

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

ARTICLE IV.

THE SOCIAL ETHICS OF JESUS.

BY PROFESSOR JOHN S. SEWALL, D. D.

WAS Jesus a Social Reformer? Was the renovation of society the special object of his mission? Did he come to regenerate the individual, or to rectify the community? These questions will open the gateway into the field before us.

It is a wonderful vision we see when we look across the ocean and back through the centuries to the country and the times of our Lord. There lies little Palestine, rugged with mountains, rich with orchard and vineyard, her soil fertile with the blood of countless battles against heathen invaders, her people ennobled by a history which no other nation could even approach; but now a province prostrate at the feet of pagan Rome, her people corrupt, her temper soured, her religion degraded, her character haughty, provincial, intolerant, hypocritical, her burdens fierce, her masses a slumbering volcano ready to burst into flame at the first word of revolt. In the midst of these disorders stands a central figure of light, calm, collected, busy with his own mysterious project. He recognizes the wrongs, the confusions, the oppressions, the perversions of character and justice and truth all around him. But he does not appear to be alarmed. He is not in a hurry. He starts no crusade against Rome. He breaks no lance with Herod, nor with the priesthood, nor with the laws, nor with existing institutions, nor with social custom. It is not along these lines that he appears to be working.

And yet when we think of the evils which afflict the race, it would seem as if here would be the point at which

Jesus would begin. The wars, the oppressions, the cruelties, the class hatred, the feuds between capital and labor, the business monopolies, the frauds, peculations, gambblings on 'change, the passions and crimes which prey upon society, the sufferings of the unemployed, the homeless, and the starving,—surely such calamities show how badly the planet needs disinfecting. Here is a Cause of sufficient magnitude to enlist even a reformer from heaven.

When we look at Jesus himself we note how finely he was adapted to just this work of social renovation. In person and character he was a God. In sympathies he was a man, and understood men. In spiritual gifts he was equipped with a revelation of divine love and divine grace to save men. In miraculous endowment he had power over the forces of nature, exorcised both demons and disease, held the keys of life and death. He claimed that all authority had been committed to him. His life, his character, his teachings, show how competent he was to assume that royal trust. And his works show him using it,—a kingly dispenser of gifts from heaven.

Into the chaos of human society comes this regal Being, freighted with the love and endowed with the power of God. What will he do? Face to face with these monstrous maladjustments, these cruel and measureless wrongs, what can he do otherwise than set himself instantly to the work of redressing them? We expect it. We shall be disappointed if he does not. We look to see the demons of malice and misrule fleeing in horrid rout before his lance. The shadows of grief and care, of hunger and hate, will melt away before his luminous presence. Perhaps he will set up an ideal society in Palestine, and by some intangible but irresistible pressure will move the other nations to build by that pattern. Perhaps he may journey from kingdom to kingdom, and mould each successively into the perfect form. Or it may be he will send an accredited envoy to each, well equipped with

light and force and miracle to bring about supernatural lustrations in thrones and dominions, in commerce and trade, in friendship and home.

It is not easy to predict the labors of such a unique visitor. His ways are not our ways. But we can see what Jesus did in Judæa, and reverently study both his methods and the results.

Some things which we might have expected may be ruled out with a negative at the start.

Jesus did not enter upon the role of the statesman or of the political economist. We look in vain for legislation. He enacts no code. He leads no party. In an empire full of slaves, he opens no crusade against slavery. War all around him at almost every point where the imperial boundaries touch the tribes outside, yet he makes no sign against war. His native province languishes and frets under the tyranny of Rome, yet he issues no counterblast against tyranny. Neither does he predict the perils of the coming democracy. The divine right of kings gets no mention, nor the diviner rights of the people. He leaves to the world no suggestion as to the proper form of government for either church or state. He has nothing to say of free schools, or of woman's rights, or of popular suffrage. He does not forecast the boasted progress of our modern civilization, the triumphs of science and invention and art, our liberties, our luxuries, our illusions. He knew the intemperance of the times, and into what bloated sensuality it would grow with the unrolling ages; yet his followers hear of no temperance pledge, nor get any hint as to whether license or prohibition would make the more effective line of attack upon the monsters of the saloon. He could foresee the fathomless iniquities which would in time grow out of the gambling instinct in human nature,—the wreck of fortunes, the ruin of homes, the swarms of fraud, deceit, robbery, suicide, murder, and all other blackest imps from the pit, that would hover about its track down through

the ages; yet in all his discourses no allusion to a moral plague so black and so destructive; no law against it. The "social evil" was an evil in his time, already portentous, and destined to taint all future generations with its swiftly spreading virus. He cast out the demons of impurity from a few wretched women. He warned men that they would be judged for the lust of thought as well as the lust of act. But he made no attempt to hedge the social evil about with laws; he built no reformatories; he organized no brotherhood of the white cross. In like manner his spirit was oftentimes burdened with the physical maladies that so racked the bodies and tortured the minds of the suffering multitudes around him; and he often healed by miracle such as came in his way, —the blind, the palsied, the leper, the lunatic, the maniac. But there he rests; and we look in vain for some system of associated charities, or any great organized philanthropy bearing his name and spreading through all lands in memory of his pity and love.

It is to be noted as a further negation that the Master never interferes with the constitution of things as he finds them in vogue in his day. If his countrymen are restive under the Roman yoke, he never preaches rebellion or anarchy. Such terms as communism, chartism, landlordism, nationalization of land, anti-monopoly, competition, co-operation, and the like, are foreign to his dialect. When a man who had been defrauded comes with the appeal, "Master, bid my brother divide the inheritance with me," he who is the very impersonation of justice declines to interpose. So far from interrupting the ordinary current of things in church or state, Jesus conforms himself thereto. He obeys the laws of the land. He teaches his disciples and the multitude to do the same. "The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat: all things therefore whatsoever they bid you, these do and observe." They are the constituted authorities, therefore obey them; the same persons whose private life, whose ava-

rice and hypocrisy, later on in the same chapter, he scorches with such terrific denunciation. When the temple tax is due and Peter refers it to him, he pays it without a question, even works a miracle to get the pittance required. If one would rightly render unto God the things that are God's, he must also render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's. Jesus holds himself amenable even to the habits and manners of his day. He dines with Pharisee as well as with publican and sinner. He joins in the festivities at the wedding. He is a guest at the marriage feast. He crowns the cheer with wine supplied on the spot by miracle. So entirely is he at one with the people about him in the daily incidents of life, that the rabble contrast him with the ascetic of the wilderness: "John the Baptist is come eating no bread nor drinking wine; and ye say, He hath a demon. The Son of man is come eating and drinking; and ye say, Behold, a gluttonous man, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners!"

II.

This does not strike us as a Social Reform; nor as an attempt at social reform. Whatever his errand, Jesus evidently did not set up as an agitator. With a divine insight into the needs of humanity, and with a settled purpose to destroy the works of the devil wherever he found them, in high places or low, it was plainly no part of his plan to storm the social problem by direct assault. He was not operating down among the details. He was arranging a campaign of great forces under which the details would work themselves out in good time. His whole attention was concentrated upon the founding of a spiritual kingdom. This was not to be some kind of a ghostly Utopia, but a present practical union of renovated hearts and lives. "My kingdom is not of this world," he testified before Pilate. It does not originate in this world. Its principles and laws are not of this

world. Its atmosphere, its inspiration, its aims, are not of this world. But its subjects are. This empire of divine love, issuing from the heart of God, reaches down into every region of human life, and, laying hold of even the weakest, the least hopeful, the most depraved, raises them up to be sons and daughters of the Almighty.

This promotion is a purely spiritual promotion. The one aim of the kingdom is to produce right character. Therefore it works upon persons, one by one. It plies the soul with motives. It offers divine inducements. Upon every soul that consents it places the crown of life. No pageantry—no lordship—no sceptre and throne—none of the insignia of prerogative and power; but something diviner—the purification of the heart and the rectification of the life.

As, if to show the world some external symbol of these inner transformations, Jesus applies his power here and there to some of the ravages of sin. Miracles of mercy radiate from his divine person. He heals the sick. He restores sight to the blind. He gives speech to the dumb, soundness to the cripple, the vigor of health to the palsied. He casts out demons. He calls the dead from the stillness of the tomb. Everywhere his ministry is one of physical restoration as well as of spiritual teaching. Everywhere he shows that he aims not only at the root of sin in the soul, but at the poisonous fruitage of it in the life. The forces of his kingdom, beginning with the spiritual, would reach out into the physical and secular, would pervade and sweeten every province of life, and would repair the damages that come from sin. The miracles of healing were samples of the complete effect which Christianity would have when in full operation among men. Set up the kingdom, and in time it would carry all other good with it. Seek ye first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.

Thus in founding a spiritual empire Jesus set in motion causes which start with the individual, and through the indi-

vidual reach out into society. His parable of the leaven is the best description of the process. Christianity is a leavening force in the world. It is a quickening force, and constructive. So far as it transforms an atom, that atom helps to transform the mass of which it is a unit. And thus is gradually progressing the moral disinfection of the world, and the moral integration of humanity.

These forces of social renovation are to be seen in the great principles which Jesus laid down.

He taught the universal Fatherhood of God, and the universal Brotherhood of Man. God made man. And therefore all mankind is his family. The members are directly connected with him, and therefore interrelated with each other. We are not a world full of dismembered units, incoherent, isolated, independent. No man liveth to himself; no man dieth to himself. Every man is neighbor to every other man. And the Good Samaritan shows just what Jesus means by "neighbor." The relationship is not so much in the blood, but in the common humanity. A man is a man, and therefore all other men are his fellows. All other men share with him in the common manhood. They have the same organs and senses, the same intelligence and affections. And men recognize their common status. They are gregarious. They unite in great corporations for manufacturing or trade. They combine in great armies for conquest or defence. They gather in great churches and sects, in populous cities and empires. Men do not form copartnerships with the beast of the field, or the fowl of the air, or the fish of the sea. There is no common basis. But man with man is a brotherhood. There is unity of being and unity of aim. And already are there lofty souls who recognize also the spiritual obligations of the brotherhood and act the Good Samaritan to their kind.

For the law of this human fraternity Jesus adopted the Golden Rule. Nothing could be more unlike the codes by which men have usually been governed. The divine right of

kings has generally signified that the realm belonged to the ruler. "The State—it is I!"—with emphasis on the I. The share that fell to the unlucky subject has been too often only neglect, injustice, oppression. The improved relations now subsisting between monarch and people are due to the humanizing power of Christianity. But the Golden Rule is not designed simply as a check upon tyrants. It has universal application. Is a man a brother? Then treat him as a brother. "All things whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, even so do ye also unto them." Your neighbor's interests are intrinsically of as much account as yours. His membership in the great family is of the same sort as yours. His relations to God are on the same basis with yours. He has therefore no inherent supremacy over you, nor have you over him. No member has the right to exploit his fellow-members for his own selfish ends. Admit the Golden Rule, and that is the end of slavery. Admit the Golden Rule, and that is the end of fraud, of speculation in the necessaries of life, of ruinous competition, of lotteries, of all those traps and snares by which greed endeavors to get for itself that which belongs to another. Put society under the Golden Rule, and every man is bound to consider not his own rights and interests alone, but the welfare of the rest of the world. How far-reaching, how all-comprehending, such a principle as this.

Jesus made of this rule something more than a command. He carried it up, as usual, into the region of motive. He elevated it into a principle and sentiment,—"*Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.*" These acts of reciprocity (to use Confucius' term) are to spring not from obedience to an order, but from regard to our fellow-man as a brother. Help him when occasion comes, not as under the compulsion of law, but by the inspiration of love. Here is the true "nerve of missions." In his last command Jesus pointed out the thing to be done: "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." But what is the motive? Not

obedience to a military order, but the promptings of a divine love.

Furthermore Jesus widened out this precept till it should include not the neighbor only, but the enemy. "Ye have heard that it was said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor and hate thine enemy; but I say unto you, Love your enemies." Lest we should be asking with the lawyer in Luke, and narrowing it down too as he did to the singular number, "And who is my neighbor?"—the Master at a stroke dispels our sophistries, and shows us that our discords and brawls with one another are so petty, so low, so unhuman, that they do not and cannot annul the real unity of the race. Serene above the bickerings of man, undisturbed by wars or rumors of wars, is the magnificent assurance that "God hath made of one every nation of men for to dwell on the face of the earth." If hostile armies then do sometimes spill each other's blood, it is a temporary insanity. When reason returns, they will shake hands across the bloody chasm, and weld again the broken links. Jesus applies his rule to all men. What is your status toward your fellows? Is it affection? Is it indifference? Is it disgust, or fear, or hate? In each and every case you are bound by the Golden Rule. No conditions release you. Be it neighbor or enemy, you are to imitate the Master, and treat men on the high principles of divine compassion. If they persecute you, nevertheless pray for them.

Here lies the explanation of those difficult precepts about non-resistance. "Ye have heard that it was said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: but I say unto you, Resist not him that is evil: but whosoever smiteth thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man would go to law with thee and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go one mile, go with him twain. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away." Society on this basis would be chaos. The good would be at the

mercy of the bad: a universal spectacle of the forces of darkness preying upon the subjects of the kingdom, plundering, fleeing, outraging those pure and conscientious souls who imagine, as Tolstoi insists, that Jesus meant literal non-resistance to evil. The meek, instead of inheriting the earth according to promise, would be but a handful of victims under the tyranny of the violent and depraved. Nothing could be more absurd. Jesus himself obeys no such rule. What he is aiming at is to get lodged in the human heart the great idea of mutual forbearance. And to make an impression sufficiently vivid, he sets forth examples which are too paradoxical to mislead, and yet startling enough to compel the attention of the world. He shows therein his purpose to get the *lex talionis* out of human history, and to substitute for it the law of kindness. This does not annul the right of self-defence. It did not prevent some punitive acts of Jesus himself. It is an anticipation, an ideal; not literally possible now, but to be wrought out in the evolution of the Christian ages. Just so fast and so far as the principles of the kingdom prevail in the world, the doctrine of non-resistance must come to be a realized fact. There will be no foe to resist. War will slink back into the night and be forgotten with the other outgrown barbarisms of the past.

As Jesus expanded his great law to include all sorts and conditions of men, so too he lifted it into a more spiritual interpretation. In his kingdom the Golden Rule rises into the Christian Law of Service. Here one has the privilege of doing for others not by the measure of their labor for him, nor by what he would have them do for him, but by the kingly example of the Master. He came into the world not to be ministered unto, but to minister. He could not hope for a return. He stood on a higher level than the Golden Rule. From that high level he poured down upon men those divine benefits which they could never render to him. He invites men to come up and stand with him. As if he should say,

Be not content to do for men, with square and even dealing, just what they can do in return, but bless them with service which is beyond their power to recompense. Whoever aspires to be great in the kingdom, let him serve. Let him rise above the Golden Rule. That is for the rank and file—for the common equities of the brotherhood. For him there is a larger place, beside his Master. Let him rise to that, and minister to men not according to the ratio of what they might do for him, but far beyond anything he could ever hope or wish they would do for him; in many cases indeed beyond anything they possibly could do for him. A missionary carrying Christianity and civilization to a Hottentot does for him what the Hottentot could not conceivably do for the missionary. This is the law of service. Jesus builds his kingdom on it. Not self-aggrandizement, not self-exaltation, not place and position and power to lord it over one's fellow-subjects—these are not the prizes of the kingdom; but that self-devotion which shall inspire one to spend and be spent for his fellow-men. This is the humility that shall be exalted. "Ye know," said the Master, "that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them. But so shall it not be among you; but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: and whosoever of you will be the chiefest shall be servant of all." It is along these higher lines that men do the finest and noblest things that ever sweeten our human history. Why are men placed in high station? Not for the rank and emoluments, but for the enlarged opportunity for service. The time will come when men will aspire to office, not to gratify ambition, but from a desire to serve their country and their kind with a more abundant helpfulness than they can render down on the lower levels. In that golden age too capitalists will handle their business not simply for the purpose of increasing their own dividends, but to build up the manhood and welfare of their workmen, to relieve

the hardships of poverty, to give to labor a more equitable share of the wealth it helps to create. In many firms and factories that day has already come. And down on the common level, also, all through the ranks of the masses, there are already to be found admirable and even brilliant examples of that mutual charity, that unselfish kindness, that self-forgetting devotion, which are of the very essence of our Saviour's teaching. These are results; and they show how, and how far, the leaven of Christianity is already penetrating the heart of the race.

III.

These in outline are the primary ideas Jesus announced as the motive of his kingdom. Taking our stand now at that point, we can look out as he did on the complications of society. How was he impressed with what he saw? How did he intend his disciples should work out these principles and apply them to the successive conditions that might arise? It may be answered at once, and in general, that his method was that of spiritual evolution; the method of the leaven. Implant certain forces in the mind, and let them work. Magnetize the human will, and of its own accord it will point to the pole.

The unit of society is the family. It needs no effort of the imagination to picture the sweetness and satisfaction of Jesus' early life in the home of Joseph and Mary. It must have been an ideal family. So too the home in Bethany, where later he formed such strong and congenial attachments. Endowed as he was with an affectional nature whose origin and whose ideal was the home on high, he must have felt the deepest interest in the family life here below. He was an honored guest at the marriage feast. He loved the children, and took them in his arms to bless them. He held them up as models to his hearers,—“whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is the greatest

in the kingdom of heaven." He identified their interests with his,—“whoso shall receive one such little child in my name, receiveth me.” He does not draw up any code of ethics for the fireside. He leaves no specific instructions for the training of children; nor rules to control the mutual conduct of husband and wife, or to govern the evolution of the family, or to enlighten parents on the laws of heredity. If the family conforms to the principles of the kingdom, he knows that all these special lines of the common life will go of themselves, and there he leaves it. The truth and honor and purity which are the fundamental ideas of his gospel, will manifest themselves first of all in the sacred precincts of the home, and will make any special legislation superfluous. For a similar reason doubtless he leaves polygamy to die its own death. It is a monster so alien to the very idea of the family, so incongruous and divisive to the home-unit, that, although permitted with other evils in the earlier barbaric conditions of the race, there is no fiat needed to bring it to an end. Let the light shine, and this spectre of the dark will flee away. But with divorce it is otherwise. Jesus evidently regards this as an ever-present menace to the peace and purity of the home which will not so easily down. It must be dealt with, directly and forcibly. The family is a divine institution, and therefore inviolable. The link which unites husband and wife creates a new being,—“of twain one flesh.” If that link be broken, it deprives the new being of life. Divorce destroys the family. It is therefore fatal to society. The family bond must be preserved in its integrity. The instructions given by Jesus therefore are absolute and inexorable. Wendt cites them all, and, after analyzing them, puts his conclusion into this emphatic statement: “Where the unit of husband and wife thus rests on a divine command, a human divorce could not be justifiable.”¹ Since from a

¹ The Teaching of Jesus, i. 353.

clear source no corrupt stream can flow, it is plainly the purpose of Jesus first of all to keep the fountain pure.

Stepping out from the shelter of the home into the general walks and ways of men, we are at once aware of the vast differences and contrasts in human conditions. The two extremes in society are the rich and the poor. How did Jesus regard them?

To the rich his message is one of admonition,—always earnest, sometimes sharp and stern. He looks upon them as living on a wrong theory. "A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of things which he possesseth." Life is not made up of "things." And yet he finds multitudes of the devotees of mammon, whose treasure is in things, and whose heart is down with and in their sordid treasure. The silly epicure, who cares only for his purple and fine linen and the voluptuous banquets at which he fares sumptuously every day,—that is the character Jesus singles out for the terrible picture of retribution in the parable of Dives and Lazarus. And the companion picture is almost as fearful—in the parable of the bacchanalian farmer, who fills his bursting barns and then settles down to a life of gluttonous ease; "Thou fool!" cries a startling voice from heaven, "this night thy soul shall be required of thee!"

Jesus looks upon wealth as in itself of small account. We can see in the two parables of the talents and the pounds, that he recognizes the legitimate uses of money. It has its place as a means to an end. He even directs his followers to make to themselves friends by means of the mammon of unrighteousness—that is, use it so that the results shall accrue to their spiritual interests; a precept which shows that he did not think of money as inherently base and corrupting, but, on the other hand, regarded that kind of spiritual gain with it as entirely feasible. But he invariably rebukes the spirit that would spend anxious thought on the temporalities of life. So little is wealth worthy of such headlong quest,

that when a man comes to him smarting under the greed of his brother, and begging Jesus to restore to him the share of the inheritance of which he has been defrauded, Jesus repels him almost indignantly,—“Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you!” How could mere “things”—a whole worldful of them—draw the Son of God aside from his mission? And he takes the incident as a text for a scathing indictment of avarice.

Jesus regards the rich as in great spiritual danger. In the parable of the sower, the deceitfulness of riches is enumerated as one of the many thorns that spring up to choke the word. The luxury of having tends so often to develop the baser sentiments of pride, selfishness, arrogance, hardness, injustice, rapacity, deceit, sensuality. Such characters oppress the poor. They devour widows' houses. Upon all such Jesus pours his indignation,—“Woe unto you that are rich!” And the tenacity with which they hold their riches, or their riches hold them, wrings from him the almost judicial verdict,—“How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God! . . . It is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.” To open the door of hope, nevertheless, to even the rich, Jesus bids them deny self, and exercise a generous charity toward the poor; a brotherly service the poor so desperately need, and they can so easily grant. As if he would say, Loosen your hold of these earthly things. Share your abundance with the hungry and the naked. Show that you recognize your membership in the great brotherhood. Be the Good Samaritan to the suffering and the fallen around you. To one young man who had great possessions, and who thought he lacked nothing essential to either this life or the life to come, Jesus applied the tremendous test,—“Go, sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me.” Jesus thought of the rich as stewards, holding a place of peculiar temptation and

peculiar opportunity in the social economy, and under bonds to use their wealth for higher purposes than for personal gratification.

What was the attitude of this divine Man toward the poor?

He was a poor man himself. This is the first thing that strikes us. They call him the carpenter's son; sometimes the carpenter. He has the *entrée* of all ranks of society; mingles with nobleman and peasant, with Pharisee and Magdalen. But he never rises, and never seeks to rise, above the humble conditions into which he was born. It was not a palace, not even a cottage, in which he first saw the light. When his mother made the customary offering for purification in the temple, it is pathetic to read that it was the offering appointed for the poor. And throughout his ministry, though this princely visitant could have transmuted the penuries of earth into the glories of heaven, yet for himself he had not where to lay his head.

As we should expect, this poor man was the friend of the poor. His sympathies go out toward them everywhere and always. He is constantly doing for them. The crowds who flock to hear him are mainly the masses. "Not many mighty, not many noble are called." Seldom do any of the gentry appear in the throng, either to listen to his teachings or to be healed by his touch. We read that he restored the servant of a centurion, the son of a nobleman, the little daughter of Jairus the ruler of the synagogue; and that is all; and all three in Capernaum, his own home, where the citizens, even the officials, knew him well. But in the main his ministrations were to the poor, the working classes, the wage-earners—called in the simple language of the Gospels, "the multitude." The themes of his discourses and the plain figures of his parables were evidently designed for such hearers; and they would keenly appreciate his illustrations drawn from their own daily toil. It was their sick that he healed, it was

their children he blessed, it was their lepers he cleansed, their deaf and dumb who heard and spake, their dead who came back to them from the grave—all at a word from him. He loved the poor. He lived and labored and died for the poor. When John sent messengers from prison, Jesus sent them back with an account of wonderful miracles performed in their sight, and crowned the list with the highest gift of all,—“To the poor the gospel is preached.” His first sermon in the synagogue at Nazareth announced in the prophet’s words, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord.” What a ministry to the suffering and the destitute this describes. So closely does he identify himself with his “little ones,” as he calls them, that he takes every kindness shown to them as shown to him; “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these, my brethren, ye have done it unto me.”

And yet, with all his gentle sympathy for the feelings and the hardships of the poor, Jesus always speaks from a superior plane, as if, after all, it were a matter of trifling concern whether one possesses “things” or not. He carries about with him a tranquil consciousness that he can at any moment supply their wants; sometimes indeed he does, as in the two miracles of loaves and fishes. But generally he aims to lift them up on the same high level of simple content where he abides himself. “Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on.” Trust your heavenly Father. Not a sparrow falls to the ground without his notice. Has he not an equal care for his children? “Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” It is no cause for alarm—the mere absence of “things”; in the future abundance you will not remember the penury you en-

dured here below. Accordingly, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon the earth, . . . but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven." Be not anxious. Think it a matter of small concern whether the riches of this world come trooping around you, bringing comforts and luxuries denied to others. Rise above selfish desire. There are matters of higher moment than food and clothing. You are under the care of One who arrays even the lily of the field more royally than Solomon in all his glory. He will see that you do not want. When Jesus sent out his disciples to preach, they were instructed to make no provision for even the simplest fare; "Take nothing for your journey, neither staff, nor wallet, nor bread, nor money; neither have two coats." Penniless pilgrims; but on an errand so august, the Master would see that all things should work together to supply their need. And a year later, on the very night of his betrayal, he confidently referred to their experience; "When I sent you forth without purse and wallet and shoes, lacked ye anything? And they said, Nothing." If we were to look for a final utterance on the subject, for a precept that should summarize all the rest, one that should contain the great Teacher's entire philosophy of daily life, it would be in these familiar words: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."

IV.

If now we rightly apprehend the idea on which Jesus founded his kingdom, we are in a position to look out upon society and observe what effects have been, or ought to be, produced by the presence of this kingdom among men. It is plain that Jesus felt the wrongs of society, and wanted them rectified. He was sensitive to all forms of suffering. If he did not begin his mission as a reformer of society, it was not that he was oblivious of the evils to be remedied.

But in applying the remedy he went to work indirectly. He did not, on the one hand, remand the whole matter to natural evolution, to let it work itself out. Nor, on the other hand, did he buckle on his armor and assault it, as Don Quixote stormed the windmill. His methods were not so startling, but they were wiser. He recognized the difficulty of the situation and the kind of material he had to deal with. Knowing the tenacity of selfishness in the human heart, he knew also that the process by which any motives, however divine, could loosen its hold, must be long and patient and slow. He must reckon therefore with the future as well as the present. And, adjusting his methods to conditions which he foresaw would be so persistent, he set causes in motion that would act down through the centuries with increasing force, and would slowly and surely transform the evil into good. He did not think best to disrupt society with explosions and upheavals; nor dissolve the common framework of humanity back to its ultimate atoms in order to reconstruct the whole mass. He relied on those more potent and enduring forces which are established in the individual soul by the Spirit of God. When winter holds our northern rivers in its grim toils, and every lake and stream is clamped in its bed with ice, no dynamite could free the imprisoned floods, nor any power known to man. But when spring draws near, those frozen masses will yield to the mere warmth of the invisible air. That which could not be torn asunder by force will melt away of itself, and lo, the river is free. In such wise comes the liberation of society. It is not in the earthquake nor in the tempest, but in the still small voice, that God speaks with power. What the sword can never accomplish, and what Socialism in any or all of its protean shapes can only touch on the surface, Christianity achieves by the slow, unseen, intangible but irresistible advance of its spiritual forces. This is coming to be recognized. It has been said recently of the English labor leader Tom Mann,—“He saw plainly that the labor move-

ment must ultimately fail unless it has a firmer foundation than that of a desire for increased wages. The social reconstruction for which he was working could only be based upon religious and economic principles. Indeed, in common with others, he sees that economics, rightly understood, is but the practical application of religion."¹ It is along this line that the kingdom pushes its way. Jesus well knew that no transformation of society can be permanent which does not transform the individual man. Instead of touching society, therefore, he went to work upon man. He expended his time and labor on the kingdom, knowing that the spiritual forces set in operation in that would in time bring order out of chaos.

His ideal is Love; an ideal for society as for the individual. Let that divine sentiment become the ruling instinct of the mind, and the man is moulded in the fashion of Jesus. The aims, the ethics, the character of Jesus become incarnated in him. His life is lived along those lines. His business is conducted on those principles. His relations to his fellow-men are governed by those motives. His place in the Christian church, his vote in the body politic, his methods in trade, his manner in his home, his care for his workmen, or his work for his own employer,—in these and all the other interdependencies of life he is controlled by the divine love within him. That divine love constrains him to be first of all loyal to God, and then loyal to his brother-man. And it has already taught him that the brother-man is not simply his friend, his partner, his peer in social life, but the operative in his mill, the truckman at his store, the day-laborer who digs in his garden. All are members of the great human family, and all are entitled to the benefit of the Golden Rule. The brotherhood of man becomes the fundamental idea in his philosophy of life. He looks out on a wider horizon. A new consciousness rises within him of a common interest with all the rest of the race. His half-dormant sympathies waken

¹ Review of Reviews, Dec. 1893, p. 662.

into life. A sense of human fellowship takes the place where selfishness had reigned before. He begins to notice with some concern the hard lot some of his fellow-mortals have to bear. He begins to speculate on the possibility of more of equity between man and man; he begins to wish for it; exerts his influence in that direction; tries experiments, suggestions, hopeful plans; becomes in his small way, and within the sphere of his own life, a social reformer. That is, by his character, by his personal life and example, by the force of the divine love within him, he is propagating in the community the spirit of his Master, who came into the world "not to be ministered unto, but to minister." And the more there are in the world of such bearers of the divine love, the more rapidly will the hardships of society disappear before the advancing brotherhood of man.

The hopes and plans of Jesus then were centred on the individual rather than on a system. He did not project some great sociological fabric. He did not found a new guild, to do its work in the world as an institution. He begins with the individual, as he did with Matthew, with John, with Nicodemus, with the woman of Samaria. His figure of the leaven represents the spiritual vitalizing force in his kingdom. A very choice figure; which shows how the spiritual life communicates itself not *en masse*, but from atom to atom. Every regenerate mind is a germ-cell of that leaven. It is alive; and can impart life to others. It is a new centre and source of goodness in the community. The gift it has to bestow is divine love; and therefore it always works in the direction of good morals and for the welfare of humanity. It is set in the world as a new point of light, and is bid to shine. It is, so to speak, a detached atom of Christ, placed where it shall live like Christ, and shall actively work in his name. Such a renewed heart will have influence; and that influence will be in the interests of righteousness; and just so far the average morality of the community will be lifted. It will be

found on the side of good citizenship, of obedience to law, of patriotism, sobriety, purity, honesty, and honor. The presence of such Christ-like souls in the community will add just so much to the forces that work for righteousness. The transformation of any one man from bad to good sets a new faculty of goodness in operation. It enlists another champion in the war with wrong. Where there are many such, it may be in many ways more convenient to organize them; but what they accomplish in the world is due not so much to the organization as to the vital force embodied in it. A general, hard pressed on the field of battle, would welcome a reinforcement, not as five or ten organizations called regiments, but as five or ten thousand fresh troops. What can be done, is done not by the system, but by the men who are in the system; a fact never forgotten in politics, but often quite overlooked in the work of the church. In our Lord's representations of his kingdom men are never handled in bulk, in droves, but in units.

The results are already great. In Christian lands the social forces are largely christianized. Set Christendom side by side with heathendom, and a glance is sufficient. In spite of its defects the splendid pre-eminence of Christian society shows what kind of forces are at work, and how they are slowly accomplishing the word of the Master. The elevation of a continent from the sea is a slow process; but as it rises, the new land, basking under the sunlight, clothes itself with verdure and life. The elevation of society is a slow process; but it takes on a higher life as it rises; and in all directions can be seen its splendid fruitage,—art, science, invention, machinery, railroads, telegraphs, cathedrals, universities, asylums, hospitals, museums, libraries, schools. The moral enlightenment may not have kept pace with the secular and commercial. But the results here also are enough to stir one's pulse with pride and praise. There is such a thing now as a national conscience. It is reflected in our

courts, in our halls of legislation, even in our newspapers and novels. Let a law be enacted whose principle is morally wrong, and the country rings with indignation. Platform and market, school-room and press, vie with the pulpit in sounding the alarm. It is the protest of conscience. Think of the irrepressible conflict between slavery and the moral sentiments of the people. Think how the Fugitive Slave Law was finally buried under an avalanche of national wrath. Could there be a sublimer spectacle of conscience than the emancipation of four millions of slaves in our Civil War? And what a brave fight is made by the conscientious against intemperance and impurity, against the lottery, in behalf of the Christian Sabbath and the Christian school, even for the prevention of cruelty to animals; not in the interest of political economy, but on moral grounds. The majority of our statutes doubtless are still working along the lines of self-preservation. Society must protect itself. If crime and vice went unscathed, if the saloon and brothel and gambling den were allowed free license, chaos would come again, and society drop to pieces from sheer putrefaction. But even protective laws now are shaped more and more in accordance with the principles of eternal right. The acts of government and the acts of legislation are held more and more strictly to moral standards. Laws that once embodied the will of the strong, or the schemes of the crafty, or the greed of the covetous, are now much more moulded by the national conscience. The passage of the Factory Acts of 1833 was a magnificent triumph of righteousness over avarice; they were passed under the pressure of conscience and against the stubborn opposition of the monied interest. And from that day to this every law which enforces justice between man and man, every law which protects the weak against the oppressor, every law which conserves the purity of the home, every law which compels the employer to provide proper sanitary conditions for his workmen, is an embodiment of the moral sense as well

as of the instinct of self-preservation. An English gentleman has left on record this striking testimony: "I have lived for more than sixty years, and I can remember the time when to have required employers to consider, in fixing wages, in arranging workshops, in building cottages, in determining the hours of labor, not only profits, but also, and more, the physical, moral, and spiritual welfare of workingmen, would have been looked upon as a kind of lunacy."¹ *Nous avons changé tout cela.* The iron hand of law has reached in among the factories and shops, the tenement traps and slums, and now men cannot be enslaved by the greed of their fellows to the extent they once could. Children are not allowed to work themselves to death so young. Women are provided now with better sanitary conditions for their work, cleaner rooms, with more light and air. Restrictions are placed around trades that handle poisonous material. In these and other directions a little has been done. Only a little; for the mass of wrong and suffering still untouched is appalling; and yet enough to show the spirit and the methods of the kingdom.

The spread of the principles of peace is another eloquent tribute to the influence of Christianity. In the savage state hostility would seem to be the normal condition. Let another tribe approach and instantly there is a collision. But in Christian nations the contrast already is world-wide. War is not the normal condition. The presumption is for peace. There must be overwhelming evidence, or overmastering passion, or a sense of desperate peril, before a Christian nation can be induced to take the sword. Once Christian England raised no protest against the buccaneering voyages of Raleigh and Cavendish and Drake; and it is reported that the Virgin Queen herself was not averse to sharing the bloody profits; but now such piracies are forevermore impossible. The moral sense of the world has grown. Christian communities are now up on a plane where they *prefer* right to wrong, where

¹ Bishop Moorhouse, *The Teaching of Christ*, p. 157.

they prefer peace to war, where they prefer justice and purity and truth; and would resent with horror any proposal to train their children in vice instead of virtue.

This latter half of the nineteenth century has been pervaded by a larger sense of human brotherhood than any other period of history. Christendom teems with hospitals, with missions, with schools and churches, with young men's and young women's Christian Associations, with associated charities, with free libraries and museums, with art galleries and evening classes, with numberless forms of philanthropy; and these are but the expression of that spirit of service which Jesus has introduced into humanity, namely, the desire to help the brother man. We cannot shut our eyes to the evils that curse the world; and yet we can see that with every passing century the ideals of life are set higher and higher, in the family, in the church, in the college, in public office, in the methods of business. Before the springtime of Christianity human selfishness is melting away and divine love is beginning to take its place. Christianity does make man love his neighbor as himself, and is the only power that can. Christianity does go to the heart of things and remove the cause of the misery, while Socialism is busy outside with the symptoms. Jesus saw clearly, and we are beginning to see, that this is the true and only solution of the social question. Men will not be dragooned even into peace and plenty. So long as they hold property and believe in the rights of property, they will guard it against all comers. They will not surrender their prerogative at the beck of anarchy, or nihilism, or communism, or chaos in any shape. They simply will not. And the attempt to force them to do it would only be war to the knife, as some of our American apostles of dynamite have discovered. The great strikes may deceive us into imagining that the fight is only begun. It may seem as though the passion were more bitter than ever, and the violence more bloody. In some cases that is true. Doubt-

less there is yet more blood to be shed. Labor and capital have many accounts to settle. But the field is wide, and the struggle fares differently at different points. Both masters and men are learning, at least some of them, that there is a better way. In some parts of the field there is an armistice. The combatants have halted. Experiments are going forward, and under a flag of truce they are watching the result. Whether it be arbitration, co-operation, profit-sharing, or whatever other special form of mediation, it is an acknowledgment of fraternity. The spirit of brotherhood has entered, if only in minute atoms; capital half-ready to concede to labor a larger share of the common product—labor clamoring for its dues, but more willing to get them by peaceable means. And when the time comes, as it surely will, when that spirit is at work among men fairly, freely, and universally, there will be no further conflict between capital and labor. Men will work for and with one another under the mutual covenant of the Golden Rule. The sunshine of Christianity will melt away the inhuman conditions of society, and we shall again hear on this planet the angels' song, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace toward men of good will."