



TRUTH, HOLINESS,

LIBERTY, LOVE.

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## THE NAME AND CHARACTER OF CHRISTIAN.

[Abridged from the Monthly Miscellany.]

A Christian is a disciple of Jesus Christ,—one who acknowledges him to be his teacher and his guide, whom he is bound and resolved to follow and obey. It is plain, as the first and lowest view, that he who takes the Christian name, must refer himself, in some way, to Christ; else, the name is without meaning. But how refer himself to Christ? Clearly to his teaching, and his life; not to his birth,—not to his nature. To be a Christian, does not require that a man believe this or that in regard to the time or manner of Christ's birth, his exact relation to God, or distinction from man. These are matters of serious import, but they do not affect the right of being called or esteemed a Christian. If any proof were needed of this, it were enough to look at the world, and see the endless variety of opinion, and shades of difference on these points, not only among different sects, but with individuals of the same sect, to whom the name of Christian has not been, nor never will be, denied. For example, since actual names are with many, the best verifications, take leading men in the various branches of the Christian church, though they may be no higher or better than many others, less known. Take the Catholic, whose name stands for his church, Feuclo; the Protestant, who vehemently assailed that church, Luther; the Puritan, Robinson; the moderate Trinitarian, Doddridge, or Chalmers, of another grade, or Edwards, of yet another; the Quakers, Fox, and Penn; the Methodists, Wesley, and Whitfield, brothers, but not in doctrine; the Baptists, Robert Hall, Dr. Stillman, and President Manning, of the same church, but not entirely the same faith; Jeremy Taylor, of the English Episcopal church, and Bishop Griswold, of the American; Lardner, and Emyln, of the English Unitarians; or Buckminster and Channing, of the same church in America. Who would venture,—who would wish to withhold from any of these, the name of Christian? Yet who would engage to write out their differences of opinion, in regard even to the Master, whose common name they bear? So of many members of any one communion, who could be named, if necessary, departed and living, distant and in our own country, holding views of the relation of Christ to the Father, and other disputed doctrines, as widely different from each other, as are our views from those of other churches, or any one church from any other. Yet to these differing brethren all would cheerfully accord the Christian name.

Such admissions and facts ought to teach us something. They bring the question home to us,—why do we give a common name to those who hold such separate views of him whose name it is? And the answer is also brought home to us,—we give a common name, because of a common faith, and a consistent character.

The only ground which sustains a common faith among all Christians, yet a high and sufficient ground for the name itself, is that which has just been intimated—an acknowledgement of the relation of disciple to Christ. The known meaning of the word "disciple," and its just sense, is that of "learner," indicating, that Christ is taken as a teacher, whom we believe, and would obey. We believe in him; believe that he lived as is recorded in the Gospels, believe that he know and taught the truth, that he attested it by his life and death, and that we are bound to receive and follow it. This faith is common to Christians of every name. Its signification is common in the writings of the New Testament, and the use of the apostles. It is this that is meant, when we are there required, in general terms, to "believe in Christ." It is this, and no more, that was required of the early disciples for admission to baptism and communion in the church. It gives of itself, and of right, a title to the name of Christian. It is all that does give it to thousands of different denominations who have borne it. It is all that the apostles demanded, it is all that any has a

right to demand, in point of faith. Let any man declare, with the appearance of sincerity, that he receives Christ as a commissioned, an authorized, and a true teacher, whom he is bound to believe, and strives to follow,—most cordially will we take him by the hand as a Christian brother, and welcome him to Christian fellowship, whatever his name, his religious or philosophical peculiarities. So far as faith or profession goes, so far as recognition and communion are concerned, he is entitled to the name and privileges of a Christian, if his lips declare that he looks to Christ as his pattern, and his life do not contradict it.

Short of this we are unable to stop. If any one do not receive Christ, as, in any extraordinary sense, a teacher and guide, we see not why he should take, or we should give, the name of Christian. The name denotes something, merely as a name. To say that it denotes only a good man, or a sincere inquirer, or an honest professor of anything, is using language very loosely, besides the offence to Christianity. It is saying that a disciple of Moses, or a disciple of Mahomet, may mean a disciple of Christ. It is saying that of the good and true Christian, and so of the sincere Platonist, so indeed of the lowest Deist. But what is a Deist? He is one who believes in God, but rejects all special revelation, such as Christ professes to have brought. He either does not receive Christ at all, regarding him as a fiction, or he turns from him as an impostor, or he takes him at best as a good man, who uttered some truths, like Socrates, and made some discoveries, like Copernicus, and Newton. To call such a believer a Christian, is as wild as to call me a Mahometan; because, while I reject his authority and pretensions, I believe that Mahomet said some true and good things. This man is not a Christian. But it does not follow, and we do not say, that the man has no Christian temper or character. He may have both. He may be a better man than you or I. There is no question that there have been Jews, Mahometans, and Platonists, more consistent, more true in heart, more faithful to their light, and acceptable to God, than many in Christian lands, and some in Christian profession and fellowship. But they are Jews, Mahometans, and Platonists still. And to call them Christians, is as unmeaning, as to call Luther a Protestant, while he was a monk, or to make Socrates divine, because he lived and died well.

But after all, many may say, what is a name? I answer, it is everything, where a name is the very matter in question. It is of a name that we speak; and if it were nothing in itself, it would be nothing to give or withhold it. The feeling it awakens, the interest expressed, even by unbelievers, when the name of Christian is granted or refused, shows, that it has a value, and that that which it represents is desired. It is little to be called a Lutheran, or to be denied this, or any other human name. But to be called a Christian, or no Christian, is serious. The name stands for a faith, and the faith is of the utmost importance. Different degrees of faith are important. There are various classes of believers. As Christ is viewed in one or another aspect, Christianity has authority or has none, is special or general, natural or supernatural. And these are not immaterial differences. He who believes in Christ as a good man merely, stands in a different relation to him, and must have a different feeling from one who believes in him as an inspired teacher, and expressly commissioned messenger. They who think he uttered many truths, but was still fallible, cannot feel towards him, or listen to his instructions, as they who believe him unerring, and bow to his instructions, as to the voice of God. It is sometimes said, that this difference is no greater than that which exists between different denominations of Christians; that the Unitarian, for example, views Christ so differently from the Trinitarian, as to be denied the name of Christian by the latter, and yet we have always complained of this as bigotry and exclusion. Shall we not be guilty of the same, it is asked, if we exclude those who withhold from Christ all peculiar faith in his inspira-

tion or authority? Is not the difference one of degree merely? By no means. The doctrinal difference does not affect the question of authority, or commission, in the least. The Unitarian believes as firmly and as fully in the divine commission, and indisputable authority of Christ, as the Trinitarian. One believes Christ to be God; and the other believes him to be the Son of God; but so peculiarly his Son, so filled with his spirit, clothed with his authority, and attested by signs and wonders, which God did by him, that he is the very power of God, and wisdom of God, and all he says comes to us as the voice of God, claiming an equal faith and obedience, with that which is yielded by the believer in his supreme divinity. Very different the faith and feeling of him who accords to Christ nothing peculiar in mission, illumination, or authority. To him he is no more than Plato discoursing on the immortality of the soul, or Cicero writing upon the nature of the Gods. He may admire more the wisdom of Jesus, but he can rely no more on his truth or word; and it may be difficult to assign any better reason for calling him after Christ, than after Cicero or Plato.

The faith, then, that unites all Christians,—without which, men, however wise or excellent, are not Christians,—is faith in Christ as the Son of God, "whom the Father has sanctified, and sent into the world." It is faith in him, as the "brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person;" the "author and finisher of our faith;" "the power of God, and the wisdom of God." And this in no vague sense, such as would apply to any man and all men, who are true, but in a sense peculiar and superior to all other; one that gives to Christ a strictly divine mission, supernatural power, and unerring truth. So much as this, in clear and settled faith, we deem essential to the name of Christian. To the character of a Christian, much more is essential.

## FREE INVESTIGATION.

To train the student to power of thought and utterance, let him be left, and still more encouraged, to free investigation. Without this, a theological institution becomes a prison to the intellect, and a nuisance to the church. The mind grows by free action. Confine it to beaten paths, prescribe to it the results in which all study must end, and you rob it of elasticity and life. It will never spread to its full dimensions. Teach the young man, that the instructions of others are designed to quicken, not supersede, his own activity; that he has a divine intellect, for which he is to answer to God; and that to surrender it to another, is to cast the crown from his head, and yield up his noblest birthright. Encourage him, in all great questions, to hear both sides, and to meet fairly the point of every hostile argument. Guard him against tampering with his own mind, against silencing its whispers and objections, that he may enjoy a favourite opinion undisturbed. Do not give him the shadow for the substance of freedom, by telling him to inquire, but prescribing to him the convictions at which he must stop. Better show him honestly his chains, than mock the slave with the show of liberty.

I know the objections to this course. It puts to hazard, we are told, the religious principles of the young. The objection is not without foundation; the danger is not unreal. But I know no method of forming a manly intellect, or a manly character, without danger. Peril is the element in which power is developed. Remove the youth from every hazard, keep him in leading-strings lest he should stray into forbidden paths, surround him with down lest he should be injured by a fall, shield him from wind and storms, and you doom him to perpetual infancy. All liberty is perilous, as the despot truly affirms; but who would therefore seek shelter under a despot's throne? Freedom of will is almost a tremendous gift; but still a free agent, with all his capacity of crime, is infinitely more interesting and noble than the most harmonious and beautiful machine. Freedom is the nurse of intellectual and moral vigour. Better expose the mind to error, than rob it of hardihood and individuality. Keep not the destined

teacher of mankind from the perilous field, where the battle between Truth and Falsehood is fought. Let him grapple with difficulty, sophistry, and error. Truth is a conquest, and no man holds her so fast as he who has won her by conflict.—*Dr. Channing.*

## LIFE'S CONSOLATION IN VIEW OF DEATH.

It is the love of God only that can produce a just sense of his love to us. It is only a deep sense of his love to us, that can assuage the wounds of our affliction. This results from the very nature of things. It is not a technical dogma, but a living and practical truth. It is not a truth, merely, for certain persons called Christians, who are supposed to understand this language; but it is a truth for all men. We suffer under the government of God. It is his will that has appointed to us change, trial, bereavement, sorrow, death. The dispensation, therefore, will be coloured to us throughout—it will be darkened or brightened all over, by our views of its great Ordainer. Ah! it is a doubt here—it is some distrust or difficulty, or want of vital faith on this point, that often adds the bitterest sting to human affliction. When all is well with us, we can say that God is good, and think that we have some love to him; but when the blow of calamity or of death falls upon our dearest possession—strikes down innocent childhood or lovely youth, or the needed maturity of all human virtue, or source of all earthly help and comfort—strikes from our side that which we could least of all spare—oh! it seems to us a cruel, cruel blow: and we say, perhaps, in our distracted thoughts, "Is God good, to inflict it upon us? He—oh! he could have saved, and he did not; he would not. Why would he not? Does he love us, and yet afflict us so? yet crush us, break us down, and blight all our hopes? Is this a loving dispensation?"

My friends, there is but one remedy for all this,—the love—the love—the true, pure, childlike love of God: such love and trust as Jesus felt—even as he, the smitten, afflicted, cast down, betrayed, crucified; who was urged, in the extremity of his sorrow, to say, "Father, if it be possible, remove this cup from me"; yet immediately added, "Father, not my will, but thine be done." This is our example. This is our only salvation. Nothing but this love of God can yield us comfort. If there is no ground for this, then there is no place for consolation in the universe. There may be enduring, there may be forgetting; but there can be no consolation. If there is ground for this love and trust, who in the day of trouble will not pray God to breathe it into his broken heart?

I have said that doubt, distrust, want of faith, is our difficulty. But I do not mean that we seriously and deliberately doubt the goodness of God. How can we doubt? How can the Infinite Being be anything but good? What motive, what reason, what possibility, I had almost said, can there be to Infinite power, Infinite sufficiency, to be anything but good? How can we—except it be in the momentary paroxysm of grief—how, I say, can we doubt? How doubt—beneath these shining heavens—amidst the riches, the plenitude, the brightness, and beauty, of the whole creation—with capacities of thought, of improvement, of happiness in ourselves that almost transcend expression—nay, and with sorrows too, that proclaim the loss of objects so inexpressibly dear? Whence, but from love in God, could have come a love in us so intense, so transporting, so full of joy and blessedness—nay, and so full too of pain and anguish? No! such a love in me assures me that it had its origin in love. Could the Being who made me intelligent, have been himself without intelligence? Nor could the Being want love, who has made us so to love—so to sorrow for what I love. By my very sorrows, then, I know that God loves me—I say not whether with approbation, but with an infinite kindness, an infinite pity. What I need is, but to feel it—to pray for that feeling—to meditate upon all that should bring that feeling into my heart—to take refuge amidst my sorrows, in the assurance that God loves me,