

ST. ANTONINUS AND SOCIAL WORK

By BRO. STANISLAUS KENNEDY, O. P.

FLORENCE, Italy, distinguished for so many illustrious sons, has perpetuated their memory in imperishable marble. In order that their inspiring examples and heroic virtues might be preserved to succeeding generations. Florence has built an exclusive hall of fame where she has grouped the statues of her famous sons and in the center of them all towers the likeness of Antoninus Pierozzi. Notable as is the place of distinction his native city has given to this son and commendable as is her effort to perpetuate his memory, her white marble becomes but a local and faint reflection of the glory that is her son's in the high place that has been accorded to him in that more enduring hall of fame—the catalogue of the saints. Three hundred years ago this year St. Antoninus was enrolled in this exclusive group whose fame and memory and inspiring examples defy the erasing finger of time and the fleeting memory of man.

Scholar, reformer, theologian, friar, archbishop, ambassador, advisor and friend of Popes, social worker, author and saint mark but a brief list of the outstanding achievements of St. Antoninus' life. In all these varied works he was preeminent in his time. Each of them could be made the subject of an interesting narrative. Here, however, it is possible to sketch but a brief outline of his social ideals and the application of his principles to his beloved Florence.

Wedded to poverty for the virtue's sake, a lover of the poor for Christ's sake, zealous for sanctity in the cloister and for the observance of God's law by the laity, keenly alert to the possibilities for both good and evil in wealth, he applied his profound knowledge of morality and justice to the problems of his day which clamored for solution and pointed the only way to peace and happiness, namely, that men, if they hope to achieve any success in social betterment, must regard the whole problem in the light of faith. God, justice and faith were the three necessary ingredients which he clearly saw were indispensable for

any remedy for social ills. To build the structure of society with the laws of God as a foundation; to make men see economic problems with the eyes of faith and to gauge them by the standard of justice was our saint's high endeavor.

His social and economic program while evolved nearly five centuries ago is startlingly modern. He worked out a very practical and detailed scheme of social advancement which considered the very problems that confront us today; even the language and the terminology read much like a modern treatise on social ills. Goods, wealth, production, distribution, consumption, interest, exchange, credit, hours of labor, welfare of workers, the living wage, workmen's compensation, monopolies and trusts, rights and duties of both employer and employee; the obligations and limitations of State, public institutions, hospitals, homes for the aged, foundlings, asylums—these are merely a few of the practical considerations which enter into his detailed analyzation of the whole economic subject. His four volumes of the *Summa Moralis* sum up a comprehensive and Christian concept of social theories which are as applicable today as when they were penned.

The very first foundation stone in St. Antoninus' social structure is God and upon this all else is built. Riches, poverty, wealth—goods of all kind—come from God and have their specific purposes in the divine plan of things. Man can divert, misapply and misuse these gifts; hence, justice must be the guiding star in men's relations with one another. Faith would be the bond that unites this trinity of principles. From this simple and wise foundation St. Antoninus develops the solution which he offers to men. Earnest seekers for social remedies have cast about in vain for a better or safer one.

If space permitted it would be interesting to indicate how St. Antoninus applied these principles to the various angles of the social questions, but in the scope of this article we may give only the barest outlines of a few which are typical of the whole program. Taking up the question of temporal goods in any form, he forcibly and convincingly indicates that riches are not intended as an end, but are merely means to something higher. Accumulation of wealth without consideration to its entailed responsibilities and possibilities is a misapprehension of the very purpose of trade. "Production," he says, "is on account of man, not man of production." Wealth, he adds, is good if only its

usefulness be properly apprehended. Poverty, in itself, is an evil though, indeed, out of it good may be obtained. Here he forstalls the modern preaching of the wealthy to the destitute that poverty in itself is good. His reasoning is equally sound and his conclusions "modern" when he gives consideration to labor, the work day and compensation.

He points out that labor is honorable and that it is man's duty to work, but in that work he must find sustenance and livelihood. The ultimate purpose of life itself reaches beyond the anxieties for temporal things and the soul is more important than the body. Hence, the whole science of economics is a moral one and the prior claims of man's soul must not be interfered with; man must develop spiritually as well as morally. Today these same principles are used by the advocates of the living wage to bring about a decent livelihood for the great mass of workers who are not receiving what is considered a living wage.

Taking up the question of hours of labor St. Antoninus indicates that men must not be made industrial slaves. Indeed, he plainly says, "to acquire by labor the amount of food sufficient for preserving one's being, requires only a moderate amount of time and a moderate amount of anxiety." Here is a defense of the short work day based upon the Christian conception of the purpose of life. Nor do the wage and the hours complete our Saint's analyzation of this phase of the question, for he clearly sets forth that it is the duty of the employer to "rather care for and tend his sick workmen than to be in a hurry to send them away into the hospitals." In other words, he advocates workman's compensation, a measure usually regarded as an enlightened product of the twentieth century since the first operative laws of this character were not passed in this country until 1910.

In a manner similar to the above we might trace St. Antoninus' development of his social doctrine through its various phases of production, distribution and consumption and indicate his clear concept of the right relations of State to family; of husband to wife; parent to child and of the various obligations of these branches of our society. It is all based on his lofty concept of Christian justice and charity, combined with a burning faith in God. The striking thing is that while the conditions of labor, wealth and social relations differed considerably in his time from those which confront us today, his vision and findings were sufficiently fundamental and comprehensive to apply not

only to his own times but to our own as well for they are founded on enduring principles.

Truly can it be said that Antoninus, the Dominican Archbishop of Florence, was a social healer as well as a healer of moral ills; much different, indeed, from many of the so-called social reformers of our own day. St. Antoninus taught that justice in its strict sense meant a belief and faith in God and therefore, a full confidence in His Divine Providence; while many present day reformers seeking to remedy social conditions, oftentimes disregard God and His providential hand and thereby bring the wrath of a just God on themselves and those whose conditions they are endeavoring to better.

These so-called reformers disdainful of the enduring principles enunciated by St. Antoninus are often the cause of the dissensions existing between employee and employer, who in their antagonism towards one another seem to forget that both factions are parts of the same industrial machine. Our Saint knew that both were as two intermediate gears of a great engine; the laborers as the one and the capitalist as the other, God being the power moving both and from which combination should result a perfect cooperation in the social engine. Unfortunately, however, this cooperation is often disturbed by the clogging of one of the gears—which may be pride, conceit or selfish motives—and hence the discord and contention in our industrial life.

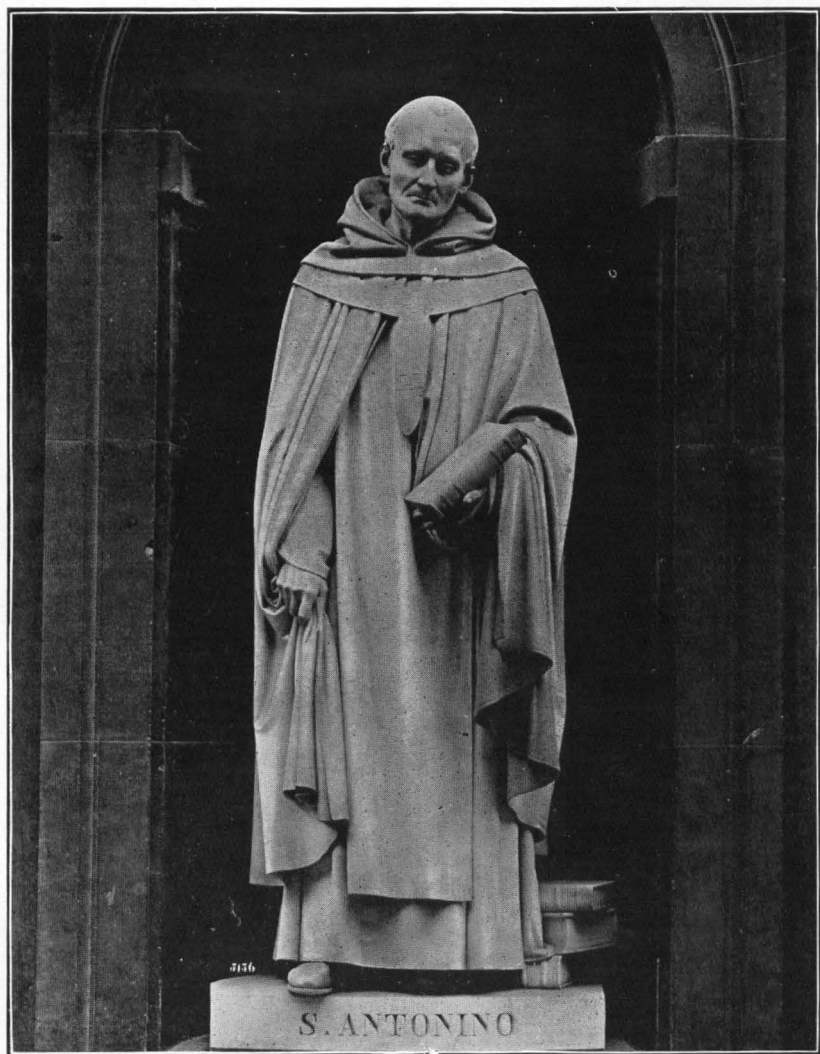
Not only was St. Antoninus a clear thinker but a doer of deeds as well. He subjected his abstract principles to a critical and practical test and proved that they offer the only safe conduct to man in his economic journey to better industrial relations.

Though confronted with many worldly problems, the Archbishop was still a Dominican and continued to observe the vow of poverty. Often feeling the pinch of poverty himself, he knew well the struggle for existence with which his poor faithful had to contend. Fra Angelico, a brother Dominican, tells us that "he (Antoninus) was loving to the poor." At times he even went so far as to deprive himself in order that he might ease others. His garden and furniture were given to the indigent, for suffering of any sort always grieved him. So great was his compassion and love for persons thus afflicted that he continually pleaded for the means of consolation for the unfortunates who could not or were too proud to beg.

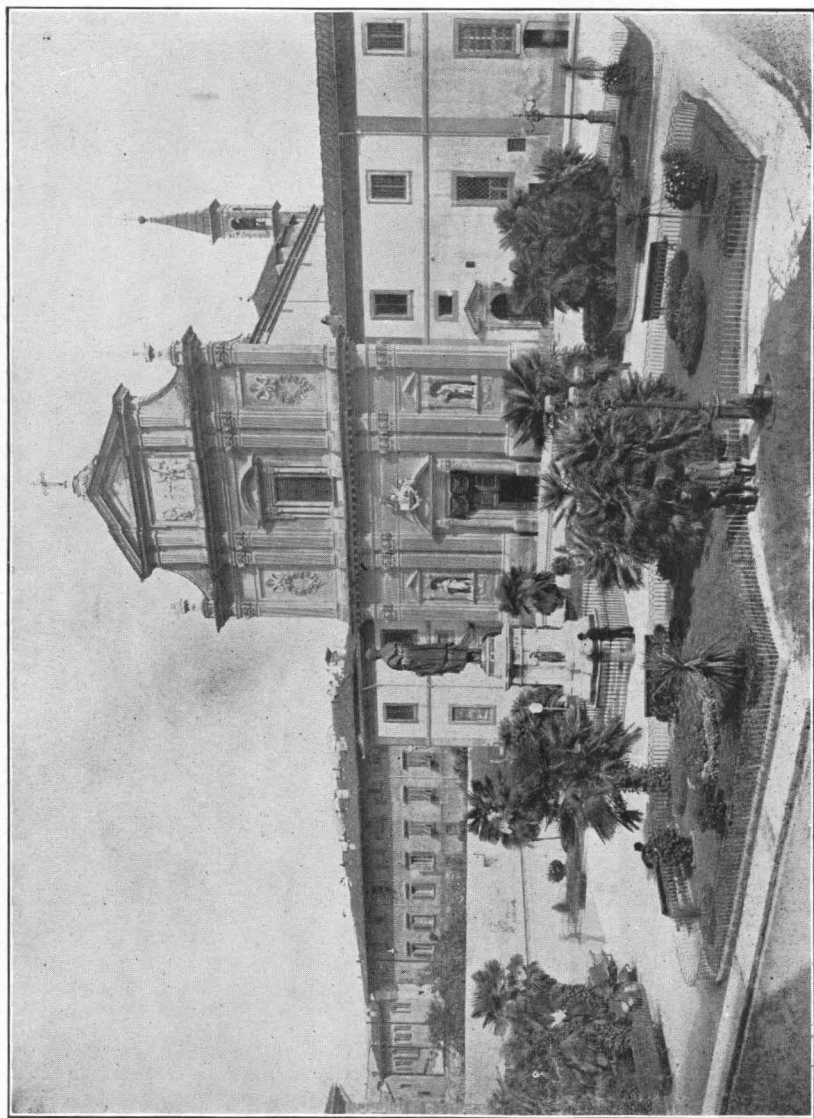
We are told that he established a confraternity to relieve the "shame-faced poor, that is, the nobles who were reduced to poverty by Cosimo, the tyrant, who on returning to power resolved to create a dynasty. The means taken to accomplish this infamous end was not the murder of his political opponents, as was the general practice of that day, but the repression of his rivals by an unjust tax." Consequently, beggary was too humiliating for the oppressed nobles and, needless to mention, starvation would inevitably have been their lot had not our Saint come to their rescue. He chose twelve honest men and after dividing the city into six districts, appointed two men to each district as solicitors of funds and to seek out the poverty-stricken and then bestow upon them in a way unknown to others the help so sorely needed. This confraternity was called the, "Good men of St. Martin."

Another example of his charity for the poor is clearly brought out in the story of the two rich beggars and the father of three daughters lacking the necessary dowries for marriage. Finding two blind men begging when they had no need he condemned their greed and took the 550 gold crowns in their possession and gave them to the father who was in great straits for dowries for his three daughters. But, as the story has it, "he charged himself with the maintenance of these beggars until the end of their lives."

No doubt, it was due to Antoninus' thoughtfulness of man's temporal and spiritual welfare that fostered and brought out his abilities as an organizer. Not only prominent nobles and the common class sought his advice and aid in perplexing problems but even the Popes looked to him as a father. It was due, in no small degree, to our Saint's wonderful powers of organization combined with his saintly character that induced Pope Eugenius IV to force the Archbishopric of Florence upon him. His was the happy privilege of being confessor to Pope Eugenius and to whom he administered the last rites of the Church. Antoninus' administrative ability began to show itself first, it is true, in the upbuilding of the religious life in his own Order, but on becoming Archbishop these powers manifested themselves more noticeably, namely, in the establishing of orphanages, the caring for the poor and distressed, the visitation of parishes and religious communities where many abuses



St. Antoninus. Statue of the Saint in the Uffizi Portico, Florence



St. Mark's Church Built by St. Antoninus. Now a Public Library

had crept in both in discipline and in the preaching of the Gospel.

Besides this we find him writing books for both clergy and laity. Nor did Pope Nicholas V underrate the Archbishop's wisdom and integrity in social and moral problems, for it was not infrequently that the Holy Father consulted with him on questions of Church and State. The same can be said of Pope Pius II who charged him, assisted by several Cardinals, to reform the Roman Court. In 1453 when Florence was shaken by violent earthquakes and large tracts of land were laid desolate by raging storms we find St. Antoninus untiring in his efforts to maintain and house the most distressed and then build homes which they could call their own.

Another ideal principle of his is made real when he sets about to establish orphanages for young unfortunates. Like Our Divine Master, St. Antoninus had a special affection for children; especially those born out of wedlock. To cope with the dire situation he took under his own personal supervision the "Home of the Innocents" founded in 1444 by Leonardo Bruni of Arezzo, the great litterateur of Florence of that day. Along with this arduous task his charity prompted him to burden himself with another work. St. Peter, the Dominican martyr, founded a military Order to crush the anti-social Paterni. In time the Paterni disappeared and, consequently, the Order's services were not needed. The Brothers of Pity, thereupon, made this place their headquarters. Their work was not engrossing and Antoninus wanting an orphanage for the many lost, vagabond or orphaned children of Florence felt that this institution would be ideal for the housing and educating of these poor unfortunates. The Brothers were glad to devote their time to the furthering of this charitable project whereby young souls could be weaned to God. Nor did he stop here; he established playgrounds for children upon a plan which is considered today as a modern development.

Many of the economic theorists of our own day apparently believe that their schemes are original concepts of their own minds when the solving of certain social problems confront them; but we—who are acquainted with the ideals and achievements thought out and accomplished by men like St. Antoninus—can see that their speculations are by no means new. We can see, too, that these well-wishing apostles, in trying to better

conditions, will labor in vain unless they, like Antoninus, have a solid foundation on which to build, and that foundation—Truth and Justice Itself, which is God.

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TO SAINT THOMAS

(On the Sixth Hundredth Anniversary of His Canonization.)

By BRO. NICHOLAS WALSH, O. P.

A paean grand the angels sing,
 The saints in song rejoice,
 The Courts of Heav'n triumphant ring,
 And sweet the sacred voice
 Of Mother Church in joy ascends
 In praise to Christ our King,
 And with the voice of Heaven blends
 Harmoniously to sing
 The glory of God's chosen one,
 Star of Dominic's crown,
 The doctors' prince, the noon-day Sun,
 Saint Thomas of renown.

O hail the fair angelic One
 Ye scholars and divines,
 Our Mother's true devoted son—
 For all his glory shines;
 Our patron, friend and guide elect
 In holy word and deed,
 The boast of darkened intellect,
 The honor of our creed.