

through which we look. God grant it be not only a mirage ; but even if it be that now, it is a vision, please God—a vision that may become a reality of what is to come in God's way and in His time. And we have need to pray to be delivered from hindering that way or delaying that time by impatience, by impetuosity, by thought, or word, or act of wilful or unwitting opposition.



Jesus Christ and the Social Question.

BY THE REV. PROFESSOR INGE, D.D.

CHRISTIANS all wish to bring the whole of their lives under the obedience of Christ. No one would now maintain that a man's religion and his social conduct may be kept in watertight compartments. But when we take up our New Testaments in the hope of finding therein some clear guidance in politics or sociology, we are confronted with great difficulties. What kind of answer may we expect to find to the question, "Lord, what wouldst thou have me to do?" Are we to look for direct guidance in our modern problems from the precepts of Christ recorded in the Gospels? Or, assuming that such complex questions cannot have been anticipated and solved in advance nearly 2,000 years ago, and under conditions widely different from our own, must we be content to ask what solution is most in accordance with the mind and spirit of Christ? What may we infer that He would have bidden us to do if He were to come among us now? The former method of inquiry seems at first sight the safer, because no one can trust himself to interpret the unspoken thought of Christ without bias from his own honest convictions. But a deeper and more critical study of the Gospels has proved that our Lord was not understood by His hearers to be legislating for a distant future. They believed that they had His authority for expecting a great catastrophe which should overthrow all existing social conditions, and in-

augurate by miraculous intervention that happier state which they spoke of as the kingdom of God. They did not at first think of the Church as the kingdom of God upon earth; rather, the Church was a stop-gap till the kingdom of God should come. Whether this expectation of theirs was due to a misapprehension of our Lord's meaning, or whether, as seems more probable, He purposely grafted His new teaching upon the stem of Jewish national hopes, we cannot, it seems to me, suppose that any prophetic anticipations of modern conditions would have been understood by His hearers, or remembered by them. Moreover, the four Gospels do not give us the same impression of our Lord's social teaching. Even if we exclude the Fourth Gospel from consideration, on account of its special character, the difficulty remains, for we find that the other three witnesses are not quite harmonious on this subject. "Christian socialism" may find some support in St. Luke, but hardly in St. Matthew and St. Mark. It is only the Third Gospel which invokes blessings on the poor as such instead of on the poor in spirit, and which threatens the rich with woes in the next world on the sole ground that they had their good things in their lifetime. Some critics have argued that the harsher and less ethical teaching is the more likely to be authentic, since the Christian Church would not dare, *e.g.*, to alter "Blessed are the poor in spirit" into "Blessed are ye poor." But apart from the conviction, which all Christians must share, that only the purest counsels could have come from the Master's lips, it is not an unlikely supposition that the bitter class-hatred which is a salient feature in Jewish literature may have found a faint echo in one of the biographies of Christ, as well as in one Epistle—that attributed to St. James. In fact, we have to make our choice in this matter between the Synoptic Gospels. Unless we are willing to suppose that St. Matthew and St. Mark suppressed an important side of our Lord's teaching, we must accept, as the only alternative, the hypothesis that St. Luke has allowed his own strong social sympathies to tinge his reports of Christ's language. And if we have to choose, we can hardly hesitate

which authority we should follow. Class-hatred of any kind was surely alien to the whole spirit of Christ. It was one of the Jewish traditions which He helped to break. He refused to countenance the social boycott of the publicans, who may be compared to the rapacious money-lenders or dishonest company-promoters of our day. He flatly refused to redress a burning family grievance, on the ground that the distribution of wealth was no concern of His. He showed no eagerness to abolish poverty, but calmly declared the condition of the poor to be preferable to that of the rich. Quite in the same spirit St. Paul regards slavery as a thing indifferent, and apparently (though the phrase is ambiguous) advises the slave not to seize the opportunity of gaining his freedom. All this leaves the question quite open whether Christ would have maintained the same attitude of aloofness if He returned to earth in our day. The presumption, perhaps, is that He would have done so, since we have no social evils so bad as slavery ; but further than this we cannot go.

Must we, then, renounce the hope of obtaining definite guidance from Jesus Christ in shaping our lives as members of a society ? I am far from thinking so. Our Saviour came with a social as well as an eschatological message, and that message is wanting neither in precision nor comprehensiveness.

The good news of the kingdom was in its essence the proclamation of a new standard of values. Christ taught His disciples that we all have ready access to our Father in heaven, who cares for all His children. He taught us that no harm can happen to those who love and trust God ; that we need not be anxious about the necessities of life ; and that man's true happiness depends mainly on three things : absolute sincerity, or single-mindedness ; ready sympathy and warm affections ; and that devotion to higher and nobler interests which He called the service of God, and pronounced to be incompatible with deliberate worldliness. This ideal involved what has been called " a transvaluation of all values " ; it cut across all conventional schemes of pleasure and ambition ; and, in return for

the renunciations which it demanded, it promised a deep and indestructible happiness, based on the consciousness of obedience to the true law of our being, and filial communion with our heavenly Father. No immunity from suffering was promised; on the contrary, the disciples were told plainly, "In the world ye shall have tribulation"; but all earthly troubles are so effectually overcome by the spirit in which they are met that "the worst that man can breathe" is calmly accepted as "our light affliction, which is but for a moment." The Christian temper, in a word, is a joyous and robust idealism, unlike any other in meeting squarely all the evils of life, and turning their necessity to glorious gain.

We do not find, it seems to me, in the mind of Christ the spirit of modern democratic philanthropy, which has been a potent force in Europe since the time of Rousseau. We do not find in it that horror of physical suffering which has made, perhaps, the chief difference between modern and medieval civilization. We do not find in it that passion for equality and justice to individuals the presence of which distinguishes modern socialistic ideals from Plato's Republic. The Christian outlook is far less materialistic, far more austere, and far more joyous than that of the modern social reformer. It sets a far lower value upon the apparatus of life, which in its more complex forms it regards as an encumbrance. Pleasure and amusement it sanctions, when these are neither vicious nor excessive; but it maintains an unmistakable aloofness towards all purely mundane interests, as things not worthy of very serious attention. The Christian is encouraged, not to neglect this world for the next, as is often falsely supposed, but to find his treasure in those experiences which link time with eternity, and which have an abiding value for an immortal spirit.

If we try to picture to ourselves a society of persons who should be Christians in deed, and not merely in name, we may suppose that we should find, in the first place, a great relaxation of economic tension, and a prevailing standard of very simple living without any tinge of harsh asceticism. We should find,

certainly, a spirit of mutual kindness and helpfulness, but no jealous passion for equality of distribution. It is quite possible that undesirable citizens would be dealt with in a manner which would shock our sensibilities ; for those who are ready to suffer pain are seldom very loath to inflict it. Class-hatred would be at an end, and with it a powerful lever for revolutionizing social conditions would be withdrawn. Externally, such a society might seem modelled on too conservative lines, because political reforms would be hardly worth the trouble where the spirit of the citizens made everything work smoothly. We have seen that St. Paul was content with the abolition of all invidious distinctions "in Christ Jesus"; the Christian State might be willing to allow their outward forms to die a natural death. Finally, the elimination of the three typically anti-Christian vices — hypocrisy, hard-heartedness, and worldliness — would give the social life of such a community a simple directness, a sweetness, and a blitheness, such as we see at present only in a few highly-favoured homes.

The diffusion of this Christian temper is the business, and almost the sole business, of the Christian ministry. The clergy are commissioned to make the mind of Christ known to the world, and to commend it by precept and example. If a man thinks that this is not the way to regenerate society, but that this object should rather be effected by machinery and legislation, he has mistaken his vocation ; he should be a politician, and not a clergyman. The crucial question is whether, in our hearts, we accept the Christian standard of values or not. If we do, we shall hardly be disposed to take a prominent part in a dispute between a fairly opulent employer and his tolerably well-paid workmen ; nor shall we feel that even real poverty is the worst that can happen to a man. Christianity without the Cross is not the religion of Christ.

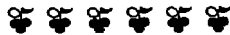
The temptation to plunge into social agitation is evidently very strong just now among our younger clergy. As usual, the motives are very complex. Passion is contagious, and the town clergy are brought much into contact with men who are smarting

under the sense of injustice. The doctrinal unrest has sapped the foundations of many a clergyman's faith, and he takes refuge in temperance work or social reform because he can preach nothing else honestly and confidently. On a lower plane, there is the attraction of excitement and popularity; here are subjects which the man in the street cares about, and he does not care much about the Bible and the Prayer-Book. The devil whispers that the masses may yet be won for the Church if the Church will tell the working-man what he wants to hear. "If the Lord will give me bread to eat and raiment to put on, then shall the Lord be my God." "Christian socialism" is the shortest cut to popularity, and to a kind of success.

But besides these inducements, most of them of sinister import, one cannot read the literature of Christian socialism without seeing that the favourite antithesis between socialism and individualism has caused much mental confusion. It is urged, truly enough, that Christianity is a social religion, and from this it is inferred that the Church ought to favour the fuller recognition of "the social organism"—the State.

Now, it ought to be, but it is not, superfluous to remind people that there are many other social organisms besides the political unit which is called the State. The family, the Church, the comity of civilized nations—these and many others are social organisms to which we belong, and which have moral claims upon us. The widest and most sacred of all social organisms is the communion of redeemed humanity in Christ. Some of these aggregates are wider than the State, others are narrower, but all have their independent rights and claims. There is nothing un-Christian in maintaining the prerogatives of these various associations against undue encroachment from the side of the political unit. The State exists only for certain objects, and cannot claim to control, much less to destroy, those other sacred bonds which will always continue to unite men and women for other and not less legitimate purposes. The question at issue, in short, is not between socialism and selfish isolation; that is an assumption which is both absurd and impertinent.

Nor must we lose sight of the important truth for which individualism stands. Our own characters are, after all, the special field which God has given us to till, and which will remain untended if we neglect it. We belong to many social organisms, but there are aspects of our life in which we are what the law calls "corporations sole."



Deuteronomy in Eastern Light.

BY THE REV. G. E. WHITE, D.D.

THE present writer has been for some years resident in Asia Minor, and has enjoyed intimate relations with all classes of the inhabitants, whether Mohammedan or Christian, whether clerical or lay. Such first-hand acquaintance with the East ought to be an advantage in the interpreting of the Old Testament. The Hebrew Scriptures were revealed to and through an Oriental people, and, in certain particulars at least, it is natural and inevitable that the religious standpoint, habits of thought, and forms of expression, characteristic of the Old Testament, should be more nearly represented by present-day life in the Orient than in the Occident. Indeed, many primitive ceremonies, which for Western Christians were superseded by the New Testament, are still in force in Eastern lands. Sacrifice is practised in every village around my home; there is some shrine almost "on every high hill and under every green tree"; there are abundant remnants of pre-Mohammedan and pre-Christian worship connected with sacred woods and waters, sacred food and drink, sacred men and seasons. The religious conversation of my white-turbaned Mohammedan friends—childish, deeply devout, often inconsistent—is strikingly like a page from the Pentateuch. As a result, I feel that I understand the Old Testament and sympathize with its writers better than formerly.

Having had occasion recently to make some special study of