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THE MESSAGE OF CHRIST CONCERNING LABOUR.

BY THE REV. G. E. FORD, B.A., Vicar of Bilston, Staffs.

AT the close of the second chapter of the Report of the Archbishops' Fifth Committee of Inquiry, entitled "Christianity and Industrial Problems," there is an Appended Note dealing briefly with certain objections to the application of Christian principles to industry. I do not propose to discuss the convincing answer which the Committee have given to these objections, but content myself with saying, by way of justifying our dealing with this subject to-day, that if Christ has given no message concerning labour, if Christianity embodies no fundamental principles by which we may be guided in dealing with that which is so essential and so predominant an element of human life, then the claim of Christ to be the Light of the world is not a true claim. He stands discredited. But if, as a matter of fact, there is in the life and in the teaching of Jesus Christ a real message concerning labour, it must be our duty to state it in the clearest and simplest terms, so that it may be understood by all men, and to preach it through good report and through evil report, as an essential part of Christ's Gospel of redemption and salvation. For if Jesus Christ is the manifestation of God to man, if His social position here on earth was of God's appointment, if His words were, as He claimed them to be, the express teaching of the Father, then the message concerning labour which is expressed in His circumstances of life and in His teaching must of necessity be applicable to industry at all times, and it will be at our most serious peril that we hesitate or refuse to make the application.

The Archbishops' Committee have accordingly put in the forefront of their admirable Report a statement, under thirteen heads, of Christian principles and their social application. Assuming that my hearers have already studied that Report, I do not intend to follow them in detail, but shall regard the subject from a slightly different angle, and shall try especially to emphasise one point on which, if I have rightly understood them, they do not appear to me to have laid sufficient stress.

There are three fundamental principles which sum up the message of Christ concerning labour ; the last of which is a necessary inference from the other two.

The first of these principles may be stated as follows :—

Because all men are brethren, children of the Heavenly Father, and because all Christian men are most intimately bound together in the fellowship of Christ's redemption, human labour, particularly in a Christian community, must be regarded in relation to those who labour, and not merely as a commodity to be bought and sold.

The importance of this principle cannot be exaggerated. The price of commodities in general is regulated by the Law of Supply and Demand. When the supply is small and the demand great, prices are high ; when there is little or no demand and a plentiful supply, prices are low. The rigid application of this law to the wages and general conditions of labour has been a fruitful source of cruel hardship to multitudes of men, women and children. In the exceedingly interesting and instructive chapter of their Report entitled "Some historical illustrations," the Archbishops' Committee have shown by what stages the relations between employer and employed became divorced from considerations of Christian principle and were subjected to this economic law ; they have also indicated some of the measures adopted by parliaments of the well-to-do to safeguard the interests of landowners and capitalists whilst denying to workmen the right of combination with a view to lightening their burdens ; and, saddest of all, they have given us samples of the way in which religion itself was degraded into a means of condoning and even justifying the hardships of the oppressed labourer.¹

To sum up their remarks on this head :—"Men took the world around them for granted, as we are doing in this our own age. They assumed that the proper thing was to accept that station in life unto which it had pleased God to call them. The Bible was taken as inculcating resignation in this world with the expectation of justice and recompense in the world to come ; and Christianity as not a standard by which to judge institutions, but as a Divine warrant for submission to them." "Paley," they tell us, "actually argued that the poor are better off than the rich, who lead a languid, satiated existence, whereas all the provision which a poor man's child requires

¹ Pp. 44-46.

is industry and innocence . . . 'frugality is itself a pleasure, and the necessary care and forecast to keep expenses level form an agreeable engagement of the thoughts.' "

Trades-unions, with the weapon of the strike in their hands, have gradually succeeded in counteracting the operation of the Law of Supply and Demand within certain limits ; but in the case of the unorganised trades, and especially in women's work, it has operated to bring wages down to the level of the bare cost of subsistence, and sometimes even below that level, with results that are too well known for me to need to dwell upon them here.

The disregard of the Christian principle of consideration for one another has resulted in a condition of chronic suspicion and strife between those whose true interests would best be served by mutual trust and hearty co-operation ; there has arisen the conviction that capital and labour are of necessity opposed to each other ; and the ideal that the worker has been led to set before himself is the abolition of the private ownership of capital and the reconstruction of Society upon the basis of collectivism, an ideal to be realised by force—either the power of the wage-earners exercised through their vote, or the brute force of revolution such as is now being manifested on the continent of Europe.

The question as to how this first Christian principle can be applied will be considered later.

The second principle is as follows :—

Because labour has been consecrated by Jesus Christ, who earned His living as a carpenter, Christian people should not tolerate the idea that the man who works with his hands belongs to a lower social grade than the professional man or the unemployed rich ; and that although absolute equality in all respects cannot prevail among men, yet all true men have an equal claim to the respect and esteem of all.

There is no question that at the present time Society is saturated with class prejudice, with pride of purse and with pride of position. One class looks down upon another, and the manual worker is looked down upon by all the rest. It is not in India alone that caste prevails.

If this were only a matter of sentiment it would even then be bad enough, for no man likes to be despised, and no Society is stable where there is the absence of goodwill and mutual respect. But the

practical results of this attitude are very real and very serious.

We know what it used to cost to feed our own family, even when everything of the nature of luxury was scrupulously avoided and our food was of the plainest ; and yet we used to acquiesce before the war in the pound a week wage for the labourer, on which he had to feed and clothe and house and warm his family, and we used even to think him improvident if he had not made provision for sickness and death by joining a club. We feel the need of having sufficient house room for ourselves, with adequate means of obtaining hot water for baths, and with proper sanitary arrangements ; and yet it has seemed to us a matter of course that the labourer should, in numberless cases, live in a back-to-back house, often consisting of only two very small rooms, affording bare shelter, with none of the conveniences which mean so much to us, and not even having separate sanitary accommodation for the household, nor access to such as there is except through the front door ! We have realised how priceless is the boon of having some security of income for ourselves ; and yet we have in no sense revolted at a condition of things in which hosts of men have had no regular employment, and those have been least certain of employment whose wages have been lowest. Pulpits and Ruri-decanal and Diocesan Conferences and Church Congresses and Convocations did not ring incessantly with the recital of these hardships of our brothers and sisters, and with passionate appeals for their amelioration. A voice here and there in the wilderness has been lifted up ; but, speaking generally, the promotion of more human conditions of life has not been manifestly the burning question ever at the front in our ecclesiastical deliberations. The Church, like the State, has tacitly acquiesced in these evils, and has only stirred uneasily when labour has been more restless than usual, and strikes have disturbed the calm surface of our daily life.

I do not say all this by way of blaming the Church, however much or little blame she may deserve ; but rather to emphasise the fact that we, like our forefathers, have taken things for granted and as inevitable which should all the time have been regarded as intolerable. And even now it has taken practically a declaration of war on the part of labour to move the nation to undertake some measures of reform.

What is the reason for this prolonged apathy? It is not that the national wealth has been insufficient for the task of paying just wages, providing proper housing, stamping out infectious diseases, like consumption, educating the nation's children up to a reasonable age and a proper standard. The war has shown us what enormous reservoirs of wealth the nation possessed and was ready to pour out in lavish abundance when national security was in danger. Nor can we say that men in general, or political and religious leaders in particular, have been lacking in humane feelings. Suffering in any part of the world which has been brought home to the heart and the imagination has never failed to elicit an instant response of generous and unstinted help. Then why have these social and industrial evils remained so long unalleviated?

I cannot help feeling that the fundamental reason is that deep down in the minds of the well-born and the well-to-do there has been the conviction that those who labour with their hands belong to a lower grade of humanity than they, and that an altogether lower scale of existence than is possible for themselves is therefore quite good enough for these; that music, art, refinement, literature, leisure are out of their line, extras with which they can very well dispense.

Although we are proud of our Christian calling, we have conveniently overlooked the fact that Jesus of Nazareth was a working carpenter, and that the most notable of His Apostles whom we revere as Saints were toiling fishermen who laboured, stripped to their skin, earning a hard living on the Sea of Galilee, belonging to a class whom many exceedingly worthy Christians would never dream of entertaining at their tables on terms of equal honour with themselves, however personally worthy they might be. The Divine example has been all the while before us; we have had the Christian principle to guide us; but deep-rooted prejudice, sometimes the inheritance of many generations, sometimes too easily acquired, has made us as really despise the Christ in the person of His fellow-workman as He was despised and rejected in the days of His flesh.

In Christ the middle walls of partition that separate men have potentially been broken down; but, actually, we are far from seeing them laid low. In St. Paul's day it was the dividing wall between Jew and Gentile that especially claimed attention; and throughout his Epistles, particularly in the Epistle to the Ephesians, we find

the Apostle striving with all his might to break down this wall, the foundation of which was religious exclusiveness. Two other walls of partition are to-day separating men, and even Christian men, with equal effectiveness ; and they are based upon racial prejudice—the colour bar—and class alienation, the setting apart of the manual labourer into a separate and socially inferior class of society. And just as even amongst the Apostles a St. Peter was to be found who by his conduct encouraged the alienation of Gentile from Jew, and thus helped to buttress up the wall that his fellow-apostle was striving to break down, so amongst even the clergy there will, I fear, be found those who by word and by example are helping to keep up these antagonisms, even though they have been abolished in Christ, “where there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bondman, freeman ; but Christ is all, and in all.”

What we need then to-day, with regard to this matter of class alienation, is that the ministers of Christ by their life and by their preaching should teach with all their power the truth of the equality of honour for all men whose conduct is honourable, wholly irrespective of the occupation by which they earn an honest living. One is reluctant to find any fault with the Report of the Archbishops' Committee, considering its generally admirable tone and the great value of its practical recommendations ; but one misses just this clear note of the fundamental equality of all genuine workers, of all true men. It speaks indeed of all necessary *work* as equally honourable ; it tells us that the true life of man is a life of brotherhood ; but whilst its effect will be to make Christian men feel that certain evils under which the industrial population have long laboured must speedily be removed, I doubt much whether it will make men and women of the so-called upper and middle classes any more disposed than they were before to regard and to treat their artisan fellow citizens and fellow Christians as worthy of equal respect and equal honour with themselves. But nothing less than this will suffice.

Of course one cannot with any comfort have at one's table, or even sitting at one's side in God's house, a man or woman who is unclean in person and offensive in smell ; one cannot associate on equal terms with people with whom one has practically nothing in common, who lack ideas and refinement, whose language is coarse,

whose manners are disagreeable ; but these things are but accidents —the result of the housing, the environment, the poverty, the limited education, the wretched traditions of these people ; they are in no sense a necessary outcome of their employment. In spite of bad housing, bad environment and all the rest there are to be found amongst the poorest members of our industrial population men and women who by innate refinement and by their outward conduct declare themselves to be as true and honourable gentlefolk as the noblest in the land ; and it is our duty so to remove the hindrances and to provide the means of uplifting, that in due time no man shall be able to blame his circumstances, but only himself, if he is found unworthy of the honour to which all should be equally entitled. A man's character and culture, not his employment, should determine his fitness to associate with others.

To emphasise this particular element of the industrial problem is not to be sentimental and unpractical. On the contrary, we may wisely leave it to those who possess large practical experience in industry to readjust wages and conditions of labour, and to the legislature, alarmed by the concerted action of workmen's unions, the task of housing, educational and other reforms ; but our special task as Christian teachers is to go deeper than this and to shape into the Christian mould the motives that result in conduct, the mental and spiritual attitude apart from which there can be no real and permanent uplifting, but only a victory here or there for the class that may be for the moment the stronger.

The present is a moment of golden opportunity. The risks we incur through class alienation are being terribly demonstrated in Russia, where class warfare of the most pitiless and atrocious description is still being waged, the natural result of the class alienation that has so long prevailed ; nor is it matter for surprise that the same root of bitterness in Germany and Austria is bearing the same terrible fruit. On the other hand, the war has proved to us how indispensable for the preservation of the nation and empire is the labourer in the field, the worker in the factory, the private soldier, drawn mainly from the ranks of the manual workers, and, last but not least, the working woman. All honour to the noble and the wealthy and the men of all the learned professions who have come forward to lead our armies, and many of them also to serve in the ranks. But equal honour, too, to the poor, the rough, the ignorant,

who, many of them from the meanest and the most wretched homes, have so well responded to the call of the nation's need, and in the trenches, in the workshops, on the sea have so nobly done their part in preserving the empire from destruction, and have in so many instances displayed such rare qualities of leadership. And the honour which the nation accords them must not be an empty breath of acclamation, but a genuine, heartfelt regard showing itself in a new opening up of opportunity for a full and wholesome life of culture as well as of duty, until the man who works with his hands shall have become as worthy of respect because of his character and attainments, and be as truly and as manifestly respected and socially honoured as the landowner or professional man or merchant.

If one result of the mutual suffering and mutual help occasioned by the recent war has been the drawing together of the allied nations in what we trust will prove to be an imperishable bond of mutual honour and mutual service, it is not too much to expect that the same causes will operate also in binding together in a similar bond the alienated classes within this nation. To promote this end by the consecration of our utmost energies to the task is, if I read rightly the signs of the times, the true Life and Liberty movement for the Church.

Devotion to this object has already drawn together the leaders of the Anglican, Baptist, Congregational, Presbyterian and Wesleyan bodies in the Manchester Diocese, and has led to their issuing a notable manifesto which *The Times* has printed under the significant title "Applied Christianity." A similar zeal for the proclamation and application of Christ's message, if it prevailed throughout the Christian Church in this land, would not only have the effect of paving the way for the great reforms that are needed, but would also re-act in unimagined benefit upon the Churches themselves. In making life worth living they themselves would live; in setting free the oppressed from their burdens, they would find the door thrown wide open for them to all the liberty for self-development they might need. And united concentration upon so glorious a work would save them from internal strife and from the injury which it involves.

The third principle arises naturally out of the two already discussed. It is as follows:—

The conditions of labour in a Christian State should be such

as will afford to those who labour the fullest opportunity for self-development, and for living a full and wholesome life.

Under the term conditions of labour, are included all such matters as wages, hours of work, workshop accommodation and sanitation, facilities for personal cleanliness, the physical health of the industrial population, and the like.

Wages should be adequate for the providing of a reasonable and happy life in which music, art and general culture should have a place. Hours of work must not be so prolonged as to shut off the worker from reasonable recreation and leisure. It must be rendered possible for workpeople to be clean in person and in clothing on their way to and from their work, and in their home. Dirty clothes and a dirty skin are a great hindrance to self-respect and the respect of others ; nor can a home be kept clean if its inmates are habitually dirty because of the work in which they are employed. The provision for the health of the people must no longer remain in its present imperfect and unsatisfactory condition. General Hospitals and Convalescent Homes must not be left for their support to casual gifts, and be forced to sweat their nursing staff in order to make ends meet. The treatment of that national scourge, consumption, must no longer be the partial, vexatious and wholly disappointing affair that it now is. Little children must no longer die from preventable causes as they die in multitudes now.

The question arises, How is all this work of reform to be accomplished ? Where is the wealth to be found from which to pay such wages and ensure such conditions of life ?

Wealth is the product of labour—labour of the mind, labour of the body. If all men who are able to serve their generation by doing some useful thing or by uttering some useful thought will devote themselves to the service that it is in their power to render, whether with or without remuneration, the nation's production and ministration will fully suffice for the nation's need. If, moreover, the vast amount of wealth that is wasted by all classes of society in excessive drinking, excessive smoking, and other forms of self-indulgence is diverted into useful channels, there will be still greater abundance to be devoted to the satisfying of legitimate needs. Investors will perhaps have to be contented with a smaller return, in some instances, in order that wages may be augmented ; and the sharks of society who by various forms of gambling, more or less thinly disguised as

business, plunder their fellows, themselves providing nothing, and rendering no service to the community for the money they get out of it, will have to be got rid of by drastic legislation.

When we ask the further question, By what process is the more equitable distribution of the products of labour to be ensured? two answers are suggested. The one is that the present individualistic basis of Society should be changed to the collectivist basis; the other, that new and more wholesome relations between employer and employed should be promoted. In a guarded statement in paragraph 132 of the Report the Committee say: "To some of us it appears that economic progress and efficiency can be secured only through the ultimate responsibility for decisions upon questions of industrial policy and organisation being, as now, in the hands of individuals who are unfettered by subordination to any superior authority; to others of us that an increasing responsibility for industrial organisation ought to be devolved upon the organised bodies of workers, as they become willing and fit to undertake it, *and that the future of the employer or manager is as one workman among other workmen, who will be, with them, a fellow servant of the community.*" In plain language, this latter ideal is collectivism, viz., that the State should be the only employer and the only owner of capital. The influence of the section of the Committee which advocates this ideal is, I think, apparent also in the summary of conclusions, where it is asserted that "the fundamental evil of modern industrialism is that it encourages competition for private gain instead of co-operation for public service."

To discuss the question of collectivism is outside the scope of this paper; but three things may perhaps profitably be said:

1. A sudden transformation of the economical basis of Society is bound to be fraught with serious risks. You may uproot a sapling and re-plant it to its advantage: but rarely can you do so with a forest tree. The present industrial system on the basis of individualism is the growth of ages.

2. When, for the purpose of some social re-organisation there is formed a combination of persons who have been forced to combine by pressure of circumstances from without, and which is not a natural development from within, the removal of that pressure is practically certain to be followed by a dissolution of the combination: for that very motive of self-advantage which formed the

combination for mutual defence will also cause a conflict to arise between the divergent interests of different groups, and separate individuals, within the confederacy as soon as the common danger has been removed which made those interests, for the time being, one.

3. It is only when the conscience of a nation is impressed with the need for a fundamental change in social relations, and all who are concerned work together for the desired reform, that such reformation is likely to be peaceful, permanent and beneficial.

For these reasons I do not see much promise of hope in the collectivist programme. There is, however, another movement on foot which does seem to have in it a large and hopeful prospect of amelioration. This movement, which is expressing itself in various methods, has for its main object the bringing together of employers and employed, either on a national scale, as in the Coal Commission for dealing with a special crisis, and in the National Alliance of Employers and Employed as a permanent organisation; or in separate industries and works. One distinctive feature which appears among these proposals, a thing strongly advocated in the Report of the Archbishops' Committee, is that representatives of the workmen in a particular industry should have a real share in the management. This is of supreme importance, for it will be a long step forward in the direction of social recognition of the workmen, and the rooting out of class alienation. When men are in the habit of sitting together in conference and getting to appreciate one another's intelligence, fair-mindedness and goodwill, class prejudice is choked out of existence. The workman will be found to be a true gentleman and will be treated accordingly. Here we are striking at the real root of the present evil, viz., the class alienation which engenders suspicion and fomenters strife.

We are at the parting of the ways: things can no longer be as they have been. The question for us is, whether the new conditions are to be the outcome of class warfare, or whether they are to be the fruit of the recognition and application even at this the eleventh hour of the message of Christ. An immense responsibility rests upon the captains of industry and the labour leaders to take a wide view of the existing situation, and to devote their best efforts to the working out of practicable schemes of co-operation—a task that can be accomplished only by experts like themselves, but which even

they will not succeed in accomplishing unless they realise that it is not only a matter of wages and hours and conditions of work that is involved, but also the status of the worker. The day of absolute monarchy in the world of politics has passed away: no nation, or league of nations, will ever tolerate another Kaiser. In the world of industry likewise the day of absolutism is drawing to its close. The new régime must be that of constitutional government, the governed having their reasonable share in the task of governing, employed sharing with employers the privilege and the responsibility of directing the industry that shall benefit all.

G. E. FORD.

BOOK NOTICES.

SEED THOUGHTS. A Selection of Illustrations and Quotations from many sources. Arranged by J. Ellis. London: *Robert Scott*. 3s. net.

Mr. Ellis has established for himself quite a reputation as the compiler of aids for teachers and preachers. This, his latest volume, is given up entirely to short paragraphs gathered from many sources. Charles Kingsley, George Eliot, Stopford Brooke, Henry Ward Beecher, John Ruskin, C. H. Spurgeon, Alexander Maclaren, Bishop Westcott, F. W. Faber and a good many other writers, known and unknown, jostle each other in these pages, and those who can use books of this kind will find here an abundance of illustrative material. There is a subject-index which will facilitate reference.

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A LITTLE BOOK FOR MOTHERS AND SONS. By Nora B. Thornhill. London: *Longmans, Green & Co.* 2s. 6d. net.

Short daily readings for seven weeks "for mothers and boys during the holidays." For each day there is a definite subject—bravery, kindness, obedience, self-control, etc., then short passages from Holy Scripture followed by the "talk." There are a great many telling illustrations drawn from a variety of sources, old legends, and stories of the Great War, together with many apt poetical quotations. Altogether we have in a small compass a large amount of helpful, sound, sane teaching.

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ISOBEL'S WINNOWING. By A. D. Stewart. London: *Morgan & Scott*. 6s.

This volume gives a picture of a sick-room that radiates happiness and serves men and women with a thoughtfulness that is as helpful as it is unobtrusive. The book is never merely sentimental. It is inspired by a spirit that cannot fail to touch the hearts of its readers and will be prized by those who value healthy literature and a deep knowledge of the weaknesses of humanity and the power of the Saviour to heal them.

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THE QUEST OF THE GOLDEN SPURS. By Shaun Mallory. London: *Jarrollds*. 6s. net.

This is a romantic tale that holds the imagination and interests the reader. Quaint in its setting it steadily develops and all ends happily.

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JINNY THE CARRIER. By Israel Zangwill. London: *Heinemann*. 7s. net.

The author abandons Jews for open-air Christians who dwelt in Essex at a time when small sectaries attracted the minds of the people. The pictures of men and their doings are described with cleverness, and even when it seems that the long story will become wearisome, the author knows how to rivet attention by an unexpected incident or a clever epigram.