

**THE CHURCH AND
LABOUR: A SERIES
OF SIX TRACTS**

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The Church and Labour: A Series of Six Tracts by L. McKenna

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L. MCKENNA

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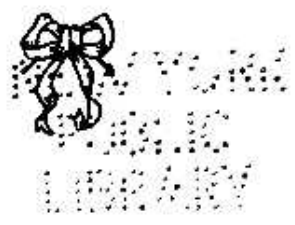
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The Church and Labour

A SERIES OF SIX TRACTS

BY

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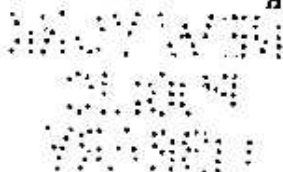
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“THE CHURCH AND LABOUR.”

IT was for the use and benefit of the whole human race that God destined the material resources which He placed in the world. To-day there is a monstrous inequality in the distribution of these resources. A comparatively small number of men hold a disproportionate amount of them. In France, for instance, a hundredth part of the nation owns half of the nation's wealth. In England and the United States one-tenth of the people hold nine-tenths of the whole country's property.

The wealthy few now rule the world.

The contrast to-day between the wealthy few They have done so before, but never precisely in virtue of their wealth; They were patriarchs, patricians, chieftains of clans, feudal nobles acknowledging responsibilities and bearing heavy burdens. To-day wealth making no sacrifices for the public good, rules in its own right, and exercises a more despotic sway than any form of authority hitherto known. It has armies and fleets at command. It has myriads of placemen, or would-be placemen, in utter dependence. It is highly centralised, and can exert a great power at any point. It can at any moment cast thousands of households into intolerable misery. Yet, though centralised, it is not open to attack. It does not, as the kings of old, dwell in castles that can be stormed by an angry people. On the contrary it stands as the embodiment of legality, order, security, peace—even of popular will. Capitalism, using the work of the labouring classes, has vastly increased the wealth of the world; yet it strives to prevent these labouring classes from benefiting by this increase. It is constantly drawing up into itself that wealth and diverting it from useful purposes. To

crown all, by its wild pursuit of pleasure and its ostentatious luxury, it renders still less bearable the lot of the dispossessed.

Over against this small number of very rich men there are the vast masses of the poor. In Prussia two-thirds of the wage-earners receive less than 18s. a week. Fifty per cent. of the American people are in severe poverty. At Paris every seventh and in London every twelfth person is a pauper dependent on State aid. Every great city has a large population living in homeless, hopeless, helpless squalor and wretchedness. To use the words of Pope Leo—"A very small number of rich men have been able to lay on the masses of the poor a yoke little better than slavery itself."

This suffering state of the poor is all the more galling as it is in ironic contrast with the power which in theory they possess. They have votes—they are appealed to as the ultimate depositories of all power, yet nowhere have they been able to exert that power for the redress of their grievances.

Is it any wonder, then, that the rich and the poor should form two hostile camps, that they should feel for each other bitter hatred, that their hatred should break out in war? And such war! Those terrible strikes! Factories shut down, vast systems of machinery idle, trade ruined, the social life of nations paralysed, homes broken up, men growling and breaking into violence, women pining with anxiety and hunger, children starving.

Is it any wonder that the old questions which agitated the world should have lost much of their interest? It is not now quarrels between princes or rival claimants to thrones, it is not even commercial or territorial disputes between nations that cause most anxiety in the council chambers of the world. It is the question as to whether the constitution of our present society is not fundamentally wrong, it is the question as to how the wealth of each nation should be distributed among

its members ; it is the social, or—what is the same thing—the labour question, that urgently presses for solution in every country.

The struggle over this question is raging not merely in France—to-day as ever the leader in revolutionary action—but in Russia, which has just emerged from the Middle Ages, in England, the land of tradition and slow change, in Germany, fettered by her iron military organisation. Now this struggle, raging on the Continent and in England, is a real and very pressing danger for us in Ireland too. Indeed it has been going on among us, but it has been disguised under the form of a national struggle. Our whole social system is part of the social system of England, the classic land of capitalistic abuse, but hardly any except the suffering strata of that system are to be found in Ireland. The population of Ireland consists chiefly of a relatively large middle class struggling against great difficulties, and of a relatively enormous proletariat struggling desperately on the verge of pauperism. Both these classes have united against the abuses of capital, but in doing so they have directed their attacks, not against capital as such, but against capital as represented by a foreign Government. Thus in Ireland the struggle between capital and the suffering classes has not had hitherto the character of a social war, which it has on the Continent. The suffering classes have not been led to confuse the abuses of capital with the rights of property, and with the principles on which all society is founded.

But circumstances are rapidly changing. It is likely that the two forces now locked in a life and death struggle on the Continent will soon be engaged in a fierce conflict in Ireland too, ranged under the same banners, urged on by the same battle cries, animated by the same bitter feelings on each side.

The strikes, rapidly becoming more frequent, notably the great strike of eighteen months ago, which paralysed the life and trade of the country and was accompanied by disorder in many of our towns, seem to show that