PERSONALITY AND GAIN (I)

THE source of most of the cruelty and at least half the folly of the world is ignorance. What we do not know may on rare occasions be magnificent. It is more frequently alarming and odious. Ineradicable ignorance of one another among the nations is the fruitful cause of war, and similar ignorance between the various classes of society is responsible for much that is unjust and indefensible in the social system. But ignorance has seldom been more harmful than when it disguises the real nature of a conflict.

In all the ancient civilizations we find the spirit of gain, and in uncivilized races also. It is one of the natural qualities which distinguish man from the other animals. There are men who rise superior to it, when they have enough to live upon without gain, and some there are who will take the chance of having enough. But for the mass it holds good under every economic system. A man wants to improve on his condition. In a money economy it is easier, because a man can save more readily. In our own civilization we find it at work in the period before the dominance of capitalism. There is the striking case of St. Godric, the Norfolk lad who began life at the bottom, then started as a pedlar and did so well that presently he acquired a vessel, took partners and traded along the East Coast and overseas with such success that in sixteen years he amassed *magnas opum divitias*. His parents were pious folk and he was a devoted son of the Church. He twice visited Jerusalem and took his mother to Rome. Becoming more and more devout, he eventually gave all his wealth to the Church of Durham and retired to live a hermit's life at Finchale. He died in 1170, and since he lived as a hermit for forty years must have been born towards the close of the previous century. How many others became rich by trading in the same pre-capitalist period we do not know; but it was St. Godric's sanctity, not his wealth, which drew attention to him and caused his life to be written. For mediæval Christianity was preoccupied with God and His directly religious service.

Amidst a powerful relapse of passions and crimes there was a simple movement of ascent of the mind to its object, of the soul to perfection, of the world to a social and juridical structure unified under the rule of Christ. With the unqualified ambition and untutored courage of childhood, Christendom erected a huge fortress on whose summit God should be seated, prepared for Him an earthly throne, because it loved Him. The whole of life was to be sacred.

The mediæval concentration on Heaven has been succeeded by the conscious discovery of the earth, the self-assertion of man and his world as valuable for their own sakes. In itself this affirmation, this "discovery" of the creature, this humanism, was good. But inasmuch as it ascribed to itself an absolute and not merely relative autonomy as against religion, it gradually developed into an atheistic secularism. A relationist positivism denied the higher wisdom of theology and philosophy, and admitted no truth beyond the data of the sciences. The logical issue has been the dogmatic and collective atheism of Marxian Communism, the established pseudo-religion of Russia, and less completely, the deification of the State or of the race by authoritarianism.

Since, however, these humanisms deny what is deepest in man, his spiritual personality and its essential reference to God, they are not the "perfect humanism" which depends on Christian principles and the work of Divine grace. To the Thomist the *Persona* is more than the *Civis* for he is an Image of the Divine and capable of being linked to God with that love of friendship that is named charity; and the Thomist theory of personality brings with it as corollary the theory of the right to private property.

To possess private property is a natural right; it is not an *absolute* right; and when the Church defends it, that in no wise aligns the Church with individualistic capitalism or any other special economic system, for the Church is above any particular economic system. Now a right, when exercised, always involves a duty. If man has the individual and collective right possess private property, he is obliged to use this property for the good of the community. "The

rich man is reproved for deeming external things to belong to him principally, as though he had not received them from another, namely God," writes St. Thomas Aquinas. And it is this point that is overlooked by American Liberty Leaguers and Liberals when they defend the institution of private property. In mediæval times, the entire economic structure rested on this social conception of private property; to-day it no longer receives general public or legal sanction. If a rich man bestows upon the working classes certain benefits, he deems himself a charitable man, yet St. Albert the Great tells him that, "For a man to give out of his superfluities is a mere act of justice, because . . . he is rather the steward of them for the poor than the owner."

Absolute right to private property is God's alone; men are merely stewards. Man's right to private property is restricted to the use, the usufruct, of the same, and man must recognize the social nature of private property, the order instituted by Almighty God. Of the man who does not recognize the duties contained in the Christian conception of private property von Ketteler declares: "A mountain of injustice, like a heavy malediction, rests on property thus abused and diverted from its natural and supernatural purpose."

Nobody has ever succeeded in explaining why the break-up of the mediæval world came exactly when it did, or in deciding whether capitalism and the Reformation were the causes or the product of this break-up; and until these fundamental questions are solved (which they never can be until there is a generally accepted philosophy of history), the question whether capitalism determined the Reformation or the Reformation capitalism seems mainly scholastic. Yet it seems evident that it is the dominance of capitalism that stands between us and the mediæval conception of uncommunicable personality and private right.

The word Capitalism has become exceedingly common in recent years; so common that innumerable people use it without thinking of its meaning, and books are written about it without any attempt to define it. That has arisen from

the controversial character of the word, which we owe to Socialists. It is with them a short way of saying the existing economic order and all that it stands for. It carries with it a reproach; and since they desire to abolish the existing order it is unnecessary to enter into details about the specific features that distinguish it. Anti-Socialists, on the other hand, take them at their word and argue the case for capitalism with an equal disregard for what constitutes it. The Catholic solution lies hidden amongst jarring ideologies.

We hear a great deal to-day about the menace of Communism. It is a very real menace, for it is by the very nature of its philosophy pledged to the overthrow of all religion. The Communist community and the Christian community are utterly irreconcilable conceptions. In contrast there is the fact that millions of the citizens of Europe have been taught to believe that the horrors of Bolshevism can only be repelled by Fascism. Fascism is not so repugnant to Christian sentiment as Bolshevism; but the religion of Christ cannot be made a mere instrument of national policy, subordinated to the supposed needs of the State.

What answer has the Christian Church to make to these rival claimants for the domination of human society? Her voice is feebly heard, for in every land she is hopelessly hampered by the existing political and economical system. The result is that in every land the Church, if not openly flouted, is patronized, while the nominally Christian nations go on living on the foundations which she laid in the ages of faith.

The Church may have no ready and convincing answer because she has been betrayed in conduct by the Christian community. The time is at hand when the foundations of Christian Europe will be tested. The Church will never perish, but she may once again be driven into the catacombs, and once again it will be her conception of personality that has proved irreconcilable with the unitary conception of the State. For Christianity is rooted in the sacredness of personality. That is the other side of the Fatherhood of God. Man is God's son. And every man is a son of God.

He has therefore certain inalienable and sacred personal rights. Christians must claim for him a political and social system in which his right to free development of his personality shall be recognised and provided for. No other system can be Christian. That is why Christianity had to offer unflinching opposition to a system based on slavery. That is also why Capitalism, as it now exists, has come to stand condemned at the bar of the conscience of mankind, so far as that conscience has been attuned to Christian standards. That is why Catholicism once more stands alone isolated not only by her dogma but by her culture.

Plutocracy and modern pseudo-democracy may struggle on the surface; yet underneath they are complementary. They have a common root, and the plane of their orbital functions is in essence the same. Their gospel is that of an "economic" heaven. And the ladder which brings one into it is that of utilitarianism of the narrowest kind. One begins to look upon everything, even upon human souls, as a means for "practical" ends. Eventually one commercializes all aspects of human activity; and things which cannot be turned into cash soon become considered irrelevant or even unnecessary.

Such a trend may be favourable to the growth of a materialistic civilization, but is fatal to culture. Cultural values are indeed the first to be dragged down to the level of "general education." The inevitable further process converts them into a source of vulgar pleasures on the one hand, and into a source of income on the other. The tastes of quantity become the decisive factors; and muses which do not pander to these tastes are ostracized. The paradox of Catholic education at the present moment is the fact that it is at the same time the sole conserver of traditional western culture and largely inarticulate in the expression of that culture in terms acceptable to contemporary thought. Yet what is beyond all question is that the Christian mind can never reconcile itself to any method of violence, involving bloodshed and crimes against persons, for the introduction of another and a better system. Changes achieved by such methods have an evil element in them, and must of necessity

be weakened and perverted by the fact that brutal passions were let loose in order to introduce them. We ourselves are hampered in the expression of our solution; we have perhaps not even the desire to enforce it; at least let us try to realise the problems we have set out to solve.

Under the influence of a motive which, as Aristotle already knew, is not the mainspring of true economic life—namely, the desire of gain—there has arisen an economic life so extensive, so great and powerful, that no previous period has seen the like of it. In the pursuit of such an uneconomic end as *gain,* man has succeeded in helping millions of men, who were as yet unborn, to live; has transformed culture radically, founded and destroyed kingdoms, built up magic worlds of technology, and changed the aspect of the globe. All merely because a handful of men were smitten with the passion of earning money.

Is this true? Is it not exaggerated? Let us admit the wonders performed by capitalism in the last hundred and fifty years; but are they all due to the fact that a handful of men had a passion for earning money? Aristotle did not say that love of gain has nothing to do with economic life, but that the two were closely connected, as they obviously are. In any money economy a man must think about having enough to satisfy his needs; some pass beyond that and, mistaking the means for the end, seek unlimited acquisition. But to mistake the means for the end is a natural transition, as we see in many other fields of life; the connection is obvious. But, apart from Aristotle, is it the fact that the achievements of capitalism have been effected by pure acquisitiveness? Would it not be truer to say that its most potent builders have been men who cared nothing for money, but only for the success of their work? What of invention and science? Now it is true, as Sombart says, that only those inventions are taken up which seem to a manufacturer to be profitable. But this does not mean that profit-making—let alone unlimited profit-making—is necessarily the cause of the undertaking; it may be merely a condition. As a condition it is indispensable. It would be

impossible for any manufacturer to go on producing a new thing at a loss; he might do it for a time, but he could not continue. And if he did it would be useless. For profit-making implies that the thing pleases consumers enough to make them give for it sufficient to remunerate the maker. If there is no profit, then it does not please the consumers; they do not avail themselves of it and it falls to the ground. Profit is therefore an indispensable condition for the working of an invention; but is it also the real cause? Granted that many may take up a new thing or a new method because it is profitable, but is that the motive of the pioneer? Is not his motive far more often the desire to do a new thing, or an old one in a better way? He has an idea which he wishes to realize, and all his thoughts and efforts are bent on it, quite apart from the profit to be attained. The Catholic argument must rest not on indiscriminate condemnation, but on a positive restatement of the ethics of Economy.

Economy is the use of natural resources by man. Its main purpose is ethical. It is furthered by certain tools and guided by the principles of certain economic virtues. The one great tool of economy is the institution of *private property*. The two great virtues regulating man's economic behaviour are, as we know, *justice* and *charity*. Without private property the natural resources of the world would not be properly administered, for without it there would be no incentive to production, no order in the use of things, and no peace in the realm. Private property is one of man's natural rights, because man in himself is an end to all lower forms of existence which are means, and which it behoves him to use as such in a wise and just manner.

Property should not only be privately acquired and privately held, but also privately administered. Insofar as man is an end in himself, the end is centred in each person separately, as each person has a separate intelligence. The exercise of individual intelligence cannot be delegated. It follows from this that the exercise of the function of administering property should not be delegated by an owner to an agent beyond the possibility of recall. The institution

of private property should not be extended to include absentee ownership.

While private property is the means of economic endeadour, the twin virtues of justice and charity determine the manner in which this means is to be employed. There are two kinds of economic justice: justice-in-exchange and justice-in-distribution. The first is expressed through the principle of proportionality. Justice-in-exchange is merely a human virtue; but justice-in-distribution is a virtue both human and Divine.

(*To be concluded*)

FELIX HOPE.

PRAYER FOR PEACE

The Union of Prayer for Peace, founded at the beginning of last year by Father Gerald Vann, O.P., has already "spread over the world . . . It is hoped that in time, as the Union grows, there will be a centre in every country." A leaflet on the need of prayer and work for world peace, on the appeals of the Popes, the aims of the Union, and the blessing and encouragement which the Holy Father has given to it, may be obtained on sending a stamped and addressed envelope to the Rev. Father Gerald Vann, O.P., Blackfriars School, Laxton, Stamford, Lincs.