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EDITORIAL

FATHER POLAND'S DISCOVERY.

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PASSAGES from a yellow-covered pamphlet entitled *Socialism*, written by the Jesuit Father William Poland of the St. Louis University, are going the rounds of the Roman Catholic press with intemperate puffs of the pamphlet's excellence. The pamphlet, although denunciatory of Socialism, is written in so refreshingly a temperate tone, considering the quarter of the social compass from which it hails, and the benignity of the writer overspreads the production so thickly that criticism would seem harsh. Nevertheless, the dignity and sacredness of the Cause of Socialism demands that all errors promulgated against it be corrected, however benign the erring brother may be, and however the correction may tend to convict him of unfamiliarity with the important subject upon which he presumes to express himself. Father Poland's pamphlet bristles with misstatements of facts and serious slips in reasoning. We shall here mention one, leaving some others for some later occasion.

The statement is made in the pamphlet that the Socialist Republic will protect the citizen against competition, and, of course, against resulting inequality of wealth by PROHIBITING ALL PRIVATE PRODUCTION, OR INDUSTRY FOR PROFIT OR SALE [pp. 7 and 11]. This is a discovery for which the Father is entitled to the sole glory, although the glory of the discovery does little honor to the Father's powers of reasoning. Of course, Socialism contemplates the enactment of no such law—for the good and sufficient reason that any such legislation would be superfluous, as a little sober thinking will prove.

Everybody knows that legislation against murderers does not prevent murders. Everybody will realize, however, that, if to be murdered were left wholly to the decision of the murdereed, not a murder would be committed. Suicide there might be; murder never. Such an automatically working principle for good is unimaginable in

the matter of murder; on the contrary, under the Socialist Republic, the thing is not only imaginable but is an inevitable conclusion, in the matter of wage slavery, or of the kind of private industry that would result in social inequality.

Not private industry or production is the cause of social inequality. It never was. The cause of social inequality ever has been the private ownership by a privileged class of the necessities of production, to the exclusion of the masses of the people. Under feudalism it was the appropriation of the land, then all-sufficient for production, by the feudal lords; now, under capitalism, it is the appropriation by the capitalist lords of both the land and the now equally necessary machinery of production. Deprived, for want of the ownership of the necessities of production, from the opportunity to exercise their labor-power, which means to live, without the consent of the class that holds those necessities, the class of the disinherited is forced to submit to be plundered. Under feudalism they became serfs of the glebe; under capitalism they become wage-slaves. Thus social inequality does not start with, or is not banked upon, private production; it is private production that starts with and is banked upon social inequality. Private production only aggravates the evils of its foundation: it digs ever deeper and wider the chasm between the social classes. Planted upon this historic fact; upon the ethnical principle that man is, what Carlyle called him, "a tool-using animal"; upon the socio-economic law that the toolless man is the slave of the tool-holder; and, finally, planted upon the sociologic principle that the system of ownership must square with the system of production, and that production being now carried on collectively, ownership must likewise be collective;—planted upon all this, Socialism maintains that the natural and the social opportunities to labor, that is, the land on and the machinery (capital) with which to produce, must be owned collectively, and that such ownership will OF ITSELF WIPE OUT CLASS DISTINCTIONS, OR SOCIAL INEQUALITY.

Obviously, with the necessities to labor owned by and accessible to all, all special laws to prevent the re-establishment of social inequality, by preventing the starting of private enterprises, become superfluous. No social inequality could exist to-day if the masses could profitably employ themselves. They cannot because the necessities to labor are not theirs. Their limbs clogged by such social inequality, they have no choice but to sell themselves in wage-slavery. Under Socialism the

conditions are radically different. Suppose some freak—for naught else but a freak he could be—were to conceive the thought, out of the abundance that Socialist production will make him master of, to set up his own private establishments of production, say a mill. Why should he be prevented? What harm could he do, except to render himself ridiculous? Alone he could not possibly operate his private concern. To operate it he will need workers. Where will he find them? Who would sell himself into wage-slavery if he can be his own master? Who will consent to be plucked of the fruits of his toil, if the decision whether he shall be plucked or not rests with him? In the collectively owned mills of the land he has independence and the full reward of his labor,—will he elect to surrender such independence, to become a chattel and to sweat and toil for a slave driver? As in the supposed case where murderers having the sole decision whether they shall be murdered or not, no murder would be possible, so under Socialism, where the decision, whether he shall be a wage-slave or not rests wholly and exclusively with the citizen himself, wage-slavery is impossible, the possibility of social inequality is an absurd supposition, too absurd to be guarded against by special prohibitory legislation against private production or industry. The prohibition will work tacitly. The freak may set up his private mill; he may gloat over it like an idiot; it will remain empty of wage slaves; only the echo of his own solitary foot-fall will resound through its deserted walks.

If Father Poland had made an effort to grasp Socialism—whatever other fault he may have found with the Movement that does propose to turn our earth from a jungle of wild beasts, among whom Christian feeling cannot bloom, into a terrestrial paradise,—he would then have saved himself the shame of a “discovery” that common sense rejects.

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