CHRISTIAN SOCIALISM,

Thoughts suggested by the Easter Season.

BY

DR. ELIZABETH BLACKWELL,


HASTINGS:

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CHRISTIAN SOCIALISM.

About thirty years ago a little band of ardent and earnest men joined themselves together as Christian Socialists, under the guidance of the Rev. F. Maurice, Rev. Chas. Kingley, and other able and hopeful leaders. They shared in a high degree that ardent desire after "Practical Christianity"—that embodiment in every act of daily life of the spirit of our Master's teachings—which has always existed in the Christian church, and which can only cease with the disappearance of the Christian faith.

The grand idea of human brotherhood is a vital principle of our Lord's teaching. It is the foundation on which He builds His Church. But practical Christianity cannot exist, unless political and social economy are founded upon this principle of brotherhood. Trade and manufactures, agriculture and education, national government and the individual home, are not Christian unless they are inspired by this central principle, laid down by our Divine Master, and reiterated in every page of His wonderful life—viz., that we must live as brethren under the inspiration of a wise and loving Father.

Attempts to realise more fully this fundamental portion of the Christian faith, by special associated efforts, have always been observed in every age. From those early times when the disciples laid their offerings at the Apostle's feet, and strove to "have all things in common," to the present day, the attempt to secure higher ends by the power of combination—a combination inspired by the highest idea of right—is always going on.

Christian Socialism, therefore, is no new idea. It is as old as our faith. It is the shaping of actual daily life on the principle of Christian brotherhood. It enters in some degree into every
association, church, chapel, or society of any kind whatsoever, which seeks to embody an unselfish or a higher spiritual idea; but the Christian Socialist believes that the structure of society in every part should be moulded by the idea of united interests.

The very gradual acquisition of wisdom by our race, however, (a slowness which seems to be the necessary condition for securing both freedom and strength) leads to the frequent exercise of zeal without knowledge. Direct attempts to join people together under better conditions than the hap-hazard methods by which villages swell into towns, have frequently ended in failure.

But each successive generation enters upon active life with increased intellectual development, and with increased command over material forces. If equal enlargement of the moral nature accompanies the growth of intelligence, then the generation has made a solid advance in wisdom, and the practical Christianity of true brotherhood is nearer at hand. The Christian Socialist believes that many principles on which a better society must be founded, have come into clearer light during the past thirty years; and have been, and are being, tested by varied and valuable experiment.

The term Christian is here used in a legitimate practical sense. Reverently and heartily a Christian must accept the rule and guide of life so emphatically laid down by our Master—viz., that in eating and drinking, in buying and selling, at home and abroad, we are to act for our brethren, not for ourselves alone. We are to seek, first of all, righteousness.

The problem we have to face, is the ever-increasing amount and variety of evils which we see around us, and to ascertain how far this is caused by the present selfish structure of society; by the false individualism, which hypocritically asks, "Am I my brother's keeper?" Evils now increase upon us more rapidly than we can remove them. Pauperism and vice, drunkenness and crime, mammon worship and frivolity, dishonesty and corruption, are all bred by ourselves. They are largely produced by the conditions of the society into which children are born, and by
which they are moulded. Our infants come into this world with equal capacities, amongst peasants and princes, but ten years of squalor or degrading conditions, will deteriorate or ruin the nature of the child. My attention was once called to a bright and charming little girl, brought to a public institution by a poor mother fallen into sickness and poverty. One year was given to the mother to reclaim her child. On a subsequent visit, after eighteen months’ interval, I failed to recognize that child; her brightness was gone, her movements had grown listless and awkward, her intelligence was dulled, her expression vacant, she was sinking with frightful rapidity into the hopeless pauper.

How pitiful are the results of our penitentiaries and reformatories, of our workhouses, orphan asylums, and industrial schools, of all the various charities by which we painfully and vainly try to mop up evil and misery, or to sweep it out of our sight. The recipients of punishment or care, when released, in the large majority of cases, fall back again into the crime, temptation, and evil, from which they had been taken, and the flood of ruffianism and vice rises ever higher.

In the hard and crushing strife for decent living, in which the great mass of our population are entangled, health is injured, hope dies out, and the gas-lighted gin shop is the solace, as the dreary workhouse is the refuge, of those who have ceased to hope. Yet the great mass of these persons have tried to do honest work. They have once hoped to support wife and children as an honest man should do. How is it that capital and labour have failed to come together in such a way that every willing worker can secure a comfortable livelihood, that every honest man can bring up his family in health and virtue? The relation of capital to labour is a vital question of practical Christianity.

Consider also the great agrarian fight always going on to some extent, and periodically breaking out in revolution and outrage. Why is it that the great bulk of English men and women are divorced from the soil? Why are they always crowding into towns, whilst the precious natural heritage of land
is so often wasted and going out of cultivation? Health and happiness should be found in country life. Such a life should not be one of dreariness and ennui, or of hopeless drudgery. There is no life so suitable for the healthy development of childhood as a country life with natural home influences. The care of animals, the cultivation and observation of natural objects, the pure air and abundant exercise which can be enjoyed, mark the country as the natural home of childhood. Again, the production in perfection and abundance of all the articles which naturally belong to various soils, is a primary need of healthy national growth. The conditions under which such cultivation can be best carried on, with the kind and proportion of manufactures which might advantageously spring up in connection with it, affect the very structure of society. They provide the necessary material and social conditions, which furnish the possibility and favouring of a religious, life or which create serious obstacles to such a life.

The relation of the people to the soil of their native land is a very serious question of practical Christianity.

Again, in what manner is the education of the various classes of our children carried on? Consider the education given to the boys of the aristocracy and upper classes. What chance have these lads of growing into a sense of Christian brotherhood? They are fawned upon from babhood; initiated at school into the most heathen vices; corrupted by luxury, taught that money can do everything, that rank will be servilely worshipped. How can these poor lads become the large-hearted leaders of a society founded on the Great Master's teaching of brotherhood? The character of education does not depend only on the more or less wise oversight and arrangements of the schoolmaster, but still more on the constant influences of the life in which the child grows up. Trace the various stages of education downwards, through all classes of the community, to the enormous mass of little boys and girls trained from babhood into vice and ruffianism, and we see that education is a vital subject of practical Christianity.
Consider next the relations of the sexes. This subject is the fundamental question of society, for the element of society is the man, woman, and child, not the individual. How do our laws and customs inculcate manly honour, womanly dignity—in short, Christian life? Carefully studying this subject in its widespread ramifications, it is seen to be the deepest question of human brotherhood—i.e., of practical Christianity.

When proceeding from more private to public affairs, we examine the modifications or arrangements of municipal institutions which have arisen in our towns, the examination is not encouraging. It is the heathen, not the Christian principle, which is chiefly exemplified. It is self intensified. The new power created throws off a sense of responsibility to those who create it. No enlarged sense of duty springs from the trust that is thus given to individuals; but petty cabals and bickerings arise, narrow party views are fostered, selfish interests advanced, or a foolish air of authority is assumed. The more high-minded inhabitants shrink from entering into corrupt political contest: centralization increases as municipal control is degraded. Local and general government is too often only a parody of representative institutions. The important question arises, in what way can we who believe that public as well as private life should be guided by a religious spirit, attain that end? How can we form associations and delegate necessary authority in such a way as to advance Christian, not heathen life? In observing the effect of Law upon the education of a nation, we find that its embodiment in government forms a very important branch of practical Christianity.

When we ponder all these vital questions, and earnestly strive to put into practice the principles of action which we believe to be profoundly true, we find our Christian sense of right shocked at every turn by fixed conditions, which are the result of selfishness not of brotherhood. The spirit of self-interest, only useful as a servant, has usurped the false position of master. Like all our faculties, self-interest needs a higher guidance, or it degenerates into the narrowest selfishness. We
have not yet learned the one grand lesson of Christianity—viz.,
that the largest view of self-interest can only be found in brother-
hood.

The enquiry now to be made, is whether any new principles of
association, co-operation, combination—or by whatever name we
choose to express united interests—have so grown, and been
proved within the last generation, that we may make successful
advance on the path dimly seen by the noble men I have
referred to.

There have been many failures in attempts at the realization
of associated or organized life; but there are also many and
striking examples of successful, though imperfect organization,
founded either upon a religious idea, or on business enterprise, or
on the enthusiasm of some clever and benevolent individual.
Roman Catholic, Moravian, and Shaker Communities, will illus-
strate the first series of successful organization; joint-stock enter-
prises and co-operative stores, the second; Ralahine, Leclaire's
house decorators' guild, and the Familistère of Guise, the third.
It is through union of the forces exemplified in these three
classes of association, that we may attain to a 19th Century
realization of practical Christianity in the future growth of towns
or colonies.

The following are some of the chief applications of the principle
of Christian brotherhood, which we believe, will re-mould the
structure of future society:

1st.—The re-purchase of land by Christian joint-stock com-
panies, in order that its control and management may henceforth
belong to those who live upon it and use it.

The absolute irresponsible individual possession of land
becomes, as society advances, contrary to the best interests of a
nation. The soil, which is limited in quantity, but indispensable
to the maintenance and welfare of the people, should not be
treated as an individual selfish speculation, regardless of its most
advantageous use, and of the needs of those who may live upon it.
It is the slow but sure result of the irresponsible monopoly of the soil by individuals, which is at the root of a great evil—viz., the unnatural and diseased growth of great unorganized or selfishly organized towns. Our towns, formerly the hap-hazard growth of accident, are becoming more and more the growth of selfish speculation, i.e., the false organization of self aggrandizement. The hereditary, or other holder of land, leases it to speculators whose one object is to make as much pecuniary profit as possible out of the lease. This is the one point held steadily in view, often through a series of under letting, in which each fresh speculator seeks to make a new profit. Health, convenience, human welfare in its necessities and interlinkings, are never thought of, or are entirely secondary to gain. A showy neighbourhood for the rich, yielding the highest rents that can be screwed out, and a crowded neighbourhood for the poor with still higher proportionate rents, are created. Gardens disappear in the dreary mass of showy, badly-constructed brick and mortar quarters, in which the young generation grows up, dreary quarters, but where rents and rates are constantly rising. This is the result of irresponsible individual ownership and perverted organization, in all our rapidly growing towns. It is a potent cause of growing immorality.

The control of land by a society or colony living upon it and using it, does not forbid the leasing of land under wise conditions, to persons who are members of the society. It is the irresponsible individual possession of land, with the speculation which such a method of holding it gives rise to, which is the principle always ultimately injurious to society.*

2nd.—Economy in distribution and management. A rational economy, in the retail distribution of products; in the domestic arrangements of our homes; in the official management of local and general government; will set free an immense number of persons whose time is now needlessly occupied. The talent and

*The works referring to the economic principles laid down in this paper, with the statistics and experiments which support and illustrate them, are too numerous to mention here; but they are of the utmost value to the Christian Socialist.
energy of this wasted multitude should be turned to increase of production, and other necessary and valuable employment, under the wise freedom of united interests.

3rd.—A fair share of profits to all workers. This is a most important principle, which can only be solved under the guidance of Christian brotherhood. In the increased production which will result from wise economy in distribution, management, and government, an equitable division of profits between capital, ability, and labour, must be arranged. Interests must be united, industry stimulated, and hope held out to the humblest worker in a Christian colony. When a young man commences life in the honorable estate of Christian marriage, it is the first duty of Christian Society to support his hope and energy. The future of this family is a matter of national concern. Steady industry deserves a fair and increasing share in the profits it helps to create. Counsel if needed, encouragement to the mother in the healthy and virtuous education of her children, and opportunity for hopeful occupation, are all positive duties owed to every member of a Christian society. The fulfilment of this duty depends, in a great measure, upon the righteous relation of capital to labour.

4th.—The formation of insurance funds which will secure aid to every worker in sickness or old age. Thrift, self-control, and an honourable sense of independence, are the results of such provision, which would be the greatest possible aid to the noble temperance movement.

5th.—An arrangement of dwellings which will facilitate communication, domestic service and supply, sanitary arrangement, the education of children, and municipal government. These objects must be secured if the rapid degradation of our poorer English homes is to be checked. Parental influence and responsibility are equally disappearing in the homes from which all sanctity has departed.

6th.—The entire abolition of all trade in the human body.

The waste of virile force, and the degradation of womanly character which result from the barbarous remnant of slavery
existing in our midst under the form of prostitution, is incautelable. No community which aspires to Christian life can permit this hideous trade to exist. The buying and selling the human body is a natural wrong. The fearful evils, moral and physical, which result from such trade, prove its inherent iniquity. Love, with the duties and responsibilities which accompany its expression, is the only Christian warrant for the intimate union of the sexes; and the growth and welfare of society absolutely depends upon the wise guidance of these relations by Christian principle. The wonderful advance of intelligence and moral perception on this vital subject, during the present generation, is the most hopeful sign of the nearer approach of organized Christian society. As a striking contrast to growing immorality, the possibility and incautelable benefit of equal purity for boys and girls, for men and women, is the great truth which is springing into vigorous life in this 19th Century. A new world of hope and freedom opens to women—a new realm of energy to men, from the consecration of this mighty power of sex, which is descending upon our age as a great guide for the future. This God-created force has hitherto been squandered in these earlier centuries of our world's life. Ignorance of woman's true dignity and providential position, has been the greatest obstacle hitherto in the Christian organization of society. This ignorance, now slowly, but surely vanishing, opens to us a great and glorious promise of unlimited future progress.

The principles thus expressed in very condensed form, appear, from their present maturer development, to be the especial gain of this age. They are the legitimate results of Christian thought growing in comprehensiveness, and conscientiously applying itself to a solution of the problems of social life.

Every proposition now set forth requires however, long and careful consideration. Some persons may not realise the dangerous and growing evils which the prevalence of opposite methods of action are inflicting on society. Young countries possessing abundance of unoccupied land, may not appreciate evils from which older countries suffer from individual monopoly of land. Other
persons may fail to see the full bearing of these principles of Christian Socialism on our daily relations. Others again may be entirely unable to foresee the methods by which a Christian organization of society can ever become a practical fact. For these reasons, union in preparation is indispensable. The wisest ways of realizing these principles in all their practical details, require the varied knowledge of different classes of persons. They require the careful consideration of many minds, possessing both varied experience, and a profound sense of the necessity of Christian organization. If, however, the principles laid down are true, then their realization must be only a question of time. In our towns, much may be done to place both business relations and domestic life on a sounder basis. The gradual introduction of methods leading in the right direction is possible, by both men and women, in the two spheres of business and home life, when the end to be obtained is thoroughly understood. A still more rapid advance may be made by those who wish to establish country life on a more Christian plan, by uniting religious principle, joint stock enterprise, and wise guidance in the organization of an industrial colony—a colony which would be the most potent Christian Missionary Society.

Religious principle must be recognised as the essential basis of permanent future growth. Only a large comprehension of the Christian teaching of human brotherhood creates the highest conscientiousness, with a sense of responsibility to an unseen but parental Creator. No accumulation of material wealth, no appeal to the lower faculties of our nature alone, or chiefly, will ever hold human beings together in permanent and harmonious organisation of daily life.

Christian conscientiousness is the only power we know of, capable of controlling and guiding self-hood. This controlling force is indispensable in any wise effort to unite human beings together in the varied interests of every-day life. Without religious principle we possess no efficient check, either upon the selfish scramble for wealth, or on the soulless pursuit of science, or on the enthralment of physical pleasure.
Consider some of our popular social maxims—"Charity begins at home," "Take care of No. 1," "Competition is the life of trade," "Demand must govern supply," "Buy cheap and sell dear," &c. No one will deny that there is an element of truth in all these maxims; but their direct logical results, pushed to an extreme under the sole guidance of selfish interest, become diabolical. This is clearly illustrated by a remark once made to my own father by a Southern sugar planter. He stated that he could raise slaves so cheaply, that it was the most profitable plan to use them up in five or six years, and supply their place with fresh ones!

The same necessity for the guiding influence of Christian conscientiousness is seen in the pursuit of science. The modern dicta: "Medicine has nothing to do with morality;" "Knowledge is its own end and justification;" are the maxims of heathen not Christian philosophers. Indeed, many of those who now pursue scientific investigation, willingly assent to this statement, having lost all knowledge of the value of true Christianity as the highest spiritual guide of our race.

Accepting then the principle of Christian brotherhood as the necessary religious foundation and constant guide of any true organization, it is evident that all these weighty problems now briefly indicated, must be considered and solved by the "Church."

A Church, in the true sense of the word, is a society of men and women, who, accepting the Divine Mission of Christ, strive honestly to embody his teaching in daily life. As each age grows out of the life of the preceding age, so the practical incarnation of our Lord's teaching varies in form from age to age. In 1800, the form which Christian life takes must necessarily vary from its form in 1882. Three generations of men, have gained immensely in intellectual scientific and moral development. All the conditions under which human beings grow up have changed. What we now especially and urgently need from the "Church," is aid in adapting the never-changing principle of Christian brotherhood, to the ever-changing conditions of 19th Century life. We need
sermons and conferences, and earnest life in the Church; but the sermons must take up the Christian view of the relation of capital to labour; the Christian view of the relation of the sexes; the Christian protection and sound education of the young; in short, the whole conduct of life, from the cradle to the grave, in private and public. A certain inevitable hypocrisy is engendered by listening week after week to lofty theories, which are never put into practice, or to impracticable suggestions. The soul grows callous when teaching demands one course of action, and daily life enforces a quite opposite course. We need to learn in what way our actual life, public and private, can be guided by our Lord's injunction of brotherhood, instead of self-hood. Our Church conferences should be the honest and eager effort of every man and woman to consider together how these true principles can be carried out by them. A Christian Church Conference must ponder the life of that army of little drudges in our underground kitchens; of the blasphemous boys and girls who gather at night in our public places; of the vicious roués, who crowd on us from London; of the struggles of the poor householder who knows not how to pay the heavy rent; of the tendencies of the trader oppressed by taxes, who sinks all scruples in the desire to get money, and of the speculator whose one desire is to make, "wealth accumulate, though men decay." These are the problems for Church Conferences, which the practical Christianity of the 19th Century urgently requires should be solved.

It is only on these humble but indispensable foundations, that a Church which meets the needs of the age can be founded. It is only in a Church so founded, that prayer and praise, and the worship of the Great Father, can become a glorious reality, and never sink into formalism.

A true Church then, suited to the needs of this age, must be a self-governing industrial community, guided by Christian principle; holding and managing its own lands, varied industries, and colleges. It should send off out-shoots from time to time, new self-governing colonies at home and abroad. These colonies necessarily possessing varied individual colouring, according to
occupation and composition, should all agree in the one great unifying principle—organization on the principles of Christian brotherhood. The Christian idea of united interest, instead of the narrow antagonism of individual selfishness, will be the distinguishing mark of true Church colonies—the practical Christianity of the future.

There are large numbers of sincere followers of our Spiritual Guide who clearly perceive the radical evils above referred to; persons who long to devote thought, time, and means to the labor of forming a Christian society; persons who would rejoice to leave their possessions to the noblest Missionary work of the age. But these earnest seers are scattered far and wide; they require the indispensable strength of union. A grand work is before all the Churches, to join their members together under the noble banner of Christian Socialism. By careful study of the various practical examples which now exist, of successful although imperfect organization, preparation can be made for union together in the formation of a true Church Colony. A band of Christian Socialists thus uniting in earnest preparation, (whilst neglecting no immediate duty) will be strengthened and guided in the course of a few years, to initiate the most important and urgent work that our age now calls for.

The meaning of the Easter season is the arising of Christianity from the grave; that grave where it lies bound in darkness, corrupting in worldliness, dying through selfishness, but thank God, not yet dead. May our religious people awake from their fatal lethargy, and roll away the stone from the sepulchre, by the establishment of a true Christian Society!

Rock House, Hastings,

April, 1882.

A Private Conference, on Important Practical Measures, will be held in London next Autumn. Notice of time and place will be sent to all who express their wish to attend this Conference.

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