

Social Theories and the Teaching of Jesus.

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V.

The Christian Standpoint.

THE use of the term *Christian Socialism* should not be allowed to obscure the fact that from the Christian standpoint there is a criticism of all existing Socialistic schemes which ought to be made. This is distinct from any criticism which may be made from the economic standpoint, although it may be linked into an economic argument. It is the duty of the Christian Church to maintain a critical examination of any social ideals less adequate to human needs than the ideal of a social order implicit in the teaching of Jesus about the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God represents, to the man whose eye is open to the spiritual values in life, the highest individual and the highest social development. From this point of view there are serious defects in the Socialist programme.

As yet the whole Socialist movement has shown no adequate sense of the meaning of personality. All the higher interests of human life—art, literature, music, science, and religion itself—require personal freedom. The man whose work lies in these directions knows that he has no right to barter away whatever contributes to the freedom of the spirit for any loaves and fishes, even though they were to feed five thousand. He will do most for the five thousand ultimately by following the calling which he feels to be of God.

Socialism as yet, both in theory and as judged by the conduct of its exponents, has shown no sign that it has learned the one great lesson which cost Europe so much to learn at the time of the Reformation—that the most important thing about every individual is that he has a private, personal, and direct relation to God which is so full of promise for the world's good that he must not allow any person, Church, or State to diminish a freedom which is necessary to his best service of others.

At present, Socialism tends to ally itself with movements of thought which have distinctly failed to value personality at its true worth. Pantheism differs from Christianity chiefly in its failure to

appreciate the revelation of personality in the Godhead. It is not surprising to find a leading Socialist, like Mr. Keir Hardie, declaring himself a Pantheist. Unitarianism has for the same reason found itself in easy alliance with Socialism in the 'Labour Church.' Among Anglo-Catholics, where the sense of the corporate life of the Church is stronger than the sense of the personal life of the Christian, Christian Socialism thrives, because a personal life which has not been differentiated from the Church, merges with equal ease in the common life of the State. Amongst working-men the same rule holds good. Socialism proves specially attractive to a large number of half-developed personalities. It proves less attractive in proportion to the fulness of development which personality has attained.

At this point the religious criticism runs into the economic, for there is a relation, sometimes no doubt exaggerated, but undoubtedly real, between personality and property. The relation is as subtle as that of a plant to the soil in which it grows, where the quality of the bloom and the strength of the plant, its power of endurance and of producing seed and fruit, depend in various degrees on the quality and sustaining power of the soil from which it draws nourishment. In the lives of inventors and improvers of industries there is generally a point where they receive as much from their environment as they give to it. They have to create the atmosphere in which development is possible. The tragedy of the unsuccessful inventor's life has often come from the lack of this. If men were deprived of the power of impressing their personality on their possessions, it is certain that society as a whole would lose. The same truth holds in many spheres. The instincts of ownership, the sense of possession, the pleasure which a man has in externalizing his character, and his love of his own work, all come to reinforce and put a fine edge on industry. The problem of the future is to retain the right of the individual over his own, so far as it con-

tributes to personal development, and to prevent it from becoming, as it is at present, a menace to the well-being of the whole community. This is a problem well worth the thought of acute political intellects. It is not solved by eliminating one of the factors of the problem as Socialism does.

Another valid criticism of Socialist proposals from the Christian point of view is that, as yet, there is hardly any evidence that the means proposed will produce the ends desired. The socializing of property is advocated on the ground that it would produce a unified social life, end the present causes of friction between classes of society, and substitute co-operative for competitive production. These are very desirable ends. They represent ideals which are implicit in every faithful interpretation of the Christian gospel. The weak point in the argument is the failure to prove the connexion between means and ends. In experience property is more divisive than uniting. Such success as has been achieved in the directions desired has come along another line. It requires a much higher order of will and character to use common property than to maintain social life with private ownership. The social will belongs to a higher order of life than social property, and while we know that the social will may produce the social use of property, we have no evidence yet that the socializing of property can produce the social will. This means that the unification of wills in obedience to a higher will at which Christianity aims is a greater contribution to a better social order than the socializing of property.

The most successful experiments in creating a

better social order have come, not from experiments avowedly Socialistic, but from the economic chivalry which is the outcome of Christian sentiment, plus the consecration of the individual will to doing the will of God. There is much essential Christianity in Mr. Cadbury's Bourneville and all similar experiments. They illustrate how much may be done in the spirit of what Professor Marshall calls 'economic chivalry,' when men, recognizing that the existing system gives them great advantages, determine to use these advantages for the common benefit. If they were more common than they are they would represent a shorter road to a new social organization than any Socialistic colony has yet discovered. The first problem before us is the making of men for the new order. Experiments in the social use of property may play an important part in that task, but until the human factor required for a higher social order is available, experiments can only be made slowly and cautiously. Meanwhile Christian Churches have both a positive and negative contribution to offer to the new order: if they are doing their proper work they are training men in principles of altruism and fitting them to enter the life of the community in an unselfish spirit; and negatively they may help society to escape those who attempt to capture it for a social order less adequate to the whole needs of man than the Kingdom of God. The Christian social order is a larger conception than the Socialist ideal; it includes what is best in that ideal, but it includes a great deal more which Socialism has not yet allowed for. It is not for the greater to yield to the less: the less should be absorbed in the greater.

Contributions and Comments.

The Star of Bethlehem.

MATTHEW II. 2.

THE Chinese translation of the N.T., commonly known as the Delegates' Version, favours the interpretation of this verse advocated by Mrs. Lewis (*THE EXPOSITORY TIMES*, December 1907): 'Wo tsai tung fang chien ch'i hsing' ('We, in the east, have seen his star'). The tentative editions of the Union Version, both the High and the Easy

Wen-li, either deliberately or influenced by the Delegates' Version, follow the same order of words. Thus these versions almost, if not quite, shut us up to taking the phrase 'in the east' as descriptive of the locality of the observers, not of the star. The point was raised a few years ago during a revision of a translation of Matthew's Gospel preparatory to the issue of the complete N.T. in the Swatow vernacular; and—perhaps rightly, from a translator's point of view—it was decided to alter the