

**SOCIALISM, THE
CHURCH
AND THE POOR**

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Socialism, the Church and the Poor by P. T. Forsyth

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BY

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PART I

THE CHURCH AND SOCIALISM

1.

THE social side of the Church is one that at the present moment receives an absorbing amount of attention. There are thousands and thousands of people who believe they are Christians, and who are yet little concerned about either the truth of Christianity or its experience, in comparison with their interest in the social work, or the social genius, of the Church. It need hardly be said that were that type to become dominant it would mean the demise of Christianity, and of the Church by consequence.

Of this class of people there are two sections, or rather three—two of them much more serious than the other in spirit and purpose. There are those who give themselves to the mere socialities of the

Church; those who devote themselves to its social philanthropies; and those who prize Christianity and the Church as the great agents of a social reconstruction. I do not propose to say much here and now about the second class, beyond this, that the philanthropy of all the Churches during the last century has been among the most precious things the Church ever achieved. And it has stood between us and a very unpleasant revolution in a way that the future historian will note. I must add, however, what I have often said elsewhere, that it becomes inadequate to social need as we pass into a new phase of things.

We are left, therefore, with the other two classes. They make two extremes—one very serious, the other far less so. We have in the latter category those who are drawn to the Church either by its socialities or its social advantages, and in the former those who are attracted to the Socialism that they find both in the Church idea and in the Gospel.

Now, I will not dwell on a thing so ignoble as the use so freely made of certain forms of the Church for the purposes of social *entrées* and promotion. But the socialities of the Church are courted mainly by the young people, and among them largely by those who court each other. It is all very well, I suppose. The Church in this regard has been described as the greatest matrimonial

agency in existence. Well, the young people must meet, and the difficulty of homeless young people meeting in a safe and honourable way is much greater than the comfortable classes realise. It is better that the sexes should meet each other under the ægis of religion than by chance acquaintance on the street. But it is not, of course, for this that the Church exists. It is entirely a by-product of the Church. And when these socialities become a mere opportunity for exhibiting vain talent, musical or other, they are a very gratuitous and somewhat trying adjunct to Church life. I never knew of a dramatic society, for instance (and I have known several), that was not what Saturday bridge-parties are—a frost and a bane to all for which the Church stands. And all this side of things is a plague and intrusion on the minister's time, and a vexation mostly to his spirit.

On this topic I may venture to say one or two brief things before I go on to deal with the other wing and its more earnest spirits. If every evening in the life of a Church is devoted to social purposes, that is a long way too much, and it can only bring spiritual dissipation and peril. Again, if, short of that, the socialities of the Church do anything to destroy or arrest the faith that the real social centre of the Church is the Communion-

**The Real
Social Centre
of the Church.**