



ALTON LOCKE

TAILOR AND POET

An Autobiography

BY

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CHEAP CLOTHES AND NASTY

KING RYENCE, says the legend of Prince Arthur, wore a paletot trimmed with kings' beards. In the first French Revolution (so Carlyle assures us) there were at Meudon tanneries of human skins. Mammon, at once tyrant and revolutionary, follows both these noble examples—in a more respectable way, doubtless, for Mammon hates cruelty; bodily pain is his devil—the worst evil which he, in his effeminacy, can conceive. So he shrieks benevolently when a drunken soldier is flogged; but he trims his paletots, and adorns his legs, with the flesh of men and the skins of women, with degradation, pestilence, heathendom, and despair; and then chuckles self-complacently over the smallness of his tailors' bills. Hypocrite!—straining at a gnat and swallowing a camel! What is flogging, or hanging, King Ryence's paletot or the tanneries of Meudon, to the slavery, starvation, waste of life, year-long imprisonment in dungeons narrower and fouler than those of the Inquisition, which goes on among thousands of free English clothes-makers at this day?

'The man is mad,' says Mammon, smiling supercilious pity. Yes, Mammon; mad as Paul before Festus; and for much the same reason, too. Much learning has made us mad. From two articles in the *Morning Chronicle* of Friday, 14th December, and Tuesday, 18th December, on the Condition of the Working Tailors, we learnt too much to leave us altogether masters of ourselves. But there is method in our madness; we can give reasons for it—satisfactory to ourselves, perhaps also to Him who made us, and you, and all tailors likewise. Will you, freshly bedizened, you and your footmen, from Nebuchadnezzar and Co.'s 'Emporium of Fashion,' hear a little about how your finery is made? You are always calling out for facts, and have a firm belief in salvation by statistics. Listen to a few.

The Metropolitan Commissioner of the *Morning Chronicle* called two meetings of the Working Tailors, one in Shadwell, and the other at the Hanover Square Rooms, in order to ascer-

tain their condition from their own lips. Both meetings were crowded. At the Hanover Square Rooms there were more than one thousand men; they were altogether unanimous in their descriptions of the misery and slavery which they endured. It appears that there are two distinct tailor trades—the ‘honourable’ trade, now almost confined to the West End, and rapidly dying out there, and the ‘dishonourable’ trade of the show-shops and slop-shops—the plate-glass palaces, where gents—and, alas! those who would be indignant at that name—buy their cheap-and-nasty clothes. The two names are the tailors’ own slang; slang is true and expressive enough, though, now and then. The honourable shops in the West End number only sixty; the dishonourable, four hundred and more; while at the East End the dishonourable trade has it all its own way. The honourable part of the trade is declining at the rate of one hundred and fifty journeymen per year; the dishonourable increasing at such a rate that, in twenty years it will have absorbed the whole tailoring trade, which employs upwards of twenty-one thousand journeymen. At the honourable shops the work is done, as it was universally thirty years ago, on the premises and at good wages. In the dishonourable trade, the work is taken home by the men, to be done at the very lowest possible prices, which decrease year by year, almost month by month. At the honourable shops, from 36s. to 24s. is paid for a piece of work for which the dishonourable shop pays from 22s. to 9s. But not to the workmen; happy is he if he really gets two-thirds, or half of that. For at the honourable shops, the master deals directly with his workmen; while at the dishonourable ones, the greater part of the work, if not the whole, is let out to contractors, or middle-men—‘sweaters,’ as their victims significantly call them—who, in their turn, let it out again, sometimes to the workmen, sometimes to fresh middle-men; so that out of the price paid for labour on each article, not only the workmen, but the sweater, and perhaps the sweater’s sweater, and a third, and a fourth, and a fifth, have to draw their profit. And when the labour price has been already beaten down to the lowest possible, how much remains for the workmen after all these deductions, let the poor fellows themselves say!

One working tailor (at the Hanover Square Rooms Meeting) ‘mentioned a number of shops, both at the east and west ends, whose work was all taken by sweaters; and several of these shops were under royal and noble patronage. There was one notorious sweater who kept his carriage. He was a Jew, and, of course, he gave a preference to his own sect. Thus, another Jew received it from him second hand and at a lower rate; then it went to a third—till it came to the unfortunate Christian at perhaps the eighth rate, and he performed the work at barely living prices; this same Jew required a deposit of £5 in money before he would give out a single garment to be made. He

need not describe the misery which this system entailed upon the workmen. It was well known, but it was almost impossible, except for those who had been at the two, to form an idea of the difference between the present meeting and one at the East End, where all who attended worked for slop-shops and sweaters. The present was a highly respectable assembly; the other presented no other appearance but those of misery and degradation.'

Another says—'We have all worked in the honourable trade, so we know the regular prices from our own personal experience. Taking the bad work with the good work we might earn 11s. a week upon an average. Sometimes we do earn as much as 15s.; but, to do this, we are obliged to take part of our work home to our wives and daughters. We are not always fully employed. We are nearly half our time idle. Hence, our earnings are, upon an average throughout the year, not more than 5s. 6d. a week.' 'Very often I have made only 3s. 4d. in the week,' said one. 'That's common enough with us all, I can assure you,' said another. 'Last week my wages was 7s. 6d.,' declared one. 'I earned 6s. 4d.,' exclaimed the second. 'My wages came to 9s. 2d. The week before I got 6s. 3d.' 'I made 7s. 9d.,' and 'I 7s. or 8s., I can't exactly remember which.' 'This is what we term the best part of our winter season. The reason why we are so long idle is because more hands than are wanted are kept on the premises, so that in case of a press of work coming in, our employers can have it done immediately. Under the day work system no master tailor had more men on the premises than he could keep continually going; but since the change to the piece-work system, masters made a practice of engaging double the quantity of hands that they have any need for, so that an order may be executed "at the shortest possible notice," if requisite. A man must not leave the premises when unemployed,—if he does, he loses his chance of work coming in. I have been there four days together, and had not a stitch of work to do.' 'Yes; that is common enough.' 'Ay, and then you're told, if you complain, you can go, if you don't like it. I am sure twelve hands would do all they have done at home, and yet they keep forty of us. It's generally remarked that, however strong and healthy a man may be when he goes to work at that shop, in a month's time he'll be a complete shadow, and have almost all his clothes in pawn. By Sunday morning, he has no money at all left, and he has to subsist till the following Saturday upon about a pint of weak tea, and four slices of bread and butter per day!!!'

'Another of the reasons for the sweaters keeping more hands than they want is, the men generally have their meals with them. The more men they have with them the more breakfasts and teas they supply, and the more profit they make. The men usually have to pay 4d., and very often 5d. for their break-

fast, and the same for their tea. The tea or breakfast is mostly a pint of tea or coffee, and three to four slices of bread and butter. *I worked for one sweater who almost starved the men; the smallest eater there would not have had enough if he had got three times as much. They had only three thin slices of bread and butter, not sufficient for a child, and the tea was both weak and bad. The whole meal could not have stood him in 2d. a head, and what made it worse was, that the men who worked there couldn't afford to have dinners, so that they were starved to the bone.* The sweater's men generally lodge where they work. A sweater usually keeps about six men. These occupy two small garrets; one room is called the kitchen, and the other the workshop; and here the whole of the six men, and the sweater, his wife, and family, live and sleep. *One sweater I worked with had four children and six men, and they, together with his wife, sister-in-law, and himself, all lived in two rooms, the largest of which was about eight feet by ten. We worked in the smallest room and slept there as well—all six of us. There were two turn-up beds in it, and we slept three in a bed. There was no chimney, and, indeed, no ventilation whatever. I was near losing my life there—the foul air of so many people working all day in the place, and sleeping there at night, was quite suffocating. Almost all the men were consumptive, and I myself attended the dispensary for disease of the lungs. The room in which we all slept was not more than six feet square. We were all sick and weak, and loth to work.* Each of the six of us paid 2s. 6d. a week for our lodging, or 15s. altogether, and I am sure such a room as we slept and worked in might be had for 1s. a week; you can get a room with a fireplace for 1s. 6d. a week. The usual sum that the men working for sweaters pay for their tea, breakfasts, and lodging is 6d. 6d. to 7s. a week, and they seldom earn more money in the week. Occasionally at the week's end they are in debt to the sweater. This is seldom for more than 6d., for the sweater will not give them victuals if he has no work for them to do. Many who live and work at the sweater's are married men, and are obliged to keep their wives and children in lodgings by themselves. Some send them to the workhouse, others to their friends in the country. Besides the profit of the board and lodging, the sweater takes 6d. out of the price paid for every garment under 10s.; some take 1s., and I do know of one who takes as much as 2s. This man works for a large show-shop at the West End. The usual profit of the sweater, over and above the board and lodging, is 2s. out of every pound. Those who work for sweaters soon lose their clothes, and are unable to seek for other work, because they have not a coat to their back to go and seek it in. *Last week, I worked with another man at a coat for one of her Majesty's ministers, and my partner never broke his fast while he was making his half of it. The minister dealt at a cheap West End show-shop. All the workman had the whole day and a half he was*

making the coat was a little tea. But sweaters' work is not so bad as Government work after all. At that, we cannot make more than 4s. or 5s. a week altogether—that is, counting the time we are running after it, of course. *Government contract work is the worst of all, and the starved-out and sweated-out tailor's last resource.* But still, Government does not do the regular trade so much harm as the cheap show and slop-shops. These houses have ruined thousands. They have cut down the prices, so that men cannot live at the work; and the masters who did and would pay better wages, are reducing the workmen's pay every day. They say they must either compete with the large show-shops or go into the *Gazette*.

Sweet competition! Heavenly maid!—Nowadays hymned alike by penny-a-liners and philosophers as the ground of all society—the only real preserver of the earth! Why not of Heaven, too? Perhaps there is competition among the angels, and Gabriel and Raphael have won their rank by doing the maximum of worship on the minimum of grace? We shall know some day. In the meanwhile, 'these are thy works, thou parent of all good!' Man eating man, eaten by man, in every variety of degree and method! why does not some enthusiastic political economist write an epic on 'The Consecration of Cannibalism'?

But if any one finds it pleasant to his soul to believe the poor journeymen's statements exaggerated, let him listen to one of the sweaters themselves:—

'I wish,' says he, 'that others did for the men as decently as I do. I know there are many who are living entirely upon them. Some employ as many as fourteen men. I myself worked in the house of a man who did this. The chief part of us lived, and worked, and slept together in two rooms, on the second floor. They charged 2s. 6d. per head for the lodging alone. Twelve of the workmen, I am sure, lodged in the house, and these paid altogether 30s. a week rent to the sweater. I should think the sweater paid 8s. a week for the rooms—so that he gained at least 22s. clear out of the lodging of these men, and stood at no rent himself. For the living of the men he charged—5d. for breakfasts, and the same for teas, and 8d. for dinner—or at the rate of 10s. 6d. each per head. Taking one with the other, and considering the manner in which they lived, I am certain that the cost for keeping each of them could not have been more than 5s. This would leave 5s. 6d. clear profit on the board of each of the twelve men, or, altogether, £3:6s. per week; and this, added to the £1:2s. profit on the rent, would give £4:8s. for the sweater's gross profit on the board and lodging of the workmen in his place. But, besides this, he got 1s. out of each coat made on his premises, and there were twenty-one coats made there, upon an average, every week; so that, altogether, the sweater's clear gains out of the men were £5:9s.

every week. Each man made about a coat and a half in the course of the seven days (*for they all worked on a Sunday—they were generally told to “borrow a day off the Lord”*). For this coat and a half each hand got £1 : 2 : 6, and out of it he had to pay 13s. for board and lodging ; so that there was 9s. 6d. clear left. These are the profits of the sweater, and the earnings of the men engaged under him, when working for the first-rate houses. But many of the cheap houses pay as low as 8s. for the making of each dress and frock coat, and some of them as low as 6s. Hence the earnings of the men at such work would be from 9s. to 12s. per week, and the cost of their board and lodging without dinners, for these they seldom have, would be from 7s. 6d. to 8s. per week. Indeed, the men working under sweaters at such prices generally consider themselves well off if they have a shilling or two in their pockets for Sunday. The profits of the sweater, however, would be from £4 to £5 out of twelve men, working on his premises. The usual number of men working under each sweater is about six individuals ; and the average rate of profit about £2 : 10s., without the sweater doing any work himself. It is very often the case that a man working under a sweater is obliged to pawn his own coat to get any pocket-money that he may require. Over and over again the sweater makes out that he is in his debt from 1s. to 2s. at the end of the week, and when the man's coat is in pledge, he is compelled to remain imprisoned in the sweater's lodgings for months together. In some sweating places, there is an old coat kept called a “reliever,” and this is borrowed by such men as have none of their own to go out in. There are very few of the sweaters' men who have a coat to their backs or a shoe to their feet to come out into the streets on Sunday. Down about Fulwood's Rents, Holborn, I am sure I would not give 6d. for the clothes that are on a dozen of them ; and it is surprising to me, working and living together in such numbers and in such small close rooms, in narrow close back courts as they do, that they are not all swept off by some pestilence. I myself have seen half a dozen men at work in a room that was a little better than a bedstead long. It was as much as one could do to move between the wall and the bedstead when it was down. There were two bedsteads in this room, and they nearly filled the place when they were down. The ceiling was so low, that I couldn't stand upright in the room. There was no ventilation in the place. There was no fireplace, and only a small window. When the window was open, you could nearly touch the houses at the back, and if the room had not been at the top of the house, the men could not have seen at all in the place. The staircase was so narrow, steep, and dark, that it was difficult to grope your way to the top of the house—it was like going up a steeple. This is the usual kind of place in which the sweater's men are lodged. The reason why there are so many

Irishmen working for the sweaters is, because they are seduced over to this country by the prospect of high wages and plenty of work. They are brought over by the Cork boats at 10s. a head, and when they once get here, the prices they receive are so small, that they are unable to go back. In less than a week after they get here, their clothes are all pledged, and they are obliged to continue working under the sweaters.

'The extent to which this system of "street kidnapping" is carried on is frightful. Young tailors, fresh from the country, are decoyed by the sweaters' wives into their miserable dens, under extravagant promises of employment, to find themselves deceived, imprisoned, and starved, often unable to make their escape for months—perhaps years; and then only fleeing from one dungeon to another as abominable.'

In the meantime, the profits of the beasts of prey who live on these poor fellows—both masters and sweaters—seem as prodigious as their cruelty.

Hear another working tailor on this point:—'In 1844 I belonged to the honourable part of the trade. Our house of call supplied the present show-shop with men to work on the premises. The prices then paid were at the rate of 6d. per hour. For the same driving capes that they paid 18s. then, they give only 12s. for now. For the dress and frock coats they gave 15s. then, and now they are 14s. The paletots and shooting coats were 12s.; there was no coat made on the premises under that sum. At the end of the season, they wanted to reduce the paletots to 9s. The men refused to make them at that price, when other houses were paying as much as 15s. for them. The consequence of this was, the house discharged all the men, and got a Jew middle-man from the neighbourhood of Petticoat Lane, to agree to do them all at 7s. 6d. a piece. The Jew employed all the poor people who were at work for the slop warehouses in Houndsditch and its vicinity. This Jew makes on an average 500 paletots a week. The Jew gets 2s. 6d. profit out of each, and having no sewing trimmings allowed to him, he makes the work-people find them. The saving in trimmings alone to the firm, since the workmen left the premises, must have realised a small fortune to them. Calculating men, women, and children, I have heard it said that the cheap house at the West End employs 1000 hands. The trimmings for the work done by these would be about 6d. a week per head, so that the saving to the house since the men worked on the premises has been no less than £1300 a year, and all this taken out of the pockets of the poor. The Jew who contracts for making the paletots is no tailor at all. A few years ago he sold sponges in the street, and now he rides in his carriage. The Jew's profits are 500 half-crowns, or £60 odd, per week—that is upwards of £3000 a year. Women are mostly engaged at the paletot work. When I came to work for the cheap show-shop I had £5 : 10s. in the

saving bank ; now I have not a halfpenny in it. All I had saved went little by little to keep me and my family. I have always made a point of putting some money by when I could afford it, but since I have been at this work it has been as much as I could do to *live*, much more to *save*. One of the firm for which I work has been heard publicly to declare that he employed 1000 hands constantly. Now the earnings of these at the honourable part of the trade would be upon an average, taking the skilful with the unskilful, 15s. a week each, or £39,000 a year. But since they discharged the men from off their premises, they have cut down the wages of the workmen one-half—taking one garment with another—*though the selling prices remain the same to the public*, so that they have saved by the reduction of the workmen's wages no less than £19,500 per year. Every other quarter of a year something has been "docked" off our earnings, until it is almost impossible for men with families to live decently by their labour ; and now, for the first time, they pretend to feel for them. They even talk of erecting a school for the children of their workpeople ; but where is the use of erecting schools, when they know as well as we do, that at the wages they pay, the children must be working for their fathers at home ? They had much better erect workshops, and employ the men on the premises at fair living wages, and then the men could educate their own children, without being indebted to their charity.'

On this last question of what the master-cannibals had 'much better do,' we have somewhat to say presently. In the meantime, hear another of the things which they had much better *not* do. 'Part of the fraud and deception of the slop trade consists in the mode in which the public are made believe that the men working for such establishments earn more money than they really do. The plan practised is similar to that adopted by the army clothier, who made out that the men working on his establishment made per week from 15s. to 17s. each, whereas, on inquiry, it was found that a considerable sum was paid out of that to those who helped to do the looping-for those who took it home. When a coat is given to me to make, a ticket is handed to me with the garment, similar to this one which I have obtained from a friend of mine.

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Mr. *Smith* 6,675 Made by *M**Ze* = 12s. = *lined lustre**quilted double stitched*
each side seams

448. No. 6,675.

o'clock *Friday*Mr. *Smith*

On this you see the price is marked at 12s.,' continued my informant, 'and supposing that I, with two others, could make three of these garments in the week, the sum of thirty-six shillings would stand in the books of the establishment as the amount earned by me in that space of time. This would be sure to be exhibited to the customers, immediately that there was the least outcry made about the starvation price they paid for their work, as a proof that the workpeople engaged on their establishment received the full prices; whereas, of that 36s. entered against my name, *I should have had to pay 24s. to those who assisted me*; besides this, my share of the trimmings and expenses would have been 1s. 6d., and probably my share of the fires would be 1s. more; so that the real fact would be, that I should make 9s. 6d. clear, and this it would be almost impossible to do, if I did not work long over hours. I am obliged to keep my wife continually at work helping me, in order to live.'

In short, the condition of these men is far worse than that of the wretched labourers of Wilts or Dorset. Their earnings are as low and often lower; their trade requires a far longer instruction, far greater skill and shrewdness; their rent and food are more expensive; and their hours of work, while they have work, more than half as long again. Conceive sixteen or eighteen hours of skilled labour in a stifling and fetid chamber, earning not much more than 6s. 6d. or 7s. a week! And, as has been already mentioned in one case, the man who will earn even that, must work all Sunday. He is even liable to be thrown out of his work for refusing to work on Sunday. Why not? Is there anything about one idle day in seven to be found among the traditions of Mammon? When the demand comes, the supply must come; and will, in spite of foolish auld-world notion about keeping days holy—or keeping contracts holy either, for, indeed, Mammon has no conscience—right and wrong are not words expressible by any commercial laws yet in vogue; and therefore it appears that to earn this wretched pittance is by no means to get it. 'For,' says one, and the practice is asserted to be general, almost universal, 'there is at our establishment a mode of reducing the price of our labour even lower than we have mentioned. The prices we have stated are those *nominally* paid for making the garments; but it is not an uncommon thing in our shop for a man to make a garment, and receive nothing at all for it. I remember a man once having a waistcoat to do, the price of making which was 2s., and when he gave the job in he was told that he owed the establishment 6d. The manner in which this is brought about is by a system of fines. We are fined if we are behind time with our job, 6d. the first hour, and 3d. for each hour that we are late.' 'I have known as much as 7s. 6d. to be deducted off the price of a coat on the score of want of punctuality,' one

said; 'and, indeed, very often the whole money is stopped. It would appear as if our employers themselves strove to make us late with our work, and so have an opportunity of cutting down the price paid for our labour. They frequently put off giving out the trimmings to us till the time at which the coat is due has expired. If to the trimmer we return an answer that is considered "saucy," we are fined 6d. or 1s., according to the trimmer's temper.' 'I was called a thief,' another of the three declared, 'and because I told the man I would not submit to such language, I was fined 6d. These are the principal of the in-door fines. The out-door fines are still more iniquitous. There are full a dozen more fines for minor offences; indeed, we are fined upon every petty pretext. We never know what we have to take on a Saturday, for the meanest advantages are taken to reduce our wages. If we object to pay these fines, we are told that we may leave; but they know full well that we are afraid to throw ourselves out of work.'

Folks are getting somewhat tired of the old rodomontade that a slave is free the moment he sets foot on British soil! Stuff!—are these tailors free? Put any conceivable sense you will on the word, and then say—are they free? We have, thank God, emancipated the black slaves; it would seem a not inconsistent sequel to that act to set about emancipating these white ones. Oh! we forgot; there is an infinite difference between the two cases—the black slaves worked for our colonies; the white slaves work for *us*. But, indeed, if, as some preach, self-interest is the mainspring of all human action, it is difficult to see who will step forward to emancipate the said white slaves; for all classes seem to consider it equally their interest to keep them as they are; all classes, though by their own confession they are ashamed, are yet not afraid to profit by the system which keeps them down.

Not only the master tailors and their underlings, but the retail tradesmen, too, make their profit out of these abominations. By a method which smacks at first sight somewhat of benevolence, but proves itself in practice to be one of those 'precious balms which break,' not 'the head' (for that would savour of violence, and might possibly give some bodily pain, a thing intolerable to the nerves of Mammon) but the heart—an organ which, being spiritual, can of course be recognised by no laws of police or commerce. The object of the State, we are told, is 'the conservation of body and goods'; there is nothing in that about broken hearts; nothing which should make it a duty to forbid such a system as a working tailor here describes—

'Fifteen or twenty years ago, such a thing as a journeyman tailor having to give security before he could get work was unknown; but now I and such as myself could not get a stitch to do first handed, if we did not either procure the security of some householder, or deposit £5 in the hands of the employer. The

reason of this is, the journeymen are so badly paid that the employers know they can barely live on what they get, and consequently they are often driven to pawn the garments given out to them, in order to save themselves and their families from starving. If the journeyman can manage to scrape together £5, he has to leave it in the hands of his employer all the time that he is working for the house. I know one person who gives out the work for a fashionable West End slop-shop that will not take household security, and requires £5 from each hand. I am informed by one of the parties who worked for this man that he has as many as 150 hands in his employ, and that each of these has placed £5 in his hands, so that altogether the poor people have handed over £750 to increase the capital upon which he trades, and for which he pays no interest whatsoever.'

This recalls a similar case (mentioned by a poor stay-stitcher in another letter, published in the *Morning Chronicle*), of a large wholesale staymaker in the City, who had amassed a large fortune by beginning to trade upon the 5s. which he demanded to be left in his hands by his workpeople before he gave them employment.

'Two or three years back one of the slop-sellers at the East End became bankrupt, and the poor people lost all the money that had been deposited as security for work in his hands. The journeymen who get the security of householders are enabled to do so by a system which is now in general practice at the East End. Several bakers, publicans, chandler-shop keepers, and coal-shed keepers, make a trade of becoming security for those seeking slop-work. They consent to be responsible for the workpeople upon the condition of the men dealing at their shops. The workpeople who require such security are generally very good customers, from the fact of their either having large families, all engaged in the same work, or else several females or males working under them, and living at their house. The parties becoming securities thus not only greatly increase their trade, but furnish a second-rate article at a first-rate price. It is useless to complain of the bad quality or high price of the articles supplied by the securities, for the shopkeepers know, as well as the workpeople, that it is impossible for the hands to leave them without losing their work. I know one baker whose security was refused at the slop-shop because he was already responsible for so many, and he begged the publican to be his deputy, so that by this means the workpeople were obliged to deal at both baker's and publican's too. I never heard of a butcher making a trade of becoming security, because the slopwork people cannot afford to consume much meat.

'The same system is also pursued by lodging-house keepers. They will become responsible if the workmen requiring security will undertake to lodge at their house.'

But of course the men most interested in keeping up the system are those who buy the clothes of these cheap shops. And who are they? Not merely the blackguard gent—the butt of Albert Smith and Punch, who flaunts at the Casinos and Cremorne Gardens in vulgar finery wrung out of the souls and bodies of the poor; not merely the poor lawyer's clerk or reduced half-pay officer who has to struggle to look as respectable as his class commands him to look on a pittance often no larger than that of the day labourer—no, strange to say—and yet not strange, considering our modern eleventh commandment—'Buy cheap and sell dear,' the richest as well as the poorest imitate the example of King Ryence and the tanners of Meudon. At a great show establishment—to take one instance out of many—the very one where, as we heard just now, 'however strong and healthy a man may be when he goes to work at that shop, in a month's time he will be a complete shadow, and have almost all his clothes in pawn'—

'We have also made garments for Sir ———, Sir ———, Alderman ———, Dr. ———, and Dr. ———. We make for several of the aristocracy. We cannot say whom, because the tickets frequently come to us as Lord ——— and the Marquis of ———. This could not be a Jew's trick, because the buttons on the liveries had coronets upon them. And again, we know the house is patronised largely by the aristocracy, clergy, and gentry, by the number of court-suits and liveries, surplices, regimentals, and ladies' riding-habits that we continually have to make up. *There are more clergymen among the customers than any other class, and often we have to work at home upon the Sunday at their clothes, in order to get a living.* The customers are mostly ashamed of dealing at this house, for the men who take the clothes to the customers' houses in the cart have directions to pull up at the corner of the street. We had a good proof of the dislike of gentlefolks to have it known that they dealt at that shop for their clothes, for when the trousers buttons were stamped with the name of the firm, we used to have the garments returned, daily, to have other buttons put on them, and now the buttons are unstamped'!!!

We shall make no comment on this extract. It needs none. If these men know how their clothes are made, they are past contempt. Afraid of man, and not afraid of God! As if His eye could not see the cart laden with the plunder of the poor, because it stopped round the corner? If, on the other hand, they do *not* know these things, and doubtless the majority do not,—it is their sin that they do not know it. Woe to a society whose only apology to God and man is, 'Am I my brother's keeper?' Men ought to know the condition of those by whose labour they live. Had the question been the investment of a few pounds in a speculation, these gentlemen would have been careful enough about good security. Ought they to take no security when

they invest their money in clothes, that they are not putting on their backs accursed garments, offered in sacrifice to devils, reeking with the sighs of the starving, tainted—yes, tainted, indeed, for it comes out now that diseases numberless are carried home in these same garments from the miserable abodes where they are made. Evidence to this effect was given in 1844; but Mammon was too busy to attend to it. These wretched creatures, when they have pawned their own clothes and bedding, will use as substitutes the very garments they are making. So Lord ——'s coat has been seen covering a group of children blotched with small-pox. The Rev. D—— finds himself suddenly unpresentable from a cutaneous disease, which it is not polite to mention on the south of Tweed, little dreaming that the shivering dirty being who made his coat has been sitting with his arms in the sleeves for warmth while he stitched at the tails. The charming Miss C—— is swept off by typhus or scarlatina, and her parents talk about 'God's heavy judgment and visitation'—had they tracked the girl's new riding-habit back to the stifling undrained hovel where it served as a blanket to the fever-stricken slopworker, they would have seen *why* God had visited them, seen that His judgments are true judgments, and give His plain opinion of the system which 'speaketh good of the covetous whom God abhorreth'—a system, to use the words of the *Morning Chronicle's* correspondent, 'unheard of and unparalleled in the history of any country—a scheme so deeply laid for the introduction and supply of under-paid labour to the market, that it is impossible for the working man not to sink and be degraded by it into the lowest depths of wretchedness and infamy—a system which is steadily and gradually increasing, and sucking more and more victims out of the honourable trade, who are really intelligent artisans, living in comparative comfort and civilisation, into the dishonourable or sweating trade in which the slopworkers are generally almost brutified by their incessant toil, wretched pay, miserable food, and filthy homes.'

But to us, almost the worst feature in the whole matter is, that the Government are not merely parties to, but actually the originators of this system. The contract system, as a working tailor stated, in the name of the rest, 'had been mainly instrumental in destroying the living wages of the working man. Now, the Government were the sole originators of the system of contracts and of sweating. Forty years ago, there was nothing known of contracts, except Government contracts; and at that period the contractors were confined to making slops for the navy, the army, and the West India slaves. It was never dreamt of then that such a system was to come into operation in the better classes of trade, till ultimately it was destructive of masters as well as men. The Government having been the cause of the contract system, and consequently of the sweating

system, he called upon them to abandon it. The sweating system had established the show-shops and the ticket system, both of which were countenanced by the Government, till it had become a fashion to support them.

'Even the Court assisted to keep the system in fashion, and the royal arms and royal warrants were now exhibited common enough by slopsellers.'

'Government said, its duty was to do justice. But was it consistent with justice to pay only 2s. 6d. for making navy jackets, which would be paid 10s. for by every "honourable" tradesman? Was it consistent with justice for the Government to pay for Royal Marine clothing (private's coat and epaulettes) 1s. 9d.? Was it consistent with justice for the Government to pay for making a pair of trousers (four or five hours' work) only 2½d.? And yet, when a contractor, noted for paying just wages to those he employed, brought this under the consideration of the Admiralty, they declared they had nothing to do with it. Here is their answer:—

'ADMIRALTY, *March 19, 1847.*

'Sir—Having laid before my Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty your letter of the 8th inst., calling their attention to the extremely low prices paid for making up articles of clothing, provided for her Majesty's naval service, I am commanded by their lordships to acquaint you that they have no control whatever over the wages paid for making up contract clothing. Their duty is to take care that the articles supplied are of good quality, and well made: the cost of the material and the workmanship are matters which rest with the contractor; and if the public were to pay him a higher price than that demanded, it would not ensure any advantage to the men employed by him, as their wages depend upon the amount of competition for employment amongst themselves.

'I am, Sir, your most obedient servant,

'H. G. WARD.

'W. Shaw, Esq.'

Oh most impotent conclusion, however officially cautious, and 'philosophically' correct! Even if the wages did depend entirely on the amount of competition, on whom does the amount of competition depend? Merely on the gross numbers of the workmen? Somewhat, too, one would think, on the system according to which the labour and the wages are distributed. But right or wrong, is it not a pleasant answer for the poor working tailors, and one likely to increase their faith, hope, and charity towards the present commercial system, and those who deny the possibility of any other?

'The Government,' says another tailor at the same meeting, 'had really been the means of reducing prices in the tailoring