

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.

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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

“the other world”, with all its stage properties—that is, the present objects of religion’.

The only claim, in short, that the Revolution of Karl Marx has ever made to religious recognition is that it ‘brings religion from Heaven to earth’. But its major prophets have never been so rash as to promise the translation of Heaven itself to earth. On the contrary the convert to Marx’s materialist dialectic has been heard to put it to the latter’s credit that it has no dope to offer the faithful, no pie whether in the sky or on earth. Herein lies the appeal of the revolution to asceticism. And we cannot deny that the revolution *has* had an abundance of witnesses, in men and women singularly devoid of self-gratification. The old inevitable gibe about communists foregathering at the sea-side ‘like lords’ and having cars, as other men, is irrelevant and a most unhappy *argumentum ad hominem*, since it can easily be retorted that, in the Christian Church, the Vow of Poverty has not, by any means, always effectively inspired the Orders.

Nevertheless, on one point the Christian tradition and the Materialist Dialectic are agreed. That is the necessity of poverty. By poverty I mean merely an inevitable human condition, whether desirable or not. The Christian believes in this necessity because of the Fall and the imperfectibility of human conditions here below. He works to relieve it: he may voluntarily share it: he recognises that its effects may be at least as harmful as they may be good, for the individual. He confesses its inevitability without pessimism, because it is of the essence of his faith to believe in compensation hereafter. The Marxist acknowledges the same inevitability, because without poverty there cannot come about the time-reversal which will deliver the world safely into the Millennium of the Proletariat. Without rich, there can be no poor; without poor, no rich. Without class-tension no delivery; without labour, no birth. His very conception of the dialectic solving of the conflict is derived ultimately from the story of Dives and Lazarus and ‘Blessed are the poor. . . .’ and again, ‘For unto every one that hath shall be given . . . but from him that hath not, even that which he hath shall be taken away’. The difference between a good Christian and a good Marxist revolutionary lies not greatly in their manner of acting, but rather in their conception of the goal for which they strive. For it *is* Heaven that the Marxist yearns for: a land flowing with milk and honey and of much richness, unreal, brought nearer by his ill-focussed glasses, and as hazy as the haziest Christian’s Heaven. This is the core of the Marxist’s faith. *Not for me but ‘for them that shall come after me, but Heaven nathless. . . .’* It is with this ‘core’,

this final analysis that these remarks are concerned. The vanities proffered in *Das Kapital* are familiar to all readers of Marx and not within the scope of my title.

It remains chiefly for Christians to examine and adjust, in the light of Christ's Gospel, their own views of poverty.

Father Garriguet has reminded us that Christ did not consider poverty a *social institution* any more than did Adam Smith or Karl Marx. Poverty is a state of suffering. He taught that, like every other suffering, it may be made use of for the Kingdom, it does not follow that he looked on it as desirable in its meaner sense. 'Give what thou hast to the poor; distribute thy goods to the poor': an integral part of the Gospel. Today men are doing their utmost to remove poverty rather than succour it. But those whose conduct is inspired by our Lord's teaching have also done as much as any to rid society of the sore of pauperism. Their aim, however, in so doing has not been to *perpetuate* wretchedness by making it tolerable—a course which would excite it to rise up and rebel; their one object has been to fulfil the Master's command, and to lighten burdens which no one can lift from human society'. We must be wary, too, of thinking too much in terms of charity as (by the Marxist) we are said to do. We have no absolute right to property, we are trustees merely of the Master: and his will is the good of all men. We cannot, in the ultimate sense, *give* of our worldly goods. But we are bound to disperse them. One thing the Christian can truly give, by the power of communicative personality. That is himself. That gift and that communication both, are utterly absent from the dismal halls of Marxist philosophy.

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NOTE.—It needs to be observed that most of Marx's approaches to the practical problems of poverty are irrelevant today, as indeed is much of his economic teaching to modern business and industry. Thus Marx 'based his law of the concentration of capital on the supposition that each business was managed by a single person. In his opinion businesses would become larger, and consequently the number of capitalists would decrease and the ranks of the proletarians would be strengthened.

He did not foresee that capitalism would enrich itself by bringing into existence a large class of persons who draw their income from investments in industrial ventures and are therefore interested in the maintenance of the system.'

(Rees. 'Social and Industrial History of England')

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