

which make men careless and cheerful under evil conditions, scoffing at public spirit and civic self-sacrifice, delighting in wars and boat-races and football matches, and scorning sweeter manners and purer laws. Not any of these things constitutes the most important thing in the world—not all of them together. The harvest to the husbandman, the product to the producer, strength and wisdom in man, beauty and gentleness in woman, health, happiness, and long life to all, and humane treatment to the lower animals—these things and the conditions that will finally render these things possible form together the most important thing in the world. As the theological formula runs, "Seek ye first the Kingdom of Heaven and all these things shall be added unto you," so the newer and more practical formula may be said to be "Seek ye first economic justice, and all these things shall be added unto you." We often hear men say that life would not be worth living if there were no Hereafter—by which they mean no serenely happy existence of the disembodied spirit. I do not say that. I do not say that life would not be worth living even if we had no hope of better conditions upon earth. An active and healthy person finds life interesting and streaked with strips of happiness—holidays, honeymoons, personal successes, the gladdening defeat and discomfiture of wicked enemies—no matter how evil his social surroundings may be. But I do say that, the hope of, and the belief in, a great future for the human race on this earth give a man courage to face difficulties, and a happy unconcern as to consequences, such as the early Christians and the Scottish Covenanters carried with them. This hope and this belief inspire affection between man and man such as I have seen no other faith, creed, sect, or movement inspire. The pictures of an imaginary heaven, with pearly gates and golden streets and jasper walls and all the quiring and wheeling of Milton's heavenly militia, make a tinsel show indeed by comparison with the perfectly natural and realisable conception of a new earth and a new man. This great hope and belief, moreover, play an incalculably beneficent part in supplying driving force and inspiration for the slow business of social reform—probably the slowest of all kinds of progress—certainly much slower than the progress made in applied science and the arts of life.

The most important thing in the world is easy to state thus broadly ; but what of the days we live in ? What indications do they afford of an approach to the millennial state ?

None of us here can remember a time when the forces of reaction were so strong as they seem in Britain at present. When the Gladstone Administration of 1868 to '74 was turned out of office after a career of comparatively brilliant reforms rapidly consummated, there followed a period of reactionary wallowing, during which Parliament and people did many things calculated to grieve the friends of progress. It was during this time that Queen Victoria was styled Empress of India by the theatrical Disraeli. It