

Dark fire. All said and done, my friends, it will be an ill day for us if what most humans mean by "religion" ever vanishes from the Earth. It can still send us the truly delicious sins. The fine flower of unholiness can grow only in the close neighbourhood of the Holy. Nowhere do we tempt so successfully as on the very steps of the altar.

Your Imminence, your Disgraces, my Thorns, Shadies, and Gentledevils: I give you the toast of—Principal Slubgob and the College!

GOOD WORKS" in the plural is an expression much more familiar to modern Christendom than "good work." Good works are chiefly alms-giving or "helping" in the parish. They are quite separate from one's "work." And good works need not be good work, as anyone can see by inspecting some of the objects made to be sold at bazaars for charitable purposes. This is not according to our example. When our Lord provided a poor wedding party with an extra glass of wine all round, he was doing good works. But also good work; it was a wine really worth drinking. Nor is the neglect of goodness in our "work," our job, according to precept. The apostle says every one must not only work but work to produce what is "good."

The idea of Good Work is not quite extinct among us, though it is not, I fear, especially characteristic of religious people. I have found it among cabinet-makers, cobblers, and sailors. It is no use at all trying to impress sailors with a new liner because she is the biggest or costliest ship afloat. They look for what they call her "lines": they predict how she will behave in a heavy

sea. Artists also talk of Good Work; but decreasingly. They begin to prefer words like "significant," "important," "contemporary," or "daring." These are not, to my mind, good symptoms.

But the great mass of men in all fully industrialized societies are the victims of a situation which almost excludes the idea of Good Work from the outset. "Built-in obsolescence" becomes an economic necessity. Unless an article is so made that it will go to pieces in a year or two and thus have to be replaced, you will not get a sufficient turnover. A hundred years ago, when a man got married, he had built for him (if he were rich enough) a carriage in which he expected to drive for the rest of his life. He now buys a car which he expects to sell again in two years. Work nowadays must *not* be good.

For the wearer, zip fasteners have this advantage over buttons: that, while they last, they will save him an infinitesimal amount of time and trouble. For the producer, they have a much more solid merit; they don't remain in working order long. Bad work is the *desideratum*.

We must avoid taking a glibly moral view of this situation. It is not solely the result of original or actual sin. It has stolen upon us, unforeseen and unintended. The degraded commercialism of our minds is quite as much its result as its cause. Nor can it, in my opinion, be cured by purely moral efforts.

Originally things are made for use, or delight, or (more often) for both. The savage hunter makes him-

self a weapon of flint or bone; makes it as well as he can, for if it is blunt or brittle he will kill no meat. His woman makes a clay pot to fetch water in; again as well as she can, for she will have to use it. But they do not for long (if at all) abstain from decorating these things; they want to have (like Dogberry) "everything handsome about them." And while they work, we may be sure they sing or whistle or at least hum. They may tell stories too.

Into this situation, unobtrusive as Eden's snake and at first as innocent as that snake once was, there must sooner or later come a change. Each family no longer makes all it needs. There is a specialist, a potter making pots for the whole village; a smith making weapons for all; a bard (poet and musician in one) singing and story-telling for all. It is significant that in Homer the smith of the gods is lame, and the poet among men is blind. That may be how the thing began. The defectives, who are no use as hunters or warriors, may be set aside to provide both necessities and recreation for those who are.

The importance of this change is that we now have people making things (pots, swords, lays) not for their own use and delight but for the use and delight of others. And of course they must, in some way or other, be rewarded for doing it. The change is necessary unless society and arts are to remain in a state not of paradisaical, but of feeble, blundering, and impoverishing simplicity. It is kept healthy by two facts. First, these specialists will do their work as well as they can. They

are right up against the people who are going to use it. You'll have all the women in the village after you if you make bad pots. You'll be shouted down if you sing a dull lay. If you make bad swords, then at best the warriors will come back and thrash you; at worst, they won't come back at all, for the enemy will have killed them, and your village will be burned and you yourself enslaved or knocked on the head. And secondly, because the specialists are doing as well as they can something that is indisputably worth doing, they will delight in their work. We must not idealise. It will not all be delight. The smith may be overworked. The bard may be frustrated when the village insists on hearing his last lay over again (or a new one exactly like it) while he is longing to get a hearing for some wonderful innovation. But, by and large, the specialists have a life fit for a man; usefulness, a reasonable amount of honour, and the joy of exercising skill.

I lack space and, of course, knowledge, to trace the whole process from this state of affairs to that in which we are living to-day. But I think we can now disengage the essence of the change. Granted the departure from the primitive condition in which every one makes things for himself, and granted, therefore, a condition in which many work for others (who will pay them), there are still two sorts of job. Of one sort, a man can truly say, "I am doing work which is worth doing. It would still be worth doing if nobody paid for it. But as I have no private means, and need to be fed and housed and clothed, I must be paid while I do it." The other kind of job is

that in which people do work whose sole purpose is the earning of money; work which need not be, ought not to be, or would not be, done by anyone in the whole world unless it were paid.

We may thank God there are still plenty of jobs in the first category. The agricultural labourer, the policeman, the doctor, the artist, the teacher, the priest, and many others, are doing what is worth doing in itself; what quite a number of people would do, and do, without pay; what every family would attempt to do for itself, in some amateurish fashion, if it lived in primitive isolation. Of course jobs of this kind need not be agreeable. Ministering to a leper settlement is one of them.

The opposite extreme may be represented by two examples. I do not necessarily equate them morally, but they are alike by our present classification. One is the work of the professional prostitute. The peculiar horror of her work—if you say we should not call it work, think again—the thing that makes it so much more horrible than ordinary fornication, is that it is an extreme example of an activity which has no possible end in view except money. You cannot go further in that direction than sexual intercourse, not only without marriage, not only without love, but even without lust. My other example is this. I often see a hoarding which bears a notice to the effect that thousands look at this space and your firm ought to hire it for an advertisement of its wares. Consider by how many stages this is separated from "making that which is good." A carpenter has made this hoarding; that, in itself, has no use.

Printers and paper-makers have worked to produce the notice—worthless until someone hires the space—worthless to him until he pastes on it another notice, still worthless to him unless it persuades someone else to buy his goods; which themselves may well be ugly, useless, and pernicious luxuries that no mortal would have bought unless the advertisement, by its sexy or snobbish incantations, had conjured up in him a factitious desire for them. At every stage of the process, work is being done whose sole value lies in the money it brings.

Such would seem to be the inevitable result of a society which depends predominantly on buying and selling. In a rational world, things would be made because they were wanted; in the actual world, wants have to be created in order that people may receive money for making the things. That is why the distrust or contempt of trade which we find in earlier societies should not be too hastily set down as mere snobbery. The more important trade is, the more people are condemned to—and, worse still, learn to prefer—what we have called the second kind of job. Work worth doing apart from its pay, enjoyable work, and good work become the privilege of a fortunate minority. The competitive search for customers dominates international situations.

Within my lifetime in England money was (very properly) collected to buy shirts for some men who were out of work. The work they were out of was the manufacture of shirts.

That such a state of affairs cannot be permanent is easily foreseen. But unfortunately it is most likely to perish by its own internal contradictions in a manner which will cause immense suffering. It can be ended painlessly only if we find some way of ending it voluntarily; and needless to say I have no plan for doing that, and none of our masters—the Big Men behind government and industry—would take any notice if I had. The only hopeful sign at the moment is the “space-race” between America and Russia. Since we have got ourselves into a state where the main problem is not to provide people with what they need or like, but to keep people making things (it hardly matters what), great powers could not easily be better employed than in fabricating costly objects which they then fling overboard. It keeps money circulating and factories working, and it won't do space much harm—or not for a long time. But the relief is partial and temporary. The main practical task for most of us is not to give the Big Men advice about how to end our fatal economy—we have none to give and they wouldn't listen—but to consider how we can live within it as little hurt and degraded as possible.

It is something even to recognize that it is fatal and insane. Just as the Christian has a great advantage over other men, not by being less fallen than they nor less doomed to live in a fallen world, but by knowing that he *is* a fallen man in a fallen world; so we shall do better if we remember at every moment what Good Work was and how impossible it has now become for the ma-

majority. We may have to earn our living by taking part in the production of objects which are rotten in quality and which, even if they were good in quality, would not be worth producing—the demand or “market” for them having been simply engineered by advertisement. Beside the waters of Babylon—or the assembly belt—we shall still say inwardly, “If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, may my right hand forget its cunning.” (It will.)

And of course we shall keep our eyes skinned for any chance of escape. If we have any “choice of a career” (but has one man in a thousand any such thing?) we shall be after the sane jobs like greyhounds and stick there like limpets. We shall try, if we get the chance, to earn our living by doing well what would be worth doing even if we had not our living to earn. A considerable mortification of our avarice may be necessary. It is usually the insane jobs that lead to big money; they are often also the least laborious.

But beyond all this there is something subtler. We must take great care to preserve our habits of mind from infection by those which the situation has bred. Such an infection has, in my opinion, deeply corrupted our artists.

Until quite recently—until the latter part of the last century—it was taken for granted that the business of the artist was to delight and instruct his public. There were, of course, different publics; the street-songs and the oratorios were not addressed to the same audience (though I think a good many people liked both). And

an artist might lead his public on to appreciate finer things than they had wanted at first; but he could do this only by being, from the first, if not merely entertaining, yet entertaining, and if not completely intelligible, yet very largely intelligible. All this has changed. In the highest aesthetic circles one now hears nothing about the artist's duty to us. It is all about our duty to him. He owes us nothing; we owe him “recognition,” even though he has never paid the slightest attention to our tastes, interests, or habits. If we don't give it to him, our name is mud. In this shop, the customer is always wrong.

But this change is surely part of our changed attitude to all work. As “giving employment” becomes more important than making things men need or like, there is a tendency to regard every trade as something that exists chiefly for the sake of those who practise it. The smith does not work in order that the warriors may fight; the warriors exist and fight in order that the smith may be kept busy. The bard does not exist in order to delight the tribe; the tribe exists in order to appreciate the bard.

In industry highly creditable motives, as well as insanity, lie behind this change of attitude. A real advance in charity stopped us talking about “surplus population” and started us talking instead about “unemployment.” The danger is that this should lead us to forget that employment is not an end in itself. We want people to be employed only as a means to their being fed—be-

lieving (whether rightly, who knows?) that it is better to feed them even for making bad things badly than for doing nothing.

But though we have a duty to feed the hungry, I doubt whether we have a duty to "appreciate" the ambitious. This attitude to art is fatal to good work. Many modern novels, poems, and pictures, which we are brow-beaten into "appreciating," are not good work because they are not *work* at all. They are mere puddles of spilled sensibility or reflection. When an artist is in the strict sense working, he of course takes into account the existing taste, interests, and capacity of his audience. These, no less than the language, the marble, or the paint, are part of his raw material; to be used, tamed, sublimated, not ignored nor defied. Haughty indifference to them is not genius nor integrity; it is laziness and incompetence. You have not learned your job. Hence, real honest-to-God work, so far as the arts are concerned, now appears chiefly in low-brow art; in the film, the detective story, the children's story. These are often sound structures; seasoned wood, accurately dovetailed, the stresses all calculated; skill and labour successfully used to do what is intended. Do not misunderstand. The high-brow productions may, of course, reveal a finer sensibility and profounder thought. But a puddle is not a work, whatever rich wines or oils or medicines have gone into it.

"Great works" (of art) and "good works" (of charity) had better also be Good Work. Let choirs sing well or not at all. Otherwise we merely confirm the majority

in their conviction that the world of Business, which does with such efficiency so much that never really needed doing, is the real, the adult, and the practical world; and that all this "culture" and all this "religion" (horrid words both) are essentially marginal, amateurish, and rather effeminate activities.