

*THE RIGHTS OF THE CONSUMER**

THE Catholic Social Guild is distinguished by one feature which marks it off from every other of the many Catholic societies which flourish in this country. It seeks to promote its objects not by action so much as by thought. Personal investigation and common discussion are the characteristics of its life. The student and the study-circle are its essential elements. I can go further and boldly assert that the Catholic Social Guild is a University—a Catholic University—the most democratic of all universities if it is judged by its members, and the most aristocratic of all if it is judged by its aspirations. This University of rich and poor, young and old, wise and simple, is naturally growing up everywhere in these our islands, because it has in itself that spontaneous creative spirit of every true University—the love of learning.

It is that same spirit which manifests itself at this very meeting. I have been accorded, not the duty of giving an instruction, but the privilege of initiating a discussion. For the former task I hold no expert qualifications ; but for the latter favour I hold those which belong to every man.

I have to speak about “The Rights of the Consumer.” What do we mean by the Consumer ? Was I a consumer when I travelled last Friday night from London to Liverpool by the L. & N.W. Railway ? If I was a consumer, what did I consume ? Certainly nothing tangible. Was I a consumer when I bribed the waiter at the Adelphi yesterday at lunch to put some ice in my ginger-ale ? If I was a consumer, what did I consume ? Certainly not ice. What do we mean by the Consumer ? What do we mean by his Rights ? These are words which are freely used in connection with a subject which is freely called a Science. What

* A paper read at the Liverpool Catholic Congress, August, 1920.

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do we mean when we speak of the science of Economics? Is there such a science? I want to question its reality. I want to be quite certain that it is not a pseudo-science, a meaningless sophistry of empty words.

The first treatise on this science of Economics appeared in 1615—that is to say, only some three hundred years ago. It was the work of a Frenchman, whose name was Antoine de Montcrétien. Before that time men had been born, lived, and died, but had never discovered this science, though it dealt with subjects which had always been their everyday interests. The Bible is innocent of its abstractions. Capital, Labour, Production, Distribution, and Consumption are words found in no concordance. The Fathers of the Church, whose writings were prolific and voluminous, cannot furnish copy enough for even a meagre pamphlet on Patristic Economics. The Greek philosophers already two thousand years ago had initiated every other science—but not the science of Economics. The Roman Empire had risen and fallen, but her Statesmen had said nothing about the science of Economics. Venice had come and gone, but her merchants had said nothing about the science of Economics. So much for the past.

What about the present? I can boast no great acquaintance among men of affairs. But my limited experience has been that the most successful, whether in Commerce or War or other fields of human activity, seem to know nothing of this science. And, conversely, those who are reputed to know most are the least successful. Is my experience exceptional? or has it been shared by others in this room? And if so, why? Can it be that those who endeavour to evolve a science out of the commonplaces of human life must necessarily fail in their attempts because they seek to make abstract what is essentially concrete? The poet and

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the historian are vivid and true when they imagine and describe their men and women. They are in touch with life. The swineherd in Homer's *Odyssey*, the mob in Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*, live. But what of life is there in what the Economist calls Labour? Has he perhaps abstracted the life and left himself nothing but the dust? Again, can it be that those who are fired with enthusiasm to discover the eternal, everlasting, immutable laws which determine the actions of men must necessarily fail in their attempts because they seek to bring under the compulsion of necessity what rests essentially on the inspiration of freedom; because they seek to make matter what is essentially spirit?

Man, because he is a man and not merely an animal, has to be judged by those activities which are his Spirit, his Soul—by those activities, in other words, which prove him the image and likeness of God.

The Spirit of Man is essentially one in its activities. But we may, for the sake of clearer knowledge and better understanding, analyse it, not, it is true, into simpler elements, but instead into contrasted aspects. We have the great contrast between Thought and Action, between Mind and Will. We call some men, men of thought; we call other men, men of action. Men of thought strike us as such because they are chiefly exercising their minds. Men of action strike us as such, because they are chiefly exercising their wills. We have, on the one hand, the Poet and the Professor. We have, on the other hand, the Soldier and the Saint.

Among men of thought we have a further contrast between those who imagine and express the palpable, the particular, the concrete, and those who imagine and express the intangible, the universal, the abstract. We have the contrast between the Poet and the Professor. They are both men of thought; but the Poet

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belongs to the passionate outside real world of his senses ; and the Professor belongs to the serene inside ideal world of his speculations. The Poet achieves what is beautiful. The Professor achieves what is true.

Among men of action we have a similar contrast between those who look to and accomplish their immediate temporal purposes and those who seek and find their ultimate eternal purpose. We have the contrast between the Soldier and the Saint. They are both men of action ; but the Soldier belongs to earth, to time ; and the Saint belongs to heaven, to eternity. The Soldier achieves what is useful, the Saint achieves what is good.

All proper human activity, then, achieves in the sphere of thought what is beautiful or true, and in the sphere of action what is useful or good.

To return to Economics. What is the subject-matter of its treatises ? Plainly man. Leave man out, and the treatises would be condensed to nothing. There can be no economics except of man. There can be no economics of, say, the jungle unless, like Mr. Kipling, our imagination endows its inhabitants with specifically human qualities.

Economics is, further, plainly concerned with man, not as a man of thought, but as a man of action. Economics has nothing to do with artistic inspiration or metaphysical speculation. It is concerned with man exercising not his mind, but his will. Economics is, further, plainly concerned with man as a man of action, who looks to and accomplishes not his ultimate eternal destiny, which is the concern of Religion and the Church, but his immediate temporal purposes, which are the concern of Politics and the State. Economics is concerned with man in action achieving whatever is useful, serviceable, advantageous, valuable, profitable to himself. It is not limited to industry and commerce. It embraces all temporal affairs. Man

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has made a business of piracy as successfully as of merchanting ; and nations have thrived on war as well as in peace.

Indeed Economics, in the limited sense of Industry and Commerce, is but one field in that great theatre of human action which Aristotle first comprehensively viewed as Politics. Politics is Economics and more, and there is no Economics which is not Politics. So the only virile science of Economics is like that of Politics ; it is the wisdom born of experience and reflection in men of great affairs. And the most sterile and useless is the compendium of abstractions evolved by academic theorists out of their own empty lives.

Lord Leverhulme and Port Sunlight are well-known names in this city. What does the ordinary economist ever see of the famous business associated with these names ? Always the less important and never the more. He is enraptured by its material aspects—by the spaciousness of the buildings, the capacity of the soap-boilers, the length of the railway sidings, the vast palm forests in the tropics. But he never sees what is the very life of that business—and that is the passion for cleanliness which impels that great multitude of men and women we choose to call Consumers to spend the millions of money which not only keep that business going, but also continually increase the prosperity of its owners.

The consumer here, as everywhere else, is the man who pays money for having what he wants. What are his Rights ? I know of none except those we call Political Rights. They will vary with the different customs and institutions of different political associations. In Russia now they are not what they were in Russia ten years ago. In Germany they are not what they are in France. In an ordered and free country such as ours, the rights of the consumer are his interests in so far as they are not in conflict with the

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lawful rights and interests of his fellow-citizens. Nobody here can compel a man to buy soap if he prefers to emulate St. Simon Stylites and forgo washing. But if he buys soap, plainly he considers himself better off with the soap and all its consequential advantages than his money. He may think he would be better off with more soap for less money. He may even agitate for what he will probably call his moral rights, which are, of course, only the political rights which his fellow-citizens have not as yet conceded him. So he will come into the life of politics which ever alternates between storm and calm, between revolution and reaction, for new interests have ever to be found room for among old ones. And just as surely as peoples and nations live under the constitutions and governments they deserve, so surely, too, are they masters of the commercial usages and industrial conditions they develop.

But plainly also he should not give the matter an exaggerated importance. Soap is not the only thing necessary for the salvation of his soul.

FRANCIS R. MUIR.



*AN ESSAY IN AID OF A GRAMMAR OF
PRACTICAL ÆSTHETICS.*

THERE are three possible qualities in a work of art. These three qualities are mimicry, intellectual content, and original form. Every work of art must have these three in one degree or another. First of all I will explain what I mean by these terms. By "mimicry" I mean what is called representation, i.e. likeness to something existing in Nature. By "intellectual content" I mean that in the work which expresses the story or anecdote it relates, that is to say, its