

A

LAY SERMON

ON

OUR PRESENT DIFFERENCES.

TEXT :

“ LET THEM FIGHT—LIKE DOGS AND CHRISTIANS AS THEY ARE !”
(Turkish Philosophy.)

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"Let them fight—like dogs and Christians as they are!"

(*Turkish Philosophy.*)

"Let them fight—like dogs and Christians as they are!" exclaims the philosophic Turk, contemptuously regarding the Greek and Latin devotees, who shew their zeal for orthodoxy by an occasional murderous onslaught on each other in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, at the gracious season of Easter.

"Let them fight!" says the "true believer," but the conflict waxes sometimes so serious as to require the intervention of the Turkish guard, with musket and bayonet, to part the *Christian* disputants.

There are many to whom the highly edifying warfare, carried on for some time past amongst Upper Canadian Churchmen, is an indifferent, if not a positively gratifying exhibition. Some watch the contest with a critical eye, applauding the force or dexterity of especial combatants—the point-blank directness of an episcopal "shoulder-hitter"—the clumsy energy of a rampant Presbyterian—or the vindictive adroitness of a grim lay-brother who has scientifically caught an opponent's head into "chancery"—all in turn earn their meed of applause. And the Turk (if we

had him) would say, "See how these Christians hate one-another," and the indifferent would mutter with Bolingbroke, "the priests remind one of the nurses of Jupiter—they make a clamour to drown the voice of their God!"

But there are many, very many, we trust, to whom the spectacle serves more for tears than laughter, and who ask sadly, What is to become of the one great cause—the spreading of that Kingdom, whose professed subjects are engaged in deadly civil strife?

The leaders on each side will answer you with some common-place about doing your duty, and leaving the consequences in higher hands, or perhaps will urge that the fight must go on till the adversary be crushed—that there can be no halting between two opinions, and that God or Baal must prevail. Brave and true words like these have been on the lips of strong reformers of abuses, but have also too often been used to justify the bigot, and to nerve the arm of the persecutor. The grave question forces itself on all minds, not hopelessly blinded by controversial zeal, whether such a state of things can continue without deadly peril to the great mission of the Church.

Party spirit has moderated very much in England during the last few years. Partizans still exist on both sides of the great questions, ready for any amount of recrimination and unreasoning calumny; but, as a keen observer lately remarked, it would be difficult just now to excite the religious world to the boiling point of fifteen or twenty years ago, or as when the war raged between Henry of Exeter and the invader of Bampford-Speke.

Public opinion has unmistakeably protested against the revival of this horrible style of discussing religious questions, and, but for the wicked course pursued by the so-called

“religious newspapers,”—disgraceful exceptions to the improved tone of public journalism,—we should hear but little of the bitterness of theological wrangling.

In Western Canada, we seem to be many years behind our parent land in these matters. Ever since the abominable warfare that sprung up on the contested election for the western diocese, party spirit has raged amongst us, and the consequences are melancholy and humiliating to all true lovers of the Church. Friends have been alienated—old friendships rudely broken—the heads of our dioceses seem hopelessly at variance—charges of heresy and unsoundness bandied back and forward, and calumny and misrepresentations sown broadcast over the land. Every combination for purposes of general interest, depending for its success on the hearty co-operation of all, is paralysed, and measures are approved or condemned according to the “school” of the men who propose them.

The design of these remarks is not to express any opinion, or take any side on the theological merits of the question at issue, but rather to draw attention to facts and probable results.

A large party in the church is vehemently assailed by another large party, as upholding certain views of a Romanizing nature, especially on Baptism and the Eucharist. It is retorted on the assailants that they are schismatical Churchmen, ignoring the Prayer Book, Homilies,* and Canons, which they dishonestly profess to be bound by, but practically deny.

This controversy, developed in milder or stronger forms, has existed since the Reformation, nor is it to be expected that it should wholly cease until a clearer revelation be vouchsafed. No freeman can object to its full discussion.

It is of the essence of Protestantism to enquire and to discuss; and by such processes the theological mind must be developed and educated.

In the judgment of all but fanatics, it is the glory of the United Church of England and Ireland, to allow as wide a latitude to her children as is consistent with the great verities of the gospel, and not to place upon their necks a yoke which neither they nor their fathers could bear. On both the sacraments, great latitude of opinion exists, and must exist so long as our Common Father is pleased to create the infinite varieties of the human mind.

This generation well remembers the satisfaction of moderate Churchmen, when the highest legal tribunal pronounced that there was nothing in the articles or creeds of the Church necessarily to exclude the large number who held Mr. Gorham's views. An opposite construction would have rent the Church asunder. Thousands who then protested against the decision, now acknowledge its wisdom.

It seems reasonably clear that our Church has her posts of honour and usefulness for good and true men who differ widely on the "baptismal" question, as well as for those whose sacramental opinions vary almost as widely as those of Luther and Ulric Zwingli. If her courts of last resort narrow her doctrine down to either the "High" or "Low" Church standard, she must at once exclude tens of thousands now embraced in her wide-spread arms.

Insist on a more dogmatic theology, and the fair globe of the Church may be shivered into the elements of half-a-dozen sects. The majority amongst us will say that they desire nothing of this kind, and wish our system to remain as comprehensive as it has ever been.

It is idle, however to profess a theoretic liberality, if we enforce a practical persecution on all who differ from us—pronounce them unworthy of Church membership, and use all our power to destroy their usefulness, and drive them from the common fold. When party spirit rages, as it unhappily does in Canada, we have the unreasoning and unreasonable extreme High Churchman, denouncing his opponents as schismatics, false to their ordination vows—false to canon and formulary. His antagonist upbraids him as a Romish wolf, trespassing on the free pastures of a Protestant Church.

Of the extreme classes to which the combatants belong, it has been said, with great show of truth, that the first too often puts the Church above its Founder ; and of the second, that its hatred of Popery far outweighs its love of Christianity.

All this, veiled as it too often is, under discreditable professions of charity and zeal for the soul of erring brethren, is simply *persecution*—the old besetting sin of Christian men. Satan has no more powerful lever to stir up the vicious inside of man's sinful heart than the appeal to his bigotry—"his zeal for the truth" as it were—to start him on the task of forcing all men to view the great truths common to all Christians precisely from his stand-point—precisely through his spectacles, green, blue or yellow, as they may be. When bigotry had power on its side, it crushed by physical force : now that the power is lost, it develops itself in systematic attempts to depreciate, to defame, and to ruin.

But little real difference exists betwixt the Torquemada and the Dominic of centuries past, and your modern bigot, "oily and venomous," protesting his profound regard for the soul of his erring brother, his desire "to speak the truth in love," and then denouncing him either as a schismatic or

a Papist—a wolf in sheep's clothing—a perverter of souls—an agent of evil—and all because the object of his unctuous vituperation, (oftentimes a true-hearted earnest labourer in the Master's service,) holds some higher or lower view on baptism or the eucharist, on which the Church and her wisest teachers have advisedly declined to dogmatise.

Is there one of our readers who cannot in a moment bring such a modern "inquisitor," before his mind's eye? Is there not instance after instance of the peace of a quiet parish, (where the Lord's work was done, not the less faithfully, because noiselessly,) utterly broken, and the usefulness of its minister seriously impaired, by the intrusive meddling of an "extreme" partizan "speaking the truth in love," and trying to persuade the flock of the unsoundness of its pastor? Read the columns of a "religious newspaper:" what a mass of malice and uncharitableness ever presents itself! No slander is too base to be uttered—no course too mean to be resorted to to "get up a case" against a clergyman who lives beyond the charmed circle of infallibility of the journal and its clique. Every complaint, however ill-founded, which anonymous malice can furnish against the poor parson from any quarter of the parish, is eagerly printed, with a commentary doubly disgusting and offensive from its ostentatious parade of charity and affectation of regret; and though the slander be promptly exposed, it is rarely retracted or apologised for.* Religious newspapers have been justly termed the "cess-pools of controversy;" but they remain oracles to readers of peculiar tastes.

"Indifferentism" will be the ready charge made by extreme men against the writer of remarks like these.

* Many readers will remember the illustrative anecdote of the new curate, nervously reading from an old-fashioned Prayer-Book, the sentence in the Litany praying for "our gracious sovereign George the Third, and Her Majesty Queen Charlotte;" whereupon the unhappy man is forthwith publicly proclaimed as having "prayed for the dead!"

It is easy to maunder about "Laodiceans" and "Galilios." It is anything but easy to undo the horrid mischief done to the cause of Christ and his gospel by the men who will be too ready to fasten such names on all who see with sorrow, verging on despair, the party feeling that is desolating the Church. The true "indifferent" cares nothing for these things. They jar not his moral epicureanism. Our "Turk" would mutter, "Let them fight—dogs and Christians as they are!"

The educated mind is ever attracted to that religious teacher who with the humility of true wisdom, abstains from unnecessary dogmatism—who shrinks from the presumption that insists on positive exactness in defining, what Holy Writ has (likely with wise design) omitted to define. The unthinking are too readily drawn to follow the shallow fanatic, who persists in fastening the interpretation patronized by his own narrow-minded faction on the solemn truths of faith. In proportion to the largeness of the intellectual grasp is the disposition to widen instead of narrowing the basis of orthodox interpretation.

Profound thinkers—our Butlers, Whatelys, and others, well knew that our creed has truths not to be interpreted by mere reason yet to be realised by faith,—and their deep wisdom revolted from the presumption of dogmatism, where the founders of our religion, and the fathers of our reformed church had refused to dogmatise. The self-confidence of controversial bitterness knows no such restraints, and damnation is launched with the fierceness, if not the power, of an Innocent or a Hildebrand, against all who dissent from the interpretation of each noisy school.

Either of the extreme parties may hope to win converts from the mass of those who are too ready to let their spiritual "directors" think for them, and perhaps the more extrava-

gant and offensively sectional the teaching, the more attractive is it to the multitude. But if the Church (to say nothing of its extension beyond its present bounds) is to win the affections of such of its professed members as think a little for themselves,—who shrink from all partisanship, and reject any weightier yoke than the law hath placed upon them,—is it not time for its ministers to lend their aid to allay instead of exciting the personal bitterness exhibited in our controversies? Can the wildest optimist believe that aught but evil can come out of such strifes as we have lately witnessed? There is One who can bring good out of every thing and make all redound to His glory : but such a comforting truth must not leave us in judicial blindness as to the palpable tendency of our lamentable divisions.

Repeating the desire to avoid all expression of approval or disapproval of the doctrinal variances involved, it is necessary to illustrate the views here presented by allusion to recent events.

Can any well-balanced mind in the Church—any calm believer in her creeds and articles—we appeal not to the zealots of the extreme schools that distract her peace—do otherwise than mourn over two striking developments of the controversial spirit now exciting attention ?

In one case we find a respectable layman,—zealous almost to slaying, for his stringent views on baptism,—not merely in rebellion to his spiritual pastor, but exercising his power to eject him bodily from his charge, solely on this speculative ground of difference.

Again, we have the case of an Institution founded not many years past by the zeal of an aged Prelate, supported by the generous liberality of Churchmen throughout the Province, and once an object of just pride to all without distinc-

tion of party. As party spirit waxed fiercer and stronger after its shameful development in the diocesan election already noticed, it became known that the institution was looked on with disfavour by one in the highest position in the Church, entitled by law to an absolute veto upon all its proceedings, and armed with extensive power to ensure to him a due weight in its counsels.

Now if ever there was a case in which reasonable men would have expected a resort to every legitimate means for the quiet reformation of any thing exceptionable in doctrine or discipline,—if ever there was a case for the tolerant consideration and kindly forbearance of all generous minds, it would seem that of an infant institution struggling for existence, and requiring the hearty support of all shades of opinion.

But zealous, even unto slaying, as the layman above mentioned, the appointed guardian and governor of the institution, suddenly startled the whole Canadian Church, by formally branding this, his own peculiar charge, as heretical in its teaching, and pronouncing over it the “greater excommunication.” The nature of this assault at once precluded all hope of peaceful compromise,—its only result could be resistance or surrender at discretion.

No event in our local Church history, perhaps, ever produced a deeper sorrow in the minds of a very large, and possibly not the least devoted, educated, or disinterested of Canadian Churchmen.

Like the zealous Layman, the zealous Churchman may be orthodox in his individual opinions, and yet wholly unwarranted in the construction he tries to fasten on those of his opponents; but, be the abstract truth as it may, the concrete mischief is as palpable, as it is (we fear) irreparable.

We point to such occurrences in a spirit of earnest sorrow, with no unkindly feeling towards the actors, but with a deep sense of the terrible consequences of this "throwing about of fire."

There has ever been, and now is, a party ready to applaud to the echo all acts of this kind. Consequences are wholly overlooked; temporary triumph over opponents is the exultant feeling. The layman and the ecclesiastic both doubtless have their applauders, but the wounds thus inflicted will continue to fester and bleed afresh, long after the echoes of thoughtless applause have died upon the ear.

The Church, as an organised body, suffers deeply from such proceedings; but deeper and deadlier injury is, we fear, done to the souls of men.

There is bitterness enough in political and social disputes; there might be some "charmed ground" left to us within the wide arms of our mother the Church, where peace and charity might find a resting-place. Our minds are all too ready to take umbrage, and find occasion for dispute. History, with uniform consistency, proves the apparent paradox, that no animosity is so deadly and so unreasoning, as that provoked by different views of the great truths of the gospel of peace. In nothing should we expect our spiritual pastors to be more scrupulously careful, than in saying or doing aught to evoke the odious demon of religious discord. Every parish in Canada contains, in various proportions, men of antagonistic opinions on the questions of the day. A discreet and kindly charity in his words and acts, will enable a faithful minister, in nearly every case, to preserve peace, without the least concealment—much less abandonment—of his own convictions. He may freely address his people, and urge them to embrace his views, without danger of offence. But a harsh word—

such as, unhappily, we all hear too frequently—will act like a spark of fire to kindle the flame of religious disputation.

When we look to our spiritual advisers for the words of peace and charity, for oil on our troubled waters, we hear but “Curse ye Meroz, curse ye bitterly!” The curse is harsh enough on the ear at all times. Disgust is added to disapprobation when the curser wraps the imprecation in some prostituted scripture formula, and assures his hearers that he “speaks the truth in love,” and that it is the doctrine, not the man, that he holds up to reprobation.

Is the case over-stated? Can any reader not readily recall the bitter words he has heard from clerical lips against some clerical brother, whose only crime was that he held an opinion a shade lower or higher than that of the speaker, as to the spiritual presence, or the efficacy of infant baptism?

The most violent and ultra of the clergy, high or low, will always have a small circle of especial admirers, whose applause will follow his every act; and the more extravagant the proceeding, the noisier will be the approbation. This loud approval is too often mistaken by its object for the voice of the public at large, and naturally so, as he hears all that is palatable to his egotism; while a far larger number of the most thoughtful and earnest-minded of the souls entrusted to his care, view his proceedings and hear his words of bitterness with silent regret.

No man is asked to surrender or to conceal an honest conviction. As frankly and uncompromisingly as ever he may press his own views,—be they of Hooker or be they of Simeon. He may, however, obtain by prayer and watchfulness the blessing of that quiet spirit, which is ready to accord to his fellow minister the credit of labouring with sincerity in the Master’s service, at least as genuine as his

own. He may succeed in exorcising that spirit of presumptuous dogmatism which prompts him to denounce his brother as an emissary of evil, and his (higher or lower) view of a sacrament as heretical and soul-destroying.

It is not pretended that foolish partizans on either side have not occasionally said and preached in a style deserving severe reprobation, straining an extreme view to apparently dangerous practical results. Such weak brethren will exist in every church—on the one side startling and offending by idle and mischievous novelties, mediæval millinery, gesture and posture masters—on the other side treating all discipline and rubrical direction with contempt; and, in an unhealthy zeal for spiritual liberty, over-leaping all decorous barrier of article or canon. These “irregulars” can be best dealt with and brought to their senses by very different weapons from those commonly used against them.

Let not the spirit of these remarks be misunderstood. They emanate from no personal bitterness. They are only intolerant towards intolerance; they pander to no party spirit; they espouse no party views. The writer desires impartial justice on all the disturbers of the Church’s peace. Of his views this much may be said, that they possibly accord most with those of the religious party which he feels most inclined to blame, not for its opinions, but for its cruel manner of enforcing them.

Is this a time for a church—struggling with heavy external difficulties—to be distracted by “civil war?” Are the two dioceses to be like hostile camps? Is the training institution, to which our Sovereign granted her charter, instead of enjoying the generous support of all, and having any proved abuses corrected by the friendly hands of its legal guardians, to be abandoned by those charged with the solemn duty of upholding its usefulness, and denounced as a

stronghold of heresy? While a rationalistic theology is openly assailing the traditions of our faith, is the Church to be internally at variance? While the Roman is thundering at the gate, are John and Simon to be slaying in the temple?

We may be called alarmists—unnecessarily anxious about temporary excitements which time will cure. The excitement doubtless may pass away, but the wounds inflicted in the contest will be long to heal—too ready to bleed afresh.

We believe profoundly in Time, both as the healer and the avenger. The day will surely come, when reflection will bring to the authors of present mischief, and the neglectors of solemn duties, a saddening and humbling consciousness that when they lightly called down fire from heaven, they “knew not what manner of spirit they were of.”

HE who made us with minds of various powers will, we trust, look more leniently on the existence of various shades of opinion among His servants, on the intangible mysteries of faith, than those servants—in their zealous weakness—looked on each other.

Fellow Churchmen—clerical and lay—are those outside our fold still, to say with the Ottoman sentry,—

“Let them fight!—Dogs and Christians as they are!”

Toronto, January, 1861.