

CHRISTIANITY AND THE SOCIAL PROBLEM.

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Christianity and the Social Problem.

Chapter 1. The Teachings of the Gospel.

A great deal of literature has recently appeared, bringing to a truer light the social teachings of Jesus. And valuable as these investigations are, there is at the same time available for the student the actual source of information.

"As it has happened before so it is likely to happen again that the gospel examined afresh with a new problem in mind, will seem again to have been written in large part to meet the needs of the new age. Words and deeds which other generations have found perplexing or obscure may be illuminated with meaning, as one now sees them in the light of the new social agitations and hopes, --- this is one of the most surprising traits of the gospel. It seems to each age to have been written for the special problems which at the moment appear most pressing." (Peabody, Jesus Christ and the Social Question, p.p. 71, 72.)

Because Christianity has been outwardly professed at least by the privileged classes, the first exponents of Socialism condemned the teachings of Christ without ^{investigating} examining them. Marx could see no other alternative than the denial of God as, "the keynote of a perverted civilization", and Babel sought a social revolution, not in a regeneration of religion but in a denial of religion altogether.

Later social writings writers have read the gospels, probably with the view of condemning them as anti-social but with the result of finding there a wealth of teaching both by word and deed to buttress their designs. From the defender of the privileged

classes Christ came to be called, "The First Socialist", "The Great Revolutionist". This change of view is well expressed by the author of "The Kernel and the Husk", Am. Ed. p. 334. "We used to think that Christ was a fiction of the priests but now we find that He was a man after all like us - a poor working man - and now that we understand this, we say that he is the man for us."

The Christian program includes two commands, "Love God" and "Love thy neighbor". The one is spiritual; the other is earthly. The Messianic law had given to the Jews a code of ten commandments. Legal custom and rabbinical tradition had added to this decalogue with lavish generosity. Never in all history had the world witnessed such a legal purification and simplification as when Jesus for one moment only in His life assumed the office of legislator and summed up all previous laws into these two great principles, love for God and love for men. Professor Ely says, "This is a most remarkable and at the same time a most daring summary of the whole duty of man. A hussar teacher would never have ventured to reduce to God's commandments to two simple statements: Nor would such a teacher have presumed to exalt man's obligation to love and serve his fellows to an equal place with his obligation to love his Creator". (Quoted, Bliss New Encyclopedia, p. 210)

Granting then that love for fellowmen is placed upon an equality with love for God, Socialism seeks to fulfil one half of Christianity. Socialism in its purest aspects is the recognition of the golden rule, that man should do to others what he would have others do to him. The various schools of Socialism have varied schemes by which that ideal is to be obtained. Some would gain it by influence and persuasion; some by legislation and administration; some would gain it

by strikes and revolution; some would gain it by battle and the sword. Jesus gave to men no plan of organized campaign.

The life of Christ is the world's great enigma. Heralded as king, yet prophesied to die upon the cross; Son of God, yet Son of Man; Lord and Creator of the universe, yet servant of the creature made; the Prince of Peace, yet chief of revolutionists; the very incarnation of meekness yet braving fears no other man had dared to face; full of sympathy and love, yet condemning lawyers, scribes and pharisees with ruthless severity.

To reveal the Father and to save mankind, that was the purpose of His life. He seems to have studied the laws of the Jews with a view to using them, laws claiming their authority in God, but He found them so utterly incapacitated by human additions and interpretations that He cast them overboard, likening them to old wineskins which would burst under the strain of His new principles of life. The Jews had made God vindictive and remote. Christ came to reveal Him as a God of love near by. His severity is only the severity of a loving Father admonishing His children, seeking to save the lost and to reclaim the fallen. But if God is love and we are His children, love must be the essence of human life. Was love for fellowmen the doctrine of the pharisees, the orthodox, religious pharisees? Far from it. "The obligation of universal love is peculiarly the contribution of Christianity to the ethical thought of the world". (King, Ethics of Jesus.) The Jews taught national salvation. Jesus taught individual salvation and therefore universal. The priests had never thought of lifting the burdens of the poor. Their duty was to offer the sacrifices which others made to Jehovah.

Jesus, we are told, went about doing good, urged by a consuming desire to sacrifice Himself for the wants of humanity. So positive was He that He had found the key of life in sacrificing self, so positive that man would ultimately be blessed, that in spite of persecution, in spite of the enmity of the world even of the religious world, in spite of the temptations to pursue a more self-glorifying course, in spite of the disappointment of those who had expected that this was He who should redeem Israel, in spite of desertions and betrayals at the hands of His own followers, in spite of apparent defeat and shameful death, in spite of real desertion on the part of God Himself as far as He was subjectively concerned, when He cried, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?", yet such faith had Christ that His principle of universal love as manifested in self sacrifice was the true principle of life, that He never once faltered in His determination to pursue it to the end. "One single need and one remedy for the life of the world - to live the life of love". (King, Ethics of Jesus, p. 205.)

Worldly aims were not to be compared with love. Wealth, fame, popularity, self gratification cannot satisfy the human race. "Yes though a man gain the whole world and lose his own soul, what doth he profit thereby, for what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" From no other person could these words have fallen with equal force, for Christ had actually weighed the world against His soul and judged the world too light a thing to take in an exchange.

Jesus left no social propaganda other than the great