

CHAPTER XIV.

THE SOCIAL WORK OF THE CHURCH IN THE
PRESENT DAY.

IT has been shown that the problems of modern society relating to the conditions under which vast multitudes live and move and have their being bristle with difficulties whose solution marks the strenuous endeavour of thoughtful and earnest men. We have considered a class of theories which, however they may differ in detail, agree in the demand that the State shall be transformed, and that the present social system shall be revolutionised; and the consideration has indicated a fatal unsoundness in their economic positions, and sometimes a fatal deficiency in moral tone. In the previous chapter, certain social-ethical trends were regarded; but of them it must be said that, whilst they are interesting and significant as exhibitives of the tendencies of influential convictions, their effectiveness depends

on the hold that Christian ethics, in its springs, principles, and laws, has of the social conscience. The conclusion at which we arrive is, that the virtue by which the wounds and bruises of humanity can be healed is not contained in any special philosophy or economy: that may do much; but, in order to the stanching of the issue, there must be internal rectifications as well as external readjustments—improved environment, but also regenerated life. This is the witness which the Christian Church is called to bear; and in accordance with the witness is its action to be shaped. It has a temporal, but it has first a spiritual, mission. And the inquiry with which we are now concerned is, How far is it fulfilling this mission, temporal as well as spiritual, in the midst of the clashing views and in the face of the perplexing circumstances by which it is confronted?

This inquiry is forced into prominence by the attacks and insinuations to which reference has already been made. Saint-Simon gave the keynote for such attacks when he declared, as against both the Roman Catholic and the Protestant Churches, that “they had lost their power simply because they had neglected their great temporal mission of raising the poor, and because their clergy remained absolutely ignorant of the

living social questions of the times.”¹ Thus he wrote a hundred years ago, and thus men write still. Is the accusation that they hurl justified?

We do not need to borrow the speech of a false humility, but neither have we occasion to assume a pharisaic self-complacency. Many of those who condemn the Churches and the clergy are in dead earnest—men whose self-devotion, intensity, and force entitle them to respect. And, as was remarked in an earlier page of this book, it is not to be wondered at that men of this stamp, into whose souls the iron has entered, feel that there is an atmosphere of unreality about much of the teaching, much in all that bulks most largely in the aspect and business, of the Church. But when this has been said—not for the purpose of turning the cheek to any smiter, but for the purpose of receiving that “reproof of the righteous which is excellent oil”—let us ask whether it can fairly be charged that “the Church has neglected its great temporal mission of raising the poor”?

In former chapters of this volume, it was demonstrated that, notwithstanding all its faults and imperfections, the Christian Church in the nineteen centuries of its history has penetrated into deeper places of human life than all political

¹ Contemporary Socialism, p. 218.

forces have done; that it has been the social friend, benefactor, regenerator, in ways often unobserved, and through influences never blazoned forth to public view. It is affirmed, indeed, that the ministers of the Church have for the most part resisted improvements; that, jealous of movements which might impair ecclesiastical authority, they have tenaciously clung to old orders even when new orders were displacing them; and that they have combined with principalities and powers in opposing enfranchisements of the people. In this assertion, there may be some truth; but, as an indictment against a whole class, it is not borne out by facts. The clergy are not usually men "given to change"; and it is no disadvantage to the cause of progress that there should be an intelligently critical attitude towards new departures. The *rationale* of these departures—their basis, aims, and advantages—must be made evident, in order that they may obtain the consent which can render them fully beneficial. If the wheels of the chariot seem to tarry, the future advance is only the more fully assured. But, any person who impartially studies the records of the past will find that the Church has been in the front, rather than in the rear, of the march. Certainly, it has been so in Scotland. By the plantation

of kirks, the division of parishes, the building of manses, centres of intellectual light and of Christian sympathy were provided in every part of the land, from which have issued agencies and offices of beneficence. The Church was, for centuries, the national almoner to the poor. It was the Church that fostered education when statesmen gave little heed to it; by its exertions, the parish school was placed beside the parish church; any encouragement that was given to secondary education and to the universities was, during many generations, given by the Church. Undoubtedly, dark shadows rest on ecclesiastical activities in days that are gone. The belief in witchcraft, and the cruelties perpetrated by presbyteries and presbyters on supposed witches, are frequently quoted. The blemish is admitted. It was a sign of the semi-barbarous and superstitious feeling that lingered in the country—an excrescence of fanaticism, fostered by the isolation of Scotland from the play of wider civilisations, which was gradually removed. The most enlightened churchmen opposed it. But to this blemish and to other blemishes, we can oppose the many social impulses that were given by the Church. Agricultural advance was largely due to the older race of parish ministers—that with which the term “Moderate” is identified. We need not have

any bias towards the type of mind which the Moderate represented, and yet, in justice, recognise that, in the words of Mr Grey Graham, "most of the literary and cultured clergy belonged to that class; those of most practical energy, shrewdest to advance improvement in trade and agriculture, the sagacious advisers of their flocks on week-days, and wise teachers of duties on Sunday. . . . The encouragement to new methods of industry often came from those shrewd parish ministers."¹ And, in the more modern time, when a higher spiritual tone was evidenced in the Church, the furtherance of social utilities did not abate. The founder of savings banks in Scotland was an evangelical Dumfriesshire clergyman. No man of his day gave more heed to social science and its applications than Dr Chalmers. The champion of the bothy lads in Forfarshire was the Rev. Harry Stuart of Oathlaw. And who that recalls the names of Norman Macleod, and Thomas Guthrie, and William Robertson of Edinburgh; the labours of the General Assembly's Commis-

¹ *Social Life in Scotland*, vol. ii. p. 96, note p. 97. Sir Henry Craik (*A Century of Scottish History*, vol. i. p. 385) writes concerning the Moderates: "In the minds of this dominant party the Church was to take an active part in the promotion of every scheme of public improvement, and was to accept as a Christian duty the advancement of the material welfare of the nation."

sion on the Religious Condition of the people, with its voluminous reports, glancing into all the scenes and circumstances of life in Scotland; the work of the Commission of Glasgow Presbytery on the Housing of the Poor; the expanding ministries of Home Missions in the Church of Scotland, the United Free Church, and other Churches; the unwearied devotion of the Roman Catholic clergy and the toils of the sisterhoods and societies in the Roman Church; who that reviews the ecclesiastical situation with an open mind needs to be told that almost the last thing which should be charged against Christian Churches is that they have not discharged their "temporal mission of raising the poor." They may not have been always wise in their methods, and the result of all the endeavour may not have realised the full fruition of the prayers and pains bestowed; but they have accepted the care of the poor, and they have not been indifferent to the social wants and aspirations of their age.

The tokens of manifold social activity abound. In the days of old, when the population was sparse, and life was quiet, if not slumberous, it was deemed sufficient to have a house of worship for the parishioners. Now, at least in all more populous centres, the Church must

have halls, premises for the prosecution of Christian work in the surrounding district, for the purposes of instruction, recreation, and fellowship. More and more, a congregation is developing from a company of "hearers" of the minister into a partnership for the carrying out of the objects of the Christian society. And, in connexion both with Church and with University, there are some striking illustrations of social endeavour which it may be well to regard.

The contention, it will be understood, is that we cannot absolutely separate between the social and the spiritual; that, in aiming at the conversion of the individual soul, the Church is really aiming at and promoting social good; that every one who welcomes Christ as the light of his seeing becomes necessarily a force economically and morally gainful to the world. Social science cannot overlook the springs of human action. What they are—their wholesomeness and vitality—is, after all, the first of considerations. A man may be improved through the improvement of his environment,—assuredly, he will be deteriorated when he is left with a wretched environment,—but the improvement coming from without will be effectual only when there is an improvement coming

from within. It is said that the wellbeing of the proletariat (so called) is dependent on a revolution, by which the State shall be made the universal capitalist and providence of the nation; but human nature in its waywardness and its selfishness needs to be dealt with: the social happiness desiderated is possible only through such a renewal of the will as shall deliver a true self-love, perfected in social fellowships and disciplines, from a love of self which separates from one's neighbour. Permanently elevated life implies the moral dynamic that Christianity specially contemplates. "The welfare of a society," it has been said, "is nothing except as it exists in the conscious experiences of the men and women who compose it."

The ministries that are based on principles, or aim at results, which place the moral elevation of the individual in the forefront, represent varieties in effort not easily classified. There shall be no attempt in these pages to do so; only some examples of the practical expression of the Christian enthusiasm of humanity shall be given.

If the endeavours that are mainly directed to the conversion of the soul sunk in carelessness and sin are not enlarged upon, this is not

because they are undervalued. Far from it. But the present point of view is a social one, and evangelistic labour is referred to only with the view of bringing out that, almost necessarily, it allies itself with humanitarian labours and ends. "What is the use," exclaims General Booth, "of preaching the Gospel to men whose whole attention is concentrated upon a mad desperate struggle to keep themselves alive? The first thing to do is to get a man at least a footing on firm ground, and to give him room to live. Then you may have a chance."¹ So it is that, in the desire to gain the citadel of the being, an evangelistic agency gathers around it a vast philanthropic service: how vast, how comprehensive of the needs and wants of both body and soul, the work of such an association as the United Evangelistic Association of Glasgow testifies.

Our survey includes organisations whose outlook is, not so much the regeneration of the life by the power of the Gospel of Christ, as the reformation of the ways and habits of the people, the utilisation of educational and moral forces in widening the horizons of thought, and the elevation of the average standards of action.

¹ In *Darkest England*, p. 145.

Has not the expansion of such endeavours, within recent years, been wonderful? For this, let us freely admit, we are largely indebted to the diffusion of views with a socialistic tendency, to the influence of a social interest that has laid hold of minds which ordinary Church methods would not have attracted. Some instances of this inspired energy, and of the methods by which it adapts itself to a new era, may be cited. It is fitting that these instances should connect with London, in the social condition of whose millions are most fully mirrored the heaven and the hell of humanity.

A young undergraduate of Oxford, too soon taken to his rest,—Arnold Toynbee,—felt the stimulating force of John Ruskin's teaching on art and on other topics. He projected the plan of a community of persons with means and leisure, associated in residence, not for the nurture of a solitary and particular virtue, but for the service of their fellows—"to raise the level of the social and moral conditions of life, to lessen the evils of sweating, and heartless management in workshop and factory, and to stimulate a healthier and more active interest in the educational and municipal movements in the neighbourhood."¹ The densely crowded

¹ Report of Christian Social Union Settlement, 1900, p. 6.

district of Whitechapel was selected as the scene of the residence. A hall was founded in 1884—since that date enlarged—as “a home for university men who, after the conclusion of their university curriculum, wish to combine work for others with the duties of their own profession or vocation, or who may be able to devote the main portion of their time to such work.” A mediæval fraternity, with a nineteenth-century aspect and a much more elastic constitution and object, was revived in the region of London slums. The conception was effective. Its realisation became an impressive memorial of the originator. To-day, a wide machinery—educational, recreative, gymnastic—is related to it. Its residents are managers of schools, and serve in public bodies. There are lectures, classes, social evenings, friendly societies, co-operative societies. Conferences on social questions are held. Lawyers are at hand to help those who cannot pay for legal advice. Men and women of good social status meet from time to time on equal terms with the people of Whitechapel. This Toynbee London Hall has been multiplied in different parts of the Empire; the original type, with local variations, being preserved. It cannot be reckoned as a Church organisation.

It does not even set Christianity in evidence. But neither is it non-religious: for, in the words of its London head, "it welcomes as residents or associates those who bring to the house that consciousness of dependence, that humility of thought, that willingness to spend and be spent which goes with all forms of true religion."¹ The reports issued year by year give most interesting pictures, from different points, of the many-sided activities that enter into the life of a settlement.

Other settlements, more or less approximating to Toynbee, have been organised. In Hoxton, the Christian Social Union has its men's and women's hostels, which provide social and material ministrations, without excluding the deeper and more spiritual sides of work, the aim being to extend influence "further and further until this one will join hands with that one across the myriads of despondent toilers, and men shall realise at last that the Fatherhood of God is their inheritance and the brotherhood of man their dearest privilege, and that these together embody and fulfil the highest instincts and truest aspirations of humanity itself."² Again, in North

¹ The Sixteenth Report of the Universities' Settlement in East London, p. 11.

² First Annual Report of Christian Social Union Settlement, p. 9.

London and Vauxhall, the Lady Margaret Hall is a nucleus of women's effort on behalf of children, in promotion of women's industries, and in aid of distress.¹ So also, in another part of the same district, the St Hilda's East Settlement, representing the Cheltenham Ladies' College, gives "former pupils of the college the opportunity of doing work amongst the poor of the East, and learning the best ways of helping them."²

Very noticeable are the institutions that associate both Church and University in social work. Oxford House, in Bethnal Green, has its clubs and institutes, its musical and dramatic associations, its lectures week-day and Sunday, its service in surrounding parishes, in hospitals, in convalescent homes, in schools, in committees for the promotion of thrift, and the erection of better houses; and thus it provides a wide opportunity for those who sympathise with its ultimate aim—"the promotion of religion by the creation of a more congenial at-

¹ Report, June 1899-June 1900: "No branch of work undertaken by the Lady Margaret Hall Settlements has prospered more, or is more full of promise for the future, than the work among invalids, crippled and defective children."

² Report June 1899-July 1, 1900: "The house provides accommodation for 14 residents, and work can also be arranged for those who are not able to live in Bethnal Green, but who are willing to give a certain amount of time weekly."

mosphere and a higher tone of morality.”¹ The ladies’ branch, with its clubs, its parochial and its charitable organisation society work, its holiday undertakings, and its St Neot’s Home, is a fitting complement.² On similar lines, the sister University of Cambridge conducts a vigorous agency. Amongst its special features, federations of working-men’s clubs, and developments in the regions of athletics, lads’ brigades, and children’s country holidays, may be mentioned. The most recently issued report concludes with the words, “The time has now come when, with increased faith in our vitality, we can send out a stronger challenge than ever to Cambridge men past and present to help us in carrying on a work that has proved its staying power and its strong foundations.”³ Lastly, in East London, Mansfield House, the youngest of Oxford colleges, and an intellectual

¹ Report for 1899, p. 17: “It was the aim of the promoters of the Settlement to undertake a social work which, by improving the condition of social life, by efforts to promote healthy recreation, by the endeavour to widen the intellectual interests of men and boys, by banding together in a common work all who desired the improvement of the district, might strengthen and organise the forces of opposition to irreligion and viciousness of life.”

² Report for 1900: “Our staff, resident and non-resident, has grown and strengthened in numbers and in experience; and we have readily and confidently enlarged our club-enterprises; adopted fresh districts; and served on more C.O.S. and other committees.”

³ Report for 1900.

centre of English Nonconformity, has its University settlement. Its success has fully realised the hope which inspired its formation—that it might “become common ground on which men and women of various classes may meet in goodwill, sympathy, and friendship; that the residents might learn something of the conditions of an industrial neighbourhood, and share its interests, and endeavour to live among their neighbours a simple and religious life.” By its Sunday afternoon brotherhoods and Sunday union meetings; its public and social work; its courses of lectures, reading circles, classes, dramatic performances, musical evenings, recreative agencies; its clubs, guilds, lodging-house, convalescent home,—by these agencies, and in other ways, it establishes touch between residents with their friends, and the people of the surrounding district.¹

These are typical illustrations of a kind of social work, actuated by Christian motives and aims, which presents features that deserve attention.

First, the settlements referred to interpret a desire whose diffusion is the best guarantee that transitions to any new order, or any modifications of the existing order, shall be accomplished with-

¹ Report for 1900.

out serious social dislocations; the desire to bring the more cultured and opulent classes into closer relation to the life and needs of the industrial or the poorer population. The settlements are conducted on the lines of brotherhood. They recognise in manhood and womanhood, apart from the mere surrounding, the root and reason of the true equality—the equality of the common sonship to God, and of the fraternity which is the outcome of this sonship. They unite residents and associates in the purpose to live a simple religious life, and, with singleness of mind, to do what they can with what they have towards the increase of the sum of happiness and virtue. They remind all that “goodness is the only investment which never fails.” They supply a *clinique* for those who accept goodness as the investment of their life. They offer an opportunity of practical instruction in the great art of being useful in right ways to their fellows. The houses and halls are the seat of colonies, planted in the denser areas of the city, with its bitter cries ever ringing in their ears—its wants studied, not from an armchair, but in closest neighbourhood. And, in the free, frank intercourse, divested of all that savours of patronage, which is established between those who have and those who have not, a fusion of interests, a com-

munity of feeling, is realised which recalls the vision of a far-past day, when they who believed had all things in common. Surely, in this there is a finger pointing to an era yet coming, when

“Man to man the world o'er,
Shall brithers be for a' that.”

Further, the London settlements, and similar settlements in other cities, interpret the breadth of the Christian spirit. All that is human is declared to be an interest. The estate of the people is reached at many points and on many sides—child-life, lad-life, men's life, women's life, family life. The physical, intellectual, sanitary, moral aspects are all comprehended. A prohibitory “Don't” is not too obtrusive: the endeavour is to find the right stimulus that shall counteract the wrong, to separate coarse and degrading features from amusement, to make things which should be lovely really attractive, and to win men from evil by giving them new tastes, inclinations, and affections. Benevolence, in doles of charity, is not encouraged; that which is encouraged is the best form of benevolence—the putting of grit into the soul, the helping of persons to work out their own salvation. The object is always to make effective the truth of the citizenship, which, as J. H. Green says, “alone

gives that self-respect without which there is no lasting social order or real morality.”

And yet a definite conviction, a definite highest purpose, is ever present. It has been observed that, in many socialistic schemes, there is a scanty recognition of the spiritual and moral forces. In some, there is no place for the eternal, there is no room for Christ, except in so far as some maxim or saying of Christ gives point to a contention. Here, then, the Christian social work parts from such schemes. Maintaining fellowship with those who believe that new constructions of society and of industry are demanded, with a view to the amelioration of social ills, those who are associated in service, at all events in the University Settlements and in the Christian Union, hold fast the Christian faith in its essential integrity. They hold that “it is hopeless to think of founding an enduring democratic State, on the principles of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity, unless these principles are always sustained and invigorated by the divine fraternal love that flows from faith in Jesus Christ.” This is the position assumed, and “the more,” as the report of the Christian Social Union puts it, “one traces the history of the different attempts which have been made to grapple with the misery of bygone years, the more one realises how fleeting

in its effects—nay, how absolutely futile—all social reform must be unless it is accompanied step by step by the deeper influences of the Christian faith.”¹

Colonies of university men and others who are well to do have been described; another and a very different species of colony may be briefly referred to. Workmen, sometimes in consequence of their own ill-doing, and sometimes by reason of misfortunes, are thrown out of employment, and the unskilled among them are in danger of lapsing into vagrancy. To meet this kind of distress, labour colonies in England and in Scotland have been organised. The Scottish Colony Association, though still in the day of small things, has made an interesting and a promising experiment. A farm in Dumfriesshire was first rented and then purchased, and to it are transferred men out of work, unfit for work, who there, in exchange for such labour as their strength permits, obtain food and shelter. The new-comers may be seen, as they arrive at their temporary home, emaciated and feeble. They get a light task at first, and, in the measure of their physical recuperation, a heavier task. None are allowed to be idle; and usually in three months' time, refreshed by the pure air,

¹ Report for 1900, pp. 6, 7.

invigorated by the regular exercise and the plain but wholesome food, they are able to return to their work, with a small bonus, earned by good conduct, in their hands. On Sundays, they worship in the parish church of Ruthwell; they meet for worship in the evening; neighbours are kind; now and again an entertainment of an innocuous character is provided. "There is no degradation about all that is done, no tendency to pauperisation. On the contrary, the movement has the high aim of helping men who help themselves. It prevents them from becoming the slaves of crime and evil habits, and keeps them employed until they are in a position to fight their own individual battles."¹ As an endeavour to prevent the "out-of-works" from sinking to the level of the loafer, to give aid in a form that inflicts no injury on self-respect, and thus to lift up those who are stumbling and in danger of falling, the association for the development of the labour colony fills a useful place in the record of Christian agencies.

But the record, even in so far as that is now presented, would not be complete without an allusion to a ministry, unique in its conception

¹ Report of the Scottish Labour Colony Association, p. 4. "The whole policy is summed up in the offer of food and shelter in exchange for work."

and in its methods. General Booth, in his sketch of 'Darkest England,' has said of the "utopians, the economists, and most of the philanthropists, that they propound remedies which, if adopted to-morrow, would only affect the aristocracy of the miserable. It is the thrifty, the industrious, the sober, the thoughtful, who can take advantage of these plans. . . . No one will ever make even a visible dint on the morass of squalor who does not deal with the improvident, the lazy, the vicious, and the criminal."¹ These wrecks of humanity cannot be disregarded, in the expectation of some future economical revolution. The Church must care for those who are "down in the quagmire of our social life." And let all honour be given to the Army which holds high the banner of God and humanity in the wild hooliganism of our cities. Much, in its plans and modes of campaign, may seem at variance with the ideals of sober piety; but the circumstances of multitudes are such that some dash, some eccentricity—something loud and, to a finer taste, bordering on the grotesque if not the openly irreverent—may be needful in order to arouse attention and to stimulate the imagination in the way by which alone it can be stimulated. At all events, when we think of

¹ In *Darkest England*, pp. 35, 36.

the 7560 corps, led by 13,505 officers, besides 40,114 local officers—all fighting a battle for God and righteousness in forty-seven different countries; when we remember the nearly 6000 social institutions, under the care of 2200 officers, in addition to many others who, without any rank, are wholly employed in the work; when we recall the service rendered by the Army in rescuing those who have strayed from the paths of virtue, and in sheltering and endeavouring to lift up the down and the wretched,¹—we may feel that the blessing of many who were ready to perish is on it, and that He in whose name it serves is saying over it, “Inasmuch as ye have done all this to the least of My brethren, ye have done it unto Me.”

¹ In the review of the social work of the Army during 1900, it is stated that in the United Kingdom 2,463,802 meals were supplied at cheap food depots, 2460 women and girls were received into rescue homes, 59,718 families in slums were visited, and 45,103 public-houses were visited.