

THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH AND THE SOCIAL PROBLEM.

By Alfred E. Garvie, D.D.

A question which is much discussed in Great Britain is whether the Christian Church should or should not bear its testimony or use its influence in regard to the Social Problem. On the one hand there are some who in the interests of what they regard as the spirituality of the Church depreciate and even denounce any part that the Church may take in public affairs. They appeal to the New Testament to justify the position of aloofness which they advocate. They point out that Jesus refused to settle a dispute about property, that He was careful not to allow His Messiahship to degenerate into leadership in a movement of political emancipation, that the Apostolic Church submitted as far as conscience allowed, to existing authority in Jewish church and Roman state, and attempted no social reform, such as the abolition of slavery. On the other hand, there are many who maintain that the Modern Church has a place in, and so has an obligation to the society around it such as the Apostolic Church had not; and insist that Christian thought and life are progressive and adaptable, and that, therefore, the continuity of the Christian experience and character does not depend on external imitation of even the Apostolic age. They further argue that the aloofness of the Apostolic Church from ancient pagan society was accidental as due to local and temporary conditions, and not essential as resulting from the character and function of the Christian Church as such in the world. A church in a hostile persecuting society has not the same opportunities, and consequent obligations, as a church in a society so far Christian that it can be potentially influenced by the church's activeness and work. They admit that the participation of the Church in the affairs of the world does involve the peril that the salt may lose its savor; but they contend that the risk must be run, for must not the leaven be put in the lump if the whole is to be leavened? The revelation of God's Fatherhood in Christ implies, it is contended, man's brotherhood; and as that brotherhood is made a reality in human society in manners, morals, laws and institutions, will the Fatherhood also be more fully revealed. The first commandment—to love God absolutely—