

THE CATHOLIC DOCTRINE OF PROPERTY¹

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It would seem that there is need for a simple statement of the Catholic doctrine on the subject of property. Some of our people are being touched with Socialism, and their talk makes it evident that they have no knowledge that there is any such Catholic teaching. They do not even see the bearing of the snatches of Catholic teaching that they come across. I find a Catholic quoting St. Gregory the Great on the neglect of the duties of property, evidently under the impression that he is denying the right of property. The speaker comments as follows: "If Victor Grayson had said that in the twentieth century, the Catholic Church would have rung with denunciation; and if I in those old days had contended that private individuals had a right to the common land I should have been told that I was setting myself against the Bishops." It is useless to tell such a man that the Church is unchanging, that the teaching of St. Gregory is the teaching of Pius X. We must tell him that he cannot hope to understand what he is quoting until he has grasped the teaching of the Church as a whole. Will he take the trouble to do this? There is little hope of it in an unthinking age when most men are habituated to a position of irrational compromise in religious matters and employ an armoury of mutually destructive arguments to attack their neighbours on the right hand and on the left.

Some minds ask why there should be a Catholic doctrine of property at all and what the Church has to do with State ownership and private ownership. Tell me: are you not pleading for justice for the worker and denouncing the

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present system as wrong, unjust, immoral? Then you are arguing a question of justice and injustice, right and wrong, a question of morals; you have entered the domain of the Church. In matters of morals she is to us Catholics an infallible guide. Do not think, then, that she has left us without a clear statement of principles as to the rights and duties of property. Where will you look for her principles? If you are a Catholic you will ask them from the living voice of the Church now speaking; for that is the Catholic rule of faith. If you are a Protestant you will select isolated passages from the Scriptures and the Fathers and understand them in your own sense, making "prophecy" of them by private interpretation; for that is one Protestant rule of faith. And you will assure the living Church that she does not understand her past sayings and the teachings of her Founder; asking her to recognize her own fallibility and to let you lead her back to the truth.

We shall consider the doctrine under four heads:—

The Right to Daily Bread (p. 2).

The Right to Own Sources of Supply (p. 7).

Founded on Natural Law (p. 8).

Sacred from State Law (p. 11).

The Duties of Ownership (p. 14).

Property gives power over others (p. 14).

Duties of Charity (p. 17).

Duties of Justice (p. 19).

Voluntary Communism (p. 22).

The last chapter deals with the

Difficulty of Understanding the Fathers (p. 26).

I. The Right to Daily Bread.

1. Let us first be clear as to the difference between the right of managing or controlling property on the one hand and the right of using and enjoying it on the other. The two are quite distinct. You may have one without the other. In a family the children have the use of their clothing, but not the control of it. The parents have the control, but not the use of it. My right to enjoy the use of a public park or library gives me no right to manage and control it. The Prisons Commissioners have the control of the convict's cell, but not the use and enjoyment of it. The distinction of the two rights is recognized by all

schools. What change does the Socialist ask for in regard to the means of production? This. In order that every individual may have the use of them, let no individual have the control of them; let the State take control. That is, the right of use and enjoyment for every individual; the right of control and management for the State. Now, it is evident that either of these rights may be called in question. You may question my right to use the park or you may question the Council's right to manage it. In writing about property a man may discuss the right to use things or he may discuss the right to control them. And the reader must know which of the two he is discussing. When a Socialist attacks private control of property do not think he is attacking your private enjoyment of your daily bread. That is simply to misunderstand him. There is a type of Socialist who turns on us with a sneering congratulation that at long last we understand this distinction between control and use. Yes, we understand it. Not at long last, but from long, long ago, from the Apostles and the Fathers. To them and to us it is a commonplace. But it has to be insisted on for your sake. You, who see it so well in your own argument, cannot keep it in mind while you read ours. When we speak of monopolizing the use of things you take our words about the control of things. When we say the use is for all men you understand that the control is for all men. If I misunderstood your demand for public control as a demand for public meals and public beds, very rightly would you ask me to understand you before I criticize. But when you fill pages with what the Fathers have written you take no trouble to see which they are speaking of, the use or the control of property. When they denounce selfish use of property you say they are attacking private ownership. And when we point out the blunder you have nothing but a sneer for our fine-drawn distinctions and scornful laughter for our suggesting that a Socialist does not understand.

We shall deal first with the right to use things to meet our daily wants, and afterwards with the right to possess permanent property. As to the first, the Church teaches that external things were made by God to supply the needs of all mankind. From this two things follow.

Whoever owns property inherits with it the duty of seeing that it does its appointed work of supplying the needs of men.

And a man in extreme need has the first claim on the things that will relieve his need, no matter who may "own" them.

2. This doctrine, that private property is still at the service of all the needy, seems strong. It will seem stronger when we have it in the words of the Teachers of the Church.

St. Thomas Aquinas (*Summa*, II II, 66, 1 and 2) asks first, "Is the 'possession' of external things natural to man?" and secondly, "Is it lawful for any one to 'possess' anything as his private property?"

From comparing the two questions it is evident that in the first "possession" only means making use of what we need, while the second deals with taking exclusive possession and control of permanent things. With this in mind let us read St. Thomas's answers.

"I. Is the possession of external things natural to man? An external thing may be considered in two ways: (1) As regards its nature. This is not under human power, but only divine, which all things obey absolutely. (2) As regards its use. In this man has natural lordship over external things. For by his understanding and by his will he is able to use external things for his own purposes, as being made for him. For always, as we have seen, the less perfect are for the sake of the more perfect; and this is the argument Aristotle uses (*Politics*, I) to prove that possession of external things is natural to man. This natural lordship over other creatures, belonging to man because of his reason, wherein lies his likeness to God, is made plain at his creation (Gen. i.), where it is said, 'Let us make man to our image and likeness, and let him be over the fishes of the sea,' &c.

"II. Is it lawful for any one to possess anything as his private property? In regard to an external thing man has two powers. One is the power of managing and controlling it, and as to this it is lawful for a man to possess private property. It is, moreover, necessary for human life, for three reasons [which he proceeds to give]. The other power man has over external things is the using of them; and as to this a man must not hold external things as his own property, but as every one's, so as to make no difficulty, I mean, in sharing them when others are in need. Whence the Apostle says (1 Tim.): 'Charge the rich of this world to give easily, to communicate their goods,' &c."

3. It is useless reading St. Thomas rapidly. But a careful reading of these passages will show that he is mapping out the ground scientifically. So far he has laid down that the use of lower creatures to meet his own wants is a natural right of man. That private property in the sense of private control and management is lawful; and necessary. That the property so owned still remains what God made it—a source for supplying man's needs. So that private ownership is only a "stewardship and governance" of things that were made by God for a definite purpose. This he makes yet clearer when he comes to set forth the doctrine that a starving man may and must use his neighbour's goods. It is worth while translating his statement of this doctrine (II II, 66, 7):—

"Human law cannot repeal natural law or divine law. Now, according to the natural order determined by Divine Providence, lower things are meant to satisfy the wants of men. Therefore the division and appropriation of these things which comes from human law does not affect the fact that a man's wants must be satisfied from such things. Therefore the things which some people have beyond their own need are by natural law liable for the support of the poor; whence St. Ambrose says, 'The bread that you hold back is the bread of the starving; the clothing that you lock up is the clothing of the naked; the money that you bury is the ransom and deliverance of the wretched.' But since the needy are many and they cannot all be relieved with the same thing, the applying of each man's property to the relief of the needy is left to his own judgement. Nevertheless, if there be a plain and urgent necessity, such that it is clear that a present need must be relieved by whatever means is at hand (for instance, when personal danger threatens and there is no other help), then a man may lawfully relieve his own necessities with somebody else's property, whether he take it openly or secretly; nor is this really theft or robbery."

4. The newspaper Socialist is quite capable of reading these passages triumphantly as if they denied the right of private management of property, whereas they affirm it as strongly as can be. Observe exactly what St. Thomas does say of private ownership in the sense of control and management: It is lawful. Further, it is necessary. Even for the relief of the needy, the management of each man's property

is left to his own judgement. Except in urgent necessity. But on the other side he says to the private owner, Do not imagine you can change the nature of your property. It was made by God to meet men's wants: it is put under private management to carry out that purpose, not to defeat it. All human law is to find ways and means how, when, and where to carry out the divine law; not to defeat the divine law. As the manager's duty is to arrange ways and means to carry out his chief's orders, not to defeat them. If this property is yours, then you are answerable for seeing that it supplies the wants of men.

We shall have to build on this principle when we come to consider the duties of property. For the present the important thing is to see that it is for Catholics a foundation principle. By it the Fathers judged the rich. On it Pope Leo XIII bases his plan of reform.

5. The axiom that "All things are common in extreme need" has been misunderstood. The real meaning is clearly stated above by St. Thomas. When "it is clear that a present need must be relieved by whatever means is at hand: for instance, when personal danger threatens and there is no other help"—then whatever means is at hand is common property, and the "owner" cannot refuse the use of it. That surely is common sense. If to save a life we want instantly a loaf, or brandy, or a life-buoy, then it does not matter whose loaf or brandy or life-buoy it is that is at hand; it must be used. Used, of course, for the relief of the needy; not for the world at large. And used for the time of need only, not permanently confiscated. When your life has been saved, you return the life-buoy and pay for the brandy: "In extreme need, all things are common": *all things* of course means all things that are required to meet the extreme need. If there is a man overboard, he must have my life-buoy; but that does not make the whole ship common property. It is no reason for "socializing" the captain's charts. There are sick men in England this moment to whom brandy means life or death; that is a good reason for giving them the nearest brandy, but not for socializing our railways.

Yet I find a Socialist gravely understanding the axiom to mean that because men are starving in England, everything has become public property. It is an instance of the

confusion above mentioned, the inability to bear in mind the distinction between use and control. The Fathers say, If any one is in extreme need, *he* must have the *use* of anything he needs. The Socialist takes them to say, If any one is in extreme need, *the State* must take *control* of all property.

II. The Right to own Sources of Supply.

6. The Catholic doctrine which we are to consider next may be stated briefly in the words of Pope Leo XIII :—

“Man not only can possess the fruits of the earth, but also the very soil. The right to possess private property is derived from nature, not from man; and the State has the right to control its use in the interests of the public good alone, but by no means to absorb it altogether. The first and most fundamental principle, therefore, if one would undertake to alleviate the condition of the masses, must be the inviolability of private property.”¹

Two questions arise. Why say that private ownership is a right derived from nature; especially when you teach that God made the world for all mankind? And even if it be a natural right, why cannot the State absorb it for the public good?

7. We have spoken of daily bread, the things man needs for his immediate preservation; to these each man has a natural right, which no human law can destroy. Next comes the question of property which will secure a constant supply of what we need. Does my need of wool give me a right to own sheep? Does my need of sheep give me a right to own pasture?

Here there are two facts to be taken into account. The first is that what is used by all is soon destroyed. The pasture that is ample for me will soon cease to be a pasture if it is used by every one. The well that supplies me will never have any water in it if the whole town tries to use it. We have more modern instances in the destruction of fisheries that are open to all, the destruction of forests and of wild cattle in America. Pocock tells us that at the present moment the cow pastures in the Western States are being destroyed by the intrusion of sheep.

The second fact is that property in private hands

¹ *The Condition of the Working Classes*, pp. 5, 37, 11 (C.T.S., 1d.).

becomes more productive. While the wild cattle are killed off, the domestic herds multiply. While the common pastures are eaten bare, the enclosed land produces tons of hay. It is important to see the reason of this contrast. A public apple-tree will never have ripe fruit on it, and will never be dug about. Why should I leave the fruit to ripen? If I do not take it some one else will; it will never ripen. Why should I try to improve it by digging and pruning? It will do no good to me; nor to any one else, since the fruit is never allowed to ripen. There is no encouragement for even the unselfish to nurse and develop common property; there is a strong motive for the selfish to extract all they can from it.

These two facts, that a man depending on public sources cannot be sure of getting a living, and that the same sources in private hands are far more productive, justify the next point in our doctrine—that a family has a right to appropriate so much of the sources of supply as will secure for it a permanent livelihood and make it independent of all others. My need of to-day's supplies gives me the right to hunt and capture wild game. So my need of continual supplies day after day gives me the right to seize any unoccupied source of supply and make it a source of continual supply.

8. As this is the point where our teaching is in direct opposition to Socialism, we must look into it in detail. Why do we say that I have a natural right to take what Nature has provided for mankind? The answer is that Nature's provision for mankind must include provision for me. If Nature intends these to be sources of supply, I am only carrying out Nature's intention when I make them into permanent sources of supply for me and mine. It is exactly like appropriating daily bread.

The eatable things of this earth, plants and animals, are the food provided by Almighty God for all mankind. They are of no use until some one takes possession of them and makes them food not for all mankind, but for himself personally. It is pure nonsense to challenge a man's right to do this: to say "You have stolen mankind's rabbit and are cooking it with mankind's firewood." For if the rabbit and the firewood are to be jealously reserved for all mankind, and no individual is to be allowed to appropriate them, then every man of us will starve in

ference to the rights of all mankind; which is pure nonsense. Daily bread for mankind implies daily bread for me. And my taking possession of a share is simply the carrying out and giving effect to the principle that these things are daily bread for all mankind. Nature made them mankind's food: "*Natura ius commune generavit.*" My seizing for my own use makes this rabbit my personal and private food: "*usurpatio jus fecit privatum.*" And this is not in any sense usurpation, nor going against nature. It is using the reason and other powers which Nature has given me to carry out Nature's intention.

All this applies to permanent sources of supply. The world is full of things that can be developed so as to give perpetual supplies. Land to make hayfields and cornfields; timber to make houses and boats; wild things from which to breed domestic herds. These are all possible sources of supply put by Nature within man's reach: "*Natura jus commune generavit.*" But they will never be actual sources of supply till they are taken under control; just as the rabbit is not actually food till somebody captures it. The field will never be a hayfield unless I can prevent mankind from camping in it and making bricks of it. The tree will never be a canoe unless I can prevent mankind from using it as firewood. My captured sheep will never become a flock unless I can prevent mankind from eating them. So if these things are to be developed and produce the abundance they are capable of producing, they must first be withdrawn from mankind at large and taken under somebody's control and possession. The man who says "I will enclose that land and make it keep my whole family beyond fear of want" is carrying out and giving effect to the principle that Nature has put means of perpetual supply within reach of all mankind. As daily bread for all mankind implies daily bread for me, so sources of supply for all mankind implies sources of supply for me. In both cases, if you ask "How did this rabbit come to be yours?" or "How did this field come to be yours?" the ultimate answer is the same: "I took it, and therefore it is mine." "*Usurpatio jus fecit privatum.*" And in both cases this taking is the method marked out by man's reason for carrying out the natural purposes for which these lower things were made. Nature has given me wants which must be supplied. Nature has given me

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my reason, to see that the sure means of supplying my wants is private property. Therefore do we say that my right to use that sure means is from Nature, a natural right.

9. To set forth this teaching concisely, here is a patchwork from St. Thomas (*Summa*, II II, 57, 3, and 66, 2):—

“By Nature’s law everything belongs to every one.”

“This does not mean that natural right requires everything to be owned publicly and nothing to be owned as private property; but that the distinguishing between different properties is not done by the natural law.” “For if this field is considered simply in itself, there is nothing in it to make it belong to this man rather than to that. But if it be considered with regard to convenience of tilling it, and peaceful using of it, in these respects it has a certain fitness to belong to one rather than another.” “Now to consider a thing [not merely in itself but] taking into account what follows from it, is the special work of reason. And therefore this considering too is natural to man because of his natural reason, which dictates it.” “So private ownership is not against natural right, but is a development added to natural right by the working of human reason.”

And here is St. Thomas’s summary of the proof that private ownership is not only right but necessary. We have quoted part of it already:—

“In regard to an external thing man has two powers: one is the power of managing and controlling it, and as to this it is lawful for a man to possess private property. It is, moreover, necessary for human life, for three reasons. First, because every one is more earnest in looking after a thing that belongs to himself alone than a thing that is the common property of all or of many; because each person, trying to escape labour, leaves to another what is everybody’s business, as happens where there are many servants. Secondly, because there is more order in the management of men’s affairs if each has his own work of looking after definite things; whereas there would be confusion if everyone managed everything indiscriminately. Thirdly, because in this way the relations of men are kept more peaceful, since every one is satisfied with his own possession; whence we see that quarrels are commoner between those who jointly own a thing as a whole.

“The other power man has over external things is the using of them; and as to this a man must not hold external

things as his own property but as every one's ; so as to make no difficulty, I mean, in sharing them when others are in need. Whence the Apostle says: 'Charge the rich of this world to give easily, to communicate their goods,' &c." (II II, 66, 2).

10. It may be objected that the arguments given as justifying private control of the means of production were evidently framed without any thought of social control as a possible alternative. These arguments simply emphasize the difference between control and no control, management and no management. They do not face the question of private management or public management. It may be perfectly true that control and management are necessary to make property productive ; does it follow that this control and management must be private and not social?

No. Social control is a possible alternative, and in any given case it is matter for free argument whether it be a desirable alternative. You do not come into conflict with Catholic doctrine by enlarging State property, but by trying to abolish private property.

But the argument given above does not merely prove the need of control. It proves the right of every man and every family to establish that control. Thus: Every man and every family have the right to secure their own subsistence. To secure their subsistence control of property is necessary. Then every man and every family have the right to establish that control over any sources of supply not yet occupied.

11. This leads us to the next point. If they have this right, the State cannot take it from them. We are here at one of the fundamental differences of principle between Catholic and Socialist. To the Catholic, the State is the preserver and defender of rights ; to the Socialist, the State is the giver of rights. Let us set out the Catholic view.

I have my rights because I am a man, not because the State gives them to me. The family has its rights because it is a family, not because the law allows them. The individual comes first, the family next, the State last. The family must preserve and respect and accommodate the rights of its individual members. The State must preserve and respect and accommodate the rights of individuals and of families. In the family the father has his right to respect and obedience, not because the family has elected him, but because he is a man and a father. The child has a right to

the family food and clothing (to the use of these, not to control them), not because the family so decides, but because it is a human child. Similarly in the State, the family has its right to support itself, not because the State decrees so, but because it is a family. The individual has a right to go from place to place, not because the law allows, but because he is a man. The father has the right to educate his own children, not by gift of the State, but because he is a father. Men have the right to form unions, not by virtue of a statute of Queen Victoria, but because they are by nature social animals.

12. This Catholic doctrine that our rights are ours by nature, and that the State can neither give them nor take them away, is really assumed by all parties. We are told that the present evils are in part due to landlord-made law. As Leo XIII puts it, the capitalist party "is even represented in the councils of the State itself." The result is capitalist law, class legislation. But why should you call class legislation unjust? You, who say the State is the giver of rights? If the State is the giver of rights, it has given these men these rights, and so these *are* their rights; there is nothing to object to. And if the State has given no rights to the working classes, then they *have* no rights; and if they have no rights, then their rights cannot have been invaded, and there is nothing to complain of. If the State will now make working-class laws, these of course will be just, as the others were just. But not more just than the others; you cannot ask for the change in the name of justice. The State gave those rights: so they were right then. The State gives these rights: so they are right now. But why should you say one is more just than the other? On your principles it is like saying one is more law than the other. They are equally law, therefore they are equally right.

No one, of course, talks such nonsense as this. But it is necessary to insist on tracing out fully the nonsense that comes from putting a demand for reform side by side with the doctrine that our rights are given us by the State. For the ordinary Socialist will join with us at this point to denounce unjust laws; but he will not face here the question of where we get our rights, because he wants to maintain on another page that the State is the giver of rights, and therefore may take away the right of private property. If a man will pin himself to that doctrine that our rights

are given by the State and can be taken away by the State, and then will turn to the question of reforming our laws, he will find that he has cut himself off from ever calling any law unjust or unrighteous.

13. Catholics are in no such difficulty. Our rights are ours by nature. We need the State, not to give us our rights, but to defend them, preserve them, accommodate them. If I so use my right to the highway as to destroy your right to it, the State must defend your right. With the best of good will it may be hard for both to use the highway without interfering with each other: here, then, is work for the State, to regulate traffic so as to secure to all their right of thoroughfare. If the father so uses his right of control as to destroy the child's right to proper food or proper education, here again is work for the State, to defend the rights of the child. We constantly appeal to the State to do this work, to preserve our rights, to arrange in what way they are to be exercised, lest right interfere with right. We have no fear of the State while it acts in this sphere; for this is its proper work, marked out for it by nature. It is natural that in the desert I should drive along whichever side of the road I have a mind, without let or hindrance. It is natural that in a crowded town my power to drive at will should be limited or destroyed by every one else's attempts to do in like manner. It is natural that men should in this confusion come to an understanding and enforce a rule of the road; in order that the necessary limitations of their right may be as small as possible, and that the right itself may be secured to all.

We are not alarmed when we see the State limiting our rights to this or that manner of exercise. Such limitation is necessary to preserve them. We are not alarmed when the State draws the line between two rights, between freedom of contract and a living wage. The line must be drawn in order to preserve the rights of the weak. But let the State quit her proper business of preserving our rights, let her attempt to take them away, as though she had given them, and we are in arms at once. If she would solve the traffic problem by saying "Every one shall stay at home," we answer: "That is an order you have no right to make. Nature has settled that we have a right to get about. It is your business to arrange how we may do it; to preserve our right, not to destroy it."

Just such a remedy is proposed by Socialism. Some men have used the right of private property in such a way as to destroy the right of other men not only to private property, but even to daily bread. Here is work for the State. The Socialist bids her do the work by taking away the right of private property. We answer : " That is no solution ; you did not give the right and you cannot take it away. If you invade our right to private property now you will invade our right to daily bread next. Nature has settled that we have a right to both. It is your business to arrange for the preservation of both ; to limit and accommodate so that one man's right shall not destroy another's ; to protect our rights, not to destroy them."

III. The Duties of Property. Justice and Charity.

14. The purpose of a man in taking possession of any source of supply is to increase its fruitfulness. The well, or the herd, or the field is to supply him more steadily and more amply than it did in its wild state. This increased fruitfulness has important consequences. For the increase is rapid and very great. If the family enclose enough land to keep themselves by sheep farming, and if in a few generations they bring most of this land under cultivation, it will produce supplies far beyond their own needs. When a stranger comes to the place, he will find it easier to get his living by working for them than by enclosing land for himself and starting from the beginning as they did. The labour and the skill he would need for this are many times greater than would be needed simply for helping on an existing farm. So the new-comer would probably ask to work for them. These facts are familiar to us on a large scale. Thus England's produce buys food for her forty millions, though doubtless at one time it could not feed one million. And a little labour here is more productive than much labour in the wild. A man who keeps his family in comfort by eight hours' work could scarce keep himself alone by eighteen hours' work in the prairie. So all our colonies have their unemployed thronging into the towns to share in some one else's work, since they cannot live by their own.

15. The man therefore who takes possession of any source of supply and develops it to secure supplies for

himself soon finds that he has supplies for others also. He owns the source not only of his own supplies, but of other people's. Not that he has stolen it from them ; he has made it for them. His power over them lies precisely in this, that he can enable them to get a living more easily than they could in the wild.

Now apply to this our first principle, that external things were made by God to supply the needs of all mankind. The very increase of fruitfulness is the gift of God ; the farmer has planted and watered, but God gives the increase. And so the man who set out only to provide for his own family finds himself steward and governor over the sources of other men's daily bread ; with power over his neighbours and with duties to them. St. Basil and St. Thomas have explained this by a parable. I translate St. Thomas. He first states the pith of the difficulty based on part of St. Basil's words, and then shows that it is removed by understanding the whole passage. The difficulty is this:—

“It looks as if it were not right for any one to possess anything as private property, for St. Basil says (discussing the words of the rich man : ‘I will gather all things that are grown to me, and my goods’) : ‘As one who should get first to the theatre and hinder others coming, appropriating to himself what is provided for the general use, so are the rich who consider as their own the common goods they have been first to occupy.’ Now, it would be wrong to block the way against others taking common goods ; therefore it is wrong to appropriate to oneself anything that is common property.

“The answer is this. He who goes first to the theatre would do no wrong if he prepared the way for others. His wrong-doing is this, that he hinders others. And similarly a rich man does no wrong if, being the first to take possession of what to begin with was common property, he lets others also have the benefit of it ; but he sins if he excludes others from it without exception. Wherefore St. Basil says in the same place : ‘Why is it that you are rich and he poor, except in order that you may win the merit of good stewardship and he may be crowned with the rewards of patience?’”

16. The first occupier finds that his position gives him a power either to help others in getting their living or to hinder them. He has a duty to use this power for good.

Do not think his duty is to resign this power. That can only mean handing it over to some one else or destroying it altogether; letting his farmed land go to waste again, or letting some one else be landlord in his stead. It is wrong to let it waste; and whoever is landlord must accept the power and the duty. His duty comes from this: that men are in need, and he has power to help them. Because he has stores he can help the hungry, the naked, the harbourless, the sick, or some of them. Because he has farm land, he can find a livelihood for some at least of those who could not win a livelihood on the prairie. And since he can, he must. Again, since the needy are many, and the workless are many, he can only help some. When he has done what he can, he has done his duty as a faithful steward. The others who are unhelped have no grievance against him. For they had no claim upon him except the claim of charity, the claim that comes from their need and his power to help. And since all had that claim, and he has exhausted his power to help, he has done no wrong to the unhelped.

17. Between the two kinds of help above mentioned there is a very important difference. To give bread to the hungry is to support him by some one else's toil. To give work to the workless is to enable him to live by his own. The one is a new burden, making the estate poorer; the other is a new support, making it richer. And if the employment be so arranged that each worker puts into the estate a little more than he takes out of it, its power of producing new supplies and supporting new workers will grow without limit; and the responsibility of the owner for his stewardship and governance will grow likewise. There is also a difference in the receiving of these two kinds of help. A self-respecting man can bring himself to accept the first kind of help only when misfortune has made his position unusual. But he will accept work with an increased sense of self-respect, all the more if he knows that he is giving more than he receives. To be one of the strong who labour for themselves and for all the helpless ennobles him. To share with the helpless the surplus of other men's labouring shames him. And if not, if he is content to ask alms instead of work, we feel that he has lost his manliness.¹ Such duties as these, based on the

¹ For a fuller discussion of this point see "Work or Charity," in *The Ampleforth Journal*, July, 1909.

needs of one and the abundance of the other, are called in Theology by the technical name of Duties of Charity. The word "charity" is used as a word of reproach, and men will angrily reject the help that is offered them in the name of charity. The Catholic view can be gathered from what has been said. Justice requires me to give you what is yours; charity requires me to give you what is mine. Charity means love of one another for God's sake, and it requires us to help our neighbour in his needs. The strong need work; the helpless need to be worked for. It is true charity, therefore, to work for the helpless, and to provide work for the strong. And both of these are duties binding on those who have means to do them. The spirit in which these services should be given and taken we learn from the family. The parents are doing services to the little ones all day long, the healthy to the sick, the active to the aged. The mother does not feel she is lowered by helping her child; nor that she is condescending; but that she is showing her love in the right way. The child is not humiliated at needing help, nor puffed up by being served. These services are given lovingly and taken lovingly. And though to give is more blessed than to receive, still both are blessed. This is the pattern of Christian charity. It is in this spirit that priests and people work each for the other; that the Sister of Charity serves the poor; that truly Catholic employers like Barff or Harmel work for their workpeople. Such service is rendered as between brother and brother; it springs from love, and it breeds love on both sides.

19. This teaching on the duties of charity may be summed up in Pope Leo's words:—

"Whoever has received from the divine bounty a large share of temporal blessings, whether they be external and corporeal, or gifts of the mind, has received them for the purpose of using them for the perfecting of his own nature, and, at the same time, that he may employ them, as the steward of God's Providence, for the benefit of others."¹

Again, Pope Pius X. says:—

"An obligation of charity rests on rich men and holders of property to help the poor and needy according to the

¹ *The Condition of the Working Classes*, p. 18 (C.T.S., 1d.).

Gospel precept ; and so grave is this precept that on the Day of Judgement, according to Christ Himself, a spécial reckoning will be made of its fulfilment.

"Hence the poor ought not to be ashamed of their poverty, or to disdain the charity of the rich."¹

20. So far we have spoken of duties of charity. When the landowner takes men into his employ, at once he will have duties of justice to them.

No one can discuss these questions without using this distinction between justice and charity. It is worth pointing out, therefore, that when a Socialist writer pours scorn on it, this does not mean that he can do without it, but only that his use of it and his scorn of it will be on different pages.

Mr. Blatchford has the gift of indignant denunciation ; and when he finds Pope Leo XIII distinguishing duties of justice and of charity, he uses his gift this way :—

"Is not this a fine jumbling and juggling of justice and expediency and charity, and divine judgements and human law? Does this sound like the language of a man who understands his subject? . . . Give us reason and justice, and they shall serve."

Mr. Blatchford has also the gift of clear exposition ; and a few pages further on he uses it as follows :—

"If the other man's crop fail and he has no food, it is JUST to let him starve. But it is not HUMANE to do so ; nor is it WISE."

But Mr. Blatchford has not the gift of remembering on one page what he wrote on the other, and so he can serenely denounce what he is going to expound, and expound what he has denounced. For observe that justice is just ; and expediency is wise ; and charity is humane. And if it is fine jumbling and juggling to distinguish justice from expediency and charity, what shall we think of your distinguishing the merely just thing from the humane thing and the wise thing? Does this sound like a man who understands his own language, or cares for its truth?

21. An example will make clear the difference between duties of justice and duties of charity. A sick child is left to die of starvation. Every neighbour who knows of it will be to blame if the child is not properly cared for. But the

¹ *Motu Proprio on Christian Social Action*, p. 8 (C.T.S., 1d.).

moment some one, no matter who, provides for it, the rest of us are freed from any duty in the matter. Charity required us to give our own substance to relieve the child's need. If it is no longer in need, we have no longer a duty to it. But suppose the need has become urgent, and the child must be relieved at once or it will die? Then, as we have seen, the child has the first claim on what will relieve it. When we give it the food that will save its life we are giving it its own, and fulfilling a duty of justice. Now turn to the child's father. His position is quite different from ours. He was unjust when he left the child without food. He was withholding not his own food, but the child's. For of course part of the father's substance belongs to the child, just because they are father and child, and when the father withholds it he sins against justice. If another person provides for the child he will feel "This is the father's duty, not mine." And when the relief has been given, the rest of us are conscience-free, but the father is not. We shall expect him to be punished for his neglect, and to repay the expense if it was serious. From this we see the difference between the two duties. Duties of justice exist between two definite persons, such as father and child, buyer and seller, employer and employed, because of their relation to one another. If I neglect a duty of justice I keep back what is yours. Duties of charity arise between any one in need and any one who can help. If I neglect a duty of charity, I selfishly keep back my own property.

Mr. Blatchford's illustration shows the need there is of careful thought. Because the two men are only neighbours, he thinks there is no injustice in refusing aid. In ordinary need, certainly not. But he has chosen a case of extreme need—starvation. And on Catholic principles, as we have seen, if you are starving and I am not, then you have the first claim on my loaf, and my ownership perishes. I am now in possession of your daily bread: the bread I hold back is the bread of the starving; and to refuse to give it is not only against charity but against justice. Pope Leo (*Rerum Novarum*, p. 18) had pointed this out: "To give alms is a duty not of justice (*save in extreme cases*) but of Christian charity"; but, as we have seen, Mr. Blatchford was only moved to scorn.

22. Employer and employed, then, have duties of justice to each other. A full discussion of the duties of employers

to their workpeople will be found in Devas's *Political Economy* (Longmans, 7s. 6d.). Here we consider principles only.

The substance of a fair bargain between the farmer and his man will always be this : the man will get his living more easily than he could by working for himself, and the farmer will improve the fruitfulness of his property more than he could without this new hand. There are limits to the possible wages above and below. If the workpeople are paid more than the estate can stand, if they take out of it a little more than they put into it, it is evident that they will soon exhaust it. It will cease to be a source of supplies. If it is to continue, and to survive accidents, it must be carried on at a profit. This gives the upward limit of the wages that can be paid for any work : they must be something less than the full product of that work. The lower limit is found by consideration of the labourer's duties as a man.

Among the duties of an ordinary man's life are the support of himself in health and in sickness, the support and education of his family, and the making reasonable provision for his old age. His only means of doing these duties is by his life's work. It follows that he is bound to see that his work will enable him to fulfil these duties. And therefore if he sells his work for wages he is bound to demand such wages and such conditions of work as will enable him to fulfil these duties. And the capitalist who employs him is bound in justice to grant these demands. We can now understand the summary given by Pope Pius X in the *Motu Proprio on Christian Social Action*, p. 8 (C.T.S., 1d.) :—

"The obligations of justice binding on capitalists and masters are as follows: To pay fair wages to the workpeople; not to injure their lawful savings by force, or fraud, or usury, whether open or masked; to give them freedom to fulfil their religious duties; not to expose them to moral corruption and the danger of scandals; not to damage their family life or their spirit of thrift; not to impose work on them disproportionate to their strength or unsuited to their age or sex."

Think how much is included in each of these; for instance, how family life is damaged by long hours of work, by married women's work, by underpaying the father and overpaying the boy. Remember that they are all matters

of justice or injustice between the employer and each workman he engages. It will be evident that only employers like Lever or Harmel do justice to their work-people.

23. Neglect of the duties of property, and abuse of the power of property are main causes of our present ills. In the light of Catholic teaching, we can now see what lines of reform are sound or unsound. We have seen that private control of sources of supply is the natural preliminary to developing them; and that the natural result of developing them is the existence of employers and employed. Of such things, recognized by the laws of all nations, St. Thomas says: "There needs no special statute to institute them; common sense itself has instituted them."

This teaching sets the Catholic reformer moving in the opposite direction to the Socialist reformer. With tumour trouble, your ideal may be no tumours. With nerve trouble, your ideal must not be no nerves, but healthy nerves. The Socialist treats employers like a tumour, and aims at having no employers. The Catholic sees that they are like the nerves, a natural development in the social organism, and therefore he aims at having good employers. The underlying principle is that the whole body is kept in health by each member doing well the duties of his position, and not by the State doing his duties for him. The Catholic programme of reform is, therefore, to get employers (and every one else) to do the duties of their position. For this the first thing needed is a sense of duty, without which no man can be prevented from misusing his position. Therefore does Pope Leo XIII say there is no remedy without religion. Next is needed knowledge of the conditions of the work and the workers, and detailed arrangements for local needs, which things can only be managed by joint boards or unions of masters and men in each trade. Then, and only then, comes the need of the State; to enforce and to punish.

Again, he who owns a small source of supply for his family is independent of employers; he who does not is dependent on employers, and this dependence has become far too common. Here also the Catholic reformer moves in the opposite direction to the Socialist. The Catholic policy is to make as many as possible independent by the

owning of small properties. The Socialist wishes to make all dependent on the State.

IV. Voluntary Communism.

24. Though the Church denounces any attempt to take away our right of private property, yet she smiles on the voluntary surrender of that right. For there is a world of difference. To be forcibly deprived of our right is slavery. To renounce it willingly is the highest possible freedom. So the Church, which condemns Socialism as immoral, has always encouraged voluntary community of goods. Here is another confusion of thought which must be cleared up, for we find writers appealing to this voluntary community of goods as a sign that the early Church was Socialist. It is like appealing to the British army to prove that this country favours conscription. There is a vast difference between a voluntary army and conscription. There is the same difference between a voluntary communism and Socialism. Let a conscriptionist ask a recruiting officer, "What is your objection to soldiering?" He will be answered, "My good man, I *am* a soldier, and the cause of others soldiering. I don't object to soldiering, but to forced soldiering." Let him ask the British Government, "Why do you object to an army?" He will be answered, "We *have* an army, and an excellent army. We are glad to see men joining it freely, but we won't have them forced into it." The Socialist is making a similar mistake when he asks me or the Catholic Church why we object to community of goods. I am a Benedictine monk. I have chosen to live in community of goods with my brethren who have chosen me. It is ridiculous to think that I object to it. But I do object to being forced to live in community of goods with others whom I have not chosen and who have not chosen me. And the Church is with me on both points.

She encourages me to defend my right of property against attack, and she encourages me to give it up voluntarily. All that can be said in defence of my right she will say, but she will also say all that can be said of the nobility of renouncing it. She maintains the sacredness of the right, and therefore she can freely praise the renunciation of it. If it were not a right there would be little merit in giving it up. She can speak to me of the nobility

of willingly sacrificing my right just because she has made sure that no man shall take it from me.

25. She encourages community of goods as a counsel of perfection. Our Lord gave counsel as well as commandments. For among lawful ways of living one may be better than another. In such cases there is no commandment to take the better way, but only counsel that those should take it who can. Virginity is better than marriage, but both are good. He who cannot rise to the better, yet does well when he marries. He who can live the virgin life is advised to do so—advised, not commanded. "All men cannot receive this word, save they to whom it is given. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it."

Among these counsels is the advice to be poor. "If thou wilt be perfect, sell that thou hast and give to the poor." The context makes it perfectly clear that this is advice and not commandment. The important sentences are these (St. Matt. xix. 16-21, A.V.) :—

"What good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?"

"If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments."

"All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet?"

"If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast and give to the poor: and come, follow Me."

As St. Bede points out, if he came he would be provided for from the common purse, which was carried by Judas. But he need not come. It is not a matter of entering into life, but only "If thou wilt be perfect." Not all men are fitted for it. Not every man taketh this word either, but they to whom it is given. He that can take it, let him take it. And if he take it, let him take it of his own free will. There is no compulsion or obligation save the obligation of generosity that comes from seeing a noble act within our reach. "Whilst thy land remained, did it not remain to thee? And after it was sold, was not the price in thy power?" says St. Peter to Ananias (Acts v. 4).

26. What is this community of goods which the Church calls voluntary poverty? It is the having all things in common in the same way as a family has all things in common. It is the poverty of a child in his own home. The child has a right to be provided for out of the family substance, but he has no share in managing it. What food

he is to have, when he is to get new clothes, what rooms he may or may not use—all these are settled for him. Only he has a right to proper food and clothing and shelter. His poverty is this, that he has no power of providing for himself. He cannot of his own will take a journey nor call a doctor. But when there is need money is given him for these purposes. In regard to the management and control of the family property he is absolutely poor; he has nothing that he can call his own. But in regard to the use of the family property he may be very rich or very poor, as his needs are amply met or sparsely met.

In a religious family there is the same community of goods. Each member is in the position of a child, entitled to be provided for out of the common stock, but with no power to provide for himself. Common meals, the common habit, a cell in one of the common houses, these are his. But he cannot order his own meals, design his own dress, choose his own dwelling-place even from among the several houses belonging to his religious family. He cannot say anything is his own, but distribution is made to him according to his needs. Who is in the father's place in such a family, to manage and control the possession of property? The spiritual father, the Abbot: for Abba means Father.

It is evident that, as a child at home may be poor in the sense that he can call nothing his own, and yet be very richly provided for, so in a community, though the members are poor in having no control over anything, yet the provision made for their needs may be either very small or very ample, varying from the bare necessities of life to the utmost luxury.

27. One great advantage of this system is that very much less managing is needed. The managing which each would need to do for himself if he retained his property can now be left to a few hands. The rest of the family are freed for other works. Also, living in common is really cheaper. The joint property allows a standard of comfort and cleanliness and leisure which would be quite impossible if each managed his own share of the property. The disadvantages of the system are rooted in human nature. First there is discontent with the management. "There arose a murmuring of the Greeks against the Hebrews, for that their widows were neglected in the daily ministration."

And so the seven deacons were elected and appointed over this business. Then there is the danger of disagreement. Those who are to live in common must have a common spirit. All communities try to secure this by a long probation of the new-comer, in which one principal point is, Will he get on with us? and shall we get on with him? Even so divergencies of spirit show themselves, and the history of most Orders is a history of subdivisions and separations. If even in a carefully-selected community, all of one religion and of similar spirit, discontent and division yet often arise, what shall we expect when the whole city has become a vast family holding all things in common, and the paternal Council makes the Wesleyans move into the Catholic church and the Catholics into the Drill Hall; or bids the alderman whose mansion is half-empty since his children married exchange dwellings with the scavenger, whose family is outgrowing his four rooms?

28. This is the communism of the monastic Orders to-day, and this was the communism of the early Church. They laid their wealth at the feet of the Apostles, and distribution was made to each according to his needs. Both are absolutely voluntary. If voluntary communism is so good, can compulsory communism be so very bad after all? Is there so very much difference? The Church says the difference is vital. And all Socialists likewise recognize in act that the difference is vital, though in word they deny it. For they have a world now dotted over with voluntary communities, the monks and nuns of the Catholic Church, and they recognize that this is not their remedy for the ills of the world. They do not praise us nor imitate us nor try to spread our way of life. They do not resent attacks on religious Orders as being attacks on Socialism. On the contrary, many of them regard us as leaders of the anti-Socialists. It is evident that when they see voluntary Socialism at their doors they do not accept it as practically identical with their own Socialism. And yet they constantly point to the voluntary Socialism of other ages and other lands as if it were one and the same as their compulsory Socialism, and deride the distinction as mere special pleading.

If any man is content to copy the communism of the early Church, the present Church will encourage him and give him models. And he will soon admire her wisdom in

applying to it our Lord's saying, "Not every man taketh this word."

V. Difficulty of understanding the Fathers.

29. If you would understand the sayings of the Church on any subject, you must bear in mind the two sides of her teaching. When you read about marriage or celibacy, you must bear in mind St. Paul's teaching: Both he that gives his daughter in marriage does well, and he that gives her not does better. That is an intelligible teaching, and the only teaching that adequately corresponds to human nature. If you forget it, you will misunderstand the Church's words. You will mistake every praise of celibacy for an attack on marriage, every blessing of marriage for a condemnation of celibacy.

When you read of the family, bear in mind both that the father must have his honour as father and that he must do his duty as father. This also is intelligible, and the only adequate teaching. If you forget it, you will think that we are undermining his authority when we speak of the rights of the child, or that we are making him a tyrant when we teach the child to obey. So there are pairs of principles that must be borne in mind in reading the Catholic Fathers on property.

(1) It is perfectly right to take property into private control and management. But if you do so, you take with it the duty of seeing that it does its proper work of ministering to the wants of men.

From these principles jointly it follows that the Fathers of the Church say on the one hand all that can be said to maintain the right of property, and on the other hand all that can be said to insist on the duties of property. If you attack the right of property the Church says, "Thou shalt not steal." If you neglect the duties of property she tells you of the rich man who feasted sumptuously every day and was buried in hell. She reminds you that the rich man trying to live a good life has a harder task than the camel trying to pass through the eye of the needle. The Church can and does speak out unflinchingly in defence of the rights of property just because she is equally plain and firm in asserting its duties. It is characteristic of the unthinkingness of our people that a speaker can carry

an audience with him while he explains first that there *is* no right of property, and then that the rich have violated it by appropriating the property of the poor. There is no such confusion in the teaching of the Church.

(2) Justice must be done to all men. But besides justice we need charity.

Justice requires me to give you what is yours. Charity requires me to give you some share of what is mine. It is an outrage to offer a man charity instead of justice. But that does not make charity a bad thing. When full justice has been done there will still be need of charity. For there will always be disease, accident, mismanagement, and therefore there will always be those who, receiving all their due, are still in want; and charity will require us to help them from our own. Do not think, then, that in urging charity the Fathers forget the claims of justice, or that, insisting on justice, they excuse us from charity. The world needs both, and the Church teaches both.

(3) Man can live a good life in any surroundings, rich or poor. But extreme wealth and extreme poverty are potent reasons why men do not live good lives.

Men *can* live a good life, because we have free will. The wealthy and the poor *do* live bad lives because their surroundings are occasions of sin. Since there is much popular science about "victims of heredity and environment," the Catholic teaching should be known. The Church works and bids us work to improve men's surroundings, not as though a man is what his surroundings make him. A man is shaped not by his surroundings, but by what he makes of his surroundings. Now, it needs a St. Francis to make extreme poverty a path to heaven: And to make riches a path to heaven needs a miracle of grace greater than the miracle of the needle's eye giving passage to the camel. And therefore, as the Church tells us individually to remove those surroundings which lead us to sin or hinder our virtue, so she tells us to labour publicly to remove from mankind those extremes of wealth and of poverty which make a good life difficult.

(4) The authority of the State is from God. But it has authority only to preserve, not to destroy, the rights of the family and the individual, which are also from God.

In a good State, therefore, the subject will combine the utmost independence with the utmost loyalty; secure

possession of his own rights with loving championing of the rights of the State. And the Church will maintain the authority of all forms of government, and at the same time will denounce their aggressions and tyrannies.

(5) It is an outrage to be robbed of one's right to property ; especially by the State, the defender of rights. But it is most praiseworthy to renounce one's right voluntarily.

30. It may be well to add a few extracts from the Fathers, partly to illustrate the doctrine we have considered, but chiefly to illustrate the difficulty of understanding them. This difficulty comes from two causes. One is that the ordinary newspaper reader is used to being told what to see, and sees only what he is told to see. He is quite unpractised in seeking out meanings for himself. An Andrew Lang would know that to understand a stray sentence from St. Augustine he must go to the context ; the ordinary reader thinks he can understand it by the light of nature. The second cause of difficulty is that the language and idiom of Latin writers is quite strange to us. It is as different from ours as we may suppose the language of Russian lawyers to be. There is a long tradition of phrases and forms of thought from the early Fathers to the present day which has to be learned slowly as legal phraseology has to be learned. There is no more reason why we should study this language than Russian law language. But one who has not studied it should remember that the chances are as much against his rightly understanding the one as the other. He knows what we now mean by charity, and laws of nature ; but that will not help him to guess what St. Augustine meant by charity, or by natural law. He knows many meanings of "possession," but he cannot understand St. Thomas's meaning in the question : "Is possession of external things natural to man?" without studying the whole chapter and the neighbouring chapters.

The following extracts, if carefully considered, will be found to embody one or other point of the teaching given above.

ST. AUGUSTINE.

31. St. Thomas (II II, 66, 2) quotes St. Augustine (*On Heresies*, 40) as follows : "The Apostolics are a body who have most arrogantly assumed this name, because they do not admit to their membership those who marry or who

possess private property ; like the monks and many of the clergy that the Catholic Church has."

Exactly as to-day : those who condemn private property as immoral are the apostolic in their own eyes, heretics in the eyes of the Church ; while those who renounce it voluntarily are the monks of the Church.

ST. JEROME.

32. St. Jerome (Epistle 151 to Algasia, quoted in the Breviary, 8th Sunday after Pentecost) writes : "Therefore the Gospel goes on : *He that is faithful in the smallest thing, i.e., in things of the body, will be faithful also in many, i.e., in things of the soul. But he that is unjust in the small thing, so as not to give his brethren to use that which was created by God for all ; he will also be unjust in distributing spiritual moneys, so as to consider the person and not the need, in imparting the Lord's teaching.*" Observe the phrase "to use." St. Jerome, like Pope Leo XIII, condemns the unjust steward not for keeping to himself the control of property, but for keeping to himself the whole use of it.

ST. BASIL.

33. St. Thomas quotes St. Basil as follows :—

"Why is it that you are rich and he poor, except in order that you may win the merit of good stewardship and he may be crowned with the rewards of patience?"

Mr. Bruce Glasier, quoting the same passage, stops at the word *poor*. The words that follow make it clear that St. Basil's ideal was the present Church's ideal, that the rich should do their stewardship well ; and not the Socialist ideal, that they should resign their stewardship to the State ; good stewardship, not renunciation of private property. Also St. Basil clearly looks not for social equality, but for good stewardship in one state of life, patience in another. But when these words are omitted, and when Mr. Bruce Glasier says that this is one of the passages that "teach complete social equality and renunciation of private property" it is easy for his readers to believe him and to think they have seen it with their own eyes.

ST. GREGORY THE GREAT.

34. St. Gregory the Great deals with the question incidentally in his book on *The Pastoral Care*. In Part iii

he has a series of chapters on how the pastor of souls is to deal with various characters. These characters he has arranged in pairs, so that we have counsels for the humble and for the haughty, for the obstinate and for the flighty, for large eaters and for small eaters. Chapter xx is "How to admonish those who give, and those who steal," and chapter xxi deals with more complex characters—those who neither covet nor give, and those who give with one hand and steal with the other.

Before reading St. Gregory's treatment through, will the reader clear his ideas by considering carefully the first few lines of it?

35. "One advice must be given to those who neither covet the property of others nor part with their own ; and another to those who, while giving freely what they have, yet steal the property of others. Those who neither covet other's goods nor part with their own must be told to understand well that the earth from which they were made is common to all men, and therefore brings forth food for all men alike. Consequently it is useless for them to think they are guiltless when they claim as their private property what God has made for all : for they take part in their neighbour's death when they will not give what they have received." If he is told that this is frankly Socialist, he will probably see in it only that "the land is common property, and it is sinful to claim it as private property"—Socialism indeed, but not contained in the text. Let us ask, then, what kind of property has the Saint in mind? Does he mean "those who neither covet other people's land and houses, nor part with their own lands"—"give freely their own fields and steal the fields of others"? Or is it rather food, money, &c., the fruits of the earth rather than sources of supply? Suppose for a moment that he means land. "Those who neither covet others' lands, nor part with their own lands." They have land, and others have land. Does he tell them, as a Socialist would, that all their lands alike belong to the State and that their supposed ownership and giving and stealing is like trying to own or give or steal the Town Hall? Evidently not. He has no thought of any one surrendering property to the State ; the giving he has in mind is clearly giving to some one else. Now, giving land to some one else is no nearer Socialism than keeping it yourself ; it is

only a change of landlords. If he is thinking of lands at all, then he is also thinking of landlords, and with no horror.

Farther down, after saying "the earth is common to all men and brings forth food for all men," he adds: "They claim as their private property what God has made for all." Does he mean the earth, or the food? Read on: "They take part in their neighbour's death when they will not give"—fields? or food? Fields to the State? or food to the starving? Evidently the latter. Then, in the first part of the sentence also he must have meant food: "They claim as their own the fruits which God has made for all." And all that follows is made clear by this interpretation. Let the reader now read the whole passage on the assumption that St. Gregory is dealing with the property owner who neglects to see that his property supplies the wants of men, and that he is blaming him not for owning, but for neglecting the duties of ownership; he will find in it much of the teaching we have considered.¹

"The poor who die almost daily are murdered by these men who keep hidden away the food of the poor. For when we give necessities to the needy, we are not making a present, but giving them their own: not doing a work of mercy, but rather paying a debt of justice. So that the Truth Himself when telling us to be careful in our works of kindness says, 'See that you do not your *justice* before men.' And the Psalmist has the same thought: 'He has scattered and given to the poor: His *justice* remaineth for ever.' Speaking of liberality shown to the poor, he would not call it mercy, but rather justice: for it is certainly just that whoever has received should use for the good of all what has been given by the Lord of all. So, too, Solomon says: 'He that is just will never be done giving.' These men must also be told to consider well of the fig-tree that bore no fruit: of which the strict husbandman complained that it cumbered the ground. For a fruitless tree cumberes the ground when the will of a grasping man keeps idle what might be of service to many. A fruitless tree cumberes the ground when a fool keeps under the shadow of his idleness the land which another might develop by the sunshine of good work. These men sometimes say, 'We are using only what is ours: we ask for no one else's. If

¹ *Pastoral Care*, iii, 21.

we do nothing to earn the rewards of the merciful, neither do we do any wrong.' This they think, only because they shut the ears of their heart against the words of Heaven. For the rich man in the Gospel who was clothed in purple and fine linen and feasted sumptuously every day is not said to have robbed any one, but only to have used his own goods fruitlessly; and after this life he was buried in the pit of punishment not for doing anything unlawful, but for giving himself up entirely to the unrestrained enjoyment of lawful pleasures.

"These misers must be warned that, to begin with, they are wronging God in this, that they offer no sacrifice of mercy to Him who gives them all. Hence the Psalmist says: 'This man will not give God his atonement, nor the price of his soul's redemption.' To give the price of one's redemption means to give a good work in return for the grace that stirs us. So John cried out: 'Now the axe is laid to the root of the tree. Every tree that does not bring forth good fruit shall be cut down and cast into the fire.' Let those, then, who, because they rob no one, think themselves innocent, see how the stroke of the axe is at hand: let them leave this sleep of blind security, lest, neglecting to bear fruits of good works, they be cut off from this life, as the roots from their leaf-bearing.

"On the other hand, those who give their own property and yet steal other people's must be warned lest, trying to appear very generous, they grow worse through this semblance of good. For these through a foolish generosity reduce themselves not only to murmuring and impatience, as we said above, but also by stress of poverty to covetousness. What more unhappy than these? Their avarice springs from generosity, their harvest of sins is sown in virtues. They must be instructed, therefore, first to keep their own property like reasonable men, and then to respect others' property."