

THE NECESSITY OF REVOLUTION

HE is an inept apologist who urges that if the poor suffer the pangs of hunger, the rich too suffer the pangs of indigestion, that surfeit is no less painful than want. It is a mischievous casuistry that reminds us that nervous prostration is as often an attendant of prolonged satisfaction as of perennial anxiety as to where the next meal is coming from. Happiness is indeed relative to our wants, which are limited by our environment and by individual and social temperament. But it is dangerous to argue that between this class and that there is nothing to choose so far as the subjective enjoyment of life is concerned. In the brute economy, the lives of sheep-devouring wolves and wolf-devoured sheep enjoy doubtless the same average of pain and gratification; we can predicate of each vessel the same fullness according to its capacity in nature's scale. But Dives and Lazarus are not (I mean in the subjective order) the analogues of sheep and wolf. For Lazarus is a man: Dives too: the primate mammal, *homo sapiens*; though each may feel some difficulty in predicating it of the other.

These are incredulous times and we must be very careful. We are most of us as fatuous when we explicate the problem of pain as when we attempt to analyse the economy of its distribution amongst men. We remember having it explained to us in early youth that pain is primarily a prophylactic whose function is to sound the alarm of lesion and disease lest (fatally) they go unperceived. Unrelieved toothache the next day (without the hollow tooth) led us to suspect the universal application of the Doctor's apologetic—a derivative of the cloudy, highly-adaptable theoscopy, a cheery convention called 'religion,' that has been leading us (since hearty Victorian times) to atheism and despair. For it is a lamentably incomplete prophylactic that provides the pangs of a famished belly, with no subsequent dinner to ward off death by starvation.

We are a little careless. We demonstrate for the comfort of the sentimental that the contortions of guinea-pigs

are little more than the simulation of suffering; tears for the animal creation may be assuaged by an a-priorism which denies the brutes time-sense, antepast and introspection. But we are in a fix when the hyper-aesthetic observer projects his sensibilities into the crudely organised lives of children no less than brutes.

We need not deny that it is the fundamental mystery that there should be suffering at all: it is the complete Catholic sense alone that can explain the mystery, can justify the Creator by submitting to the requirements of the end and nature of his creation. But it is with the social sequelae of pain, the sufferings of humanity, that we are concerned. We have little illusion as to the degree of our own suffering and (when, at least, we are personally touched) we do not usually err on the side of what the moderns call 'callous objectivity.' We are in the thick of the agony, if no nearer than next door; it shall take more than comfortable words to dull its acuteness if we be truly Christian.

'One misery begets another' apothegm has it. It were a less trite thesis that should trace the wandering rays of revolution back to that feeble, questioning candle-glimmer—an indifferently treated problem of pain. Had Lenin understood the meaning of the cross on which the suffering Man-God died, the gibbet on which his brother was hanged might have meant the Christian recrudescence that can alone save the world. But Lenin was not a Catholic—nor remotely acquainted (let this acquit him of the guilt of the Revolution) with Catholicism. Only since 1917 have we appreciated the full catastrophe of the Schism and Vladimir's adherence to it.

We have called these stray thoughts the Necessity of Revolution. And though their humble intent in the following paragraphs is no more than to catalogue a few of the evils that have followed the Reformation (and to stimulate a keener sense of the misery abroad) we are aware of the ambiguity that suggests the inevitableness of revolt. For the revolt of the twentieth century is a standing indict-

ment of neglectful Christians, and only when they revolt against Mammon with the same energy that Bolsheviki have revolted against God can we hope for light. Like the smug heresy of the Pharisees our apostasy lies secretly in a protestation of faith which is cynical as to its own efficacy. And if we lack the courage to act, let us at least have the honesty to see.

Somewhat more than half a century ago the *bien-pensant* world was worried (in quite large numbers) about the scandal of Manning. And Manning was not alone to scandalise. Bishop Ketteler of Mayence had been a herald of revolt (if revolt it was). Leo himself had not been inactive as Bishop of Perugia. By the 'eighties large groups of students of every nation, 'Social Catholics,' were meeting at Fribourg under the leadership of the democratic Cardinal Mermillod. By '87 scandalised *patrons* were organising a congress to combat the social congresses of Liège; for the movement was universal; its membership was not confined to priests and intellectuals and the workers themselves. Léon Harmel was not the only employer in its ranks; and much international labour organisation to-day is the result. But dissent and reaction, as we have suggested, were not rare. The number of the Faithful who regard the Church chiefly as the divinely appointed guardian of privilege and property have always been too great. And there were the usual number, fifty years ago, conveniently unable to distinguish between Social Catholicism and that non-existent thing they would call Catholic Socialism.

The Archbishop at Westminster taught no new doctrine, but he sought to restore Catholic teaching on property and to apply it vigorously to the nineteenth century conflict between Capital and Labour. His expression 'right to steal,' as de Pressensé remarked, grafted on the right to work and to be helped, though borrowed from the most orthodox teaching of the Church was hardly calculated to soothe the already exasperated nerves of the pocket-conscious. For Manning (as for any Catholic with intelligence and ingenuousness enough to perceive in Catholicism

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the Fraternity of Christ) political economy was a moral science subject to the laws of conscience: Man alone was the essential social unit, his needs and functions, the only absolute economic standard.

Man was an entity whose recognition must be enforced; the Cardinal endorsed the right of the State to interfere. The economic history of the working man, he perceived, had been a violation of these principles. Labour was not a commodity and its right should be a pervading principle in the distribution of wealth.

'Let the workers unite' may from a church dignitary have sounded strange to a world made uneasy by Marx's manifesto. But Manning was as sceptical as any German State-Socialist in respect of the cajoleries that disguised exploitation. Where the worker existed for the process of production and not the process of production for the worker, he was quick to perceive the thin end of the wedge of slavery.

Even we remember when luxury (beer and tobacco) amongst the workers aroused indignation as at a national calamity. The failure of the worker to abstain was indeed one of those recurrent calamities to which Capital was subject. For the mass of surplus value was clearly affected by the workers' reaction to the Capitalist Exhortation to Higher Things; its augmentation was appreciably assisted by the workman's thrift. (We need hardly insist in the relation of 'thrift' to wage-depression). Communal kitchens, etc., and the philanthropic supervision of the workman's recreation were pretty sound investments. The profligacy of the working class was a canker gnawing at the nation's prosperity.

Similarly in Manning's own day memories of Malthus had provided the Capitalist with a thesis whereby the most intimate activity, the right to reproduce, was a grace accorded or withheld at the good pleasure of Capital. For the Malthusians, with a muddle-headed notion of the correlations between the growth of the working class and the increase of Capital were unable to distinguish between the

inconstant requirements of capitalist production and the actual productivity of the existing means. In consequence the workers were bidden to adapt their numbers to the requirements of Capital. They were exhorted 'to abandon their thoughtless habits.' Procreation must be limited by the extent of employment. The worker was the appendage of Capital: subservient to his product even after his work was done, consuming, recreating, propagating himself only in accordance with the interests of Capital.

Manning used as bitter words about the Sanctity of the Free Contract as he would to-day of the sanctimonious appeal to the Principle of Property (with which the sycophants of capital to-day attack the proletariat, or propertyless.)

'Between a capitalist and a working man there can be no freedom of contract. The capitalist is invulnerable in his wealth.' Manning upheld the Law of Property sanctioned by revelation and the Catholic Church underlying both civilisation and liberty, whereby all had the right to possess. But equally his conception of possession was limited by Catholic teaching (*cf. Summa, 2a 2ae: lxvi*). As for the anarchical accumulation of wealth, he was near to agreeing with Bacon that property was like muck—good only when spread.

If it was Fabian Socialism that was employed to sidetrack the real Socialists of the nineteenth century, then it is the Bolshevik Bogey that is to-day the unfailing weapon of the pocket-conscious. There is trouble with the less sophisticated spirits? a cry for a little light in the darkness? Then let us talk of the Bogey-man and there will be no more trouble.

Meanwhile this is an age of anomalies. Crime is crime—the revolt of free will against God. But it is not criminals for the most part that we send to prison, the robbers and child-murderers of modern society. By a whimsical dispensation of justice we punish frequently not felons but those that go proxy for them, men on whom want has im-

pressed sufficiently the stamp of our economic insanity and bestiality: tramps and beggars and sometimes little girls.¹

Or again, have you compared the statistics of England's infant mortality with 'Russia's starving millions' (or whatever your newspaper's latest caption was)? I have.

Anomalies, I have called these things. But there is no trick nor cunning too low for our decayed sincerity: no new brutality that we need not fear from ourselves.

By an inevitable providence there is an acutely sensitive consciousness of these miseries in the encyclicals of Pope Pius XI and these are quoted elsewhere without fear (alas!) of undue reiteration. It should not be necessary to inform Christians of the object of the present Pope and his predecessor Leo XIII in approaching the social question.

In fact, of course, it is: —

'This is the aim which Our Predecessor urged as the necessary object of our efforts: the uplifting of the proletariat.'

It was not that the Encyclical might provide Christian newspapers next day with the serviceable caption POPE CONDEMNNS COMMUNISM, nor that the nerves of the pocket-conscious should be soothed into the additional complacency of the *bien-pensant*. It was that Christian civilisation might avail itself of the power and the vision to which it is heir.

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¹ I write with the precise figures before me,