

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *Bibliotheca Sacra* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_bib-sacra\\_01.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bib-sacra_01.php)

## ARTICLE V.

WHAT THE WORKING CLASSES OWE TO  
CHRISTIANITY.

BY THE REV. GEORGE FRANCIS GREENE.

THE heart of the church of God is throbbing with interest in the Social Question. Never were the opposing forces of Christ and Belial working so zealously for the favor of the workingman. Is the battle to be won by the carpenter's Son, or by the spirit of irreligion? Serious minds discover almost a crisis in the existing relation between the gospel and the labor problem. Concerning the subject a thoughtful writer remarks, "The future is pregnant with the gravest potentialities for religion. We are not far off the crossroads, one of which leads to a truly Christian haven and the other to practical atheism. Is the freethinker or the churchman to be the pilot?"<sup>1</sup> The issue is, indeed, most momentous.

Clearly, Christianity cannot long survive without the faith of the common people. It was this class that gave kindest welcome to Jesus, and heard his message most joyously. To the support of those about the base of the social pyramid—its strongest portion—early Christianity owed its life and triumph. The loyalty of a thousand serving-men was apparently more sought by apostolic teachers than the favor of one Herod or Augustus. And it is true in the nineteenth century, as it was in the first, that the bone and sinew of the church is found among the plain and lowly. The children of industry are to the church what granite blocks are to the bridge or monument.

<sup>1</sup> Edward Salmon in *National Review*, Vol. ii.

If we are to believe Mr. Bryce, the American people excel the rest of the world in the matter of church attendance.<sup>1</sup> Yet, if we inquire concerning the attitude of the so-called working classes of our country toward the church, the answer is alarming. The result of correspondence with two hundred labor leaders of Massachusetts points to the fact that the workingmen of that State are quite generally alienated from the church.<sup>2</sup> Dr. Strong informs us that more than one-half of our farmers live apart from church life.<sup>3</sup> After inquiry among the laboring people of a large number of manufacturing towns, Rev. A. H. Bradford, D. D., has declared, that "church neglect among the poorer classes is rapidly increasing."<sup>4</sup> Washington Gladden, who has made special investigation of the subject, sums up his conclusion thus, "The proportion of wage workers in our churches is diminishing."<sup>5</sup> And finally, Mr. Moody, who has large opportunities of observing popular phenomena, observes, that "the gulf between the church and the masses is growing deeper, wider, and darker every hour."<sup>6</sup> In England the matter is even worse, if the late Lord Shaftesbury is to be believed, for he is said to have stated that only two per cent of British workingmen attend any church, Catholic or Protestant.<sup>7</sup>

What the attitude of the working classes is toward Christianity, or toward the Divine Person who is the source of its life and power, is another question. For the visible church is not Christ any more than a cloak is a part of the man it covers. Happily we need not believe that it is the spirit of Jesus from whom America's working people are so largely alienated. The social democrats of Germany pronounce themselves followers of Jesus.<sup>8</sup> We judge that likewise the majority of our own workingmen are not avowedly antichristian.

<sup>1</sup> American Commonwealth, chap. ciii.

<sup>2</sup> Josiah Strong's *New Era*, p. 214.    <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 207.    <sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 208.

<sup>5</sup> *Applied Christianity*, p. 149.    <sup>6</sup> *New Era*, p. 204.    <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 210.

<sup>8</sup> *New Era*, p. 216.

This relieves the dark picture just drawn of its most somber colors. And hope is offered that the true Christ will not reach out his hand to American workingmen in vain. Keeping in mind, then, the distinction between Christianity and the church, those of the class in question who are unconnected with the church may be divided into three groups with reference to their relation to Christian teaching and living. *Group first* includes those who are intelligently and actively hostile to Christ. The cause of their enmity to the truth is the old-fashioned cause of all opposition to divine law—stubborn hardness of heart. The number of these is probably comparatively small. *Group second* includes those who profess, like the social democrats of Germany, to honor Christ as a social leader, while spurning the church's ordinances. The number of these is doubtless large. *Group third* includes those who are simply indifferent to religion, and who presumably are ready to give a cordial response to discreet and loving action on the part of the church. This is possibly the largest group of all. The appeal to intelligence in behalf of the gospel of Jesus is to be made chiefly to those who honor Christ though they do not adore him, and to those who are in a sense neutral with respect to revealed truth. The minds of these may be supposed to be open to argument; these may be expected to listen when Christian teachers present the claims of Christianity in honesty and candor.

We desire to enforce the claim that Christianity is, as a system of religious teachings, the absolute friend of the working classes. The ground of this claim is simply the truth that Christ is the best friend of man. For Christianity recognizes no class distinctions. God is no respecter of persons. Christ is the friend of every element of the race because he is the friend of all. We shall try to show the friendliness of Christ for the working classes, first, by showing in outline the teaching of the New Testament concerning labor and the laboring man; and, next, by showing the actual historical effects of

Christianity in enlarging and brightening the conception of work, and opening the door of hope and opportunity for the working people.

## I.

What was the condition of the workingman in the civilized world when Christ appeared with his divine message? This inquiry turns our eyes in the direction of Grecian and Roman society. In these states the workingman stood in reality where we would expect to find him in view of the prevailing philosophy. That philosophy ascribed no value to the individual in virtue of his manhood.<sup>1</sup> The principle of individual liberty, as now understood in civilized societies, was never dreamed of. An individual life was nothing save as it could be of service to the state. Not even the genial Socrates appears ever to have hit upon the conception of an individual right.<sup>2</sup> In the view of Aristotle, "no one should think that he is anything in himself."<sup>3</sup> This was the teaching likewise of Cicero.<sup>4</sup> In view of the same principle in Plato, the ancients themselves inquired if he had not caused more tyranny than he had cured.<sup>5</sup> Such a philosophy enforces no duties, save those that are owed to the state. Individual morality was not enforced; for, as Dr. C. A. Row has truly said, "Ancient philosophy divorced morality from religion, and thereby deprived itself of all moral and spiritual force."<sup>6</sup> Mr. Lecky, who is certainly not prejudiced in favor of revealed truth, has pointed out that Christianity gave the world two principles that were absolutely unthought of in Grecian and Roman life, viz., that of the brotherhood of man, and that of the sacredness of human life.<sup>7</sup> The absence of these two principles, indeed, tells the whole story about the place of the workingman in ancient society, before the keynote of Christ's

<sup>1</sup> Schmidt's *Social Results of Christianity*, p. 110.

<sup>2</sup> *Memorabilia*, iv. 4. 12.   <sup>3</sup> *Polit.* viii. 1, p. 244.

<sup>4</sup> *De Legibus*, and *De Republica*.   <sup>5</sup> *Social Results of Christianity*, p. 12.

<sup>6</sup> *Moral Teaching of the New Testament*, p. 150.

<sup>7</sup> *History of European Morals*, Vol. ii. p. 66.

ministry was sounded in the "good will to men" of the angels' song over the Judæan hills on the nativity morning.

It is easy to show that the idea of human brotherhood was wanting among the ancients. For one thing, hospitality to strangers was unknown.<sup>1</sup> The term "foreigner" was equivalent to the term "enemy." Ages before Christ, the chosen people had been taught to "judge righteously between every man and his brother, and the stranger that is with him."<sup>2</sup> But in the view of Socrates and Aristotle, and also of Plato, it is not only "just to rule over foreigners or to sell them for slaves," but it is wrong not to treat them thus, for that is their appointed destiny.<sup>3</sup> If a company of laboring people had emigrated to Rome in search of better fortune, from some Ireland or China, as emigrants from other lands have for decades been seeking our shores, they would have been likely to receive a sorry reception! How the ancients treated the sick and the poor is well known, and illustrates the same truth. Humanity, to say nothing of kindness, in the treatment of the victims of contagious diseases, and of insanity, was exceptional, even on the part of the relatives of the sufferers.<sup>4</sup> The treatment given a man who was so unfortunate as to be poor may be imagined. Said Quintilian, "Couldst thou possibly condescend so far as not to disdain the poor?"<sup>5</sup> Said Plautus, "It is but a poor kindness to give a beggar anything to eat or drink. For, both that which you give is lost, and the beggar's life is lengthened out for further wretchedness."<sup>6</sup> It is safe to say that in Rome and Greece, during their greatest political glory, the wealthy classes felt no sympathy whatever for the poorer classes.<sup>7</sup> Charity for the benefit of the unfortunate poor, as we understand that grace, was an unknown quantity.<sup>8</sup> "The active, habitual, and detailed char-

<sup>1</sup> Social Results of Christianity, p. 15.

<sup>2</sup> Deut. i. 16.

<sup>3</sup> Memorabilia, ii. 2; Polit. i. 1. 5, p. 4.

<sup>4</sup> Social Results of Christianity, p. 264.

<sup>5</sup> Speeches. <sup>6</sup> Trinummus, ii. 2.

<sup>7</sup> Social Results of Christianity, p. 68.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.

ity of private persons, which is so conspicuous a feature in all Christian societies, was scarcely known in antiquity, and there are not more than two or three moralists who have ever noticed it."<sup>1</sup> Nor can it be said that there was no room for the exhibition of charity; for the amount of poverty and consequent suffering in these ancient states must have been frightful. It has been asserted that when Christ appeared three-fourths of the population of Rome were enrolled paupers.<sup>2</sup> The failure to recognize the brotherhood of man among the ancients appears, again, in the contempt felt by the wealthy classes for labor and laborers.<sup>3</sup> The enormous slave population in Rome, for instance, was regarded neither in philosophy nor law as entitled to the rights of humanity. The slave in Greece as well as Rome was regarded as a thing, not a man.<sup>4</sup> And the conception of all labor was colored by that of the labor of the slave, as must be true of every society in which slavery exists. Thus we are not surprised to find that Cicero declares, "All who live by mercenary labor do a degrading business. No noble sentiment can come from a workshop."<sup>5</sup> Aristotle's words are these, "The title of citizens belongs only to those who need not work to live."<sup>6</sup> And in the "Republic" of Plato contempt is expressed for manual labor, which is declared to be suitable only for slaves.<sup>7</sup>

We need not dwell upon the assertion, that the idea of the sacredness of human life was practically unknown in ancient society. This fact is evident, to go no further, from the extent of slavery, and from the conditions which surrounded slave life. The law of Rome directed, and the requirement was frequently enforced, that if a slave murdered his master, all the slaves of the same household should be put to death.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>1</sup> History of European Morals, Vol. ii, p. 84.

<sup>2</sup> D. J. Hill's Social Influence of Christianity, p. 38.

<sup>3</sup> Social Results of Christianity, i. 3.

<sup>4</sup> Æschines, quoted by Schmidt, i. 3.

<sup>5</sup> Quoted in Hill's Social Influence of Christianity.

<sup>6</sup> Polit. iii. 3. 2.   <sup>7</sup> De Republica, ii.   <sup>8</sup> Tacitus, Annals, xii., xiii.

The life of the slave was absolutely at the mercy of his owner.<sup>1</sup> Instances were not uncommon of these unfortunates being tortured and murdered solely for the amusement of their masters.<sup>2</sup> "Many were furnished to the amphitheatres to be killed in the public festivals. Old and infirm slaves were abandoned to die of hunger."<sup>3</sup> The low value that the ancients placed upon human life is shown not only by considerations like these, but also by the common practice of murdering unwelcome infants,<sup>4</sup> and by the popular approval of suicide.<sup>5</sup>

Plainly in a state of society in which the interest in humanity is purely selfish, and in which contempt is felt for the life of the individual, the rule which comes to prevail must be that of passion and brute force—a rule that, of course, must bear most sorely upon those who carry the heaviest burdens of toil, whether as enslaved or free working people. Indeed, it is evident that in such a society there can be no such thing, in any true sense of the term, as free labor. The very *idea* of labor is in chains.

## II.

Such being the condition of working people at the point when Christ appeared, what was the message that the New Testament brought to those who labor with their hands? It is of immense significance that Christ was the son of a workingwoman, and that apparently all of his earlier disciples belonged to the same social order. Peter, Andrew, James, and John were fishermen.<sup>6</sup> Even the last-called of the apostles, who was superior to his predecessors, socially and in point of culture, as a rule supported himself by manual labor. "We toil, working with our own hands," is his assertion.<sup>7</sup> The most of Christ's active ministry seems to have been spent

<sup>1</sup> Juvenal, vi.    <sup>2</sup> Seneca; Dio Cassius; Brace's *Gesta Christi*, p. 47.

<sup>3</sup> *Gesta Christi*, p. 47.    <sup>4</sup> Quintilian, *Declamations*.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. *Social Results of Christianity*, pp. 350, 369, 374.

<sup>6</sup> Matt. iv. 18, 21.    <sup>7</sup> 1 Cor. iv. 12.

among those classes who performed manual labor. Doubtless these paid the greatest respect to his teaching. It is said that "the common people heard him gladly."<sup>1</sup> He declared that his work was chiefly to aid those who toil and bear burdens. His own declaration was, "To the poor the gospel is preached."<sup>2</sup>

We can only glance at the teachings of the New Testament which bear, directly or indirectly, upon the condition of the workingman. The gospel of Christ places, over against the contempt for life shown by the Romans, supreme value upon the individual, and everything pertaining to the individual.<sup>3</sup> The gospel teaches that man bears the divine image;<sup>4</sup> and the necessary consequence of this teaching is to ennoble the conception of man, and give respect to human life, and all that concerns it. Neither in Buddhism nor Brahmanism is any relationship to God found in the human soul; and consequently these religions, like the philosophies of Rome and Athens, fall infinitely short of Christianity in the value they ascribe to man in virtue of his manhood. Indeed, Christianity appears to be the only religion which demands respect for the individual on the ground of the reflection of the divine life in every human soul. Thus in theory Christianity levels all class distinctions. Or, rather, it brushes aside all arbitrary or purely human classifications of men, and redivides them into two classes—the righteous and the unrighteous. There is no social aristocracy in the kingdom of God; only an aristocracy of belief. Helots and rulers in the industrial or social world are all alike children of the same Father. In the view of the gospel, soiled hands do not imply defiled characters. Not labor, but only sin, degrades.

Thus the New Testament reveals its friendliness for the

<sup>1</sup> Mark xii. 37. Literally, "The great multitude heard," etc. Christ was a preacher for the masses.

<sup>2</sup> Luke vii. 22; iv. 18; Matt. xi. 28.

<sup>3</sup> Mark viii. 34-38.    <sup>4</sup> 2 Cor. iii. 18.

workingman by giving the world for the first time the doctrine of the brotherhood of the race.<sup>1</sup> God is declared to be "no respecter of persons."<sup>2</sup> The wall between Jew and heathen is said to be broken down.<sup>3</sup> The devotees of Christ's precepts are directed to carry their gospel "to every creature."<sup>4</sup> And the leading exponent of the gospel after the Master, considers himself debtor to men of every nationality.<sup>5</sup> Both the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man are insisted upon in the gospel; and these truths necessarily operate to uplift the lowly. "The great truths of the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of men are ever and everywhere available as material for argument in support of the attempt to make the brotherhood of men a reality."<sup>6</sup> It is needless to say that the New Testament abounds in utterances declarative of this truth of human brotherhood. Such are the following: "One is your Master, and all ye are brethren."<sup>7</sup> "Be ye all of one mind; love as brethren."<sup>8</sup> "This commandment have we from him, that he who loveth God, love his brother also."<sup>9</sup> "And we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren."<sup>10</sup> One logical outcome of the realization of this sublime truth would be the abolition of war; and how war crushes the working class appears from the fact that the standing armies of Europe cost fourteen hundred millions of dollars annually, the most of which is a tax upon the poor.<sup>11</sup> Another logical outcome of the universal acceptance of the truth would be a perfect system of charity throughout society. "Let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others."<sup>12</sup> Another effect of the complete acceptance of this truth would be a perfect form of popular educa-

<sup>1</sup> Acts xvii. 26. <sup>2</sup> Acts x. 34. <sup>3</sup> Eph. ii. 14.

<sup>4</sup> Mark xvi. 15. <sup>5</sup> Rom. i. 14.

<sup>6</sup> Rev. J. H. Rylance, D. D., in published Lectures—"Social Questions."

<sup>7</sup> Matt. xxiii. 8. <sup>8</sup> 1 Pet. iii. 8. <sup>9</sup> 1 John iv. 21. <sup>10</sup> 1 John iii. 16.

<sup>11</sup> Social Influence of Christianity, p. 77. <sup>12</sup> Phil. ii. 3, 4.

tion. Is it not true that the free schools of America are the outgrowth of this doctrine, and is it not also true that they are the greatest boon ever conferred upon the working element of our population? Again, the hope of every class that is striving for better conditions in the social or industrial world lies along the line of the operation of the principle of individual liberty. But this principle came into the human mind through the channel of the gospel of Christ. There is perhaps no better testimony upon this point than that of Hegel. He says, "The consciousness arose first in religion, in the inmost region of spirit. It is the freedom of spirit which constitutes its essence. . . . Freedom first arose among the Greeks; but they and the Romans likewise knew only that some men were free, not man as such. Even Plato and Aristotle knew not this. . . . That was an idea which came into the world through Christianity, which recognized that the individual as such had an infinite worth."<sup>1</sup>

The message of Christianity concerning industrial relations may largely be inferred from what has just been shown to be the principles of the gospel of Christ concerning the value of the soul and the brotherhood of man. But the points of gospel doctrine under this head should perhaps be more specifically stated. We are more and more impressed with the moderation and practical sense of the Scripture view of the subject. Both extreme communism and extreme individualism are avoided. But the mean adopted is a scheme which offers the highest development to every class. It especially offers the largest opportunities and incentives to the working people in the direction of material and moral improvement. This teaching may be set forth in outline as follows:—

1. The New Testament recognizes the right of private ownership of property, as against the demand of the extreme communist. It plainly appears, from the parable of Lazarus, that not the possessions of the rich man, but his improper

<sup>1</sup>Quoted in Stubbs' *Christ and Democracy*.

use of his wealth, is condemned.<sup>1</sup> In the parable of the talents, the right of property is assumed.<sup>2</sup> The widow's right to the possession of her two mites, likewise, was involved in her right to make the offering of them to God.<sup>3</sup> And that the communism which existed briefly in the early apostolic church was purely a matter of option appears, to go no further, from the declaration of Peter to Ananias concerning the latter's possession, "Whiles it remained, was it not thine own?"<sup>4</sup> We infer that the right of private property in a Christian society works to the advantage of every class. It operates thus by supplying that healthful ambition without which bright and happy work is plainly impossible.

2. The New Testament regards private property in the light of a trust, of which God is the actual owner, as against the view of those who follow the law of gross worldliness in their estimate of their acquirements.<sup>5</sup> Greed is ruled out, strictly and absolutely, in the gospel view.<sup>6</sup> The love of money (for its own sake) is said to be the root of all evil.<sup>7</sup> To trust in riches is to make the kingdom of God difficult of attainment.<sup>8</sup> Selfishness finds no standing room in the Sermon on the Mount.<sup>9</sup> As the Christian is wholly God's, all his possessions must be humbly laid at the Master's feet.

3. The New Testament plainly subordinates temporal blessings to spiritual graces and privileges, as against the materialistic view of those who regard money as the *summum bonum*.<sup>10</sup> Where wealth is seen to stand in the way of a man's spiritual advancement he is bidden resolutely to turn his back upon it, and devote himself to ministering to the needs of his brethren.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, an undertone of depreciation of merely temporal blessings appears to permeate the entire New Testament, which must be understood as meaning that material

<sup>1</sup> Luke xvi. <sup>2</sup> Matt. xxv. <sup>3</sup> Mark xii. 41-44. <sup>4</sup> Acts v. 4.

<sup>5</sup> Rom. xiv. 7; Gal. ii. 20; 1 Pet. iv. 2. <sup>6</sup> Matt. vi. 19; Heb. xiii. 5.

<sup>7</sup> 1 Tim. vi. 10. <sup>8</sup> Mark x. 23. <sup>9</sup> Matt. v. 16.

<sup>10</sup> Matt. vi. 20, 21. <sup>11</sup> Mark x. 21.

wealth becomes an evil whenever it operates to interfere with spiritual law. This view is a necessary consequence of that dualism which is of the essence of all religion. If soul and immortality be realities, the interests of the spiritual man are, of course, paramount to those of the material man.

4. The New Testament dignifies manual labor, as we have already seen. The remark of Paul to the Thessalonians may sufficiently illustrate this statement, "If any would not work, neither should he eat."<sup>1</sup> "A cardinal doctrine of Christian morals is the importance of industry."<sup>2</sup> Work, whatever its nature, if honest, becomes divine in the gospel plan. This view of the dignity of manual work, so plainly enforced in the New Testament, may well be considered in contrast with the view of the Greeks and Romans that work was essentially vile and degrading.

5. The New Testament requires that justice to all concerned, not selfishness, shall be the guiding principle in all industrial relations, as against the *laissez-faire* view of the long-prevalent philosophy of the subject.<sup>3</sup> "Thou shalt not steal" is proclaimed by Christian law with thunderous emphasis. "Render to all their dues,"<sup>4</sup> will be readily admitted by all true Christians to be a central and fundamental demand of the gospel of the Son of man.

6. Finally, the New Testament requires that love and benevolence shall enter into and control every human relation.<sup>5</sup> This brings us to the very soul of the gospel. There is practically no limit to the amplification that might be made of this fact, by quotation from inspired sources, and comment concerning the matter. Sufficient here to say, that evidently whenever the royal law of love, which is written in golden letters in Scripture, shall meet with general obedience throughout human society, the social problem will find instant solution.

<sup>1</sup> 2 Thess. iii. 10. <sup>2</sup> Gesta Christi, p. 69.

<sup>3</sup> Col. iv. 1; Eph. vi. 5, 6. <sup>4</sup> Rom. xiii. 7.

<sup>5</sup> Matt. v. 44; Rom. xiii. 10; 1 Cor. xiii.

## III.

Let us now ask, What were the actual effects of the doctrines of Christianity upon the condition of the working classes in early Christian history—say, during the first three centuries of our era? There can be no better test of what the spirit of the Christian religion is than the changes it practically accomplishes in social conditions.

No effect of early Christianity was more pronounced than the elevation of labor to a nobler plane than it has ever occupied under pagan influences. Nothing can possibly degrade labor more than a system of slavery; and wherever the gospel was accepted, the foundations of slavery began to be undermined. While for good reasons there is little or nothing of express condemnation of slavery in the words of Jesus, it is plain that a gospel which declares that God "hath made of one blood all nations,"<sup>1</sup> and that there is before the Highest no distinction of "bond or free,"<sup>2</sup> works logically to the final extinction of slavery. Hence we are not surprised to find express denunciation of slavery in the teachings of the Fathers. Thus Clement of Alexandria declared that "no man is a slave by nature."<sup>3</sup> This echoes the spirit of Christ, as against the universal teaching of paganism. And through strictly Christian influences, within two centuries after the death of our Lord, reforms looking to the abolition of slavery were inaugurated in Rome. That slavery in civilized states lingered in the world until the nineteenth century was no fault of the gospel of Christ; and, apart from the question of slavery, Christianity operated from the first in the societies in which it found acceptance to give a dignity to manual labor it had never before received. Chrysostom taught that labor is essentially noble, and denounced idleness as a most serious sin.<sup>4</sup> "Work with your hands," was the exhortation of Barnabas.<sup>5</sup> Under such teaching, work cannot remain a badge of

<sup>1</sup> Acts xvii. 26. <sup>2</sup> Gal. iii. 28. <sup>3</sup> *Pædagogos*, iii. 12.

<sup>4</sup> *Social Results of Christianity*, p. 214. <sup>5</sup> *Epistles*, xix.

servility. It becomes a crown of honor to the worker. Those who toil with their hands become God's freemen. In early Christian societies, again, we find the happiness of the working class promoted by certain forms of Christian charity. For instance, hospitals for the sick were established through the inspiration of Christian teaching. The first hospital is said by Mr. Lecky to have been founded in the fourth century by Fabiola, a Christian woman of Rome, as an avowed Christian act.<sup>1</sup> Then, too, the new value that the Christian religion placed upon human life practically operated, within the range of the early Christian church, to the advantage of working people, by protecting them from occupations or situations in which life or health were needlessly jeopardized.

#### IV.

Nor can the unprejudiced student of history fail to see that it is the law of Christian philanthropy which has been behind every movement for the advancement of the workingman, from the fourth century to the nineteenth, as the law of magnetism is behind every movement in nature. A few illustrations from European history must suffice. What English liberty has meant to the English-speaking workingman, each can judge for himself. English constitutional liberty had its birth with Magna Charta; and it is noteworthy that John was persuaded to sign that document by a Christian minister, Langton, the Archbishop of Canterbury.<sup>2</sup> Again, the early English laws, those especially of Alfred, were far in advance of all earlier legislation in the protection afforded to the interests of the laboring class—for example, in the matter of the enforcement of Sunday observance; and it was avowedly and distinctly Christian legislation.<sup>3</sup> The peasant wars in Europe during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, which resulted in lightening the burdens on the necks of the work-

<sup>1</sup> History of European Morals, Vol. ii. p. 85.

<sup>2</sup> Fisher's Outlines of Universal History, p. 296.

<sup>3</sup> Gesta Christi, chapter xix.

ingmen, were apparently the direct outgrowth of the spirit of the Reformation.<sup>1</sup> And finally, the labor guilds of the Middle Ages, the forerunners of the modern trades-unions, were founded on Christian lines, and had distinctly Christian aims.<sup>2</sup> It was the Christian spirit undoubtedly which made their existence possible. It would be easy to multiply illustrations like these, and greatly to enlarge upon the truth they set forth; but probably few will seriously question the claim that during all the Christian centuries the Christian spirit has shaped both the laws and the customs that have swept aside the obstacles to the workingman's material and moral advancement.

## V.

We approach another question, What does the gospel of Christ now offer to do for the working classes in the direction of the abolition of poverty?

It is significant that the capacity of the gospel to solve the problem of poverty, coextensively with the problem of sin, is recognized by many socialistic leaders. Of course we do not expect the New Testament to receive fair treatment from a nihilist, like Bakunin, or an apostle of a materialistic philosophy, like Karl Marx. But let us listen to such testimonies as the following. Henry George has said, "The salvation of society, the hope for the free, full development of humanity, is in the gospel of brotherhood—the gospel of Christ."<sup>3</sup> Raffaele Mariano, an Italian socialist, declares, "No religion corresponds more to humane and social ideas than the Christian."<sup>4</sup> Le Play, a socialist who receives high praise as a thinker from Kaufmann in his "Christian Socialism," pays this tribute to Christianity, "There is no room for doubt that Christianity remains the first requisite of humanity, and that

<sup>1</sup> *Gesta Christi*, pp. 233, 234.   <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 147.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in Kaufmann's *Christian Socialism*.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted from Kaufmann.

nations living under a liberal *régime* like ours must be brought back to it, not only by divine grace, but also from a desire of their own well-being."<sup>1</sup> There is surely encouragement in the tone of these utterances for those who have been fearing lest the Great Teacher has been losing his hold upon the masses. Probably the truth is that the majority of the working classes have at heart the same regard for Christ as is evinced in the tributes just quoted. "It has been repeatedly said by workmen that they do not disbelieve in Christianity, but in 'Churchianity.'"<sup>2</sup> If the larger portion of those of this class who are indifferent toward the church are really ready to respond to the touch of Jesus, the figures recently given by Dr. Strong concerning the church-going habits of the masses in our American cities are not quite so appalling as appears at first glance.

Irrespective of the inquiry as to whether any sort of socialism can be deduced from the New Testament, it is to be observed that the teachings of Jesus certainly work to destroy the seeds from which poverty grows. They war against poverty in two fundamental ways. They attack both the outward and the inward causes of it. We believe the claim is just that a man who obeyed the gospel, and dwelt in a community whose members obeyed the gospel, could not long remain in a state of severe want. A ripple of applause spread over the audience at a meeting of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church several years since, at the witty remark of a speaker in answer to the criticism, that the poor were not as a rule found in Christian churches. Said he, "It is not the church's fault if its members are not poor. When the poor join our ranks, they begin to outgrow their poverty, they cease to be poor." We believe there is more than a suggestion of serious truth in this playful statement with respect to the logical social effects of Christianity among the poor.

<sup>1</sup> Christian Socialism, p. 4. <sup>2</sup> Strong's New Era, p. 217.

We have seen that the gospel of Christ befriends the poor man by forbidding that he be made the victim of selfishness and injustice in any of his social relations. If any part of existing society be a state of warfare, and its actual motive principle be selfishness or greed, Christianity is not responsible therefor. Any school of political science that assumes the necessity of selfishness as the basis of business dealings is unchristian. Christian justice forbids an employer's retaining more than his equitable share of the fruits of his servant's industry. And he is morally bound to provide every possible safeguard to life and health for those whom he employs. He who follows the New Testament will acknowledge that the rule that labor is to be bought at its lowest price has its limitations, to say the least. The gospel, also, in demanding that strict justice be brought into the relations of buyer and seller aims to protect the poor from robbery in the course of their consumption of the common necessities of life. A corner in wheat, controlled by a half-dozen Chicago or New York capitalists, must be regarded as hateful in the view of the gospel, on the ground that it is clearly a form of robbery of the poor. The same may be said of the manufacture and sale of shoddy clothing, adulterated food, and the like. The dishonest management of trust funds, which doubtless has been one of the causes of the recent financial depression, belongs to the same category. The poor are sometimes robbed through methods like these; but it is done by defying God's law. When society grows up to the level of the Sermon on the Mount, these forms of oppression of the poor will be an utter impossibility.

But it is through offering to place the individual into a right relation to God that Christianity most effectually battles in his behalf against poverty. It supplies those moral personal qualities which best give their possessor a control over his material circumstances. While it may be true that ordinarily extreme wealth may be won only by those who

have a genius for money-getting, the storehouse of nature seems to be full enough to afford plenty for all who will simply learn to be masters of themselves. And by offering a divine principle to every human life, the gospel aims, in the most effective way conceivable, to teach men self-government and self-respect. These are the most effective weapons against poverty. It is safe to say that by far the most of the suffering which directly springs from poverty is primarily caused by sin through the loss of self-control. Says G. Loring Brace, "The self-control, sobriety, temperance, and moderation He teaches, tend to a certain control over circumstances. . . . The great sources of poverty are idleness, intemperance, and vice."<sup>1</sup> The remark of the late President Roswell D. Hitchcock is of like import, "The greatest inequality is that which comes of immoralities; the chiefest of which are willful indolence, intemperance, and licentiousness. In their coarser forms these three vices give us by far the greater part of all our paupers and outcasts."<sup>2</sup> Who cannot see, to consider the vice of drunkenness alone, what would be the result if the proportion of the twelve hundred millions annually spent on strong drink in our country that is contributed by the working class were placed to their credit in savings banks? The drink and tobacco bills of Great Britain are said to aggregate upwards of three hundred millions of dollars annually. The observations just quoted bring us to the very heart of the problem of poverty. It is needless to dwell upon the fact that no true follower of Christ can be an idler, a drunkard, a spendthrift, or an unclean person. Plainly, Christ offers to do for society, through the removal of the personal causes of poverty, what no mere machinery of government could ever accomplish. No socialistic scheme ever yet devised, which has left Christianity out of account, has successfully dealt with the factor of sin as an obstacle to material prosperity. It has been assumed that sin is an effect, rather than a cause,

<sup>1</sup> *Gesta Christi*, p. 417. <sup>2</sup> *Socialism*, p. 11.

of poverty, and that it would disappear with a reconstruction of society on communistic lines. But it needs no deep study of the human soul to determine that sin lies too deep to be uprooted by any material causes, and that it is really the fountain of all human misery. Surely it is not a better environment that is needed, by a majority of those who are regarding an atheistic socialism as their gospel, so much as a sincere consecration to the law of God as revealed through Christ.

"The fault, dear Brutus, is not with our stars,  
But with ourselves, that we are underlings."<sup>1</sup>

Of course, so far as legislation can serve to improve the circumstances of the poor and weak, it should be seriously employed for that end. So far as human suffering is really referable to a false construction of society or government, the mending of these should be sought by every friend of humanity. No one seriously supposes that society has yet found its ultimate constitution. Society is like Christ's kingdom,—not a crystal in the rock, but a growing mustard tree. Here again the gospel comes to the aid of the weak and wretched. It aims to make the best of political mechanisms and forces by carrying integrity and benevolence—in a word, God, into the idea of Christian citizenship, and by offering to the race in the inspired account of the kingdom of God the one perfect ideal of human brotherhood. Christ's own spirit is in the lines of the Christian singer of our century,—

"Ring out the darkness of the land,  
Ring in the Christ that is to be!"<sup>2</sup>

## VI.

Nothing is to be gained, on the part of Christian teachers, in hotly defending the existing industrial system. The condition of the working classes in Christian lands is neither ideal nor final. That fact may as well be frankly admitted. The aspirations and struggles of workmen for a larger

<sup>1</sup> Julius Cæsar, Act i. Scene 2.   <sup>2</sup> In Memoriam, cv.

freedom and opportunity, so far as they are held within the lines of justice, are wholly commendable. It is no more just or sensible to lay at the door of aspiring labor the charge of an unholy discontent than it is for certain demagogues to make sweeping denunciations of wealth. It is the duty and privilege of those who stand for Christian doctrine to urge that the mechanism of Christian society is to "go on unto perfection"—along Christian lines. They are to shun alike that conservatism on the one hand, which is like Ephraim clinging to his idols, and an extreme radicalism on the other. No friend of the race can teach that men have reached an ultimate condition in any direction. The defectiveness of the existing social system appears, in the first place, in the injustice it works. It gives an unfair opportunity to dishonest ability. It allows grasping corporations and private capitalists to take advantage of an overmassing of labor at certain points to purchase work at figures approaching starvation rates, and thus to get a larger share than is just of the fruits of labor. The individualistic system, again, permits untold waste—as Bellamy has clearly shown. To build a railroad, or factory, that is not needed, save for speculative purposes, is equivalent to so much total destruction of the world's wealth, and is morally as reprehensible as the burning of barns or warehouses. Such waste, and in every direction, is a necessary consequence of the system which glorifies selfishness, and practically says to every man, "Take all you can get, within the limits of a bungling human legislation, from your brother men." If our view of this matter is erroneous we are in good company. Thus ex-Mayor Hewitt of New York has said, "The present distribution of wealth does not conform to the principles of justice."<sup>1</sup> And to the same purport Professor Fawcett has declared, that "the rich are becoming rapidly wealthier, whereas no increase can be discerned in the comforts of the laboring classes."<sup>2</sup> Says Professor R. T. Ely,

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in *Social Questions*, by Rev. J. H. Rylance, D. D.

<sup>2</sup> Likewise quoted in *Social Questions*.

“An ethical demand of the present age is a clearer perception of the duties of property, intelligence, and social position. It must be recognized that extreme individualism is immoral.”<sup>1</sup> And the testimony of the late Rev. R. D. Hitchcock, D.D., is in a similar strain. He says, “Our present civilization, nominally Christian, is nevertheless distinctively and intensely materialistic. Its special task has been the subjugation of nature. . . . The result is great wealth, rapidly accumulated, with an inequality in the distribution of it which cannot be wholly justified; an inequality which only began not very long ago to be redressed: in France, by the Revolution of 1789, and the Code Napoleon; in England, about twenty-five years ago; in Germany, and most other European countries, not yet.”<sup>2</sup> If all of this be true, it follows that the duty of the Christian church is not to content itself with teaching the passive qualities of patience, industry, and faithfulness, to the toilers, but is also to seek to mend society, outwardly and inwardly, to the end that all may be brought into a condition to get as much as God intended out of life,—both that part of it which is, and that which is future.

It becomes us to speak modestly concerning the ultimate framework of society after it has come from under the constructive hand of Christian truth. Whether, however, the final social order is to be socialistic or individualistic, it is certain that it will afford the workingman every opportunity and privilege that he can possibly obtain on earth. In a completely Christianized society there will be no injustice; and hence the worker no more than the individual or body for which he labors will be defrauded of what is justly his. Possibly the wages system will disappear, and be supplanted by some form of coöperation or profit-sharing. But, at all events,

<sup>1</sup> I cannot here recall the particular work of Professor Ely from which this quotation found its way into my note-book. However, his words are accurately quoted.

<sup>2</sup> *Socialism*, p. 12. It is to be remembered that Dr. Hitchcock's essay was written eighteen years ago.

social tyranny and injustice will be at an end. It will be impossible for soulless corporations or conscienceless multimillionaires to grind the faces of the poor. Idleness and thriftlessness will always suffer, as they should; but plenty will pour into the lap of the humblest worker who is true to divine law and faithful to himself. This much may safely be said of the workingman's social ideal. To it Christianity points with divine finger; and no other guide, with magic utterance, can open its golden gates.

## VII.

When it is said that modern socialism and the gospel of Christ are rivals for the allegiance of the workingmen of our land, it is meant that the spirit of the prevailing type of socialism, in America as well as in Europe, is grossly materialistic, and so far atheistic. It is not denied that there is a Christian Socialism, represented by such teachers as Schäffle, Kaufmann, and Ely. But the platform of the Social Democrats of Germany is clearly hostile to the church, and American Socialism is chiefly of the German type. This Socialism rests upon the materialistic and evolutionary philosophies of Hegel and Comte. Its theory is that man is a creature of environment. "*Man ist was er isst.*" It is not man's inner spirit—his faith, his devotion to duty, his reverence for God—which determines his destiny; but his place in the social order determines his inner character. In other words, it attempts to use the evolution theory of Darwin as a means of uplifting the poor and the downtrodden. Logically it comes to this: The rights and privileges of the socially weaker members of society are somehow to be promoted through the law of the "survival of the fittest."

Those who are asked to join the ranks of the followers of Karl Marx should consider carefully wherein the gain would consist in substituting this philosophy for the gospel of free

grace that is embodied in the New Testament. For whatever the faults of those who compose the church, the gospel of Christ emphasizes the value of the individual, reveals the way by which each can work out his own salvation, and teaches that every man may become the master of his environment; while the philosophy of the socialism in question makes each a passive slave of his social condition. The gospel of Christ offers hope to the humblest through the expansion of their inner qualities; the gospel of Hegel offers only despair to those whose social environments are unfriendly. If human society were universally to throw overboard faith in a God of grace, and a gospel which glorifies the individual, and were to accept a system whose tenderest message to man is the pitiless phrase "the survival of the fittest," is it to be believed that the consequence would be a brighter beacon-light of opportunity or a wider door of happiness for the world's working people, or, indeed, for any element of humanity save those only who combined the largest intelligence with the smallest mercy? It will be a sorry day for the poor, and the weak, and those who look aloft, and aspire after an honest happiness, when the gospel of mercy shall have become a forgotten volume in the earth.

Have those of our American wage-workers who are disposed to allow themselves to become alienated from the Christian church really given Christianity a fair trial as a means of removing human injustice and suffering? Have they always done their full part toward securing the purity of the church, rendering it a complete embodiment of Christ's teachings, and supplying its largest strength for the destruction of sin, with all tyranny and all selfishness? To ask the question is to answer it. Granting that the visible body we term the church but faintly represents the system of truth of which Christ is the soul, and that its members are not all laboring for the fulfillment of the kingdom of God on earth, how bet-

ter can any friend of humanity serve the race than by entering the church, and laboring to make it what it ought to be, and what in idea it is? If there be a vital connection between gospel and church, and if the former be the one message of peace, justice, and love to humanity, the argument for friendship and loyalty to the latter on the part of every aspirant for the best the universe affords for man becomes unanswerable.