

the enmity between man and God. Ancient exegesis is largely determined by the contemporary language and also by the contemporary problems of the Church; and its influence has been far-reaching.

The commentary of Ephrem affords a good illustration of this influence of the age and country in which the Fathers wrote :—

“Ipse enim est pax nostra, id est ipse fecit pacem inter *Hebræos et Gentiles* : quoniam fecit utraque unum testamentum et solvit in carne sua medium parietem inimicitiae, *insaniam videlicet idolorum* . . . et legem terrenorum mandatorum spiritualibus decretis suis evacuavit ut duos, *Ethnicos videlicet et Hebræos*, condat in semetipso in unum novum hominem.”¹

J. H. A. HART.

THE SOCIAL TEACHING OF JESUS.

THE social teaching of Jesus is a subject of which it would be absurd to attempt to dispose in an article, if the intention were to enter into particulars; for the half of the words of Jesus could be included under such a designation. But the object of this article is not to deal with details, but to discover the principles which move the mass of our Lord's sayings on social subjects. These do not lie on the surface, and may be missed even by those who have often read all His words. It will tend to clearness if they are contrasted with modes of speculation on such subjects which are at present familiar to all.

I.

Everyone remembers the idea in *Ecce Homo*, that the originality of Jesus consisted in the creation of the Church.

¹ I owe this quotation to Dr. J. Rendel Harris, who adds: “It is interesting to note how Ephrem, living away from a time when the dividing line was circumcision, projects back the worship of idols as the barrier between Jew and Gentile.”

Jesus was not a mere teacher or philosopher, but the founder of an institute, in which virtue was to be taught by a new use of man's social instincts. As these are used in an army with such astonishing effect that men, as soldiers, will do without hesitation what they would never do as individuals—for example, shoot down their fellow-creatures or even expose themselves to be shot—so Jesus invented a social system in which the influence of the environment should tell with similar effect, but for different ends—for the formation of character and the generation of benevolence. This may be called the thesis of *Ecce Homo*, which is by far the most original book in the whole literature on the Life of Jesus produced in the nineteenth century. But, like a great many other things in that book, it lacks demonstration in the actual words of Christ Himself. It is much more a philosophy of Christianity, as it has actually existed, than a deduction from the record. In point of fact, the place of the Church in the teaching of Christ is a very insignificant one: a score of lines would exhaust all He said on the subject; and His sayings present anything but a complete image of the organization of the Church. Of course it is open to us to believe that He spoke much more on the subject than has been recorded, or thought more about it than He said; but it is certain that, far from being the essence of the evangel, as He preached it in Galilee, this hardly had a place in His discourses at all, the thoughts with which He attracted the multitudes and won the hearts of His disciples being of a totally different order.

There are many at the present day who think of Christianity somewhat in the same way as the author of *Ecce Homo*, with this difference, that in place of the Church they would put a Christianized society. They may be to some extent alienated from the Church, but they think of Christianity mainly as an institution, embodied in social arrangements and customs, and acting on the individual from without. The triumph of Christianity would be to

make of society a well-formed and kindly matrix in which the individual should be born into a pure atmosphere, while, as he grew up, he would be encouraged by good examples and supported on every side by the steady pressure of influences favourable to his moral development. The environment, it is taken for granted, makes the man, and it ought, therefore, to be the primary consideration.

There can be no doubt that this view is one for which a great deal can be said ; but there is just as little doubt that it was not the view of Jesus. To Him the individual was primary, and to produce in His hearers a belief in the wonder and glory of the soul, first in their own interest and then on behalf of others, was His main object from first to last. The fact is, that, although to a generation accustomed to the excessive individualism of the Evangelical Revival the suggestion that the thought of Jesus was primarily social has an attractive air of novelty, this would not have been original at all in the mouth of Jesus, because the primacy of some form of society was the belief of all antiquity before Him. In Greece the state was supreme not only in the practice of the Greek race but in the speculation of the loftiest spirits it produced ; and, in the Hebrew Scriptures, when salvation or progress is spoken of, it is the nation which is in the thoughts of prophet or psalmist. Only by slow degrees, and in isolated passages of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, does the perception begin to dawn that the individual, apart from the state or the Church, has an importance of his own. But in the teaching of Jesus this is the prevailing conception all the time. He puts no bounds to His language when describing the grandeur of the soul ; He appeals directly to the individual to make his own choice and secure his own salvation ; and it is in doing the same that Christianity is most obviously imitating its Founder.

An argument for the social as distinguished from the

individual nature of the Gospel has been found in the use by Jesus of the conception of the Kingdom of God; and His use of this phrase was so frequent as to make this argument appear conclusive. But the fact is, there is nothing in the entire record of our Lord's teaching so dubious as His use of this idea, so difficult is it to determine what it means, or what is its value. Frequently as He employed it, it is doubtful whether it can really be called His own, or whether it was imposed on Him by the necessities of His historical position. He, at any rate, did not invent it, and the Apostles very soon allowed it to fall into desuetude. As you try to grasp its signification, it eludes your pursuit, and it changes like a chameleon.

At first it seems to have a political meaning. It is certain that the predecessors and contemporaries of our Lord used it in this sense; and, when He began to employ it without any explanation, it was natural to suppose that He used it in this sense too. His royal entry into Jerusalem seems to prove that to the very last, or almost the last, He still entertained the hope of being a king, in which case the realm over which He ruled would naturally have been the Kingdom of God. On the other hand, in His temptation, He appears decisively to have rejected the ambition of an earthly kingdom; He subsequently treated with indignation the proposal to make Him a king; and He said before Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world." Sometimes, again, the Kingdom of God seems to be identical with the Church; but He thought and spoke of the Church so seldom, and of the Kingdom so constantly, that they must be different: at least, the essence of the Kingdom must be something anterior to the Church as an outward organization.

There is one saying of Jesus the translation of which is among the most disputed of His utterances—"The kingdom of God is within you." The preposition *ἐντός* may

mean not "within" but "among," and the statement would be, in that case, not the mystic and overawing thought that the Kingdom of God is in the breast of the individual, but that the beginnings of the Kingdom, as an outward organization, were already in the midst of the hearers. I hold that the right translation is "within," which seems to me to be far more in accordance than the other with the surrounding ideas. But, even if it were not, I should say that the mistranslation expresses the very essence of what Jesus intended by the Kingdom of God. The best guide to our Lord's meaning is to be found in the parables of the Kingdom; and some of the finest and most characteristic of these, like the Sower, the Pearl of Great Price, and the Leaven, all point to the experiences of the individual rather than to the fortunes of an organization. The Kingdom is, in short, the supremacy of the spiritual nature in the individual, and the victory of the spirit over the world, and St. Paul did not misapprehend the meaning of his Master, when he said: "The kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost."

This is the first point at which, in following the teaching of our Lord about the Kingdom of God, you obtain firm footing. The Kingdom exists wherever there is a human being in whom the lower nature has ceased to rule and the spirit has gained the supremacy; and the Kingdom grows as one is added to another of those in whom this experience has taken place. The deeper and more singular this experience is, the more completely are those who have passed through it separated from the world and identified with one another. Thus their unity is provided for, but not thus only. This experience transforms the whole aspect of humanity to him who has enjoyed it, because he sees in every other human being the possibility of all that has happened to himself. There is in this spiritual birth a

propagandist instinct. It is joyful in its nature, and joy radiates. It transforms the environment, penetrating the material of daily existence with its own spiritual glow; as we see in Home Mission work, where one of the difficulties actually arises from the fact that those who have been spiritually awakened so inevitably rise above their squalid surroundings and migrate to a more congenial neighbourhood.

But, when the experience of this spiritual change becomes rare and dim, and the progress of the Kingdom by the process of adding soul to soul is slow, then men begin to dream of wholesale ways of expanding the Kingdom, which comes to be regarded as something else than the communion of redeemed souls. At one time it is a Holy Roman Empire, at another the Christian nation of the Broad Churchman's imagination, at another the baptismal regeneration of the High Churchman, at another some philanthropic panacea, like popular education or the housing of the poor. But the distinctively Christian achievement is the power of summoning the soul out of its bondage to the flesh and the world. The test of Christian effort is not the expenditure of time and money, but the amount of resilience it awakens in the lost and the power it lends them of helping themselves. As has been said by one of the foremost philanthropists of this generation, whose special sphere of labour has been the housing of the poor, the problem is not to find better houses for the people but better people for the houses.

II.

Another interpretation of Christianity, also inspired by the social passion characteristic of our time, is that which makes it out to be the service of man, this being sharply contrasted with the service of God. Through long cycles of the history of the past mankind have lavished on the service of God all the strength of their emotions, considering no offering too expensive to propitiate the favour of Deity. But the proper object of passionate love and devotion, so

long supposed to reside in the distant heaven, is really at our side in this world: it is our brother man. The gods do not need us, but our fellow-men do.—To take pride in the grandeur and achievements of man, to pity his failures, to forecast and to further his progress—this is the true employment for the tenderness and enthusiasm which have been thrown away on imaginary beings. While it may be conceded that the worship of God and the faith of Christ have paved the way for the service of man by at least saving the unselfish emotions from the atrophy of absolute disuse, yet the ladder of religion, having served its purpose, may now with advantage be kicked away. We can now love man, not because God commands us to do so, or because the supposed incarnation of the Son of God has lent to the race a borrowed interest, but because man's own value has been discovered.

In this extreme and doctrinaire form the magnifying of the service of man belongs to those who are more or less direct adherents of the Comtist philosophy; but there are many who, without going so far, agree on the whole with this attitude of mind. They believe that the service of man is the essence of Christianity, and that whatever else it may contain is trivial in comparison. Jesus Himself, they contend, taught the priority of morality to religion—"If thou bring thy gift to the altar and there remember that thy brother hath aught against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift." In His great picture of the last day, in which mankind are represented as sheep and goats, deeds of brotherly kindness are accepted as an equivalent for all services to Himself. And, in the parable of the Good Samaritan, untutored human nature does the deed of magnanimity required, while the priest and the Levite—the men whose natural impulses have been perverted by the influence of religion—pass by on the other side.

It cannot be denied that there is a certain kind of service of God with which the service of man may be justly placed in contrast. The religion prevalent in Christ's own day was an instance in point. It was a religion in which the worshipper was kept far from the object of worship, the transaction at the altar being a performance of the priest in his stead. Everything depended on the punctual observance of ritual; and, the more gorgeous the display and the more frequent the celebration, the more acceptable was the worship supposed to be in the eyes of the Deity. So meritorious was the service of God that it released the worshipper even from the obligation to support his parents. This quantitative estimate of the value of worship has always been characteristic of the heathen religions, and in many an age, it cannot be denied, it has clung to the Christian faith. The Holy Eastern Church has been buried under mountains of ceremonial almost since its birth; and the Church of Rome will not easily purge itself of the reproach of trafficking in merit accumulated by mechanical acts of divine worship.

Against a service of God of this sort the entire life of Christ was a protest. He believed that it blinded men to the duty which they owed to their fellow-creatures by begetting in their minds an overweening estimate of their own relation to God. God is far less interested in ceremonial flattery paid to Himself than in helpful service rendered to His creatures. It is a terrible satire to think that in the name of Christ so much religion of this sort has prevailed and still prevails in the world. I do not think that Harnack, in his recently published book on *The Essence of Christianity*, goes too far when he says that the religion called by the name of Jesus has often been identical with the religion in opposing which He sacrificed His life.¹

¹ "Wo ist in der Verkündigung Jesu auch nur eine Spur davon zu finden, dass man religiöse Weihen als geheimnissvolle Applikationen über sich ergehen lassen soll, dass man ein Ritual pünktlich befolgen, Bilder aufstellen und

But, while thus dissociated from so much that has passed among men under the name of religion, Jesus lived and moved and had His being in the religion of the heart. His Father's name was constantly on His lips, and He seized every opportunity of escaping not only from His toil but from His popularity, that He might refresh His spirit by communion with Him. This religion, which is not a tribute paid to God, but a means of obtaining advantages for man, was the supreme blessedness of Jesus Himself, and He communicated it as the secret of blessedness to others. There has recently been a remarkable consensus among scholars of different schools in identifying as the one among His sayings which most adequately expresses His consciousness of Himself and His mission these words of purely religious import: "All things are delivered unto Me of My Father, and no man knoweth the Son but the Father; and no man knoweth the Father save the Son, and He to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him"; and the popular mind has always, by a sure instinct, regarded as the most significant of all His teaching the parable of the Prodigal Son, which is an account of how the lost soul and the lost race are brought back to God.

Such an accentuation of the service of God may appear to draw away attention from man; but it has really a direct bearing on human interests. The fatherhood of God has for its sequel the brotherhood of man. Jesus constantly lifts up the example of our Father in Heaven as a guide and spur to the service of man. "Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father in Heaven is merciful"; "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God"; "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which de-

Sprüche und Formeln in vorgeschriebener Weise murmeln soll? Um diese Art von Religion aufzulösen, hat sich Jesus Christus ans Kreuz schlagen lassen; nun ist sie unter seinem Namen und seiner Autorität wieder aufgerichtet"!—*Das Wesen des Christenthums*, p. 148.

spitefully use you and persecute you ; that ye may be the children of your Father who is in heaven ; for He maketh His sun to shine on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." But it is evident—though it is frequently forgotten—that the force with which the example of the Father will tell depends upon the religious condition of those to whom the appeal is made. It will have no effect whatever on such as are unreconciled to God, unacquainted with Him, and unaccustomed to pay any regard to His will. Its force is reserved for those who have come back to Him as prodigal children and are finding their blessedness in His fellowship. The Father's view of the world will gradually become that of His children, and His wishes about the condition and the destiny of mankind will be reproduced in their aspirations. What His concern is for the welfare of mankind in all its aspects, no reader of the words of Jesus can have any doubt ; and the same concern must spring up in the hearts of all who, by prayer and other forms of spiritual worship, are cultivating His intimacy.

Similar to the effects of such intimacy with the Father, is that of intimacy with Jesus Himself. The most obvious attempt at social organization which He made was the formation round Himself of the circle of the Twelve. This is the most undeniable proof which can be quoted of the importance attached by Him to social influences ; and I suppose it may be looked upon in some sense as the prototype and the justification of all Christian organizations since. One of the objects He had in view in bringing the Twelve together, there can be no doubt, was that they should impress one another ; and it would not be difficult to show that the play upon one another of so many diverse individualities, and especially the influence of the finer and more prominent spirits, had a very great effect in making the Twelve the figures they have become in the history of the world. But it is still more evident that this was

entirely subordinate to the impression made on them all by their Master, and that what they gave to each other was, for the most part, derived from Him. Their social value, in fact, was due to their connexion with Him. And this is the permanent law in the Kingdom founded by Christ in this world: the value of its members to the social system is measured by the closeness of their connexion with Him. When they ardently love and profoundly revere the Son of God, they see their fellow-creatures through His eyes, feel for them the sentiments of His heart, and cherish His aims on their behalf. Jesus made Himself the Friend of publicans and sinners, because, as the farmer sees the harvest in the seed and the gardener the glory of the summer in the root which is at present without form or comeliness, so He foresaw what they might become through His saving activity; and Christians, in so far as they possess the mind and spirit of Jesus, see in the humblest and even the wickedest of their fellow-creatures those who may yet reflect the perfect image of the Son of Man and shine as the stars for ever and ever.

George Eliot used to resent the idea that we should require any other motive for caring for our fellow-men but their own dignity and necessities. But it is by no means certain that man, if stripped of all connexion with higher beings, will command honour and sympathy. If he is only an ephemeral creature with no divine origin and no immortal destiny, what does it matter whether he suffers or is happy, whether he does well or ill?—it is by no means certain that this would not be the practical conclusion drawn by the general mind from the premises of unbelief. It is not more moral precepts we want: the world has always been well supplied with them. Even Christ's own, though by far the best, are not what we want supremely. The desideratum is a set of motives which will act so as to cause the precepts to be obeyed. This was why Jesus taught men the love of God and gave them such good

cause for loving Himself; for the future of the world is assured if men and women are learning to have the same mind and heart for their fellow-creatures as the Father and the Son have for them; and this new source of motive power is the grand contribution of Jesus to the solution of the social problem.

III.

The most outstanding product of the social passion characteristic of our age is undoubtedly Socialism itself; and it will help to bring out what is distinctive in the teaching of Jesus to compare its spirit with that of socialism.

There is a preliminary difficulty in the way, due to the extreme variety of ideas embraced within the name. Even in a book like Mr. Kirkup's there reigns a most irritating vagueness, which, however, is to be attributed not to his lack of the power of exposition, but to the indefiniteness of the systems which he has to expound. Everyone has felt how difficult it is to attach any distinct meaning to what is called Christian socialism; and the happy confusion of the general mind is well indicated in the remark of an eminent statesman, that, in one sense or another, we are all socialists nowadays.

But the pith of socialism lies, I fancy, in the importance it attaches to the economic basis of life. Man has certain natural rights; and the first of these is the right to live. Until the material basis of existence is assured, man is a nomad, in whom the social virtues cannot be developed. If you wish him to give his mind to his own improvement, or to impersonal aims or immortal hopes, you must first set him free from engrossing care about the satisfying of his hunger and the defence of his person from wind and weather. Nature, in her bounty, has provided enough for all, but it is ill-divided, the share of a few being too large even for their own good, while the share of the majority is miserably inadequate. The *status quo* is sanctioned by law and custom, but there is a vast difference

between law and equity. A redivision of the goods of the community is necessary, that all may share and share alike, or that, at least, there may be some tolerable approximation to equality.

The heart of socialism is the sense of the indispensable-ness and value of material comfort; and the doctrine may be stated in true and reasonable forms. But too frequently the soilure of earthiness clings to it. While the propertied classes are attacked for the greed which engrosses more than their own share, there is, too often, obvious in the very terms in which they are assailed the same spirit as that for which they are blamed; only in the one case it is the smug and complacent greed of those who have, and in the other the impotent and envious greed of those who have not. I have sat for a whole day in a convention of the International, when orators from all the great cities of Germany were haranguing a crowd of working men. The speeches were of remarkable oratorical excellence, but there was not in them one word to make a working man take any interest or pride in his work for its own sake, the string on which everyone harped being denunciation of the plutocracy for making away with more than their own share of the spoil, or dismal moralizing on the lot of those who have to slave in the sweat of their brows to keep up the fabric of a society by which they are despised and pillaged.

The economic contrasts in the society of Palestine in Christ's day do not seem to have been less cruel than they are at present; and His sayings abound in reflections on the lots of rich and poor. His sympathy for the poor is overflowing, and there is an edge of indignant severity in His references to the rich. He had compassion on the multitude; He fed the five thousand; in the company of the Twelve a bag was kept for the relief of the poor; while, on the contrary, in parables like the Rich Man and Lazarus and the Rich Fool He drew lurid pictures of the judgment of Heaven on the wealthy.

When, however, these sayings of Jesus are closely examined, it becomes apparent that they are not more in harmony with the spirit of socialism than they are with conventionality and plutocracy.¹

One contrast, especially, springs at once into notice—namely, the eschatological colouring of all Christ's teaching. Socialism is a doctrine of this world, and it is impatient of any mention of a world to come. To encourage the poor to seek an inheritance in heaven is to cheat them of the heritage to which they are entitled on earth: it is only a device of the wealthy, and of a Church which fawns upon wealth, to distract attention from the spoliation by which the poor are exploited. Jesus, on the contrary, always spoke as one native and familiar with the world to come. Not infrequently the statement may be read that it was for this world He legislated, and that He said comparatively little of another world. But the reverse is the case. Not only do His directly eschatological statements form a large proportion of all His sayings, but the eschatological atmosphere is in His teaching from beginning to end.

He pitied the poor, but chiefly because their excessive engrossment with what they were to eat and what they were to drink had made them oblivious of their heavenly destiny. His remedy for anxiety about food, clothing and shelter was, "Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things," and He taught all to pray for daily bread. He even said, "Blessed are ye poor," on the ground that the lack of earthly possessions might prove a stimulus to seek a better heritage in heaven. His indignation at the rich was not more due to their oppression of the poor than to their folly in preferring for themselves the gratifications which would last only for a day to those which would last forever; and the motive by which He con-

¹ "No teaching has been more potent in forcing the strong to yield to the weak, the rich to the poor, the noble to the lowly. But none the less is it true that Jesus is far less interested in the rights than in the obligations of men."

—SHAILER MATTHEWS, *The Social Teaching of Jesus*, p. 177.

strained the wealthy to make a benevolent use of their means was that the poor whom they assisted would welcome them into everlasting habitations.

Yet, though Jesus was thus apparently indifferent to points of view which to many in our day appear paramount, He really produced the most effective of all solutions of the social problem; and it is found precisely in that doctrine of another world which to many appears so irrelevant.

His doctrine of the Last Judgment puts a check on the selfishness and extravagance of the rich, for it teaches them that they will have to appear before a Judge who has no respect of persons and pays no regard to anything but character. They are but stewards of their means; and the one damning fault at His bar will be to have done nothing with their talents. In every poor person whom they have left unclothed, unfed and unvisited they will, on the great day, be made to recognise the Judge Himself. So much for the influence of the doctrine of the judgment on the minds of the wealthy. He does not promise to the poor, on that day, a corresponding reward for their poverty, except it has been incurred through suffering for His sake; but the doctrine of immortality itself is the most animating and elevating of all influences ever introduced into the minds of the poor. A poor man who believes in his own immortality cannot be a slave: he is able to stand up against the proudest tyrant, whose superior he may easily be in the judgment of Heaven. On the judgment day the positions will be reversed and all injustices redressed.

It is on this self-consciousness of man as man—as a spiritual, godlike and immortal being—that Jesus relies to alter the inequalities of society and at length to leaven the whole lump. For man in this character, however lowly be his lot, He challenges the respect of the mightiest. But especially He strives to evoke the latent powers and activities of the poor themselves. Their present blessedness in God and their prospect of immortal life, while rendering

them comparatively indifferent to the distressing elements of their earthly lot, yet impart to them a moral strength that overcomes the world. After all, as some one has said, the lever that moves this world has its fulcrum in the other world; and an individual or a class penetrated with faith in the value and the immortality of the soul, and in the Fatherhood and the judgment of God, is on the pathway even to earthly independence and prosperity.

The conclusion of the whole is, that the essence of the social teaching of Jesus lies in its supernatural elements—the value of the soul, the love of God, the immortality of man. The tendency of the present hour is to let these slip out of sight, if not to deny them, and to seek short cuts to human amelioration. In place of the awakening and the sanctification of the soul there is substituted the moulding influence of society; in place of the passion for human regeneration, due to the experience of redeeming grace, there is substituted a vague enthusiasm for humanity; and in place of the honour and glory surrounding man as an heir of immortality there is substituted the self-respect of an assured economic position. These ideas may, on account of their novelty, excite in some minds more enthusiasm than those of the Gospel; and, in spite of objectional elements, if they wish to baptize themselves with the name of Christ, they ought not to be forbidden, on the principle laid down by Christ Himself—he that is not against us is for us. Earnest Christians may even be stirred up to emulation by the sympathy and zeal of those who hold comparatively little of the Christian faith. Yet the old motives reach far deeper down than the new. Christianity will wither in the long run, if it tries to live on ideas derived only in a secondary sense from the Gospel; but the way to ensure that it will bring forth much fruit is to keep its roots continually steeped in the most native and characteristic ideas of its Founder. JAMES STALKER.