

language has likewise its improprieties and absurdities, which it is the duty of the lexicographer to correct or proscribe.' The line between an anomaly which we must suffer and an absurdity which we may abolish is not perhaps easy to draw, and Johnson did not draw it: but his sentence may stand both as a warning and as an encouragement.

THE SOCIALIST

BY S. H. McGRADY

EVERY afternoon the old Socialist went for a walk through the fields. He walked slowly, leaning on a stick, for all his life he had fought a hard fight. For years he had toiled, and now, when all things were fading, he had no regrets.

This afternoon, when Spring, clothed all in white, was dancing in the meadows, he had gone farther than was his custom. Never again, perhaps, would he gaze on the mist in the elm trees, or hear the call of the cuckoo.

So with feeble steps he crossed the tiny bridge over the brook, and entered the wood. He felt rather tired. It was a long time since he had come so far. At last, however, he reached the little waterfall that splashed with silver spray among the leaves, and, sitting down, he feasted his eyes on the vernal beauty of the scene. Here a gorse bush flamed, and there, fresh and graceful, stood a wild cherry tree in blossom. Under the branches were shy anemones and tufts of yellow primroses, and in the undergrowth a bullfinch was calling to his mate.

For a long time he sat there, with his back against an aged ash, and his feet at the water's edge. The sunlight, peeping through the leaves, touched gently the gray hair and patient, rugged face. He watched the tiny, brown

mice, squeaking and playing in and out of the bushes. He remained immovable, holding his breath, while two wild, glowing hares, with quivering nostrils, gamboled around him. Then — save for the music of running water — all was still, and the woods were full of beauty and a great silence.

For a long time the old Socialist sat there. Very glad was he for this vision of spring. He thought of the spring-times of long ago, when he and his merry companions wandered over the countryside, looking for eggs or playing robbers. He thought of the best springtime of all, when a trusting girl put her hand in his. And he thought of the factories in which he had worked, with the grime and grease and roaring machinery, and the monotonous, never-ending toil, while out in the fields the fresh, gentle wind was blowing, and the buds were bursting into blossom.

But, most of all, he thought of the fight he had fought for freedom. How, after the day's work was over, tired and weary, perhaps, he had given the few hours remaining to humanity. For the cause he loved he had sacrificed leisure and pleasure, domestic happiness even. He had never received a decent education, and it was with difficulty that he had taught himself to read and write. Literature, music, art were not for him. Nearly always he had lived among the smoke and dirt, slaving in the works, day after day, year after year, with intervals for food and sleep, so that on the morrow the human machine might be ready again for the dreary, weary monotony of soulless toil. To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow. . . .

It was not for himself that he had fought. It was not for himself he had struggled against the hideous machine that ground human lives to powder. It was not for himself that he had striven to express in words the wild strivings

and longings that gathered in his heart. He had never had a chance. But the boys and girls, shouting and playing in the streets, and the peaceful, sleeping babies — life must be better for them.

Socialist! How often had the very men and women whose battles he fought turned against him, laughed him to scorn. Yet he loved them, his comrades, not less, but rather all the more. For they, too, had never had a chance.

Socialist! Groping in the dark! Yet, even now, there were signs of the dawn. The thousands of ordinary, obscure men, like himself, had not lived in vain.

So the old man sat there in the stillness of the wood, watching the water splashing over the stones, looking up at the patches of blue above the pine trees, dreaming, wondering.

All at once, however, he realized with a start that he was not alone.

A short distance away, watching him intently, a stranger was standing. His face was gaunt and pale, his lips firm, his eyes piercing. At first glance the expression seemed stern and relentless, cruel even. Yet there was something about him that spoke of kindness and sympathy, as if he had seen much pain and suffering, and knew that these, too, are the gifts of God.

'It is very pleasant here,' said the old Socialist.

'You are right,' answered the stranger, sitting down on the grassy bank beside him.

Although the weather was warm he wore a heavy cloak, seemingly without inconvenience, for there were no traces of perspiration on the pale, calm face.

'I can easily see that you do not belong to these parts,' observed the Socialist.

'I travel a good deal,' answered the other.

His voice was gentle, and for all his

severity there was something charming about his smile.

'All my life I have longed to travel, but being a poor man, I have never had an opportunity of doing so. How wonderful it must be to visit new lands, to see strange peoples, to study their customs and ways, to realize that all these men are brothers, that they, too, are crying in the night.'

The stranger agreed. He condemned the caste system. Divisions of class were nothing to him. Yet everywhere society erected barriers. For himself he saw no difference between a peasant and a prince.

'I am an old man,' continued the Socialist. 'To-day, because it is spring-time, I ventured a little farther than usual, and I have been sitting here by the water, listening to the birds, and living over again the years that are gone. And I have been thinking, too, of the future, and wondering if it will be well with the cause I have at heart. I want all men to have an equal chance. I want to do away with class privileges. I want the world for democracy. But sometimes, as to-day, I am afraid. Perhaps, after all, tyranny and capitalism will prevail. Perhaps there will always be serfs and masters to grind them down. Yet, whatever the future, I have no regrets; for I have fought and suffered for the truth.'

'Do not despair,' said the stranger. 'Only this morning I arrived here from a far-off land, where all men, without exception, have the same rights.'

The eyes of the old Socialist lit up with enthusiasm.

'Tell me,' he exclaimed eagerly, 'tell me about this happy, far-off land.'

'In that land,' answered the stranger with a kind smile, 'all men and women are equal. There you will find no class distinctions, no monopoly of land or gold, no corrupt politicians, no savage wars. For there all men are brothers.'

'Splendid! Splendid!' cried the old man, clasping his hands.

'In that land all share alike. A king and a beggar, going there, are equal; and a nobleman and a dustman receive the same treatment. There are no poor and no rich — for everything is in common — no hunger and poverty, no strife and cruelty and hatred. For all is rest and peace.'

Music rang in the ears of the old Socialist, and glad was his heart. Wonderful, far-off land! How lucky was this fascinating stranger to have lived there.

'Would you not like to see this country?' asked the speaker, leaning toward him, 'you who have struggled and suffered that men may become brothers.'

'Indeed, I would,' cried the old man, his eyes sparkling. 'But I am old and feeble and poor — as you see.'

'Yet there, mighty statesmen, and silver-tongued poets, even the rich, would welcome you as a comrade, and you and they would be one.'

Fascinated, the old Socialist gazed at the pale face of the stranger, and met his deep, piercing eyes. His limbs were trembling, his heart beating violently, for upon him there came a vague, indescribable feeling, a strange mixture of contentment and fear. Surely, he had fought a good fight, and now he was old and longed for rest. And this stranger would help him, and show him the way.

'Take me — if you will — to this wonderful far-off land.'

Smiling, the stranger stretched out his hand, and laid his cold, thin fingers upon the fingers of the old Socialist.

'Come! We will go together. I will be your guide.'

And as the old man looked, the hard lines on the stranger's face melted away, and he seemed no longer stern and cruel, but full of kindness and hope. And his eyes were those of a little child.

'Tell me,' he whispered. 'What is your name?'

'I am Death,' answered the stranger gently, taking the old man's hand.

[*New Witness*]

BALLAD

BY GEOFFREY DEARMER

'COME over to-morrow at sunset,' she
cried,
'And knock at my door in the sunny
hill side,
If I love thee, I'll answer, and thus
thou shalt know,
But if there's no sound from me, gal-
lantly go.'

I bowed to the bargain and lowered my
head,
'My lady, to-morrow at sunset,' I said,
'Have pity and hear, O my heart-beat
and breath,
For silence will send me to solitary
death!'

Ere sunset I climbed over the heather-
topped hill
And down past the churning, monotonous
mill;
My forehead was tingling and clammy
and cold,
For there stood her cottage, my breath
to behold.

It stood there all silent, and terrible
fears
Welled up, for I heard 'rat-a-tat' in my
ears;
And I felt the foreboding a soldier may
feel
Anticipating the silence of steel.

I climbed and climbed nearer, my blood
seemed to scorch,
And I saw the bright stone-crop, a
patch on her porch;
And the swift circling swallows swept
round in black streaks,
And I heard the 'snap' 'snap' of their
fly-catching beaks.

Nearer and nearer, I heard every sound
From the near and the far and the
flowery ground—
Yes, even a feathery, flickering bat,
As I knocked at her door 'rat-a-tat,'
'rat-a-tat.'

And I stood there as one turning slowly
to stone
His breath nor his brain nor his body
his own,
For in echoless silence my dull knock
had died,
And I stood there in loneliness on the
hill side.

In a world lone and lightless I stood
frozen there
Nothing knowing but growing and
darkening despair;
Till I heard from a casement beneath
the thick thatch
Louder, louder than trumpets, the click
of a latch.

[*The Nation*]

CHRISTINA

BY ANGELA CAVE

'WOULD you be old, Christina?'
'No, I would not be old;
I should not love to become outworn,
Like a tale that is told.'

'The old eyes see best, Christina.'
'They may see clear,
But I see what I wish to see,
And hear what I would hear.'

'Old hearts are true, Christina.'
'That does not make for laughter;
My heart goes where it lists, my loves
Run softly, run after.'

'Age drinks at the well of peace,
Christina.'
'And I drink joy;
Laughter runs into my life
Like a quick-footed boy.'

'Are you never sad, Christina?'
'The young love Sorrow;
They kiss his lips in a dream,
And wake to-morrow.'

'What will you do when you are old,
Christina?'
'I shall save my breath;
Sit and stare at the world,
And wait for death.'