

THE CLERGY AND THE SOCIAL PROBLEM.

IT is a common thing in these days to regard "the priest in politics" as a patent anomaly. Protestantism has established a complete divorce between things secular and spiritual, temporal and eternal. The intense contrast between the puritanical Sabbath with its almost ghostly solemnity and the thrifty workdays of the week, exemplifies the principle in point. Owing to the further logical development of "individualism" in faith, we find public religion rendered impracticable to a large extent through multiplied subdivisions of belief and authors, and gradually committed to private enterprise, until it comes to be a matter which the State abstracts from and ignores. As far as the people or rulers retain Christian principles, religion will indirectly and informally affect politics to a certain extent. A man who, in his heart, believes in the sanctity of marriage will not vote for measures which weaken the marriage bond. His religion influences his politics because he has got a conscience. If the majority are of his mind, it is as clear a case of religion entering into politics as when a mediæval Pope put down his foot and forbade a measure hostile to Catholic morality. The difference is that in the latter case the authority of religion was publicly recognized. It is perfectly evident to those who believe in liberty of conscience that the clergy of all denominations are bound in conscience, as professing to be God's ambassadors, to use their whole influence in the interest of what they hold to be right. Indeed, this is the duty of every man, and of the clergy only in a greater degree. Furthermore, if they use their influence to the advantage of their own sect, provided it be without injury to others, they are no more to be censured than the representatives of any other interest in the country. The limits of this due interference in political matters is reached only when the matter is one which in no way bears on morals or religion. But those who think at all deeply, will recognize how easily questions which at the first proposing seem purely secular and indifferent, ramify in their consequences, and entangle themselves with supernatural interests. Hence he must needs be a man of very bounded horizon who would content himself with pulpit platitudinizing and prefers a calm indifference to questions which affect the morality of millions. No doubt many such are to be found in every denomination, but one can hardly view them as ideals of the Christian priest, who by profes-

sion should be a man, not merely of public but of catholic and cosmopolitan spirit.

Least of all to the Catholic priest is such an attitude of supine apathy becoming—to him who is the inheritor of that grand conception which reached its fuller development in the middle ages, of a marriage between an universal church and an universal empire; a conception which, perhaps, has yet to come to a fuller maturity as the social and political problems which are now crushing us to earth find their solution in a truer and nobler brotherhood of nations than Charlemagne ever dreamt of. Body and soul, members and head, wife and husband, these and similar are the analogues of secular and spiritual, State and Church—"a free Church in a free State" understanding by freedom, not mutual indifference but the greatest possible facility for healthy development which is secured by mutual aid and co-operation. Both alike, in the Catholic conception, have for their end man's happiness here and hereafter. Their separation, much more their hostility, cannot but be disastrous. The miserable past may teach us that the terms and conditions of their union and harmonious working is a problem yet to be solved, seeing that those former solutions have been fatal to the liberty, now of one, now of the other. That the very nature of things postulates imperatively their co-operation is a truth which the experience of godless politics is making daily more evident. Every plantation that the heavenly Father has not planted shall be uprooted, and the violent, unnatural divorces of religion from politics cannot but lead to unnatural issues. "Quos Deus conjuxit, homo non sepatet."

Urged by these considerations, we contend that the priest ought to have, as he always has had and will have, his voice in politics; that, in the way his profession allows, or rather invokes, he should use his whole influence for what he conceives to be the greatest possible happiness of the greatest possible number. The anti-clerical and the secularist may strive to exterminate the cleric, but while he is to the fore he has no moral option but to cry aloud and spare not where the interests of truth are concerned.

Now, if the priest has his part to play in politics, still more is he bound to interest himself in the social question which bears so much more directly on the ethical and religious development of mankind. Let us assume for the present, against certain liberal optimists, that there *is* an urgent social problem pressing for solution, a problem touching the rights of the laborer, that is, of the numerical majority in every civilized community. Granting this, is it possible or tolerable that the Catholic priesthood should maintain an attitude of apathy and indifference? Waiving the question as to whether there is or is not an injustice to the poor

crying to heaven for vengeance, or an extreme of misery crying to charity for succor, the very fact that there are so many who assert the existence of such evils is reason enough to make indifference in the clergy inexcusable. Were it but the cry of a few fanatics or interested partisans here and there, prudence might disregard it, but the clamor of a multitude is not without cause, and is always worth attending to.

It is hardly needful to insist on the truth that a concern for the temporal necessities of the poor, quite apart from their spiritual well-being, is an essential part of Christian charity. Not merely as a bait or allurement to higher things, but for its own sake, the alleviation of pain, hunger, misery, ignorance, degradation, is a good work which Christ counts as done to himself. There is a pseudo-charity which has no real feeling for these ills, but condescends to them in the spirit of bribery, and regards their relief as a fair means to a good end: Not so Christ, who rebuked those who followed him only for the sake of the loaves and fishes, and on another occasion pitied the starving crowds who had listened to Him for three days, and were about to return, weary and fasting. Doubtless, the tender commiseration He showed for their sickness and want moved them to hear Him as one who really loved them, and had a keen interest in their *entire* welfare. But this is not to follow Him for the sake of loaves and fishes. True charity is the quickest road to influence; but true charity does kind deeds for kindness' sake, and not merely for some other end, however high and holy.

Therefore, the mere alleviation of the necessities of the poor, apart from all spiritual considerations, is a duty binding on all Christians, and more especially on the clergy. May we not even say that, in order of time and urgency, it is a principal duty, though not in order of dignity and necessity? This principle is involved in St. John's argument: "If a man love not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" which seems to mean, if a man is not moved by what is natural, sensible, evident, how can he pretend to be moved by what is remote, spiritual, inferential; if he is indifferent to starvation and bodily suffering which should appeal to his very first and most fundamental instincts of benevolence, with what face can he go about distributing tracts and good advice? For the higher rests on and grows out of the lower, and grace presupposes nature. There is much of this pseudo-spirituality abroad which refuses to admit that any mere temporal evil, *as such*, is worthy of a Christian's compassion, which is eminently calm and philosophical in contemplating the sufferings of others, and armed with trite consolations as to the inestimable moral advantages and chastening

effects of transitory afflictions. No Christian can deny these advantages, but they do not in any way lessen, however they may compensate for the inherent bitterness of the chastisement. It is a mistake to be wiser than God or more spiritual than Jesus Christ. If He afflicts us for our good it is always unwillingly; and the slightest twinge of pain or throb of heartache finds in Him a tender compassion beyond all measure of human sympathy.

A zeal for souls which does not presuppose an affection of pity for the poor human body and human heart is a delusion not far removed from hypocrisy. Therefore we conclude that, viewed merely as a question concerning the existence of a great deal of unnecessary human suffering and injustice, the social problem is one demanding the close attention and keen interest of the Church and the clergy. Certainly no one who knows the history of Catholic Christianity can fail to see the great stress it has always laid on what are called the "corporal" as opposed to the "spiritual" works of mercy. Whole orders and congregations have existed who have made the temporal sufferings of mankind their principal care, and if they have made use of the resulting opportunities of doing spiritual good as well, yet this is something incidental and by the way. Nor does the Church interpret the words: "I was hungry and you fed me" and the rest, as directly signifying the satisfaction of spiritual cravings, but first of all in their natural sense of bodily hunger, thirst, and all manner of want and misery.

Now, if a compassion for this or that individual case of distress is an outcome of charity, a wider-seeing charity will inspire a zeal for the relief of the collective misery of the masses where such exists. When Christians were yet "a feeble folk," a little leaven hid in a great mass, almsgiving was necessarily left to private enterprise and unsystematic, but when greater powers were put at the Church's disposal, and she rose in secular influence, her care for the poor became universal and organized. The precept of charity binds the Christian State and its legislators as stringently as it does the individual. All those wonderful means which a divinely directed progress has put into the hands of modern governments for the prevention and relief of destitution, and for the moral elevation of the people, give that precept a width and depth of meaning hardly suspected in by-gone days. One must not undervalue individual efforts in behalf of the distressed, which will always be a necessary supplement to public measures, and which are so invaluable to the giver as means of drawing out all that is best in the human heart. But as things are in modern society, which, though professedly non-Christian, is still dominated by much Christian sentiment, it would be criminal negligence in a Catholic priest, or a minister of any denomination, to use anything

less than his whole influence in favor of universal and public remedies so far as they are feasible and expedient.

The priest is one destined to the service of man, and of the whole man, body and soul. Nor is his ministry merely to individuals singly, but to all collectively, to society, to the State. He differs from other public men in that he views secular problems explicitly in their bearing on morals and religion from a higher standpoint; and in the methods which he uses, which are, as a rule, individual and confined to the category of moral, rather than of political or material power. When, however, we consider the social problem in the light of those spiritual interests which are the priest's highest, if not always his most immediate concern, indifference to it becomes still less excusable. We have already noticed the fact that although it is repugnant to Christianity to use works of mercy simply as a bait or bribe to allure men into an outward conformity with religion, yet when such works are evidently done out of genuine kindness, and would as evidently be done apart from any ulterior result, they cannot fail to dispose men to lend a willing ear to their well-workers. It is hopeless to persuade a hungry man to come to a mission if one shows a calm and philosophical indifference to the emptiness of his stomach. He will naturally be skeptical about one's tender interest in his spiritual welfare. Nor will it mend matters very much if he is relieved in such a way as to imply a contract of "do ut des." So with regard to the masses. If the clergy in any locality are indifferent to their needs, or if their interest is inspired solely by some other motive than sympathy, however high and holy, they will perhaps not undeservedly lose that loving, loyal trust and affection which is a *sine qua non* for their spiritual influence. Wherever, on the contrary, they display (as in Ireland) a genuine sympathy and fellowship with the sufferings of their flocks, there they are followed as Christ was followed by the crowds, who, seeing His love for their bodies, could well believe in his love for their souls. Here, of course, we assume that the masses must be at all times the Church's principal care. "Pauperes semper habetis vobiscum." Whatever exaggeration there may be in Lasalle's estimate, which represents the laborers as 90 per cent. of the population of Germany in his time, or in Henry George's, who allows a similar percentage to England at the present day, it is hardly an exaggeration when applied to the 200,000,000 of the Catholic Church. Were we dealing with a secular society, we might maintain that a numerical minority was in point of ability and worth a true majority, and deserving of prior consideration. But here the Church is essentially individualist, her ultimate end being the salvation of souls, and no man, from this point of view,

is worthy of more consideration than another. The interest of the *numerical* majority of her children is therefore the Church's chief interest; that is to say, the interest of the laboring classes. She, like her Divine Master, views the multitudes that follow her so faithfully through all ages, and is moved with compassion because they have nothing to eat.

Again, if it is hard for the rich to enter into the kingdom of God, it is in some ways still harder, not for the poor, but for the destitute and degraded, and perhaps for the same reason, namely, that both are concentrated on the things of the body; the rich on luxuries and superfluities, the destitute on the bare necessities of subsistence. Of course, the error of the latter is eminently excusable, especially where destitution is the child of misfortune, not of sin. "Having food and raiment, let us be therewith content," says the Apostle; but he lays no such duty of contentment on those who have neither. Destitution and vice play into each other's hands. So far as vice takes the lead there will always be a sediment of misery in spite of the most ideal social economy. But if there is anything in present social or political institutions which forces the weaker classes into destitution, and thereby into vice and degradation, it is imperatively the duty of the priesthood to investigate the evil, to see if it be remediable, and then to use all its influence to effect the remedy. Of course, destitution never forces free-will into vice in any individual case, if, by force, we understand that which produces psychological necessity; but the fact remains that the temptations and pressures due to destitution, as a general rule, do inevitably lead to moral corruption. Although civilization need not go on to sanctification, yet it is (at least a certain degree of it) a prerequisite for the establishment of anything like a stable Christian community. No doubt there is something in Christianity for the lowest intelligence and crudest morality to lay hold of and strengthen itself by; but every mental darkness and moral obliquity is an obstacle to its full development and a potential source of danger to its purity and persistence. The cause of civilization, truly conceived, is the cause of God and religion. Both tend to the fullest possible perfection, mental and moral, of the greatest possible number, and though religion carries on the work where secular civilization drops it, yet up to that point they are co-operant for one and the same end. It is, then, in the interest of religion that all should co-operate cordially for the removal of the cause of destitution and degradation. It may be denied that such inculpable destitution exists, or that it does so to any notable degree. It may be said that the evil exists of necessity, and that no political or social reform can be devised which does not involve the like or greater evils. Yet none of

these statements must be taken for granted, but they demand the serious consideration of the clergy, whose interest it so closely concerns.

Another reason why the clergy are bound to interest themselves in the social problem is that the question is really, at root, an ethical question. This is coming into clearer recognition every day, even in the writings of non-Christian sociologists. We hear the older economists very deservedly reproached for their abstract and unreal treatment of man as a money-getting animal, with a complete ignoring of his many other and infinitely complex springs of action. We are told that what is really wanted is a yet unborn "science of human nature," which, of course, involves ethics as one of its subordinate sciences. We find candid avowals from the most hostile quarters that, rightly or wrongly, man has always been, must always be, a religious animal, and that religion is one of the prime movers in social life. And when we examine the problem for ourselves we see how it all hinges on notions which belong to ethics and to natural religion, such as desert, justice, remuneration, selfishness, altruism, equality, property, liberty, fraternity, personality, the State, its origin, constitution, functions; the end of man, here and hereafter, his true perfection, development, and many other questions all more or less ethical, and, therefore, indirectly religious. Much as "Chair-Socialism" may be despised as theoretical and impractical by short-sighted "men of action," yet those who read history know how, in the long run, there is nothing so practical as theory, and that many a revolution was first conceived by an idle theorist dreaming in his easy-chair. The social question is one to which, as guardians and disseminators of religious and philosophical truth, the Catholic clergy, at all events, are bound to give their full attention. It is no small matter to decide whether, under the existing system of competition, the laborers are or are not suffering an injustice; and if they are, whether it is a material or a formal injustice. Yet this is only one of the grave doubts suggested by what is called the "Social Problem." The fact that socialism has made its appearance only in countries imbued with the aroma of departing Christianity is due to its being, according to some, a perversion; according to others a development of certain Christian principles touching equality, fraternity, property, riches and poverty. To whom does the true exposition and defence of Christian principles belong except to the clergy of the Catholic Church?

Laveye, ("Socialisme Contemporaine") takes it for granted that the present interest displayed by the Catholic clergy in Germany in the social question has for its sole motive the triumph of the

Church. Seeing that political power is passing into the hands of the masses, seeing that little is to be hoped for at the hands of monarchs and nobles, seeing that by apathy in the past they have to some extent alienated the trust and loyalty of the millions, the Black International hopes to retrieve its lost influence by some sort of an alliance with the Red. It is not in any hostile spirit that this criticism is made. Laveleye freely allows that the triumph of the Church is a spiritual cause, an unselfish end. There is none of that vulgar narrowness which views the Roman Church as a commercial speculation. Yet there is a latent insinuation that the triumph of the Church is a distinct cause from that of the popular temporal welfare; that it is simply as means to this higher but wholly distinct end that the clergy want to identify themselves with the prominent movement of the day, which in our time happens to be socialism. Such critics have no adequate notion of the Church's mission, and fail to see that her cause includes that of civilization as the greater includes the less.

It is only in keeping with the history of the Church's development by natural events under the guidance of Providence, that the initiative in many causes which she has subsequently made her own, should be taken from without. Thus heresies have been instrumental in the evolution of her dogma. They have roused her to condemn explicitly what before she had condemned only implicitly, or perhaps had in no way ever touched upon. They have drawn her out and revealed to her her own mind. We ourselves individually often are ignorant as to what we believe, or what we like, or what we do, until some opposition exposes us to ourselves. So it may freely be conceded that the social question was raised, not by the Church, but by those outside her, perhaps by her opponents. Yet, the question being raised, she is bound to consider it, and formulate her mind on the subject. She is bound to protest against any false or immoral solution of it; to sift the true from the untrue, the wheat from the chaff, and to adopt it and make it her own. That the Church never interested herself about this precise form of the social problem in past ages only means that it did not then exist. About the cause of the slave, and the poor, and the oppressed, she has interested herself in every age and country where she has had liberty and scope, and has not been made the tool of selfish factions and private ambition. Whatever her misfortunes and afflictions have been in that line, her principles, her faith, her aspirations are eternal, irrepressible, and ready to break out and assert themselves unchanged as soon as the contingent restraint is relaxed. Therefore the charge of self-interest made against the Church's recent activity in the matter is narrow and unmeaning. Even were she using the

movement as a means to her highest end, that end is eminently an unselfish and benevolent one. No doubt it is an end which, in the eyes of many anti-religious socialists, is wholly vain and delusive; or even mischievous and obstructive to material progress; and so far their hostility to what is called "Catholic Socialism" is logical enough. But if they accuse clerics of feigning sympathy with the social question in the interests of religion, may we not retort very justly against those who are so obviously using it in the interests of irreligion and immorality? Can we credit those with a disinterested zeal for benevolence, justice, right, equality, fraternity, liberty whose first principles or negations are fatal to every one of these much-abused and perverted notions? It is to save the ignorant and undiscerning masses from these would-be "angels of light" that the Church has roused herself in these days, if not to the solution of the problem, at least to the scrutiny and detection of false solutions, which would result in a state of things "worse than the first" seven times over. We hope, then, we have said enough to justify abundantly the activity shown by the Catholic clergy in Germany and elsewhere with regard to the great question of this day and of the immediate future. If, as Professor Nitti hints ("Catholic Socialism"), in certain countries they seem to be lethargic and inactive, it may be that there the question is not so burning, or that the clergy are few and overworked, or not sufficiently educated to deal with the question. Be this as it may, wherever the question does come to the front it is one which intimately concerns the interests of religion, and even if it did not, it is one which concerns the higher interests of humanity, and as such it cannot fail to enlist the keenest attention and sympathy of every priest who recognizes himself to be the representative of the Healer of the Nations.

GEORGE TYRRELL, S.J.

Stonyhurst, Eng.
