

WHAT THE CHURCH HAS DONE FOR THE WORKER

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INTRODUCTION.

Among the catch-cries and slogans of a materialist age is: "Religion is the opium of the people." Just in what way religion drugs men has never been rationally explained. It did not need explanation to people who believed Christianity was dead. Marx and Lenin, who gave the slogan currency, themselves knew nothing at first hand of genuine Christianity. Their only contacts had been with an enfeebled Protestantism and a petrified Orthodoxy. They knew nothing of the Catholic Church, her doctrines, her achievements, her past.

Just how deeply religious nations like the Irish, the Poles and the Spaniards proved so warlike, so bitterly resentful of tyranny, so determined on individual and national liberty was not explained. But in defiance of history, the cry was broadcast until many Catholics even came to believe it "the Church has done nothing for the workers."

For 2000 years the Church preached that in the great essential the slave was as good as his master, the tenant as his landlord, the soldier as his general. In nonessentials—brains, beauty, brawn—there were differences. But the soul of a garage attendant is as valuable as that of Henry Ford; that of a bank messenger boy as valuable as that of Montagu Norman. The Church gave every man and woman something to live for. She said—for the first time in civilised history—that hard, manual work was a jolly good thing. Cicero had spoken contemptuously of a man as of the lowest type—"he was a butcher." Pagan literature deliberately refused to concern itself with the poor. The Church set up a Carpenter as the Ideal Man.

Chapter 1.

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH OVERTHROWS SLAVERY.

The well-known Rationalist historian, Lecky, a bitter opponent of the Church, wrote in his "History of European Morals" a passage which was very remarkable coming from the pen of such a writer. Lecky says "Christianity broke down the contempt with which the master had regarded his slaves, and planted among the slaves a principle of moral regeneration which expanded in no other sphere with equal perfection." And the most significant section: "Its action in procuring the freedom of slaves was unceasing."

Was the Church, in fact, the chief means through which the abolition of slavery in the Roman Empire was accomplished? Most readers are aware of what the institution of slavery meant to the Roman Empire. Two things seem undeniable. All pagan civilisation before Christianity was based on slavery. Never, outside of Christianity, has there been an industrial system which was not a slave system.

Roman Paganism and the Workers. How did Roman paganism treat the workers?

In the first place, it is clear that all of the Roman workers were slaves. There was certainly a large number of free men in Rome who owned no property, but the only time these have ever been referred to as workers was in a book by Mr. Joseph McCabe, a writer whom very few people take seriously to-day, and who must have written that passage with his tongue in his cheek. It certainly seems odd to describe as workers a section of the population which received two hundred public holidays a year, and the rest of the time lived on the dole provided by the State, and on the bounty of rich men, regarding all work as beneath them. The joke will be appreciated by industrial workers in our own factories.

Misery of Roman Slaves.

The real workers throughout the Roman Empire were the slaves. The slave class—which is almost the same as saying the working class—of Rome existed in a state of misery and degradation almost unimaginable to people who have enjoyed the results of centuries of Christianity. In law and in fact the Roman slave was treated as an animal, as a

chattel, not as a human being. He was not even allowed his own name, which he could pass on to his children, like a freeman, but he had to accept any name which his master chose to give him. The slave was legally not a person, but a thing. "A slave or any other animal," "slaves, animals and other things." Phrases like these recur in the writings of the legal authorities.

Paganism Denies Family Rights.

A slave had no family rights. No slave could legally be husband or wife. Their unions were regarded as merely cohabitation; never legal marriage. Slaves who lived together as man and wife could be separated by their master, and could be forced to contract unions with persons named by him. Slave parents had no right to their children. The law did not recognise relationship between slaves. The titles, father, mother, brother, sister, were applied to them only as a matter of convenience. The children of slaves belonged to their masters. Sometimes speculators bought female slaves in order to make profit by selling their offspring. In other cases, masters found it to their interest to prohibit parenthood to their slaves.

Roman Cruelty.

Apart from exceptions stated later, the master had uncontrolled powers of killing or otherwise punishing his slaves. It was the stark terror of torture and death that kept slaves submissive to their oppressors. Slaves worked enchained in the fields, and wore chains even in their beds. Porters in private houses were chained. Because a Roman master had been murdered, four hundred of his slaves were slaughtered.

There is the horrible case, often quoted, of the Roman master who threw slaves into his fishpond to feed the fishes. Mr. Joseph McCabe, in attempting to palliate the cruelties of paganism, says only one instance of throwing slaves to fishes is on record, and that Seneca, who records it, declares that the fiendish master was worthy of a thousand deaths. That is quite true. But Seneca was an exceptionally humane fellow, and he gives many other instances of horrible cruelty.

Most of us today are disgusted by many of the episodes related. There are many who would feel that the Catholic Church should have brooked no compromise with such a system, that the system was so rotten that savage revolution was the only effective way of clearing the mess; for it is quite clear that slavery was not only demoralising in itself, but that it meant the ruin of the free worker in just the same way as at the present time industrial awards are broken down by sweated labour.

A violent revolt against the institution of slavery on the part of the tiny Catholic Church would have been fruitless. When an institution was so widespread and fundamental as was slavery in the Roman Empire, a successful revolt against it would have meant the overthrow of the whole established order. As the experience of modern Russia proves, it is easier to overthrow the established order than to build one which is better, while many a violent revolution proclaimed in aid of the workers, by the very brutal measures which it uses, fixes the rivets of exploitation more firmly upon them.

Failure of Revolt.

In the history of Rome there are numerous violent revolts by slaves. There was the rising of over 200,000 slaves in Sicily under Eumus, who proclaimed himself king—a rising suppressed only after two years of savage warfare. There was the revolt of 70,000 slaves under Spartacus, who in two years won successes which imperilled the existence of Rome itself. And, finally, in the last great struggle which preceded the establishment of the Roman Empire under Augustus, the army of his opponent, Sextus Pompeius, was composed in large part of rebellious slaves.

And what was the result of all this violence? When all the wars were over, the institution of slavery was entrenched more solidly than ever before. After the revolt of Spartacus, 6000 slaves were crucified on the roads leading to Rome to strike terror into the hearts of other slaves. When Augustus defeated Sextus Pompeius, he returned to their masters 30,000 slaves to be put to death for having revolted.

Violence Not the Way.

Such was the bitter and hopeless prospect facing the workers in the Roman Empire in the middle of the first century. And yet, by the end of the fourth century, the whole institution of slavery was rapidly disappearing. No reliable historian will deny that economic factors were of some importance in this change. It is equally certain, however, that even those people who can see no good in religion historians—such as Lecky, for example—cannot possibly deny that it was the Catholic Church which was the great motivating cause in the raising of the status of the slaves who composed the working class of the Roman Empire.

Christianity and Slavery.

Christ did not formally condemn slavery, yet the disappearance of slavery was the inevitable result of Christian teaching. When Christ said, “A new commandment I give unto you, that you love one another,” He did not add that this applied to everybody except slaves. St. Paul was even more explicit: “There is neither Jew nor Greek; there is neither slave nor free—for you are one in Christ Jesus.” This doctrine of spiritual equality, of the brotherhood of all men in Christ, slaves or free, and of the fatherhood of God over all, was a most revolutionary doctrine alien to the ancient civilisations of Greece and Rome.

In the whole history of the ancient world there was no greater thinker than Aristotle. And yet in his ideal State the institution of slavery not only existed, but was the entire basis of the society which he depicted. Even by modern standards Aristotle was a very humane man. Hard though it be for us to realise, a reading of some of the works of Aristotle, Plato, Cicero, and the other great thinkers of ancient times makes it quite clear that they really believed, they really felt that there was an essential difference between a slave and a freeman, that they were made differently. A freeman was a man, while a slave was an animal.

The Fathers Against Injustice.

It is a very pleasant picture to visualise the shock which must have been given to the smugness of the old pagans by the golden-mouthed orator of the early Church, St. John Chrysostom, when he declared: “He who has immoral relations with the wife of a slave is as culpable as he who has like relations with the wife of the prince. Both are adulterers, for it is not the condition of the parties that makes the crime.” It is certain that it was the slaves whom the great St. Gregory had in mind when he delivered his famous condemnation of social injustice: “It is vain for a man to regard himself as innocent while he usurps for his own the gifts of God which belong in common to all. Those who do not distribute what they have received are wading in the life-blood of their brethren. Every day they murder so many of the poor who are dying of hunger and might be saved by the means which they keep for themselves. So when we distribute to the poor what they need, we are not giving what belongs to us; we merely pay back their own. We are paying a debt of justice rather than fulfilling a work of mercy.”

Gradual Overthrow of Slavery.

Under the influence of the Church, the process of emancipation went on gradually and increasingly. The Church made the freeing of a slave an act of disinterested charity. Pagan masters had sometimes sold him his liberty for his market value, out of his painfully amassed savings. Catholic masters gave freedom as an alms. The works of St. Ignatius of Antioch show that it was not uncommon for the Church to redeem slaves out of its common resources. Heroic Christians are known to have sold themselves into slavery to deliver other slaves. Many Catholic masters freed all the slaves they had.

In pagan antiquity were found masters freeing large numbers of their slaves—but only by their wills after they themselves were dead, so that they lost nothing by it. It was only Christians who freed all their slaves in their (the Christians’) lifetime, thus effectively despoiling themselves of all they had. It was in acts like this that the great work of freedom accomplished by Catholic doctrine revealed itself.

At the beginning of the fifth century there was the most outstanding example of all—that of St. Melania, who freed no fewer than 8000. Taking the average price of a slave as about £25, she was thus moved by the spirit with which her principles inspired her to give away no less than £200,000. And we must remember that the historian Palladius wrote of this before the year 406 A.D., which was long before Melania had exhausted her enormous fortune in similar acts of

liberality.

Then, when this great work of civilisation was going on uninterruptedly, there came the barbarian invasions of the Western Empire. The Huns and Goths overran Europe from the East. The Visigoth came over the blood-drenched sands of Northern Africa, barbarians without a trace of pity, devastating, murdering, destroying—Roman province after Roman province becoming a desert under the hammer of barbarism. The Danes and Norsemen spread terror from the North. Roman civilisation in England, Ireland and France was drowned in the blood spilt by the Vikings. The days of slavery seemed to have returned.

Reconquest.

And then the Church resumed its work of redeeming the slaves who had suffered most of all from the incursions of the barbarians. Documents from the fifth to the seventh century are full of instances of captives carried off by barbarians and doomed to slavery being redeemed by Bishops, priests and monks and sent back by thousands to their own country.

Meanwhile, councils of the Church were legislating constantly to raise the status of the slave. This legislation secured protection for a slave who had been a victim of his master's ill-treatment, and who had validity of marriages contracted between free persons and slaves. It forbade the reducing of a freeman into slavery. It held that the ordination of a slave to the priesthood was valid, while any slave could become a monk with or without the consent of his master.

Meanwhile, as the barbarians were converted to Christianity, wealthy proprietors endowed monasteries and bishoprics with lands and the slaves on them. These were thenceforth given a fixed legal status, with rights as well as duties, completely removed from the whole idea of slavery. Their new position as ecclesiastical serfs put hundreds of thousands of them in a more favourable position for being freed by the Church, and hundreds of thousands were actually freed.

A New Society,

By the ninth century the condition of society had changed completely. Slavery, which had been the fundamental basis of all previous civilisations, was practically non-existent. There is no institution which can boast a finer achievement than that accomplished by the Church in raising the status of all the workers throughout the Roman Empire.

Badge of Honour.

A writer in the "Christian Democrat" some years ago declared that the Catholic Church regenerated European society from slavery **by making men fit for freedom**. The great work of the Church was in revolutionising the whole idea of labour. To the Romans it had been a degradation; to the Christian it was a badge of honour, worthy of a freeman. That is the testimony of the German non-Catholic historian, Gottfried Kurth, in his book, "The Origins of Modern Civilisation." "Labour, the occupation of a slave, despised by the ancient world as unworthy of a freeman, was, in the eyes of the Christian, not only a meritorious, but a holy occupation. He was not content with resigning himself to it as if it had been an inevitable law; he accepted it joyfully as a badge of honour. Work became a glory and an honour among the disciples of the Gospel. They thought of Joseph, father of the Holy Child, who had worked as a carpenter in his tiny shop at Nazareth. Before their eyes was the Apostle of the Nations who had earned his bread as a sail-maker, and who had proclaimed: 'He who will not work shall not eat.' These were new themes which found a strange home in pagan society."

The Roman Empire itself was destroyed before the Church succeeded in abolishing slavery. Despite the Catholic Church's magnificent and ultimately successful struggle against this degrading incubus on the workers of the ancient world, one can be forgiven for wishing that success had come more quickly. It is impossible to doubt that one of the main retarding factors, one of the handicaps which dogged the Church's efforts were the evils which prevailed during the fourth and fifth centuries even among professing Catholics. Human nature has probably altered very little, and to-day there are many Catholics who, while paying lip-service to the principles of the Social Encyclicals, continue

cheerfully to commit the very sins of injustice condemned in those same Encyclicals. There is no reason to believe that the same type of Catholic did not exist in those early centuries—the type of Catholic who, while very carefully guarding against lies and sins of unchastity, forgets completely that the denial to the worker of his just wage is one of the sins crying to heaven for vengeance.

Other powerful factors also operated against the Church:

1. The attempts of the Church Pope, Bishops, monasteries—were repeatedly beaten back by fresh barbarian conquerors, by the ravages of civil war and the complete collapse of Roman civilisation. Just as the work seemed complete, a horde of barbarians, Vikings, Saracens, Saxons, Danes, would overthrow the existing Christian rulers, and reimpose slavery. The labour of two centuries would perhaps have to be repeated after the conversion of the new conquerors of Christianity.

2. Economic conditions—lack of machinery, of good roads, of ready money made any rapid emancipation of serfs impossible. Men believed that only by cheap slave labour could a large manor be managed efficiently.

3. Poor men preferred to submit themselves to the power of a powerful lord who could protect them from brigands, raiders and robber barons. It was better to be alive and secure as a serf than in constant danger as a freeman.

As economic conditions improved and regular government became possible, the freeing of the serfs was accomplished rapidly. Once towns became large and could provide employment, once money became plentiful, the economic reasons for keeping slaves disappeared and the glorious ideal of the Church—a Europe of free Christian men and women—was at last a reality.

Chapter II.

THE WORKERS OF THE MIDDLE AGES.

It is clear beyond any shadow of doubt that the workers were far better off in the Middle Ages than they are to-day. The important point is this—that the Middle Ages is the only time in the history of the world that an economic system has been organised in the spirit of the social principles of the Church. The Church accepts responsibility for the general social and economic ideas which prevailed in the Middle Ages. It accepts responsibility for the doctrines of the Just Price, the Living Wage, Private Property, and its limitations and the condemnation of usury, which were publicly proclaimed by the Church throughout the Middle Ages, and on which the social institutions of that period were founded. If the condition of the worker was then better than it had ever been before, or has ever been since, it was because that was the first and last time that European civilisation has been built on Catholic social teaching.

Writers of the most diverse political and religious opinions have united in paying a tribute to the great labour which was accomplished by the Church for the working class in those ages.

What are the things the worker has wanted in every age? What are the things to which he has a right? Fundamentally it can be said that he wants an income which is sufficient to keep himself and his family at a level of decent Christian comfort. He wants security in employment, so that he is not faced with the gnawing fear that the time may come when his children will not have enough to eat. He wants sufficient property to enable him to preserve his freedom from the ever-encroaching claims of the State.

The claim which any Catholic is entitled to make, after a consideration of all the facts, is that the worker of the Middle Ages had these things, where the modern industrial worker has not, and that, the institution which gave them to him was the Catholic Church.

Just Price and Living Wage.

The most important single weapon which the Catholic Church wielded in its defence of the worker was the doctrine of the Just Price, which was closely associated with the doctrine of the Living Wage. There are very few modern business men who do not conceal a smile when such a vague idea as the Just Price is mentioned. Yet the fact is that the simple mediaeval theologians knew all about the modern business practice of buying cheap and selling dear, while modern business men knew very little of the mediaeval practice. The reason is that the modern practice was justified by Roman Law, which the Church Law came to replace.

The Mediaeval Law.

The law which prevailed in the Middle Ages was entirely different. St. Thomas Aquinas laid down quite definitely that it was not lawful to sell a thing for more than it was worth. The principle to be guarded is that buyer and seller have an equal right the right to receive the exact equivalent in value of what each gives the other. It may be thought that this was a hard and impracticable thing to achieve.

The way in which the people of the Middle Ages reduced this principle to practice is explained by the fifteenth century writer, Langenstein, who lays down the rules which a Government should follow in fixing prices. It should make the price high enough to enable workers, artisans and merchants to maintain themselves suitably, but low enough to enable the poor to procure the necessities of life. When in doubt, the tendency should be to lower rather than to increase prices. Broadly speaking, it was the costs of production that determined the Just Price, and costs of production were whatever was necessary to maintain the different producers in their customary standards of life. The first charge on industry was to be the living wage, and prices were so regulated as to ensure that a living wage could be, and was, paid to the worker.

Wages the First Charge.

Writing concerning the practical applications of these two principles, Professor Cunningham, a noted English economic historian, has this to say: "In the Middle Ages, wages were taken as a first charge; in modern times the reward of the labourer cannot but fluctuate in connection with fluctuations in the utility and market price of things. There must always be a connection between wages and prices, but in the olden times wages were the first charge, and prices on the whole depended on them, while in modern times wages, on the other hand, are directly affected by prices."

The same thing is said by Lipson, another non-Catholic historian, in his "Economic History of England": "Mediaeval authorities endeavoured to fix prices according to the cost of production. Starting from the conviction that the labourer was worthy of his hire, their principle was to reward him with a recompense suitable to his station. They did not hold what we may call the theory of minimum subsistence—the iron law of wages—where wages were forced down to the lowest level at which the workman can subsist. Instead, they seem to have recognised that wages should be made to conform to fit a proper standard of life."

Abundant testimony on the same lines could be furnished. "I have stated more than once," writes the famous Professor Rogers, "that the fifteenth century and the first quarter of the sixteenth were the golden age of the English labourer, if we are to interpret the wages he earned by the cost of the necessaries of life. At no time were wages, relatively speaking, so high, and at no time was food so cheap. Attempts were constantly made to reduce these wages by Act of Parliament, the Legislature frequently insisting that the Statute of Labourers should be kept. But these efforts were futile; the rate keeps steadily high, and finally becomes customary and is recognized by Parliament.

Although the social principles which motivated the institutions of that period, the actual provisions as to wages and working conditions, and the testimony of historians are important, it is essential to appreciate the real conditions which prevailed among mediaeval workers by comparing their conditions with our own.

The Serf.

There was no class among the Roman slaves which was the victim of worse treatment than the slaves who worked on farms. By the tenth century slavery had been abolished and three-quarters of the population of Europe were what is known as serfs.

The main restriction on the serf was that he was "bound to the soil." He could not, without the consent of the lord of the manor, leave the land he was supposed to cultivate. If he wished to marry a wife from outside the manor, he had to obtain the lord's consent. If he had no direct heirs to whom his property would go at his death, he could not dispose of it, but it reverted to his lord. He had to pay certain fixed rents, not in money, but in kind, and by way of personal service to the lord. A number of other restrictions which emphasised the serf's subordination to the lord were also imposed upon him.

The modern worker has not the obligations of the serf. It is equally important, however, to note that he has not the

rights the serf enjoyed. All the serf's essential family rights were secure. Once his due services were fulfilled, he was, in fact, the complete owner of his farm and of whatever other property he might acquire. The rents due to the lord could not be increased with the increased value of the holding, even though the increased value was in no way due to the serf's labour. The serf could not be evicted from his home. This is more than could be said for the supposedly "free" workers of Australia, as many have found to their cost. The serf's land, or working capital, could not be sold up for debt. Modern conditions have "progressed" by making it possible for the worse kind of money-lenders to grind debt-ridden workers into the gutter. In addition to his land, the serf had defined claims on the communal lands of the manor, such as free grazing rights, forest rights, fishing rights, the use of waterways and water power. "All these rights and the amount of each serf's and each lord's participation in them were regulated minutely by custom and could not be altered by the lord."

From all these things emerges the fact that in the matter of security and in the provision of his essential needs, the serf was far better off than the modern unprotected agricultural or industrial worker. He had definite, enforceable claims on the protection of the lord, which the modern worker has not. He had his permanent house and farm, which the modern worker has not. "The serfs," says Ashley, "were indeed tied to the soil, but the soil was also tied to them. No very great increase in wealth was possible to them; but, on the other hand, they always had land on which they could live and live, except in very occasional seasons, in rude plenty."

History of Serfdom.

Even more important than the existence of these rights was the fact that under the influence of the Church the serf was gradually, but certainly, evolving into a free peasant with land of his own, which he held absolutely. It is a notable fact that in Catholic countries serfdom disappeared early, while in those countries affected by the Protestant revolt it died very hard. Serfdom had practically been replaced by a society of free peasants by the sixteenth century in Catholic England. Except for certain feudal rents, it had disappeared from France by the fourteenth century. In Italy and that portion of the Spanish Peninsula which had been reconquered from the Moors, serfdom was abolished by the beginning of the fifteenth century. In Protestant Baden, serfdom remained until 1783, in Denmark until 1804, in Prussia until 1809, in Saxony and other Protestant parts of Germany until 1832.

In the development of a community of free peasant farmers, which was to become characteristic of Catholic Europe, too much praise cannot be given to the work of the monastic Orders. Through the monasteries there began in Europe the tradition of scientific farming, which they alone taught. Around the monasteries gathered the communities of free cultivators, living a life of security, independence and rude comfort; a life of toil, but a life without nerve-racking rush; a life punctuated and made beautiful by the numerous Church festivals, observed far more punctiliously by freedom from labour than are our modern public holidays.

Chapter III.

THE CHURCH INSPIRES THE GUILDS .

The Guild System.

The guild system is, no doubt, the best-known feature of mediaeval society. The origin of the guild system was the merchant guild, of which all the merchants of the town were members. This organisation not only directed the municipal government of the town, but regulated the trading practices of the members.

The main interest centres, however, not in the merchant guilds, but in the craft guilds, which developed later, for it is in the craft guilds that the industrial workers, as men understand that term today, were truly represented. As population grew, and there came to be a greater variety of crafts and trades, the tendency was for men of each craft, like weavers, bakers, goldsmiths, brewers, armourers, and so on, to form a separate guild and claim the right to govern their own trade, instead of leaving all control in the hands of the general merchant guild, which had now become a sort of town council.

Every trade had its own guild. If the system existed today, it would apply roughly in this way. If you are a carpenter, you would be a member of an organisation which included all the carpenters in the town, an organisation which controlled the activities of all the carpenters and in the government of which all the carpenters had a voice.

If you intended to qualify as a carpenter, you would first become an apprentice, in which position you would remain generally for about seven years. The relationship between yourself and the man to whom you were apprenticed would not be that of employer and employee. It would be that of father and son. The master would be bound to give you a thorough training, and if he was at all deficient in this respect, the guild would see to it that he was kept up to his work. On your side, you would owe respect and obedience to the master. You lived in his house, you ate at his table, you were virtually a member of his family. It was not uncommon for apprentices to transform this into a real relationship by marrying the master's daughter, a frequent theme of the romantic writers of the time.

Admitted to the Guild.

At the end of seven years, when you had received a thorough training, you would be admitted to the guild. Now, in case it had been impossible for you to become apprenticed and go through this sort of training, the majority of guilds accepted workmen as members—even if they had never been apprenticed—provided they could produce satisfactory evidence that they were competent tradesmen.

After you had completed your apprenticeship, you would probably work for wages for about three years as a journeyman. You were not tied down to any one master. You would probably travel from town to town to acquire experience. Although you would not be eligible for official positions in the guild, you would have a voice in its administration, and a vote in the election of the governing council.

Finally you became a master. You did not need a great amount of capital at that time. If you did need any, you would find the guild ready to advance money to its own members on easy terms. There were certain other qualifications you had to fulfil before you became a master. You had to be a practising Catholic. You had to present satisfactory testimonials from the masters under whom you had served previously. You had to pass a professional test, which usually took the form of presenting an example of your own handiwork which was called a "masterpiece."

That is a rough summary of the life of hundreds of thousands of European workers in the Middle Ages. That progress from apprentice, to journeyman, to master was the normal course of events for the young worker in all countries where the influence of Catholicism was dominant in social life. The guild of which they were members not only had complete control and administration of the craft which it represented; it gave to all members a thorough industrial training, not only protecting the consumer against poor workmanship, but fitting the worker completely for his trade.

Each guild quite literally controlled the trade it represented. The guild made regulations which had to be obeyed by all people working in the trade. "Guild regulations," writes Cahill in his "Framework of a Christian State," "were aimed at preventing the undue absorption of the trade by any individual; of checking profiteering, trusts or monopolies, and all commercial practices which savoured of excessive selfishness. . . . No one was allowed to take part in any work that did not belong to his own craft. Separate unions of masters and journeymen were forbidden. To such an extent did the altruistic spirit prevail in some places—as, for instance, at Florence—when a member was considered unduly wealthy he was bound to give his surplus wealth to the guild."

Workers Govern Themselves.

It was the guild which fixed the prices of goods produced in the trade, and the level of wages to be paid to the workers. That was a most important provision. Wages and prices were not left to chance, or to cut-throat competition; neither was the State called in. An independent, self-governing body on which the workers had full representation decided both. The guild was self-governing. The men who worked in the trade, who produced the goods, had sufficient pride and confidence in their own ability to govern their trade equitably.

The first principle animating all fixation of prices was the Just Price—a price which would secure a proper return for the manufacturer, a proper wage for the worker, and protection for the consumer. Thus, every worker was enabled to earn a fair living, for the first charge on the industry was always the worker's wages. There was no struggle between masters and workers. "A conflict of interests was unknown," writes Professor Seligman. "The journeyman always looked forward to the period when he should be admitted to the freedom of the trade. This was, as a rule, not difficult for the expert workman to attain. No insuperable obstacle was thrown in his path. . . . It was a period of supremacy of labour over capital, and the master worked beside the artisan."

Sins of Injustice.

Behind the self-government of the guilds, behind their fixation of prices and wages, was the all-pervading authority of the Church. Evasion of the prices fixed by the guild on the part of profiteers, evasion of wage standards by sweaters, were punished by the laws of the guild. But, more than that, they were condemned by the Church as immoral, as sins which had to be confessed and atoned. In those days the words of the Apostle were ever-present in the actions of men—that to deprive the worker of his just wage is a sin which cries to heaven for vengeance.

Guild-Planned Economy.

It was the guild, and not the State, which planned the economy of the trade it represented. The workers at their guild meeting not only decided on prices and wages in their industry; they planned the amount of goods to be produced, in order to avoid over-production. The guild often acted as a buying and selling co-operative.

The guildsmen themselves fixed the hours to be worked in the trade. Different hours were worked in summer and winter, and there is not one single instance in all the records of the guilds of a journeyman complaining of the hours he worked. This is especially notable, since the records show that the guildsmen were never backward in voicing their complaints. In a case in which he appeared before the French courts, the Socialist, Paul Lafrague, declared: "I say, and I maintain, that under the old regime the labourer was in a better position than today. The Church each year assured him of fifty-two Sundays and thirty extra holidays."
