

OUR CONTRIBUTORS.

THE LAW OF CHRIST AS APPLIED TO THE ORDINARY BUSINESS OF LIFE.

The following address, the first half of which appeared in the present issue of THE PRESBYTERIAN, was delivered at Leicester, by the Rev. John M. Gibson, of St. John's Wood, London. The clear and forcible presentation of timely truths, characteristic of its author, will be read with much interest:

The law of Christ is more than mere morality. A law of righteousness it is; and so far it is coincident with the universally accepted code of morals. But over and above the law of righteousness there rises another law, which is distinctively the law of Christ. This is the law of love in two great branches: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind," and "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." No one doubts that common morality should rule the Christian and everybody else in the ordinary business of life; and therefore we need not spend any time in insisting on the claims of the law of Christ so far as it coincides with the other; it is of the higher law of love that we must speak. It will be at once seen, then, that our subject is not what is generally understood as "commercial morality." I firmly believe that we shall never have the right kind of commercial morality till men take the higher standard suggested by the subject before us, and insist not only on that righteousness which no one disputes, but also on that love which very few acknowledge as binding in the ordinary business of life. It is true, indeed, that while men in general are sound enough in theory as to commercial morality, they are very far from being as universally sound in practice; and therefore there is abundant scope for the most strenuous enforcement of common honesty and integrity; occasion enough, and quite too much, for urging and urging again the duty of fair and square dealing as between man and man; and such appeals can be properly enough made, and ought to be made, in the name of Christ and of Christianity; but the question comes, whether, while not neglecting this, there may not be something better for us to do. You will have observed how little, comparatively, Christ has to say about common honesty. It may be said, indeed, that trade and commerce did not bulk at all so largely in Palestine life as they do in ours; and yet they did constitute so large a part of it that it would have been unpardonable to omit them or pass them lightly by. Besides, Christ was legislating, not for Palestine alone, but for the world; and not for that century alone, but for all the coming centuries; and therefore we must seek some other explanation of what to some might appear a strange omission or neglect.

We cannot do better, probably, than examine with this view the Sermon on the Mount. That sermon may be fairly considered a summary of the law of Christ. It has been aptly called by Dr. Dykes, "the Manifesto of the King;" and while it is by no means a legislative code in the proper sense of the term, it is a summary of principles of wide enough range to cover all the common relations of life. Now, if we were to ask what place commercial morality has in that code, what would be the answer? Those who take low ground on the subject would probably say, "No place at all." The main substance of it is an exposition of the righteousness of the kingdom; and yet the one commandment which directly covers the ground of commercial morality is deliberately passed by. The eighth commandment is not even mentioned. The Great Lawgiver of the new covenant deals with all the rest of the second table of the law, but omits all reference to the one commandment which some people now-a-days seem to consider "the be all and end-all" of morality. What is the reason? A careful reading of what follows will suggest that it is because He has something better to say. He has something more efficient in reserve. He sees that the tenth commandment gives a far stronger leverage than the eighth, and so He urges and presses it, not only in its own light, but in the light of "the first and great commandment," warning us against "laying up treasures on the earth;" warning us against attempting to "serve God and mammon;" warning us against too much anxiety as to the supply of our bodily wants, and closing a long and sustained appeal by the positive rule, "Seek ye first the king-

dom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." It is in this large and wise way that he deals with the ordinary life, lifting it out of the region of mere morality and setting it in the full light of "the first and great commandment" of the law of love; and then, further on, He urges a similarly high standard in the light of "the second, which is like unto it," when he lays down the golden rule, "Therefore, whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them; for this is the law and the prophets." Thus we see that he does not omit or neglect the ordinary business of life, but gets at it in a way of his own. This method is constantly kept up throughout all his teaching. Instead of treating of business relations on the lower ground of square dealing, he always tries to lift men up to the higher ground. When a certain man comes to him with the appeal, "Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me," he not only will not interfere, but He uses the opportunity not, as might have been expected, for the enforcement of square dealing, but for an earnest warning against covetousness. "He said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness; for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." So it is all the way through. He by no means undervalues honesty, but he lays far greater stress on having a heart set on higher things than money or any earthly possession. He lays the axe at the root of the upas tree. He plants his danger-signal not at the spot where the ice ends and the water begins, but at the place where the ice begins to get thin. He treats not the mere symptoms, but the deep-seated disease within. And his example is faithfully followed by His apostles. Their warnings against covetousness are far more frequent than against dishonesty. And even when honesty is urged, it is larger and loftier honesty than is involved in mere fair dealing. It has in it the idea of nobility and honour, as well as of mere justice. They did not make it a matter of exchange of money, or of that which money represents, as our modern moralists are so apt to do, but of "the love of money." It was the root they were aiming at. And even when they do look at the matter from the lower point of view, how naturally they rise to the higher; as when the apostle, writing to the Roman Christians, says, "Owe no man anything, but love one another; for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. . . . Love worketh no ill to his neighbour; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law."

We find, then, that the method of Christ and His apostles was one which, while assuming and requiring the broad basis of righteousness in all things, specially urged the law of love in both its branches as the true leverage by which even the commonest morality in the business of life could be most effectively secured. Is the method a sound one? Is it still applicable and likely to be effective in all the complexity of the business life of the nineteenth century? This is our main question; and a very important one it is. There are those who emphatically say "No;" and we must listen to what they have to urge. There is, first, what may be called the objection of the average business man. It may be thus expressed: "Business is business, and must be conducted on strictly business principles, according to the law of demand and supply, and the common-sense rule of buying in the cheapest and selling in the dearest market. This talk about the law of love is all very well for 'pulpit eloquence,' or pulpit twaddle, as the case may be; on 'Change it must be 'Every man for himself, and—' well, instead of finishing the adage in the rather rough way which shows what is the fate of 'the hindmost,' we shall give the modern equivalent, and call it 'the survival of the fittest.' And the use of this scientific phrase reminds us that, besides the objection of the average business man, there is that of the sociologist, which, however, is just the old popular objection put into scientific form. It is fully and ably set forth by Mr. Herbert Spencer, especially in his "Data of Ethics," where according to himself, he shows to a demonstration that the Christian law is not only inapplicable to the ordinary business of life, but would be positively ruinous to society if it were actually carried out. It may be well to quote some of his own words, premising that by "egoism" he means the doctrine "Every man for himself," and by "altruism" the doctrine, "Every man for his neighbour," which, according to him is the Christian doctrine. He says: "It does not seem to be suspected that pure altruism is actually wrong. Brought up as each is in

the nominal acceptance of a creed which wholly subordinates egoism to altruism and gives sundry precepts that are absolutely altruistic, each citizen, while ignoring these in his business and tacitly denying them in various opinions he utters, daily gives them to lip-homage, and supposes that acceptance of them is required of him though he finds it impossible. Feeling that he cannot call them in question without calling in question his religion as a whole, he pretends to others and to himself that he believes them—believes things which in his innermost consciousness he knows he does not believe. He professes to think that entire self-sacrifice must be right, though dimly conscious that it would be fatal." ("Study of Sociology," International Series, p. 184.)

The enormous mistake on which this criticism is based is due to a confusion of ideas between what is required of a Christian as toward God and what is required as toward his fellow man. It is true that we are asked to surrender ourselves implicitly and entirely to God. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind." If this is "pure altruism," it is an altruism which can never do any harm in the most complex state of society, but will always and in all circumstances secure the highest possible welfare both of the individual and of society. Let a man implicitly and fully surrender himself to God—to obey His commandments, to do His will, to live for his glory—and it will be the best for the man himself, the best for his family, the best for his friends, the best for his enemies, the best for the society in which he lives, the best for the world at large. Would that all mankind were only altruistic after this fashion, and the great problem of sociology and of Christianity would be finally and fully solved. There would be a heaven upon earth! But the scientific critic of the law of Christ seems to know nothing of this kind of altruism. The altruism he is thinking of is the surrender of everybody to his neighbour: and no intelligent Christian needs to be told that there is no such surrender asked of us by the law of Christ. "Thou shalt love thy neighbour." How? With the whole heart? No. "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." This, as we are told, is the sum of the second table of the law, which has to do with our duty to our neighbour. And what a grievous misrepresentation of it are the words above quoted. And still more so, when our critic goes on to say that it calls us to the "continual giving up of pleasures and continual submission to pains," "so that its final outcome is debility, disease, and abridgment of life." There are, indeed, some exhortations here and there in the New Testament which seem open to this kind of criticism, if literally pressed; but the difficulty entirely disappears if we look at the evident spirit of them; and this is what both Christ and his apostles remind us we must do. For instance: "Look not every man on his own things; but every man also on the things of others." Here the first part seems to forbid attention to our own interests, while the second summons us to attend to the interests of others. But does not the word "also" show clearly that a proper attention to our own interests is taken for granted as a thing of course (as may be very safely done)? "Look not every man on his own things; but every man also on the things of others."

It is abundantly clear that the spirit of it is to caution us against seeking after our own interests to the disregard of the interests of our neighbours. And surely this is good enough social doctrine. It is not at all at variance with the strictest social science. And then, lest any should be disposed to run into the altruistic extreme, of which the critic is afraid, have we not such reminders as this: "If any provide not for his own, and especially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel." Thus we find that the scientific objection to the Christian law of love does not deal fairly with the second commandment of the law, and, what is still worse, leaves out of sight the first commandment, which takes precedence of the second, and therefore, of course, modifies its application. Such objections are valid against certain systems of modern humanitarianism, but they have no force whatever against the Christian law of love. So much for the scientific objection. But a little more may be said on the practical difficulties of the average business man. There are, undoubtedly, quite conscientious and excellent business men who do not see how the law of love can be carried into ordinary business. Let us, then, investigate a little