THE LOYALTY OF CLERGYMEN.

BY THE EDITOR.

Dr. N. I. Rubinkam was a clergyman who for many years attended to the duties of preacher and pastor in faithful allegiance to his church. As he grew more liberal he felt less and less at home in the pulpit. He realized that he was expected to stand for a world-conception which was antiquated, and finally he severed the tie which, at the beginning of his career, was so dear to him. He felt in honor bound to relinquish the charge which he could no longer honestly fulfill, and since he hated prevarication of any kind he gave up his position and left the church.

In the course of time the churches have grown more liberal, and no one can deny that they are now willing to hear the truth. A periodical which, as we understand, is devoted to a special church organization, invited Dr. Rubinkam to write frankly concerning the pulpit of to-day, and to state what reforms he would suggest. In reply to this invitation he wrote an article which, however, proved unacceptable. The editor, while fulfilling his business obligations toward the author, deemed it unwise to let this statement appear in his columns, and so he returned the manuscript which Dr. Rubinkam thereupon offered to The Open Court.

While we do not quite agree with Dr. Rubinkam, we publish the article in the present number because it is well worth reading. It offers us an opportunity to familiarize ourselves with the feelings of a clergyman who, during the course of his development, has become alienated from the doctrines of his church.

Clergymen who grow broader in their views are apt to become unjust in judging their surroundings. They feel their freedom of speech curtailed, they have to mind traditional beliefs and they resent the restraint imposed upon them.

I myself, who, though destined for the pulpit, have never held a position in the church, can be more impartial in estimating the
conditions of church life and the clergy's duty of allegiance. I feel that Dr. Rubinkam's position is based on a prejudice engendered by the very experience which he had while growing beyond the dogmatic demands once common to all churches and still demanded by some of them.

The message of Christianity, so wonderfully dramatized in the story of Christ conveying the belief in God as a Father "in whom we live, and move, and have our being," is in its real meaning completely and fully true; and the underlying principle is not less true when we understand that the expressions "fatherhood of God," "sonship of man," "atonement," "inheriting the kingdom of God," etc., etc., are allegories and parables. In the stammering of transient dogma, we receive a message enabling us to assume an attitude in this great All, which is the only proper one to take. We ought to feel at ease in misfortune, in tribulation and suffering and even in the agony of death. We ought, instinctively, to find the right direction in which we must press forward. We ought to be attuned to the harmony of the whole and cherish the panagapic sentiment, the universal love. Our heart should go out to all our fellow beings with the same spirit as prevails in the divinity that encompasses with impartial beneficence the whole cosmic universe.

Myth, parable and dogma are attempts to express the religious sentiment back of them, but religious sentiment is independent of all dogma and has been expressed by the sages of China, India, Greece and Palestine—in truth "there is no speech nor language where its voice is not heard."

Many, who are accustomed to symbols, think that the truths would be lost if the literal meaning of the symbol could be proved untenable. They are apt to look upon devotees of other religions as infidels, though cherishing the same sentiments. These pious souls are like people whose linguistic knowledge is limited to their mother tongue, and who insist that the speech of other nations is mere gibberish—like the good old Scotch woman who, when praying for the victory of the British forces, thought that the good Lord would not understand French and so the prayers of the French could have no effect.

Among our correspondence we have received a letter which may be fitly reproduced here to elucidate the truth of this statement. Our friend writes as follows:

"I feel as confident of a personal Heavenly Father, as I do of my earthly parents; and have unutterably more satisfaction in Him and in my own certain knowledge of Him, than even in my earthly parents, though they were of the best."
"I feel as sure of the Divine authority of reason, conscience (I like Kant's name for it, 'categorical imperative'), of the Bible, of the Deity of Christ, and of the present guidance of the Holy Ghost (even Socrates said he was guided by a δαυάρον) as I do of my own existence; and I find immeasurable comfort in these beliefs and in voluntarily leaning upon Divine Personal support. Thirty-four years ago to-day I lost a son, of unutterable sweetness to me, nearly ten years old. The loss is as real now as then, but the support given has corresponded to the loss.

"I suppose you would not write exactly so, but you will not be uninterested in these personal facts, as I am interested in Spencer's Autobiography and all personal testimonies, especially of men so able, and so able to express their thoughts,

"We can all meet, I hope, at least on the platform that we all profess to desire to know the truth which is one for all."

The scoffer may come and tell a man of this attitude that he is mistaken; that there is no father in heaven; that Christianity is like a house built on sand; that the higher criticism has destroyed the reliability of the Bible; that dogmas are untenable and self-contradictory, and what not. All these arguments may be granted point by point, and yet the meaning conveyed in the Christian doctrines is an eternal truth which we need for the daily bread of our spiritual life, and woe unto him who goes without it. Who would deliberately deprive himself of its blessing makes a very fatal move. He who has not grown strong enough to hold fast to the eternal trust underlying dogmas, would better retain his childlike faith in the mythology of his religion.

We are at present living in a period of transition when mankind, or at least the elect of mankind, those who are destined to actualize the higher aims of the race, are developing a higher conception of religion, and it may seem to them that progress is too slow. I have long been watching the course of events not without concern, and sometimes it seems to me that progress is almost too quick. Most liberals are impatient and would fain sweep out all at once the leaven of old conceptions. But there is danger lest with a too sudden surrender of the symbols we lose our grasp of underlying principles; lest in our anxiety to dispose of the husk we throw away the precious grain before it has ripened.1

1 The subject is of great importance and we have discussed it frequently from different standpoints and for different purposes. See The Monist, II, 278; also "Pious Frauds" by the Rev. A. Kampmeier, Open Court, XXI, 53, and the discussions following on pp. 179, 185, especially "Modern Theology,"
Back of all phenomena of life there is an eternity. Man, as the rational type of being, is conditioned by some feature in the world-constitution which everywhere under various conditions makes it possible to formulate the laws of thinking, such as logic, arithmetic, mathematics and other sciences of pure thought. In a similar way there is also an eternal prototype of our legal institutions, of religion, of art, and the social interrelations of rational beings. These eternalities, however, which are part and parcel of the cosmic constitution of the world-order, of God, are not revealed in a sudden flash, but in this world of time they come to light in a temporal way, in a sort of procession of events in the development of what we now call evolution.

Religions are formulated under definite historical conditions. Hence it follows that as in all cases of actualities, many incidental features make their appearance, and it is but natural that the incidental features are insisted on by devotees as the most essential part of their religion. But the philosophers of each successive age dig down to the eternalities behind the doctrines, and their comprehension, too, appears in the successive phases of evolution, i. e., in the history of philosophy.

The religious development of all faiths, therefore, shows a strange mixture of specialized conceptions with definite and, to a great extent, accidental formulations of doctrines, of symbols, of rituals, and other methods of giving expression to religious sentiments which are subjected in successive stages to successive philosophical interpretations; and while the accidental characteristics of two or several faiths may be very different, even to contradiction, the historian will observe a parallelism in the successive stages of their philosophical conceptions.

The most interesting parallelism of this kind appears between Buddhism and Christianity, where we notice in either religion all shades of dualistic and monistic philosophy holding successive sway, expounding the traditional doctrines which sometimes produce close analogies even in details. In this connection we mention as a striking instance the Buddhist and Christian docetism, the doctrine that the ideal man, the Christ, the Buddha, retains his divinity even during his human life so as to render his bodily existence a mere semblance, we might almost say, a sham.

The docetists, both Buddhist and Christian, have disappeared, but both, in an independent development, have left us documents

stating with great insistency that the Buddha and the Christ did not really suffer; the Christ seemed to pass through agonies on the cross, the Buddha seemed to eat and to feel pain as he took his last meal; and this parallelism of a special doctrine is due to a parallelism of philosophy, tried at a definite period of the philosophical development of both religions and later abandoned.

Another strange parallelism is the development of the idea of salvation by faith alone, vigorously preached in Christianity by Luther, and in Buddhism by the Shinshu sect, a kind of Protestant Buddhism in which the clergy, as in Christian Protestant denominations, are allowed to marry and are no longer obliged to follow the strict rules of abstinence from meat, etc. These incidental and yet striking parallels which make their appearance without historical connections teach us a lesson and show that all religious development is subject to historical law. They point to the significance of a philosophical interpretation of religion, which was frequently changed from age to age within the very same creed, and proves the kinship of all faiths upon earth—nay in the entire stellar universe if we could but have a glimpse into the life of other planets.

The philosophy of a religion forms its substratum, and though the very same religion may exhibit successive interpretations which seem to be secondary, we insist that the philosophical interpretation, though not always appearing on the surface, is the more important part of religion; it grasps the essence. The philosophy of an age or a nation is a powerful undercurrent determining the character of that age and nation and producing the general atmosphere which affects even that class of people who are incapable of comprehending its principles.

We are approaching an age of science. The superior man, the Ubermensch of the future, is not Nietzsche's ruthless brute who tramples under foot the rights of his fellow beings. He is the man to whom scientific insight is no longer an aim to be attained, but rather a tool, an organ which brings forth blessings in abundance to the many, and consideration to the multitude of those who are incapable of grasping the loftiness of his position. Instead of enslaving men, the scientific man will lift them to his own level.

The age of science will be a period of superior mankind. It will not come by an oppression of the weak, nor by crushing the herd and sacrificing their interests for the interests of the few; but rather by transfiguring all human life and fulfilling the religious idea of compassion, of Christian and Buddhist love and universal brotherhood.
There are many among us, especially those who have been active ministers in the church, who grow impatient for the realization of this ideal. They have come in contact with much hypocrisy, with human frailty and with the smallness which mortals everywhere are heir to, and they grow impatient. They are blind to the fact that these human shortcomings are sometimes due to the fear of losing a livelihood; and again what may seem hypocrisy is often consideration for others, the natural duty of not hurting the religious feeling of narrower brethren; while frequently it is the result of sheer pusillanimity. But, in spite of all this, there are many men in the church who fearlessly seek the truth and often show their manhood under trying conditions.

Though fully aware of all these drawbacks, I do not feel pessimistic or gloomy about the future of the church. I believe that the spirit of truth is working out the salvation of mankind in religion not less than in the general progress of civilization. We may pass through critical phases, but upon the whole progress is steady and wholesome; and as regards church life it is rather to be feared that its pace is too rapid rather than too slow. We all have reasons to hope that the harvest time is at hand when the full grain will be garnered into overflowing granaries of spiritual nourishment for future generations.