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LETTER TO A RETIRED CLERGYMAN

So, you tell me, the future looks dark. Under the bread-and-circus régime of demagogue leaders and recurring crises you see little hope of saving anything of that virile yet cultured and tolerant tradition we both thought worth living for, and even dying for.

But it is pleasant to hear from you again, and, characteristically, you do not mention your personal difficulties. I know, however, that the evening of your life is clouded over by the drab material struggle suffered by all those who planned to retire on just enough to live tolerably and now find their incomes unexpectedly reduced by the dishonest currency and oppressive taxation of governments which appear to regard independence as a crime. You must have little leisure for that study of Greek poets and old divines which you had intended, and no surplus to help your poorer neighbours—whom you will help all the same.

Some pundits of the Left impute all expressions of discouragement like yours to the thwarted arrogance and frustrated selfishness of the reduced bourgeoisie; but I know some humble cottagers, your friends and mine, whose faces will soften for a moment when I tell them you are alive and still think of your old parish.

You know, only too well, that villagers in general to-day have no more interest in religion than in agnosticism, except for a predilection to blame the parson. And a parson who spends most of his time with the afflicted or destitute, who cannot pander to the wealthy for that kind of help which advertises itself, and who is too ingenuous to be effusive with all—such a parson is an easy subject for criticism. Yet, even if I could find one of your critics to-day he would laugh at the idea of selfishness or arrogance associated with your name. At most he might still doubt whether you made a striking success of things, and you would be the first to share his doubts. But your conception of success would be so different that comparison would be impossible; and any attempt on my part to explain the force of a constant example of absolute sincerity upon a community which perhaps never experienced it before would also fail. Sincerity can hardly be made conscious of itself.

And yet, and yet. . . . When I contemplate your life's work, and that of the long roll of thousands who, no doubt, have served the Church as devotedly and unselfishly as yourself I cannot suppress a feeling that the world would have benefited more from the exercise of such rare and precious qualities if a more careful estimate of the

situation had been made at the outset. If you had been as diligent to ensure that authority was wise and just as you were ready to obey perhaps we should not now be deploring the domination of leaders who seem almost as blind as the blind millions who push them on from one false step to the next. You were so anxious to sow the seed that you forgot no healthy crop can grow in starved or polluted soil.

For the mass of men true religion, like true virtue, can flourish only where compulsion or bribery is absent. You will remind me of examples, under the most adverse circumstances, of rectitude and sacrifice transcending heroism. But these are the exceptions, the miracles of human nature, the divine sparks which eternally rekindle our hope. We have no right to expect that just for our convenience the exceptions will become the rule. Self-respect can develop, for most of us, only in so far as we are able to rely upon ourselves—just as God has given to the lowest animals equal freedom to provide for themselves by their own exertions, without coercion, without recourse to charity.

You will suspect, perhaps, that I am here introducing economic considerations, on which you do not feel competent to decide. But no scientific jargon can justify our refusing the evidence of our senses which shows us that the law of man, in contrast to the law of God, denies to our countrymen equal access to natural resources and equal freedom to exploit them. To me the question is not, What is the basic solution of our problems? but, Why do good, honest men close their eyes to it? If only, at the eleventh hour, perhaps, for our civilisation, all men of goodwill and intelligence would bring this injustice into the open, and raise it from the slough of politics into the realm of conscience! And this obligation falls most heavily upon the middle classes, upon those still partially-independent men and women not blinded by the fear begotten of great possessions, or the cares and bitterness of poverty, or the servile indifference which comes from habitual dependence on public funds.

That the mass of men cannot develop the best things of the spirit when denied free opportunity of providing themselves with the things of the body can be illustrated by the history of the Church itself. No Churchman would now contend that the coercively maintained mediæval Church was conducive to a true appreciation of the message of the carpenter's Son. And later, when the village churches were filled with those who feared their

absence might result in eviction or stoppage of "charity" from Hall or Rectory—could worship have been sincere under those conditions?

The records show a gradual decay of spirit even among the clergy themselves until new forces arose to challenge their domination. And to-day when the villagers feel dependent most of all upon the State, it is to that coarsest of all superstitions that their worship is transferred, and the churches are left almost empty. If men had always been free to accept Christianity freely the Christian spirit could have prevailed more widely, its adherents would have remained true, and the Church itself would have been more in accord with the teaching of its Founder. I do not see how those good Churchmen who have never thought for themselves can escape some responsibility for the present situation, and they cannot plead compulsion as an excuse.

Looking at the present crisis in the light of these considerations I cannot find any reason to accept the experts' suggestions that all decisions should be left to them. To be free the citizen himself must be sovereign. He may pass on the detailed work to others, but he must first decide the main course after setting the general picture in due perspective. A people so long accustomed to the exactions of privilege that they have become blind to them are involved in a war largely paid for by borrowing,

within and without. At the conclusion various groups seek power by promising conditions which cannot be established if the debts are to be only partially discharged and the privileges maintained. No party considers abolishing the privileges because by so doing the need for power-groups altogether would be reduced. Thus all attention is concentrated on currency juggling, conferences of experts, official monopolies of manufacture and trade, and similar expedients. But the day of reckoning cannot be put off when the exploited taxpayers of our foreign creditors threaten to revolt.

Some new expedient may be patched up to carry us forward to the next crisis, but it is plain that no permanent alleviation can be established until the privileges are resolutely attacked. The situation shows a good many features in common with that period of debt, official restriction and sectional privilege after the Napoleonic Wars. Then the people were driven to try freedom at last. Perhaps on this occasion we shall be able to try it more thoroughly.

To me privilege appears the embodiment of evil, evil in its inception, evil in its results; demoralising to those who profit from it, degrading to those who suffer. To fight evil leaves no time for despondence and one has the satisfaction at least of knowing that every one of one's steps is in the right direction.

F. D. P.

THE SITUATION IN THE PHILIPPINES

A Review of the Report and Recommendations of the Joint Philippines-American Finance Commission.

IN the field of Science, termed Physics, any attempt at accurate calculation was foredoomed to failure until the law of Gravity was discovered and applied.

In the field of Social Affairs termed Political Economy a similar state existed until an equally universal law of Rent was formulated.

"G" in Physics has been universally acknowledged and adopted.

"R" in Political Economy, except by a very small group, has been either ignored or only partially apprehended.

The disastrous effect of this is seen in the results accruing to all attempts to produce a healthily developing peaceful society on this planet.

In the nineteenth century it was hoped that Liberty of the Individual was the key to such a society, but the grossest inequalities persisted, because of ignorance or disregard of "R."

In the modern age not only "R," but even the distinction between land and wealth is ignored. Terms such as "real property" utterly obscure reality. Calculations regarding the distribution of wealth are made in all the schools to-day, in all the centres of finance, in all the Treasuries of the world, with the omission of the factor "R," and the result is the same as if "G" were omitted from physics.

The above is of vital importance in considering this Report on the Philippine situation. The Report is a mass of statistical information. It produces arguments which, in the light of to-day's academic teaching and practice, are unexceptional. It assumes that the conduct in these matters of the United States is more or less the ideal to strive for. There is little in it that would be objectionable to the Socialistic Government of Great Britain.

Similar results will no doubt be reached by all.

The fact that wealth is concentrated in few hands in the Philippines is noticed, but no attempt is made to explain how this arises. There is no evidence that it is a matter of concern, or in any way understood.

The ignoring of a law does not prevent the law from operating. Rent—economic rent—will accrue in the Philippines and will distort all efforts to produce a healthy, just, free society unless it is brought into the calculation accurately.

The Commission were unfortunate in that their terms of reference bound them to endeavour to base their report on the socialist ideal of "ability to pay." Superficially and sentimentally this appears to be a sound, fair method of providing for the community's financial needs. Looked at more carefully, it is a delusion, and is really a penalising of any who have used their talents more conscientiously and more intelligently than their fellows. Further, it is fundamentally not honest, because it ignores the inherent right of an individual to what he creates by his labour.

It is not mentioned, possibly not noticed, that taxation systems, i.e., systems of public revenue, which are based upon the slogan "ability to pay," all work by taxes levied upon improvements, upon industry, upon production, upon ability, upon the exchange of wealth, upon transport, and so on. All hamper the production and distribution of wealth; all reduce incentive; all distort the economy from functioning ideally. Indirectly they produce conditions which lead to dissatisfaction through poverty, which encourage and breed greed, which foster corruption, enmity, and finally war. These systems necessitate hordes of officials, police and statisticians; idle labour from the production standpoint; expensive and useless labour from the community's standpoint. Worse still, they gradually