CHAPTER VII.

The Church and the Labor Question.

Come unto me, all ye that labor.—S. Matthew, 11:28.

We have seen how far plutocracy conflicts with the principles of democracy. We must now consider to what extent the principles of religion, and of Christianity in particular, are inconsistent with it. And we cannot look into the religious aspects of the question without seeing at once that the tenets of democracy—the doctrine of equal rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness—have their origin in the Christian law of doing to others as we would have them do to us, which law is itself the outcome of the deeper principle of love to neighbor; and that these profound ideas, while in their full flower they are distinctively Christian, show themselves more or less clearly in the religion of the Old Testament and in that of all the historic peoples. For the principles of religion and of democracy are one.

There are two theories of the Church: one that it is an institution for the salvation of individuals; the other that its object is the reclamation of the world. According to the former, my business is to save myself for a future life. I look forward to a selfish eternity of bliss, and all else is incidental. According to the latter, I must try to make the world better. Preoccupation with the idea of a future individual life has never tended to produce a high degree of justice in human affairs. Ancient Egypt gives us the best example of such a religion and civilization, for the Egyptians seem to have thought of little else but personal salvation. They believed that the life of the soul depended upon the preservation of the body, and the

entire activities of life seem to have been directed to the service of the dead. The shores of the Nile are strewn with the grandest ruins of the earth, and they all have relation to death. All of them—pyramids, obelisks, temples—are the remnants of tombs and cemeteries, and the homes of the living must have been insignificant in comparison. Whole tribes were devoted to the task of embalming corpses. The great artists of the day (and they had great artists) were content to do their best work in the interior of tombs where it would be forever alone in the dark with the dead.

The costliest jewels, the finest fabrics, the choicest perfumes, the best examples of the cunning of potter and artificer, were buried in sepulchres, and the whole empire seems to have been one vast undertaking establishment. If absorption in the thought of a future life is the essence of religion, then were the Egyptians the most religious of peoples. And what effect did it have upon their conduct to their fellow-men? Alas, we know too well! Their own sculptures tell the tale of oppression. It was slavery of the worst kind under the lash of the taskmaster, that filled Egypt with mighty monuments. And we read the same story in the Pentateuch—the story of the cruel bondage of the Israelites, which has become the very type and exemplar of industrial tyranny. Moses evidently saw the evil effects of turning the minds of men away from this world, and in the books ascribed to him we find no hint of a world to come. It was evidently his opinion that true religion concentrates itself on the present; and that to do right and be right now, is the best security for being right forever. At any rate, the Ten Commandments deal exclusively with this world. Jesus sums them up in love for God and love for neighbor, both of them present obligations; and in the Lord's Prayer he never wanders away from the present tense, and there is not a word in it of "going to heaven when I die"—that most natural of prayers for the man who craves individual salvation—nor any sign of solicitude for the future. If we enter the kingdom

of heaven now, we are likely to stay there forever; and it is no distant future spiritual state, but it should be within us, on earth as it is in heaven, and we cannot be good Christians and live in a state of injustice, enjoying plenty while our neighbors are in want. We are safe, then, in concluding that the labor question is pre-eminently a religious question.

And the Bible is full of it. We need not go back to the account of the Fall, wherein man is told that he shall eat bread in the sweat of his face; but if we begin with the history of the Israelites we shall find that it was the labor question which created the nation and gave them a national church. It was a strike—the first strike on record—that of the oppressed brickmakers of the Delta, that was the occasion of the founding of the Hebrew Commonwealth and Church; and as the Christian Church sprang from the Hebrew, it too may trace its origin to the same source. It was a contest between capital and labor of the ordinary kind. "And the Egyptians made the children of Israel to serve with rigor, and they made their lives bitter with hard bondage, in mortar and in brick, and in all manner of service in the field." (Exodus, 1:13-14.) It was the desire for easier work and shorter hours, for industrial justice, that drove the Hebrews out into the desert; and their great leaders, Moses the lawgiver, general and ruler, and Aaron the high-priest, began their notable careers by exercising the functions of labor leaders—of walking delegates, if you will—before Pharaoh, the employer of their people. And it is only natural that the Law of Moses should deal largely with economic conditions. The Ten Commandments, we are told, were given out shortly after the escape of the Israelites from their taskmasters, and we find the longest statute of all (the Fourth Commandment) devoted to the establishment of a day of rest. This is a labor statute, pure and simple. We sometimes imagine that the Sabbath was designed for the honor of God, and we designate

our substitute for it as the "Lord's Day"; but this is a great mistake. Christ tells us that the Sabbath was made for man; and if we accepted his view of it we should call it "Man's Day." Fancy the position of the Israelitish fugitives. They had just escaped a terrible industrial tyranny, and in their first law they give the largest place to a statute providing that no man should work more than six days in the week. In Egypt they had worked seven days in the week (there is no day of rest now in the Twentieth Century for the fellaheen of the Delta), and what a natural thing it was for them to raise to a position of distinction in their Constitution the idea of repose from labor! This restriction of the days of work to six is an excellent precedent for an eight-hour day. The principle is the same. If idleness may be prescribed for certain days, so may it with equal reason for certain hours. And yet the Supreme Court of Illinois has declared a law unconstitutional which limited the hours of work for women in factories, on the ground that it infringed their right to life, liberty and property! The women of Illinois can thank the Constitution for the inestimable privilege of working twenty-four hours a day! Is it not a parody on justice to decide a case in favor of a corporation and against its employes, and then pretend, in the language of the opinion of the Court, that the decision is in favor of the latter? A few years ago an enterprising member introduced the Ten Commandments as a bill in the legislature of Kansas. I have never heard what its fate was, but if it passed, the Fourth Commandment prescribing a six days' week would have to be held unconstitutional according to the ruling in Illinois!

Already at the time of the promulgation of the Ten Commandments we see taking form and substance the ruling thought of the Hebrew race, the thought of the "Promised Land." All their religious visions centered in the picture of a rich and abundant soil, "flowing with milk and honey," equally shared by every descendant of Jacob. We

must remember that at that early day justice was not extended to foreigners. The laws of Lycurgus, for example, were absolutely impartial to the Spartans, but they left the slaves, the Helots, unprotected and unprovided for. We cannot well criticise this—we who, while we pronounced the most eloquent sentiments of brotherhood and equality in our Declaration of Independence, held a nation of slaves in subjection, and who still at the present time deny all rights worth speaking of to Indians and Filipinos. It is no wonder then that Moses restricted in part his grand ideas of justice to his own race, although in the books which bear his name there are some noble passages which show that at their best the ancient Hebrews could attain to the conception of universal brotherhood; such for instance as the following: "Love ye therefore the stranger, for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt." (Deuteronomy, 10:19.) This dream of the "Promised Land," I say, which so dominated the soul of the race, this paradise of justice on earth which the chosen people were to enjoy, reveals itself in the Ten Commandments. In the Fifth Commandment we read: "Honor thy father and thy mother that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee." "The land which the Lord thy God giveth *thee*"—what pregnant words these are! Note the singular number. Each individual is entitled to his part in that land. We often speak of "our country" when we have no right to a square foot of it. Is it not absurd for a landless man to sing,

My country, 'tis of thee?*

We repeat the Ten Commandments in our Sunday Schools. Suppose (as I have heard suggested) some bright child, after reciting the Fifth

*Compare the words of Tiberius Gracchus as given by Plutarch: "The private soldiers fight and die to advance the wealth and luxury of the great, and they are called masters of the world, while they have not a foot of ground in their possession." (Life of Tiberius Gracchus. Plutarch.)

Commandment, should ask his teacher where the land was that God had given him; what would the teacher answer? He would have to tell him that others have taken his land away; that when we say such things we do not mean them, and that our religion, when it comes down to the things of this earth, is a farce and a sham. Moses meant what he said; we do not—that is the difference between a live religion and a dead one.

And with what wisdom Moses and his successors carried out the principle of equal rights in land implied by this commandment! They developed the idea of the Fourth Commandment, which as we have seen was a labor statute, into a complete system of industrial and agrarian justice, and made the Sabbath the basis of that system. Each seventh year was to be a sabbatical year, and field and vineyards were to remain unsown and unpruned; "it is a year of rest unto the land." (Leviticus, 25.) After seven such weeks of years came the year of jubilee, and in that fiftieth year every piece of land returned to its original possessor. It was to be a year of freedom! "And ye shall hallow the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof; it shall be a jubilee unto you, and ye shall return every man unto his possession, and ye shall return every man unto his family." All sales of land were made upon this understanding, and no Israelite could permanently disinherit himself from the soil. "The land shall not be sold forever, for the land is mine; for ye are strangers and sojourners with me." No Hebrew was to hold another as a slave; he might bind him over to serve as a hired servant, but even then he was to go free in the year of jubilee. And this word "Jubilee," meaning freedom to the Jews, has come in England to mean a day when armed men, fresh from subjugating feeble peoples, march up and down the streets in martial array and receive the blessing of a degenerate church! But the Jubilee and the Sabbath stood for the ancient Jew as the symbol of

social justice and mercy; while in our day they have become a mere fetish, entirely divorced from all considerations of the kind; and our Sabbath has become a mere formal recognition of a future life which makes no uncomfortable demands upon our present economic relations.

That these wise laws of the Mosaic code were ever, or for any long period, carried out according to their intent, is extremely doubtful. The "Promised Land" was never such a Utopia as its projectors had dreamed, and it never is; but the grand ideal of a free people in a free land was always before the loftiest minds of Israel. The Psalmist often raises up his voice on behalf of the poor and oppressed: "The wicked in his pride doth persecute the poor; let them be taken in the devices that they have imagined. . . Arise, O Lord; O God, lift up thy hand; forget not the humble." (Psalms, 10:2 and 12.) In another place he tells us that "the heaven, even the heavens, are the Lord's, but the earth he hath given to the children of men." (Psalms, 115:16.) The prophets are not unmindful of the lost rights of the people in the land. When King Ahab and his wicked wife, Jezebel, coveted the vineyard of Naboth to make a garden of herbs of it as it adjoined his palace, the owner answered with all the the pride of an Israelite who knew the privileges to which he was entitled under the law: "The Lord forbid it me, that I should give the inheritance of my fathers unto thee." And when they had compassed his death and had seized the estate, the prophet Elijah came and denounced the King to his face. The main function of the prophets was that of social reformers; of representatives of the oppressed people; of leaders in the protest against tyranny of all kinds. The spirit of revolt and rebellion against despotism and injustice breathes throughout their utterances, and the popular idea that they spent most of their time in making obscure guesses at particular future events is altogether beside the mark. They held up the ideal of a perfect commonwealth when the

whole world "shall beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." (Isaiah, 2:4.) The kingdom of David should be established "with judgment and with justice from henceforth even forever." (Isaiah, 9:7.) Isaiah, whom we have just quoted, was the grandest of this noble line of men. "Woe unto them," he cries, "that join house to house, that lay field to field, till there be no place, that they may be placed alone in the midst of the earth." (Isaiah, 5:8.) "Ye have eaten up the vineyard; the spoil of the poor is in your houses. What mean ye that ye grind my people to pieces, and grind the faces of the poor? saith the Lord God of hosts." (Isaiah, 3:14-15.) And in the 65th chapter of Isaiah (whose author may indeed have been a second Isaiah, as great as the first) we read: "They shall build houses and inhabit them, and they shall plant vineyards and eat the fruit of them. They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat." (Verses 21-22.) Amos is equally emphatic in his arraignment of those "who store up violence and robbery in their palaces." "And I will smite the winter house with the summer house, and the houses of ivory shall perish, and the great houses shall have an end, saith the Lord." (Amos, 3:10 and 15.)

Under the teaching of the prophets the people gradually formed the hope and expectation of the coming of a great king who should make justice to reign on earth and usher in a state of universal peace. This was the "Messiah," the "Anointed One," who through Israel was to reform the world. These prophecies Jesus took to himself, and the word "Christ" is the Greek translation of "Messiah" or "anointed." The Messiah was to be a great reformer on earth, and Jesus in taking that name assumed the same role. His kingdom, the "kingdom of heaven," or "kingdom of God," was to be established in this world; it was "within you;" his disciples were to pray that it might

"come on earth as it is in heaven;" it was "at hand." It had to do with this present life just as clearly as the laws of Moses and the Messiah of the prophets. The very word "Gospel" is taken from Christ's sermon at Nazareth, where, quoting from Isaiah, he announces that he has been "anointed to preach good tidings to the poor." (Luke, 4:18.) "Gospel" is old English for "good tidings;" "anointed," as we have seen, means "Messiah" and "Christ"; and thus in this one sentence taken from the greatest prophet we behold Jesus accepting the mission of the anointed Messiah and expressly addressing it to "the poor." If we turn back to the passage in Isaiah (61:1) and the verses immediately preceding and following it, we shall see that it has exclusive reference to a golden age on earth. "Thy people also shall be righteous; they shall inherit the land forever." Justice, justice on earth, is the burden of the Golden Rule and the natural fruit of loving your neighbor as yourself. Jesus and his disciples were themselves members of the working class, and they naturally saw the injustice from which they suffered, and much of their teaching was directed against the exactions of the rich.

The first fruits of Christian preaching after the crucifixion was an experiment in communism at Jerusalem, an indication of the natural outcome of the doctrines of Jesus; and it is a noteworthy fact that the great Christian feast, the "Communion," means "communism." St. Barnabas in his epistle (undoubtedly an authentic work) says: "Thou shalt communicate to thy neighbor of all thou hast; thou shalt not call anything thine own; for if ye partake in such things as are incorruptible, how much more should ye do it in things that are corruptible?" (Barnabas, 14:16.) And the early fathers of the church repeatedly urged that the brotherhood of men implied by the fatherhood of God was not to be confined to the world to come, but ought to show itself in the distribution of the products of nature and labor in this. Clement of Alexandria, Ambrose and Chrysostom

were especially insistent upon this view of Christian "communion." Lactantius in his "Divine Institutes" (circ. 300 A. D.) says: "God has given the earth in common to all, that they might pass their life in common, not that mad and raging avarice might claim all things for itself; and that that which was produced for all might not be wanting to any." (Lactantius, "Divine Institutes," book v, chap. 5, "Ante-Nicene Fathers," vol. vii, 140-141.) But unfortunately this preaching had little permanent effect, and Christianity made the serious mistake of postponing the "promised land" to a future existence, and confining its practice of Christian "communion" in this life to a brief ecclesiastical ceremony.

Enough has been said to show that religion has a vital connection with the labor question. I might quote from the Hindoo and Chinese sages, I might show how ideas of justice inspired the religions of Greece and Rome and how their Golden Age was also an age of equity and equality, but it would not make the fact any more clear. The labor question is a religious question, and the churches must face it frankly if they are to retain their hold upon mankind. The promise of justice in a future world ill becomes the lips of those who deny it in this. And incidentally we may remark that unjust social conditions have a tendency to distort all our plainest ethical precepts, a fact of which the church should take cognizance. Luxury is in itself a vice, but when we have an army of unemployed suffering from hunger and cold, it becomes a virtue to "give them work," and any expenditure, however foolish, seems to be justified. It may be indeed only a seeming justification, for every outlay of money should bless spender and recipient alike, and the thing bought should be useful and edifying; but at any rate the belief that we are employing people who need employment is an easy salve for the conscience, which might be shocked otherwise at the idea of devoting many thousands of dollars to a single entertainment, and this salve can only be applied

when there are unemployed men needing employment. By the same system of reasoning the destruction of wealth becomes a virtue, and the man who should empty cargoes of goods into the sea or burn down a city would be a public benefactor, for he would give work to the unemployed.* And in like manner a wholesale murderer would bless the community, for he would either remove the unemployed or provide places for them by removing the employed. This may seem to be fanciful argument, but it is really the one which is used often in excuse of war. War, by its destruction of life and property, always stimulates business, but the stimulation is due to the unemployed whom it sets to work. Again, useful labor ought to be a good thing for the community, but in the presence of the unemployed it becomes a curse, for every day's work that I perform takes away a day's work from some one else, and the man who digs potatoes and hoes Indian corn, while supplying food, is really taking food out of another man's mouth, and it becomes meritorious to be idle for those who can afford to avoid work. Plainly, if our moral standards are to be preserved, the church must do something to find work for the unemployed.

But what can the church do? It is not its place to teach political economy, and it would be likely to err if it did. This is true, but it might find some hints for its guidance in the Bible upon which it stands. It tells us that God is our father, and that "the earth he hath given to the children of men." The land question is then the question of division of inheritance, and the Golden Rule points to equality as the rule of division. It may help us to understand this matter if we imagine ourselves studying another planet. Some scientific men have supposed that we might be able in the future to communicate with the inhabitants of the planet Mars. Let us suppose

*Since writing the above paragraph it has been verified by the burning of cotton in the South by planters, in order to raise the price of that staple.

that our telephone has made the connection, and that our first question is, "Do you, inhabitants of Mars, nine-tenths of you, pay rent to the other tenth for the privilege of remaining upon the planet when you could not get off it, if you tried?" Clearly there is something to be said for a new arrangement of land ownership and possession. We have seen how the principle of equal rights in land was recognized by Moses and his code of law. We can hardly be accused of being too progressive in this matter, if we go no farther than he did so many centuries ago. His system was indeed imperfect and would not be applicable to modern times, but we must find a just system of our own. The church can teach the principle of equal rights in God's gifts, and leave it to men of affairs to find the method of applying it.

And how foolish our present system is! Take a valuable piece of land on Broadway or Fifth avenue in New York. Not many years ago it was a swamp perhaps, or covered with worthless rock, affording a precarious subsistence to the nomadic goat. What has turned it into a gold mine? The owner has had nothing to do with it. He may have been crying in his nurse's arms, or playing baccarat at Monte Carlo, or serving a term in Sing Sing prison; but still the shower of coin is falling upon his land, and he, and he alone, can shovel it up. He did not make his land. Who did? It was the Creator. To whom did he give it? To the "owner" or his grantor? Let him produce his title-deeds then and trace them back to the source. No, the land belongs to the human race, and not one human being should be left without a stake in it. And this usurpation of the property of the whole by private individuals lies at the bottom of all our social injustices, and under every fountain of profit we find the landlord's pail.

There is another explanation of human economic misery—that associated with the name of the Rev. Thomas Malthus—namely, that population tends to increase faster than the means of subsist-

ence, and that hence it is a man's own fault if he has children who cannot take care of themselves. This might become a practical question if the world were overpopulated, but as a matter of fact, its entire present population could be contained in the State of Texas, and could be well provided for in a single continent. The inheritance is large enough for every child that will appear for many a day to come. Nor is it likely that this question of overpopulation will ever become a pressing one, for civilization decreases the size of families, and it is the pauper class that is the least provident in this respect; and as the standard of living rises we may expect families to grow smaller. Whether in a socialist or communist society the same rule would prevail, has often been disputed; but if mankind ever manifests a sufficiently strong spirit of co-operation to live together as brothers. it will doubtless be accompanied by an equally strong spirit of prudence. Meanwhile it is amusing to listen to our statesmen as they deplore "race suicide" (as in France and America), and at the same time shudder at the prospect of overpopulation.

But the chief work of the church in relation to the labor question must be the awakening of that spirit of co-operation, of brotherhood, of love, which is to be the motive power of the new society, and which sums up the law and the prophets. Let us not be deceived into supposing that this is not a practical matter. It is as practical as the generation of steam is to a steam engine, and without it the best institutions will fail. Heat is the material representative of love, and it too is "only a feeling," but it is none the less the force that keeps the earth in its orbit and produces all life and energy. There is profound wisdom in the old nursery tale (as in many other folk tales) which relates how the sun and the wind had a contest with each other to see which could tear off the cloak from the shoulders of a traveler on the highway. First the wind tried, and it blew up a veritable hurricane; but the more it blew the

tighter the man wrapped his cloak about him, and at last the wind had to abandon the task. Then the sun took it up, and began to send forth hotter and hotter rays until the temperature was scarcely bearable, and the wayfarer soon began to unwind the folds of his cloak and at last removed it altogether, and the wind was obliged to acknowledge that the sun was the victor. It is not impossible that in like manner, after we have tried in vain to dislodge the cloak of privilege from the backs of the "upper classes" by means of the gusts of legislation (and indeed wind and legislation usually go together), and after seeing the cloak fastened only the more securely upon them—it is not altogether impossible that on some fine day we may bethink ourselves to have recourse to the quiet, steady sun, and simply turn on the heat of good fellowship and learn wisdom from the little fairy tale. It is only another form of the Bible anecdote (there is plenty of wisdom in the Bible, too) which tells of the old prophet who had sense enough to see that the Lord was not in the wind, nor in the whirlwind, but in the still small voice.

And in preaching the new brotherhood feeling which is to be the dynamo of our social machinery, the church may discover a great new commandment (which is in fact a form of the old one, "Thou shalt not steal"); and the new commandment is, "Thou shalt not live on others' labor." And to hold up that principle and develop it to its logical conclusions, will, I think, give enough practical work in connection with the labor question to occupy the church for a long time to come.