

MODERN MARTYRS.

In former ages the tests of fidelity to Christ were severe. Go into the Church of San Stefano at Rome, and the panels set forth the tribulations through which the early disciples entered the Kingdom of God. Stephen was stoned, Peter crucified, James beheaded, Paul torn to pieces of wild beasts, if these traditions be true. Some were boiled in cauldrons of oil; others were stretched on the rack, burned at the stake, buried alive; no ingenuity was spared that could, by the refinements of cruelty, put faith and faithfulness to the test.

But in these days we face no such horrors and terrors. The tests of Christian character and loyalty are no longer exile, persecution, imprisonment, torture and death. Civilization has brought toleration, and made cruelty distasteful even to those who are not Christian disciples. In enlightened communities the profession of Christ is rather a glory than a shame, and the church is the highway to popular respect and regard. In God's providence, to confess Christ is no longer linked with loss of property, liberty or life.

Is there then any room for martyrs in modern times? Are there tests of our piety and loyalty to Christ, which, though different in form, are as decisive as the old ordeal of fire?

1. The modern martyr is he who dares to live an *unworldly life*. Before the days when Constantine wedded the profession of piety with the possession of state patronage, secularism had begun to invade the house of God. The spirit of the world was shaping the doctrine, deportment, policy and polity of the Church. Worldly men and maxims and measures began to control and prevail, and even the Reformation of the sixteenth century, which did so much to revive evangelical faith, did very little to divorce Church and State, and separate the secular from the spiritual. Nothing is more needed to-day than practical separation from the world, not in form like the anchorite, but in fact, in spirit, like the Master, who even at the wedding feast at Cana manifested forth his glory. To be brave and interpid enough, firmly and fearlessly to protest both by his lips and life against worldliness in the Church; the spirit of caste invading Christian equality; the spirit of fashion turning the sanctuary into a place of display; the spirit of frivolity treating, with lightness, sacred and solemn things; the spirit of selfishness that sneers at self-denial; the spirit of rationalism that would take out from the Bible all miracle and mystery,—all this demands the faith and firmness of a martyr to withstand and oppose. The drift is toward the world, and he who swims heavenward opposes the current. The preacher, the editor, the disciple, who in these days dares patiently, constantly, firmly to “stand up” for spiritual truth, worship, teaching and holy living, may still find that “all who will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.”

2. There is room for martyrdom still in unswerving *loyalty to Scripture principle and practice*. The tendency always is to make void the Word of God through human tradition, to disregard the divine pattern of heavenly things, and introduce into God's house what is foreign to the spirit of the Gospel. From time to time devout and godly souls