

THE CATHOLIC SOCIAL MOVEMENT IN GERMANY

THE Industrial Revolution had progressed through the earlier decades of the nineteenth century before there arose any true appreciation either of the vastness of the economic changes that were in progress or the extent of the social evils that were in rapid growth. Agriculture continued to fall back before the *villes tentaculaires* of Verhaeren's vision and a huge new and debilitated population crowded into the sordid streets as fast as they sprang up. It is true that as early as 1839 the Comte de Montalembert, stirred in his Catholic conscience by rumours as to the conditions under which the factory workers lived, journeyed up to Lancashire to see for himself 'these appalling towns' which filled him with a 'triple horror,' but this was the gesture of a singularly kind-hearted politician rather than an experiment in scientific investigation. The emergence on every side of vast fortunes was guarantee enough to the average citizen that great material progress was being made, while the political economists of the day unhesitatingly enunciated the principles on which such progress could be relied on for the future.

Unexpectedly enough, it was in Germany that a new appreciation on Christian lines was to present itself on a wide scale with social and religious results of the highest importance. It was in the Western parts of the Empire, and more especially in the Catholic Rhineland, that industrial development first showed itself on lines similar to those in England, and these were the districts that had been most severely affected by the principles of the French Revolution and by the disasters of the Napoleonic wars. Hence much loss of faith and social unrest while poverty and unemployment were wide-spread and the most revolutionary doctrines found ready acceptance among the workers. By these the 'Communist Manifesto' was hailed almost as a new Gospel, and Christianity appeared to have no effective reply to its arguments. Happily, two modern reformers were at hand. Adolf Kolping and Emmanuel von Ketteler, the one a working shoemaker in Bavaria, the other the son of a distinguished Westphalian family, destined for the Civil Service, threw up their careers about this time in order to study for the priesthood and devote themselves wholly to the work of social regeneration. Kolping's life's task was to be the building up of the *Katholische Gesellverein* (Catholic Journeymen's Guild), for the benefit of the large class of wandering journeymen—at that period a most revolutionary element in the industrial world—through a system of hostels which provided them with a de-

cent substitute for home life together with excellent educational facilities. Both he and Ketteler had realised—and here lay their genius—that the new social evils needed new social remedies, and that it was futile to press Christian truths on men immersed in all the miseries of a life of toil and poverty. ‘Before we can deliberate,’ declared Ketteler, ‘how to Christianise these masses, we ought to create institutions to humanise them.’

Emmanuel von Ketteler, who had been consecrated Bishop of Mainz in 1850, was a man of indefatigable energy, a voluminous writer, and a powerful orator, who at once became a commanding figure at the first of the great annual Catholic Congresses held at Mainz. Here he launched his new programme of Catholic social reform, taking his stand in opposition both to the Liberal economic school and to the social teachings of Frederic Lassalle, though agreeing with the latter in his advocacy of co-operative associations. The bishop had started as an opponent of all State interference in industry, but he soon came to see that there could be no real protection for the working-man save through legislation. He realised to the full that insecurity was one of the chronic evils of the wage system. ‘Whoever works for another,’ he said, ‘and is forced to do so all his life, has a moral right to demand security for a permanent livelihood. All the other classes of society enjoy such security. Why should the working-classes alone be deprived of it?’ Within the lawful claims of the worker he included higher wages, shorter hours and days of rest as essential to Christian family life, while supporting trade unions on the British model, co-operative associations and higher education as means towards building up that workmen’s ‘Estate’ which he regarded as an indispensable feature of the social order. Thus he became the true initiator of German social policy which in the course of half a century was to place the country in the very forefront of labour legislation and to find official Catholic confirmation in *Rerum Novarum*.

Slowly this new conception of Christian responsibility towards labour made its way in all ranks of Catholic life. With dynamic energy the Bishop of Mainz stirred up his diocese, and by means of sermons, pamphlets, the religious press, and especially of the great annual ‘Katholikentag,’ which in reality lasted five days, attracting audiences of several thousands, new organisations sprang into existence to meet the various needs of the times. These congresses, it must be noted, although invariably opening with High Mass, were in no sense merely ecclesiastical events, but great democratic gatherings of the laity, and were always presided over by a layman, the most distinguished of whom was Dr. Windhorst. It was from these

enthusiastic gatherings that was derived the driving power for more factory legislation and for new social enterprises until the Franco-German war and the creation of a fuller German unity gave a fresh direction to men's thoughts. When the first elections to the new Reichstag took place in 1871, Ketteler was elected by his Cathedral city and thus he helped to organise that small group of Catholic deputies with a definite democratic programme that within a few years was to develop into the powerful Centre Party that was so often to hold the balance of power in the German parliament. Ketteler's main work in these last years, however, was his great fight against Bismarck in the bitter religious war launched by the Chancellor against the Catholic Church, known as the Kulturkampf, which was only brought to a triumphal end in 1877 after the death of the Bishop himself.

It would be unfair to claim that all that was accomplished in these fruitful years was due to Catholic initiative alone, but undoubtedly to Bishop Ketteler and his school belongs the honour of being first in the Catholic field to grapple in a comprehensive spirit with the new industrial conditions and to have built up, on a firm theological basis, a practical social doctrine with which to oppose the economic heresies of the time. Thus more than to any other leader it fell to the Bishop of Mainz to pave the way towards *Rerum Novarum*, which came to the German people, not as the enunciation of a new social doctrine, but simply as a welcome endorsement of all that in the industrial field they had achieved for themselves in the previous forty years. It is indeed well known that on more than one occasion Leo XIII acknowledged his indebtedness to the German bishop, to whom he referred as 'my great precursor.'

It goes without saying that a social movement on so wide a scale in the very centre of Europe was bound to exercise considerable influence in adjacent countries. This proved emphatically the case in regard to Germany. In Belgium, where owing to the opposition of the dominant Liberal Party, with its hatred of all interference in industry, and later of the Catholic Conservative minority, with its acute distrust of all social economic experiments, progress in a democratic direction up to the publication of *Rerum Novarum* had been practically nil, the inspiration, when it came, was, in the main, not from France, but from Germany, and it was in Germany that the models were found for factory Acts and social schemes. The direct influence of Germany was still more markedly felt in the case of Switzerland, where Dr. Decurtins, the brilliant young democratic leader, made no secret of his profound admiration for Bishop Ketteler and sought in his teachings the bases of the wide social and

industrial policy which has contributed so much to modern Swiss prosperity.

Austria fell naturally within the German sphere, though less definitely than might have been anticipated. Yet without the German example and without a copious supply of German social publications, it is doubtful if the more easy-going Austrians would have responded to the need. It is, however, from France that the most striking testimony to the force of example has come to us, and the story is told by Count Albert de Mun in his charming volume of memoirs, *Ma Vocation Sociale*. Made prisoner at Metz in 1870, he and his friend, Count René de la Tour du Pin, spent four weary months—not in a concentration camp, but prisoners on parole at Aix-la-Chapelle, where they had ample opportunity, of which they made full use, for studying the Catholic lay activity all around them and could compare it with the utter absence of any similar social work in France. For the twenty years of the Third Empire had proved lamentably barren in any industrial or social initiative for the benefit of the working-classes. Returning to France in time to live through the terrible experience of the Paris Commune and to see for themselves the tragic results of class hatred engendered by long years of social injustice and economic misery, there arose in both these young men the generous determination to devote the rest of their lives to the task of rousing the dormant Catholic conscience of the French upper classes to their national responsibilities. Though Albert de Mun, through birth and education, worked within rather narrow social limits, he initiated a really fruitful apostolate among the worldly young men of his own rank and profession and later, as a deputy in the French Chamber, did valuable work in promoting labour legislation. Other French sociologists, such as Georges Goyau and Max Turmann, have borne generous testimony to all that Christian democracy in their own land has owed to the splendid initiative of the German Catholics.

All those valuable national qualities of order, discipline and organisation which, in the middle of last century Ketteler brought under the inspiration of his faith, to the service of his fellow Christians, are to-day, alas! laid at the feet of the false goddess of Nazism. Yet surely they may be re-consecrated once more to their rightful purpose, and may reconstruct where they have destroyed so utterly. Christian faith cannot be wholly extinguished in a nation in the brief period of twenty years, and much that to-day may appear irretrievably lost should prove recoverable. That surely should be the aim of our post-war diplomacy.

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