

The Western Churchman

A JOURNAL DEVOTED TO THE INTERESTS OF THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND IN MANITOBA AND THE WEST

Vol. 2—No. 2.

WINNIPEG, JANUARY 14, 1897.

PRICE 5c.

PUBLISHERS' NOTICE

The Western Churchman is published every Thursday. Communications for insertion, and copy for advertisements should be in the office not later than eight o'clock.

Correspondence is invited on subjects bearing on the interests of the Church of England in Manitoba and the West.

Annual subscription \$1.50 (if paid in advance \$1.00). Single copies 5c each. Matter for the Editorial Department should be addressed to REV. R. C. JOHNSTONE, 184 McDermott Street, Winnipeg, Man.

All business communications, money orders, etc., should be sent to
 THE COLONIST PUBLISHING COMPANY,
 H. S. White, J. J. Roberts, P. O. Box 1351

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CHARLES KINGSLEY AND THE SOCIALISTIC MOVEMENT.

In the year 1848, a social hurricane swept over Europe, and compelled even the most powerful governments to look to themselves, lest they should become involved in a mighty political upheaval. The struggle between capital and labor had reached such a climax that a continuance of the existing state of things could only culminate in Revolution. The position of the poor was deplorable. The upper classes and those in power were, as a class, callous and apathetic: they seemed either not to care, or to be unable to deal with the prevailing evil. In London, Eng., workmen banded themselves together, and demanded the redress of their grievances, and, had not a few wise and good men come to the front and set themselves to guide the Chartists, there undoubtedly would have been a deluge of spoliation and bloodshed.

Looking back on these days, some of us may perhaps be inclined to regard these poor men as wild fanatics, who did not want to labor, but sought a Utopian life of ease and comfort without contributing any equivalent therefor, and, we mayhap condemn the stand they took for what they believed to be their rights. If, however, we look at the whole story from a fair and impartial standpoint, we shall see that,

while some of the methods adopted were wrong, decidedly wrong, still, there was a real need for reform. Workmen everywhere had grievances of a most serious kind—they had just cause for rising up against the tyranny and oppression to which they were subjected. Among those who fully realized the position of affairs, and sympathized with the sufferers, there was no one more in earnest—no one who did more—than Charles Kingsley, rector of the little country village of Eversley. When the news of the Chartist rising reached him, he set out for the Metropolis, and threw himself, heart and soul, into the struggle. During the height of the crisis, he worked incessantly for the cause. While his dear ones were sleeping peacefully in their quiet country home, he was “burning the midnight oil,” writing letters and placards, which would direct the poor Chartists in their desperation, and keep them from the commission of crime. How wonderfully wise and beautiful were the letters of “Parson Lot,” as Kingsley signed himself! How calmly and deliberately did he speak amid an atmosphere of turmoil and passion! His well balanced mind could appreciate both sides of the question: and so we find him counselling patience, deliberation, and peaceful, orderly measures. He bids them look into themselves, and see if they should not begin the work of reformation by reforming themselves. “Be fit to be free,” he says, “and God Himself will set you free.” And then he closes his letter in the powerful words of the Sweet Singer of Israel, “Commit thy way unto the Lord, and he shall bring it to pass.” What he preached he practised. Men saw that, and so his words acted like a charm; for, without doubt, it was to him and a few friends who rallied round him, that London owed its freedom from a social revolution.

It was many a day before the intellect, and influence, and power of England recognized the greatness of his work, but now, wherever the Saxon tongue is spoken, the name of Charles Kingsley is revered and honored as that of a man who was a God-sent leader of the people, a man who feared no man however high in power, and who did not hesitate to attack any system, when fully convinced that it was based on a false foundation. His was Christian socialism of the purest kind, a socialism which