

# A Catholic Social Catechism

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## INTRODUCTION.

THE following pages aim at presenting a brief summary, not a detailed exposition, of Catholic teaching on modern social conditions. They deal only with the general symptoms of the disease and the root principles of the remedy. But the disease is so acute and the non-Catholic remedies advocated are often so plausible and so mischievous that all true Christians, in virtue of their faith, must try to realize what is wrong and bestir themselves to right it in the only effectual way. Our modern civilization, although originally inspired by Christianity, is now infected with un-Christian elements. The grinding of the faces of the poor, the "sweated" labour of women and children, the denial of real religious education to the young, the degrading conditions of slum-life, the callous selfishness of many capitalists, the abuse of riches in mere pleasure-seeking, the unfair incidence of what should be common burdens, the tax which unjust rent-contracts lay on the thrift and industry of tenants, the curse of chronic unemployment, the encouragement of the vice of intemperance and gambling, the "social evil" of our streets, the falsehood and immorality that degrade the Press — all these and other forms of hardship and injustice and lawlessness, which form the theme of socialist denunciation, call for a still sterner condemnation from those who profess the faith of a Christian. It is our business, or rather our privilege, to bring back Society to those Christian principles of justice and charity which alone can heal its wounds. Ardent reformers, full of a just indignation against injustice and oppression, abuse of privilege and idle luxury, are loudly advocating their various panaceas. Socialism holds up materialistic Utopias to captivate the imaginations of the poor and wretched. It is our duty to lead them back to the Divine Physician who promises to refresh them and give peace to their souls. The remedy of Christianity, once so effective to sweeten the lot of the toiler and the afflicted, has never really been applied to modern social conditions as a whole. It is for Christians to apply it, on the lines suggested in this short Catechism.

## 1. THE PATIENT.

TEACHER: What do you mean by the Social Problem?

SCHOLAR: I mean that Society is very ill and must be cured.

But what do you mean by Society?

I mean all the men, women, and children of a country united under one government and meant to work together and help each other to lead full and happy human lives.

So by Society you do not mean the "fashionable society" or "smart set" that we read about in the newspapers?

No, I mean everybody. We are all citizens or members of Society and have all an interest in the common welfare.

But you say Society is very ill. Are we all very ill?

No, we are not all very ill, but the Society to which we all belong is very ill.

But is Society like a person in that it can be ill?

Yes, Society is something like a person. It consists of many parts or organs working together.

What are these parts or organs of Society?

They are the different classes of Society --rich and poor, employers and employed, rulers and subjects.

Why then is Society ill?

Because these different classes do not work together for the common good. When one part of our body does not work well with the rest, we say that we are ill.

But I thought all men were equal: if they differ, as the parts of our body differ, they are not all equal. Can you explain this?

When we say that all men are equal, we mean that all men are God's children and were created for the same end. But they differ from each other in so far as they have different gifts and do different work.

How do we know that men differ in gifts?

Because we see it. Some men are strong and can work well with their arms, others are good at organizing, others at inventing. We are not all fit for the same work.

Is it a good thing that men should differ like this?

Yes, for otherwise Society could not get on. Society needs what is called the "division of labour."

Did God mean any of us to be idle?

No, we all have our work to do in Society, for we are all members of Society. Just as all our limbs are of some use to us, so all members of Society are intended to be a help to Society and not a hindrance.

But what about the idle rich?

Not all rich men are idle; neither are all poor men industrious.

But some rich men are idle?

Yes, but these are neglecting their duty and offending God, who has given them their riches not merely for themselves but for the service of others.

Must we all try to help Society?

Yes, we must all try to help Society and make it better.

How are we to do this?

First of all, by making ourselves better. Society is made up of individuals, and, if the individuals are honest and generous and self-controlled, then Society will be healthy.

What else must we do to help Society?

We must use what influence we have to make others better, especially our children and those under our care.

Have we special duties as members of Society?

Yes, and we must discharge them as well as we can. If we have a vote we must take care to use it well. We must also respect the rights of others and avoid class-hatred.

But do we live merely for Society? Is the whole object of our lives to make Society prosperous?

No, our first object is to obey God's law.

What is His law?

To love Him above all things and our neighbour as ourselves for His sake.

Is there anything in this law which is hurtful to Society?

On the contrary, its universal observance would make Society quite healthy again.

But who made Society? Is it a human invention?

No, it was instituted by God.

How do you show this?

Because God, who has given us work to do, must have given us the means of doing it. Now we cannot do His work unless we live together in Society: therefore God means us to live in Society.

But why cannot a man live by himself and leave Society alone?

Because a man who lived altogether apart from human society would not be able to live properly. He needs the help of others.

Is there another reason for our having to live in Society?

Yes, we need human sympathy and human conversation in order that our minds and hearts may develop properly.

Is government a divine institution also?

Yes, government is a divine institution also.

How do you know this?

Because government is necessary for Society. Without government Society would tumble to pieces. We must have law and order and someone to enforce these things when necessary.

But how does this show that government is a divine institution?

Because God commands and sanctions all that is absolutely required by our human nature. Now human nature requires Society, and Society requires government; therefore government is from God.

Do you mean to say that the present Prime Minister (or Taoiseach) was directly appointed by Almighty God?

No, that does not follow. I said that government was from God, not this or that particular representative of government. God has left us free to arrange who is to govern.

May there be different forms of government?

Yes; all that God commands is that there be some effective and suitable form of government — whether a King or a President or an aristocracy or a democratic parliament.

Do our rulers receive their power from God?

Yes, our rulers receive their power from God, even though we determine who those rulers are to be.

Then we do not give our rulers their power to rule?

Not directly: but in choosing some stable and practical form of government we are, as it were, the agents of God, who ratifies our choice.

Is there, then, a right inherent in the community to change the form of government?

Yes, but only to be exercised in very grave circumstances, whenever, for instance, the existing form ceases to fulfil the end of its existence, namely, the good of the governed. Pope Leo XIII has clearly laid down the Catholic teaching on this important and delicate matter: -"Whatever in the State is of chief avail for the common welfare; whatever has been usefully established to curb the license of rulers who are opposed to the true interests of the people, or to keep in check the leading authorities from unwarrantably interfering in municipal or family affairs; whatever tends to uphold the honour, manhood, and equal rights of individual citizens; of all these things, as the monuments of past ages bear witness, the Catholic Church has always been the originator, the promoter, or the guardian." — The Christian Constitution of States (Immortale Dei).

"He [St. Paul] openly declares that if laws of men contain injunctions contrary to the eternal law of God, it is not right to obey them..." "There is no doubt but that in the sphere of politics ample matter may exist for legitimate difference of opinion, and that, the single reserve being made of the rights of justice and truth, all may strive to bring into actual working the ideas believed likely to be more conducive than others to the general welfare." — "Christians as Citizens" (Sapientim Christianae).

Ought rulers to govern for the good of a class?

No, government is for the good of all the people: not for the good of a class, still less for the private advantage of those who rule.

But should rulers take special care to protect and aid the poor and the working classes?

Yes, for otherwise these classes will be unjustly treated, as Pope Leo XIII has explained in *Rerum Novarum*.

## 2. THE SICKNESS.

TEACHER: You say that Society is very ill. What is the matter with it?

SCHOLAR: The different parts are not doing their work properly. The various classes do not try sufficiently to help each other.

What are the signs of this sickness?

They are many. Capital and Labour, for instance, are often seen to be in conflict instead of in harmony.

How can they be in harmony? Their interests are different. Their true interests are not different: you might as well say that the interests of the brain and the heart are different. They do different things,

but both work together for a common good. If they do not work in harmony both will suffer.

"Wherever there exists, or there is reason to fear, an unjust oppression of the people on the one hand, or a deprivation of the liberty of the Church on the other, it is lawful to seek for such change of government as will bring about due liberty of action...

"Neither does the Church condemn those who, if it can be done without violation of justice, wish to make their country independent of any foreign or despotic power. Nor does she blame those who wish to assign to the State the power of self-government, and to its citizens the greatest possible measure of prosperity." — Human Liberty (*Libertas Praestantissimum*).

How does this conflict between Capital and Labour show itself?

In many ways. For instance, there is a great deal of "sweating."

What is "sweating"?

"Sweating" is employing people to work and not giving them enough wages for a decent living.

Does the Catholic Church allow sweating"?

No, the Catholic Church condemns it as cruel and unjust. To defraud labourers of their due wages is a sin "crying to Heaven for vengeance."

Name some other results of the want of harmony between Capital and Labour.

Child labour, unemployment, bad housing, destitution, sinful extravagance.

Are not children protected by law from being put to work?

Yes, but they are not protected sufficiently.

Are there many men out of work?

There are always many men out of work, and this means great misery for their wives and children.

Why are they out of work? Is it through their own fault?

Very often it is not through their own fault but is due to the defects of the present social system.

Are the people who work properly housed?

Very often their homes are not fit to live in, and many have to sleep crowded in a single unhealthy room.

What is destitution?

Being without the necessities of life or means of obtaining them.

Does God mean any member of Society to be in such a state?

It is contrary to God's will that His children should lack the means of living, and of loving and serving Him.

What is extravagance?

Wasting the goods of this life on useless or unworthy ends.

Are there any other bad results of our social sickness?

Yes, the worst results of all are the spiritual and moral results.

What are the spiritual and moral results?

One result is that many rich people have become very selfish and think only of making money and enjoying themselves; and many poor people have become very bitter and would like to rob the rich.

Are riches bad for people?

No, not in themselves; if properly used they may do much good. But they are a great danger.

Why are riches a danger?

Because men who are rich easily forget that God has ordered them to use their riches to help others. Rich men often come to look upon their riches as if they were intended for themselves alone.

Is poverty a bad thing?

Poverty is not a bad thing. Christ was poor, and many saints have preferred to live in great poverty. But destitution, which is being without what is necessary for decent living, is bad.

Does being poor make a man good?

No, being poor does not in itself make a man good. It removes some temptations which rich men have; but it has other temptations of its own.

Must we try to get rid of extreme poverty or destitution?

Yes, because when people are very poor they may easily give way to sadness and despair, and forget all about God: and people who are very poor cannot lead a healthy family life.

What do you mean by a healthy family life?

I mean the life led together by father, mother, and children, when the father gets sufficient wages and spends them on his family, when the parents look after their children and bring them up well, and where there is mutual peace and love.

Is it important that people should lead a healthy family life?

It is most important: the welfare of the individual and of Society depends upon it.

Why is this healthy family life necessary for the individual?

Because in the family he gets his earliest training, and this is most important; and the family is a school of virtues for parents as well as for children.

Why is it necessary for Society?

Because, as history shows, Society only flourishes where there is a healthy family life.

Mention some of the things which hinder this healthy family life.

Insufficient wages for the father, the continued absence of the mother at work, habits of drink, neglect of parents to bring up their children well, disorder, selfishness.

Must we try to make family life healthy?

Yes, and first of all by doing our duty in our own family.

Is the modern neglect of family life a great evil?

Yes, it is one of the great curses of modern Society.

Can the State take the place of the family?

No, the family comes before the State and is more directly from God. It is the duty of the State to protect and help the family only when the family cannot help itself.

Mention briefly other symptoms of social disorder.

The intrusion of the State into the religious sphere and its interference with the rights of conscience.

Wherein is this disorder chiefly manifest?

In the attempt made to deprive children of religious education.

### 3. THE CAUSE OF THE MALADY.

TEACHER: Why is Society sick?

SCHOLAR: The chief reason why Society is sick is because men have forgotten God. If men loved God, they would love their fellow men instead of trying to overreach them.

Are all men brothers?

Yes.

What is it that makes all men brothers?

All men are brothers because they are all children of God.

What is it that makes men forget that they are all brothers?

Men forget that they are all brothers because they forget that God is their Father.

And Society is sick because men forget that they are all brothers?

Yes, that is the reason. They forget their common origin and their common destiny, and all that should unite them in mutual love and consideration.

How does this forgetfulness show itself?

Rich people often forget that their wealth is intended by God not merely for their private pleasure but for the good of others. Employers of labour often aim only at increasing their profits and forget their duties to their workmen.

Are the rich alone to blame?

No, others are to blame too. Workmen often squander their wages in drink instead of providing for their families. Servants often neglect their duty and make it impossible for employers to keep them. Mothers often neglect their children, who grow up wild and unruly.

Then, if people were all good Christians these evils would not have arisen?

No; they would not have arisen.

Have politicians neglected their duty too?

Yes, very often.

What was their duty?

It was their duty not only to protect people's rights but to help the poor and the working classes when they could not help themselves.

Why have politicians neglected their duty of protecting the rights of all and of helping the helpless?

Because politicians have neglected the teaching of the Catholic Church.

Does the Church tell rulers to have a special care for the poor?

Yes.

Does the Church herself love and care for the poor?

Yes.

Give an example.

In olden times all working men were slaves: the Church helped much to abolish slavery. She has always been on the side of freedom.

Do we owe our liberties to the Church?

Yes, we owe our liberties to the Church. For instance, great Churchmen, like St. Anselm, St. Thomas of Canterbury and St. Hugh of Lincoln, did much to overthrow the tyranny of the Norman kings.

When England was Catholic did the Church protect men's liberties, provide for the poor, and teach the dignity of labour?

Yes.

Would the poor be oppressed if the Church had her way?

No, the Church regards the oppression of the poor as a deadly sin.

Then Society has become ill because it would not listen to the Church?

Yes, that is the reason. Social evils are mainly due to injustice and want of charity.

Is it true to say that social evils are all the result of machinery and the growth of industry?

No, it is not true. These were only the occasions of the evils, not their causes.

How does an occasion differ from a cause?

The cause is what does the work: the occasion is what gives the cause the opportunity of working. For example: the sun is the cause of the room being lightsome: the window is the occasion.

#### 4. THE UNQUALIFIED PRACTITIONER.

TEACHER: What is an unqualified Practitioner?

SCHOLAR: One who plies the art of healing without proper credentials, whether of authority, knowledge, or experience.

Will enthusiasm, self-devotion, good intentions, make up for want of knowledge and skill in the art of healing?

Certainly not.



Are there any unqualified Practitioners prescribing for our social sickness?

Yes, a good many, but perhaps the most prominent are the Socialists (in the strict meaning of the word).

What remedy do these Socialists propose?

They propose to take away all private capital and give it to the State.

What is Capital?

Capital is the means of making money, or, wealth which is used to produce more wealth.

Then land and machinery are forms of capital?

Yes.

So these Socialists want to take away land and machinery from the people to whom they now belong?

Yes.

Is this unjust?

Yes, this is unjust. If a thing really belongs to me, other people have no right to take it away.

Why do these Socialists want to take away capital from the people who now own it?

Because they say that the working classes will be better off if capital is made common property.

Is this true?

No. People work harder for what is their own than for what does not belong to them. If all capital belonged to the State there would be a great temptation to be idle, and all would suffer.

Would people lose their liberty under this Socialism?

Yes, for there would be only one master, the State, and we should feel its interference everywhere. There would be no redress, for the State would be supreme.

But surely the poor are not free now. They have to take what they can get.

At least, they have some liberty. We should try to give them more, not take away the little they have got.

May a Catholic be a Socialist in this strict sense?

No, because as a matter of fact this Socialism denies certain Catholic doctrines and, besides, it is an international movement, and its leaders on the European Continent are bitterly hostile to the Catholic Church, not to say to the Christian ideal. Many have embraced full-blown Marxist Communism.

Do Socialists in this country attack the Catholic Church?

Some of them do.

Are all Socialists bad men?

By no means. Many of them are upright and unselfish men who really believe that Socialism would benefit mankind.

Why cannot we join with moderate Socialists?

Because moderate Socialists are directly paving the way for the Extremists. Besides, even moderate Socialists often work on false social principles.

Is it wrong to own capital?

No, it is not wrong to own capital, so long as the capitalist pays fair wages and performs his other duties.

How do you show that it is not wrong to own capital?

Because a man can make capital by saving up, and he has a right to keep and use what he has made. If I make a machine out of my own materials I have a right to keep it. If I improve my own land I have a right to the improvement.

But is it not wrong to make profit?

No, it is not wrong to make profit, so long as we are ready to share what is really superfluous with those who need it.

May the State take part of the profits of capitalists for the common good?

Yes, it is often the duty of the State to do so.

May the State take control of capital itself?

Yes, in cases where such control is for the public welfare, and the previous owners are not treated unjustly.

Can it confiscate all capital and forbid anyone to own capital in future?

No, for this, as we have seen, would be unjust and harmful to Society.

## 5. THE FAMILY DOCTOR.

TEACHER: What is the Pope?

SCHOLAR: The Pope is the head of the Catholic Church and the successor of St. Peter as Bishop of Rome.

What does the Pope do?

He rules and governs the Catholic Church. He is the supreme teacher in matters of faith and morals.

Is the present Pope interested in the social question?

Yes, the Popes have always been interested in the social question.

Why should the Pope be interested in the social question? Has it anything to do with faith or morals?

The social question has a great deal to do with morals; that is, with questions of right and wrong.

What is the reason of this?

One reason is because Society is or ought to be based on justice.

What is justice?

It is the giving to every man what is due to him.

But what has this to do with the social question?

The social question has arisen because men do not give to their fellow-men what is due to them.

Give an example.

Men have a right to a living wage and a fair share in the produce of labour. Do they always get it?  
By no means.

Has the Pope a right to speak with authority on the social question?

Certainly he has, and Popes have often done so.

Give an example.

Pope Leo XIII issued many instructions on social questions.

Name one.

The famous letter on The Condition of the Working Classes, Rerum Novarum.

So the Pope is an expert on social questions?

Yes; being, as it were, at the focus of the world's religious life, he has exceptional opportunities of knowledge; he is aided moreover by the traditions and the experience of his great office.

Then the Pope is a kind of doctor to Society?

Yes.

We may call him the "Family Doctor" since he has known the patient so long?

Yes, we may call him that.

But why is Society so sick now? Could not the family doctor have prevented it?

He tried to, but the patient would not let him, but wanted to get on without him, and try various quack remedies.

Is the Pope a clever and experienced doctor?

Yes; he has all the wisdom of the Catholic Church behind him.

Does the Catholic Church know what is good for the patient?

Yes, the Catholic Church knows mankind and its ills thoroughly.

## 6. THE FAMILY DOCTOR'S REMEDY.

TEACHER: What is a prescription?

SCHOLAR: A prescription is the advice given by the doctor to a sick man.

Has the Pope given a prescription for sick Society?

Yes.

Where is such a prescription to be found?

In Pope Leo's Encyclicals (or public letters), especially that on The Condition of the Working Classes Rerum Novarum.

Why did the Pope write this letter?

Because he saw that the working classes were being oppressed, treated unjustly, and misled.

When was this letter written?

In the year 1891.

To whom was it addressed?

To the whole world.

Has the letter produced any results?

The letter has produced great results, wherever it has been studied and taken to heart.

Name one country where it has been studied.

It has been much studied in Germany; and the Catholics have helped to pass many laws for the protection of working men in consequence.

Ought it to be studied in England?

It ought to be studied in England by politicians and by employers and by working men. It would do them all good.

Does the Pope tell rich and poor, capitalists and labourers, to work together in a friendly way to make Society better?

Yes, he says that Society will never get better so long as there is class conflict.

How can rich and poor be brought together?

First of all by religion, for religion will remind all classes of their duties to each other.

Should there be a friendly spirit between the different classes of Society?

Yes, and it will grow up if men will remember that they are all children of God, and that this life is only a preparation for a better life to come.

If men forget about the life to come, will they be happy in this life?

No, and they will not let others be happy either.

How is this?

If men think only of this life, they will scramble for its good things. Some will get more than they need, others will get pushed aside and not secure enough for decent living.

Will the ones who get more than is good for them be happy?

No, riches alone cannot make us happy. Rich men are often very restless and miserable.

Should we value wealth for its own sake?

No, we should use it as a means to enable ourselves and others to lead healthy and beneficent lives.

Should the rich spend money on themselves alone?

No, they should think of others too; the Church says that they are only stewards of their riches and must use them for the good of others.

Are they bound to do this?

Yes, they are strictly bound to do this. Christ will not receive into Heaven rich men who have not relieved the necessities of others.

Has God a special love for the poor?

Yes, if they bear their poverty patiently for His sake. Christ was poor Himself.

Is it true that the Church tells the poor to be patient because the Church is in league with rich men and wishes to share their wealth?

No, that is not the reason why the Church tells the poor to be patient. She tells them to be patient because that is the command of Christ, and because their reward will be all the greater hereafter. Like Him she has a special love for the poor and has always protected and aided them.

Does Pope Leo XIII tell us to restore a healthy family life?

Yes, he thinks that is most important.

What then, in short, is the Pope's prescription?

The Pope's prescription is that men should return to a Christian way of living.

Would the poor be better off if this were done?

Very much. As the Pope says, "Christian morality when adequately and completely practised leads of itself to temporal prosperity."

## 7. APPLYING THE REMEDY.

TEACHER: Who is to apply this remedy which the Pope has prescribed?

SCHOLAR: All must help. The Pope calls upon politicians and employers and rich men and working men and clergy and laity.

What does the Pope tell politicians to do?

He tells them to aim at public and private well-being in the laws they make. They must strive to benefit every class, and especially the poor and the working classes.

Why does the Pope say that the working classes should be specially benefited by the laws?

Because, as he says, "Justice demands that they who contribute so largely to the advantage of the community" should themselves "share in the benefits which they create - that being housed, clothed, and enabled to sustain life, they may find their existence less hard and more enduring."

Will such special consideration for the working classes be harmful to the rest of Society?

No, the Pope says that it will be to the advantage of all: "For it cannot but be good for the commonwealth to shield from misery those on whom it so largely depends."

Should the government forbid excessive hours of labour, dangerous trades, and such-like evils?

Yes, if they cannot otherwise be prevented.

Should the government protect private property?

Yes, for if private property were not secure, Society would be thrown into confusion.

Are there limits to what a government may do?

Yes, it is limited by the rights of the individual and the family.

Name some of the things that a government may not do.

It may not banish religion from the schools, as it has done, to a large extent, in France of the Third Republic, and in other places. It may not prevent men from exercising their religion. It may not undermine the family, by sanctioning or facilitating entire dissolutions of the marriage bond.

What does the Pope tell employers of labour to do?

To give their workmen fair wages, not to overwork them, not to give them work which is harmful to them; to give them opportunities of practising their religion, to protect them from bad influences, to respect them as men and Christians.

Is the employer bound to pay a fair wage?

Yes, he is absolutely bound to pay a fair wage.

But suppose that the workman agrees to take less. Is it then unjust to give him less?

Yes, it is still unjust, if the workman cannot help himself. We may not take advantage of the misfortunes of others.

Should the working classes be encouraged to acquire capital?

Yes, to possess some capital will secure them against want and will give them honest independence and self-respect.

But how are they to acquire capital?

The laws of the land and the action of employers and rich men ought to make it easier for them to acquire capital; and the working men must help themselves by diligence and thrift.

Would it be a good thing if every working man could own his house and garden?

Yes, it would make Society more stable and prosperous.

What does the Pope tell working men to do?

To be honest and upright, to avoid violence, and not to follow those who would mislead them.

Does not the Pope wish working men to defend their rights?

Yes, but he is not afraid to tell them to practise their duties also. Some popular leaders speak only of rights, never of duties.

How does the Pope advise working men to defend their rights?

By means of associations or Trade Unions.

Is the government bound to encourage such Unions?

Yes, unless they are harmful to Society.

If a Trade Union became anti-Christian would it be harmful to Society?

Yes, for it would tend to undermine Society by weakening the moral virtues.

Should Catholic working men take an interest in their Trade Unions?

Yes, they should take care to get good men to represent them who will work for the benefit of their trade and will not try to turn religion out of the schools or to spread strict Socialism.

Should Catholics join Catholic Federations and other good Catholic associations?

Yes, for in this way alone will they be able to defend their religion from attack and thus do good to Society.

Should Catholics who are wealthy give freely of their wealth for the benefit of others?

Yes, and not only their wealth but their sympathy and personal service.

Has the Catholic body in England done much for the poor?

Yes, it has done very much. Though it is not wealthy as a body it has a wonderful record of good works — homes, orphanages, hospitals, and so on.

Do we owe much to the nuns and other religious, engaged in teaching and works of charity?

Yes, we owe them very much. They have given up their lives to serve their poorer brethren and they have brought help and joy to thousands.

Should Catholics study the Encyclical "On the Condition of the Working Classes" Rerum Novarum.?

Yes, for it will show them how to act so as to cure sick Society.

Is this letter of special interest to working men?

Yes, it is the working man's charter. It shows how he may get protection against injustice and better his condition both spiritually and temporally

Is it enough to read this letter over once?

No, it should be read often and studied and thought over.

Why is this?

Because it is so full of wisdom and truth that even a clever man cannot take it in all at once. Some of the greatest statesmen have read it again and again.

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