

Library Signpost

Common Sense About Land

By Rev. Benedict Ehmman

(One necessary point in the Catholic program to "putter all things to a head in Christ" is to restore work on the land to its proper importance and dignity. The Catholic Rural Life Conference is totally dedicated to this ideal. The Catholic Worker Group has it as one of its aims. A few of the local Catholic Workers have started a farm near Scottsville, and are working valiantly to convert weeds into action. Many books have been, and are being, written on this most vital topic. Mary Agnes Dougherty here reviews one of the most recent of them—a factual book, hilarious as its title, yet serious and honest in its wisdom. It is being added to the Catholic Evidence Library.)

Old McDonald Had a Farm

by Angus McDonald (Houghton-Mifflin Co.)

Old Man McDonald, preacher and farmer, was not a gentle soul. Emma, his wife, who never called him anything but "Mr. McDonald," was a model of true Christian womanhood, playing the role of devoted and understanding wife and mother, and peace-maker between her ruling husband and likewise wilful children. However, the Old Man would prefer to have slaughtered his prized hog than to have admitted that "Emmy" was an extraordinary woman. He was contrary enough to have put one foot inside Hades, had his congregation challenged his eligibility to membership among the damned. When he felt his power to convince was lacking in force, he would invariably engage the support of the good Lord, and with the Lord on McDonald's side—the right side—on argument was won before it began. He was as stubborn as the colts he broke to the harness, he sputtered like an engine needing fuel; he bellowed like the athletic organ in his church.

But you will like the Old Man despite his cantankerous nature, because he has the courage, foresight, straightforwardness, honesty and Christian sense of the great men who built up our fine country. He loved the land and relentlessly taught his people that this was God's earth, that it should be cared for properly, should not be desecrated and used for selfish purposes. "This is God's earth and you are sinning and desecrating His land when you plow up and down the hill." He upbraided the improvident farmer and deplored the abominable commercial system that was impoverishing the landowners and bringing ruin to our great land of freedom.

Old McDonald was never deterred from his purpose. His outlook on life was a personification of the law of nature which was so close to his heart. He saw man in his proper relationship to his Maker; that he was given rights and freedom by God, the means to attain them and the duty to preserve them, that if these rights and this freedom were abused man would be avenged by his own transgressions and responsible to God for his abuses. He believed

"that our ancestors fought for something worth fighting for, and that anything worth fighting for is worth defending, and that means from wind, water and aggression." When he said "You've got to feel it or there's no real religion," he meant you had to live it seven days a week. He made it clear to his children that "their daddy and their daddy's daddy was one of the plain people" not put up by worldly success but mindful that "it is in the things of the spirit that we really prosper."

Angus McDonald, the author, is the son of the Old Man, who after his father's death felt a great void in his life. He decided to acquire some education by travelling. He worked in almost every possible capacity, from dishwasher in school teacher, and ended up with a Master's degree from the University of Oklahoma. He is now working for the Soil Conservation Service of the U. S. Government. This is his first book, and as one of his friends said: "You ought to write more, because your writing doesn't sound like writing, and you don't use big words to cover up your ignorance."—M. A. B.

Summer time gives us more than the usual chance to see the country. Or would it be truer to say, the countryside? For usually it is from the smooth highway that most of us see the country. But how many of us realize that not all is well with the land? That the rural problem is one of the most urgent of national problems, even though it is at present eclipsed by the war? That the present revolution through which we are beginning to pass will have to include a broad and deep solution of the rural problem? That the healthy balance between urban and rural economies has long been lost, with our cities grown monstrous and the country depopulated? That the Catholic Church in the United States is 80% urban, and 20% rural? That this offers a most appalling prospect for the future—even the quite immediate future, since the city does not reproduce itself, but has always been populated from the country? That the 80-20 ratio must become at least 50-50 for the welfare of the Catholic Church in our country?

In his *The Story of American Catholicism*, Mr. Theodore Maynard writes, "What we see in that our cities have a huge Catholic population; what we miss seeing is that the cities have constantly to be replenished with new blood from the country districts, and that these are unable to supply Catholics in any considerable numbers. The conclusion is inescapable, within a few generations a very serious situation will confront the Church which is no longer able to fill up its ranks by immigration, and must therefore expect a sharp decline, should present statistical trends continue." (p. 44)

In the face of this enormous situation, the Catholic Rural Life Conference and the Catholic Worker seem as puny as David before Goliath. But theirs is the conviction that what must be done can be done under God and for God; and the prayer, study, and in simple quiet way they are retreating to the "lost land," like Old McDonald, though he was far from quiet, and putting their hands to the plough and the hoe. I have the feeling that they will become rallying points of tomorrow, making world-wide, even as were the monks of St. Benedict in the dawning days after the collapse of the Roman Empire.

EDITORIALS

(Continued from Page 11)

Informing talks on the purpose and the methods of the Church in carrying on her work of charity will be given, and a discussion period will follow each talk. Emphasis will be placed on the present need for volunteer workers. Pastors will have opportunity to present the needs of their particular parishes, and the use they can make of volunteer workers.

The sponsors for these conferences are looking to the Pastors for needed help and cooperation in making them a success. Information on the meetings and their programs may be obtained from the offices of the National Conference of Catholic Women, or from the Diocesan Office at Columbus City Centre, Rochester, N. Y. All interested are invited, and there will be no charge of any of the foregoing.

WORTHY, BUT PRIZELESS!

The War Week Parade is history now! Even the floating parade! To the fortunate winners, prizes have been awarded for the best float band, the best visiting band, for the best marchers, and also for the second-best. The judges had no easy task, and as many splendid entries it required accurate judgment to pick the winner. All will agree that the award to the Labor Float was fully justified, both because of its beauty and its significance.

The unanimous declaration of the Board of Judges on the Inter-faith Good Will Float is almost an award in itself. "It is a class by itself," not offering any common ground for comparison with other floats. The Inter-faith Good Will Committee accept the verdict, agree with the judges of the outstanding qualities and significance of this float, and accept graciously the decision that it is so worthy that it must remain prizeless.

A WAITING FOURTH OF JULY

There will be plenty of fireworks in all parts of the world on the approaching Fourth of July. They will not be the type to which we were used to years ago; supposedly harmless, but prohibited totally because they caused so much harm. No, the fireworks of the Fourth are not make-believe affairs! They are real, and are expected to produce dire results in destruction of enemy property and enemy forces. They are America's answer to the unprovoked assault of panzer divisions. They are America's means of seeking a just and lasting peace with victory.

Our soldiers on the field and in camp, our sailors on their ships, our marines on land and sea, our fliers in their planes, will observe the Fourth this year with renewed love for the country they are bravely defending. The symbol of Old Glory, of the revered banner of our country, of the Stars and Stripes, shall fly from battleship and from ship's mast as it has flown in time of peace and of war in days gone by. The symbol of freedom, of liberty and equality for all, it shall stir in all hearts renewed acts of love and devotion for our glorious country. It shall awaken new longings in the hearts of all patriots to do and to die that the United States may continue to live.

You spent money on other Fourth's for fireworks with which to mark your love of America, your joy in her past accomplishments. Spend your money on this Fourth for War Stamps, War Bonds, to show your confidence in what America must and will accomplish in the world of today. Invest in freedom, in justice, in God-given respect for the rights of men; invest in your country's future and in the future of a world that longs for deliverance from the enemies of God and man; invest in War Stamps, invest in War Bonds!

IN THE WILDERNESS

How can man find food for mind and heart in the wilderness of this world? So many influences of worldly origin, supported by diabolic suggestions and temptations, afford only poison and not food for man. God's blessings and God's bounty are often so hidden that there appear only those drear trappings of paganism that make the world, indeed, a veritable wilderness. In such a world, the question easily arises: "Can any one fill them here with bread in the wilderness?"

Only from Jesus Christ can men find food for mind and heart in the wilderness of this world. Just as the world would be a complete wilderness devoid of vegetation, unproductive of material food, were it not for the bountiful blessing of God on field and grove and flock and harvest; so also the world about us would be devoid of all that gives food to the spirit of man, were it not for the spiritual bounty of Jesus Christ poured forth on the souls He came to save.

Christ multiplied the loaves and fishes to feed the hungry multitude; He fed them, even in the wilderness. Christ breaks for us the food of heavenly doctrine through the ministrations of His Church; Christ breaks for us the Bread of Life in His visits to us in the Holy Eucharist. In Him and in His teachings, in His abiding presence in the Sacrament of His Love, let us find for our souls food in the wilderness of this world!

is in it, but you can read it without distraction, and indeed with fascination on your way to work in the bus or even while hanging to a strap, and being jostled, stepped upon and poked in the ribs by the rush hour crowd in the subway. Emmanuel Kant is in it, and Herbert Spencer and Bernard Shaw and Alfred Whitehead (whom you never could read in his own works) and Sir James Jeans; Gertrude Stein and James Joyce get mention; and there are quotations from Millikan, Eddington, Compton, the greatest names in the world of science today, and Sir Isaac Newton, and the greatest names in science, with all due regard to Einstein.

They are not lugged in; they glide into the text imperceptibly. They add a dozen others will speak to you out of the pages of this little pamphlet and you will read them as painlessly as you read West-brook Pegler (if you do read him painlessly), or Arthur Koestler, or Anne O'Hare McCormack. You will even find bits from the poets, Shakespeare, Shelley, Longfellow, Pope, Kilmer. And without any effort on your part, you will get brief excerpts from Plato and Aristotle. And all the while you will be learning about that supremely interesting and usually baffling subject: God. Dr. O'Brien's pamphlet is a triumph and a joy.

All of us who have studied Scholastic philosophy have learned by heart the classic arguments for the existence of God. Here you will find a few of them in an easy adaptation. And together with them you will find (on pages 28 and 29) an argument to prove the All-Wise and All-Powerful Creator, from—you would never guess—a description of the development of a child in the womb of its mother. Believe me or not, it is beautifully done.

This may seem to some a publicity "plug," especially since the pamphlet is by a friend of mine and comes from the Paulist Press. But I don't do that sort of thing when I wax enthusiastic. I do so spontaneously. And I think you will if you read Father John O'Brien on God.

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FIVE and TEN Years Ago

In the files of the CATHOLIC COURIER

From July 1, 1932, Edition
Rev. Msgr. Charles E. Shay, Director of the Rochester Diocesan Pilgrimage to Dublin's Eucharistic Congress met with President Eamon de Valera in Ireland. Monsignor Shay told President de Valera of the Irish president's mother and of her last days on earth, back in Rochester. Condolences of His Excellency, Bishop O'Hern, and many others were conveyed by Monsignor Shay.

From July 1, 1937, Edition
In a new set-up for Catholic Charities in the diocese, Archbishop Mooney, Administrator of the diocese, appointed the Rev. Gerald C. Lambert, Diocesan Director; the Rev. Hubert A. Bisky, M.A., Director of Family and Child Placing Division of Rochester and of Elmira Catholic Service Society, Inc.; the Rev. Joseph E. Vogt, Director, Social Action Division and William T. Nofsh, Director, of Finances and Budget Division.

The Lesson of a Dream Feast Days

A rich man bought a very valuable diamond with all his possessions and he wished to hide it in the hollow of his hand and carry it with him when he died. He fell asleep and dreamt he had lost his diamond and he began to weep. When an angel asked him why he wept he told the angel of his great loss. The angel asked him if he ever performed any kindly act on earth. "Yes," he answered, "I dried an orphan's tear one day." That tear is here, laid up for you, said the angel; "behold it! It sparkles 1,000 times more brilliantly in our sight than all the jewels of earth together."

On awakening, he distributed all his possessions to the poor and needy and died in great peace of soul.

- Sunday, July 1—ST. PETER OF LUXEMBURG
- Monday, July 2—ST. IRAE
- Tuesday, July 3—ST. CYRIL and METHODIUS
- Wednesday, July 4—ST. ELIZABETH OF PORTUGAL
- Thursday, July 5—ST. VERONICA
- Friday, July 6—THE SEVEN BROTHERS AND ST. FRANCIS, THEIR MOTHER
- Saturday, July 7—ST. PAUL, APOSTLE

Man may show his greatness; he cannot show it off. The soul that wallows in sin is less than mortal. He may live as an animal, but he will die as a man. Louis Venturi.

Sursum Corda

A Little Masterpiece

By Rev. James M. Gillis, C.S.P.

There is not and of course there cannot be a more interesting subject for a writer or for a speaker than "God." In the catechism we say that God is the Beginning and the End of all things. That seemingly simple fact of which even the children grasp the primary meaning, is really the most profoundly significant truth that has ever been presented to the human mind. A child, I say, can see the surface meaning but not even a St. Thomas Aquinas can see the ultimate implications of the truth that God is the Source from which all things come and the End in which all things are directed. "I am Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last," says God, and the expression is as unfathomable as that other, "I Am Who Am." Any man who could see—I will not say to the very depths of that truth—but half way down to the bottom—would take place in the history of thought as superior to Socrates, Aristotle, St. Thomas not to speak of Kant, Descartes and Leibnitz.

But since the subject of "God" is so deep and difficult, there is all the more reason why some good scholar should "popularize" it for us. Scorn not the popularizer, O all ye pedants, ye men of academic mind. The popularizer is a better man than you. He has to know all that you know—and then some. To be a reliable popularizer, he must be able to penetrate into the realm where the philosophers dwell and then come out of that mysterious world to tell us in our own simple patois (as the learned would call it) what they think and what they say in the world of the Illuminati.

And that, if you please, is why I keep hammering and clamoring here in Sursum Corda and elsewhere for some one who can be an inhabitant of two worlds at once, who can move easily and gracefully from one world into the other and back again, from the brilliant world of philosophy into the humdrum of every day life. From time to time I have presented to the readers of this column the name of some scholar who has acquired the knack of passing back and forth across the border as Moses had the habit of going into the mountain of God and coming down again to repeat to the people what God had said to him. Perhaps the latest instance was that of Father Farrell, O.P., who first mastered the Summa Theologiae of Aquinas and then repeated it for us in easy, graceful, witty language that tickles the imagination while it illuminates the mind.

It may seem a far cry from that huge synthesis to a little 57-page pamphlet. But I do wish to call attention today to a smaller and less pretentious piece of work. It is by the Rev. John A. O'Brien, Ph.D., LL.D., of the University of Notre Dame; the title is "God. Can We Find Him, Light from Modern Science and Philosophy." To me it seems a superlative piece of work. Something of the sort has been done a thousand times before but in my judgment never so well. Everything and everyone