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Whose Fault Is It ?

BY HUGH O. PENTECOST.

To almost every one the times in which we live seem to be more or less out of joint. There is commotion among the Protestant Christians concerning the interpretation of some of the creeds. There is commotion among the politicians concerning the growth of uncommon political doctrines. There is commotion among persons engaged in industrial pursuits concerning hours of labor and rates of wages. The only classes of persons who appear to be disturbed about nothing are those whose brains have been chloroformed by priests, or stupefied by inherited wealth, or stunned by poverty, namely: Catholics, the Four Hundred, and the abjectly poor. To the Catholics all religious questions are settled. To the Four Hundred all social questions are settled. To the abjectly poor there are no large questions to settle. The Catholics are sure of going to heaven. The Four Hundred are sure of a steady income. The abjectly poor are sure that they never can be any worse off than they are. All these are quite contented with things as they are, but nearly all others are fermenting with discontent.

Different classes of persons take different views of the situation.

Orthodox Christians think heretics are the disturbers of the religious peace. They say that if all persons would believe what they are told there would be a religious calm, and this is true, as the experience of the Catholics goes to show. If people would not think, they would not become excited, or, being excited they would become calm if they would submit to a hypodermic injection of theological morphine.

On the other hand, the religious heretics think there would be no disturbance, if the orthodox people would let them alone, and that is also true. Where there is perfect liberty there will be perfect harmony.

Monopolists think that if tenants would quietly pay their rent, borrowers uncomplainingly pay their interest, subjects dutifully submit to taxation, and employés gratefully accept such wages as employers choose to pay, all would be as serene as a summer day, and that is true. Where there is abject slavery, there is no agitation.

On the other hand, some laborers, wealth producers, believe that if each person in every community could possess all and only that which he produces, or its equivalent, there would be social happiness, and that is true. If there is no forceful appropriation of the products of one by another, there will be no discontent.

All this being true, the persons of each class in the community, swayed by their emotions, and judging of the situation from their own narrow and prejudiced standpoint, are apt to blame the persons of some other class for the disturbed condition of the religious and social world.

My mental condition and the circumstances under which my thoughts have formed are and have been such that on a superficial view of the field, and were I to be influenced by my emotions, I should say that the

orthodox Christians and the monopolists, the appropriators of other persons' labor products, are to blame for the condition which confronts us, for they are the ones who apparently hinder the enjoyment of freedom, and, in my opinion, happiness is only possible where there is freedom. But it seems to me that should I pass such a judgment as this on the persons of one or another class in the community, its fairness would not be substantiated by facts.

It seems to me that the foolish and injurious conduct of the religious managers and social monopolists is but what would naturally follow all that has gone before, is to be accounted for in the light of the facts observed in social evolution, and is exactly what we might rationally expect of them. Indeed, however much we may wish they would act differently, it is difficult for me to understand how, under the circumstances, they could, if we suppose, what is probably the truth, that they do not see that it would be to their own interests to do so.

And if this is true of them it is equally true of the persons of every other class in the community. I, therefore, shall make no attempt to answer the question propounded in the title of this address: "Whose fault is it," but shall content myself with presenting certain facts and leave you each to answer the question as you like.

What are the facts in the case?

Take the state of affairs in the realm of religion. Millions of persons believe in the existence of a person who made this world, who gave them life and sustains that life, who has performed certain acts which will take them to a happy place after they are dead, if they believe in those acts in a certain way. If they do not believe in those performances in a proper manner, they think they will be plunged into a place of

misery after death. These millions of persons believe that this creator in whom they believe has established certain fixed laws of right which they should follow, and can only depart from on pain of punishment. They believe that the pains of human life are means of blessing and should be borne with submission and gratitude. If they have boils, or rheumatism, or consumption, or paralysis, or go crazy, they think they should be thankful to the great person who thus afflicts them. If their children are barefooted and starving, they think they should rejoice on account of so great an evidence of the loving kindness of the supreme father. They believe that certain men are the spiritual agents of the supreme person and that as such they should be obeyed; that a certain organization is the repository of the wisdom and will of the supreme person; that a certain book is the expression of his mind and the declaration of his purposes.

What follows? These millions of persons are more or less under the domination of certain men who take their money from them, partly by force, and partly by appeals to their sense of obligation to the supreme person and to their fears; who teach them to be submissive to the rulers, on the ground that they are the appointed officers of the supreme ruler; who teach them to be contented with small wages, on the ground that the supreme ruler separates men into classes and distributes wealth, and that if they happen to belong to an unfortunate class in this world it is because the all-father wishes it so, and he will make it all up to them after they are dead, if they properly believe what is told them.

This is not an exaggeration or misstatement of facts. It is a plain setting forth of the truth.

From my standpoint it is very unfortunate that so many persons, or any, should hold such views, for,

first, they are, plainly enough to me, entirely without foundation in fact, and, second, it is certainly injurious to believe anything that is not true, and, third, these beliefs render most of the persons who hold them a prey to priests, rulers, and industrial monopolists.

It would be unfortunate if these religious beliefs were merely hallucinations unconnected with the practical affairs of life, such hallucinations, for example, as those which are accompanied by fright when one tips over a salt cellar, or sees the new moon over his left shoulder, or breaks a looking glass, or discovers that he has inadvertently started on a journey on Friday, or suddenly meets a cross-eyed man. Such illusions are comparatively harmless. They are merely foolish. We can afford to laugh at them and let them go. But the popular religious superstitions are positively and practically injurious.

They are injurious to the *brain*. If a man has a god of any kind in his brain, he is incapable of seeing or appreciating facts. A god is like too much whisky—when it is in the brain correct reasoning is not to be hoped for.

The ordinary religious superstitions are injurious to the *trunk and limbs*, for where they hold sway these portions of the body are apt to be inelegantly and insufficiently clothed and painfully overworked. While I was preparing this address a number of men were working in the street, just in front of my residence, shoveling sand, carrying and laying paving stones, and pounding them into place with heavy iron battering tools. They were working harder and more steadily than any other animals have to work to earn a living. They have worked thus so many hours each for so many days that their hands are as hard as leather, their backs are bent and stiff, and their brains are like gristle. If there were no religious superstitions,

these men and others like them would not have to work so long and so hard for so little pay.

Religious superstitions are injurious to the *stomach*, for where they exist the stomach is apt to be empty.

All this being, as I think, demonstrably true, the existence of such superstitions is to be deplored and opposed. But are we, therefore, entirely right in blaming the elderly person in Rome, who manages to get a sumptuous living out of the contributions of the poor? or the theological professors and clergymen who find so much more time to wrangle over the p's and q's of their absurd creeds than to give to the study of questions of human happiness and misery? I think not, and I will tell you why.

Suppose you go to one of those foolish persons who give up part of their earnings for the support of clergymen, the building of churches, and the meeting of the running expenses of religious institutions; one of those human beasts of burden who toil early and late and endure many privations on account of the false teachings they have received, and attempt to explain the fallacious nature of the pretensions set up by the clergymen. What happens? You are repulsed with more or less anger. You are called names. You are made to understand that you are meddling where your services are not wanted. The poor dupe, the pitiful serf, turns on you as it is said a pig may do if you offer him pearls instead of swill. You discover that he loves his deceiver passionately, and that he prefers to delve and drudge on half rations in the enjoyment of his miserable superstitions. He regards you, who would serve him if you could, as an enemy, and is ready to make common cause with his real foes in fighting for the privilege of being humbugged and sheared.

It is plain that if the vast number of clergymen are riding on the people's backs, it is the people's wish

that they should. It is plain that if the people's brains are stupefied by superstitions, they enjoy their misfortune and do not wish to be disturbed in their enjoyment of it. It is plain that if the people did not wish the Pope to live in a palace while they journey toward the Potter's Field, it would not be so. Why, then, should we blame the Pope, knowing that he is merely doing for them what the people wish him to do?

Take the state of affairs in the political realm.

Millions of people believe that certain persons have a kind of divine or natural right to rule over them. They believe that these certain persons have a right to take from them by force of arms one sixth or more of their earnings in the form of taxes, much of which goes to supply these rulers with the corporeal and incorporeal luxuries of life. They believe that these certain persons have a divine or natural right to invade the privacy of the family and attempt to regulate its internal arrangements, to imprison them, often when they are guilty of no crime, and even to take their lives in a most humiliating and cruel manner.

What follows? Many millions of these people are in the grossest ignorance and poverty. They toil and moil, and the incomputable wealth they produce, except a trifle more than is necessary to keep them alive, is quietly filched from them by the operation of laws which their rulers make. The Land Lord rakes in his millions under cover of the laws which monopolize vacant land. The Lend Lord levies his enormous tribute by virtue of the laws which monopolize the right to manufacture and sell money. The Trade Lord gathers in vast quantities of unearned wealth by the operation of laws restricting commerce and trade. The Transportation Lord appropriates enormous sums by virtue of charters which protect him against competition. The Professional Lord increases his chances

for wealth by monopoly laws governing his calling. Everywhere monopolists grab somewhat of labor's products until the poor toiler is left with little more than the skin on his body.

These are not the wild vaporings of a crank. They are statements which can be verified with scientific precision. The system under which we live is not one under which all men work for a living. It is one under which some work for a poor living and others legislate for a gorgeous superfluity.

But what then? Shall we blame the rulers and monopolists, with whom the clergymen work hand in hand to grind the face of the poor? the clergyman chloroforming the victim while the ruler and monopolist go through his pockets. It seems to me such blame is irrational, and I will tell you why.

Suppose you go to one of these miserable, downtrodden wealth producers and try to explain to him the nature of his misfortunes. What happens? He will defend his rulers with all the infatuation of hypnotism.

You can point out to him one man who absorbs \$50,000 a year from the earnings of his class, without performing one act that would be useful among rational people, but if that man should happen to drive by while you were talking to the poverty stricken wretch, he would throw up his hat and hurrah, and run after the human god's carriage, with tears of joy, as the children ran after the pied piper of Hamelin, and when he grows old he will, with swelling pride, tell his grandchildren that he once had the good fortune to actually see His Royal Uselessness.

You can point out to him a dozen, a hundred, a thousand men, each of whom has riches enough to build a house made of silver dollars, not one thousand of which were gained without the aid of a law; you could care-

fully and truthfully explain to him that while such men get riches as they do, he and his class will ever be poor, and five minutes afterward you may find him scraping the earth with his feet and pulling his forelock before these very men.

You may appeal to the reason of the working people, as a class, until you wear yourself to skin and bone by anxious effort, and after you have done your best some priest will hold up some shining bit of junk before them, or some politician will wave a particolored rag over their heads, and all your work will be undone.

The voice of the demagogue, the music of a brass band, the sound of the fife and drum, the flash of a torch, the glitter of buttons, will lead the average workingman into the din of the mill or the darkness of the mine, there to work like a mule, or to the ballot box, there to vote like a tool, or to the battle field, there to die like a fool. Against these tricks and symbols, which appeal to the passions and the imagination, he who speaks plain words of truth has no power.

The sum of all which is, that if the vast majority of the human race today are ignorant, poor, and miserable, as they undoubtedly are, they are also very well satisfied to be as they are. They reverence the priest, and love to kiss his toe. They idolize the ruler and are pleased to lick his hand. They admire the monopolist and enjoy being spattered with mud from his horses' feet. They fight only two classes of people: their employers, who, as employers, are not their enemies, and the men who tell them the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, who are certainly their friends.

Are they, then, to blame for the present state of affairs? I think not. Seeing the road over which they have come, and the disadvantages under which they labor, I do not understand how they could be other than they are, or act other than they do.

You see, I have left my question unanswered. I thought it well to ask the question, state the facts, and allow you to answer it to suit yourselves.

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