

A Lay Sermon for the Christmas Season.

Once on a time a conversation took place between two friends, one a Jew, the other a Christian. Said the Jew, or, as it happened, the Jewess, a very able and brilliant woman, by the way:

"Come, let us get up a fine new religion: let us take a little of your religion, and a little of my religion, and a little of Chunder Sen's religion, and make up a new religion of our own."

"No, my good friend," said the Christian; "I cannot do it. I am like Stockton's man who was too old to change his diseases. I am too old to change my religion; and besides, I have never quite lived up to it. When I have thoroughly exhausted Christianity as a working religion, I may return to your proposition and assist in the attempt to make a better religion than the one to which I was born."

There is a class of religionists whose happy creed it is to believe not only in entire sanctification, but in their own perfect holiness. We remember the confession, on the part of a kindly and somewhat humorous pastor, of the fearful trouble given him by a superlatively virtuous person, whose peckiness seemed to increase in direct proportion to her piety. Not that (God forbid!) this is always the case; but outside of the ranks of the "wholly sanctified" there are a few born or adoptive Christians who are not of the state of mind of the above-quoted respondent,—feeling that, with all their efforts, occasional or continuous, they are still grievously unsatisfactory as Christians. The best of men are apt to be those most convinced of being chief among sinners.

A church-going neighbor of ours, talking the other day about the standards of orthodoxy, stated facts in his own experience tending to prove, what all intelligent persons are well aware of, that during the last thirty years the standards have changed, or there has come a change in their interpretation and application,—a lessening of stress. The condition of things indicated is notorious; to some honest souls, to some scholarly, capable, and consistent controversialists, it is deplorable.

Deplorable, unquestionably, it would be if any change in the standards of orthodoxy meant a lessening of the hold of Christian principles upon individuals and nations.

We believe that the Christian spirit does not forbid utterly the use of force between nations and men, but the tendency of the Christian spirit is to wipe out war and cruel strife everywhere.

It is more, and not less, Christianity that the world needs as between peoples and between people, in diplomacy, in public and private business, in all affairs of the state, the family, and the individual. Unselfish kindness, helpfulness, courtesy, gentlemanliness, honorable dealing among men,—these are all practical versions of the Golden Rule, and genuine products of the Sermon on the Mount.

In the secret soul there are apprehensions and appreciations of the hidden truth, the deep humanity, of even the dogmas which are so often spoken of, nowadays, with scornful and superior criticism by those who have not studied their philosophical significance or felt their meaning in spiritual experience. The doctrine of atonement, by so many deemed outworn,—how many souls it has helped to cast off an impairing and degrading past, some encumbering sin of the inherited flesh! How many, in dashing aside the shell of form and tradition, despoil themselves of some inner treasure, fit and needful for the spirit's food!

More, and not less, of genuine Christianity is the need of this world. Every intelligent religion may have something to impart to those born to Christianity; but those so born, and the nations thus cradled, will arrive at nobler destinies in the increasing endeavor to follow the spirit of the teachings of the world's one inimitable prophet.



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