

Lukewarmness.

BY REV. HUGH PRICE HUGHES.

I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot; I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth, Rev. 3: 15-16.

These are strong words—very strong, painfully strong. Many persons object to strong language, and of course there are certain instances in which the use of strong language is a sign of weakness and of folly. But when we fully acknowledge that, we are bound to remember, on the other hand, that some persons object to strong language because they themselves are weak. Timid and cowardly souls shrink from the conflicts which strong language provokes, and men, whose convictions are shallow, cannot understand the intense emotion which must express itself in intense words. At the great moments of life, and in reference to the vital issues of conduct, strong language is for earnest natures inevitable. All strong men with strong convictions and strong hopes use strong language.

As far as I am aware, no public teacher the world has ever seen dared to use language quite so strong as that which fell from the lips of Jesus of Nazareth. Who, for example, except Jesus Christ, dared to address a congregation of ministers in such words as these: "Ye serpents, ye offspring of vipers, how shall ye escape the judgment of hell?" How startling it is to find that, when some one told him that Herod desired to kill him, Christ answered, "Go ye and tell that fox, Behold, I cast out devils, and I do cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I shall be perfected." Those who are accustomed to suppose that Christ always used very meek and delicate phraseology would be startled by these quotations. It is very significant that nothing provoked such strong language from Jesus Christ as lukewarmness. Remember his terrible attack upon St. Peter—"Get thee behind me, Satan; thou art a stumbling block to me"—because Peter had made the devilish suggestion that Jesus Christ should hesitate in his obedience to the will of God. Then how remarkable is the expression in the passage where we read there went with him great multitudes. Then and there he turned and said unto them, "If any man cometh unto me, and hateth not his own father and mother, and wife and children, and brother and sister, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple." I need scarcely explain to any one in the full possession of his reason that when he used the word hate he did not intend it to be taken mechanically and literally, but by the use of this strong expression he would fain bring home most vividly to each one of us that the one thing which he does require of us is total, absolute, unconditional, whole-hearted, self-surrender to himself; a demand which it would have been monstrous for him to make, and blasphemous for him to make unless he had been very God. No other great teacher has ever dared to make such an immense and tremendous claim of men. When men said to him, "Show us the way," he answered imperiously, "I am the Way;" when they said, "Tell us the truth," he said, "I am the Truth;" when they said, "Give us the life," once more he replied astonishingly, "I am the Life." Mahomet never dared to say anything like that. But Christ said it, and it was the distinctive note of his teaching. As a matter of fact, he could not start and constitute his Church until there was in the world at least one person who believed in his divinity, and was therefore capable of that absolute devotion to him which is impossible until we realize that he is our God. Peter, as we know, was the first of his disciples who clearly, definitely, expressed and audibly recognized his divinity, and the moment there was one ready for this absolute self-surrender Christ established in him the Christian Church. It was because Peter, with all his shortcomings and inconsistencies, was so whole-hearted that Christ loved him so much and trusted him so much. It was because St. John was even more passionate and intense at heart than St. Peter himself that Christ loved St. John most of all. So we learn from our text that the Lord Jesus Christ positively prefers downright coldness to lukewarmness. It is Christ who says, "I would thou wert cold or hot; but thou art lukewarm, half-hearted, inconsistent; I will spue thee out of my mouth."

During the three years of his public ministry he did not try to make numerous disciples, but rather discouraged the multitude at the height of his popularity. Instead of flattering them he turned round and used mysterious, perplexing and discouraging language, which I have twice quoted. That is not the way to induce the frivolous and superficial and the careless to attach themselves more closely to you. His great aim during his brief public life was simply to induce twelve young men to obey him with all their hearts. The condition of success, he knew, was not a multitude of lukewarm fol-

lowers, but a company—it may be a mere handful—of red-hot disciples. So he sought not a lukewarm multitude, but a small group of red-hot disciples, and in their hands be placed the destinies of the human race.

I have had in Italy impressive and overwhelming evidence of the value of the great truth which the text announces. Rome was twice the mistress of the world—once before the birth of Christ and once since; pagan Rome and clerical Rome. Both these world-empires have passed away. Pagan Rome lives to-day only in its ruins; clerical Rome is self-imprisoned in the Vatican. But we may learn much from these two dead empires. They teach us, in fact, the secret of victory, and they illustrate and explain our text. For what is the explanation of the twice-repeated world-supremacy of Rome?—whole-heartedness; first patriotic whole-heartedness and then clerical whole-heartedness. The triumph of pagan Rome was due to the fact that her citizens made an absolute, unconditional self-surrender to her. They lived for her, they sacrificed everything for her, so she conquered the human race. One of the fables and most characteristic legends of old Rome is to the effect that some 360 years before Christ a great chasm yawned in the Forum, and when the augurs were consulted they said that the immense abyss would never be closed until the most precious thing in Rome was cast into it. Thereupon a young Roman leaped upon his horse, in full gallop, and declaring that the most precious thing was patriotism, he leaped into the abyss which closed over him. They believed in patriotism intensely. They were prepared to sacrifice their trust and best for the supremacy of Rome, and so they conquered the world.

The secret of the second supremacy of Rome is precisely the same—absolute self-surrender to the Roman Catholic is Ignatius Loyola, and what does he say in his "Spiritual Exercises?" He says that the consistent member of the society of Jesus must have no more self-will than a stick; he must place himself absolutely, totally, unconditionally, unreservedly at the disposal of the Pope Jesus of Nazareth asks tonight from you and me the same absolute self-surrender which the young Roman gave to Rome, and which Ignatius Loyola gave to Papal Rome. And I have come here to-night in the name and presence of Jesus Christ, and by the authority of Jesus Christ, to make that claim and that demand of everybody in St. James' Hall. As the Roman knight gave up everything to his city, as the Spanish soldier gave up everything to his church, so men and women, I invoke you and beseech you to give up everything at this moment to Christ. And first I press this rigorous demand of the Gospel upon my own heart. In company with many of my brethren—with a larger number of members of this mission than ever before—I have used the strongest and most solemn language at the Covenant Service this afternoon, declaring that I did there and then place myself unreservedly, absolutely at the service and disposal of Jesus Christ. Christ is my witness that I am not conscious of any reservation whatever. I know I am unable to keep this resolution in my own strength which he has promised me, I do unhesitatingly and gladly, publicly, in the presence of you all, desire to give myself up absolutely to Christ. I do not ask you to do what I have not done myself, but I do ask everyone to do what here and now I do myself. I appeal specially to those who profess and call themselves Christians. This is a new year. We are all making fresh starts. Shall we make a fresh start by giving ourselves afresh to Christ? The one universal demand which is made by Jesus of Nazareth is that you and I should give ourselves up honestly, intensely, whole-heartedly to Christ.

The one thing that is most loathsome to Christ is the lukewarm Christian. No language is strong enough to describe the misery which the lukewarm Christian brings upon himself and the church and the human race. From that may God in his great mercy save you and me. Is there any occasion for this appeal? I ask men of business here, Have you always been loyal to Christ? Have you always in your commercial and business transactions done what you know Christ would have done? How much compromising there is! How much sophism there has been to excuse the tricks of trade! But even at the risk of bankruptcy we must make up our minds that we will never do anything in trade that we could not justify on our knees on Sunday. So with respect to the great sphere of political life in which, happily, men and women of this country are more and more taking an earnest part. How men especially do for the sake of their party what they know is contrary to the mind of Christ! How blasphemously, how atheistically some Christians dare to say—and I presume, try to believe—that religion has nothing to do with public life, and that a man in his capacity as a politician may do what he would never dream of doing in his private capacity! In public life as well as private we must be loyal and consistent and thorough-going disciples of Jesus Christ. So with regard to the pleasures in which we indulge, the one supreme purpose of every moment must be loyal and consistent and thorough-going disciples of Jesus Christ. So with regard to the pleasures in which we indulge, the one supreme purpose of every moment must be to do the will of Christ.

How awful the penalty of lukewarmness: "I will spue thee out of my mouth." Many of you probably read in the newspapers yesterday the distressing description of the public degradation of that unhappy officer in the French army who is supposed to have betrayed military secrets to the possible enemies of France. It made my heart bleed to read the story of his degradation in the presence of the regiments and a great crowd—how they plucked the gold lace from his cap, the epaulettes from his shoulders, the lace from his trousers, broke his sword in two and cast it on one side. Surely a man would rather die than be exposed to that degradation! He had been lukewarm, unfaithful in his devotion to France after having sworn that he would serve France with life and death. It was awful! But there is something more awful than that—to be degraded in the presence of Christ. France publicly spued that unhappy man out of her mouth, and Christ will spue the lukewarm Christian out of his mouth.

But that is not the motive to which I mean mainly to appeal tonight. Before I close I may address to you a higher and brighter argument than that. Consider for a moment what Christ has suffered and sacrificed for you. What have you done for him? Was there any lukewarmness in anything that Christ did for you? He was faithful to death in the Garden of Gethsemane, and on the Cross for your sake. What is the return? Careless, half-hearted, superficial service, an inconsistent life of business and doubtful pleasure? God forbid. Let us be thorough, whole-hearted. Let us pray God to deliver us from lukewarmness. You may never have served God at all. God is willing to save you now as truly as an inconsistent Christian. But you say, "I admit the truth of your words; I feel the force of the appeal; I confess my heart is lukewarm. What can I do?" Listen; there was a predecessor who told us what Christ would do, and this is what he told us: "Behold, he that cometh after me is mightier than I; he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire." O blessed word. O Jesus Christ! do Thou work in the hearts of all the lukewarm Christians, baptizing them with fire. There is one apocryphal saying of Christ which expressed a profound truth: "He that is near me is near the fire." Blessed be God, we are all near Jesus now. At this very moment Christ is nearer to you than the person next to you. That lukewarm heart of yours may be made hot with that fire now. Are you willing?—Preachers' Magazine.

Reverence in Worship.

This was the subject of a sermon by one Brunswick pastor, a few weeks ago. It seemed timely. The text was: Isaiah 6: 3. "And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory." The introduction was a brief statement concerning Isaiah's Vision, of which the text is a part. The speaker said, among many lessons that might be drawn from this wonderful vision of the prophet's, he would only speak of one, namely: *Reverence in Worship*. The general analysis was stated thus: First, the need of greater reverence for the house and worship of God. Second, How may a greater spirit of reverence be secured?

On the need of more reverence, the preacher said: We are living in the high-noon of one of the most irreligious ages the Christian religion has ever witnessed. We will do well to take a lesson from the angels this morning, as to the true spirit of reverence, in worship. Angels are a much higher and holier class of beings than men and women, but note their humble attitude as they bow in worship before the King Immortal: "Above stood the seraphim, each had six wings; with twain (two) he covered his face, with twain he covered his feet and with twain he did fly." This veiling of the face and feet speaks of the reverence with which the angels come into the presence of God. The faces of angels must be purer than the faces of men, even the most devout, but in the presence of God they cover them, as a mark of reverence. The Revelator gives us a picture of reverence on the part of the angelic host. "They rest not day and night, saying, holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was and is and is to come." Take one of our ordinary congregations, and the lack of reverence would fill the angels with fear and trembling. There is reason to fear that we are losing much of the reverent spirit that characterized our fathers. There may be a more polished manner, but the real spirit of reverence is not so great. Irreverence is just as dishonoring to God to-day as in the days of Nadab and Abihu. But it may be said God does not need forms and attitudes, that is true, but we do. The attitude reveals the Spirit. We call all form popery, and in our attempt to get away from the form, we have swung to the other extreme, and dropped both form and Spirit, one has said: "Worship has its beauty as well as its holiness, and we must not make it repulsive under the pretense of making it devout." Many people treat God and His worship with a discourtesy that they would not show to a neighbor. On one occasion Mr. Spurgeon was greatly tried with three young men, who persisted in wearing their hats in the house of God. For some time he seemed to pass it by, but at length he proceeded to tell his audience of a recent visit that he paid to a Jewish synagogue: "When I entered," said he, "I took off my hat, but was speedily informed that it would be a greater mark of