

function of the Community is to work, and the next is to see with how little that work can be done. Everything that is superfluous should be abolished. There should be a searching survey of what is superfluous and it should be ruthlessly set aside. There is hardly a nation in the world that is not now suffering from poverty—involuntary poverty. We must practise voluntary poverty. You can make your meditation on that as often as you like. It is a practical thing. Make your meditation on how to be careful about the soap—all sorts of things. And you can make your meditation on the love of God in such a simple thing as that.

Look at Nazareth. Now at the end of my life I realise salvation does not come from Jerusalem, nor from Rome, nor from London, Chicago, New York, Shanghai, Peking, but from Nazareth. And I think that the thing that would strike you if you went to call on our Lady and the Incarnate Son of God would be the poverty, the simplicity. Nothing superfluous. Then what would be your feelings when you realised that in that abject poverty was all that was necessary for the Redemption of the world!

VINCENT McNABB, O.P.

[From a retreat preached to religious sisters in 1934].

POVERTY AND THE LAND

POVERTY is an essential attribute of the good landsman. That is a truth that may easily be misunderstood, but it is a truth nevertheless.

It may be well to begin by dispelling some misconceptions. First of all it must be made clear that poverty is neither a synonym for destitution nor for financial failure. Poverty is a positive way of living that implies sufficiency, but rejects the accumulation of superfluities. It is indeed more than that. It is the inevitable result of the practice of charity, since Catholic teaching insists that ownership is not absolute, but must be limited by the needs of others. In this wider meaning of universal application obviously the landsman takes his place beside every other kind of worker. Charity is incumbent upon every human being, and is not the special perquisite of any particular kind of man. The landsman like everyone else may practise charity imperfectly or not at all, but, if he be a *good* landsman, he will at all events have created conditions for himself compatible with the practice of that greatest of the virtues—in a word he will be poor.

But there is another misconception that must be cleared away. Given freedom and the absence of unfair handicaps beyond his

control, the good landsman will in one sense be rich. Not only will he enjoy food better in quality and more unrestricted in quantity than those who are out of touch with the land, but his production will always be in excess of his own needs. That is to say, he will have a surplus to sell, with the proceeds of which he will be able to buy other necessities. He will normally live better than the townsman. Perhaps it may be thought that this 'richness' contradicts the claim that poverty is one of his essential attributes.

Let us see. The distinctive thing about husbandry is that it constitutes a unique kind of partnership, a partnership in which man is the junior partner, and the land itself occupies the senior position. So long as the two work in harmony, all goes well, but that harmony is absent if the junior member oversteps the position allotted to him, and especially if he aims at acquiring more than his rightful share of the profits of the business.

For example, although man possesses within limits the choice of crops to be grown, yet even in this respect he will fail if he omits to take account of soil texture, climate, previous sowings, etc. But those are far from being the only concessions that he has to make to the dictates of his senior partner, if he is to be a good landsman. Before drawing his own profits—even at the risk of having no profits to draw—he will have to ensure that the land has received its full dividend. Nor can he fob it off with a quack medicine when what it requires is a full diet of nutritious food. He must, in a word, sacrifice his own riches in order that his partner may be continually rich. More than that, he will have to work unremittingly and refrain from the temptation of extending his business beyond an area which he is able to control personally.

It is thus true to say that the man whose object is to get rich through landwork is not a good landsman. Husbandry is a vocation, and, like other vocations, it has as its primary aim something beyond the mere interests of the man who practises it. Just as surely as the teacher should put his pupils' interests before his own, or the doctor his patients', so should the landsman take thought for the land before taking thought for himself.

Speaking generally, the best landsmen throughout history have been the peasants of all countries, and riches are certainly not the mark of the peasant. Indeed in those countries in which the commercial dictum rules that the accumulation of riches is the primary end of all effort, peasants have been dispossessed and have disappeared. Even the word peasant has come to be a term of reproach,

and all the faults associated with peasant farming have been magnified. Of these the one most commonly picked out for condemnation is avarice. The peasant, it is said, will always strike a hard bargain and will give away nothing of what he has fought to get. There is some truth—though by no means the whole truth—in this generalised accusation. In their private lives peasants are at least as charitable as any other group of men. Avarice, when it appears amongst them, is almost always due to exaggeration of a virtue—the virtue of thrift. Now thrift is of the very essence of true poverty, and it nearly always disappears amongst people who have accumulated great personal riches. Its opposite is waste, and no peasant can afford to be wasteful. His livelihood, as has been said, depends upon his liberality to his partner, the land; and such liberality demands of him continuous saving of everything the land requires. If he is niggardly in this respect, he will forfeit both his independence and his subsistence. It is thus not surprising that he should sometimes fall short of liberality in other directions.

In all walks of life there is a bias towards some particular kind of fault. The peasant is not exceptional in sometimes yielding to this bias. On the contrary what differentiates him from many of those engaged in other forms of activity is that, whereas his sins derive mainly from the abuse of virtues, the so-called virtues of those others are too often in reality sins.

However, it is no concern of this article to prove that good landmen are necessarily good men—obviously they are not—but rather to attempt to show that, lacking that attitude towards life which expresses itself in poverty, a landsman will fall short of excellence in his craft.

The most striking example of the incompatibility of the money-making spirit and good farming is to be found in the dust-bowls of the world. Soil erosion almost invariably originates in theft by the junior partner of dividends that belong rightfully to his senior. What happens has been told over and over again. A man sees that there is money to be made out of virgin soil or land that is in good heart through past cultivation on the right lines. He chooses a high-priced crop and draws all the profits of his sales without returning to the soil the ingredients it has lost in producing the crop. He repeats this process until the emaciated soil ceases to return a good dividend. He then moves on and begins the same robbery again on a new piece of ground. The top soil that he leaves behind him is bereft of humus and becomes a prey to wind or water. It is swept away in dust or mud, and a desert is left in its place.

This is the extreme example of bad farming. Often the process is not quite so crude. It may be that a few more pounds are wrenched from the soil by forcing a bigger yield through the application of stimulants in the form of artificial manures. This also gradually wears away that full fertility of the soil that is at once the sole safeguard of the peasant and the pledge of a continuing high quality and full natural yield in the crops sown.

But down to the work of the humblest farm labourer priority given to the profit motive over service to the land must always affect husbandry adversely. The man who thinks first of what are called the 'amenities' of life, which today usually comprise adjacent cinemas, bus routes, wireless sets, tennis courts, etc., misses that essential attribute of the best landwork—the spirit and practice of poverty. He approaches his craft from the wrong angle, speculating what he can get out of it rather than what he can put into it.

It can be said with some justice that this is true of other callings besides husbandry. And indeed there are very few kinds of work to which the precept of poverty does not apply. Speculation in all its forms must be counted an exception, for the sole aim of speculation is to make money, and the speculator who does not do so is not poor, but bankrupt. But in most kinds of work there is at least an element of vocation. Yet in a modern industrialised society work has been so degraded that it has lost almost all its properties except the one guaranteeing a monetary reward. The approach of a factory hand to his task is rarely the approach of a craftsman to his craft. Responsibility and sympathetic tendance have disappeared, and with them the spirit of poverty. There is a scramble for highly paid posts, but little or no sense of partnership in creation, which is the background of poverty.

In such a society, therefore, land work, unless it too is tainted with the modern industrial poison—and in that event it very soon ceases to perform its function—becomes sharply distinguished from other kinds of production. It is despised as the refuge of the unambitious clothopper, and it is forced into the position of being the sole upholder of poverty as a way of life. This isolation brings unnecessary hardships, that are unconnected with poverty as such, but which bring into disrepute the whole setting in which the landsman works. Poverty comes to be regarded as something of a disgrace, if not an actual sin against society, and it is thus doubly hard for the landsman to attain excellence in his craft. Instead of being able to live in an environment suitable to his work, he is for ever being harassed and tempted to join in the money rush that is

going on round him. His great partnership with the land is in jeopardy.

It is only necessary to note the state of English agriculture during the zenith of financial capitalism to see how ill it fares when the primary end of endeavour is self-enrichment. Derelict or half-uncultivated fields, choked ditches, weeds, waste, illhealth from starvation of the soil—these are some of the evils arising from the cult of riches in a country possessing some of the best land in the world.

In sharp distinction to this state of things is the husbandry practised by two ancient races, differing from each other in almost every respect except their service to the land and their background of poverty—the teeming millions of China and the little tribe known as Hunzas that inhabit a single valley in the vast mountain range of the Karakoram. Among these two peoples peasant farming, on a basis of freehold family holdings, has been practised for centuries, and the result has been robust personal health as well as the conservation of the whole fertility of the soil they till. In his 'Reconstruction by Way of the Soil' Dr Wrench writes of them: 'Thus in the small body of the Hunza and in the large body of the Chinese, much broken by the near past and present havoc, we have rare survivals, instances of skilled and continuous life within the limits that are set by Nature and the land; a fitting of skilled mankind into the life-cycle'. He might have added that true poverty was and is the mainspring of their success. For man cannot serve two masters. He cannot divide his allegiance between riches and the land.

R. D. JEBB

Editor of *The Register*.

POVERTY AND THE MARXIST SCHOOL

MARXIST revolution, Bebel tells us, differs from all its predecessors in this, that it does not seek for new forms of religion, but denies religion altogether. 'The first word of religion,' wrote Friedrich Engels, 'is a lie'. 'The idea of God', said Marx, 'must be destroyed; it is the keystone of perverted civilisation'. 'It is useless', adds Bax, 'blinking the fact that the Christian doctrine is more revolting to the higher moral sense of today than the Saturnalia of the cult of Proserpina could have been to the conscience of the early Christians'; and elsewhere: 'In what sense socialism is not religion will now be clear. It utterly despises