

THE CHURCH
AND
ITS SOCIAL MISSION

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(The Baird Lecture for 1901)

BY

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PREFACE.

THIS volume contains six lectures which, in accordance with the requirements of the Baird Trust, were delivered in Glasgow, in the early months of last year. The lectures, however, are not reproduced in lecture form. They have been divided into chapters; and, in carrying out this division, some rearrangements and modifications of the original plan have been made necessary. In chapters xiii. and xv., the author has inserted parts of the course that he had designed, which, for want of time, he was obliged to omit from the lectures.

The chief interest of the present day is a social interest. Over questions relating to the furtherance of wellbeing, and to the improvement of the conditions of life, the most active and influential thought is exercised. Thus, with regard to the arts and the sciences, it is felt that, whilst know-

ledge is to be pursued for its own sake, and the ascertainment of truth is the end of research, the ultimate aim of all real knowledge and of all truth is the making of life worthier and wealthier. The work of the student is coming ever more fully into line with the efforts of those who, as philanthropists, as educationists, as officers of health, as members of corporations, as politicians, are bent on reducing the occasions of evil to individuals and of loss to the community, and on a more effective application of the laws and the constituents of social righteousness. With this convergence of purpose in view, no issue can be more important than that which bears on the moral and spiritual influence that pervades all endeavour. Sometimes this influence is ignored. Sometimes, though not altogether ignored, the entire emphasis is put on sanitary, on scientific, or on economic principles and methods. In this volume, the contention virtually is that, in the building up of a noble human society, as in the building up of a noble human being, the indispensable factor is the moral will, the moral conscience,—that it is this that determines the quality both of the personal unit and of the civic unity.

The book now published assumes that the ministry of the Christian Church specially con-

nects with ethical impulses and standards. It presents the Church as a society founded by Jesus Christ, and commissioned by Him to be the salt of the earth, through the propagation of its ideals in the surrounding world. It traces the gradual unfolding of this mission in the nineteen centuries of the history of the Church, and, referring more particularly to Great Britain, it exhibits the influence of the National Churches on the moral pith and tone of the British peoples. And, then, proceeding to the consideration of the vast and intricate problems of modern life, it discusses the solutions of these problems that are proposed or attempted, dwelling, at some length, on the revolutionary collectivism demanded by many as the only cure of social wrong and ill. By this review, the inquiries pressed on the attention of Christian men are such as these: What has the Church to say to an age whose wealth-lands and woe-lands are so glaringly contrasted? To what extent, and in what ways, is it co-operating with all agencies that aim at social betterment, and is it realising its own proper vocation to regenerate and guide the life of the soul? By what elasticities of method is it adapting its service to the complexities and the perplexities by which it is confronted? Wherein does it need to be

strengthened, it may be reformed, in order that fuller effect may be given to its work?

That the author has satisfactorily realised his intention, he cannot say. He is conscious of the many imperfections that attach to his treatment of a great theme. But he can honestly say that his labour has been a labour of love, and that he has done his best with the resources, the time, and the opportunity, at his command to secure a generous appreciation.

He acknowledges, with deep gratitude, the kindness of his esteemed friend and colleague, Professor Davidson, LL.D., who, in the midst of his onerous duties, undertook the revision of the proof-sheets, and of whose valuable suggestions he has gladly availed himself.

Such as it is, the author sends the treatise forth, in the hope that the charity of those who read it may cover any blemishes which they may detect, and that it may be of some use to the generation he desires to serve according to the will of God.

CHANONRY LODGE, ABERDEEN,

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