

LETTER TO GEORG FUCHS

(1931)

After reading your letter I felt a wave of the deepest sympathy, but it was soon halted by two reflections - an internal difficulty and an external obstacle. A sentence from your own preface offers me an apt expression of the former: 'No doubt, however, there are people who have so poor an opinion of the civilized humanity of to-day that they deny the existence of a world conscience.' I believe I am one of those people. For instance, I could not subscribe to the assertion that the treatment of convicted prisoners is a disgrace to our civilization. On the contrary, a voice would tell me, it is in perfect harmony with our civilization, a necessary expression of the brutality and lack of understanding which dominate the civilized humanity of the present time. And if by some miracle people suddenly became convinced that the reform of the penal system is the first and most urgent task before our civilization, what else would emerge than that capitalist society has not now the means for meeting the expenditure which that reform would demand? The second, the external, difficulty is brought to light in the passages in your letter in which you exalt me into a recognized intellectual leader and cultural innovator and attribute to me the privilege of having the ear of the civilized world. I only wish, my dear Sir, that it were so: I should not in that case refuse your request. But it seems to me that I am *persona ingrata*, if not *ingratissima*, with the German people - and moreover with the learned and the unlearned alike. I hope most positively that you will not think that I feel seriously aggrieved by these signs of disapproval. It is tens of years since I have been so foolish; measured by your example, moreover, it would be too ridiculous. I only mention these trivialities to confirm the fact that I am no desirable advocate for a book which seeks to kindle its readers' sympathies on behalf of a good cause. Let me add that your book is a moving one, noble, wise and good.