CHAPTER XIII.

SOCIAL-ETHICAL TRENDS.

UNDER the term socialism have been comprehended various schemes which, though differing in points of greater or less importance, take a common view of the claims of industrial labour, of the method by which equalisations of condition and opportunity are to be realised, and of the readjustment of society to be effected through the corporate action of the State. But, as has already been remarked, many who cannot accept either all the principles on which these systems are built up, or all the conclusions to which they lead, are yet in sympathy with some of the ideas that pervade them, and it is proposed, in this chapter, to consider certain social-ethical trends in which this sympathy is expressed.

In using the phrase social-ethical, the limitations of our survey will be recognised. It is not the intention to treat of ethics as involving the

laws of personal conduct. These, of course, cannot be set aside, inasmuch as what is true or right, false or wrong, as to the aggregate must correspond to what is true or right, false or wrong, as to the individuals who form the aggregate. But the intention is to regard the crystalline in its wholeness, not to analyse the separate rays in their separateness. In every age, there must be modifications and elasticities in the application of principles to existing facts: as in Lowell's words—

> "New occasions teach new duties,
> Time makes ancient good uncouth."

Every community, moreover, has what may be called a special moral judgment, a judgment that represents the sum of the special influences acting on it and through it. Two or three of such influences let us review.

One of the inclinations of thought which, in this day, connect with social ethics is, the assertion that work, with a moral end in view, is the mark of human worth and dignity. It is true that this is a very old assertion. But, in our time, it has been presented with a new emphasis. Ruskin, in his 'Crown of Wild Olive,' distinguishes between work and play. Both mean action; but the contrast that he states is, "Play is an exertion of

body or mind made to please ourselves, and with no determined end." And, somewhat fancifully, he groups together money-making, horse-racing and betting, ladies' dressing, and war, as "the games which the playing class in England spend their time in playing at." In opposition to all this he sets the work with hand or brain, or both, which fulfils three tests—viz., that it be honest, that it be useful, and that it be cheerful.[1] Now, the contention that the olive crown is the wreatb of all who thus work, from the highest to the lowest, that such work is the one and only sign of worthy living, is a feature of the most influential literature of our country, and indeed of the civilised world. No more fervent prophet of the gospel of work has spoken to his generation than Thomas Carlyle. We are now so familiar with his utterances, his writings have so moulded the feeling of men, that we are apt to forget how mighty was the impulse which he gave, and even to speak lightly of him. But there are not a few who can recall the mental and moral incitements realised through the perusal of his 'Sartor Resartus,' his 'Past and Present,' his 'Lectures on Heroes,' his 'Latter-day Pamphlets,'—how they were wont to repeat to themselves his hot, crisp sentences: "Not what I have but what I do,

[1] Crown of Wild Olive, chap. i.

is my kingdom."[1] "That impossible receipt, Know thyself, let it be translated into this partially possible one, Know what thou canst work at."[2] "Be no longer a chaos but a world, or even a world-kin. Produce; produce. Were it but the pitifullest infinitesimal fraction of a product, produce it in God's name."[3] "The situation which has not its duty, its ideal, was never yet occupied by man. Work the ideal out from the actual, and working, believe, live, and be free."[4]

This reiteration supplied the right tonic for an age of prodigious activity. The right tonic; for, in contradistinction to effort for mere material and selfish advantage, it associated work with an ideal, it maintained that the only action which can win the olive crown is that whereby the actual is the translation of the ideal into deed. The range of vision was wider than that of the socialist. It did not make manual labour the standard for all labour. Carlyle recognises two men, and no third,—the one who toils by the hand, and, by his toil, secures the goods and good of the earth; and the other (but to him he gives the higher place), the one who labours for the bread of life, for all that nourishes the higher life of the soul. And in this a distinct ethical note

[1] Sartor Resartus, chap. iv. p. 83.
[2] Ibid., chap. vii. p. 114.
[3] Ibid., chap. vii. p. 136.
[4] Ibid., chap. vii. p. 135.

is sounded, whose vibrations are felt everywhere. Formerly, the only exertion which society would allow to the scions of the upper classes was in the direction of Ruskin's "play." Now, we behold them aspiring after useful service of many kinds. Even in the "game of war," we have beheld the sons of the gentry enlisting as privates in yeomanry corps and in other regiments, so as, in the hour of need, to serve their country. The emancipation of women from conditions that restrained their energy, that doomed multitudes to inane existence, "pecking about like birds after what pleased them," was a consequence of this magnifying of strenuous useful work. Now, women of all degrees recognise that there are careers of usefulness open to them, that they can be helps to society otherwise than through marriage, and helps to themselves in developing the capacities with which they are endowed. A new social bond of cohesion has thus been formed between the various sections of the community, and a new ethical ambition, purifying all life, has thus been stimulated.

The prominence that is given to the ethics of wealth marks another trend of thought in our day—a trend that finds the age in one of its most noticeable features, and one of its chief worships.

Poverty is not the only problem to be pondered by those who aim at social wellbeing. The enormous wealth, referred to in a previous chapter, is also and equally a problem; and in connexion with it the questions arise, How is the wealth made? How is it used? How is it distributed? The Christian Church has surely its mission and its message to the rich as well as to the poor, and it must take care that this mission and this message are not overlooked.

There are prevalent conditions of commercial life which it is impossible to reconcile with a high standard of morals. Tricks abound in every trade; but, with many, trade is a continual trickery. Business transactions have no substance behind them; commodities are bought and sold before they are in the market, or without their being in the market at all. Accommodations of many kinds make business an endless and weary financing. The spirit of speculation infects all classes and grades, from the plutocrat to the message-boy; with what consequences there is no need to specify. The haste to be rich, the need to provide for wants that are created by the ambition to live in stylish ways, is a constant temptation to invest in risky concerns, to clutch at possibilities of gain, which are also possibilities of loss that cannot be met. And

even when methods of action are legitimate, avarice—the craving for more and ever more—immolates at its altars the energy, the strength, the interest of manhood; in the desire to accumulate, nobler and worthier desires are sacrificed, and the man becomes a servant of mammon. It is very difficult to keep the conscience in living correspondence with a high ideal, to keep the hands clean and the heart pure, in the scramble for money that everywhere confronts us, and amid the competitions that become every year more pressing. The Christian merchant is not an unknown person—on the contrary, he is to be often met; but sometimes it is scarcely possible to harmonise transactions with the law of Christ.

Assuming wealth to be honestly gotten, the vital issue is, How is it to be used; what are the principles which should guide those who have the larger shares of this world's goods? This is an issue that requires to be fairly considered. We cannot lay down hard and fast rules. It must be admitted that differences in social position, in taste, and in temperament, imply differences in the expenditure by which a man receives the good of his labour. Wealth, too, has an office to discharge in the promotion of art, of the higher forms of culture, of the more refined aspects of social life. Increases of comfort are inevitable.

But, when this is said, the line must be drawn between elegance and mere luxury. Consumption of means, parade of means, in extravagant fashion —in ways that are quite beyond all that really beautifies and enriches existence—is to be utterly condemned. The wealthiest, no less than the poorest, stand before a white throne, and the books of the life are opened, and judgment is made out of the books. And if, as thus judged, excesses, ministering only to ostentation, to vain-glory, to an enervating softness, to heartless selfish enjoyment, are proved, the sentence, Guilty, is swift and sure. The waste of wealth is sin.

That the possessor of wealth is responsible to God and to society for its administration is a conviction which every year is becoming more intense. In the tone of those organs of public opinion that reflect the best feeling of the country, we can observe a growing impatience of the dissipation of fortunes on frivolities, and the reckless squandering of means on betting and gambling. For the gratification of æsthetic taste, and for all that healthily ministers to refinement, liberal margins are allowed. None will object to such a provision for families as shall secure a vantage-ground for the exercise of their aptitudes, without bringing on them the curse of idleness, or leading them into the temptations which the

want of stimulus to action causes. But, in respect of all beyond this, it is more and more demanded that a man should regard himself, not as the absolute and irresponsible proprietor, but as the trustee, for behoof of his world, of the riches he has inherited or acquired—that these riches should be held as an estate with whose administration he is charged. Wealth has its obligation and its privilege. It is a privilege to have an abundance to give, to be able to originate or to direct causes that benefit mankind, to identify personal joy with the welfare of others. It is an obligation to study the best ways and methods of doing this. Indiscriminate and injudicious benevolence demoralises society, and works ill to one's neighbour. He who would really benefit must wisely consider and act. It is a poor evasion alike of privilege and of obligation to hoard money during the lifetime, and leave it to charities in a last will and testament: to keep it so long as it can minister to the mere pride of life, and to give directions as to its application after the owner's death. The death-duties rightly snatch a portion for the good of the nation; the moral which they point being that men should be their own executors, utilising the surplus which they have, in the consciousness of a stewardship that they cannot re-

nounce, for the glory of God and the good of their fellows.

An object-lesson on the duty of the wealthy has been given by Mr Carnegie, the well-known millionaire of Pittsburg. In his 'Gospel of Wealth' he thus states the responsibility of the man of wealth: "To set an example of modest, unostentatious living, shunning display or extravagance; to provide moderately for the legitimate wants of those dependent upon him; and, after doing so, to consider all surplus revenues which come to him simply as trust-funds which he is called upon to administer, and strictly bound as a matter of duty to administer, in the manner which in his judgment is best calculated to produce the most beneficial results for the community; the man of wealth thus becoming the mere trustee and agent for his poorer brethren, bringing to their service his superior wisdom, experience, and ability to administer, doing for them better than they would or could do for themselves."[1] These are words that express a high ethical ideal—words that the Christian Church, in the light of its great Exemplar, should "teach and exhort."

But another view of wealth has been presented, which must not be omitted from our survey.

[1] The Gospel of Wealth, p. 15.

Ruskin, often in eccentric fashion and with unnecessary exaggerations, set himself to the task of combating apprehensions which he held to be promotive of a base prostration before the golden image of Dura. He attacked political economists as blameworthy, in so far as they narrowed the scope of a science that is especially needful for the nation to mere money-making, and as they ignored the first and the essential condition of the wealth of a people and of individuals. He distinguished between wealth, money, and riches. Wealth, he urged, consists in things essentially valuable; money consists in things of currency and exchange; riches include the relations of men to each other, and the just laws of their association for purposes of labour.[1] With all his might he affirmed that in wealth, properly so called, there are two elements of value—the *intrinsic*, denoting all that contributes to life or has the power of supporting life, and is thus essentially useful; and the *effectual*, denoting the capacity in the person to accept and realise the use, and thus have the life which is ministered to. Wanting either of these, nothing, he maintained, could be an occasion of wealth; having both of these, there is wealth—that is, life and life abundant.

Here, then, is a great ethical inspiration—the

[1] Munera Pulveris, chap. i. pp. 10, 11.

inspiration long ago breathed into the nostrils of humanity by Him who knew what is in man. But it is uttered in a new form. The point to be grasped is, that the first requirement in order to wealth is that there be that which in itself and for itself is everlastingly worthy, and that there be the power to possess this and turn it to its full account. A millionaire may have money in heaps. If he utilise that money for the securing of noble objects, and if he be himself a noble man, the money, by that which it commands, lifts him into the region of wealth. If he hoard as a miser, the love of the money eating into his soul; or if he speud it on things and in ways that are ignoble, if not wrong; if he be himself a mean, small-minded, and narrow-souled man; to him it may be said, "Thy money perish with thee; it is not wealth, it is but a pile piled on a moral carcass."

This teaching may seem hazy. Many whom it reached shrugged their shoulders and pronounced Ruskin a dreamer. It was so unpopular that the editors of magazines in which he expounded it were obliged to discontinue the publication of articles relating to it. Scientifically, it may be at fault. But, nevertheless, there is in it a conception which has laid hold of minds—such as Arnold Toynbee and Patrick Geddes—that have influenced their generation, and through

them, slowly perhaps but surely, it has become a part of the experience of the time. Even where the view of wealth as life which it expresses is not fully received, it is operative. A more distinctly ethical element has been infused into political science, and additional momentum has been given to altruistic feeling and service.

This altruistic feeling, this humanitarian trend, is one of the most conspicuous features in the social ethics of the present day.

Altruism has been exalted into a worship. The most explicit form of the worship is to be found in the Positivism propounded by M. Auguste Comte. In the earlier period of his career, Comte sneered at "religiosity as a mere weakness and avowal of want of power." But, in the later period, he discovered that religiosity cannot be dismissed with a sneer, and he elaborated a travesty of Roman Catholicism which he intended to be the glorifying of humanity, to be an education in the love of humanity, to be the expression of the only true morality—that in which the progress of the race is made the one end and the only good of life. Comtism as a system has waned. It is a house divided against itself, split into sections that are bitterly hostile to each other. And, in the circles to which it appealed

most powerfully, the more explicit socialisms of the Continent and of Great Britain have supplanted it.

But the essence of the system pervades the thought of the time. It is "the only philosophy that is a really new agent in progress."[1] Christianity is humanitarian. But the new agent, as interpreted by its more prominent advocates, diverges from Christianity when it separates the love of the neighbour from the first commandment, to which, in Christ's teaching, it is like—the commandment "to love God with all the heart, and with all the soul, and with all the might"—and when it eliminates the central motive-power, the love of man for Christ's sake and in Christ's love. Altruism, in magnifying the love of one's neighbour, opposes that to the love of self. The love of self is to be lost. The New Testament recognises a legitimate self-love, not to be lost, but to be the measure of the love of one's neighbour. Altruism has its religion in itself. The synthesis which it desires is one that explains man and his universe only from man's point of view. George Eliot, in whose writings this humanitarianism is skilfully presented, "takes religious patriotism for the subject of her last novel,[2] but is at some pains to show that her hero

[1] Mallock, 'Is Life worth living?' chap. i.

[2] Daniel Deronda.

may be religious without any belief in God, and patriotic without any but an ideal country."[1]

There is a humanitarianism which has a religious hue, but this kind sometimes assumes an eccentric character. The Tolstoyism that has developed in Russia is an illustration which presents many points of interest.

Count Leo Tolstoy, a noble of ancient lineage, under the power of altruistic convictions, renounced his position with all its privileges, and chose to live as a labourer among labourers. The history of his inner life gives a special character to his self-renunciation. In 1845, when he was sixteen years of age, he discarded all religion. His moral attitude then and for many years thereafter, and the genesis of the new faith by which he was quickened, are outlined in one of the principal persons in his painfully realistic novel, 'Anna Karénina.' Levin (so far a portrait of himself) became obstinately sceptical as to all the beliefs in which he had been reared. From the age of twenty to thirty-four, "our organism and its destruction, the indestructibility of matter, the laws of the conservation and development of forces, were words which were substituted for the terms of his early

[1] Quoted in 'Life, is it worth living?' by the present writer, p. 64.

faith."[1] Then came the shock caused by his brother's death. He realised that these terms "stood for nothing in the face of real life." The problem of his existence—the problems of existence—haunted and tormented him; and, scrutinising "the whole arsenal of his scientific convictions, he could find no answer whatever to his questions." The more he puzzled, the greater was his despair. Tortured by his ignorance, listless as to "anything that was good and useful for all, for humanity," he left his barn one day, after a period of toil, along with a humble machine-tender. In the course of their talk, the names of two men were mentioned, and the *muzhik* said: "'Men differ. One lives for his belly, like Mitiukh' (one of the two), 'but Fokanuitch' (the other) 'is an honest man; he lives for his soul, he remembers God.' 'What do you call living for the soul and remembering God?' exclaimed Levin eagerly. 'Why, that's plain enough,' was the rejoinder. 'It is to live according to God, according to truth.' The simple words echoed through the heart, and weighty thoughts, as from a hidden source, arose, filling him with their brilliant light."[2] "Reason," he said to himself, "has nothing to do with loving the neighbour." He

[1] Anna Karénina, p. 741. [2] Ibid., pp. 748, 749.

could not accept all the teaching of the Church, but he could live that life of the soul which alone is worth living for; and henceforth life would be, "not meaningless as before, but full of a deep meaning which he would have power to impress on every action."

This is the picture of Tolstoy (and, more or less, it is the picture of many persons in the present day). Impatient of creeds, of councils, of fathers, of St Paul himself, the one point is "access to the spirit of life through Jesus." Tolstoy's doctrine, such as it is, is extracted from the Sermon on the Mount. He comprehended his doctrine in five great commandments of peace—commandments which are the articles of universal brotherhood. What his religious position to-day is, it may be difficult to determine. The orthodox Greek Church has excommunicated him; it is to be hoped that he still clings to "Christ's Christianity." But he has his followers who, as is frequently the case, have not observed the limits of the master. He has lived with his wife and children. They have become a colony, almost monastic without a monastery,—"ranging from nobles and millionaires to tramps and peasants, and possessing not even coat and spade, but happy, contented,

serene, overflowing with hard work and brotherly kindness."[1]

All this is suggestive of features reproduced, with variations, in many lands. It represents (or misrepresents?) humanitarianism in its more emotional and mystical aspects. Humanitarianism has other aspects—the scientific, the political, the evangelistic, the practically philanthropic. But that now specified is, perhaps, the most interesting of all. In one form or another—Christian, non-Christian, anti-Christian—the ethic of the day is humanitarian. And the world insists, as Christianity does, on the altruism of deed, not mere word. It is intolerant of the arm-chair men, who

> "Debate the evil of the world
> As though they bore no portion of that ill,
> As though with subtle phrases they could spin
> A woof to screen us from life's undelight;
> Sometimes prolonging far into the night
> Such talk, as loth to separate and find
> Each in his solitude how vain are words
> When that which is opposed to them is more."[2]

Such, then, are some of the more conspicuous ethical trends of our day. Their influence is apparent in its politics. It is impossible to

[1] 'Edinburgh Review,' July 1901.

[2] Quoted by Canon Gore, Bampton Lecture, p. 201.

separate the political from the ethical. They are necessary each to the other, if, indeed, the one is not a part of the other.[1] Though, in respect of method and, so far, of motive, they are apart, they have the same end in view, the same background and the same foreground. "On the one hand," writes Professor Sidgwick, "the duty or virtue of any individual is held to consist essentially in the performance of his functions as a member of a social organism, in such a manner as to realise or effectually promote the wellbeing of the whole organism, whilst on the other hand a certain kind of political order is generally held to be an indispensable condition or constituent of such wellbeing."[2] Now, we can trace the main currents of social ethics in the ampler perspectives of legislation, witnessing to the change which has passed over the conception of the State and of the powers and province of government. And in these perspectives, in this change —in the lines of advance which are thus indicated—many will recognise the pathway of such a harmonious development of national life, such a consistency in the growing sway of beauteous order with the growths in the life of man, as shall secure a real counteractive to the wild and

[1] Aristotle maintained that it was.

[2] Sidgwick's Methods of Ethics, p. 20.

irrational types of socialism which denounce all private property as immoral, and in whose extreme left we discern the gunpowder and the dynamite of the anarchist.

But, irrespective of all direct political reference, the dominating subject of interest to the Church is the moral or ethical life of the people. It is sometimes affirmed that an ethical standard is involved in the civilisation of the twentieth century. To a certain extent this is true. But Mr Mackenzie justly reminds us that "civilisation, as it actually exists, is partly a product of the vices as well as of the virtues of mankind, and is adapted to the former as well as to the latter. It is not arranged for the extinction of vice, but at most, in Burke's language, 'that vice may lose half its evil by losing half its grossness. It is arranged not for the promotion of virtue but only of respectability.'"[1] If, therefore, rank growths of evil no less than good may be expected as the product of civilisation, the inquiry remains, What is the vitality of the force that is working, as from an inner moral centre, through our civilisation?

The signs are mixed. Looking up and down, out and about, on the hollowness of much of the religious profession of the day; on the absence of

[1] Manual of Ethics, p. 391.

lofty motivé in the conduct of man to man and man to woman; on the selfishness in competitions and rivalries, by which the strong push the weak out of the running and leave the less fit hopeless and forlorn; on the immoralities in trade, the more than questionable practices in vogue in commercial circles; on the heartless frivolity, ostentation, luxury, and looseness of large areas of fashionable life, and the low, coarse animalism of thousands on thousands of the population,—taking these and many other features into account, a despondent feeling is apt to steal into the mind. Who does not often realise this feeling, and with Tennyson, in "Locksley Hall Sixty Years After," has not sometimes been moved to protest—

"When was age so crammed with menace? madness? written, spoken, lies?

. . . .

Evolution ever climbing after some ideal good,
And Reversion ever dragging Evolution in the mud."

An even more cynical note may ring through the protest—such a note as that sounded by a biographer of Ibsen as an appropriate motto for him:—"Let others complain of this age as being wicked. I complain of it as being contemptible; for it is devoid of passion. Men's thoughts are thin and frail as lace; they themselves are the weakling

lacemakers. The thoughts of their hearts are too paltry to be sinful."[1]

But this represents the mood of a dismal day when the sky is leaden, and the rain drips, and there is no tonic in the air; the mood of a moral climate which, having lost the sunshine of faith, and being laden with manifold unhealthiness, depresses the system and turns the light in the soul into darkness. Against all that is untoward in the social prospect are to be set the tokens, neither few nor uncertain, of a purpose, whose momentum is ever increasing, to reduce the vices and degradations that are casting dark shadows across our civilisation,—a steadily progressive movement towards better life-conditions and averages, higher levels and nobler loves for the individual units of mankind. Why is it that attention so concentrates on the plague-spots in all our cities? Why is it that the best thought of the period is so exercised on the question, What is to be done to make life wealthier and worthier, and, What are the most effective methods of such doing? Why is it that on all sides there are organised efforts directed against particular social evils and iniquities? Why is it that persons of all ranks are drawn together, as by an irresistible magnetism, in strenuous endeavours to

[1] Ibsen and Bjornsen, by George Brand, p. 49.

"work out the beast in men's world" and "let the ape and tiger die"? In the early part of last century, the state of our country was immeasurably worse than it is in this, the dawning year, of the new century. And the men of that time slumbered and slept. There has been a great awakenment of conscience. The moral ideal, as has been shown, is higher. The chasm between the ideal and the actual is more vividly perceived, and for the width of this chasm society is arraigning itself as verily guilty. Government is active. Municipalities are active. Science and art are active. The demand is for more and better education; and education is being made ever more comprehensive in its survey, and more ethical in its spirit and aim. Houses are improving. Healthier recreations are provided. The reverence for the person of woman or man which Milton commends is more strenuously inculcated, and many endeavours are made to elevate and purify tastes and habits. All forces, intellectual, social, and religious, are in full operation—the voice sounding through all as the sound of many waters being, "In God's name, let men be free in the freedom of the truth." This awakenment, this consensus of aims, this determination of will, is in itself the most hopeful of features, the most convincing of the signs of a stronger ethical life.

It bids us be of good cheer. It reminds us that, through all the groans and travail of our time, the manifestation of the sons of God is being hastened. As William Watson has sung,—

"The new age stands as yet
Half built against the sky,
Open to every threat
Of storms that clamour by;
Scaffolding veils the walls
And dim dust floats and falls,
As moving to and fro their tasks the masons ply."