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Pope Leo and the Labor Question

Cincinnati, July 26.—At the Vine Street Congregational church, the pastor, Herbert S. Bigelow, took for his theme, Pope Leo and the Labor Problem.

Text: "For the needy shall not always be forgotten: the expectation of the poor shall not perish forever."—Psa. 9:18.

Mr. Bigelow said in part:

The graceful and kindly expressions of love and praise which the death of the pope has called forth from the men of all faiths are a tribute, not only to the pope, but also to that growth of Catholicity among men which makes the Protestant world proud of the glories of the motner church, and sincerely mournful of her loss.

It was the good fortune of our Catholic brethren to have had for their head a man whom the world loved, and it is good to know that there is hardly a Protestant heart anywhere which does not cherish his memory as with filial affection.

This morning I desire to remind you of the pope's contribution to the discussion of that all-important problem of labor. His attitude upon this question should not be overlooked in the enumeration of his services to mankind.

Unfortunately we have some Protestant preachers who defend the existing social order as ordained of God, and deprecate as harmful any discussion of proposed changes. This is not the teaching of Scripture, neither was it the teaching of the pope.

Protestants who have substituted the authority of the Bible for the authority of the church ought to be influenced by such words as these of our text. They should be hospitable to every sincere effort to improve social conditions and should never be reconciled to the presence of wide-spread and galling poverty. "For the need shall not always be forgotten: the expectation of the poor shall not perish forever."

Catholics for whom the pope speaks as one having authority should give heed to these words of Leo: "At this moment the condition of the working population is the question of the hour; and nothing can be of higher interest to all classes of the state than that it should be rightly and reasonably decided." These words were written twelve years ago in the pope's famous

encyclical letter on the "Condition of Labor."

This letter solemnly declares that it is not only the duty of citizens, but especially the duty of the church to discuss this most momentous of questions. The third paragraph of the letter begins with this emphatic sentence: "But all agree, and there can be no question whatever, that some remedy must be found, for the misery and wretchedness which press so heavily at this moment on the large majority of the very poor."

Much is said today, concerning the unjust distribution of wealth, which seems severe and revolutionary. The street corner agitator talks of "wage slavery" and some will say that such talk ought to be suppressed as calculated to set clas against class. But listen to these words of the pope:

"A small number of very rich men have been able to lay upon the masses of the poor a yoke little better than slavery itself."

The spirit of this letter gives ample encouragement to those who would so change society that it shall not be possible for "rich men and masters," to use the language of the pope, "to exercise pressure for the sake of gain upon the indigent and the destitute, and to make one's profit out of the need of another."

It is true that in this letter the pope failed to discriminate between the doctrines of socialists and single tax men and those of communists. And it was because of these misconceptions of the single tax movement, that Henry George wrote an open letter to the pope setting forth in a reverent and forceful way the claims of his school of political economy.

There is not wanting evidence that the pope was led to modify his views of the single tax movement. The man who persists in error after new light has come to him sacrifices truth to personal vanity. A great man will change his mind on occasion. This the pope seems to have done. This seems to be a legitimate inference to be drawn from the history of the McGlynn case.

It will be recalled that Edward McGlynn had been excommunicated for publicly advocating the election of Mr. George as mayor of New York. This was in 1887. Four years later the pope's encyclical was published which contained some strictures upon the

single tax theory. Two years after this McGlynn went to Rome and had a personal interview with the pope in which he explained the opinions of single tax men. Previously to this the pope had received a copy of Henry George's letter and also through the papal delegate, Satolli, he had received a statement of the single tax position which McGlynn submitted to Henry George for his indorsement before it went to the pope.

With these documents before him the pope received McGlynn at the vatican, and hearing his case he lifted the ban which had been placed upon him. Therefore single tax men will cherish the memory of Leo XIII. because it was he who gave justice to their beloved McGlynn; for they feel that the church in America has had no more honored name since the days when the noble Las Casas plead for the West Indian slaves at the court of Spain.

It is my understanding of the Catholic doctrine of infallibility that it is not held that the pope is above the possibility of error in secular matters, but that in church matters his authority is not to be questioned. Therefore I assume that it is entirely consistent with orthodox Catholicism to admit that in the formation of his views on politics the pope, like any other man, would necessarily be influenced by his surroundings. But when we remember the environment of a pope I think we may say that Leo XIII. was remarkably progressive and took advanced ground in his discussion of the labor question. It will be a great blessing to the world if the church should secure a successor to Leo who shall be as nearly abreast with the best political thought of the twentieth century.

As greeting to the new pope may we not repeat those words with which Henry George closed his letter to Leo XIII.?

"Servant of the servants of God! I call you by the strongest and sweetest of your titles. In your hands more than in those of any living man, lies the power to say the word and make the sign that shall end an unnatural divorce, and marry again to religion all that is pure and high in social aspiration."

Under the single tax a man works for what he gets, and he gets what he earns.

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