

BOOK REVIEWS

I. PRACTICAL THEOLOGY.

Socialism and the Ethics of Jesus. By Henry C. Vedder, Professor of Church History in Crozer Theological Seminary. New York: The Macmillan Company. 1912. \$1.25 net.

There is to-day no dearth of vigorous literature dealing with the social problem and the relation of Christianity to it. Among the books dealing with these vital themes this one must be classed among the strongest. The style is singularly clear and trenchant; its spirit bold and fearless; its grasp of the problem broad. As befits a professor of history, he deals with the whole question historically. He begins with a critical outline of the history of modern socialism and anarchism (which he accurately distinguishes), examining somewhat in detail the careers and theories of Lassalle and Marx. In discussing Socialism in America, he draws a terrible indictment of our present industrial and political systems; and, on the whole, every unprejudiced and well-informed man must admit the truth of the indictment. His treatment of the ideals of Socialism is for the most part satisfactory, and his discussion of the general principles of the social teachings of Jesus eminently so. His explanation of the social failure of the Church is extremely well written, informing and interesting, though not in all respects quite satisfactory. In stating, in the last chapter, the proper attitude of churches and ministers to social questions, the high-water mark of the book is reached; and it is this chapter above all others that I hope thousands of ministers and church members will read carefully and take to heart.

As intimated, there are some defects which candid criticism should point out.

1. There is too much of the dogmatic spirit manifest. Sometimes the language seems somewhat intemperate, which may be pardoned one who has seen to the bottom of the unrighteousness of our economic system, but which it is wise to eschew if one desires to convince conservatives.

2. The author does not seem to do justice to Carl Marx. There is no space for specification and argument, but Marx's intelligence cannot fairly be belittled; nor can his contribution to modern economic theory, despite his admitted errors. I feel likewise that he does not do full justice to Paul. Doubtless Paul felt acutely the need of an intellectual correlation of Christianity with the previous religious experience of mankind and devoted much of his energy to that. But there is far more of the social gospel in his writing than is accredited to him by the school of thinkers with which Dr. Vedder allies himself.

3. Some of the author's statements are hard to harmonize with one another. E. g., he makes on one page the surprising statement that "the educated man is by nature and training a pharisee and aristocrat, even if he come from the plain people;" and on the next page he says: "And reality is what modern education teaches men to see and demand everywhere." In one place he represents Christianity as having absolutely turned away from its social mission and as having entirely ignored the social message of its Founder; in another place he rightly attributes a great deal of social amelioration to the activity of the Church and vigorously defends institutional Christianity against the charges of men who allege that it has been a social failure. These faults are due, no doubt, to a certain emphatic absoluteness of statement and lack of qualification and shading in the expression of his thought.

But these faults of detail do not by any means neutralize the central power and value of the book. It is truly a strong, awakening and inspiring discussion of a great theme; and my earnest hope is that it may have a wide reading among the constituency of this review.

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