

WASTE NOT - WANT NOT!

If we have our principles right, I think that we are sure of success, because it is usually possible to enlist the necessary effort. Then if effort is there and principles are right, you cannot hold back a Christian work. It is not the least of those principles which I now discuss. I start by quoting a passage taken from the works of Frederick Ozanam. It contains a thought which is not only true and beautiful but provocative too: "We are all unprofitable servants, but we serve a master who is absolutely economic, who lets nothing go to waste - not a drop of the sweat of our brow any more than a drop of His heavenly dew. I know not what fate awaits this book, whether I shall finish it or whether I shall reach even the end of the page which lies beneath my pen. But I know enough to cause me to throw into it the remnant, be it great or small, of my strength and of my days."

Therein is a tremendous truth. Might I go so far as to style it the great unrecognised truth of the day! Indeed so little is it regarded that it seems to be a sort of object in life to set it at naught.

The Economy of Nature

God has created all things for His own glory, and as one of His first laws He must get that glory out of those things. Everything must serve that purpose and exploit it to its maximum. Everything created is subject to that law, and grace obeys it as well as nature. Let us first look at pure Nature, unfettered by man's interference, and let us see what takes place. Take as one example the process of evaporation of water which accomplishes

itself incessantly. Water is converted into vapour and ascends into the heights; then down again it comes as rain. That rain is the great life-giver of the world and could be said to be a figure of grace. In this country we do not view it as a complete blessing, but it is a blessing all the same, almost as essential as the air we breathe. You see that if you walk in an arid land. Take Egypt, whose very existence depends on the Nile, that historic artery which traverses the land from top to bottom. Everything, as they say, goes into the Nile and everything comes out of it! Every single thing is swept into the Nile and then, as I say, everything comes out of it. That water, having given life to the vegetation, to the animal and to man, then plunges into the sea, once again to be caught up into that amazing cycle of evaporation. As it enters the seas, it bears with it all the debris or waste matter of existence. Dead vegetation, animal and human matter, waste food, every sort of remnant of living and that is not an ending but a new beginning. In the depths of the ocean the cycle continues. The drama of existence is not less varied there than it is above the surface.

At every stratum of that ocean, which in some places is as deep as five or six miles, there moves its own particular set of creatures. And each stratum contains millions of greedy little mouths open to receive that mass of stuff as it sinks; they are living by it. Down and down and down falls that rain of rubbish (or what is rubbish to us), and at every foot of its descent it imparts life. By the time it reaches the bottom, one would think that nothing of worth remained. Yet in the layer of mud at the bottom of the ocean are incalculable millions of minor creatures waiting for that ultimate slime on which they depend. And then again, of course, each creature that has eaten and thereby lives,

has itself to die. But whether living or dead, it is food for others. And so that incredible process perpetuates itself in Nature, where truly nothing is wasted.

The Economy of God

What a lesson as to God's idea! No waste. There everything is put to economic use, to vital purposes. Value is extracted out of everything and overflowing value, because it is extracted again and again and again and again. Economy is, we see, a first principle of God's action.

It is just as much a principle in the life of man, individual or community, though here we do not, or will not, see it. We ourselves are caught up in the same process. We are digging things up out of the ground, or taking things out of the sea, and we are using them. Crops, minerals, and all those other products. Then after a little while everything has been absorbed into Nature for re-using. How can we doubt that God will apply the same idea to the higher creation and to the order of grace?

Thou shalt not waste. It is really fit to be an Eleventh Commandment. Everything is intended to be productive; increase must be the aim. If that be God's arrangement, one of His vital laws, then violation of it will be done at a price. Infringement will destroy the balance and result in disorder. Let us apply this to the nation.

In the nation the disregard of that law will result in maladjustment, inequality, poverty, pain of every sort. What was intended to be an extensive round like that round of Nature, administering good and blessing at every stage, is too often confined to operating in one stage alone, man holding it up

from going any further. We know the Gospel parable of the talents, and the way in which God exhibits Himself there as a sort of usurer. He gave out those talents to people to use, but He expected them to be used for profit. He was not satisfied that the accounting should give back just what He had given out. There must be use, increase, development, value. He has to get value. The final result where He does not get value is shown in that parable. He descends drastically upon the defaulter. He condemns him. He takes away what He had lent. He has to take it away by reason of His law. And apparently ignorance is no excuse. That principle of economy has to assert itself, and the loser is left in poverty, or he has to toil painfully to live, whereas the intention was that he should have enough. I think that therein we have the secret of the toil of the world. Enough is given but it is misused, and as a consequence everything is out of balance; some have too much and use it to their own destruction; and most have too little so that they have to suffer.

The Fallacy of Waste

What sort of treatment does this law receive at the hands of the communities of the world, that is nationally? We see that so far from the nations obeying that principle, they are doing the opposite; and that they are doing the opposite by malice aforethought, with absolute deliberation. We find a whole school of economists which specifically contradicts every item of what I have been suggesting as the law of the Economy of God. For instance, it is said: Go slow so that a job may employ two men instead of one. They said: Waste things so that factories will have to work harder to replace the waste. Or: Use things

only a little, partially, so that there will be more production, more employment, more wages. Thus will come prosperity!

This incredible philosophy is so ably argued by the black-is-white method that almost everyone ends by being convinced. Apparently waste is wealth! And so, let there be waste. Certainly the nations of the world are run on that principle. Then at the end there is amazement that national accounts do not balance, that manufacturers are so dear that they cannot make a market for themselves outside the country or in it; that foreign goods, sometimes produced at higher wage rates, are able to come in and undercut. And so, in spite of those economists, unemployment, emigration and poverty abound. You would think that this obvious failure would give thought to the philosophers of that school, but not at all! They have a name for the trouble, and a remedy for it. Put a tariff on the imported product. That keeps out the external menace so that all will be well. But will it be? No matter what ingenious language is used to disguise the fact, a tariff is always a tax, and a tax dampens down industry. It is not the incoming product that is paying the tax but the people of the country.

Advertise, say the professors of that school, when the wheels of that maladjusted industry slow down and begin to stick. Advertising pays; it will stir up demand! But that can be like pouring oil into a rotten machine. It is an expedient, or at best an adjunct, not a repair. It does of course make for production, but, as against that, it means increase of price, and every extra burden militates against competition. Concealing is not healing.

A million other devices are resorted to in order to make it appear that peoples really can carry on with such methods, while at bottom no one is giving full value, where most of the talents

are producing little or nothing, are hidden in the ground with complete unprofit. All the time the air is ringing with suggestions and solutions. Everybody who speaks has a remedy. But when you have listened to them all, you will find that nowhere is a mention made of waste, or of giving value, or of producing according to capacity, or of being honest!

The Fallacy of Debt

In spite of seeing the collapse of their formulae for success, the experts of waste are not beaten yet. The final remedy is the floating of loans. That will pay the bills and provide the capital for production, development, expansion, industrial conquest. One loan after another! They argue with convincing phrases that a National Debt is a good thing to have. We have heard that extraordinary argument one thousand times. It is a good thing for a nation to be in debt, we are told. It gives the people who have lent the money a sense of proprietorship! Giving them a stake in the country will produce stability! There are hundreds of specious arguments and plausible phrases to demonstrate that what is wrong for the family and for the individual is absolutely right for the nation. One law for the family and a different one altogether for the nation! It is economic to keep on living on our debts, piling them up! It sounds like a nightmare, but it is a real proposition, there before us all! But unlike the ordinary nightmare, one does not waken up out of this one. Or rather, we do waken up, but it is to something worse. It is to poverty, disaster, disgrace, to the making of shameful bargains, even to the selling of one's national soul in exchange for that money which has to be found! We know that nations have gone to war

for the sake of cloaking up such a situation. That is a fearful suggestion which will be rather shocking to the less sophisticated among us, but it is historical. It is more than historical, it is not uncommon.

Faith must be Productive

I go on to the higher order, the spiritual. God has given us the supreme talent of Faith. It is not to be hidden in the ground; it is to be made productive in the highest degree. It is to be one hundred per cent fruitful in our lives. It is to be passed on to all other men and made productive in the highest degree. It is to be one hundred per cent fruitful in our lives. It is to be passed on to all other men and made productive in them. If this chain reaction is not set in motion, it will be at the same price that we have seen attached to common waste. Eventually God, looking at that broken chain, at that failure to exploit that treasure in our own lives, will take it away, and we will be left penniless. He has to do it by reason of the operation of that economic law of His. He has largely done it in many of the old Catholic countries; France, Spain, Italy, Poland, and one could go on. As spiritual operations are invisible, it is not easy to trace the processes and the effects of waste. It may take one hundred years for the consequences to become evident, but the process itself, as apart from seeing it, is remorseless. If there is waste, immediately the fatal sequel is at work. Insufficient use of any part of that treasure causes trouble automatically in one's own life, and then far afield throughout the world. Souls are lost because we are slacking or wasting our share of the Gospel treasure. It is the same as in Nature. Everything is supposed to produce its due

effect. If something stops short at us and does not go on from us on its intended career of circulating through men, then there is stagnation, disorder, even death in us.

But as the condition of being used by God, as the foundation for all our other efforts, we must work fairly, we must be honest, we must give value in every department. We must treat our neighbours as ourselves, especially in the matter of imparting the truth to him. We are given the truth so that it will increase in us and then proceed from us over the earth. The two are but one and the same operation. If it does not go out from us, neither will it grow in us, or even stay with us. But if we do produce that multiplication, we are fulfilling the law of God and He will use us fruitfully.

Full Value from God's Gifts

A second clause of this law of Economy lies in the right knowing and appreciation of the doctrines of the Faith. We must extract full value from what God designs to give. For instance, it is not enough to believe that the Catholic Church is a sort of sacred university teaching the truth. It is that, of course, but it is infinitely more. That would be, so to speak, only the cradle of the Church. The Church is the living Body of Christ, into which we have been incorporated in such a degree that we are verily His members, His means of action, even indispensable to Him. This does not mean, and this is a vital point, that we are mere mechanical agents. We are no machines, we retain our own will, our own individuality, and we can if we like withhold from Him our co-operation. But if we offer ourselves to Him, He will use us in His own fashion. He does not put His very words on

to our lips so that we speak unerring truth, nor does He put His miracles into our hands, but He does turn our work and our words to His purpose, so that they can be said to be His actions. Through them He accomplishes His designs.

And when it comes to Mary, it is imperative that there be not waste. And yet there is. There is much devotion to her, but insufficient understanding, which means that we do not get value out of that priceless gift of God. But she is so basic an ingredient in Christianity that we cannot afford to lose, so to speak, an ounce of her. She is our Mother. As we are one with Christ, she is as intensely our Mother as she is His Mother, and she gives to us the same sort of care as she gave to Him in His infancy. She is as necessary to us as she was to Him: No Mary, no Christ; and we might go on to say: No Mary, no us!

Even if we ourselves possess a certain degree of appreciation of the doctrine of the Mystical Body and of its Mother, that is not enough. That Economic Law of God applies. We have that appreciation only in part for ourselves. In part it is for others, and the two ideas are connected, so much so that we have it only to give it; and if we do not give it, we do not retain it for ourselves.

Energy, Skill, Fineness

As for those great gifts of God, so for the lesser ones. They are given to us to use for His glory. We must be prepared to fulfil the ancient malediction of God which, when we do it, turns into a blessing: By the sweat of our brow we must earn our bread, which includes our spiritual nourishment. Every act and word of each day's varied performance is a part of that earning. Not one little

motion, not one flicker of the mind, is exempt. And as each item is a part, so into it must go our spiritual sweat, that is energy, skill and fineness. We must be honest and thorough; we must produce; we must add to what we have received from others, and then pass it on.

We must not waste, and then we will not want. We should not waste even the trivial things. Not even a sheet of paper. We should not use notepaper for scribbling on; we should not throw away paper which is used only on one side, because the other side is still good for making notes. The used postage stamps on envelopes are of value for the Missions. Then why consign them to the waste-paper basket? Doing these little things, practising on them, we learn the big idea and put it into force.

We must do all things, great or less, with at least one eye on the economical housewife of Nazareth. She discerned the Will of God in everything. She saw the Infinite linked to the scrubbing of a floor and the rocking of a cradle. We know that she did everything perfectly. We may be sure that she got value out of everything; that she never threw away a thing that God intended to have profit extracted from. Working in that same way, we learn the great philosophy of life: Thou shalt not waste; which applied to our own existence means for us reasonable comfort, grace and a mission. Applied to the national life, it means likewise reasonable comfort, grace and a mission; because in spite of those philosophers the order for the nation is not different to that of the individual.