

that our readers may make it a beginning for their own reflections; they could do much worse than start by reading, critically, this book of Mr. Mascall's to which we have done such scant justice.

COLUMBA RYAN, O.P.

RICHES AND POVERTY¹

By ST. CATHERINE OF SIENA (1347-1380).

CONSIDER, dear child, the shame of wretches in love with wealth, who will not follow the lights that nature gives them to win the sovereign and everlasting Good. This was not beyond the pagan philosophers, who for love of knowledge cast riches from them; they saw them to be a hindrance. Yet the men I speak of wish to make riches their god, witness their greater grief to lose temporal wealth and substance than to lose me, the sovereign eternal riches. All manner of evil, if you but think a little, issues from this un-governed will and desire for wealth.

Pride issues from it—the desire to be the greater; injustice to self and others; greed, which in lust for money makes no scruple to rob a brother or steal what belongs to Holy Church, bought though it is with the blood of my Son, my Word, my only-begotten. There issues also the trafficking in time and in neighbours' flesh and blood (so with usurers, who sell like thieves what is not their own). Gluttony issues from it, with excess of foods and ungoverned eating; licentiousness too, for if a man had no wealth to spend, he would often not keep such sorry company. There are murders too; hatred and uncharitableness; cruelty; faithlessness towards me; and self-presumption, as though it were thanks to themselves that men had wealth. Unperceiving that it is through me alone that they either get or keep it, they lose trust in me and trust only in it—idly, for it drops from them unawares, whether lost in this life by my provision and for their good, or whether lost at their death; thus they learn at length the hollowness and the fickleness of wealth.

Riches impoverish and kill the soul; they make a man cruel towards himself; they make him finite and dispossess him of the dignity of the infinite, for his desire, which should be united with me, infinite Good, has been set on a finite thing and lovingly united with that. He loses taste for the savour of virtue and odour of poverty; he loses self-mastery and becomes a thrall to riches. He is not to

¹ Text in *Libro della divina dottrina* (Scrittorio d' Italia, 1938), pp. 348-354. The passage does not occur in the available English Translation of the *Dialogue* by Algar Thorold.

be satisfied, because what he loves is something less than himself; all things created are made for man, to serve him, not for him to serve; his service should be to me, his end.

What perils and hardships by land and sea will men put themselves to that they may win great wealth and come home to their own cities in luxury and in honour! But as for virtues, the wealth of the soul, they will be at no pains or care to win and hold them. Their heart and affections, which ought to serve me, have been sunk in wealth and set on that, and their conscience is burdened with much ill-gotten gain. See what wretchedness they bring themselves to, and what it is they have made their master—something changeable, something unsure and unenduring; they are rich to-day, poor to-morrow. Now they are up, now down; now the world is in fear and awe of them for their wealth, now it mocks them for having lost it and meets them with ruthless taunts and contumely, because they sought and obtained men's love through their riches and not through virtue of their own

How heavy these burdens lie on their consciences, so heavy indeed that in the path of their pilgrimage they cannot run and cannot pass through the narrow gate! In the holy Gospel my Truth has told you that it is less possible for a rich man to enter eternal life than for a camel to pass through a needle's eye. The rich here are those who possess or desire riches with pitiable and inordinate affection (there are many poor who nevertheless, in will, possess all the world with inordinate love, could they but get it). Such as these cannot pass the gate, for it is low and narrow; they must throw down their burden, curb their love to the world, and in meekness bend their heads; they will not pass else. And there is no other gate to lead them to life, there is only the wide gate that leads to everlasting damnation.

They seem too blind to discern their doom, for here on earth they have a foretaste of hell. In any event they suffer misery. They desire what they cannot have, and this means misery. Or again they lose what they had, and this means misery—misery in the same measure as the love with which they possessed it once. They lose the love of their neighbour and take no care to win any virtue. Oh the corruption of this world!—not of earthly things in themselves, for everything I created is good and perfect, but corrupt is he who clings to and seeks them with inordinate love. The mass of evils that spring from this are more than your tongue could tell, my child; yet though these men have continual sight and experience of them, they will not perceive or understand how much it is that they lose.

All this that you may the better understand the treasure of willed and spiritual poverty. Who understand it? My dear poor servants, who to pass this way through the narrow gate have cast aside the burden of riches. Some do so in deed and mind alike; these are those who observe both precepts and counsels in deed and mind. The rest observe the counsels in mind alone, stripping themselves of affection towards riches and possessing them not with undisciplined love, but with discipline and with holy fear, becoming no longer possessors of them but dispensers of them to the poor. This is good, but the other is perfect, with more fruit and less hindrance, and my providence may be seen the better to shine in act therein

I have shown and told you that from the love of riches there comes all manner of evil, loss and misery in this life and in the next. Now I tell you that contrariwise all manner of good, peace, rest and quiet comes from true poverty. Only mark the look of the truly poor, how cheerful, how gay they are. They are never sorrowful except for offence towards me—a sorrow which makes the soul thrive not pine. By their poverty they have won all wealth; leaving darkness, they find most perfect light; leaving this world's woes, they inherit joy; for mortal goods they receive immortal, and greatly are they comforted. Toil and suffering are a refreshment to them; they live in justice and in brotherly love towards every being possessed of reason; they are no accepters of creatures. Shining in them are holy faith and true hope, burning in them is the fire of divine charity, for by light of their faith in me, the sovereign and everlasting riches, they have withdrawn their hope from the world and from all vain riches, and have embraced in bridal true poverty and her handmaids—abasement, self-misliking and true meekness, which serve and foster the love of poverty in the soul. In this faith, this hope, this kindling with fire of charity, my true servants did and do overleap both riches and self-feeling. This it was that the glorious apostle Matthew forsook great riches, overleaping his money table, and followed my Truth, who taught you the way and pattern of loving and following this poverty. Nor did he teach you by words alone, but by example, and that from his very birth to his life's end.

He wedded for you this bride, true poverty, though he was highest riches by the union of his divine nature, whereby he is one with me, and I, who am everlasting riches, am one with him. If you would see him humbled in utter poverty, look how God became man, clothing himself with your baseness and humanity. You see him—the dear and loving Word—born in a stall while Mary was wayfaring, to show you wayfarer that you must ever be reborn in the stall of

self-knowledge, and there you will find me, born by grace in your souls.

You see him there lying among the beasts in such poverty that Mary has not wherewith to cover him. It was the cold season, and she warmed him with hay and the beasts' breath. He who is fire of charity wills to suffer cold in his humanity all his life long. Through his life on earth he willed to suffer, without his disciples or with his disciples (there were times when in their hunger they plucked and ate the grains of corn from the ears). And at his life's end he was stripped naked and scourged at the pillar so, and thirsting he lay upon the wood of the cross, in such poverty that earth and wood failed him both and gave him no place to lay his head. He laid it therefore upon his shoulder, and like one drunken with love he bathed you with his blood (for his body was pierced, the body of the Lamb), pouring it forth from every limb

Truly then he has given you the pattern of love, showing you the greatest love that he might, giving his life for you, who had become foes to him and to me, the sovereign eternal Father . . . He has given you the pattern of true humility, humbling himself to the shameful death of the cross; and of abasement, bearing reproaches and great revilings; and of true poverty, so that Scripture tells you his own lamenting words: *The foxes have holes and the birds their nests, but the Maiden's Son has not where to lay his head.* Who understands all this? He who has the light of holy faith. In whom is this faith found? In the poor in spirit, who have taken Queen Poverty for bride, casting away the riches that benight men with faithlessness.

This queen has her own kingdom where there is never war, but peace and calm always. She abounds in justice, because everything that commits injustice is separated from her; the walls of her charity are strong, because their foundation is not upon earth but upon the living rock, the sweet Christ Jesus, my only-begotten Son. Within there is light with never darkness, because the mother of the queen is the abyss of divine charity. The adorning of this city is loving-kindness and mercy, because it has thrust out the tyrant Riches, who in old time used cruelty. There is goodwill in it towards every citizen, that is, there is love of every neighbour. Long perseverance is there, and prudence, for the ways and government of that city are full of prudence and careful heed. Hence the soul that weds this sweet Queen Poverty becomes lord of all these riches, and cannot have one without the other.

Translated by WALTER SHEWRING.