

## Henry George and Catholic Doctrine An Inquiry into the McGlynn Case

By ERNEST LEOGRANDE

**A**FTER the long and involved dispute over Henry George's teachings, after Fr. Edward McGlynn's excommunication and reinstatement, after his assignment to St. Mary's Church in Newburgh, New York, the priest talked to a young boy aspiring to the priesthood.

The bitterness in him softened somewhat and looking back, he touched the boy on the shoulder and said—half to himself—"One thing to remember, never let your head get too big for your shoulders."

It was a significant remark for this man to make, this man who had defied the earthly head of his Church, the head whom he acknowledged to be the representative of Christ on earth. He was far from his beloved St. Stephen's Church in New York City. He had spent five years under the censure of excommunication. He had broken with his friend, Henry George, the championing of whose cause had brought on his excommunication.

All this was the result of his quality of determination—or stubbornness, as you care to look at it. Fr. McGlynn must have realized, talking to the youngster, that there *are* times when discretion is the better part of valor, that there *are* times when a man's head can become unwittingly too big for his shoulders.

In 1886, before the current of events had become too rapid for him to cope with it, Fr. McGlynn was still at St. Stephen's. He was preaching the doctrine of public ownership of land, a doctrine which his immediate superior, Bishop Corrigan, misinterpreted as a surrender of man's right to individual property.

He had been ordered by Bishop Corrigan to cease speaking on the subject. His refusal had been made known to Rome, and Fr. McGlynn had been ordered to appear before the Pope to state his case.

All together, he received four summonses all of which he ignored. He pleaded illness. He pleaded hopelessness of approval, saying his su-

perior's minds were already made up. And, to complicate matters, the slowness of the communication of the day was not sufficient to keep up with the rapidity of the changing situation.

What Fr. McGlynn failed to realize or, realizing, failed to acknowledge was that he stood an excellent chance of winning his case, if he went to Rome. He was an eloquent spokesman as he had proved. He knew George's books thoroughly, where Bishop Corrigan did not. And during the controversy Cardinal Gibbons, Archbishop of Baltimore, a brilliant man and a defender of Fr. McGlynn's position, was in Rome.

Instead he chose not to go. In the summer of 1887 orders were sent from Rome for his excommunication. He had already been suspended from his pastorate at St. Stephen's.

Ironically it was the arena of politics which brought Fr. McGlynn and Henry George together and politics which separated them.

Fr. McGlynn had first incurred the episcopal rebuke by campaigning for Henry George in the New York City mayoralty campaign in 1886. In the presidential campaign year 1888 the two split over the support of Grover Cleveland. George felt that Cleveland, who was ostensibly for free trade, could advance the cause of land reform by taking a first step of eliminating unfair tariffs.

Fr. McGlynn saw this support as a risking of the cause of land reform for a dubious ally. Over this question they split ways.

Now Fr. McGlynn had lost both his parish



Dr. Edward McGlynn

This is the third and final article in this series. In the second installment, Mr. Leogrande continued his story of the controversy from a Catholic viewpoint. He saw Fr. McGlynn's immediate superior, Bishop Corrigan, as a man who was sincere but a little quick in condemning Fr. McGlynn's support of Henry George. He also saw Fr. McGlynn as a man equally uncompromising in his own, a man who refused a direct order to come to Rome to plead his case.

and the friendship of the man into whose arms he was once "willing to fall."

In the McGlynn-George break, I don't know which chose the best path for the liberation from rent that they both wanted. In the McGlynn-Corrigan argument, I feel Fr. McGlynn unwisely decided to become a martyr rather than gird himself and carry his cause to an authority above the bishop.

It was not until 1892 that he was reinstated. He did not have to retract his belief in Henry George's teachings, but that does not prove he was correct in his actions.

His reinstatement came about because the case assumed international proportions and Pope Leo XIII sent Apostolic Delegate Francisco Satolli to investigate the validity of the bishop's censure. The delegate found there were many advocates on the excommunicated priest's side and became convinced there was nothing heretical in his stand. Consequently the excommunication was declared null and void.

An excommunication is not necessarily permanent. It can be removed if: A. The person amends the course of action that brought it on; B. It is shown the excommunication was not justified. This latter is what happened in the case of Fr. McGlynn.

### At Last—The Peace

It has been wrongly assumed that the papal encyclical of 1891, "Rerum Novarum" ("Of New Things"), was directed at Henry George. The encyclical nowhere specifically mentions Henry George nor is there any indication the Pope was thinking of one man when he wrote it. The encyclical covers a broad field, dealing with the relations between capital and labor and the state and labor. It was necessitated by the fast-changing economy in which machines and monopoly were replacing not only men but also men's awareness that they were responsible for their brother's welfare, that man is entitled to a decent wage and the inalienable rights of a human being. It was not a slap at Henry George. Rather it was a blow on the side of all men championing the rights of labor.

Now the tumult and the shouting has died. An oil portrait of Fr. McGlynn hangs in the rectory of St. Stephen's. The priest and his Church are reconciled.

I know the story now and I am not troubled anymore. But I think it can teach all of us a lesson: Be wary of how you take criticism. You may discover that you and your critic are on the same side of the fence once you understand each other.