

LOYALTY AND LOVE.*

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"And this is His commandment, that we should believe on the Name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another."—1 St. John iii. 23.

Some of us are very fond of diagnosing the spiritual condition of the times in which we live, and of prescribing remedies for the ills which we may thus discover.

I shall not undertake this task to any extent. But I may, perhaps, venture to suggest what I think are two characteristics that this age particularly needs. These are: Loyalty and Love. Loyalty toward Christ, and love one toward another.

They are enjoined upon us in the Epistle for the present week, and will, I trust, be found particularly appropriate for our consideration at this representative gathering of clergymen and laymen.

In our believing † the name of Jesus Christ, we furnish a test of our loyalty to Him as the only-begotten Son of God, such as goes far beyond the faith and fealty of those who recognize Him or believe Him simply Son of Man. Indeed our loyalty to Him is because we believe Him to be Divine. If He were not, we might owe Him something, as we owe to Socrates and Plato and Shakespeare; but we could disbelieve Him without our disloyalty to Him entitling us to any grave condemnation.

It might appear to some that there is but little need of emphasizing our adherence to the doctrine of Christ's Divinity. Would that it were so! But to some of us, who are constantly brought face to face with the—may I here use a somewhat familiar, but expressive phrase?—shilly-shally Christianity of not a few, it is all too evident that this fundamental doctrine requires to be more unequivocally proclaimed and enforced.

There are those to-day who give themselves, and to whom others allow, the name of Christians, who utterly repudiate the dogma of Christ's Divinity. We have been lately ‡ reminded of those disciples to whom this lofty name was first given. Think you that they had any misgivings as to the twofold nature of Christ, or that they would have believed His name and felt themselves honored in bearing it, if they had supposed Him to be only a man? And yet we frequently meet neighbors of our own who cling to this supposition as the very ground work of their religion. Shall we, can we call them Christians? Some may. I will not. I may be far from living consistently with the faith which this denial of their consistency involves. But at least I shall do what I can to protect this holy appellation from being worn by those who reject the very essence of its significance.

Only a short time ago, there was erected in a building in my native city of Philadelphia a monument commemorative of the undoubted talents and virtues of one who was styled the founder in America of what was denominated "Unitarian Christianity." Unitarian Christianity, indeed! There can be no such thing. It is a very contradiction of terms.

And it is not uncharitable to say so: for that is not charity that blinks the truth. Has it come to this, that, rather than hurt the feelings of some kind-hearted, amiable friend, we will deny the Lord that bought us, and crucify Him afresh? If I must needs be uncharitable, it

surely will not be to Him, in practically making Him—I say it with all reverence—an impostor, while I am cowardly cringing to the so-called liberal spirit of the age. And this phrase, "spirit of the age," is no unmeaning one. It represents a vital force with which we have to do. But before I will consent to drag down to its meaner level the great truths centring in the Incarnate Son of God, I will loyally strive, by God's grace, to raise the spirit of the age to the nobler ideal of the Catholic Creeds, and teach men everywhere of that one omnific name whereby alone—because of His being both God and man—the world can be saved.

When men are asking, as they asked of old: What shall we do to be saved? it is no time for us to present His name as one only out of a multitude, any one of which they may with equal safety select and believe. Nor must we so express our own belief in it as to leave them uncertain as to what we actually do believe. Let there be an unequivocal, aye, an uncompromising confession of Him as the only Messiah, the Sent of God, the alone Propitiation for sin, the one Mediator between God and man.

Now, no such titles and offices can possibly be given in intelligent sincerity to any one save Jesus Christ; and not to Him except as He is Himself Divine, and while Divine manifest in human flesh.

Any confession of Christian faith less than this is disloyalty to Him. And to allow in another less than this and call it Christian, is also disloyalty to him.

It is disloyalty, too, to our Father, for thus to believe in His Son is His commandment, as St. John instructs us in our text. No matter what may be our own intellectual conclusions; no matter what may be the intellectual conclusions of others; the commandment—the direction of our Creator and our Governor—is that we should believe the name of His Son Jesus Christ. And that this belief should leave out the Son's partaking of the Father's nature is so utterly unreasonable, that one cannot but wonder and wonder how such an idea could ever be seriously entertained.

The commandment is not grievous. It contradicts nothing that is rational. Its obedience helps to the obedience of other commandments.

And yet with what complacency do many who affect belief in Him look on the disbelief of others! Think you that if there were more of that sort of loyalty to Him which I am now enforcing there would have been such encouragement afforded a renegade American to undertake a mission to this country, not to exalt the name and dignity of Christ, not to diffuse a wider knowledge of, and reverence for, the Holy Bible, but to convert this nation—you and me and our families—to Mohammedanism and the Koran?

I call him advisedly a renegade American, because, despite the fact that in our national constitution there is no express recognition of God and Christianity, Christianity is the common law of this land. No one, therefore, who sets himself in array against its cardinal principles is a true American.

When I recall the fact that in the beginning of our national history, the conversion of the aboriginal inhabitants of this land was declared in the Royal Charters to be the main purpose of the colonization schemes thus sanctioned by the British sovereigns, and, further, that in the complement of a fleet the chaplain was deemed as essential as the admiral, I feel myself entirely justified in claiming this country as a Christian country.

Shall we say that, because in many instances and respects it shows departures from the faith, we will give up this claim, and allow its enemies to usurp the dominion of Christ? Or shall we not, the rather, by our unflinching fealty to Him

amid all discouragements, make it impossible for them to withstand His onward course?

This is no time for vacillation and faint-heartedness, nor for contemptuous disdain for such notions as are actually undermining in some souls the very foundations of Christianity. These notions are to be combatted with unswerving bravery and consistency. One of the dignitaries of our Mother Church of England, who, although more than four-score years old, is still striving for the truth with the ardor of youth, was once discoursing to a rural congregation on the spiritual cowardice of the age. "When," said he, "men come to invade God's acre as, doubtless, they will, and begin to plough up our bones, what do you think will most surprise them? It will be the scarcity of back-bones." I wonder if the same surprise would not accompany similar proceedings in America? We do certainly need more back-bones among the professed disciples of Christ; more of that stout maintenance of the Faith once delivered to the saints, which although it may provoke the enmity of the world, will entitle us to the friendship of God.

Not that I would counsel any such controversy or methods of controversy as would needlessly antagonize those from whom we differ, or would lead us to hatred and bitterness. We must speak the truth. But we must speak it in love. For so is the commandment of God, as found in my text: "That we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another." We are to be loyal in our love and loving in our loyalty.

We may be never so immovable in holding on to the forms of sound words in which we confess our belief and hope, but if we have not charity, the world will fail to be converted from its many phases of infidelity. It was when we were His enemies, that we all were reconciled to God* by the love of His only-begotten Son. The disciple is not to be above his master. The same law of love reveals to both the Father's will.

Doubtless, it is difficult in the face of so much disloyalty to Christ, to restrain our indignation always within the bounds of righteousness. But the command is absolute in terms, and limitless in range. And the very displeasure we feel because of men's unfaithfulness against God will all the more move us, out of our love for them, to save them from the awful consequences of their sins. So our love toward them will become as the flowing back of God's love toward us.

We will even love them to the point of suffering for them, for we cannot long remain true to God without in some way being made to feel that we are losing something which the world esteems. Not that in itself this suffering involves the loss of anything really valuable, but that in maintaining our loyalty to Christ there are toils and self-denials which, without a neighborly love, we are not likely to endure.

It seems strange, indeed, to profess our love for others, and yet be indifferent to their belief and practice. It is but to imitate the spirit of the first murderer when we dismiss from our minds such apprehensions as must come to us because of their clear ungodliness, with the reflection that they are sinning wilfully amid the same opportunities of grace as are within our own reach. If we have a real love for them, we cannot but be most anxious and unhappy at the slightest suspicion of any danger that threatens their eternal welfare. We ought not to be able to rest day nor night until we have done what we can to bring them into agreement with what we have learned to believe is essential to such welfare. The Kiss of Peace may have disappeared from our own religious rites; but there is no reason why we should not cherish that unity of faith, as the counterpart

*Romans v. 10.

*A sermon delivered before the Archdiocesan of Westchester, in Christ Church, Piermont, N. Y., June 15, 1893.

†The *dative* is here employed.

‡Epistle for St. Barnabas' Day.