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Social Theories and the Teaching of Jesus.

BY THE REV. D. MACFADYEN, M.A., HIGHGATE, LONDON.

III.

The Social Outlook of the Gospel.

THE social element in the teaching of Jesus is not a discovery of the nineteenth century. It is a seed always in the New Testament soil waiting for the right circumstances of season and atmosphere to grow and blossom. Men have felt in other ages than our own that to be identified with Christ was to be identified with a definite ideal of social conduct, a definite conception of social relations, and an attempt to realize a society not only redeemed but redeeming. The practical and hopeful disciple fresh from unhopèd-for victories over the evil in himself, has refused to relegate the vision of the Kingdom of God to the region of the 'heroic for man too high.' No victory over selfishness is too great to hope for if it is to be won in the name of Christ. The deal is not the impossible: it is the perfect which is to complete the visibly imperfect. If the disciple cannot find the Kingdom of God he must help to create it. The repeated reappearance of some such spirit as this in the history of the Christian Church warrants us in regarding it as a natural product of the teaching and influence of our Lord. We may take as illustration two periods when, in a special sense, the minds of men came freshly to the evangel—the first Christian century and the sixteenth.

(a) The Church of Jerusalem as described in the second chapter of the Acts represents an early and enthusiastic attempt to establish a society which should exclude temptations to worldly living, eliminate selfishness, foster brotherliness,

and establish social relations between its members which should fit them for the millennial Kingdom of God which was daily expected. It cannot be quoted to illustrate the economic soundness of socialistic methods, for it developed into an eleemosynary community supported by the alms of generous individualists in other churches: [Ac 11^{29, 30}, 1 Co 16¹⁻⁴, 2 Co 8¹⁻⁴ 9^{1,2}.] But it may fairly be quoted in evidence if we want to know how Jesus was understood by His immediate hearers and disciples. While they felt the impress of His personality, and lived under the first generous impulse given by the incoming of His Spirit, they felt the necessity of creating a community-life of a new order. They 'continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and in fellowship and in breaking of bread and in prayers . . . and all who held faith (*οἱ πιστεύοντες ἦσαν*) were of one mind, and continued to have all things common.'

It was not to be expected that so bold an experiment should succeed when first tried. The most exacting form of social life was not to be reached at a leap. The Ananias and Sapphira incident indicates that the human material was still in the rough, but the attempt made may be taken as proof that the disciples felt the compulsion of Christ upon them to make it. It was an economic experiment resting on a common 'faith.'

(b) The gospel of the Kingdom came again like a new light to the men of the sixteenth century. The light, indeed, had never wholly gone out in

the intervening time, but it had burned dimly beneath the shade of a vast dogmatic system, even when it was not purposely obscured by the weight of ecclesiastical authority. The New Testament, once in the hands of the people, was found to be full of luminous comment on social relations. Indeed, the common folk to whom Luther gave the New Testament in their own tongue, found in it something which carried them farther than the man who gave it. He set in operation the powers of grace and faith, and those who recognized these powers set them to work in the sphere where their interests lay. Their interests were in life, in freedom, in securing the conditions of mere manhood and womanhood. It would hardly have been natural had they been content to quarry from a New Testament which seemed to contain treasure present and eternal for themselves, mere bolts wherewith to pierce the joints of the Roman armour. There were matters more pressing on which Christ had evidently something to say. He had come to preach good tidings to the poor: they were poor.¹ He was sent to proclaim release to the captives: they were serfs. He had come 'announcing the gospel of God, and saying, . . . that the kingdom of heaven is at hand'²: they still lived under the dominion of injustice, terror, oppression, rapacity. The evangel filled them with new hope—it set up the ferment of a Christ-inspired ideal. It is true that the leaders in the Peasants' War made fatal blunders. They proposed to verify their unworldly faith by appeal to grossly mundane weapons. They tried to initiate a regenerated society with bills and reaping-hooks matched against stone walls and mailed knights. It is a pathetic record of [childlike—almost childish—faith wedded to futile heroism. But there is no doubt that their visionary hopes and revolutionary proposals were the direct product of their faith in Christ. Every claim they made rested on a promise of Christ. The preamble of their demands declared that they sought nothing which the gospel did not justify. The last article demanded that all the rest should be brought to the test of Scripture. They construed the gospel as the charter of a new society which was to end the wrongs of the old, and could not believe that their lords would accept it so far as it liberated them from Rome, and reject it when it dealt with other plague spots.

¹ Lk 4¹⁸.² Mk 1¹⁴.

The Peasants' War failed, as the Church of Jerusalem did. It was premature, quixotic, hopeless. It did positive harm to the Reformation. It frightened Luther and threw him on to the side of the princes; made him an Erastian to prove that he was not a revolutionist. But it is not less decisive than our first witness as a proof that men who came freshly to the words of Christ, found in them an authoritative ideal of social relationships, and a real necessity laid upon them by their faith in Christ to create a community which should embody and express His will.

(c) Other movements with the same aim followed the failure of the peasants' insurrection. The attempt to follow utterly the principles of the teaching of Christ led to the establishment of various communities on socialistic lines. Some are still existent;³ others fell a prey to the folly of individuals or the temptation of antinomian extravagance.⁴ An exhaustive list of such communities would be full of interest, biographical and economic. It would have to include the religious societies of the commonwealth, the history of the Moravian settlements, the Quaker and similar communities which have taken root in the virgin soil of America.

But numbers add nothing to the argument. Indeed, it is hardly necessary to argue that there are social implications in faith in Christ. Whether we turn to the record of other days or watch the working of the Christian teacher in a city court or alley, we find that when men first feel the touch of the spirit of Christ upon them they feel an obligation to create a new social environment in which the redeemed soul can live according to the new principles of life it has received. They instinctively reject the habits and relations to which they have been accustomed. They want other habits and relations, and alas! in seeking them, often enough fall under the spell of traditions of respectability which are different from their own, but hardly better in the sense of being more vitally Christian. They rise a step in society, but not always a step nearer the Kingdom of God.

(d) The Christian Socialist movement of our own time thus falls into line with a long series of others, stretching back to the Church of Jerusalem. Our 'return to Christ,' which is the most hopeful of all

³ E.g. the Schwenkfeldians in America.⁴ Cf. the Munster Anabaptists.

signs of the times, has brought us again to a fresh appreciation of the New Testament message. It has reminded us of the social implications of faith in Christ. The discovery that Christ came not to teach a creed so much as to create life of a certain type, has made us restless. Our dogmas seem to distract attention from some things which are of prime importance. We are dissatisfied with a social organization which, from a Christian point of view, seems very like social disorganization. It seems to discourage some of the virtues essentially Christian, and it offers immense premiums to the cultivation of some very unchristian vices, such as self-assertion, avarice, cunning, selfishness. There is an uneasy feeling that the moral basis of our commercial life is profoundly insecure. We are re-examining our 'fundamentals' with some anxiety. A German socialist has said that 'whoever would understand the social question and contribute to its solution must have upon his right hand the works of political economy, on his left the works of scientific socialism, and must keep the New Testament open before him.'¹ The saying illustrates well the temper and method in which many men in all churches are looking hopefully for some means of breathing a new and more wholesome spirit into the economic and social relationships of our complex national life. The main contribution to a saner social condition must be ethical. It will come from more strenuous loyalty to Christ and a better understanding of what is involved in that loyalty. Political economy is bringing keener insight into the forces which act in society to-day. Insight stimulates criticism. Economic science is becoming a study of the causes of poverty rather than a study of the causes of wealth. Scientific socialism is incessantly employed in the endeavour to work out the economic ideal, which would be the correlative of a more wholesome ethical condition.

It is hardly possible to sum up briefly and in a scientific shape the points in the teaching of Jesus on which Christian Socialists rely for their reading of the gospel. That is because the teaching of Jesus is neither scientific nor systematic. It proceeds from individual to individual, from question to question, from case to case. It is only when we put together parable and incident and epigram that we feel our way into the general conception

¹ Herr Todt, *Radical German Socialism and Christian Society*.

and the unifying purpose behind the particular sayings.²

By way of illustration and suggestion rather than with any intention of exhausting the subject, we may put together some of the sayings which deal with three vital points of social life: (1) personal relations, (2) property, (3) the social end.

I. *Personal Relations*.—Jesus taught men to enter society in a certain spirit. 'Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do also to them.'³ We owe to all men an *equality of consideration*. Each man is to be treated as an end in himself in the same sense as we are ends to ourselves. No man is merely a means to the life of another.⁴

The disciple is to go among men in a spirit of profound humility, ready to give place to others, reverencing the poor, feeling for the weak who go to the wall (Mt 5^{3, 5, 7}, Lk 6²⁰ 14⁷⁻¹¹). No man can be trusted to insist on his rights except he who is ready to give them up (Mt 5³⁸⁻⁴²). The most vital right secured by the Christian society to its members is the right to do good, and so long as that is inviolate other 'rights' are to be reckoned unimportant (Lk 6^{9, 27-38}). Jesus put His own construction on the word 'neighbour.' His commentary on the word in a famous parable is the germ of a gospel of neighbourhood which is now the clamant need of many of our great cities. He sets the word 'brother' free from its bondage to a physical relationship, and makes it include all realized spiritual relationship. The man who in Christ discovers his sonship to the Eternal Father has come into a family as large as God's own, and owes fraternal duties to all its members.

We are to cherish a deliberate optimism about men. We are to despair of no man (Lk 10³⁴). Consideration for all, brotherhood towards all, love to the brethren, humility as to personal claims, hope for all, are some of the characteristics which are to mark personal relations in the Christian society.

² This has been done recently in several different ways with varying success. Cf. Wendt, *Lehre Jesu*. Horton has put Wendt in English dress. F. H. Stead has a convenient summary in his manual, *The Kingdom of God. Ecce Homo* is still among the best of books for this subject. Cf. also Washington Gladden's books, and Shailer Mathews' *The Social Teaching of Jesus*.

³ Mt 7¹².

⁴ For an admirable Christian statement of the Kantian doctrine, see Gore, *Social Teaching of the Sermon on the Mount*.

A mere enumeration such as this, of marks of the Christian spirit in social relations, is a severe criticism on a 'cash nexus,' which yields the minimum of individual consideration. The Christian ideal reads like a deliberate condemnation of a competitive system which identifies 'success' with the prosperity of one at the cost of the sacrifice of many. The final condemnation of the competitive system is not that it is competitive but that it may so easily end in monopoly—which is the sacrifice of all in the interest of one. Any system is finally condemned which offers neither function nor consideration to many of the units which compose society.

But if the Christian disciple is to enter society in the spirit indicated, there must be a society for him to enter which will not treat him as a fool and send him, at last, to the workhouse or the asylum, as the prey of rogues or the sport of fools. The social organization which Jesus contemplated was one in which every man might live on condition of discharging his function. The birds of the air fulfil their part in the scheme of nature, and are provided for. The lilies fulfil their part, and they lack no beauty; they attain their end. Every human life has its place to fill in a wholesome society. Security of work is as necessary as security of life. The labourer is worthy of his hire. There are no unemployed 'classes' or 'masses.' It is the part of each and of all to see that in the individual life God's will is done in and through it, and by a perfectly natural process the discharge of function will secure the material basis of life.

A moralized society would discourage and protect itself if possible against whatever militates against this natural condition of things. It would suppress the monopolist who masters the market and will not let others live, and the speculator who rigs the market to his own advantage. It would punish equally the anti-social habits of the idle rich and the idle poor. It would protect itself against all who by selfish ownership of instruments of production prevent others from the discharge of useful function.

2. *Property.*—Very significant for our time is our Lord's dealing with the idea of personal property. The characteristic word of that teaching is the word 'steward.' When He wanted to illustrate the prudent use of worldly wealth He did so

in the parable of the unjust steward.¹ When He spoke of the wise use of authority He described 'the faithful and wise steward' (Lk 12^{41, 42}). Property was to be construed as responsibility rather than privilege. It was to be regarded as bringing more duties than dignities (Lk 12⁴⁸). A man has not a right to do what he wills with his own, but only a right to do what God wills. The man who accumulates wealth as a means of self-gratification is the one man who is supremely a fool (Lk 12²⁰). The man who owns without using what he has as responsible to the Giver of all, is the 'unprofitable servant,' to be cast into the outer darkness. In an unchristian society the pre-eminent in wealth or position wield authority, in the Christian society they are eminent only in service (Mt 25³⁰).

These sayings are sufficiently definite to constitute a specific Christian doctrine about private property. There is a definite limit to the right of acquiring property, and that limit is the power of using every part of it according to the Master's will. It cuts at the root of exclusive ownership. What the world calls ownership it calls stewardship. That is at least as important as the Christian 'doctrine of baptism.' Is it unreasonable to claim that it should be taught as definitely? Were it as generally accepted and as much insisted on, the kingdom of heaven would be appreciably more visible.

Although Christian Socialism like State Socialism does not recognize absolute ownership, the positions are, of course, distinct. State Socialism would recognize no property in instruments of production, and, if necessary, would take what it regards as necessary for the community. The New Testament recognizes individual property, for no man can exercise the Christian duty of being generous unless he has something of his own. But it recognizes no proprietorship for purely selfish purposes. The plant of human nature is allowed soil for its roots: there its just claim ends. A man may have and keep what is necessary for developing personal character and family life, but he is to hold that and all besides only for the sake of the common good. The end for which he holds it determines the conditions under which he will exercise his proprietary rights.

In the sixteenth century, certain German anabaptists who were led to the stake for their

¹ Lk 16¹⁻¹³.

revolutionary tendencies, were asked to state their heretical opinion about the 'community of goods.' They replied that their idea of 'community of goods' was 'that a Christian ought to stand free and indifferent to all his property, ready to share with a brother in need.' The words express well enough the construction which Christian Socialism has put upon the teaching of Christ about property. They are revolutionary enough, but not in the sense sometimes attributed to them. The socialism of force relies upon the compulsion of force to produce its community of goods. The socialism which is of Christ relies upon the compulsion of Christian faith and loyalty to produce a like result at last.

3. *The Social End.*—The teaching of Jesus about the possession of property is of one piece with His teaching about wealth as a social 'end.' If plain words could have guarded disciples against the desire of gain they should have been beyond the temptation of living for wealth. 'Woe unto you that are rich!' (Lk 6²⁴). 'Woe unto you that are full now, for ye shall hunger' (Lk 6²⁵). 'How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!' (Mk 10²³). 'Ye cannot serve God and mammon' (Mt 6²⁴). These and words like them are a direct warning against the perils of the counting-house and the exchange. They are deliberately intended to warn His followers that—

'Gold if it stick
Unto thy fingers, woundeth to the quick.'

They seem to hedge in the Christian life in order to compel it to choose some other purpose for life than the getting of gain. The purse of the disciple is to be of the kind that 'waxes not old,' because by a natural law the heart is bound to that which is the heart's treasure (Lk 12^{33, 34}). A man's life does not consist in possessing an abundance of things (Lk 12¹⁵). These are the complements of that other saying which states the social 'end' positively: 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.'

Before the first age of the Church had passed away, the apostles had discovered that the temptation to accumulate wealth was to be the special temptation of their converts. Their habits were frugal: as they withdrew from other passions and pursuits, the love of riches became more fascinating. They grew rich. But the apostles felt that

the development was out of all harmony with the spirit of their Master. They met it with protest and rebuke. James repeated the woes for the wealthy which he had heard first on the lips of his Brother and Lord (Ja 5¹⁻⁶). In the First Epistle to Timothy we have a brief summary of the teaching of one who claimed to 'have the mind of Christ.' 'They that desire to be rich fall into a temptation and many foolish and hurtful lusts, such as drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil, which some reaching after, have been led astray from the faith, and have pierced themselves through with many sorrows' (1 Ti 6^{9, 10}).

This is very plain speech. It ought to have a very definite effect in creating the tone of a Christian society in its attitude to wealth and men of wealth. The case which suggests itself as a parallel is that of intemperance. The love of alcohol is a 'root of all kinds of evil.' But men of Christian principle have never taken the extreme position that all intoxicating drinks are necessarily an evil. The facts on which such a conclusion may rest are medical: the question must be settled on scientific grounds. But in spite of all arguments as to the 'good gifts of nature,' Christian people have recognized the need of emphatic protest against the abuse of alcohol. We are agreed that if wine causeth a brother to stumble we will drink no wine while the world standeth. As a protest against the national vice of drunkenness many abstain; others are careful to be conspicuously moderate. But the teaching of Jesus is much more decisive as to the danger of wealth than as to the danger of alcohol. In one case our protest rests only on an inference, in the other it may rest on a direct command. It is not necessary to take an Ebionite position and say that material possessions are necessarily bad. In the hands of a conspicuously good man they might be conspicuously good. It is—according to our Lord—possible for God to guard the heart even of a rich man from the danger of his wealth; but it is important to recognize that no one else can. His position is like that of a man who keeps a spirit shop and has in his blood an hereditary tendency to drunkenness.

What is required is that as society comes under the spell of the authority of Christ it should recognize this great peril. The desire of gain is as great a danger to the life of the individual Christian and to the Christian society, as a whole, as the passion

for drink. It demands an equally strong protest. The trades which make profit out of the demoralization of humanity would be easily ended if they were not so profitable. The Augean stables would be easily cleansed did it not pay so well to keep them foul.

Men are wanted who will deliberately decide not to make money, not to seek wealth, but to put their strongest energies into human service, to carry on commerce as the doctor who practises amongst the poor carries on the work of his profession—satisfied to do a good turn to those with whom they deal and to get only a 'living wage.' *The social end must be well-being, not wealth, or wealth only so far as it can be made commonwealth.* This is the demand made long ago by Christ Himself: 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.'

Much more might be said. The bearings of the words of Christ on social life and social relations are very many. We have mentioned only three: the Christian doctrine as to personal relations, the Christian doctrine of property, and the Christian view of the social end, but these are fundamental. They suggest a conception of a Christian society which has still to be created. They warrant re-

peated endeavours to realize the ideal suggested. They make a solid basis for the work of a Christian Socialism which aims at the improvement of society by a Christian society. It is impossible to doubt that the reformative and creative power of such a Christianized society would be far greater than that of the separate individuals who form it. A cathedral is something more than the separate stones of which it is built. Its power to still the fretful spirit into awe and reverence, its dignity and imaginative appeal, do not exist until the stones become the embodied idea of the architect—the expression of one reverent idea and worshipful purpose. An individualistic Christianity quarries and polishes the separate stones. It does not give form to the idea of the great Architect. To get that idea in all its power, to see the purpose of Christ for the world taking effect, we must have not only Christian individuals but a Christianized society. The individual is not reached only by an appeal to him as an individual; he may be drawn and fascinated by the vision of an ordered whole, an organization of life, a society moulded into harmony and dignity of relation, redeemed out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of the sun of God's love.

Literature.

THE PASTORAL TEACHING OF ST. PAUL.

THE PASTORAL TEACHING OF ST. PAUL: HIS MINISTERIAL IDEALS. By W. Edward Chadwick, D.D., B.Sc. (*T. & T. Clark*, 1907. 7s. 6d. net.)

DR. Chadwick is favourably known to many by his *Social Teaching of St. Paul*, and it is matter for congratulation that we have now received a volume from his pen upon the Apostle's pastoral teaching. As Matthew Arnold foresaw, 'the reign of the real St. Paul is only beginning'; the press now teems with works upon his life, his travels, his gospel, his theology. But there was room for a book, at once scholarly and practical, which should exhibit him as a model of the pastoral life; and this place has been filled in no small measure by Dr. Chadwick's new book.

As the writer himself remarks, it may seem

strange that in a treatise on St. Paul's pastoral teaching no use has been made of the Pastoral Epistles. But the decision to exclude them is probably wise. The letters to the Churches reveal more of the pastor's heart than those which are concerned with the technicalities of the pastoral care; in the former we are able to discern principles and methods, motives and sources of strength, while the latter are largely occupied with details which are of less interest to the present age. In the letters to the Churches, under the welcome guidance of Dr. Chadwick, we discern the Apostle's conceptions of the Christian pastor and his pastoral work; we see him at his work of teaching, we hear him interceding for the flock; we gather the secret of his devotion, and the nature of the wisdom on which he relies. All this is drawn out from St. Paul's own words, by a careful study of the text; and, this done, the results are applied with no