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The Beatitude of the Loyal and Open-minded.

BY PROFESSOR JAMES MOFFATT, D.D., D.LITT., NEW YORK.

HAPPY indeed are those who have never had occasion to doubt the Lord. There are numbers of people in the Church who could honestly say, if you questioned them, that they are not conscious of having felt any temptation to be upset by scepticism or sharply disappointed with the ways of God. The fact is, they live quiet, faithful lives, unaffected by any surge of contemporary uncertainty about the principles or the practice of their religion; if they happen to hear of these disturbing waves, it is with a genuinely puzzled sense of wonder and pity, such as an inland peasant might feel on hearing of a typhoon. Such people have not been called to pass through experiences which seriously threatened to shake their simple faith. Any religious concern in their case is due to doubt of themselves, not of God. If they are visited by uneasiness, it is over the question of their personal faithfulness. Instead of wishing to have the ways of God justified to them (an idea which would scarcely occur to their minds, even in facing tragic pain or loss), they have searchings of heart about the measure and the quality of their devotion to the Lord, and are rather disposed to ask themselves if their ways can be justified to Him. But this questioning spirit, in the more serious and thoughtful, rises from the strength of their belief, not from any apprehension that their belief is being undermined by some outside shift of opinion. It is a humble self-examination which is one pulse of vitality. Blessed indeed is the man who thus finds nothing in the circumstances of his Christian inheritance to upset the soul or to destroy the nerve of loyalty to the Lord.

Our beatitude does not refer to this type of Christian. When Jesus said, 'Blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me' (Mt 11⁶, Lk 7²³), it was shaken faith, not simple faith, that He had in mind. We have no precise idiom in English to serve as an equivalent for the word rendered by 'offended.' To be offended is, in our common usage, to feel annoyed or hurt by something or some one. We are offended 'by' a person, not 'in' him, and as a rule the dislike does not go very far or very deep, even though people may talk of being mortally offended. But, on the lips of Jesus and His early followers, to be 'offended' meant something serious and really mortal; it was to be tripped up or to let oneself be upset in such a way that confidence was shaken, if not

shattered. To be 'offended' in Him was to be shocked or scandalized by something in Him, till trust in His mission and message either waned or was abandoned. The 'offended' person is staggered, so taken aback that he loses his footing. This is the setting of the sentence: 'Blessed is he who is repelled by nothing in me.'

No one can be repelled who has not been first attracted. It is only the loyal who are tempted to doubt the wisdom of a leader and to withdraw or qualify their allegiance. While some loyal Christians are blessed with a faith and with circumstances which never give rise to such a sharp temptation, others know only too well the strain put upon simple faith by developments or by lack of developments in the religious sphere. It may be suggested to them, for instance, that the living Lord to whom they pledged their word in earlier days is not equal to the actual situation in the present, or it may seem as though He were either unable or unwilling to fulfil legitimate expectations created by the very faith which He Himself inspired. They anticipated a wonderful result, but it is disconcerting to find that it is either slow in being realized or not sufficiently prominent, the reason being that they identify the gospel with some particular issue. If such suspicions or objections are allowed to settle on the mind, they may upset religious faith altogether. A man may be driven back disappointed, disillusioned, from the Jesus Christ who once meant everything to him. Now, faith has its phases. Doubts of this kind may be growing pains. Loyalty puts a strain upon mental as well as upon moral courage, and Jesus never resented any such passing mood of uncertainty, which may well be due to a genuine, though an ill-instructed, zeal for the good cause. What He does warn His followers against, is permitting these impatient doubts of the aims and methods of Christianity to overthrow loyalty to Himself, as they will surely do if by brooding over them a man, to all intents and purposes, begins to assume that he knows better than the Lord. 'Blessed is the man who is repelled by nothing in me,' but who, in spite of appearances and inner questionings, still sees no hope for the future except in siding with his Master.

The saying is a flower on the soil of a strange interview. John the baptizer was in the dungeons of Machaerus and also in Doubting Castle. When

news of Jesus came to him, with glowing accounts of the Lord's mission, he was excited and yet uncertain. Was this really the way to bring about the restoration of the people? John could not feel quite satisfied. The new development ran counter to some of his cherished hopes. No fasting, no heading of the nation with dramatic messianic authority, no direct action, no agitation, no public challenge thrown down to the age in the name of God! Only preaching the gospel and ministering to human needs! It was all so unlike what the revivalist prophet had imagined, so different from the ancestral hopes of a divine messiah, so undemonstrative, such a side-issue, that John began to waver in his convictions; almost in spite of himself, he seems to have been conscious of perplexity over this unconventional appeal to the provinces. So wistfully or impatiently he dispatched some of his personal adherents to elicit from Jesus a straightforward answer to the question, 'Art thou the Coming One, or are we to look out for some one else?' The answer they received was this: 'Go and tell John the things you hear and see; blind are receiving their sight, lame are walking, lepers are being cleansed, deaf folk are hearing, the dead are being raised, and the poor have the gospel preached to them.' In the wake of this object-lesson and its significance came the beatitude, 'And blessed is he who is repelled by nothing in me.' It is He and no one else, not even John, who is responsible to God for the gospel, and the argument for the gospel is its action.

The sentence is a grave reminder that Christian loyalty in every age must be prepared to meet the living Lord with an open mind. Not with the open mind which is quite ready to treat Him as one of the rare spirits of the world and to classify Him neatly with other leaders of the human soul. This is liberalism outside the Christian allegiance; whatever it may come to, it is as yet devoid of the Christian presupposition. The open-mindedness required by Jesus Christ is directed towards His own revelation of God. It is not an alternative to Christian convictions, but a warning against the damage that may be done to these inside the ranks by the narrowing tendency of inherited traditions and preconceived opinions. To suppose for one moment that there can be any other hope for the world than our Lord is to be untrue to Him, and those who entertain such an idea are warned, in this stringent beatitude, that they are in danger of departing from the living God, no matter how they may adorn their view with fine phrases about breadth of mind.

The loyalty of Christians is exposed to a variety of trials, moral and mental. One common reason for giving up faith in Christ is undoubtedly the misbehaviour of some who bear His name. It is possible to be repelled from Christianity by the sight of Christians doing one thing and saying another, combining orthodox opinions with indifference to truth, justice, and kindness, yoking godliness to what cannot be described as anything but inhumanity. Jesus knew this, but He does not speak of it here. He is thinking of another trial to loyalty which many people bring upon themselves by failing to see and believe that He fulfils His eternal purpose in many ways, some of them far beyond our preconceived ideas. There is nothing for it but to attend to Him, opening the mind to His surprising developments in our day and generation, even although these may take us aback. 'Say what you will,' Pascal told his age, 'there is something astounding in the Christian religion.' And astounding not simply to outsiders but to those inside Christendom. The revelations of His Spirit which are hailed as a grateful proof of His perennial power are at the same time challenges to the loyalty of His followers, testing their receptiveness. Are they prepared to follow the new lead, at the cost of prejudices? It is a crucial issue. Loyalty to Him is larger than loyalty to our ideas of Him, though good people occasionally fail to realize that. It may even be that some loyalists have to trust Him without quite understanding Him for the moment. Yet that is one supreme proof of devotion, for surely any deeper apprehension of His purpose comes through nothing except personal allegiance to His will, so far as that is already known. The Lord is often served well by the puzzled head with the steadfast heart, by a faith which is indeed shaken but so far from being upset is strengthened by the ordeal.

You see, the oft shaking of the cedar tree
Fastens it more at root.

It is quite possible that the loyal at times may be sure of little else than this, that they are safer and wiser to follow His lead than to leave Him.

Anyhow, the point of our beatitude is that we ought to be brave enough and broad enough to welcome signs of His leadership, no matter how these may run counter to our tastes or compel us to revise our expectations. We are to be measured by His standards, after all, not He by ours. The Cross does strike across a number of sub-Christian ideas and assumptions dear to every age, even

within Christendom. Some enthusiasts want the gospel or the Church to do little else than further some urgent cause of their own in social or political reform. Others are averse to any such connexion, for higher and for lower motives. In every age those who have something in common with Jesus Christ may find themselves brought sharply up against inferences from His gospel which disturb the mind and even unsettle some accepted opinions about His religion. For various reasons it is possible that loyalists may be repelled by that gospel, if they will not consider patiently, fully, and humbly its facts and forces. Bishop Butler once reminded people that 'it is as easy to close the eyes of the mind as those of the body,' and nothing closes them like prejudice. Jesus the Lord lives for us in a faith which has the spiritual gospel at its very heart, so simple and so far-reaching, so concerned for the broken, the weak, and the handicapped, and so forward with the message of messages for sinful and suffering alike. Some are repelled by any spiritual concern for sin, as though that meant a diversion from the central issue of human suffering. Others are repelled by methods which embrace anything except sin, as if the gospel should practically confine itself to this problem of problems.

Then again, others, individuals no less than nations, may turn away from such a hope in any form, social or spiritual, as inadequate to their confident plans for the future; or, short of that, they may ignore Christianity by closing their eyes as far as possible to any side of it which does not happen to suit their special interests or propaganda. In the latter case, all that can be said is that they lose the blessedness of entering into the full sweep of the Lord's saving purpose, if they do not in the end lose touch with Him altogether. In the former event, the loyalists know that to turn from His light is to surrender to the dark spirits of the day; but they themselves hold on, seeing in Jesus Christ what the true Church has always seen in Him, and reassured by this beatitude that no real hope or happiness lies outside His revelation. They are loyal enough to have one question closed. On no account will they reopen the question of His divine authority to speak and act for God on earth. But, because of that, they school themselves to 'hear and see' Him dealing with mankind; they will do their best to respond to His demand for a mind which is so true to Himself that it lays life open to any new application or interpretation of His gospel in its commands as well as in its comforts.

John M'Leod Campbell and the Atonement.

BY THE REVEREND J. M. GRAHAM, M.A., CLYDEBANK.

IN 1831 John M'Leod Campbell at the age of thirty-one was deposed by the General Assembly from his charge at Rhu, Dumbartonshire, by 119 votes against 6. Campbell's father was a commissioner to the Assembly, and in presenting a petition in favour of his son from the parishioners of Rhu, he said :

'You have heard him this day in his own defence, and he has told you that he just teaches that "God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life"; and with regard to Universal Pardon he has told you that he just means by it that sinners may come to God through Jesus Christ as to a reconciled Father. . . . And with regard to Assurance, what he says is no more than this—that a sceptic

is no Christian, that doubting God is not believing Him. . . . And I can say that I never heard any preacher more earnestly and more powerfully recommending holiness of heart and life. . . . Moderator, I am not afraid for my son: though his brethren cast him out, the Master whom he serves will not forsake him; and while I live I will never be ashamed to be the father of so holy and blameless a son.'

The spectacle of the Church of Scotland depriving herself of her greatest theologian is not a pleasant one. But this episode, the father defending the son, bridging with his fine trust the gulf that is apt to separate the generations in these matters, must be one of the happiest in the long and not too happy history of theological disputation. Equally fine is the spirit in which M'Leod Campbell faced his