

# **PROBLEMS OF THE NEW LIFE**

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Problems of the New Life by Morrison I. Swift

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**MORRISON I. SWIFT**

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THE NEW LIFE**



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MORRISON I. SWIFT.



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- II. The Old and the New Life. (Published also in the present volume.)

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Some portions of "The Old and The New Life" have already appeared in *The Open Court*, and through the courtesy of that journal I reprint the section entitled "The Sociological Function of Universities."

On pages 29 and 30 I have described the unique course of a business firm who voluntarily raised the wages of their employes. The case is stronger in their favor than I have there stated it, since it is also the practice of this firm to divide ten per cent of its profits among its employes annually.





## The Social Ordeal of Christianity.

BY MORRISON I. SWIFT.

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I.

Dr. Ernst Barth has written a book of somewhat general interest.\* It is a review of the condition of society, and some hard questions about existing institutions are asked in it. The prayer, "Thy Kingdom Come," he says, is offered every Sunday in the churches and daily in the schools and at home. In this manner we have been praying for eighteen hundred years. But when is the Kingdom to come, and where are even the simplest beginnings of it? The thought must give us shame that even in Christian countries the social requirements laid upon men in this petition from Christ have received almost no attention. And there is not the excuse that the powerful of the earth have opposed the religion that offers this prayer; they have long been its protectors. Yet when we look for the fruits of our religion and consider withal the social distress, we must recognize that we have not brought it to much more than an empty, arrogant word-Christianity, and that we are not worthy to bear the name of Christ.

Are the causes ascertainable? Consider the poor. What can be hoped of people so oppressed with want and care and labor that they have neither time, repose, nor collectedness to think of the higher problems of humanity? Indeed one who, year in and year out, in the midst of cruel distress, can only think about the scanty support of his family, and who sees his children starve and his wife pine away, will not have much time or strength to labor for the Kingdom of God. Material things engross the attention of those who are prosperous; scholars and specialists feel the pressing demands of their profession. Meanwhile human misery, bodily and moral, persists.

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\* *Die Reform der Gesellschaft durch Neubelebung des Gemeinewesens in Staat, Schule und Kirche.* von Dr. Ernst Barth.

In the opinion of this writer the saving power is still Christianity, but Christianity knowing that the kingdom of God was to come on this earth. His plan of reform and revitalization proposes no departure from existing and accepted ground principles.

There is a different view. It may be that not many people are yet aware that bodies of men and women in New York, Chicago and some other cities have joined themselves together in the name of a new religion. Certain it is, at all events, that the import of this action is scarcely appreciated. Where do the leaders of this movement stand?\*

In consonance with the opinion already cited they recognize the evils of the present society as few not actually suffering from them have yet done. They reject, without compromise, the too prevalent thought 'that the varying lot of men is ordered by Divine Providence, that the social order which exists with its classes and distinctions, has a Divine sanction.' They commit themselves with absolute assurance to the thought 'that the Perfect Order of things, which Omnipotence was to produce for us in another world, we are ourselves are to create here.' With a clearness of conviction that may well cause our cheap moralities to shudder, they give utterance to the deep meaning of human responsibility *now*. "A perfect order of society, how can it ever dawn on the earth, save as man sets his heart upon it and determines that it shall be?" The present age "is not inclined to accept the order of human life as it is, but to try it and test it by a thought of what it ought to be, to see whether it meets the wants, the rights of human beings and of *all* human beings; and it is mightily inclined to believe, too, that the satisfaction of these wants and the doing justice to those rights, need not be delayed to a future world, but may be undertaken here, and that by no other power than ourselves."

To this task Christianity is unequal. Protestantism "has not given us any new faith such as the world wants." 'It has seemed to regard moral idealism as exhausted in the statements of the Sermon on the Mount.' 'An era of social righteousness is the want of the world, and this is what Protestantism has not given us, what it has apparently had no aim of giving us.' And the religion that declares these principles fetters itself to no

\* The following quotations are from two printed lectures of Mr W. M. Salter, of Chicago, entitled "Why Unitarianism Does not Satisfy Us." and "The Success and Failure of Protestantism."

theology. Its last and deepest utterance is: "Perfect freedom for the mind, a righteous life rather than any creed, and the worth, the sacredness of human beings."

Thus from two very different sides we find a recognition of the great wrongs existing in society, and of the inadequacy, hitherto, of the efforts of all organizations for lifting mankind. They agree no further. One awaits help and conquering life from a reanimated Christianity; the other will work new veins of moral inspiration.

There are many, no doubt, who view the Ethical movement as they would a new-born sect within the church. They see in it no great significance. To us it is one of the way-marks of the time. It is one of the most decisive expressions of powerfully moving tendencies that we have yet beheld. It contains ideas to which men must listen from this time on, and that will sooner or later reform conduct. To say the very least about it, it is a protestation against the exaggerated emphasis of ideas that will every day mean less to men, and that already confuse and mystify instead of helping such as thirst after excellence. And it would appear that the right and abiding attitude toward the movement is not the attitude of silent indifference, or of condemnation for its standing toward Christianity, but acceptance of the hint its mere existence gives, and probing of the tendencies that brought it into being. And since it does but repeat the arraignment of inefficiency against the religion of the day brought by those in no sense hostile to it, but holding it as the light of the world, there remains no release from the constraint of its message.

It cannot be denied that these criticisms of what now passes for Christianity disclose the main causes of its weakness. For reasons in part doctrinal, Christianity has lost faith in its power to regenerate the world and its attempts are responsively feeble. This we say with full recognition of the noble efforts of individuals scattered here and there. It is to Christianity as a whole that we refer, and its efforts are singularly inadequate to the needs of the day, and wholly out of proportion to its resources. It would appear that the idea of bringing the Kingdom of Heaven upon earth is not one of the things in which it believes. Those who believe in the greatness of Jesus declare this perfidy to him. But the message of cheer from the doctrinaries is that the world must gird itself to patience and wait improvement through supernatural interferences of Christ. A departure so gross as this by dogmatists from the reasonable level of natural