at
which anyone who is not
blind or paralytic can drive it after a few lessons.
Even now it needs far
less nerve and skill to drive a car ordinarily well
than to ride a horse

ordinarily well; in twenty years' time it may need no nerve or skill at all. Therefore, one must say that, taking society as a whole, the result of the transition from horses to cars has been an increase in human softness.

Presently somebody comes along with another invention, the aeroplane for instance, which does not at first sight appear to make life safer. The first men who went up in aeroplanes were superlatively brave, and even today it must need an exceptionally good nerve to be a pilot. But the same tendency as before is at work. The aeroplane, like the motor-car, will be made foolproof; a million engineers are working, almost unconsciously, in that direction. Finally--this is the objective, though it may never quite be reached--you will get an aeroplane whose pilot needs no more skill or courage than a baby needs in its perambulator. And all mechanical progress is and must be in this direction. A machine evolves by becoming more efficient, that is, more foolproof; hence the objective of mechanical progress is a foolproof world--which may or may not mean a world inhabited by fools. Mr Wells would probably retort that the world can never become fool-proof, because, however high a standard of efficiency you have reached, there is always some greater difficulty ahead. For example (this is Mr Wells's favourite idea--he has used it in goodness knows how many perorations), when you have got this planet of ours perfectly into trim, you start upon the enormous task of reaching and colonizing another. But this is merely to push the objective further into the

future; the objective
itself remains the same. Colonize another planet, and
the game of
mechanical progress begins anew; for the foolproof
world you have
substituted the foolproof solar system--the foolproof
universe. In tying
yourself to the ideal of mechanical efficiency, you
tie yourself to the
ideal of softness. But softness is repulsive; and
thus all progress is seen
to be a frantic struggle towards an objective which
you hope and pray will
never be reached. Now and again, but not often, you
meet somebody who
grasps that what is usually called progress also
entails what is usually
called degeneracy, and who is nevertheless in favour
of progress. Hence the
fact that in Mr Shaw's Utopia a statue was erected to
Falstaff, as the
first man who ever made a speech in favour of
cowardice.

But the trouble goes immensely deeper than this.
Hitherto I have only
pointed out the absurdity of aiming at mechanical
progress and also at the
preservation of qualities which mechanical progress
makes unnecessary. The
question one has got to consider is whether there is
any human activity
which would not be maimed by the dominance of the
machine.

The function of the machine is to save work. In a
fully mechanized
world all the dull drudgery will be done by
machinery, leaving us free for
more interesting pursuits. So expressed, this sounds
splendid. It makes one
sick to see half a dozen men sweating their guts out
to dig a trench for a

water-pipe, when some easily devised machine would scoop the earth out in a couple of minutes. Why not let the machine do the work and the men go and do something else. But presently the question arises, what else are they to do? Supposedly they are set free from 'work' in order that they may do something which is not 'work'. But what is work and what is not work? Is it work to dig, to carpenter, to plant trees, to fell trees, to ride, to fish, to hunt, to feed chickens, to play the piano, to take photographs, to build a house, to cook, to sew, to trim hats, to mend motor bicycles? All of these things are work to somebody, and all of them are play to somebody.

There are in fact very few activities which cannot be classed either as work or play according as you choose to regard them. The labourer set free from digging may want to spend his leisure, or part of it, in playing the piano, while the professional pianist may be only too glad to get out and dig at the potato patch. Hence the antithesis between work, as something intolerably tedious, and not-work, as something desirable, is false. The truth is that when a human being is riot eating, drinking, sleeping, making love, talking, playing games, or merely lounging about--and these things will not fill up a lifetime--he needs work and usually looks for it, though he may not call it work. Above the level of a third- or fourth-grade moron, life has got to be lived largely in terms of effort. For man is not, as the vulgarer hedonists seem to suppose, a kind of walking stomach; he has also got a hand, an eye, and a brain. Cease to

use your hands, and you
have lopped off a huge chunk of your conscious-ness.
And now consider again
those half-dozen men who were digging the trench for
the water-pipe. A
machine has set them free from digging, and they are
going to amuse
themselves with something else--carpentering, for
instance. But whatever
they want to do, they will find that another machine
has set them free from
that. For in a fully mechanized world there would be
no more need to
carpenter, to cook, to mend motor bicycles, etc.,
than there would be to
dig. There is scarcely anything, from catching a
whale to carving a cherry
stone, that could not conceivably be done by
machinery. The machine would
even encroach upon the activities we now class as
'art'; it is doing so
already, via the camera and the radio. Mechanize the
world as fully as it
might be mechanized, and whichever way you turn there
will be some machine
cutting you off from the chance of working--that is,
of living.

At a first glance this might not seem to matter. Why
should you not
get on with your 'creative work' and disregard the
machines that would do
it for you? But it is not so simple as it sounds.
Here am I, working eight
hours a day in an insurance office; in my spare time
I want to do something
'creative', so I choose to do a bit of
carpentering--to make myself a
table, for instance. Notice that from the very start
there is a touch of
artificiality about the whole business, for the
factories can turn me out a
far better table than I can make for myself. But even

when I get to work on
my table, it is not possible for me to feel towards
it as the cabinet-maker
of a hundred years ago felt towards his table, still
less as Robinson
Crusoe felt towards his. For before I start, most of
the work has already
been done for me by machinery. The tools I use demand
the minimum of skill.
I can get, for instance, planes which will cut out
any moulding; the
cabinet-maker of a hundred years ago would have had
to do the work with
chisel and gouge, which demanded real skill of eye
and hand. The boards I
buy are ready planed and the legs are ready turned by
the lathe. I can even
go to the wood-shop and buy all the parts of the
table ready-made and only
needing to be fitted together; my work being reduced
to driving in a few
pegs and using a piece of sandpaper. And if this is
so at present, in the
mechanized future it will be enormously more so. With
the tools and
materials available then, there will be no
possibility of mistake, hence no
room for skill. Making a table will be easier and
duller than peeling a
potato. In such circumstances it is nonsense to talk
of 'creative work'. In
any case the arts of the hand (which have got to be
transmitted by
apprenticeship) would long since have disappeared.
Some of them have
disappeared already, under the competition of the
machine. Look round any
country churchyard and see whether you can find a
decently-cut tombstone
later than 1820. The art, or rather the craft, of
stonework has died out so
completely that it would take centuries to revive it.

But it may be said, why not retain the machine and retain 'creative work'? Why not cultivate anachronisms as a spare-time hobby? Many people have played with this idea; it seems to solve with such beautiful ease the problems set by the machine. The citizen of Utopia, we are told, coming home from his daily two hours of turning a handle in the tomato-canning factory, will deliberately revert to a more primitive way of life and solace his creative instincts with a bit of fretwork, pottery-glazing, or handloom-weaving. And why is this picture an absurdity--as it is, of course? Because of a principle that is not always recognized, though always acted upon: that so long as the machine is there, one is under an obligation to use it. No one draws water from the well when he can turn on the tap. One sees a good illustration of this in the matter of travel.

Everyone who has travelled by primitive methods in an undeveloped country knows that the difference between that kind of travel and modern travel in trains, cars, etc., is the difference between life and death. The nomad who walks or rides, with his baggage stowed on a camel or an ox-cart, may suffer every kind of discomfort, but at least he is living while he is travelling; whereas for the passenger in an express train or a luxury liner his journey is an interregnum, a kind of temporary death. And yet so long as the railways exist, one has got to travel by train--or by car or aeroplane. Here am I, forty miles from London. When I want to go up to London why do I not pack my luggage on to a mule and

set out on foot,
making a two days of it? Because, with the Green Line
buses whizzing past
me every ten minutes, such a journey would be
intolerably irksome. In order
that one may enjoy primitive methods of travel, it is
necessary that no
other method should be available. No human being ever
wants to do anything
in a more cumbrous way than is necessary. Hence the
absurdity of that
picture of Utopians saving their souls with fretwork.
In a world where
every-thing could be done by machinery, everything
would be done by
machinery. Deliberately to revert to primitive
methods to use archaic took,
to put silly little difficulties in your own way,
would be a piece of
dilettantism, of pretty-pretty arty and craftiness.
It would be like
solemnly sitting down to eat your dinner with stone
implements. Revert to
handwork in a machine age, and you are back in Ye
Olde Tea Shoppe or the
Tudor villa with the sham beams tacked to the wall.

The tendency of mechanical progress, then, is to
frustrate the human
need for effort and creation. It makes unnecessary
and even impossible the
activities of the eye and the hand. The apostle of
'progress' will
sometimes declare that this does not matter, but you
can usually drive him
into a comer by pointing out the horrible lengths to
which the process can
be carried. Why, for instance, use your hands at
all--why use them even
for blowing your nose or sharpening a pencil? Surely
you could fix some
kind of steel and rubber contraption to your
shoulders and let your arms

wither into stumps of skin and bone? And so with every organ and every faculty. There is really no reason why a human being should do more than eat, drink, sleep, breathe, and procreate; everything else could be done for him by machinery. Therefore the logical end of mechanical progress is to reduce the human being to something resembling a brain in a bottle. That is the goal towards which we are already moving, though, of course, we have no intention of getting there; just as a man who drinks a bottle of whisky a day does not actually intend to get cirrhosis of the liver. The implied objective of 'progress' is--not exactly, perhaps, the brain in the bottle, but at any rate some frightful subhuman depth of softness and helplessness. And the unfortunate thing is that at present the word 'progress' and the word 'Socialism' are linked in-separably in almost everyone's mind. The kind of person who hates machinery also takes it for granted to hate Socialism; the Socialist is always in favour of mechanization, rationalization, modernization--or at least thinks that he ought to be in favour of them. Quite recently, for instance, a prominent I.L.P.'er confessed to me with a sort of wistful shame--as though it were something faintly improper--that he was 'fond of horses'. Horses, you see, belong to the vanished agricultural past, and all sentiment for the past carries with it a vague smell of heresy. I do not believe that this need necessarily be so, but undoubtedly it is so. And in itself it is quite enough to explain the alienation of decent minds from

Socialism.

A generation ago every intelligent person was in some sense a revolutionary; nowadays it would be nearer the mark to say that every intelligent person is a reactionary. In this connexion it is worth comparing H. G. Wells's The Sleeper Awakes with Aldous Huxley's Brave New World, written thirty years later. Each is a pessimistic Utopia, a vision of a sort of prig's paradise in which all the dreams of the 'progressive' person come true. Considered merely as a piece of imaginative construction The Sleeper Awakes is, I think, much superior, but it suffers from vast contradictions because of the fact that Wells, as the arch-priest of 'progress', cannot write with any conviction against 'progress'. He draws a picture of a glittering, strangely sinister world in which the privileged classes live a life of shallow gutless hedonism, and the workers, reduced to a state of utter slavery and sub-human ignorance, toil like troglodytes in caverns underground. As soon as one examines this idea--it is further developed in a splendid short story in Stories of Space and Time--one sees its inconsistency. For in the immensely mechanized world that Wells is imagining, why should the workers have to work harder than at present? Obviously the tendency of the machine is to eliminate work, not to increase it. In the machine-world the workers might be enslaved, ill-treated, and even under-fed, but they certainly would not be condemned to ceaseless manual toil; because in that case what would be the

function of the
machine? You can have machines doing all the work or
human beings doing all
the work, but you can't have both. Those armies of
underground workers,
with their blue uniforms and their debased,
half-human language, are only
put in 'to make your flesh creep'. Wells wants to
suggest that 'progress'
might take a wrong turning; but the only evil he
cares to imagine is
inequality--one class grabbing all the wealth and
power and oppressing
the others, apparently out of pure spite. Give it
quite a small twist, he
seems to suggest, overthrow the privileged
class--change over from world-
capitalism to Socialism, in fact--and all will be
well. The machine-
civilization is to continue, but its products are to
be shared out equally.
The thought he dare not face is that the machine
itself may be the enemy.
So in his more characteristic Utopias (The Dream, Men
Like Gods, etc.), he
returns to optimism and to a vision of humanity,
'liberated' by the
machine, as a race of enlightened sunbathers whose
sole topic of
conversation is their own superiority to their
ancestors. Brave New World
belongs to a later time and to a generation which has
seen through the
swindle of 'progress'. It contains its own
contradictions (the most
important of them is pointed out in Mr John
Strachey's The Coming Struggle
for Power), but it is at least a memorable assault on
the more fat-bellied
type of perfectionism. Allowing for the exaggerations
of caricature, it
probably expresses what a majority of thinking people
feel about machine-

civilization.

The sensitive person's hostility to the machine is in one sense unrealistic, because of the obvious fact that the machine has come to stay. But as an attitude of mind there is a great deal to be said for it. The machine has got to be accepted, but it is probably better to accept it rather as one accepts a drug--that is, grudgingly and suspiciously. Like a drug, the machine is useful, dangerous, and habit-forming. The oftener one surrenders to it the tighter its grip becomes. You have only to look about you at this moment to realize with what sinister speed the machine is getting us into its power. To begin with, there is the frightful debauchery of taste that has already been effected by a century of mechanization. This is almost too obvious and too generally admitted to need pointing out. But as a single instance, take taste in its narrowest sense--the taste for decent food. In the highly mechanized countries, thanks to tinned food, cold storage, synthetic flavouring matters, etc., the palate is almost a dead organ. As you can see by looking at any greengrocer's shop, what the majority of English people mean by an apple is a lump of highly-coloured cotton wool from America or Australia; they will devour these things, apparently with pleasure, and let the English apples rot under the trees. It is the shiny, standardized, machine-made look of the American apple that appeals to them; the superior taste of the English apple is something they simply do not notice. Or look at the factory-made,

foil-wrapped cheese and
'blended' butter in any grocer's; look at the hideous
rows of tins which
usurp more and more of the space in any food-shop,
even a dairy; look at a
sixpenny Swiss roll or a twopenny ice-cream; look at
the filthy chemical
by-product that people will pour down their throats
under the name of beer.
Wherever you look you will see some slick
machine-made article triumphing
over the old-fashioned article that still tastes of
something other than
sawdust. And what applies to food applies also to
furniture, houses,
clothes, books, amusements, and everything else that
makes up our
environment. There are now millions of people, and
they are increasing
every year, to whom the blaring of a radio is not
only a more accept-able
but a more normal background to their thoughts than
the lowing of cattle or
the song of birds. The mechanization of the world
could never proceed very
far while taste, even the taste-buds of the tongue,
remained uncorrupted,
be-cause in that case most of the products of the
machine would be simply
unwanted. In a healthy world there would be no demand
for tinned foods,
aspirins, gramophones, gaspipe chairs, machine guns,
daily newspapers,
telephones, motor-cars, etc., etc.; and on the other
hand there would be a
constant demand for the things the machine cannot
produce. But meanwhile
the machine is here, and its corrupting effects are
almost irresistible.
One inveighs against it, but one goes on using it.
Even a bare-arse savage,
given the chance, will learn the vices of
civilization within a few months.

Mechanization leads to the decay of taste, the decay of taste leads to the demand for machine-made articles and hence to more mechanization, and so a vicious circle is established.

But in addition to this there is a tendency for the mechanization of the world to proceed as it were automatically, whether we want it or not. This is due to the fact that in modem Western man the faculty of mechanical invention has been fed and stimulated till it has reached almost the status of an instinct. People invent new machines and improve existing ones almost unconsciously, rather as a somnambulist will go on working in his sleep. In the past, when it was taken for granted that life on this planet is harsh or at any rate laborious, it Seemed the natural fate to go on using the clumsy implements of your forefathers, and only a few eccentric persons, centuries apart, proposed innovations; hence throughout enormous ages such things as the ox-cart, the plough, the sickle, etc., remained radically unchanged. It is on record that screws have been in use since remote antiquity and yet that it was not till the middle of the nineteenth century that anyone thought of making screws with points on them, for several thousand years they remained flat-ended and holes had to be drilled for them before they could be inserted. In our own epoch such a thing would be unthinkable. For almost every modem Western man has his inventive faculty to some extent developed; the Western man invents machines as naturally as the Polynesian islander swims. Give a Western man a

job of work and he
immediately begins devising a machine that would do
it for him; give him a
machine and he thinks of ways of improving it. I
understand this tendency
well enough, for in an ineffectual sort of way I have
that type of mind
myself. I have not either the patience or the
mechanical skill to devise
any machine that would work, but I am perpetually
seeing, as it were, the
ghosts of possible machines that might save me the
trouble of using my
brain or muscles. A person with a more definite
mechanical turn would
probably construct some of them and put them into
operation. But under our
present economic system, whether he constructed
them--or rather, whether
anyone else had the benefit of them--would depend
upon whether they were
commercially valuable. The Socialists are right,
therefore, when they claim
that the rate of mechanical progress will be much
more rapid once Socialism
is established. Given a mechanical civilization the
process of invention
and improvement will always continue, but the
tendency of capitalism is to
slow it down, because under capitalism any invention
which does not promise
fairly immediate profits is neglected; some, indeed,
which threaten to
reduce profits are suppressed almost as ruthlessly as
the flexible glass
mentioned by Petronius.[For example: Some years ago
someone invented a
gramophone needle that would last for decades. One of
the big gramophone
companies bought up the patent rights, and that was
the last that was ever
beard of it.] Establish Socialism--remove the profit
principle--and the

inventor will have a free hand. The mechanization of the world, already rapid enough, would be or at any rate could be enormously accelerated.

And this prospect is a slightly sinister one, because it is obvious even now that the process of mechanization is out of control. It is happening merely because humanity has got the habit. A chemist perfects a new method of synthesizing rubber, or a mechanic devises a new pattern of gudgeon-pin. Why? Not for any clearly understood purpose, but simply from the impulse to invent and improve, which has now become instinctive. Put a pacifist to work in a bomb-factory and in two months he will be devising a new type of bomb. Hence the appearance of such diabolical things as poison gases, which are not expected even by their inventors to be beneficial to humanity. Our attitude towards such things as poison gases ought to be the attitude of the king of Brobdingnag towards gunpowder; but because we live in a mechanical and scientific age we are infected with the notion that, whatever else happens, 'progress' must continue and knowledge must never be suppressed. Verbally, no doubt, we would agree that machinery is made for man and not man for machinery; in practice any attempt to check the development of the machine appears to us an attack on knowledge and therefore a kind of blasphemy. And even if the whole of humanity suddenly revolted against the machine and decided to escape to a simpler way of life, the escape would still be immensely difficult. It would not do, as in

Butler's Erewhon, to smash every machine invented after a certain date; we should also have to smash the habit of mind that would, almost involuntarily, devise fresh machines as soon as the old ones were smashed. And in all of us there is at least a tinge of that habit of mind. In every country in the world the large army of scientists and technicians, with the rest of us panting at their heels, are marching along the road of 'progress' with the blind persistence of a column of ants. Comparatively few people want it to happen, plenty of people actively want it not to happen, and yet it is happening. The process of mechanization has itself become a machine, a huge glittering vehicle whirling us we are not certain where, but probably towards the padded Wells-world and the brain in the bottle.

This, then, is the case against the machine. Whether it is a sound or unsound case hardly matters. The point is that these or very Similar arguments would be echoed by every person who is hostile to machine-civilization. And unfortunately, because of that nexus of thought, 'Socialism-progress-machinery-Russia-tractor-hygiene-machinery-progress', which exists in almost everyone's mind, it is usually the same person who is hostile to Socialism. The kind of person who hates central heating and gaspipe chairs is also the kind of person who, when you mention Socialism, murmurs something about' beehive state' and moves away with a pained expression. So far as my observation goes, very few

Socialists grasp why this is so, or even that it is so. Get the more vocal type of Socialist into a comer, repeat to him the substance of what I have said in this chapter, and see what kind of answer you get. As a matter of fact you will get several answers; I am so familiar with them that I know them almost by heart.

In the first place he will tell you that it is impossible to 'go back' (or to 'put back the hand of progress'--as though the hand of progress hadn't been pretty violently put back several times in human history!), and will then accuse you of being a medievalist and begin to descant upon the horrors of the Middle Ages, leprosy, the Inquisition, etc. As a matter of fact, most attacks upon the Middle Ages and the past generally by apologists of modernity are beside the point, because their essential trick is to project a modern man, with his squeamishness and his high standards of comfort, into an age when such things were unheard of. But notice that in any case this is not an answer. For a dislike of the mechanized future does not imply the smallest reverence for any period of the past. D. H. Lawrence, wiser than the medievalist, chose to idealize the Etruscans about whom we know conveniently little. But there is no need to idealize even the Etruscans or the Pelasgians, or the Aztecs, or the Sumerians, or any other vanished and romantic people. When one pictures a desirable civilization, one pictures it merely as an objective; there is no need to pretend that it

has ever existed in space and time. Press this point home, explain that you wish to aim at making life simpler and harder instead of softer and more complex, and the Socialist will usually assume that you want to revert to a 'state of nature'--meaning some stinking palaeolithic cave: as though there were nothing between a flint scraper and the steel mills of Sheffield, or between a skin coracle and the Queen Mary.

Finally, however, you will get an answer which is rather more to the point and which runs roughly as follows: 'Yes, what you are saying is all very well in its way. No doubt it would be very noble to harden ourselves and do without aspirins and central heating and so forth. But the point is, you see, that nobody seriously wants it. It would mean going back to an agricultural way of life, which means beastly hard work and isn't at all the same thing as playing at gardening. I don't want hard work, you don't want hard work--nobody wants it who knows what it means. You only talk as you do because you've never done a day's work in your life,' etc., etc.

Now this in a sense is true. It amounts to saying, 'We're soft--for God's sake let's stay soft!' which at least is realistic. As I have pointed out already, the machine has got us in its grip and to escape will be immensely difficult. Nevertheless this answer is really an evasion, because it fails to make dear what we mean when we say that we 'want' this or that.
I am a degenerate modem semi-intellectual who would

die if I did not get my
early morning cup of tea and my New Statesman every
Friday. Clearly I do
not, in a sense, 'want' to return to a simpler,
harder, probably
agricultural way of life. In the same sense I don't
'want' to cut down my
drinking, to pay my debts, to take enough exercise,
to be faithful to my
wife, etc., etc. But in another and more permanent
sense I do want these
things, and perhaps in the same sense I want a
civilization in which
'progress' is not definable as making the world safe
for little fat men.
These that I have outlined are practically the only
arguments that I have
been able to get from Socialists--thinking,
book-trained Socialists--
when I have tried to explain to them just how they
are driving away
possible adherents. Of course there is also the old
argument that Socialism
is going to arrive anyway, whether people like it or
not, because of that
trouble-saving thing, 'historic necessity'. But
'historic necessity', or
rather the belief in it, has failed to survive Hitler.

Meanwhile the thinking person, by intellect usually
left-wing but by
temperament often right-wing, hovers at the gate of
the Socialist fold. He
is no doubt aware that he ought to be a Socialist.
But he observes first
the dullness of individual Socialists, then the
apparent flabbiness of
Socialist ideals, and veers away. Till quite recently
it was natural to
veer towards indinerentism. Ten years ago, even five
years ago, the typical
literary gent wrote books on baroque architecture and
had a soul above

politics. But that attitude is becoming difficult and even unfashionable.
The times are growing harsher, the issues are clearer, the belief that nothing, will ever change (i.e. that your dividends will always be safe) is less prevalent. The fence on which the literary gent sits, once as comfortable as the plush cushion of a cathedral stall, is now pinching his bottom intolerably; more and more he shows a disposition to drop off on one side or the other. It is interesting to notice how many of our leading writers, who a dozen years ago were art for art's saking for all they were worth and would have considered it too vulgar for words even to vote at a general election, are now taking a definite political standpoint; while most of the younger writers, at least those of them who are not mere footlers, have been 'political' from the start. I believe that when the pinch comes there is a terrible danger that the main movement of the intelligentsia will be towards Fascism. Just how soon the pinch will come it is difficult to say; it depends, probably, upon events in Europe; but it may be that within two years or even a year we shall have reached the decisive moment. That will also be the moment when every person with any brains or any decency will know in his bones that he ought to be on the Socialist side. But he will not necessarily come there of his own accord; there are too many ancient prejudices standing in the way. He will have to be persuaded, and by methods that imply an understanding of his viewpoint.
Socialists cannot afford to waste any more time in

preaching to the converted. Their job now is to make Socialists as rapidly as possible; instead of which, all too often, they are making Fascists.

When I speak of Fascism in England, I am not necessarily thinking of Mosley and his pimpled followers. English Fascism, when it arrives, is likely to be of a sedate and subtle kind (presumably, at any rate at first, it won't be called Fascism), and it is doubtful whether a Gilbert and Sullivan heavy dragoon of Mosley's stamp would ever be much more than a joke to the majority of English people; though even Mosley will bear watching, for experience shows (vide the careers of Hitler, Napoleon III) that to a political climber it is sometimes an advantage not to be taken too seriously at the beginning of his career. But what I am thinking of at this moment is the Fascist attitude of mind, which beyond any doubt is gaining ground among people who ought to know better. Fascism as it appears in the intellectual is a sort of mirror-image--not actually of Socialism but of a plausible travesty of Socialism. It boils down to a determination to do the opposite of whatever the mythical Socialist does. If you present Socialism in a bad and misleading light--if you let people imagine that it does not mean much more than pouring European civilization down the sink at the command of Marxist prigs--you risk driving the intellectual into Fascism. You frighten him into a sort of angry defensive attitude in which he simply refuses to listen to the Socialist case.

Some such attitude is already quite clearly discernible in writers like Pound, Wyndham Lewis, Roy Gampbell, etc., in most of the Roman Catholic writers and many of the Douglas Credit group, in certain popular novelists, and even, if one looks below the surface, in so-superior conservative highbrows like Eliot and his countless followers. If you want some unmistakable illustrations of the growth of Fascist feeling in England, have a look at some of the innumerable letters that were written to the Press during the Abyssinian war, approving the Italian action, and also the howl of glee that went up from. both Catholic and Anglican pulpits (see the Daily Mail of 17 August 1936) over the Fascist rising in Spain.

In order to combat Fascism it is necessary to understand it, which involves admitting that it contains some good as well as much evil. In practice, of course, it is merely an infamous tyranny, and its methods of attaining and holding power are such that even its most ardent apologists prefer to talk about something else. But the underlying feeling of Fascism, the feeling that first draws people into the Fascist camp, may be less contemptible. It is not always, as the Saturday Review would lead one to suppose, a squealing terror of the Bolshevik bogey-man. Everyone who has given the movement so much as a glance knows that the rank-and-file Fascist is often quite a well-meaning person--quite genuinely anxious, for instance, to better the lot of the unemployed. But more important than this

is the fact that Fascism draws its strength from the good as well as the bad varieties of conservatism. To anyone with a feeling for tradition and for discipline it comes with its appeal ready-made. Probably it is very easy, when you have had a bellyful of the more tactless kind of Socialist propaganda, to see Fascism as the last line defence of all that is good in European civilization. Even the Fascist bully at his symbolic worst, with rubber truncheon in one hand and castor oil bottle in the other, does not necessarily feel himself a bully; more probably he feels like Roland in the pass at Roncevaux, defending Christendom against the barbarian. We have got to admit that if Fascism is everywhere advancing, this is largely the fault of Socialists themselves. Partly it is due to the mistaken Communist tactic of sabotaging democracy, i.e. sawing off the branch you are sitting on; but still more to the fact that Socialists have, so to speak, presented their case wrong side foremost. They have never made it sufficiently clear that the essential aims of Socialism are justice and liberty. With their eyes glued to economic facts, they have proceeded on the assumption that man has no soul, and explicitly or implicitly they have set up the goal of a materialistic Utopia. As a result Fascism has been able to play upon every instinct that revolts against hedonism and a cheap conception of 'progress'. It has been able to pose as the upholder of the European tradition, and to appeal to Christian belief, to patriotism, and to the military virtues. It is far worse than useless to

write Fascism off as 'mass sadism', or some easy phrase of that kind. If you pretend that it is merely an aberration which will presently pass off of its own accord, you are dreaming a dream from which you will awake when somebody coshes you with a rubber truncheon. The only possible course is to examine the Fascist case, grasp that there is something to be said for it, and then make it clear to the world that whatever good Fascism contains is also implicit in Socialism.

At present the situation is desperate. Even if nothing worse befalls us, there are the conditions which I described in the earlier part of this book and which are not going to improve under our present economic system. Still more urgent is the danger of Fascist domination in Europe. And unless Socialist doctrine, in an effective form, can be diffused widely and very quickly, there is no certainty that Fascism will ever be overthrown. For Socialism is the only real enemy that Fascism has to face. The capitalist-imperialist governments, even though they themselves are about to be plundered, will not fight with any conviction against Fascism as such. Our rulers, those of them who understand the issue, would probably prefer to hand over every square inch of the British Empire to Italy, Germany, and Japan than to see Socialism triumphant. It was easy to laugh at Fascism when we imagined that it was based on hysterical nationalism, because it seemed obvious that the Fascist states, each regarding itself as the chosen

people and patriotic contra mundum, would clash with one another. But nothing of the kind is happening. Fascism is now an international movement, which means not only that the Fascist nations can combine for purposes of loot, but that they are groping, perhaps only half consciously as yet, towards a world-system. For the vision of the totalitarian state there is being substituted the vision of the totalitarian world. As I pointed out earlier, the advance of machine-technique must lead ultimately to some form of collectivism, but that form need not necessarily be equalitarian; that is, it need not be Socialism. Pace the economists, it is quite easy to imagine a world-society, economically collectivist--that is, with the profit principle eliminated--but with all political, military, and educational power in the hands of a small caste of rulers and their bravos. That or something like it is the objective of Fascism. And that, of course, is the slave-state, or rather the slave-world; it would probably be a stable form of society, and the chances are, considering the enormous wealth of the world if scientifically exploited, that the slaves would be well-fed and contented. It is usual to speak of the Fascist objective as the 'beehive state', which does a grave injustice to bees. A world of rabbits ruled by stoats would be nearer the mark. It is against this beastly possibility that we have got to combine.

The only thing for which we can combine is the underlying ideal of Socialism; justice and liberty. But it is hardly

strong enough to call this ideal 'underlying'. It is almost completely forgotten. It has been buried beneath layer after layer of doctrinaire priggishness, party squabbles, and half-baked 'progressivism' until it is like a diamond hidden under a mountain of dung. The job of the Socialist is to get it out again. Justice and liberty! Those are the words that have got to ring like a bugle across the world. For a long time past, certainly for the last ten years, the devil has had all the best tunes. We have reached a stage when the very word 'Socialism' calls up, on the one hand, a picture of aeroplanes, tractors, and huge glittering factories of glass and concrete; on the other, a picture of vegetarians with wilting beards, of Bolshevik commissars (half gangster, half gramophone), of earnest ladies in sandals, shock-headed Marxists chewing polysyllables, escaped Quakers, birth-control fanatics, and Labour Party backstairs-crawlers. Socialism, at least in this island, does not smell any longer of revolution and the overthrow of tyrants; it smells of crankishness, machine-worship, and the stupid cult of Russia. Unless you can remove that smell, and very rapidly, Fascism may win.

13

And finally, is there anything one can do about it?

In the first part of this book I illustrated, by a

few brief
sidelights, the kind of mess we are in; in this
second part I have been
trying to explain why, in my opinion, so many normal
decent people are
repelled by the only remedy, namely by Socialism.
Obviously the most urgent
need of the next few years is to capture those normal
decent ones before
Fascism plays its trump card. I do not want to raise
here the question of
parties and political expedients. More important than
any party label
(though doubtless the mere menace of Fascism will
presently bring some kind
of Popular Front into existence) is the diffusion of
Socialist doctrine in
an effective form. People have got to be made ready
to act as Socialists.
There are, I believe, countless people who, without
being aware of it, are
in sympathy with the essential aims of Socialism, and
who could be won over
almost with-out a struggle if only one could find the
word that would move
them. Everyone who knows the meaning of poverty,
everyone who has a genuine
hatred of tyranny and war, is on the Socialist side,
potentially. My job
here, therefore, is to suggest--necessarily in very
general terms--how
a reconciliation might be effected between Socialism
and its more
intelligent enemies.

First, as to the enemies themselves--I mean all those
people who
grasp that capitalism is evil but who are conscious
of a sort of queasy,
shuddering sensation when Socialism is mentioned. As
I have pointed out,
this is traceable to two main causes. One is the
personal inferiority of

many individual Socialists; the other is the fact that Socialism is too often coupled with a fat-bellied, godless conception of 'progress' which revolts anyone with a feeling for tradition or the rudiments of an aesthetic sense. Let me take the second point first.

The distaste for 'progress' and machine-civilization which is so common among sensitive people is only defensible as an attitude of mind. It is not valid as a reason for rejecting Socialism, because it presupposes an alternative which does not exist. When you say, 'I object to mechanization and standardization--therefore I object to Socialism', you are saying in effect, 'I am free to do without the machine if I choose', which is nonsense. We are all dependent upon the machine, and if the machines stopped working most of us would die. You may hate the machine-civilization, probably you are right to hate it, but for the present there can be no question of accepting or rejecting it. The machine-civilization is here, and it can only be criticized from the inside, because all of us are inside it. It is only romantic fools who natter themselves that they have escaped, like the literary gent in his Tudor cottage with bathroom h. and c., and the he-man who goes off to live a 'primitive' life in the jungle with a Mannlicher rifle and four wagon-loads of tinned food. And almost certainly the machine-civilization will continue to triumph. There is no reason to think that it will destroy itself or stop functioning of its own accord. For some time past it has been

fashionable to say that war
is presently going to 'wreck civilization'
altogether; but, though the next
full-sized war will certainly be horrible enough to
make all previous ones
seem a joke, it is immensely unlikely that it will
put a stop to mechanical
progress. It is true that a very vulnerable country
like England, and
perhaps the whole of western Europe, could be reduced
to chaos by a few
thousand well-placed bombs, but no war is at present
thinkable which could
wipe out industrialization in all countries
simultaneously. We may take it
that the return to a simpler, free, less mechanized
way of life, however
desirable it may be, is not going to happen. This is
not fatalism, it is
merely acceptance of facts. It is meaningless to
oppose Socialism on the
ground that you object to the beehive State, for the
beehive State is here.
The choice is not, as yet, between a human and an
inhuman world. It is
simply between Socialism and Fascism, which at its
very best is Socialism
with the virtues left out.

The job of the thinking person, therefore, is not to
reject Socialism
but to make up his mind to humanize it. Once
Socialism is in a way to being
established, those who can see through the swindle of
'progress' will
probably find themselves resisting. In fact, it is
their special function
to do so. In the machine-world they have got to be a
sort of permanent
opposition, which is not the same thing as being an
obstructionist or a
traitor. But in this I am speaking of the future. For
the moment the only

possible course for any decent person, however much of a Tory or an anarchist by temperament, is to work for the establishment of Socialism. Nothing else can save us from the misery of the present or the nightmare of the future. To oppose Socialism now, when twenty million Englishmen are underfed and Fascism has conquered half Europe, is suicidal. It is like starting a civil war when the Goths are crossing the frontier.

Therefore it is all the more important to get rid of that mere nervous prejudice against Socialism which is not founded on any serious objection. As I have pointed out already, many people who are not repelled by Socialism are repelled by Socialists. Socialism, as now presented, is unattractive largely because it appears, at any rate from the outside, to be the plaything of cranks, doctrinaires, parlour Bolsheviks, and so forth. But it is worth remembering that this is only so because the cranks, doctrinaires, etc., have been allowed to get there first J if the movement were invaded by better brains and more common decency, the objectionable types would cease to dominate it. For the present one must just set one's teeth and ignore them; they will loom much smaller when the movement has been humanized. Besides, they are irrelevant. We have got to fight for justice and liberty, and Socialism does mean justice and liberty when the nonsense is stripped off it. It is only the essentials that are worth remembering. To recoil from Socialism because so many individual Socialists

are inferior people is as absurd as refusing to travel by train because you dislike the ticket-collector's face.

And secondly, as to the Socialist himself--more especially the vocal, tract-writing type of Socialist.

We are at a moment when it is desperately necessary for left-wingers of all complexions to drop their differences and hang together. Indeed this is already happening to a small extent. Obviously, then, the more intransigent kind of Socialist has now got to ally himself with people who are not in perfect agreement with him. As a rule he is rightly unwilling to do so, because he sees the very real danger of watering the whole Socialist movement down to some kind of pale-pink humbug even more ineffectual than the parliamentary Labour Party. At the moment, for instance, there is great danger that the Popular Front which Fascism will presumably bring into existence will not be genuinely Socialist in character, but will simply be a manoeuvre against German and Italian (not English) Fascism. Thus the need to unite against Fascism might draw the Socialist into alliance with his very worst enemies. But the principle to go upon is this: that you are never in danger of allying yourself with the wrong people provided that you keep the essentials of your movement in the foreground. And what are the essentials of Socialism? What is the mark of a real Socialist? I suggest that the real Socialist is one who wishes--not merely conceives it as desirable, but actively wishes--to see tyranny

overthrown. But I fancy that the majority of orthodox Marxists would not accept that definition, or would only accept it very grudgingly. Sometimes, when I listen to these people talking, and still more when I read their books, I get the impression that, to them, the whole Socialist movement is no more than a kind of exciting heresy-hunt--a leaping to and fro of frenzied witch-doctors to the beat of tom-toms and the tune of 'Fee fi, fo, fum, I smell the blood of a right-wing deviationist!' It is because of this kind of thing that it is so much easier to feel yourself a Socialist when you are among working-class people. The working-class Socialist, like the working-class Catholic, 's weak on doctrine and can hardly open his mouth without uttering a heresy, but he has the heart of the matter in him. He does grasp the central fact that Socialism means the overthrow of tyranny, and the 'Marseillaise', if it were translated for his benefit, would appeal to him more deeply than any learned treatise on dialectical materialism. At this moment it is waste of time to insist that acceptance of Socialism means acceptance of the philosophic side of Marxism, plus adulation of Russia.

The Socialist movement has not time to be a league of dialectical materialists; it has got to be a league of the oppressed against the oppressors. You have got to attract the man who means business, and you have got to drive away the mealy-mouthed Liberal who wants foreign Fascism destroyed in order that he may go on drawing his dividends

peacefully--the type of hum-bug who passes resolutions 'against Fascism and Communism', i.e. against rats and rat-poison. Socialism means the overthrow of tyranny, at home as well as abroad. So long as you keep that fact well to the front, you will never be in much doubt as to who are your real supporters. As for minor differences--and the profoundest philosophical difference is unimportant compared with saving the twenty million Englishmen whose bones are rotting from malnutrition--the time to argue about them is afterwards.

I do not think the Socialist need make any sacrifice of essentials, but certainly he will have to make a great sacrifice of externals. It would help enormously, for instance, if the smell of crankishness which still clings to the Socialist movement could be dispelled. If only the sandals and the pistachio-coloured shirts could be put in a pile and burnt, and every vegetarian, teetotaller, and creeping Jesus sent home to Welwyn Garden City to do his yoga exercises quietly! But that, I am afraid, is not going to happen. What is possible, however, is for the more intelligent kind of Socialist to stop alienating possible supporters in silly and quite irrelevant ways. There are so many minor priggishness which could so easily be dropped. Take for instance the dreary attitude of the typical Marxist towards literature. Out of the many that come into my mind, I will give just one example. It sounds trivial, but it isn't. In the old Worker's Weekly (one of the forerunners of the Daily Worker)

there used to be a column of literary chat of the 'Books on the Editor's Table' type. For several weeks miming there had been a certain amount of talk about Shakespeare; whereupon an incensed reader wrote to say, 'Dear Comrade, we don't want to hear about these bourgeois writers like Shakespeare. Can't you give us something a bit more proletarian?' etc., etc. The editor's reply was simple. 'If you will turn to the index of Marx's Capital,' he wrote, 'you will find that Shakespeare is mentioned several times.' And please notice that this was enough to silence the objector. Once Shakespeare had received the benediction of Marx, he became respectable.

That is the mentality that drives ordinary sensible people away from the Socialist movement. You do not need to care about Shakespeare to be repelled by that kind of thing. Again, there is the horrible jargon that nearly all Socialists think it necessary to employ. When the ordinary person hears phrases like 'bourgeois ideology' and 'proletarian solidarity' and 'expropriation of the expropriators', he is not inspired by them, he is merely disgusted. Even the single word 'Comrade' has done its dirty little bit towards discrediting the Socialist movement. How many a waverer has halted on the brink, gone perhaps to some public meeting and watched self-conscious Socialists dutifully addressing one another as 'Comrade', and then slid away, disillusioned, into the nearest four-ale bar! And his instinct is sound; for where is the sense of sticking on to yourself a

ridiculous label which even after long practice can hardly be mentioned without a gulp of shame? It is fatal to let the ordinary inquirer get away with the idea that being a Socialist means wearing sandals and burbling about dialectical materialism. You have got to make it clear that there is room in the Socialist movement for human beings, or the game is up.

And this raises a great difficulty. It means that the issue of class, as distinct from mere economic status, has got to be faced more realistically than it is being faced at present.

I devoted three chapters to discussing the class-difficulty. The principal fact that will have emerged, I think, is that though the English class-system has outlived its usefulness, it has outlived it and shows no signs of dying. It greatly confuses the issue to assume, as the orthodox Marxist so often does (see for instance Mr Alee Brown's in some ways interesting book. The Fate of the Middle Classes), that social status is determined solely by income. Economically, no doubt, there are only two classes, the rich and the poor, but socially there is a whole hierarchy of classes, and the manners and traditions learned by each class in childhood are not only very different but--this is the essential point--generally persist from birth to death. 'Hence the anomalous individuals that you find in every class of society. You find writers like Wells and Bennett who have grown immensely rich and have yet preserved intact their lower-middle-class

Nonconformist prejudices; you find millionaires who cannot pronounce their aitches; you find petty shopkeepers whose income is far lower than that of the bricklayer and who, nevertheless, consider themselves (and are considered) the bricklayer's social superiors; you find board-school boys ruling Indian provinces and public-school men touting vacuum cleaners. If social stratification corresponded precisely to economic stratification, the public-school man would assume a cockney accent the day his income dropped below L200 a year. But does he? On the contrary, he immediately becomes twenty times more Public School than before. He clings to the Old School Tie as to a life-line. And even the aitchless millionaire, though sometimes he goes to an elocutionist and leams a B.B.C. accent, seldom succeeds in disguising himself as completely as he would like to. It is in fact very difficult to escape, culturally, from the class into which you have been born.

As prosperity declines, social anomalies grow commoner. You don't get more aitchless millionaires, but you do get more and more public-school men touting vacuum cleaners and more and more small shopkeepers driven into the workhouse. Large sections of the middle class are being gradually proletarianized; but the important point is that they do not, at any rate in the first generation, adopt a proletarian outlook. Here am I, for instance, with a bourgeois upbringing and a working-class income. Which class do I belong to? Economically I belong to the

working class, but it is
almost impossible for me to think of myself as
anything but a member of the
bourgeoisie. And supposing I had to take sides, whom
should I side with,
the upper class which is trying to squeeze me out of
existence, or the
working class whose manners are not my manners? It is
probable that I
personally, in any important issue, would side with
the working class. But
what about the tens or hundreds of thousands of
others who are in
approximately the same position? And what about that
far larger class,
running into millions this time--the office-workers
and black-coated
employees of all kinds--whose traditions are less
definitely middle class
but who would certainly not thank you if you called
them proletarians? All
of these people have the same interests and the same
enemies as the working
class. All are being robbed and bullied by the same
system. Yet how many of
them realize it? When the pinch came nearly all of
them would side with
their oppressors and against those who ought to be
their allies. It is
quite easy to imagine a middle class crushed down to
the worst depths of
poverty and still remaining bitterly
anti-working-class in sentiment; this
being, of course, a ready-made Fascist Party.

Obviously the Socialist movement has got to capture
the exploited
middle class before it is too late; above all it must
capture the office-
workers, who are so numerous and, if they knew how to
combine, so powerful.
Equally obviously it has so far failed to do so. The
very last person in

whom you can hope to find revolutionary opinions is a clerk or a commercial traveller. Why? Very largely, I think, because of the 'proletarian' cant with which Socialist propaganda is mixed up. In order to symbolize the class war, there has been set up the more or less mythical figure of a 'proletarian', a muscular but downtrodden man in greasy overalls, in contradistinction to a 'capitalist', a fat, wicked man in a top hat and fur coat. It is tacitly assumed that there is no one in between; the truth being, of course, that in a country like England about a quarter of the population is in between. If you are going to harp on the 'dictatorship of the proletariat', it is an elementary precaution to start by explaining who the proletariat are. But because of the Socialist tendency to idealize the manual worker as such, this has never been made sufficiently clear. How many of the wretched shivering army of clerks and shopwalkers, who in some ways are actually worse off than a miner or a dock-hand, think of themselves as proletarians? A proletarian--so they have been taught to think--means a man without a collar. So that when you try to move them by talking about 'class war', you only succeed in scaring them; they forget their incomes and remember their accents, and fly to the defence of the class that is exploiting them.

Socialists have a big job ahead of them here. They have got to demonstrate, beyond possibility of doubt, just where the line of cleavage between exploiter and exploited comes. Once again it

is a question of
sticking to essentials; and the essential point here
is that all people
with small, insecure incomes are in the same boat and
ought to be fighting
on the same side. Probably we could do with a little
less talk about'
capitalist' and 'proletarian' and a little more about
the robbers and the
robbed. But at any rate we must drop that misleading
habit of pretending
that the only proletarians are manual labourers. It
has got to be brought
home to the clerk, the engineer, the commercial
traveller, the middle-class
man who has 'come down in the world', the village
grocer, the lower-grade
civil servant, and all other doubtful cases that they
are the proletariat,
and that Socialism means a fair deal for them as well
as for the navvy and
the factory-hand. They must not be allowed to think
that the battle is
between those who pronounce their aitches and those
who don't; for if they
think that, they will join in on the side of the
aitches.

I am implying that different classes must be
persuaded to act together
without, for the moment, being asked to drop their
class-differences. And
that sounds dangerous. It sounds rather too like the
Duke of York's summer
camp and that dismal line of talk about
class-cooperation and putting our
shoulders to the wheel, which is eyewash or Fascism,
or both. There can be
no cooperation between classes whose real interests
are opposed. The
capitalist cannot cooperate with the proletarian. The
cat cannot cooperate
with the mouse; and if the cat does suggest

cooperation and the mouse is
fool enough to agree, in a very little while the
mouse will be disappearing
down the cat's throat. But it is always possible to
cooperate so long as it
is upon a basis of common interests. The people who
have got to act
together are all those who cringe to the boss and all
those who shudder
when they think of the rent. This means that the
small-holder has got to
ally himself with the factory-hand, the typist with
the coal-miner, the
schoolmaster with the garage mechanic. There is some
hope of getting them
to do so if they can be made to understand where
their interest lies. But
this will not happen if their social prejudices,
which in some of them are
at least as strong as any economic consideration, arc
needlessly irritated.
There is, after all, a real difference of manners and
traditions between a
bank clerk and a dock labourer, and the bank clerk's
feeling of superiority
is very deeply rooted. Later on he will have to get
rid of it, but this is
not a good moment for asking him. to do so. Therefore
it would be a very
great advantage if that rather meaningless and
mechanical bourgeois-
baiting, which is a part of nearly all Socialist
propaganda, could be
dropped for the time being. Throughout left-wing
thought and writing--and
the whole way through it, from the leading articles
in the Daily Worker to
the comic columns in the News Chronicle--there runs
an anti-genteel
tradition, a persistent and often very stupid gibing
at genteel mannerisms
and genteel loyalties (or, in Communist jargon,
'bourgeois values'). It is

largely hum-bug, coming as it does from bourgeois-baiters who are bourgeois themselves, but it does great harm, because it allows a minor issue to block a major one. It directs attention away from the central fact that poverty is poverty, whether the tool you work with is a pick-axe or a fountain-pen.

Once again, here am I, with my middle-class origins and my income of about three pounds a week from all sources. For what I am worth it would be better to get me in on the Socialist side than to turn me into a Fascist. But if you are constantly bullying me about my 'bourgeois ideology', if you give me to understand that in some subtle way I. am an inferior person because I have never worked with my hands, you will only succeed in antagonizing me. For you are telling me either that I am inherently useless or that I ought to alter myself in some way that is beyond my power. I cannot proletarianize my accent or certain of my tastes and beliefs, and I would not if I could. Why should I? I don't ask anybody else to speak my dialect; why should anybody else ask me to speak his? It would be far better to take those miserable class-stigmata for granted and emphasize them as little as possible. They are comparable to a race-difference, and experience shows that one can cooperate with foreigners, even with foreigners whom one dislikes, when it is really necessary. Economically, I am in the same boat with the miner, the navvy, and the farm-hand; remind me of that and I will fight at their side. But

culturally I am different from
the miner, the navvy, and the farm-hand: lay the
emphasis on that and you
may arm me against them. If I were a solitary anomaly
I should not matter,
but what is true of myself is true of countless
others. Every bank clerk
dreaming of the sack, every shop-keeper teetering on
the brink of
bankruptcy, is in essentially the same position.
These are the sinking
middle class, and most of them are clinging to their
gentility under the
impression that it keeps them afloat. It is not good
policy to start by
telling them to throw away the life-belt. There is a
quite obvious danger
that in the next few years large sections of the
middle class will make a
sudden and violent swing to the Right. In doing so
they may become
formidable. The weakness of the middle class hitherto
has lain in the fact
that they have never learned to combine; but if you
frighten them into
combining against you, you may find that you have
raised up a devil. We had
a brief glimpse of this possibility in the General
Strike.

To sum up: There is no chance of righting the
conditions I described
in the earlier chapters of this book, or of saving
England from Fascism,
unless we can bring an effective Socialist party into
existence. It will
have to be a party with genuinely revolutionary
intentions, and it will
have to be numerically strong enough to act. We can
only get it if we offer
an objective which fairly ordinary people will
recognize as desirable.
Beyond all else, therefore, we need intelligent

propaganda. Less about 'class consciousness', 'expropriation of the expropriators', 'bourgeois ideology', and 'proletarian solidarity', not to mention the sacred sisters, thesis, antithesis, and synthesis; and more about justice, liberty, and the plight of the unemployed. And less about mechanical progress, tractors, the Dnieper dam, and the latest salmon-canning factory in Moscow; that kind of thing is not an integral part of Socialist doctrine, and it drives away many people whom the Socialist cause needs, including most of those who can hold a pen. All that is needed is to hammer two facts home into the public consciousness. One, that the interests of all exploited people are the same; the other, that Socialism is compatible with common decency.

As for the terribly difficult issue of class-distinctions, the only possible policy for the moment is to go easy and not frighten more people than can be helped. And above all, no more of those muscular-curate efforts at class-breaking. If you belong to the bourgeoisie, don't be too eager to bound forward and embrace your proletarian brothers; they may not like it, and if they show that they don't like it you will probably find that your class-prejudices are not so dead as you imagined. And if you belong to the proletariat, by birth or in the sight of God, don't sneer too automatically at the Old School Tie; it covers loyalties which can be useful to you if you know how to handle them.

Yet I believe there is some hope that when Socialism

is a living
issue, a thing that large numbers of Englishmen
genuinely care about, the
class-difficulty may solve itself more rapidly than
now seems thinkable. In
the next few years we shall either get that effective
Socialist party that
we need, or we shall not get it. If we do not get it,
then Fascism is
coming; probably a slimy Anglicized form of Fascism,
with cultured
policemen instead of Nazi gorillas and the lion and
the unicorn instead of
the swastika. But if we do get it there will be a
struggle, conceivably a
physical one, for our plutocracy will not sit quiet
under a genuinely
revolutionary government. And when the widely
separate classes who,
necessarily, would form any real Socialist party have
fought side by side,
they may feel differently about one another. And then
perhaps this misery
of class-prejudice will fade away, and we of the
sinking middle class--
the private schoolmaster, the half-starved free-lance
journalist, the
colonel's spinster daughter with L75 a year, the
jobless Cambridge
graduate, the ship's officer without a ship, the
clerks, the civil
servants, the commercial travellers, and the
thrice-bankrupt drapers in the
country towns--may sink without further struggles
into the working class
where we belong, and probably when we get there it
will not be so dreadful
as we feared, for, after all, we have nothing to lose
but our aitches.

THE END