

## FEATURES OF THIS WEEK'S ISSUE

Leader.—The Right to Private Property, p. 25. Notes—Joseph Conrad; Walter Besant; Seumas O'Sullivan, p. 26. Topics—Home Rule for Scotland; A Plague Spot; The Need of an Antidote; Divorce, pp. 14-15. Thomas Davis (By T. P. Cummins), p. 11. Majority Rule (By Dean Burke), p. 17. Australasian Irish Race Convention, p. 35. "Ideals of the Irish People" (Sermon preached by Father Lockington), p. 39.

## MESSAGE OF POPE LEO XIII. TO THE N.Z. TABLET.

*Pergant Directores et Scriptores New Zealand Tablet, Apostolica Benedictione confortati, Religionis et Justitiæ causam promovere per vias Veritatis et Pacis.*

Die 4 Aprilis, 1900.

LEO XIII., P.M.

TRANSLATION.—Fortified by the Apostolic Blessing, let the Directors and Writers of the New Zealand Tablet continue to promote the cause of Religion and Justice by the ways of Truth and Peace.

April 4, 1900.

LEO XIII., Pope.



THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 27, 1919.

## THE RIGHT TO PRIVATE PROPERTY



THE verdict of Socialism is that "the current respectability of to-day is a huge inversion of righteous and scientific social order, weltering in dishonesty, uselessness, selfishness, wanton misery, and idiotic waste of magnificent opportunities for happy living"; that the starving of the poor makes a decent man ashamed of his good meal, as their suffering from cold makes him shiver in his warm overcoat; that there is scarcity of food in the midst of jewels, velvets, and laces, motor cars and racehorses; that many a lady of fashion spends more on an upholstered coffin for her pug dog than would support a family for a month; and that "with all its energy, its Smilesian 'self-help,' its merchant-princely enterprise, its ferocious sweating and slave-driving, its prodigality of blood, sweat, and tears," it has heaped up nothing better than a "monstrous pile of frippery, some tainted class literature and class art, and not a little poison and mischief." The social question is a terrible evil; and there is little fault to be found with the terms of that indictment. The heartless tyranny of the rich, the shameless exploitation of the poor, the profiteering which gives some reason for believing that there is truth in the charge that this war will never stop because too many people are with the connivance of our capitalistic Governments making money out of the dead, have certainly brought about intolerable conditions in the world, and at length a determination on the part of the sufferers to endure no longer. What is the remedy? Socialism says that the right to possess private property is at the root of all the evil, and that therefore there must be no more private property. What examination will this remedy bear? Will it give even a hope of better things and at the same time violate no higher laws?

At first sight it looks as if the remedy were too drastic and too forthright. It seems to us to be analogous to the argument that because a tooth gives a lot of pain the tooth must go, or because a criminal is a nuisance he ought to be exterminated. Is there no other conclusion? A dentist would advise that the tooth be saved by filling; and the State would suggest that reformatory treatment be tried on the criminal.

Our conclusion is on the same lines. Reformatory treatment for capitalists, surgical if necessary, and the same, "only more so," for the capitalistic State, is the golden mean, and on entirely abstract grounds just as logical as the abolition of private proprietors. It has also the advantage that it does not violate prior and higher rights and that it does not substitute a sin of excess for one of defect. In the opinion of all but Socialists, the right to possess private property is as clear as an axiom. It is a working principle that what a man makes by the labor of his hands or his brain is his own, or that the reward he receives for his toil is his to keep or to give away as he wills. If he has been able to save and if he invests his savings in security, whether it be in land or stock, it is reasonable to hold that the land or stock he buys is his to dispose of as he pleases. Man precedes the State and the earth and its fruits were given by God, not to the State, but to Adam and his children; that is to a family and to the individuals of the family. God gave the land in this way to mankind, not through the State or through Governments, but so that the limits of possession might be fixed by man's own industry. With good reason the common sense of mankind has found in the study of Nature and in the laws of Nature a guarantee for the right of private possession. The same principle is confirmed by the civil laws which are deductions from the Natural Law. The Divine Law explicitly recognises man's right to private ownership when it lays down the Commandment: *Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife; nor his house, nor his field, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor anything which is his.* *La propriété c'est le vol*—Property is robbery—said Prudhomme, and the saying, which is a bald, unwarranted generalisation, has received assent from Communists who came after him. Property is a right of mankind, says the Divine Law, and it adds that to violate that right is robbery. There is no doubt at all that the abuse of property and of private ownership is the cause of much suffering and misery. But we have no warrant whatever for concluding that because a thing is abused it is wrong; nor have we any grounds for believing that the abolition of property would make matters any better. The law of Nature and the Divine Law point to the middle way as the solution of the problem.

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To remedy one evil by introducing another does not help. And because the Catholic Church believes that the remedy of Socialism is an evil we must seek elsewhere for the solution of the social question. We believe that the right of private ownership is necessary for the welfare of the individual and of the family. With St. Thomas we believe it is also beneficial for society at large: that private property is necessary (1) as an incentive to labor, (2) for the maintenance of economic order and organisation, and (3) for the interests of good order and well-being. But we believe also that the right of private property is limited by higher laws and that there are obligations of justice and charity and friendship, which place serious bounds to our liberty of disposal of property to be considered. The development of these considerations under the guidance of the teachings of Christ supply the curb and the control which can effectively prevent the abuses from which mankind suffers. Looking at the problem in the light of faith, we find that the evils result not so much from the possession of private wealth or riches as from the fact that those who possess them ignore the laws of God and trample on the poor in defiance of charity and justice. And just as we are convinced that in the revival of Christian virtue in the world lies the remedy for the corruption of modern society and the only hope of the restoration of purity and honesty in individuals and in families we hold too that in Christian principles lies too the cure for the misery of the poor and the restraint upon the tyranny of the rich. Our sympathies are all with the laborers; but we cannot forget that they too are human and that without God's grace human nature is so weak that any scheme

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