

Chiefly a Dialogue

Louisa Bevington

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Chiefly a Dialogue

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A DIALOGUE.

BY L.S. BEVINGTON.

Dunce.

What is money?

The Other Fellow.

Something rare and useless which you are compelled to obtain before anyone will let you get at things that are needful, useful and plentiful.

Dunce.

Oh! Then, I suppose, if you have not got any money you had better leave off hoping for the plentiful things, and set to work to make what you want for yourself.

Other Fellow.

Why, old man, you can't!

Dunce.

How's that? I feel as if I could.

Other Fellow.

Not you. Money is there to stop you. It is a means used not only for making it difficult for you to get at what is ready-made, but also for making it dangerous for you to start digging or planting, or making what you want for yourself.

Dunce.

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Then what on earth is money good for?

Other Fellow.

Ah, that's where the joke comes in. Money is a device for enabling **some** people to get at whatever they want without paying for it.

Dunce.

What is paying?

Other Fellow.

Damaging yourself in some way: parting with what you are in need of; enduring something injurious; depriving yourself of health or strength or rest; spending more than your exertions can restore to you; impoverishing your **life** in some way. Money lets **some** people get all they want, and more too, by only damaging **other** people; so that they themselves are not required to pay at all.

Dunce.

Oh, but I shouldn't like to do that. Is there not enough of everything in this great big world for everyone to get at what they are in want of without damaging anyone?

Other Fellow.

Yes; and now—a—days it can all be got at too. But, then, there's not **money** enough to go round; and as I said before, you are bound to get money before you will be allowed to get at anything better, or even to make and use anything better, for yourself. And if no one **gives** you money which some one else has paid for, you will have to pay for some yourself. But whether you are one of the people who pay damage or no, when you have once got money enough away from other people, you can bribe anyone with it to let you have anything else you choose.

Dunce.

What people are they who don't pay?

Other Fellow.

Well, they have many names. They call themselves "noble" people, and "gentle" people; "upper" people, "higher" people, the "best" people, and so on. They speak of one another's "majesty," "highness," "grace," "holiness," and "eminence"; and are addressed as "honorable," "reverend," "learned," "worshipful"; and, in the absence of the other epithets, never miss getting themselves called "respectable."

Dunce.

What pretty names! Why do they call themselves all that?

Other Fellow.

Their god only knows. (There are three Ms and an N in their god's name. Aye! And he **is** in the know, too; and "has mercy on them, miserable sinners.") But they only call themselves by fancy names when money is not

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being inquired about. When it is, and especially when they are thinking about the man in the street, they call themselves Sovereigns, Legislators, Owners, Employers, Pastors, Masters and Benefactors. And the man in the street is mostly careful to get well out of the way of their carriages—and-pairs before he has the cheek to nickname them Bosses, Exploiters, Sweaters, Parasites, Loafers and Frauds. They are all men of **means**, that's why.

Dunce.

What is a man of means?

Other Fellow.

I told you before: men with money enough to procure necessaries, comforts, luxuries, leisure and pleasure without paying for them and entirely at other folk's expense; and then to force these folks to put up with them.

Dunce.

But don't people pay for what **money** they have?

Other Fellow.

Some do; some don't.

Dunce.

Who have the most money; the people who pay for it, or the people who don't?

Other Fellow.

The people who don't. They are called "rich" people, because they get more means than they can use up. They grow tall and live a long time, and are very much respected.

Dunce.

And what are the people called who pay for what money they have?

Other Fellow.

They are called "poor" people. They spend their time, strength and ability in making necessaries, comforts and luxuries to give the rich people. They generally die early, and often miserably. They are not at all respected or envied.

Dunce.

Why do they spend themselves like that?

Other Fellow.

To buy a little money with, from the rich people whom they make the presents to. You see, they cannot have any food or clothing for themselves till they have bought some money. And without any food or clothing they could not go on spending their time and strength again to-morrow, and then the rich people would miss their

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luxuries.

Dunce.

But when they have bought enough money for their food and clothes, whom do they give it to? where do the food and clothes come from?

Other Fellow.

One question at a time, please. They **don't** give in the money where the food and clothes come from. They give the money to some people who have custody of the food and clothing, but who have not made it; and these people give a little of the money to the poor people who **have** made the food and clothes, keeping the rest for themselves. Sometimes the money is handed through several, and what passes on gets less and less, so that the men who buy the last shillings of it with the time and toil which they have spent away in providing the good are, you see, poor men also. This way of going on is called "business."

Dunce.

Stop! Let me understand. Then you mean to say that some rich folk, whom for clearness I'll call Strong, Sons & Co., get the full produce of the poor men's life-time and life-strength, and turn it into counters, and then hand back a very few of the counters so that the poor men may have them as tickets for useful stuff for Strong & Co. to-morrow; and then do you tell me that another lot of rich people, whom we'll call Rong Brothers & Co., take the tickets as a bribe for the clothes and food, and keep back part of the counters from the other poor men who have made the clothes and food on like terms?

Other Fellow.

Yes, that's something like how it is. Only you've got to recollect that, with Strong, Sons & Co., over the way, insisting upon having everything they can think of for nothing, and forcing **everybody** to take their counters in exchange or go without, Messrs. Rong Brothers & Co. couldn't live **at all** (let alone live idly or "respectably") if they did not stop some of the goods from going straight where they are wanted, so as to be able to stop some of the counters coming from the other direction. They then let the goods pass on their way on condition of receiving **more** counters than they gave up in order to get the goods into their custody. What do you think of it all?

Dunce.

Why, if you ask me plainly, I think the rich men are impudent rogues, and the poor men are damned fools. Which are you, sir, may I ask?

Other Fellow.

Oh, I'm one of the damned fools, or I certainly should not have answered your questions on the square. But, mark you, the impudence of the other gang is **legal**. There's a deal in that. And it takes a clever dunce like you to find out I am a fool. Most people think a man wise and prudent who puts up with what is legal. But you're right; I **am** a fool.

Dunce.

Legal! legal! what's **legal**?

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Other Fellow.

Oh, come now! Have I got to explain that too? Legal means according to Parliamentary law: the business way of managing to live by money, at the cost of other people's lives and liberties is according to law, whether fools call it impudence or not.

Dunce.

Isn't there any plainer word to tell me what Parliamentary law is; and why it makes people seem wise who put up with being impudently treated?

Other Fellow.

Why, Parliamentary law is whatever a few score of fellow have settled among themselves to make tens of millions of other people conform to; in fact, everybody is made to conform who has not extra money enough to make it worth the while of anyone in office to let him go his own way instead.

Dunce.

Oh! ah! But that isn't telling me **what** "law" is. What is it those fellows want you to conform to?

Other Fellow.

Well, you've got to conform to anything, no matter what, that more than half this little lot of fellows want to see other people do. Sometimes it's one thing; sometimes it's another: but it is always whatever this lot of fellows suppose will turn out best for **business** .

Dunce.

Then, it is only the wishes of the bigger number of this little lot that all other people are made to conform to? And the wishes of these law-fellows is whatever is good for business? And business is the plan of getting most money into the hands of people who pay least? And money is a means by which these people may make it difficult for the rest of us to get at what is necessary in order to make useful things with, and difficult to have the use of them when made? (Scratches his head.) And folks are "damned fools" who don't see the wisdom of putting up with it all.....Please, sir, what is this country called? because it seems to me that everyone in it is off his chump.

Other Fellow.

You dunce! It is a glorious Empire! The land of the **free** !!

Dunce.

Free what? Free business-law makers? or free rich law-breakers? or free swindlers and sweaters? or what?

Other Fellow.

Sh ! It isn't respectable to talk like that. Free **citizens**, of course! A free citizen is a law-abiding citizen. You are free just as far as you do what you are told.

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Dunce.

I say, you're having a game with me! I'm not such a dunce that I don't know what "free" means. It doesn't mean abiding by what you are told, especially when you can't "abide" the chaps that tell you, nor yet their impudence. Free means exactly the opposite. It means living just how your own give-and-take commonsense makes you want to live. It means not being made to toil when you are in want of rest; and it means not being forced to be idle when you want to be at work.

Other Fellow.

Oh, that sort of freedom is only fit for angels and the other lower animals. It may suit beavers and birds and bees all right; but you and I are free citizens, you know, because we can take our chance of choosing **whose** wishes we will conform to. We can have a "Yes," or "No," to give to anyone who wants to be a law-maker; and if a certain number of others choose him too, then he can be one of those whose will will become our law and everyone else's, that is, of course, if he is one of those who, **by counting heads**, prevails over the others in Parliament. You must see how much freer that makes a citizen than having only himself to consult! And a country may well be called free where nearly everyone can help choose his own law-master, some one whose head may chance to count up on the right side.

Dunce.

Nearly everyone? I suppose that means nine out of ten of us? Well, there's me and my wife at home, and my aged mother, and my daughter, aged 22; and two strong sons of 17 and 18. I suppose if nearly all of us can help choose whose wishes we'll conform to (so that business may go on) we all of us at home can have a choice; unless perhaps me, because everyone knows I'm a dunce. My mother and wife and daughter and sons are very sharp witted.

Other Fellow.

No: on the contrary, it's only you in all the family who may help choose someone to impose on the lot of you **his** way of keeping business what it is, and of keeping the rich people where they are, that is, in position and in possession.

Dunce.

Lord! how queer! What knocks me is your saying we are **all** free citizens. If many households are constituted like mine, I should say it was only a small minority who may even choose, and it's a chance whose choice wins; and that believing in one master more than another has nothing to do with being **free**. But now, explain to me why anyone **must** choose any law-maker at all?

Other Fellow.

Must choose? Well, there's nothing to make you choose **anyone** if you don't want to. And there's no **reason**, if you come to that, why people who don't like to spend their lives in working and suffering for the leisure and pleasure of those who take all their means from them, and run the laws to save themselves from being opposed, no reason **at all** why they should choose anyone. But I suppose they do it because they good-naturedly believe the man they chooses cares more about them than himself; or because they believe it is good for somebody else even if it isn't very advantageous for themselves to have to conform to whomsoever wants to have his will made into law. And then, you see, if the poor don't help choose, they rightly suppose the rich will have all the choosing to themselves; and everything would be more business-like than ever. For, if you don't help choose, mark you, you have to conform to what **others** choose, all the same.

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Dunce.

What a hell of a fix! But you keep saying "**have** to conform," and "**make** you conform," How's that? How can you be **made** to do anything in a land of free citizens?

Other Fellow.

What I mean by being made to conform is that if it is known that you don't want to conform you'll not get employed to help fatten any business man and his covey. And if he don't want you for his job you'll starve, just in proportion as you are free and law-abiding. That is your impersonal, non-aggressive legal punishment at his hands. And if you really set about going your own way as a man, wherever and whenever you think the law is unfair, the you'll get a personal and direct punishment. Why, man alive! you've heard of "coppers" and police-courts, and soldiers and bullets and prisons and gallows, eh? You live in the enemy's country wherever you go.

Dunce.

Yes; but even now I can't imagine how it is possible to get the prisons built, or to find police and soldiers enough to do any particular harm with, if there are so few rich people in comparison with poor people. For, I suppose it is only rich people who care to build prisons or arsenals, or who will care to be coppers or soldiers or hangmen?

Other Fellow.

You Juggins! No. The rich people can't do all that! Why they want all their time for the Turf, and clubs, and big "receptions," and "little" dinners, etc., etc., etc. The prison-builders, and bullet and bomb makers, gallows-men, soldiers and bobbies are all poor devils like you and me! The rich folk carry out their law against the poor with the help of the poor. If our sort didn't do it for them, and bully our own sort in favour of the big bugs, then it wouldn't get done at all, because it **couldn't**.

Dunce.

Then being poor seems to make men do whatever rich folk want done; even if it is to injure themselves and to help kill one another.

Other Fellow.

Yes: being poor means being governed, body and soul. Being rich means governing.

Dunce.

Govern? that's another new word.

Other Fellow.

Same as law. That is to say, Government is a trick in two moves: First move, make your will "law"; second move, injure people who disobey your will, that is who "break" your law.

Dunce

(indignantly).

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And, top of all this, you mean to tell me the people who are wise not to laugh at the officers, spoil the arsenals, make a bonfire of law—papers and title—deeds, and

Other Fellow.

For Peace and Quiet's sake stop **that** nonsense. Why, it's true it's Anar, at any rate it's revo I mean it's downright **unconstitutional** to talk that way! It is quite constitutional to lock men up for less than that sometimes.

Dunce

(after reflection).

Well, I've got an idea that can't be unconstitutional. Suppose all the poor people chose a little set of men like themselves to make the laws, how would the rich people get along then?

Other Fellow.

Come, dunce; you're getting quite a politician! And that's the very thing the rich folk more than anyone else would be glad to see you stop at, because your interests would have to lie their way then, and real change could be avoided.

Dunce.

How's that? Surely poor men's laws would be all fair and square; and there would be plenty of everything bread, occupation, education, and liberty, for everyone then, and no money to hitch the wheels with.

Other Fellow.

Poor men's laws! Ha! ha! Poor men don't need laws to make them able to dig and plant, or build machines and houses, or make roads, or steer ships, or take notice and learn things, and think. They can do all that as easily as bees can make a honeycomb and fill it, directly you sweep all the legal money—rubbish out of the way, and let them get at the land, and at the machinery they have already made. It is only parasites that can't get hold of what they want any way except by turning the workers' honey into money, and then wiping it into their own pockets by the great law—trick.

Dunce.

Well, but poor men in the talking—shop might talk **their** wills into law, mightn't they? And make it **illegal** for anyone to live at another people's cost.

Other Fellow.

No: poor men are not patent men, warranted to **keep square** where it is cheaper to **turn round**. They are just like other men so far as that goes, and once inside the "gas—house" their first job is to stop there, and get themselves made into rich men if they can. Their "honorable" position makes them change their tastes to fit the present system and their memories get hazy about their mates in the street. And it soon dawns upon them that in order to run **any laws at all** with reference to a class that the laws **don't suit**, it is needful to do more than talk and report and tie knots in red tape. They must have the disposal of **Tyranny's tricolor!**

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Dunce.

Eh? What's that?

Other Fellow.

Tyranny's three colors, I say, Red, Black, and Blue; Soldiers, Priests and Policemen. If they have truncheons, cordite, and hell–fire to drive their laws home with, well and good. But law, without these little aids, ends in gas, and looks silly. And these three implements cost **money**, don't you see? How are law–makers to expect to get the business folks' money to pay for brute force and clerical cunning, when it is to oppose business and riches by it?

Dunce.

Why, by taxes. I didn't know what law was till you told me, but the tax–collector told me the law could **force** me to pay my taxes, and had a right to the money to keep up the Royal Family, and the Army, and the Church, and God knows what. But if **we** had the government we could force the rich people to pay for things **we** care about, couldn't we? Education, and Science, and Art, and beautiful smooth roads and railways, and electric locomotion, and miles of splendid gardens and free parks. Oh, my!

Other Fellow.

How you do gallop on. It is all wrong. Governments can only get money into their hands by taxing folks who have money. And more and more people would be short of money, to pay government or anyone else, if business got shaky or trade came to a standstill. And business and trade **would** get shaky directly people with a little money stopped a trick called "investing." And they **would** stop investing if Govern–ment couldn't be trusted to back up business for them, and to leave the control of the land and other capital just where it is. No, no, dunce. Even if it were any good to anyone to have this or that set or class of men forcing their notions on all the rest, there would still be no chance of getting government worked by our sort in our behalf. No need to waste time and energy that way. Everything that really wants doing by arrangements made directly among those able and willing to do it, without any formalities forced on them (with fines attached) by men at a distance not directly concerned in it. Red tape is expensive, mind you, besides tangling everybody's fingers.

Dunce.

Then what earthly reason have the people for not **joining together** and getting whatever there's enough material and machinery for, without bothering about the law? What is there to stop the poor policemen and soldiers from helping the people to employ themselves without orders from officers. What earthly reason

Other Fellow.

Look here! You forget the Church. There's no **earthly** reason, but there's an **unearthly** one. The priests and parsons who live at the people's cost, like the rest of the business world. They don't produce any wealth but they are allowed by the law to use up a good deal in exchange for the service they do the Royalties and Law–and–War–makers, Bankers and Stockbrokers, Pleasure–seekers and loafing Landgrabbers. Their job is to keep the people's minds dull and quiet, so that they should not make awkward inquiries, and find out how the whole swindle began and what it's kept going for. They chloroform the people's wits.

Dunce.

That's a bit! How can they chloroform anyone who doesn't choose?

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Other Fellow.

Why, by telling them corrupting lies about wrongs and rights, and making out there's a dreadful curse on people who don't believe what parsons and priests say, and by keeping them so ignorant that they have no chance of discovering where the lies come in. These lovers of darkness have the decency to dress up in black; it is about the only honest thing they do. They cadge for money to run their music, illuminations, scents, millinery, and entertainments in church bait for women and children' and, bock of it all, their job is to **steal a march** on straightforward progress, so as to keep the game as long as possible in the hands of those classes whose interests it is to run churches. They are after their own grub in the only way they know. It is a very respectable way of lying, cheating and tyrannising. In this free country these black ones are all the sons of gentiles and nobles and highly-respectable commercials.

Dunce.

Still I don't see how they can tie the hands of the people and prevent soldiers and police from joining them in trying for freedom.

Other Fellow.

Tie their **hands**? no. They know a trick worth two of that. They tie their **consciences** while they are young. They are funks about argument with men, but by flattering and baiting the women they get the children trusted to them in the schools of ignorance, because the little creatures are so defenceless against lies, that the best of them can be made to grow up with just that shaped conscience that it suits law and property for wage-slaves to have. When the people find out what the Church is after, then there's hope for the people. Not before.

Dunce.

Well, your information has made me feel sure of one thing. Law is only a fine word for coarse, cruel force wrapped up in fraud and cunning. And its only use is to keep up property and to keep rich people easy and unopposed. It is a big infernal **swindle**!

Other Fellow.

Agreed, old man. It is not Power but Freedom we want. You are a dunce, and I am a fool; but I think it would puzzle a philosopher to prove we were wrong.

PLAYED OUT.

Too long have been played
Moral tricks of mere trade,
They've brought us well-nigh to perdition;
For trade as a saviour
Of human behaviour
Is placed in a d d false position.

The base of sound moral
Leaves room for no quarrel,
But binds every life to its brothers;

PLAYED OUT.

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While the meaning of trade
Is "Sell! **Sell!** till you're 'made.'
"Get power, Number One; **hang** the others!"

HOW IT'S DONE.

"How shall I fill this church of mine
"On which my power depends?"
"Say what old Mammon wants to hear,
"And he will help your ends."

"How shall I win an echoing name,
"As one too just to sin?"
"Why, own a 'Daily,' sweat your staff,
"And puff yourself therein."

"But how to get the paper read?"
The tradesman swift replies:
"Just advertise my shoddy, sir,
"And then I'll buy your lies."

"How shall I make my son a lord?"
Sighs yonder man of beer.
One who has done it tips the wink,
And whispers in his ear

"Run your own venture on the cheap,
"And flatter those you sweat;
"Give moral reasons everywhere,
"And keep what of you get."

"How shall I get my weary wife
"An hour of needed rest?"
"How shall I feed the little child
"That's starving at her breast?"

"Disguise your principles, my man,
"Accept a priest's advice,
"And sell your soul, to feed your child,
"At labour's lowest price."

"How shall I get our daughter wed?"

HOW IT'S DONE.

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Cries Dives to his wife
The answer was so infamous
I ran for my dear life.

THE ANATHEMASIAN CREED.

Whosoever will be damned, before all things it is necessary that he hold the Capitalistic Faith.

Which Faith except everyone do keep whole and unqualified, without doubt he shall progress indefinitely.

And the Capitalistic Faith is this: that we worship one Mammon in Trinity and Trinity in Unity.

Neither confounding the monopolies nor dividing the substance (especially not dividing the substance).

For there is one monopoly of the Money–Bag, another of the Statute, and another of the Holy Church.

But the Mammon of the Money–Bag, of the Statute, and of the Holy Church is all one; the vainglory equal, the majesty co–infernial.

Such as the Money–Bag is, such is the Statute, and such is the Holy Church.

The Money–Bag indiscriminate, the Statute indiscriminate, and the Holy Church indiscriminate.

The Money–Bag indefensible, the Statute indefensible, and the Holy Church indefensible.

The Money–Bag infernal, the Statute infernal, and the Holy Church infernal.

And yet they are not three infernals but one infernal.

As also there are not three indefensibles, nor three undiscriminated, but one undiscriminated and one indefensible.

And yet there are not three Almightyies but one Almighty.

So is the Money–bag a god, the Statute a god, and the Holy Church a god.

And yet there are not three gods, but one god.

Likewise the Money–bag is Law, the Statute is Law, and the Holy Church is Law.

And yet not three Laws, but one Law.

For like as we are compelled by the Capitalistic Verity to acknowledge every privileged personage by himself to be God and Law.

So are we forbidden by the Capitalistic superstition to say there be three Gods, or three Laws.

The Money–Bag is made of none, neither needed nor earned.

The Statute is of the Money–Bag alone, not earned nor needed, but purchased.

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The Holy Church is of the Money–Bag and the Statute, neither earned nor needed nor purchased, but resulting.

So there is one Mammon, not three Mammons; one Statute, not three Statutes; one Holy Church, not three Holy Churches.

And in this Trinity none is afore or after the other, none is greater or less than another.

But the whole three Jingoos are co–infernal together and co–equal.

So that in all things as is aforesaid the Unity in Trinity and the Trinity in Unity is to be worshipped.

This is the Capitalistic Faith, which except a man believe faithfully he may possibly be saved.

Glory be taken from the Money–Bag, and from the Statute, and from the Holy Church.

As it was in the beginning so it isn't now, nor ever will be again. Progress without end. Amen.

WHO MADE THE CAKE?

"In the sweat of your brows," the rich man said, "ye who are useful shall eat your bread. In the sweat of your brows, too don't mistake we pastors and masters will live on cake." Year in, year out, the sweating was done; they toiled in the factory, toiled in the sun; for the master still left them a daily crust, and the pastor still preached that the text was just. Year in, year out, grew the pile of laws; this point grew weightier, clause by clause, "To him that holdeth shall more be given; from him that yieldeth take all but heaven."

The Lord said, "Sweat of the brow brings bread." It was something shrewder the landlord said: "Out of their sweat–won bread we'll draw cake for ourselves, and our rights by law." The parson in preaching quite left that out; the people were foolish and dull, no doubt; but landlords' hirelings have such an air when they mount in the pulpit or groan in prayer. They have lived on the fat of the land, you see, by letting the will of the landlord be, and by urging the winners of daily bread to bow to God's will in all they said.

Well, a new day dawned, and the people awoke, and found it was only old Mammon who spoke; they examined the swindle that held them fast, and got to the back of the trick at last. The sweat of the patient, toil–worn brow, buys more than the vouched–for bread by now. Surely, O world, there's a sad mistake, for where are the people who made the cake? How are they cared for, how are they fed? Care–worn and bound with their crust of bread; while the folk whom they feed make a law, you see, to keep themselves leisurely, merry, and free.

Men of the factory! men of the field! you who have won all this plentiful yield, cry to the world for your children's sake

"Those who have made it shall taste of the cake!"

(back)