

Land and Freedom

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Comment and Reflection

IT is characteristic of current thinking that it deals with surface indications. One would scarcely imagine that all of these problems we call problems of distribution were existant prior to the invention of money and prior to the establishment of forms of government. When wealth is considered it is estimated in the form of money; when wages are spoken of the mind thinks of so many dollars a day, or so many shillings a week. And it goes no further than that.

IT is perhaps no exaggeration to say that half of our so-called economic works of the present decade deal with the subject of money, and hence the basic fundamental laws of political economy have been utterly lost in their reasoning and calculations. This has resulted in the world losing sight of much economic phenomena that is more important and entirely independent of money systems, stable money, the gold standard, bi-metalism, greenbackism, and all the host of related theories and fallacies covering the medium of exchange. In this welter of confusion, this Babel of tongues, the really significant things are rarely touched upon.

ALL the fundamental phenomena of distribution are prior to the invention of money and remain under all systems of coinage. Men work and produce, and are robbed of the fruits of their toil through tariffs and taxes, and the private collection of the rent of land. Thus the masses of men are kept in poverty because of institutions independent of all mediums of exchange, which while not unimportant are purely subsidiary and, measured fundamentally, largely negligible.

IF we keep in mind the true connotations respecting money, while realizing that faulty monetary systems *do* cause loss and inconvenience, we shall be nearer to the solution of all real economic problems. But so long as we imagine that these problems can be solved through approaches to money or changes in the monetary system (vide Father Coughlin) we are traveling *from* and not *toward* a real solution.

BUT there is one thing that is significant and reassuring. That is that the social ferment is now mount-

ing to the top. It is no longer confined to the members of the lower strata, the less influential groups, but the Church, and notably the Catholic Church, is showing signs of uneasiness. The phenomenon of Dr. Coughlin, despite his concern with the superficialities of the problem, as for example the question of money to which we have had occasion to refer, is not unpromising in the welter of confusion to which he has in some measure contributed. And this not merely because of his occasional hints at something more fundamental, but because here is a priest of the Church who for the first time in several decades speaks for the disinherited, and, doffing his priestly robes, appears in the character of an American citizen in a fearless assault against what he regards as economic abuses.

JUST how much of this has the friendly countenance of the Pope, just how much of it is due to example set by the Supreme Ruler of the Church, it is of course impossible to say. Let the reader's memory go back to Elizabeth Barrett Browning, who, disappointed at the failure of the then Supreme Pontiff to carry out the liberal professions of his earlier years, wrote these bitter lines:

"Perhaps it is that other eyes may see
From Casa Guidi windows what is done
Or undone; but whatsoever deed they be
Pope Pius will be glorified in none."

IT may be said with confidence that it is doubtful if ever again another Elizabeth Barrett Browning will be able justly to voice such criticism. The present Pope appears in a very different light. A benignant presence rules at the Vatican. Despite the dignity of his great office, he is a lovable personality. A change has come over the Church, a very subtle but very noticable change. The social ferment has risen. In high places now the economic and social structure of society is being subjected to searching questions. There is everywhere a suspicion that the foundations of society are unsound. From this inquiry nothing but good can come.

WE repeat that the phenomena of Dr. Coughlin and his Bishop are distinctly reassuring. Confident

as we are that the remedy proposed by Henry George is the true one we can afford to wait on the development of independent thinking among the clergy to straighten out the confused thinking which after all is not important if men, including churchmen, are free to think and express their thought. For there are other Father Coughlins to come. If we believe a change has arrived it will not be long before some great voice will be heard from the Church with a message that will ring round the globe.

WE have read with gratification the admirably reasoned defense of Father Coughlin from his Bishop, Michael Gallagher, and again we can afford to ignore the implications of the philosophy for the vastly more important declaration of the intellectual independence of the priesthood. Despite the influence that must have been brought to bear to close the lips of the priest, the Bishop gives him his imprimatur, which is "leave to print," in this case the leave to speak. He says: "It does not mean that the Bishop agrees with everything to which he has given his imprimatur." And again: "His judgments are necessarily personal judgments but they are absolutely essential to estimate the ratio of our nation's debt to our nation's wealth or to see a just rate of interest on mortgaged property."

THE language is a little loose here. But again we can afford to ignore it for the fine sympathy exhibited throughout by His Excellency, and the courage with which he faces the question of the inequitable distribution of wealth. If he does not get close to the problem the important thing is that he recognizes it. In declaring for the freedom of Father Coughlin to circulate his written and spoken word "without objection throughout the land," His Excellency has ranged himself with the great leaders of the Church who, fearless and intrepid, have borne witness to the truth as they saw it. When he says: "Father Coughlin preaches the doctrine of *social justice for all*" we cannot doubt that he believes this and will stand by him when and if he does. What more can we ask? We repeat, the social ferment is rising.

WALTER LIPPMAN is most impressive in his title heads. We are held in pleasurable anticipation of what we may look for in the subject matter—only in most cases to be disappointed. Maybe the *Herald-Tribune's* heading to his recent Phi Beta Kappa address at Harvard is not his, but it is so close an imitation to his habitual title heads as to serve for an example. The heading is as follows: "Lippman Tells Youth to Hold Economic Liberty as Its Ideal." Looks promising for a moment, doesn't it?

EVER since Mr. Lippman as a young man started out with his friend Croly to write on economic and social questions he has been like that. He indicates fundamentals only to evade them a few paragraphs later—perhaps in the very same paragraph. He is very attractive, he is a master of English and apparent coherency. We listen entranced if we do not stop to ask inconvenient questions. In this address he talks of "economic liberty"—he uses the phrase at least—but it is quite clear that he does not know what it is. He has approved and condemned the experimentation and regulation that have gone on under the present administration. He was never quite certain where he stood.

HE has no full conception of what constitutes "economic liberty." Otherwise he would have swept away with one impressive condemnation the preposterous experiments of the Roosevelt Administration. He would have been able to see that one man at least, in an epoch-making work, had talked understandingly of "economic liberty." He would have gone to Henry George instead of ignoring him. The challenge that this unknown printer made to the world over fifty years ago is as vital now as it was in the time it was written, and it will remain vital until it is answered. Lippman is like so many of his cotemporaries that have gained the ear of a half cultured and superficially thinking public, so enamoured of their own wordy speculations and phrases that seem to mean something but slip away from the understanding like so many slippery snakes, that if they ever hit upon some fundamental principle, it is by the merest accident and is promptly forgotten.

MR. LIPPMAN says in this address at Harvard: "We are unable to transmit from our generation to the next a credible and coherent tradition." It is not so much a tradition that is needed as an understanding. Economic liberty is impossible without a place to work, and land is a place to work. We thank Brother Foley for that contribution to clear thinking. We commend it to Mr. Lippman. If he will prayerfully consider it he will write fewer words but he will write more sense.

THE text book on physics used in Cincinnati high schools during the 1880's declared a heavier-than-air flying machine impossible because no engine powerful enough to lift the weight of a man could lift its own weight. Probably the same or similar textbooks were used in most other cities. We may laugh at this teaching now but it is no laughing matter, for it undoubtedly discouraged much research and effort that may have given us the airplane sooner and given us more time for progress in air navigation. Similarly fallacies taught today in universities as economics, which may be laughed at forty years hence, constitute no laughing matter.