

Library Signpost

Shine On, Farmer Boy

By Rev. Benedict Dorman

The spirit of democracy proceeds from a Christian view of life. A Christian regards each individual as having infinite value, purchased by the blood of God. Where Christian faith leaves the mind of society, education and charity begin more and more to prevail. In the actual conduct of life, account must be taken, of course, of the diverse talents, many or few, which are given to men; and no one should expect the world's democracy to mean that all people are equally competent to be judges on all matters. This is one of the precepts of Gethsemane, and when all this stands the essential dignity of each soul, which is created before God. In whatever way the redemption of the common man is ultimately to be fulfilled, let us hope that Christians will have the "pluck" as they certainly have the "will" to take it up for Christ; the fact remains that all its promises would have been closed to the human mind without the teaching of the Christian revelation.

I have seldom seen this reverence for the common man so intelligently expressed as in a recent editorial in *Maryknoll*: THE FIELD AFAIR, written by Bishop Walsh from China. Because it is too good to be missed by American readers, I give it here, with Maryknoll's permission.

Shine On, Farmer Boy

I saw him in the ricefield. He stopped working, as I approached, and leaned on his hoe. The sweat of a June day under the South China sun glistened on his brow. His coolie suit of blue denim was covered with dust, and the end of his frayed trousers disclosed a clumsy pair of stub-toed bare feet. He was a big boy for his age, but there was no coarseness in him; nobody would have looked at him twice: he was a clodhopper.

I knew his father a blunt old farmer, respected, hard-working, and honest. I knew his older brother, who was being educated at a city school. I inquired about the family. I spoke to him of his brother's progress. Then I tactlessly asked him if he also would like to go to the city and study books. He looked up in naive surprise, turning his whole countenance upon me with the openness of a sunflower. Complete frankness was in his gaze, but a mist of puzzlement also clouded his eyes. I had hit upon something he did not quite understand, although he knew only too well the answer. He replied very simply and without a trace of feeling, "I am not bright enough to go to school, my family parent says I am good only to work in the fields."

His father was not a harsh man; he was merely a truthful one. He had read his son aright and had told him that he was not made for anything else than a life of labor. The boy did not question this. He merely did not understand it. He did not resent it or rebel; he was not envious of others more nor

mal, more gifted. He was content. But he was also puzzled. And I know he was in reality puzzled through a whole dark life of obscurity and toil, until God gathered him in His arms to explain the mystery to him in the realm of light.

That puzzled resignation written in his honest eyes impressed itself indelibly on my memory, and it stirred me as I have seldom been stirred. I have known love. I was not inessential to the ties of affection that bound the members of a singularly happy family, and the very name of my mother was to me like a song of angels. I have had friends that I thought were cherished in the very fiber of my soul. I have cherished admiration and affection on every special object of God's creation—on saints and sinners, on geniuses and dull wits, on heroes, birds, and bushes, and on many other things besides. In short, I have had my transgressions. But I thought I had never scratched the surface of love before as I look the story surge that came to me now. It was romance, if you will, certainly it was passion.

"I choose you" sang in my heart, as I looked at my awkward farmer boy, perfect picture of the underprivileged soul. "I choose you" sang with you the countless millions of God's children, the poor, the everworking and overlooked, the forgotten and despised, men white, black and brown, souls imperiled and unendowed. I choose you, and I dedicate myself to you, and I ask no other privilege but to devote the energies of my soul to such as you. For in this sudden revelation shines an incarnation of my life ideal. You are my father and mother, my sister and my brother; you hold the center of my dreams. Men of no attraction, you attract me. Souls of no distinction, you draw and dazzle me. Clodhoppers of the world, for your own you claim me.

There is, of course, a special reason for the deep impressions made on me by this living symbol of the world's need. I am a missionary. I am a man sent by the Catholic Church to minister to such as he. That Church has the recipe for every need of all the sons of men. She creates souls. There is guidance for the gifted; there is opportunity for the energetic; there is development for the rugged and the strong. But for the frail and the forgotten, for the puzzled and the poor, there is also something; for that Church is a true mother, and it is for her weakest children that she reserves her deepest interest and her tenderest care. I am proud to be a missionary, with a vocation that has animated me to preach the Gospel to the poor.

Shine on, farmer boy, symbol to me of the thousand million like you who draw the attention of God from heaven to smooth and brighten our weary anxieties and your puzzled brows. Come to me often in your barefoot squalor and loneliness from out these hopeless and bewildered eyes. Do not let me forget that vision, but stay by me and preside over my dreams. Teach me the souls of the people. And remind me everlastingly that they are magnificent people like you.

REVEREND WALSH

Sursum Corda

The Shoemaker And His Last

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

If I should suddenly burst out with a dissertation on shall we say the strategy of aerial warfare, and not content with discussing the general principles of that art, should reason to dogmatize about some fine point still in dispute among the experts, what would my readers say? Only one guess is needed: they would say, "What does he know about it?" Why doesn't he stick to something that he has studied? And here is Aldous Huxley—a good man in his line, which, as it happens, is fiction—deliberately venturing into the field of theology, and in that field expressing a confident judgment upon a subject that not one theologian in a hundred would tackle mysticism. Even if a doctor in theology did speak or write on mysticism in general, I don't think even the most learned D.D. would be so sure of himself as to upbraid a whole group of saintly persons for practicing a high degree of prayer when they should, in his judgment, have gone in for a superior degree of contemplation.

It is a matter for amazement what these novelists will attempt. I used to know a medical doctor who, after high school and no college, with only two years in a medical school of mediocre reputation, told me "I tackle anything." This of course was many years ago; medical schools nowadays don't turn loose such potential murderers.

Also I knew a preacher, a good holy man who, as his colleagues used to say, would preach before the Pope without a moment's hesitation or a moment's preparation on any subject, no matter how difficult.

Aldous Huxley, who only a few years ago seemed heads over head in the problem of moral and social degeneracy, has turned to theology. There is no harm in that. We wish him well—we hope he continues and studies himself into the Church. But he ought to walk warily until he becomes theologically proficient. In his recent excellent biographical work "Grey Eminence" he is concerned with "Father Joseph," the *Señor* Achates of Cardinal Richelieu. Father Joseph was indeed a queer one: up to his neck in political intrigue and yet an ascetic; mixing with all sorts of people in a wicked court, but practicing severe mortifications, with a reputation for being kind of a Machiavelli, but none the less exact in his devotions and given to a form of contemplative prayer.

That last mentioned feature of the life of Father Joseph explains why his biographer, Aldous Huxley, considered it necessary to go into the subject of mysticism. Novelists rush in where theologians fear to tread. I wouldn't tackle it though I had the usual course, and somewhat more than the usual course in theology and have read mystical theology a thousand times more since getting my degree than I did to get it. I say I wouldn't tackle it, and I don't know any priest who would. You have heard noticed that you never hear a sermon from a Catholic pulpit on mysticism and contemplative prayer. Seldom will you hear one even in a monastery or a convent. Why? Too difficult. Too dangerous. Any

spiritual director who does venture a bit of instruction in such or priests on that subject, makes apologies, gives warnings and disclaims personal experience.

The specific mistake of Aldous Huxley is something he said not about Father Joseph but about Cardinal de Berulle, founder of the French Oratory. (You will remember that Cardinal Newman was also an Oratorian.) Mr. Huxley claims that the French School of Piety, which Cardinal de Berulle partly founded and partly followed, "ruined Catholic mysticism for two centuries." Mr. Huxley prefers the form of mystical prayer to be found in a fourteenth-century masterpiece, "The Clouds of Unknowing." The author of that work remains anonymous, but, as Father Ronald Knox says, "he reduces the act of contemplation to a naked act of faith, discarding in that prayer not only all the thought of mundane things but all thought whatever, even on the holiest subjects." Thinking upon Our Lord's life or His Passion can have no part in that prayer.

A great mystic of two centuries later, Father Benet Casfeld, exiled to France, followed "The Cloud of Unknowing," says Huxley, except that he believed that "even the most advanced contemplatives should persist in the practice of the passion." Father Benet if we accept Huxley— Influenced the whole French school of mystical theology to its very great harm. And so, he says, Cardinal de Berulle's school "ruined the whole stream of contemplative life."

I think that much will do. If we go further we shall get in deeper, and if we get in deeper we may drown. If you wish to see a beautiful sample of correction administered to Mr. Huxley, look up an article by Father Ronald Knox in the *London Tablet* for May 2 of this year. I understand that Father Knox and Mr. Huxley are good friends; and perhaps on that account Father Knox is kinder with Huxley than you would expect. "It is not for me," says Father Knox, "to whitewash Father Joseph, but when Mr. Huxley criticizes de Berulle, I see red." He sees red but he remains polite. He administers castigation, but mercifully.

But what concerns me and I hope the reader of this column is the peculiar phenomenon of an outsider's thrusting himself into a most difficult and perplexing problem in the most bewildering form of theology, and issuing a judgment and a condemnation. It is just one more instance of what we see in lesser matters every day, the shoemaker abandoning his last. Father Knox's correction should be a lesson to Huxley, and a paradigm to us. We must always be ready to ask "What does he know about it?" Often that question will be better than controversy.

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FIVE and TEN Years Ago--

—in the files of the CATHOLIC COURIER

From Aug. 19, 1937, Edition

Under the authority of the Most Rev. Bishop John Francis O'Hern and with the assistance of a committee known as the Diocesan Church Committee named by the Underwriters Board of Rochester, N. Y., a complete survey of the insurance covering all Catholic Church property in the Diocese of Rochester was being conducted.

'Quiz' Corner

Should one worry if they are not certain that they made the act of contrition when they were in confession?

There is no necessity to make a formal act of contrition in the confessional. Contrition is a condition of mind and heart. The very fact that you want to confess indicates that you were sorry for your sins, that you had contrition. It is well to make a formal act of contrition while the priest is giving you absolution as a good means to settle our hearts to sorrow. The fact that you forget it in the confessional should cause you no worry.

It is good confession in a person has confessed his sins in a priest as clearly as he thought possible and has not willfully omitted anything and later learns he should have made himself more clear, were these sins forgiven?

The sins were forgiven but there remains the obligation of fuller explanation of the sins confessed when next going to confession.

Is it true that certain sins are forgiven by receiving Holy Communion?

A worthy reception of Holy Communion remits venial sins on the soul of one who is properly disposed. If a person were fully of a mortal sin, but not conscious of its presence on his soul and received Holy Communion with a worthy for all the sins that he had committed and a real love of God, it is a probable opinion that the sin would be forgiven. We must confess that such would be a very rare occurrence.

If Protestant churches are false, why does the Catholic Church recognize Protestant Baptisms?

Because Baptism, as a sacrament of such necessity, can be administered by anyone, provided he pours water which comes into actual contact with the one to be baptized, says at the same time the right words, "I baptize thee in the name of the Father, and of the

Son, and of the Holy Ghost," and intends to do what Christ intended in instituting the sacrament. Since the sacrament operates independently of the faith or morals of the one who administers it, and since all the efficacy from the will and merits of Christ, you can see that the faith or morals of the minister goes not of itself affect the validity of Baptism.

Is Baptism invalid if one of both of the sponsors should be in the state of mortal sin?

The spiritual condition of the sponsors does not affect the validity of the Sacrament of Baptism. The validity of Baptism requires absolution with true contrition and the pronouncing of the prescribed words. The sponsors who perform the rite must at the same time pronounce the words.

Trust Quietly

We ought never to be dependent upon the recommendations of others; we shall not be so quietly trusting that we will be our salvation and life. We ought to be thoughtfully busy, helpful in lifting others by our words of communication.

Feast Days

- Sunday, Aug. 23—ST. PHILIP BENEDI.
- Monday, Aug. 24—ST. BARNABAS APOSTLE.
- Tuesday, Aug. 25—ST. LOUIS KING.
- Wednesday, Aug. 26—ST. AUGUSTINE KING, PETER AND MARTIN.
- Thursday, Aug. 27—ST. JOSEPH CALASANCHES.
- Friday, Aug. 28—ST. AUGUSTINE.
- Saturday, Aug. 29—BREAKING OF ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST.

EDITORIALS

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ican Indian—for whom war and the hunt were paramount and who compelled women and captives to do the work—was not high. It is in his four-volume "History of Greek Culture" Burckhardt suggests that, on the other hand, the ideal now existing in Europe derives primarily from that of the urban middle class of the medieval age. Having accepted the Christian concept of labor, the members of this class in the course of time attained equality with the nobles, both from the standpoint of wealth and of education, although differing somewhat in kind.

After "the glory that was Greece" had departed, however, the Greeks treasured the rapidly fading memory of their heroic age, a world unacquainted with either profit or loss, and nothing could so directly efface it from their minds. In fact, they were much nearer to that heroic life, Burckhardt points out, a life composed simply of combats, the tragedies of the royal houses and consideration for the deities, the whole interwoven with a wonderful poetry. This, ever were the members of the burgher class of the Middle Ages to the Germanic sagas.

In Greece, moreover, the author of "The History of Greek Culture" affirms, slavery kept pace with the development of the urban aristocracy which devoted itself more and more to sports, and forensic and poetic contests. And because to the labor of women and slaves was added that of the serfs, contempt for manual labor continued. Even peasants and artisans able to purchase slaves were not accorded public respect. In Sparta, for example, the ideal of Hellenic life was unalterably opposed to any participation in gainful occupations. A plenitude of leisure, so Plutarch believed, was the height of everything to be desired, one of the greatest and most fortunate blessings a man could enjoy.

According to Burckhardt, the entire system of government in Sparta was predicated on a subjected group of people, by far the larger element in the city, who were obliged to do the work. Meanwhile, it was the proud boast of the Spartans that no member of their class was required to do anything to advance the common good or that of the State. And the same ideal prevailed in other parts of the country, if not always in so exaggerated a form.

Burckhardt's explanation throws new light on the statements made by the Administration leader on the occasion referred to. The glory of ancient Greece was bought at high cost. And not only did the elite alone enjoy "freedom from labor." They also were the only ones to enjoy "freedom of religion, of assembly, of speech and speculation," but this too the speaker did not explain.

It remained for the Christian dispensation to elevate the status of work and the dignity of woman, despite the fact that the newer "barbarism" (money-mad, materialistic, ostentatious, corrupt) are again degrading both. So much so that it is becoming increasingly difficult to sustain the Christian concepts. Should it be impossible to do so the cycle will be complete and unemployment will come more be identical with leisure; at least for the fortunate few, while the remainder will plod their way through life as ciphers if not subjected to a certain organization, determined for them by the totalitarian party or the State!