

“The Challenge in Respect of Social Righteousness.”

BY THE REV. L. F. E. WILKINSON, M.A.

THE true balance between Faith and Works has always been one of the most difficult to achieve and maintain in Christian Experience. On the one hand, especially in times of difficulty and stress, it is easy to run away from the challenge of the days, by a retirement into one's own spiritual life, until the bounds of one's soul become almost a monastic wall. While acting on the fact that if only one is holy enough, the power of God will be able to flow through one's life and deal with the situation around, it is easy to do nothing, either in getting to know the problem or seeking by prayer and experiment to find an answer. On the other hand there are those who, appalled by the seriousness of the times, devote themselves wholeheartedly to doing all they may to alleviate them, and in so doing are too busy to realise that works without faith are as sterile as faith without works.

THE MESSAGE OF THE PROPHETS.

Some of the most relevant parts of the Bible to the times in which we are living, are the books of the Prophets. They proclaimed their message for the most part to a nation that had drifted far away from God. It was a nation, though, which liked to maintain that they were God's people; in the same way that most men-in-the-street in this country who never darken a Church door, would feel it an insult if it were suggested that the British were anything but a Christian nation. To them, who had a name to live but were all but dead, the prophets brought not only a message of the might and sovereignty of God, and a call to repentance; but also one which dealt specifically with the daily life of the Nation. They condemned those who lived by usury (much of our financial system is based on it to-day), those who joined land to land, in the accumulation of wealth at the expense of others, and those who were guilty of sins against the marriage bond. A careful study of the Major and Minor Prophets shows that these men of God had a very deep concern for the Social Righteousness of the nation. Without a return to the ways of God in the daily things of life; without a just attitude and treatment of one's neighbour and his goods, they saw no possibility of God's hand being stretched out in blessing. Perhaps it would be good for some who are praying much for Revival in these days, if they were to take up the study of the Prophets afresh, so that the need of Social Righteousness and its practical outworking might form a real place in their prayers and action.

THE EMPHASIS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

When one comes to the Gospels and watches Christ at work amongst men, one is amazed at the great proportion of His time which He

spent tending to the needs of the bodies of those around. In the narrative of His ministry, a very large part is devoted to His miracles of healing. And once and again, we get the suggestion from a summary verse, which covers days and periods of which no special incidents are given, that these miracles are only samples of that which occupied His time day after day. Take for instance Matt. ix. 35. "And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the Kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people." His life was the true example of the life of faith to which we are called, but His life was also a constant ministry of battling with the Social needs of the day. In His sermon on the Mount He clearly established for members of His "Kingdom" the great fundamental laws which underscore all true social righteousness, while re-affirming and amplifying the ethical and moral laws which had been given by Moses of old.

As one turns on to the Epistles, it is clear that these early disciples realised that the Gospel which they had learned from Christ, and the New Life which was theirs through the Spirit, was one which had to be lived before the world, and which must make a difference to Social Relationships, whether in the home, business life or in one's attitude to the State. How many of the Epistles first declare the Doctrine, and then proceed to make clear the practical and social obligations to which the truth expounded obviously gives rise! A believer who is not a doer; a Christian whose action is guided by wealth and social distinctions is rightly condemned by St. James. He also deals, to quote but two examples, with the up-to-date subject of sweated labour, and the duty of the Church in sickness. To the early Church the evils of the time were matters which demanded facing in the most practical fashion; necessitated the careful application of the principles of Christ, and, above all, were given a foremost place in their prayers.

THE WITNESS OF THE EVANGELICAL REVIVAL.

One of the signs of the genuineness of the spiritual movement which took place in England in the eighteenth century was the impact which it made on the social life and evils of the country of that day. Wesley in his sermons preached strongly against the curse of the slave trade and other social evils. Later, as the direct outcome of the Revival, Wilberforce and the Clapham Sect inaugurated a definite movement for the Abolition of Slavery and carried the work forward, both in Parliament and through the education of the country, until they completed their work in the face of great opposition, and slaves throughout the British Empire were freed. We find also the movement of Prison reform begun through the pioneer labours of John Howard and Elizabeth Fry, until the condition in which prisoners were kept, and the sentences by which they were punished, were eased and made more conformable with the teaching of Christianity.

Following close behind them came Anthony Ashley-Cooper, the great Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury, another true son of the Evangelical Revival, whose social reforms changed the conditions of working men, women and children throughout the land. Here was a man, in whose sterling character and burning faith was shown, by what he did, the reality of his Christian experience. The Gospel to him was a dynamic

which must go forth into the ordinary walks of life, and make a difference to them, because the Christ Who is central to the message, demands an Individual and Social Righteousness which is far separated from the ordinary principles and habits of the world. If a Christian was to be as salt in the earth, preserving it from decay ; if the disciple of Christ was to be a light, then it surely meant the active attacking of the forces of darkness and disintegration.

THE TRANSFERENCE FROM SOCIAL REFORM TO INDIVIDUAL PIETISM.

But even in Shaftesbury's time there was opposition from Evangelical ranks. Some of those who should have been his strongest supporters were amongst his most bitter opponents. Two events would seem to have contributed to the steadily increasing withdrawal of Evangelicals from interest in and activity concerning Social Righteousness. The growth of an exclusive sect in the middle of the last century, followed by the development of the Holiness Movement, (in no way am I condemning either, but merely noticing a trend to which they gave rise) emphasised the truth circling round the text "Come ye out from among them, and be ye separate, and touch not the unclean thing." While this is a vital truth in Scripture, it is not set forth in isolation from other truths, such as loving one's neighbours as one's self, but the tendency became increasingly to allow this truth to produce a pietist, almost a monastic, outlook on the world. Fellowship was impossible with any who did not see everything from one's own doctrinal, and sometimes dispensational, point of view, and the emphasis was directed almost solely to the development of individual righteousness, on the grounds that given the clean channel, God would certainly use it.

All too often, however, it was maintained that the only place where such a channel could be of use was in the foreign mission field. And, broadly speaking, it has been overseas that the most effective Evangelical witness and progress has taken place during these last years. Now with advancing civilisation many an evangelical missionary is finding himself more and more having to face the Challenge of Social Righteousness in the mission field, and having to act with little Evangelical help or guidance from home. For instance, it has only been with difficulty that medical and educational work in foreign missions have made their way, such has been the opposition in past years—until they compelled acceptance by their results.

The other happening of the last half of the nineteenth century was the development, first in Germany and from thence spreading to England, of the movement of Biblical criticism, sometimes given the exalted name of "Higher Criticism." It is not the province of this paper to pass judgment on this movement, except to notice that it has been largely instrumental in dividing the life and witness of Evangelicals. Those who embraced the new outlook were regarded as deserters of the Evangelical faith and the essential authority from which the Evangel is declared with assurance ; while the others were looked upon as men of little learning, and obscurantists who lived on past traditions and were unwilling to face present facts.

Further, this split has tended to drive those who were unwilling to accept modern trends in Biblical teaching more and more into partner-

ship with those of Pietist outlook, so that through the interdenominational movements of the past half-century and more, the teaching of separation and other-worldliness has become increasingly that on which the attitude to life of many young Evangelicals has been moulded. The teaching concerning the Second Advent, commonly termed "The Futurist Interpretation", though actually first drawn up by the Jesuit, Ribeira, at the end of the sixteenth century to counter the prophetic teaching of the Reformers, (though it may nevertheless be true) has frequently been taken to be the only true teaching on Christ's Return, and has assisted in turning many Evangelicals from all thought of dealing with the social needs of the time. It was felt that the Lord's Return was so imminent that the only thing to be done in this world, which seemed to be fast disintegrating and preparing for the great Tribulation, was to preach the Gospel and be separate and ready. To many the very word "social" has become synonymous with a heretical outlook, and a failure to discern the times.

The Truth of the Lord's Return is a sure and certain fact which we proclaim both in the Creed and in the Lord's Supper; but any theories which make a Christian adopt an exclusive and "monastic" attitude to the needs of the world around is surely to be suspect. In the Early Church the certainty that the Lord was coming again stirred them to continual endeavour in the world, that they might be found faithful when He came. William Wilberforce was so convinced that he was living in the wickedness of the last days, that he felt it to be wrong to marry and bring children into the tribulation which he saw around him. Yet this conviction that Christ was at hand urged him on to greater zeal in seeking the abolition of slavery. The Earl of Shaftesbury declared that the Hope of Christ's Return was one of the driving forces which drove him forward in his work for social righteousness. How far many Evangelicals to-day have moved from that attitude of truly "occupying till He come." With their outlook bounded by the text "When the Son of Man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth?", they divorce it from its context, and adopting the position of holding fast in difficult circumstances, they refuse to take their Gospel Witness out into the spheres of social unrighteousness which need it desperately.

This has been a long historical introduction, but I believe it is necessary, if we are to realise that the acceptance of the challenge of Social Righteousness to-day is in keeping with that which has been best in the Evangelical witness through the years; and also if we are to grasp some of the difficulties which must be overcome, before the Evangelicals in the Church and country will unitedly go forth to do something practical to exalt and establish, by Christ's help, Social Righteousness in our Land.

THE FALLACY OF PREACHING WITHOUT PRACTICAL ACTION.

The plain fact is, that the comfortable saying "If we only preach the Gospel we can leave all the rest to God" simply does not work. Take the case of the godly Christians, who are earnest worshippers and attenders of conferences and other Christian gatherings, but who draw much of their incomes from slum property to which only the barest necessities of repairs are ever done. These people are sincere,

converted people, but somehow they have never been converted in the realm of their social obligations. There is the real possibility of having a list of personal sins and short-comings from which one keeps conscientiously free, and therefore satisfied that real spiritual progress, or at least stability, is being maintained; while at the same time there may be a great deal of short-coming with regard to one's neighbour and the community of which one remains happily oblivious, because such social duties have never been considered in any way binding. There is the tendency at gatherings for the development of the Christian Life to have a list of defined sins, such as temper and lack of charity, publicly named and denounced, but rarely if ever is mention made of sins and failures individual and corporate in the larger social sphere. They are held to be irrelevant and beyond the scope of the meetings, which are purely aiming at the individual.

THE COMMUNITY AND THE INDIVIDUAL.

We must, however, face the fact that the world and the Church to-day are confronting two attitudes of life, both of which are felt to be essential. As yet neither has found that successful blending which truly satisfies the heart and is therefore something worth ringing out to all men. Yet equally vital as is the attainment of personal holiness, surely the need for the Church is to find her solution to these two attitudes and so give a Christian lead in these days.

Throughout this century, with ever increasing emphasis, there has been the growing consciousness that the old theories of *laissez-faire* and individualism, which had dominated economic life and society during the Victorian era, had merely raised problems of slums, poverty, sweated labour, etc., which they did nothing to ease. As the Rev. K. L. Parry has said :

“Men have been and are looking for new forms of solidarity in their social life. What is it that has overtaken the youth of Germany, Italy, Spain and Japan, and in a different way, perhaps of Russia? It is a returning desire for community. Now that, I believe to be profoundly true; and that is the first thing to say about the world to-day. There is everywhere this aspiration towards a community. There is the attraction of Communism for so many of our young people to-day, and mark you, it has a very great attraction and fascination for thousands of our best young people. It is a world movement; it is the trend of the age; it is a re-action from self-centred individualism. Human life IS in terms of the community.”

But we are fighting, too, to-day for the value of the Individual. One of the great errors we feel with the totalitarian schemes is that the individual is utterly submerged in the State, so that he can only think and believe and do what the State decrees. These are the two issues. And if we are to have a true message for bleeding and perplexed Europe, I believe that we must be able to take them one which will give to them a solution between these two extremes.

The fact, however, which we must face as Evangelicals and members of the Church, Christ's Body, is that Christendom itself has been split over exactly this same antithesis. Catholicism has laid its great stress on the community; until in the Roman Church you reach a totalitarian form of religion where the individual is entirely subservient to the Church. To the “Catholic”, be he Roman or Anglo, to be a member of the Church community is to be a Christian. Protestantism

is the revolt from this attitude, and the excesses to which it gave rise and inevitably still gives rise, all too easily. It stressed the relation of the individual soul to God, and the Church became more a gathering place of a number of individuals who had found God in Christ and shared a common experience, and often a similar common outlook!

Is not part of the weakness of the Church to-day her failure to present to the world, which is puzzled between the rival claims of the community and the individual, the solution which there is in Christ?

Wherever the guiding principle of the Christian community and Church is Love, the true place and infinite value of the individual will be continually realised. The Church has given to the world the value and worth of every individual. She must now, if true Social Righteousness is to be realised, demonstrate before the world that the true personality of the individual is only to be developed and realised fully in a world community in which the Love of God is the welding bond.

Now it is because Evangelicals in the Church of England stand so clearly for the worth of the individual soul, and the necessity for individual conversion, and yet at the same time have a conception of the necessity of ordered community Church life, that I believe that there lies before them an unparalleled opportunity at the present time. The world is groping, and because it is in the dark there is the tendency of individuals to shut themselves up into themselves so that the creed of the majority is "My life is my own to do what I like with." As K. L. Parry says again:

"If you urge one's duty to one's country, to see it is well governed, you get the answer, 'But I am not interested in politics, surely my life is my own to do what I like with.' If you urge one's duty to the poor, to care for one's neighbour, you get the answer, 'Am I my brother's keeper? Surely my life is my own to do what I like with.' If you urge one's duty to God and His claims of worship you will be answered, 'Well, I never go to church, I prefer golf on Sundays.' If you urge the claims of family life you get the answer, 'We don't intend to have any children; they are such a care and responsibility.' If you urge the claims of parents and home upon children you get the answer, 'But one has one's own life to live. Surely my life is my own to do what I like with.'"

Here is the attitude which has to be broken down if we are to bring light into the self-centred lives, which, though they know it not, are hungry for the achievement of their personalities in the fellowship of a community of love. This paper is fortunately entitled "The Challenge" and not "The Solution." I have in practical terms no solution to offer, though I am certain it lies in Christ and Christ crucified known and expressed through the fellowship of His Body the Church. I feel I must, however, outline to you some of the practical details about which I believe that we must think and pray and take action wherever possible together:

1. *The Relationship of Man to God.* Nothing extensive need be said on this, for it is the realm in which Evangelicals feel their message is most applicable. Yet perhaps it may be well to summarise the aspects of the message which need emphasis to-day, if it is to bring home to men the essential importance of a true relationship with God, if the society in which they live is ever to be satisfying.

A. R. Vidler in his book "God's Judgment on Europe" has well

summarised the main points of men's outlook to-day under four heads, and the Christian message in response to it.

- (1) It is assumed that man is naturally good and naturally reasonable ; and the Christian has to declare with no uncertain voice the doctrine of original sin and the fact that, individually or collectively, man without submission to God has a bias to wrong-doing, of which this war is in part, another proof.
- (2) The idea that the Goal of history can be realised within history. The Church has to ring out that the revelation of the Kingdom of God in Christ has shown once and for all that the goal of history lies beyond history.
- (3) All secular utopias of the future days aiming at social well-being are to be the outcome of human achievement and the result of the enlightened labours of mankind or of the inevitable law of progress. The Gospel declares that man can never by his own natural efforts, achieve perfection or the final satisfaction of his ideals. The perfection for which man is made is a free gift of God to be received through repentance and faith and forgiveness and the grateful and responsive action which is endowed by supernatural grace.
- (4) The motto of all secular utopias is in effect "Glory to man in the highest." Here is the final issue which the Church must make with all who would set their own claims above the claims of God, and refuse that they are miserable sinners who, falling under the judgment of God are, at every moment in need of His redeeming grace."

It is against this background that the grace of God in Christ and Him crucified must be set. Church Members by life and lip must show that Christ is able to deliver, and enable ; and by humility of life prove that they realise themselves to be but sinners saved by grace who are at work in a Kingdom which reaches its fulness in the certainties of eternity itself.

2. *The Relationship of Man to Man.* The Golden Rule "All things whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so to them" is still the essential challenge which the Church must ring out to the world. It covers such ordinary and yet vital matters as Truthfulness and Honesty, and the Fulfilment of Obligations. All too often these principles of human relationship are ignored to-day. In business life and even amongst young people, it is considered nothing out of the way to promise and never fulfil. The Church as a community must put these elemental things back into the forefront of her life and practice ; for to-day it is not always the case that those who believe the Gospel are scrupulously truthful and honest. The Golden Rule needs to be put into the relationship of employers and employed. Samuel Jones, Governor of Ohio, made a name for himself as a manufacturer in the United States as "Golden Rule Jones" because he removed the list of Iron Rules which he found in his works, and put up the Golden Rule instead. The tragedy in all too much business work is that there is little or no difference between Christian employers and those who make no profession. Too many Christians seem to believe that worship is one thing, and business another. What principles shall govern labour after the war ? If every Christian employer and employee were to act according to the principles laid down by Christ, so that each individual realised that he was being treated aright, and was working in a community, in which the well-being of each and all was the interest of all, something new would emerge in business life. What is the Church's answer to want and unemployment ? Merely a scheme of State insurance, as outlined by Sir William Beveridge ? or does even that require for its working a true Christian regard of man for his neighbour ?

3. *The Relationship of Man and Woman.* Here again is a tremendous social problem facing our land now, and one in which the Church should be playing a leading part, both in guidance and education and also in the laying down of definite standards. Sex is one of the most imperious of the instincts, and the facts reveal that it is not true that "preaching the Gospel" solves all the problems of sex relationship. The laxity of the present day, and the promiscuous relationships, which all too often take place, especially at the present time, calls forth chiefly condemnation of those who as Christian leaders and ministers have had young people under their teaching, and have utterly shirked their duty in dealing with this subject, which they knew sooner or later would have to be faced.

Only a few Sundays ago, I compelled myself to preach a sermon on the Sin of Adultery, by taking a course on the Ten Commandments, and even then I fear I tended to avoid the gaunt and grisly facts. I have found in asking other clergy what they have done, that almost with one consent they confess that they have never once ventured to speak on the subject. Here then is the situation; yet every clergyman is conducting many weddings a year, and he is in touch with young people who will before long be considering marriage. It is our duty, whether we are ministers, parents, or Christian workers, to let them know, as Hugh Martin puts it, that :

"Married love is more than a succession of ecstasies. It is sharing life, at its plainest bread-and-butter level as well as on the heights. It is companionship—or it is misery. A union that is based merely on physical attraction is woefully incomplete, and will crumble into ashes. But a merely spiritual companionship is not marriage either. Men and women are spirits, minds, bodies. True marriage means a sharing in all three."

To create such an understanding of marriage so that men and women may be guided aright in the choosing of their partners for life, needs instruction over a long period, in order that right attitudes become the normal outlook on marriage, and the sex function is seen to be God-given and to be used not merely to satisfy bodily desires, but as that which must be carefully safeguarded because abused and soiled it will rob true marriage of its deeper harmonies.

What a condemnation of the clergy, as a body, is contained in the article in the current *World Dominion*, when one signing himself "Consultant" writes to say that he has had 12,000 enquiries from different people in the course of the last year who were troubled over the problems of sex and marriage. The answer he received from many when he asked them why they did not go to see their minister was "We did not think he would understand." Would that some Society would answer this challenging situation and appoint some expert who could visit clergy groups and parishes, so that a definite constructive programme of education might be developed. It cannot start too soon. The housing conditions in which people live, and the recreational opportunities for young people are all parts of this problem which stands challenging the true advance of Christian Social Righteousness in this realm.

4. *The Relationship of Man and other Nations.* What is the solution to the continual procession of wars? people are asking insistently. Must it ever be strife between the nations? Is there

any true relationship which will bind the nations in one? The League of Nations, at whose meetings no prayer was ever offered and the name of God rarely mentioned, has been proved ineffective. Can it be that the world-wide Church will prove herself to be the world-community for which the hearts of men yearn? Surely this will never be, while barriers stand between denominations and sections of the Church. It is from India that a great step forward has come, as we shall be hearing later, and yet how much opposition has still to be overcome from Bishops and others. And how much progress will still have to be made even after the South India Scheme is accepted and in operation. It will not affect England at once. The Baptists are in no way included as yet. While the Church, the Body of Christ, wrangles on still divided, it would seem as if the world's opportunity will all too quickly slip by her.

Who is sufficient for these things? Surely God only. The fire of His Spirit alone can burn up the dross in denominationalism until we are fused into one body of purpose and love for our common Lord, though details of practice may continue to differ. He, alone, can bring purity and true fellowship into homes and relationships of men and women. It is Christ, by His Spirit within, Who alone can enable a man to live utterly selflessly for others, so that the Golden Rule becomes a practical proposition. It is Christ alone Who can so tune our lives that we shall love God with all our heart and soul and mind and strength. The Church, with the fire of the Holy Spirit energising her, will alone demonstrate to the world, *that* community for which it is yearning, in which every individual will have his or her true place. The Spirit-filled life is the truly ordered life in which faith and works find their right balance. How necessary then in these critical days when we face the Challenge of Social Righteousness that we take upon our hearts the prayer of the Chinese Church after the Jerusalem Conference: "Lord, revive Thy Church, and begin in me." May God grant it.

The Challenge in Respect to Education.

BY THE REV. H. J. BURGESS, B.A.

WHEN I was invited to give this paper, there was every indication that the new Education Bill expected early this year would be before the House by now. In its absence it is very much more difficult to gauge what scope the national system of education will offer to us in the matter of religion. We may be safe in assuming that in one way or another, the Bill will incorporate the substance of the Archbishops' Five Points, but beyond that assumption it is not safe to go.

I purpose to divide this paper into two main sections:

1. *The General Challenge of Education.* I shall conclude this section by asking the pertinent question—Are we interested?