

Land and Freedom

FORMERLY THE SINGLE TAX REVIEW

VOL. XXXVII

SEPTEMBER—OCTOBER, 1937

No. 5

Comment and Reflection

THE appearance of the life of Dr. Edward McGlynn by Stephen Bell tempts us to a brief glance over the years in which the church as an institution has grown from its humble beginnings. At no time did the church appeal to the hearts of the people more effectively than when it spoke in the language of Christ to the disinherited. Its most glorious traditions center around its early history in Rome, the ministrations in Ireland of its "Soggarth Aroons" (the beloved priests) and the heroism of its missionaries. Everywhere its most potent appeal has been, not to the imposing character of the church as an institution, but through the work of its humble and sainted martyrs who have glorified its mission, and among these the name of Edward McGlynn is not the least.

IN the reign of Augustus, in an obscure corner of the world, of a race of peasants and fishermen held in subjection by a race of conquerors, the man Jesus was born. The religion of Rome would not have served the purpose of Jesus, for it was essentially aristocratic and purely a state religion. It was a religion which had bred a callous indifference to human suffering and human misery, and it excused injustice because its ideal worship was strength. Such a religion was entirely unsuited in its mere formal ritual, in its cold deification of abstract virtues, to the dawn of liberty, to the time when the Roman yoke was becoming more and more intolerable to the whole world. The religion of Pagan Rome was perfunctory, and religious or spiritual enthusiasm and exaltation were expressly condemned.

EXCEPT among the philosophers there was no ethical religion, and to the state religion the great masses of the Roman people were unattached. To the nobles and patricians the state religion was a convenience merely, since it justified the assumption by them of the most extraordinary privileges, and for their emperors the positive deification as gods. It was not this kind of religion that was to arouse a spirit to sweep away a rotting civilization. There was nothing in it to induce the masses of men to make common cause, and there was everything in it to perpetuate the separation of classes which the unequal distribution of wealth had created.

ON the other hand this new religion spoke in a new tongue, but not in unwelcome accents. Fragmentary as are the words of Christ, repeated to his disciples and orally reported, must have been, in which the new and unfamiliar conception of an All Loving Father who welcomed to his kingdom poor as well as rich was given to the world, these glad tidings were eagerly grasped and formulated into principles for life and conduct. It mattered not how the doctors and philosophers of the new faith wrestled with the more esoteric parts of the creed; that which the masses grasped, which was the real strength of the new religion, was the brotherhood. It told its beautiful story, not to Roman Prætor, but to foreign slave; it whispered its words of emancipation to the helot aching over his task; to the galley slave bending to the oar. It disappointed the aspiring Jew, who dreamed that Israel might play again the part she had once played in the drama of nations—that she should be another greater and grander Rome. But the new spirit breathed the language of peace; the conquering of self was declared to be a greater victory than the conquering of a city. It was said to be the kingdom of heaven that had come, and its leader was the Prince of Peace.

IT was its passionate charity, its benignant justice, which in the beginning had overthrown the Pagan temples, that constituted the real strength of Christianity. The meek and the poor should inherit the earth and a sweet assurance was borne to the hearts of the disinherited. The moral conscience of the world was already in revolt against the tyrannies and barbarities of Rome, against the more revolting cruelties of slavery, against Pagan gods who possessed every quality but compassion.

IN the more obscure corners of Rome the real founders of Christianity, or the earliest names identified with her history, resided in dwellings of misery, amid the hawkers of trifles in localities which must have closely corresponded to the tenement wards of our great cities. Here lived Aquilla and his wife Priscilla when the church was without prelates, when her chief apostles were tramps and vagabonds—human oxen of commerce, who along the quays of Rome, amid casks and bundles of ill-smelling merchandise, first heard the name of Jesus.

THE new faith taught gentleness and humanity, and for a time the heart of the whole world that was addressed beat true. In the very mode of its acceptance the inner core of the new faith was revealed. It found favor in the eyes of the poor Jew and the Assyrian, but in the free Greek, when he accepted it, was aroused a mere languid acquiescence. To Asia and Syria, accustomed to subjection, it spread like prairie fire. It found a lodgment in Rome itself, largely because the Roman people were sunk in poverty and misery, but to the Roman patrician it was "an odious superstition." It was the selfishness of the Pagan religion which destroyed that religion; that which replaced it was in its inception at least the very negation of self.

BUT the vision of Jesus receded as the friends and defenders of privilege sought for its perpetuation the alliance of the ermined and sceptered followers of the companion of fishermen. When Rome became Christian she was still Rome. It is true of all creeds that they are purest in revolt; it is true of all creeds that institutionalism weakens their essential strength. In the new faith of Christianity lived the spirit of old Rome. It was from Rome—geographically the heart of the faith—that she propagated the doctrine in its first stages through all her conquered provinces. The old vessels of the Roman empire were filled with the new wine. The channels of the old conquests became the channels of the new. The imperial dream, which the Master, with a divine gentleness, had put aside, became the ambition and aim of his later disciples. It put itself above nationalities but sought to gather to itself all the springs of power.

THE Church taught contempt of the world, while in her inmost heart she pined with a greedy sickness for dominion. She emasculated her worshippers while she grew big with power, and her grip tightened upon thrones while she taught ascetism to her followers. It is little wonder that Compté, observing this, should have superficially concluded that religion was the invention of priests and politicians. For never was there a mode of power so easy to the astute and designing; and never was there a superstructure so surely founded as this, which had dominion for its motive, superstition for its method, and oh—, saddest of all!—love for its base. The dream of the enfranchisement of man was wrought again upon the anvil of the church to be the instrument of destruction for the ignorant and the poor.

GRADUALLY the spirit of hierarchy—the real spirit of old Rome—began to manifest itself. At the precise juncture when apparently the church was the strongest the seeds of weakness had been introduced. Nor is it an accident that the forces of Christian sacerdotalism gravitated toward Rome, for it sought to accomplish

by subtler measures what Rome had wrought by force of arms. Rome's conception of government at bottom was civil, not religious. But the new power claimed temporal supremacy by virtue of celestial authority. It used its power just as Rome had used hers. It substituted a vital, passionate form of power for a cold and empty one which could not outlive its triumphs in the field. The claim of one was a stubble to the fire of the other. For Rome and her eagles it set up the standard of Christ and his bishops. Its decrees were imperial; it recognized no civil assumptions not sanctioned by the ecclesiastics. It began its conflict for universal power with a dream that dwarfed Rome's. It wrested the spiritual idealism of Christ to the service of empire, and it defaced the image of Christ that it might substitute for a creed of the purest freedom and equality, one of privilege, of the insignificance of the laity, of priestly supremacy and social inequality. And the contrast grew and deepened with the material progress of the church. The revolts against this tendency were at all times active but they were everywhere crushed by a militant hierarchy.

WHATEVER Christ was he was a man. Whatever else he may serve for, he offered us a practical ideal. Whatever he claimed to be or whatever others claim for him, his conception of life and conduct, and the adaptation of his actions to his theory of life have relation to the purely practical affairs of today. Whatever view we take of him the splendid mystery of the life of the Nazarene is the same. The lesson is the principal thing; the life is the all in all. He did not say, "I am the doctrine," but he did say "I am the way." He did not build temples of worship, but he went out into the cities and the fields and told the story of the Fatherhood. And the common people heard him gladly. Well might the Frankish king, when solicited by his Christian wife to confess Christ, answer with a sneer, "Your god is not even of divine descent—he is a mere plebian."

THE church may wield a mighty power when it decides to enthrone the plebian Christ. When she does she will not lack adherents. Here and there in her history such times have been, and men have arisen at whose words humanity rose up and girded itself with a strength which, when summoned, the forces of evil, of injustice, of oppression, may in vain assail. Whitfield among the colliers thunders his message, and down cheeks blackened with coal dust from the mines unwonted tears are seen to run. In our day a McGlynn, clinging to the vows of his priesthood and jealous of the canons of his church, appears, and under the inspiration of a mighty impulse Catholic audiences cheer the reading of the Lord's Prayer by an excommunicated priest. Or a Father Damien gives his life for the lepers, and the whole world bows its head and princes make memorials for him. Or in other

fields a Father Huntington casts his life with the moral lepers of a great city, and men speak lovingly of him as of one who is indeed doing the Master's work.

SOMETIMES we speak of the doctrines we hold as a science—the science of political economy. And so it is. But it is more than that. It is an ethical and religious message. It is upheld, in essence at least, by many eminent churchmen of the past, teachers and saints of the Roman Catholic faith. It has been declared by the very highest authority as not contrary to Catholic doctrine. The Fatherhood of God carries with it the Brotherhood of Man and the right of all men to God's bounties. The message of Dr. McGlynn is a message for today.

No Taxes

BY FREDERIC CYRUS LEUBUSCHER

I WENT into a store in New York City to buy a deck of playing cards. When I objected to paying twenty cents, the salesman said they could be sold for a profit at ten cents were it not for the federal tax of ten cents. I handed him two dimes. Instead of the usual "thank you," he said, "One cent more please for the New York City sales tax; any sale of thirteen cents or over must pay 2 per cent tax."

"So, if there had been no federal tax on cards, there would be no sales tax?" "That's about the size of it; the cent is a 10 per cent tax on a tax." "It is worse than that," I retorted. "If we had time to figure the share of the tax on the wood pulp, on the paper-making, building and machinery, on the printing press and the building in which it is housed, on the oil for the machinery and the ink for the press, on the railroad cars and trucks from the forest to the store, on—oh many other taxes which will occur to you; if, I say, you apportion all these taxes, you may find that the direct tax on this deck of cards is perhaps fifteen cents. Did you notice I said 'direct.' There is also an indirect tax—the tariff on wood pulp, on building materials, on machinery, on cars, on trucks, etc., the effect of which on the price of these fifty-two cards would compel a statistician to burn the midnight electric juice, which is also taxed."

Feeling that I had taken too much of the salesman's time in a purchase in which the store might make only a few cents gross profit, I ordered two packs of standard cigarettes at twenty-five cents. Of course the sales tax was added. The salesman, who seemed to be as much interested in the discussion as I, said that the United States tax was again half the price, and traced the other taxes as I had done with the cards, arriving at much the same result. He ended up with, "I never realized before how much we are taxed on everything; three-fourths of the price must be taxes." I assured him that it was

not quite as bad as that, on the average. While there are no accurate statistics, economists estimate that the taxes on industry of the federal, state and local governments take from one-fifth to one-third of the national income, or at least twelve to fifteen billions a year.

Every dollar of this is added to the price. And more too. If a given article costs one dollar to make, the manufacturer adds twenty-five cents to cover his overhead including a small profit. With a tax of twenty cents his costs increase to \$1.20. Adding his 25 per cent, he charges the wholesaler \$1.50 instead of \$1.25, thus adding five cents profit on the tax. The wholesaler in his turn adds profit on a profit on the tax, and the retailer in self defense adds a profit on a profit on a profit on the tax. The consumer pays them all.

The mere fact that one hundred thirty million people still eat, wear clothes and live in houses proves that there is consumption enough to furnish the various governments with revenue, even though it has to be eked out with borrowings. Not all the one hundred thirty millions; for twenty millions of them would be in rags, sleep in the streets and starve were it not for the taxes paid by the one hundred ten millions. While playing cards and cigarettes are luxuries, no direct taxes of 100 per cent are levied on necessities. Even so, they are all taxed. *The Manufacturers Record* states that a loaf of bread pays seventeen taxes and shoes twenty-three. Empty stomachs and bare feet are the result.

However, with a fifth to a third of their incomes going to tax-eaters, the one hundred ten million themselves eat less, buy fewer clothes, build fewer houses, rent fewer apartments and cut out many amusements. The results: Farmers can't sell all their crops, many factories shut down, some thousands of banks fail, millions lose jobs—the depression. Everybody damns the taxes. Mark Twain said, "Everybody complains about the weather but nobody does anything about it." But there are a few—and their number is increasing daily—who assert this crushing deadly burden of taxes is utterly unnecessary and that government can be efficiently administered without levying one cent of tax.

But who will pay the bills? Why the one hundred thirty millions, with the publicly created revenues of their own property, just as you and I pay our bills. These "voices crying in a wilderness" who make this startling claim, base it on fundamental economics. The land of this country, they say, with what we know as natural resources, was given to its inhabitants by their Creator at the time he gave them the atmosphere; they say that man is a land animal and would languish if denied access to land as surely as he would suffocate if denied access to air. Land and natural resources are generally lumped with food and factory products as property. Indeed, when we say, "He is a man of property," we usually mean he is a landowner. But these thinkers maintain