

Conscript Inheritances, Suggests Bishop Brent

This Would Be the Reverse of Socialism, He Says, in Discussing Sacrifices That Must Be Made to Save Liberty in the World

CONSCRIPTION of inherited fortunes is suggested for this country by the Rt. Rev. Charles H. Brent, Protestant Episcopal Bishop of the Philippines, who recently returned to this country from the battlefront in France and who declares that universal service in the most literal sense is needed to win the war. As a part of a general plan of such service Bishop Brent urges that the abolition of large private inheritances be considered seriously. He is not seeking to "promote" such a scheme as his own solution of our vast economic war problem, but says he heartily believes that in the practical consideration of "ways and means" at the present time the question of inheritance conscription should be taken up in detail.

The possibility of the present taking over by the Government of large inherited fortunes was first brought to Bishop Brent's attention by an American who is himself very rich. Since then, he has given the matter keen attention and discussion. He does not regard the conscription of inheritance as a disadvantage for the person from whom the large legacy would be taken; rather does he look upon it as a definite gain.

"The younger generation would be deprived of the individual wealth of their fathers," he pointed out, "but they would be beginning their lives with equal opportunities in a country of better opportunity, not weighted down by an enormous debt and financial burden.

"The idea of the abolition of inheritance is not new. It has been suggested many times, to be accomplished either by the imposition of very high inheritance taxes or the prohibition of legacies over a certain fixed sum. I am not urging it as my solution of the present situation, but I consider it worthy of the gravest consideration.

"According to the charter of our liberties, all men are born free and equal. Of course, they are not all born equal. Some are allowed to start their careers with a tremendous handicap.

"I have in the fairly recent past spoken in a great many boys' schools. For the most part the students were rich boys. And I have always taken the position that it was a most unfortunate thing for a boy to have his own checkbook, unless he had first learned to earn his own bread. In nine cases out of ten it is an evil result of inheritance. What it does is to debase the value of youth. The boy depends on his checkbook instead of himself.

"The idea of such abolition of large inheritance is the very antithesis of Socialism. Socialism tends to decrease the freedom of the individual. The principle of making it impossible for any youth to inherit a large fortune is a principle of individualism; it would act to increase the freedom of the individual. In drawing nearer to actual equality, it would offer to the young man more opportunity of individual development and individual value. It would make the individual more important to the State because of his own innate value. It would proceed on a principle of individual democracy instead of on a principle of Socialism. It would mean equality of opportunity, and that is the basis of democracy, the basis of our nation—what we are fighting for. In the present time of need it would release an immense amount of money, and free the country from a great future burden.

"I have thought very seriously on this situation in connection with the known effects of the civil war on the South. I think we can say that the civil war did in large degree stunt the whole development of the South, in laying on it so tremendous a financial burden. We want to avoid such burdens as much as possible.

"Of course, I realize that there would be all sorts of difficulties in working out such a scheme to a practical conclusion. There is, for instance, the question of the large businesses that must continue, and that must not be disor-

ganized upon the death of the owner or proprietor. But it is, I believe, worthy of the most careful personal consideration at this time.

"I have presented the plan as the man who first discussed it presented it to me, along the lines which he thinks practicable. And he is a man of wealth and position, whose whole-hearted suggestion of such a principle impressed me greatly with the willingness of our country to make whatever sacrifice may be called for. I have had cause to feel that very deeply.

"Of course, the conscription of inheritance works in with the principle of general compulsory service. If it is right to claim that our manhood should

State. Of course, many young men do work on farms now in the Summer, not because they need the money, but for the work and the experience. That sort of plan surely be extended."

Naturally, the mention of farms, and even of compulsory service, suggests the question of food. Bishop Brent has been studying that problem, too, during his months in France and England.

"I came over on the boat with Herbert Hoover," he said, "and I should like to say to America that whatever Hoover tells the country to do, the country should do, without question and without delay. He is the one great food expert of the world at the present time. He has studied the problem as few men have

hours of labor are such as to make nourishment necessary after that hour. Except in such cases, food taken in those night suppers after 9 is simply wasted.

"In Europe at the present time the rule is to serve only three courses at all dinners and luncheons; you cannot get more at hotels, restaurants, or clubs, and private families are generally falling into line. People are on a bread allowance—it is not inadequate—so as to minimize the consumption of wheat flour. There is no unadulterated white flour in England or France today, and bread is always served stale, because waste is lessened in that way.

"We must understand that we must not stint ourselves of nourishment—we must only plan carefully and avoid waste. In England there is no more white sugar; what they use is not even what we know as brown sugar, but the old 'black sugar'—and a limited amount of that. In France each person is allowed three lumps of sugar a day.

"This appears to be wandering far from the subject about which I began to talk"—Bishop Brent smiled—"but in reality it is not. It all goes together. We must take the bearing of the smallest things into consideration. The people must wake up to the fact that nothing is too small to do for the cause and that everything counts, and every man, woman, and child counts. It all goes together; we must give ourselves, our money, our food. And once a man has offered himself to his country and the cause of his country, then everything he has is bound to go, too. The gift of a man's personality includes everything else. We must realize that.

"I have just come," he added, with an apparent irrelevance that was no irrelevance at all, "from where men are going out every morning to die—knowing that they are going to die. I had a service at the front at Arras—the men came in from the trenches to the service—it was in the thick of the fight—and went back immediately. That was only a few weeks ago, yet probably not 20 per cent. of those men are alive today.

"The whole principle of this war," Bishop Brent went on, after a slight pause, "is that it is different from other wars, because it is not a property war.

"We are fighting for the rights of personality. Therefore no service can be effective except the full power of personality. In the old days wars were fought for territory, and, in so far as they were thus fought, they placed property above human life. In the old wars men fought for property with human life; we are now fighting with human life and with property for the human right to live.

"This is very far from being a 'capitalistic war.' It is a war of the plain people."

"And we cannot lay too great emphasis upon the general principle of service," he summed up. "When I think about the war and its needs and what it demands of us, I think, as of a text, of the sentences that I saw on the wall of the soldiers' reading and writing room in the fortress of Verdun: 'Germany fights to oppress; France fights to set free. On the fate of France depends the fate of the world.'

"That is very fine, and it is perfectly true. England and Belgium saw it in 1914. Now we have awakened to it. I don't like to hear Americans say, boastfully, that we are fighting unselfishly; the French have been fighting unselfishly. It is quite true that we are fighting for others, and that we have no thought of conquest or spoils. But it is also true that we are fighting for the right to live for ourselves.

"On the fate of France depends the fate of the world. Nothing is too small for us to do for the cause for which we are fighting, and all that we have must be offered with the gift of ourselves to that cause."



Bishop Charles H. Brent of the Philippines, Who Has Just Returned from the French Battlefront.

serve the State, how much more right is it to claim that what is so much less than manhood—wealth—should also serve the State. If we compel personality we should certainly compel property.

"Yet in the true sense it would be no compulsion, as military service is no compulsion. There can be no compulsory service in a democracy. If democracy, in Lincoln's sense, means anything at all—government of the people, by the people, for the people—it is obvious that it means that the citizen is the Government and the Government is the citizen. Consequently, there can be no such thing as compulsion in the registration of the citizen for service in the need of the State.

"The heart of the whole principle of compulsory service is that it must be for peace as well as for war. We need the organization of all our resources so as to relate the ability of man to the needs of the State, whatever those needs may be. And no man should expect thanks for such service any more than for paying his taxes.

"For example, take school vacations. Many schools might be made far more profitable if the boys had some organized vacation work for the good of the

ever studied it. He has worked out tremendous plans of organization in his work in Belgium. He knows the food problem as no one else knows it. And he is, besides, a man of rare gifts and rare consecration—a wonderful man.

"He told me that if the present rate of consumption continued—including waste along with the consumption—with a normal crop and some increase of production, a year from now there would not be an ounce of breadstuffs in the world.

"Yet there is no need for us to be panicky or unreasonable," Bishop Brent added, quickly. "We must simply face facts and practice such economy as will operate to the increase of national efficiency.

"We can save prodigious amounts merely by avoiding waste. The conservation of foodstuffs that we now waste will enable us to go on until the next harvest. We must remember that we must now feed France and England as well as ourselves. And there are a number of things that can be done. Useless late suppers are so much waste, and could be eliminated. I think that every restaurant should be closed at 9 o'clock at night—except, of course, that full provision must be made for the workers whose