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Common-Sense Country.

BY

L. S. BEVINGTON.

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AND

ALL THE BEST WRITERS AND THINKERS
IN THE SOCIALIST MOVEMENT.

Common-Sense Country.

There was a country where Common-sense had somehow got the upper hand. In that country sense was as common as lunacy is in a madhouse. There was a place for everything, and everything was either in that place, or else was on the direct way there—the shortest way, the easiest way, the cheapest way. In that country everybody was brought up with the notion that the simplest plan in everything served everybody's turn best, even the clever people's; and it was taken as a matter of course that if things did not go wrong people wouldn't. They read in their books of history and comparative sociology that in countries were things do go wrong, people go wrong too, in the blind, blundering attempt to straighten things back a bit. But in Common-sense Country it was always said when things went wrong that there had been some nonsense—that is, empty word-play—in the heads or habits of the people, which had diverted attention from realities, and caused the people to let things wander out of the way.

In Common-sense Country all the commodities and goods, all the instruments, utensils, and appliances—in short, all the "things"—had very simple and unadventurous biographies, and, if they could have spoken, they would not have had much harrowing information to impart about the ravages of their tissues and textures caused by moth and rust, nor yet of vicissitudes incurred at the hands of thieves breaking through to steal. "I was needed: I was made: I was conveyed: I was applied: I was consumed." That would have summed up the history of a thing in the country where things went right: only five short chapters. In most countries, of course, all sorts of distressing and distracting other

chapters intervene. Thus: “I was coveted: I was done without: I was lied for: I was hated for: I was speculated in: I was adulterated: I was advertised. I was legislated about: I was sold (and my buyer with me): I was squandered: I was hoarded: I was quarrelled over: I was fought for: I was burgled: I was bombed.”

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In Common-sense Country there was a job for everyone, and everyone was merrily, ardently, or placidly doing that job. No one was doing mere “business” and calling it work. No one was doing real work and feeling it “toil”. Dull jobs were done in short spells by an immense number of people; delightful jobs were worked at for the pleasure of the thing, in longer spells, and by a fewer number of people. It fell out so, naturally, and because of common sense; nobody had to be at the trouble of enforcing the arrangement. The man with the dullest or most fatiguing job, as a matter of course, got the longest leisure for re-creation of his naturally flagging zest for the job. The man with the pleasurable and healthy job hardly knew leisure from job. The kindliest and most able-bodied and jolliest of the people had common-sense reasons for attending to the least appetizing tasks. Everybody knew they wanted doing; and these kindly, vigorous, and jolly folks were those who cared most about getting them done, and cared least about minor disagreeables. They also liked the peculiar way in which other people shook hands with them for it, and more than made it good to them in the way of respect and hospitality wherever they went.

You never saw any feet without shoes in cold weather in Common-sense Country. And you never saw any shoes heaped up thousands thick in warehouses with no feet to put into them. Common-sense citizens had grave objections, not only to cold, discomfort, and disease, but also grave objections to the enormous expense of thought, time, material, and goodwill, necessarily involved in any and every measure for keeping

empty shoes warm indoors, and human feet cold outside in the street. You never came to a place in any Common-sense city where, by turning your head to the right, you could see one horn of a dilemma in the shape of a lot of grain or fish being destroyed on the lunatic excuse that it could not be sold for more than it cost, while by turning your head to the left the other horn of the dilemma became visible in the shape of men and women (with their children) hungry, worried, and constantly at their wits' end, only because they could not buy back the comestibles they had ploughed, reaped, milled, fished, and otherwise laboured to bring within human reach.

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In Common-sense Country there were no jerry built houses, because people could not see any reason for making insecure and unhealthy dwellings. There were no ground landlords to make it disadvantageous to any builder to build honestly; no builders so hard pressed, therefore, that they were obliged to cause the masons to scamp work, use limeless mortar, or unseasoned wood. No builder or mason, moreover, had (in the name of common-sense) any object whatever in view so immediately as the supplying of buildings wanted for use. He built houses for bakers, clothiers, artists, and all sorts of other useful persons; and these lived in the houses and produced food, clothing, works of art, and all sorts of other useful things for the builder in exchange.

There was no waste of any energy or of any talent in Common-sense Country. There were no churches and temples made with hands; because hands had better things to do than build prisons to shut up souls in. Also because in strict common sense the sky was holy enough to "sit under," and even to sing spiritual songs under. Besides, Common-senseites had discovered that you could not get the sun and fixed stars and all their

lesser lights into the biggest of temples ever made with hands. In Common-sense Country people liked daylight for their minds and morals as well as for their bodies; and found it cheapest in the long run.

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There were next to no shipwrecks on the coasts of Common-sense Country; no one raced any ships to port in all weathers for the nonsensical reason of getting in before other ships. People on shore could always afford to wait a day or so for the weather, better than they could afford to kill men, sink ships, and spoil cargoes through running amuck at nature's meteorological arrangements. It did not matter a jot to any one which ship got in first, since all ships were full of supplies, and sure to drop in, in natural order, as fast as needed. What sense of hurry there was, founded of course on experience of the inconvenience of waiting, led to all possible improvements in the art and science of ship-building and engine-building, so that wind-and-wave difficulties had been reduced to a minimum. So there was no colliding in fogs, no bursting of boilers, no over-lading, and no un-seaworthy craft; also no "Lloyd's" agencies, to speculate on anyone's want of common-sense, and to live as parasites on the low moral vitality of the public, making profit at its expense. When folk talked of "insuring" in that country, they always meant making as sure as possible against chances of mishap. To insure a ship was to build her well, fit her well, man her well, to steer clear of shoals, and keep her in sound repair. Likewise with the insurance of houses. And to insure your life, you had only to eat, drink, and clothe yourself on hygienic principles, to avoid the indolence or the over-taxing of any of your faculties, and to act fairly by every one of your fellow-creatures with whom you had to do. In common-sense language, insuring your life or property never meant to make it worth anyone's while to destroy either one or the other.

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No visible teacher taught common-sense in that country. Children were born with it ready-made. It lay in their human nature. It taught itself. It "growed" (like Topsy) because neither "business" nor "policy" existed to check or warp it—indeed neither the policy of business nor the business of policy were known at all, except as queer, sad, old superstitions, suffered through and done with ages ago, during the time when human generations were paying a big price in the purgatory of civilization, for the privilege of having beaten other creatures in the dangerous matter of language. Children in Common-sense Country were never taught to be "wise and prudent," because that was the way to prevent anything of any interest or beauty or high import from being "revealed." Their little, honest, ignorant, simple questions received honest, accurate, and simple answers, in language which they could understand, and which they never needed to unlearn afterwards. And this alike on all subjects. Every young man and young woman grew up with as much common-sense in his or her head or expectations as the elders could help them to. And each young man or young woman went on from a common-sense starting point to use his or her faculties as individual endowment suggested, so that each generation kept on fearlessly adding to real knowledge by experimenting in new directions as common-sense prompted; while the elders loved to have it so, and felt rewarded for their good faith to the children, and were sometimes in their own turn listeners, questioners, learners.

Common-sense citizens never said "Time is money." They said that money-minting, money-managing, and money-protecting entail endless waste of time and trouble; that they are an abuse of human faculty, resulting in a great deal of death—bodily, intellectual, moral, and spiritual. Also it was said these and like employments were as nonsensical in their objects as they were vicious in their effects. Money in Common-sense Country had no meaning, any more than it has in a beehive. No one said "Money is power." Sometimes it was said "Money is

weakness." That was when Common-senseites were speaking of the doings and miseries of the inhabitants of Lunatic Land. (By the way, the word used was not *money* but *mammon*.) One objection they had to money, beyond its nonsensicalness, was its tendency—in proportion to the degree of its accumulation in a man's hand—to sap away his "soul," his moral individuality, his character. They said, "What can it profit a man to lose his soul, and become a moral paralytic?" They observed also that wherever in Lunatic Land mammon had accumulated in a man's hand, it had a tendency to put into his other hand a sceptre, a truncheon, a gatling gun, or some other preposterous implement, making of that moral paralytic a lord over two, or five, or ten cities, or markets, or communities—as the case might be.

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As there was no mammon, there were none of those dismal things which are eternal essentials where mammon reigns. There were no arsenals, no armies, no police, no spies: no banks, no prisons, no poorhouses: no brothels, no divorce courts, no nunneries, no confessionals: no "rings," no strikes, no infernal machines, no gallows. Common-sense found no sort of use in any of these queer things. Common-sense knew by hearsay that mammon could not reign without them; but then common sense found no reason whatever for putting up with mammon, or paying its expenses.

There were many stores and depots where anyone who wanted anything for wear, or consumption, or instruction, or pleasure, or any other use, could go, or send and get it, or get it made. He never had to ask "What's the damage?" because in Common-sense Country damage was objected to. Everyone knew that no one had got what he did not want, because nobody was so insane as to cumber himself with the custody of anything that was of no use or pleasure to him; so that to ask him to give up what was of direct use or pleasure to him would damage

him. No one was short of anything, because the world is very fruitful, and human beings are very numerous, very ingenious, and very industrious, and are able and eager to make it more and more fruitful. Wealth in Common-sense Country increased even faster than the population, so that there was more leisure for every new generation born. Whatever was not of direct use to the individuals who produced it, it was to the convenience of these individuals to place in care, and outside custody altogether, so that those to whom it was not superfluous might choose their own time and put it to their own uses. It is only in Lunatic Land that everybody (willingly or not) makes a practice of fining everybody else for the privilege of living alongside of him on the same planet. It takes a hereditary lunatic of many generations' standing to go shamming about in the roundabout, nonsensically solemn effort to convert man's natural home into a penal colony, by means of a cunningly devised system of fines all round for being alive and active and wanting to stop so.

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In Common-sense Country there were born ninety-five per cent. fewer idiots, cripples, and otherwise afflicted mortals than are born elsewhere. The few there were, were not felt as a burden; for those of tender hearts found a natural pleasure in doing what could be done to make life tolerable for these sad and ever diminishing exceptions; and of course they were no expense in a land of plenty, where access was free to whatever was wanted, without money and without price.

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In Common-sense Country words were true, and purposes single; even newspapers expressed real opinions, and conveyed real information; fun abounded, and nobody preached. Every shade of individuality was respected and made welcome, variety being suggestive as well as interesting. No one wheedled, no one canted, no one flattered, or equivocated, or slandered; because none of these were necessary expedients. There was never anything to fear from either honesty or generosity in that land. People could have food, friends, fun, and freedom without little abject servilities. Every individual was, as a matter of course, left perfectly free on his capable side, while being courteously and gladly aided, by custom and common consent, on his weak side. So that there was nothing to prevent his voluntarily and naturally making common cause with others in the overcoming of common difficulties, and in the acquirement, production, and distribution of all good things.

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There was no schism in that country, because there was no Church. There was a great deal of religion, because Common-senseites had time to try their best powers of life and mind on everything, and the more they knew, the deeper depths of sheer wonderfulness did they find beneath the new-won knowledge. They found that life, love, liberty, peace, progress, and everything worth having came as the reward of adherence to certain inexorable, universal laws, inherent in everything; laws in which there was no variableness, nor shadow of turning; and also no respect of persons. They had the intensest interest and zest in getting hold of these laws, and in falling in with them as fast as they became visible; and they never dreamt of making cheap and nasty substitutes for laws in places or cases where none appeared of their own accord. As neither the ignorance nor superstition of their fellows served anyone's turn in a country where citizens were free and trusted one another, no people in black were kept to purvey either the one or the other, not even

to women or to the little children. All black arts were forgotten, and not missed. On the other hand Common-sense Country was rich in prophets, or poets, of the variety known as “born not made.”

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There was no sedition, because there was no State. Instead, there was every where a most beautiful order; for common-sense, left to itself, saw no use in a public muddle, or in a private scramble; such as exists everywhere and all the while in Lunatic Land. It was moreover found that there were a thousand simpler, cheaper, and surer (because more natural) ways of forestalling and discouraging any atavistic aggressiveness on the part of individuals, than bribing a number of strangers beforehand to be in readiness to retaliate by proxy.

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There was no swindling because there was no competition. Instead, there was endless emulation. The results of doing anything well, usefully, or admirably were wholly pleasant. The social results of doing any thing that wanted doing better and more easily and swiftly than it had been done before, were so exceptionally pleasant that all the most energetic and able people aspired and endeavoured to experience those results at first hand. No man-imposed restriction thwarted or impeded any experiment, and in the end the community learnt something useful by every mistake made. General goodwill and prosperity were immense; because there were no reasons at all for tricking anybody—quite the reverse.

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Human nature was never made a butt for satire, or a subject of regret, in Common-sense Country. No mud, no rotten eggs, no printers' ink were thrown at it. No one made a "living" by undertaking to convince others of their unsuspected depravity, with promise of cure for it in exchange for cash down and vows of allegiance. No one made any name or fame for himself by undertaking to keep human nature in others in order, by means of penal and restrictive regulations invented and imposed by human nature in himself or his set. Common-senseites saw that human nature was a branch of nature at large, and that to divide it against itself was the surest way to get it out of gear. Whenever a proclivity was found to be universal amongst humans, common-sense put the natural interpretation on the fact, and respected the proclivity, however superficially inconvenient in minor respects or exceptional cases. They respected it as due to some instinct, implanted and developed by the law of Lifewardness, and which it was therefore dangerous and disastrous systematically to nullify and oppose. Their endeavour was, instead, to become better acquainted with it.

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The great pleasure of trustful, unchecked sympathy, and of spontaneous glowing kindliness, was enjoyed nowhere to such a degree as in Common-sense Country. The old people, the little children, the animals and birds had a happy time of it; and there was free exchange of friendship and affection between the dumb and the human sharers of earthly life. And in the healthy, breathable, moral atmosphere of habitual good faith, fearless thinking, true speech, and sincere dealing which (by dint of simple good sense) people had gradually instituted, the necessary love of self, which takes such crude forms in Lunatic Land, had overflowed at every point, and become indistinguishable from the delicious, zest-giving, and inexhaustible pleasure of love for those around.

There was Peace in Common-sense Country, and Goodwill among men; and Happiness and Fullness of Life had become the Natural Order of the day.

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