

away the difficulty already stated of an illustration introduced into the argument without elucidating it. It will have helped to vindicate the continuity and sustained reasoning of this great Epistle. ARTHUR CARR.

PRIMITIVE CHRISTIANITY AND THE LOWER CLASSES.

III.

BUT we should be giving a very one-sided picture if this were the one thing that we had to say on the subject of "Primitive Christianity and the Lower Classes." Primitive Christianity was a *religious* movement of the lower classes—that is the next point to be insisted on. It was not a speculative movement in support of some new theory of life and the universe, nor was it an emancipatory movement with a tendency to communism. The celebrated passage in the Acts of the Apostles about the community of goods in the church at Jerusalem (Acts iv. 32 ff.) has been greatly exaggerated in historical importance, because the moral emphasis with which it is formulated has been mistaken for the language of an official inquiry into social conditions. The Primitive Christian expectation of the kingdom of God was doubtless of decisive influence in worldly affairs in so far as it was the expectation of a renewal of this earth by God and His Anointed and the hope of a great adjustment of inequalities at the Last Judgment. But Primitive Christianity never sought to organize the proletariat and so bring about the ideal State by fighting for political power. All that was to come—and they expected much—was expected from God. Man's contribution towards the mighty revolution of things that should come with the kingdom of God consisted in fitting his own soul for it by inward reform, self-denial, and self-sacrifice for the brethren.

And here we have touched the second factor that is characteristic of the relation of Primitive Christianity to the lower classes. We can express it more precisely thus. Located *in* the masses, and sympathizing with the masses, Primitive Christianity discovered the individual in the masses, set an unprecedented value on the individual soul and assigned it tasks hitherto unheard of.

It is no mere accident without significance that we find the expression "souls," even in earliest Christian usage, when the masses were being numbered. "There were added unto them about three thousand souls," so we read in the Acts of the Apostles (ii. 41). This usage, for which other passages might be quoted, was not a Christian invention; it is found in the Old Testament, and there is a pre-Christian papyrus letter ¹ in which an Egyptian peasant begs for food to be sent "to save many souls." But the usage is very characteristic of Christianity. The masses are regarded as made up of souls, and it is the desire to save individual souls that urges on the Master and His apostles.

The same Jesus whom we find standing before the crowd of five thousand, promises to be present to the twos and threes that gather together in His Name. The same Jesus whose grand consciousness of His mission sends Him forth to the "many" and even to "all," devotes the most special individual care to the souls of the lost, the fallen, and those in danger of falling whom their misery casts in His way. When prayer, the most intimate act of devotion, is concerned, He who Himself at times sought refuge from the thronging multitude in the night and in the desert, takes the individual out of the multitude and out of the street, and bids him flee into the closet. He even contrasts the many who are called with the few who are chosen, and He speaks of his "little" flock. The same Jesus who looks with warm

¹ The Tebtunis Papyrus No. 56 (σώσαι ψυχὰς πολλάς).

sympathy on the degenerate mass of the lower orders sees also the guardian angel of each one of them ; knows that not a hair falls from their head without God's will ; and ennobles the individual by showing him the possibility of joining the company of God's elect. Jesus places the whole world in one scale and the soul of man in the other, and the world is found to weigh lighter than the soul of man. Not a single one of these souls must be lost ; Jesus could identify Himself with the simplest and the poorest soul. At the same time it is clear throughout that He places exceptional confidence in the human soul which He prizes so extremely highly, for He makes exceptional demands upon it.

The same polarity of interest, here for the many, there for the individual, is found also in St. Paul. Driven up and down the world by a tempestuous missionary zeal, himself a debtor to the Jews and to the Greeks, he wants to convert a whole world to obey Christ, and at the same time he is an accomplished master of the finest arts in dealing with the individual soul. A typical example is the pastoral care he lavished on the runaway slave Onesimus and his master Philemon, of which we have precious testimony in the brief letter to Philemon. Doctrinaire prepossessions have caused some people to mistake entirely the peculiar character of that one priceless page. It is not, as they seem to think, a pamphlet on the attitude of Christianity to slavery : it is an instantaneous view of Primitive Christian pastorship. The pastor who could throw off such a letter had penetrated deeply on the intricate path of the inner life of man ; the intoxication of looking after the many had not destroyed his sober appreciation of the individual. No less typical is the treatment of another individual human soul in the second Epistle to the Corinthians—a Corinthian, otherwise unknown, who had deeply offended the apostle on the occasion

of the short visit to Corinth. And then St. Paul himself, the great pastor, represents—how could it be otherwise?—an altogether remarkable type of the individual soul, the like of which will not be seen again, alive to this day in the confessions contained in his Epistles, which witness that St. Paul had compassed all the heights and depths of man's spiritual nature with untrammelled freshness and vigour of experience. Like Jesus, St. Paul ennobled the individual soul by bringing it into connexion with the higher world. The individual is a temple of the Holy Ghost, a member of the Body of Christ, elect of God, a co-heir with Christ, a saint, i.e., one saved from the sinful world and brought into Christ's holy sphere. The individuals thus saved enter into organic union with the church of God, with the Body, or, as was said later under the after-influence of St. Paul, with the spiritual house in which they are living stones (1 Peter ii. 5), or with the brotherhood. By such deep conceptions as "saints," "body of Christ," "church of God," and "brotherhood" the apostles establish a line of division within the confused mass: here the saints, and there those that are without. And within the ranks of the faithful yet another organic classification of individuals, according to the gifts and powers given them by God; and all, from Jerusalem to Rome, from Galatia to Corinth, across land and sea, held together by the spirit of solidarity (especially clear in 2 Cor. viii. 13 ff.), each esteeming the other as his neighbour and brother, and himself as a slave for Christ's sake.

Our picture showing the Gospel united in the closest bonds with the lower classes of that age has now been enriched by one characteristic feature the more. Primitive Christianity, its stand taken among the masses of the ancient world, has discovered the individuals within the masses, sanctified them, and united them in a living organism.

The complete picture, then, beneath which we can write the title of this paper, is this :—

Far away in the East, on Galilæan soil, from out the serried ranks of the insignificant many, the weak and the lost, the babes, there rises the figure of a Redeemer. He towers above the inferior masses and above the handful of superior persons, and yet neither cuts Himself off from the masses nor despises them : He rather embraces the masses with His whole soul and bids them all to the Kingdom of God. But *in* the masses He seeks the individual, raises the individual from the masses, makes a soul of the individual, brings this soul into contact with the higher world, equips and sanctifies it for the great blessings which God will bestow on His own in the Kingdom.

A generation later a man is working among the lower orders of the populous cities of the Hellenistic world of the Mediterranean. It is Paul the missionary, himself a thorough man of the people, calmly contemptuous of the sham culture of the superior persons. He gathers together brotherhoods for the cult of that Redeemer, and though his thoughts are bent on the evangelization of the world he has the pastor's loving eye for each individual, so as to build up the house of saints out of single souls.

The polarity of the two interests—interest in the masses and interest in the individual—is one of the polarities on which the elastic force of Primitive Christianity depended.

Contact with the masses is the source of the continuous unaffected simplicity of its religious convictions. Contact with the masses is the foundation of that homely forcefulness which is prophetic of its triumphal progress from the people to the peoples. The delicacy and depth of its pastoral care for souls assure ethical energy to Primitive Christianity and safeguard it from selling its birthright and from degenerating into a mere cult.

With this polarity of interest in the masses and interest in the individual, Primitive Christianity set succeeding generations tasks that have remained immeasurably great and serious down to the present day. For us indeed they have become greater and more serious than ever before. Never has the individual soul been so threatened by the fact of its existence in the mass, and never has the menace to the soul reacted with such force upon the mass, as now in the machinery of modern mass-existence.

To enter into contact with the masses, to understand the masses as they are and as they have grown, what they can do and what they cannot do, to get to love the masses as we love our mother earth, the spreading cornfield, the wide forest, and the endless sea ;—then to discover the individual in the masses, to save the individual from the dangers with which he is threatened by existence in the mass, to raise the individual above the mass, and by thus raising the individual to improve the mass and thereby assure to our great social communities, the State, Society, and the Church, their natural foundation—that is the programme that has brought us together in the Evangelical-Social Congress. It is a programme of sentiment. It prescribes to the social politician the direction but not the exact path to be taken in his practical work. He must find the path himself. Others may smile at a programme of sentiment ; *we* feel ourselves strong in the certitude that with this programme we are representing the sentiment of the classical, the creative period of our faith.

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