

Richard Nelson li. the Athanasian Creed

by J.H. Newman

The sermon emphasizes the importance of the Athanasian Creed as a vital defense of Christian doctrine against contemporary challenges.

Scripture: Psalm 119:105, 1 Corinthians 16:13, Ephesians 6:13, 2 Timothy 4:3, 1 Peter 5:8

Topics: "Trinitarian Theology", "Doctrinal Purity"

Description

J.H. Newman preaches about the importance of upholding the Athanasian Creed in the Church's liturgy, drawing parallels between protecting a garden from floods and ponies to safeguarding the essential truths of the Gospel from encroachments and innovations. He emphasizes the Creed as a strong bulwark against false teachings and a necessary warning against doctrinal errors that could lead souls astray. Newman defends the Creed's sharp language as a means of preserving the purity of faith and preventing the undermining of foundational Christian beliefs. He highlights the Creed's role in reminding Christians of the core doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation, essential for salvation.

Transcript

I LOOK back with much pleasure to the visit I had from my friend Mr. Woodnott, the Bristol Merchant I before spoke of.

He stayed with me some days, and we had many agreeable rambles and discussions together, which were to me peculiarly interesting, from the wide experience he had had of men and things, and of places too, as he had been often abroad, in Switzerland, in Turkey, and on different parts of the American Continent, where he had spent some years.

Two or three days after our meeting with Richard Nelson, as stated before, we took our walk (it being a pleasant evening to wards the end of August,) along the side of a little stream, which we traced for a mile or two down the valley, returning by a kind of natural terrace, which terminated in my favourite beech-walk. The sun was low when we got here; and we stood still, (it was not far from Nelson's garden hedge,) to admire its rich glow on the opposite side of the valley. I was pointing out to my friend a bold and almost mountainous outline of hills rising in the distance, far to the west in Lancashire, Pendle-hill, as I fancied, and other lofty tracts in the neighbourhood of Clitheroe; and we were speculating on the distance they might be from us.

"Sir," said a voice, which startled me, from my not observing that any one was near, "Pendle-hill must be full fifty miles off; what you see is most likely some of the high ground beyond Halifax."

"Why, Richard," said I, "what are you doing down there?" for I could scarcely see more than his head--"you seem to be making a strong entrenchment round your castle."

"I dare say, Sir," he answered, "you may wonder what I am about; but at this time of year, when the springs are low, I generally spend an hour, when I have leisure in an evening, in repairing the garden-mound, that it may be fit to stand against the assaults of what I call my two winter enemies."

"What can they be?" I asked; "I did not know that you had any enemies."

"Yes, Sir, I have," he replied; "at least my garden had two, land-floods, and Scotch ponies. Almost every winter, once, if not twice, there is a violent land-flood from the high-ground behind the house; and if this ditch were not kept clear, to take the water off immediately, the garden would not recover the damage all the next year. To be sure, this kind of flood does not commonly last many hours; but that is long enough, you know, Sir, to spoil the labour of weeks and months."

"That I can understand," I answered; "but how you can be in any alarm about Highland ponies, I cannot imagine."

"Why," said he, "you know, Sir, that there is a fair at the town every year, early in the Spring, where a great many of these ponies are bought and sold; and for many years past, Mr. Saveall, the owner of this field, has let it for one day and night to the horsedealer, (a well known man out of Lincolnshire,) to turn those ponies into, as well as other horses he may have purchased at the fair. The first year I was here, I was not aware of this custom, and had taken no precaution against it; so these little mountaineers got in at a weak place in the hedge during the night, and trod the garden, as one may say, to a mummy. So, to protect myself for the future against such mischievous visitors, I put this fence along, which I was now repairing. And if you will please to look at it, I think you, Sir, will allow that it was not badly contrived, though I say it, who should not say it."

All along the whole length of the garden, (which might be perhaps nearly one hundred yards,) on that side which was next the foot-path, he had fixed very neatly, about half way up the slope of the ditch on the opposite side, a double indented line of sharp strong stakes, pointing upwards, presenting a sort of chevaux de frise; an impenetrable barrier, which no pony, highland or lowland, could possibly get through or over.

We said something in commendation of his skill and pre caution: on which he observed; "I am glad, Sir, you approve of what I have done; for it has cost me a good deal of labour. And my neighbour, Farmer Yawn, who has been standing by me for the last three quarters of an hour, and went away just as you came up, he says, I am taking a deal of trouble, and very likely for nothing; how can I be sure there will be a land flood, or that the man will turn in the ponies? and besides, (says he,) neither land flood nor ponies would stay twelve hours. But I know better, Sir, than to take Mr. Yawn's advice; for if my bit of garden should be ruined for a twelvemonth, it would be no comfort afterwards to think, that perhaps it might not have happened, or that the mischief was quickly done, or that with timely caution it might have been prevented."

After a few more words we wished him a good evening, and walked on for some little way in silence, which my companion put an end to by saying, "It must be confessed that our friend Nelson is a sensible man; and not the less so, (added he, with a smile,) because I am sure he will agree with me in opinion."

For in the course of our walk we had been discussing rather earnestly the subject of the Athanasian Creed; the question between us not being as to the doctrines contained in it, but as to the expediency of retaining it in the Liturgy, supposing any changes should take place in that also, as in every thing else. Not that there was any real difference of opinion between us on that point either; but wishing to know his views on the subject, I had been urging the various objections, such of them at least as are more plausible, and had been gratified with observing how little weight he attached to them; and my satisfaction was the greater, because, from his education and profession, as a layman and a merchant, he could not be accused of what have been scornfully designated as "academical and clerical prejudices."

In the course of our conversation he had expressed himself most earnestly in favour of the Athanasian Creed; alleging, for this his opinion, various reasons, and among others the following; "that he regarded this Creed in the light of a fence or bulwark, set up to protect the Truth against all innovations and encroachments; and that to take it away, particularly in times when popular opinion, or rather feeling, was against it, would be almost high treason against GOD: (that was his word:) would be, so far as in us lies, wilfully to expose the Truth to be trodden down by its enemies."

"Now," said he, "whilst you were talking to our friend Nelson, it struck me that his care about his garden very aptly expresses our duty in respect of this very subject. For why is this Creed so obnoxious? simply because it is so strongly and sharply worded; because it leaves no opening for a semi-socinian or a five quarter latitudinarian to creep in at; because it presents a insurmountable obstacle to every intruder who would trample under foot the LORD'S vineyard."

"And even if the aspect of things were more favourable, even if there were no sign of danger at hand, I should much rather advise that, like Nelson, we should look forward to probable or possible inroads, than venture to neglect, much less to remove, our fences."

"But," he continued, "in the present condition of what is by courtesy, (or one might almost say, facetiously,) called the Christian world, it were in my judgment little less than madness to yield so strong a position,--one too which, if once lost, call never be recovered."

And then he referred to what he had before been insisting on, the great mistake made by the American Church in rejecting the Athanasian Creed from her Liturgy; and how, from personal observation during his residence, first at New York, and afterwards at Charleston, he was sure the time would come when its loss would be felt and acknowledged by the true sons of that Church. "And I wish," added he, as we concluded our walk and our discussion together, you would endeavour to ascertain what are the sentiments of our friend Nelson on this subject, for I have no doubt he has turned it over in his mind; and his opinion must certainly be of value, because happily for himself he has not been, I suppose, in the way of hearing, the profane absurdities that are daily written and spoken against this inestimable Creed."

"Yes," said I, "whatever his opinions are, I doubt not they will be found candid, and free from unreasonable prejudice; and I will take an early opportunity of ascertaining them."

Soon after this my friend left me, and I promised to communicate to him the result of my inquiries. The Sunday following, it being a serene autumnal morning, according to the description of the Divine

Poet--"most calm, most bright"--I proceeded earlier than usual towards the school.

When I came up to Richard's cottage, he was standing at the gate, with his infant child in his arms, looking as if he could envy no man; as if Sunday were to him what it should be to us all, "the couch of time, care's balm and bay."

"You are rather earlier, Sir, than usual," he said.

"Yes," I answered, "the morning is so lovely, so Sunday-like, I could not endure to stay any longer within doors."

After some few observations had passed between us--in which he expressed with an unaffected solemnity of manner peculiar to himself, his sense of the value of each returning LORD'S day, calling it (and I think he used, though unconsciously, Isaac Walton's very words,) a step towards a blessed eternity,"--I asked him if he would have any objection to take two or three turns with me in the beech-walk, as it still wanted a considerable time to school.

He answered that he would gladly accompany me, especially as it might be better for the child to be taken under the shade of the trees.

"Richard," said I, "my friend Mr. Woodnot, and I may call him your friend too, was much amused with your plan for keeping off the enemies of your garden. He commended it highly, and thinks you therein set a good example to all true Churchmen, and especially to us of the Clergy."

"In what respect, Sir?" he asked. "Why," I replied, "in keeping your fences strong and sharp, and contrived in the best possible way to serve the purpose of fences; namely, to preserve one's property from injury. For we understood you to say, that, were it not for a little observation and foresight, however well all might be for three hundred and sixty-four days in the year, in one twenty-four hours all might be laid waste, either by the torrent from the high ground above you, or by the cattle from your neighbour's field."

"Indeed, Sir," he answered, "that is no more than the truth. But I confess I do not exactly see how, in acting thus, I have set any particularly good example. No person of common sense could do otherwise."

"As to that," I replied, "perhaps what some witty man said of common honesty, he might too have said of common sense, that it is a very uncommon thing. But be that as it may, it certainly would appear to me to be no mark of sense nor of honesty either, if we Christians who are put in trust (as St. Paul speaks) with the Gospel, were to draw back from our strong advanced positions, in the vain hope that the Enemy would be content with this success, and encroach no further."

"May I ask, Sir," he said, "What is it you refer to?"

"Why, Richard," I replied, "of course you have heard that a great many people think the Church Prayer Book ought to be altered; and that first and foremost the Athanasian Creed ought to be put out of it."

"Sir, said he, "I have heard more than one person make this observation, but I never took much account of it till about a year or eighteen months ago, when a brother-in-law of mine, who is fond of poring over the newspapers, told me he had been reading extracts from the works of a famous preacher, one Dr. Hoadley, which I am sorry to say he was inclined to admire. For in these extracts there were objections made to other parts of the Church Service, and particularly to the Athanasian Creed, which (the Dr. said) was a

great blot in the Prayer Book, and that he wished we were well rid of it, with other such disrespectful expressions. Now, Sir, it seemed to me such a thing, for a Clergyman who had signed the Articles and the Prayer Book, and had his maintenance from the Church, and had taken an oath before GOD and man to teach the truth to his flock, according to the Prayer Book; that a Church Minister should take upon him to omit so remarkable a portion of the Church Service; nay more, should speak so slightly of what he had solemnly assented to, and was even sworn to; this seemed to me to be astonishing, and, I must confess to you, even shocking. And, Sir, I thought of what my mother had said to me in her last illness, about the danger of trifling with GOD ALMIGHTY. I thought too, if there should be many such clergymen as this Dr. Hoadley, what confusion and perplexity they would throw people's minds into, driving some perhaps into downright infidelity. And then I went on to reflect, what if my poor children should hereafter fall into the way of some such false teachers, and learn to deny the LORD that bought them, and to despise the SPIRIT of Grace.

"This thought I could not endure; so I resolved, that with GOD'S gracious help, I would search the matter out for myself; for surely, Sir, it is a matter in which not the clergy only, but we all are deeply interested."

"You say right," I replied; "the knowledge of GOD'S truth must be the greatest earthly treasure to us all. It unquestionably concerns the Laity full as much as it does the Clergy, to ascertain the truth and to keep it; also to hand it on, pure and uncorrupted, to their children after them."

He proceeded; "My plan was this; first to endeavour to make out what was the intention of the Church in appointing this and the other two Creeds to be occasionally used; and then to try this Athanasian Creed by Scripture rules; and if I could not reconcile it to them, why then certainly, however unwillingly, I should have joined in opinion with those who wish to have it left out of the Prayer Book."

"A very good plan," said I, "but you must recollect that the enemies of this Creed would ask, what possible reason you could have for being unwilling to part with it, especially when you know that great numbers of people have so vehement a dislike to it."

"Sir," said he, "I have long made up my mind, that on questions of this kind relating to GOD and Eternity, people's likings and dislikings are not much in the scale either way. But I think, Sir, I can offer one or two good excuses for my being unwilling to have this Creed laid aside. In the first place, it would give me pain to have any great alterations made in such a book as the Prayer Book; which I have been used to from my infancy; which as a child I was always taught to reverence; and which, (I am not ashamed to say,) I do reverence from my heart more and more the older I grow. In the next place, I am sure all must allow that some parts of the Athanasian Creed are very noble and beautiful to hear, especially when they are well read or repeated. And again, even a child may see that if this Creed be put away, great encouragement will be given, not only to professed infidels, but also to many wild thoughtless persons, who would fain believe that Religion, like every thing else, needs to be radically reformed."

"But, Richard," I said, "you are not, I suppose, so vain as to imagine that our Church Reformers will be willing to keep the Prayer Book just as it is, merely because you and I and a few more admire some of the clauses in this Creed?"

"Sir," said he, "you may be sure I never imagined such a thing. I was not presuming to give an opinion, whether or not the Prayer Book is likely to be improved by any alterations which may be made in it. I was only excusing myself for being loath to part with the Athanasian Creed."

"But," said I, "will you now tell me what conclusion you came to in your inquiry into the intention of the Church in appointing this and the other two Creeds to be used?"

"I remembered," he said, "that I had heard you, Sir, or some one whose opinion I could take on these subjects, make an observation, that the three Creeds were not written all at the same time, but at three different periods. That the Apostles' Creed was made first, either in the time of the Apostles, or very soon after. That the Nicene Creed came next, after an interval of two hundred years or more. And that then again, after another considerable space, I think I understood more than a century, followed the Creed of St. Athanasius, as it is called.

"So it came into my thoughts that the Church seemed to act like a tender mother very anxious for her children, from the very first; but growing still more and more anxious as they grow older, are more exposed to dangers, and yet less and less willing to yield themselves to her control.

"Thus it may seem, that in the most ancient, the Apostles' Creed, a plain simple rule of faith is given.

"In the next, the Nicene Creed, the same rule is laid down, but more at length, and in a tone of anxiety and caution as if the enemy were at hand.

"But in the last, the Athanasian Creed, where still the very same rule of faith is laid down, the alarm is loudly sounded, there is throughout an expression of urgent warning, as needful for persons in the very midst of foes, some open, and more secret foes, who would rob GOD of His honour, and man of the everlasting inheritance, purchased for him by his SAVIOUR'S Blood."

"Indeed," said I, "it is fearful to think to what lengths the pride of human reason will draw those who yield to it. But before you proceed with your statement, I should wish to know what opinion you have come to respecting what are so falsely, not to say profanely, called the 'damnable clauses' in the Athanasian Creed. You are doubtless aware that many good sort of persons, who profess not to disapprove of the other parts of the Creed, are, (or at least fancy themselves,) much offended and hurt in their feeling by these clauses.

"Observe, I am not now exactly referring to persons who speak harshly or disrespectfully of this Creed, but rather to persons of piety and learning, who with all reverence for it as an ancient and true confession of faith, have yet thought that some of the expressions in it are unnecessarily strong, and what they cannot endure to repeat or to hear."

"Sir," he replied, "if it is not presumptuous in me to pass my opinion on the conduct of such persons as you represent, I should say to them, if you can endure to believe these things, you may also endure to acknowledge such your belief, and to hear it confirmed by the voice of the Church.

"The parent who cannot endure to correct his child, will doubt less live to repent his mistaken tenderness, as we are taught in Scripture.

"And if the Church or her Ministers through like false pity should no longer endure to hold out to our consciences the terrors of the LORD, we of the people shall no doubt have cause to lament their mistaken tenderness; even though now, like over-indulged children, we may many of us be impatient of strict restraint or of warnings seemingly severe: yet, if the Church will be but firm to her sacred trust, many souls will doubtless in the end bless GOD for these very warnings and threatenings; which now they fancy to be almost intolerable.

"But as to persons who scruple not to speak scornfully and reproachfully of this Creed, or any part of it, I must think such language of theirs shows rashness, and ignorance too, very unbecoming a Christian. Or, it may well be asked, is a mother to be blamed who, seeing her child in imminent danger, warns him of it in language the most powerful her tongue can give utterance to?"

"If the Gospel of CHRIST be indeed our only hope, is not the Church a true friend to us, in telling us so; in making us confess it, as one may almost say, whether we choose or no?"

"If the Gospel of the LORD JESUS be our only hope; is not this kind?"

"Indeed," said I, "your argument is most just; it is the truest kindness to warn people of their danger. But as it is too often a thankless office, so it is in the present instance. For, as you know, these, which may fitly be called 'The Warning Clauses,' or 'The Monitory Clauses,' are especially reviled; as, in fact, the tendency of the whole Creed is accounted to be unscriptural and uncharitable, even by some who think themselves, and desire to be thought by others, very serious Christians."

"Sir," said he, "to any Christian who was disposed to think so ill of it, I should like just to mention a conversation I had some time last year with a man of our parish, Edmund Plush, the man that has set up the new beer-house. You know, Sir, I dare say, that he was once a gentleman's servant?"

"I have heard so," I answered; "but as I see some of the boys coming, it is time for me to leave you, and make the best of my way to the school."

"And I," said he, "will take the child back, and be after you in a quarter of an hour; but in the evening I shall hope, Sir, to have some further conversation with you."

"I hope so too," I answered. But, as it happened, I was called to go after the Evening Service to visit a sick person in a distant part of the parish; and a week or two passed away before we again met. He then happened to come to my house one evening to settle an account; I desired he might come to me into my Study; and when we had concluded our business, I told him I wished he would stay half an hour, that we might finish the conversation which we had broken off so abruptly before.

He said, if I were disengaged he would be glad to stay; and not without some difficulty I prevailed on him to sit down.

"Richard," said I, "if you recollect, you were going to tell me of a conversation you had with Edmund Plush."

"Yes, Sir," he replied; "I had two or three days' work, pointing his garden wall; (for Edmund is very curious about his fruit, especially about some favourite Orleans plums;) and one day, as he was standing by me, and running on with his talk about alterations and reforms, he said, among other observations not very moderate, that the Church Prayer Book wanted to be altered and reformed as much as any thing.

"To this I replied, that alteration was one thing! and reform was another: and that if the Prayer Book was altered, it did not follow that it would be reformed.

"He then went on to so say, that while he was footman at Squire Martingal's, over in Cheshire, one day, when he was waiting at table, and there were four or five gentlemen at dinner, they were talking about the Prayer Book, and whether it was not now time for it to be altered.

"And the Squire gave it as his opinion, that there was one word in particular which he wished very much to see put entirely out of the Book; and that was, the word 'damnation.' Such words as that, he said, ought not to be in a book which gentlefolks were expected to sit and hear.

"Edmund went on to say, that there was a gentleman at the table, who observed, it would be better to alter the word to 'condemnation;' of which the company very much approved, though, (as Plush himself remarked,) it was not easy to see what was gained by the alteration.

"Now, Sir, it does seem to me, that Squire Martingal and his friends forgot, when they made such short work with the Prayer Book, that there was the Bible still in their way, quite as much needing to be corrected and amended.

"And I told Edmund so; and I also told him, that if I were in his place, I should not like to go about repeating private conversations which he might have overheard at his master's table; especially when they were so little calculated to be of use.

"However, Edmund must do as he pleases; but for myself, Sir, I do assure you, that after giving the subject the best consideration in my power, the objections which people make against the Athanasian Creed, are, to my thinking, not at all more substantial than Squire Martingal's against the Prayer Book and Bible. Indeed, Sir, it is my opinion, that there is nothing in that Creed either unscriptural or uncharitable, but quite the very contrary; that it is essentially, (as I once heard you call the Communion Service,) 'in its matter, Christian Truth; and in its manner, Christian Love.' And, Sir, if you will not be weary of me, I will try to show you how I came to this conclusion."

"Richard," said I, "you need not fear that you will tire me."

"Well, Sir," he proceeded; "it seemed to me plain from the Scriptures, (what no one indeed will deny or question,) that the Great ALMIGHTY GOD should be the object of all our Love and Adoration. From the same Scriptures it also appeared, that the LORD JESUS CHRIST, our only Saviour and Hope, is entitled to all our Love and Adoration.

"And again, from the same Scriptures, it appears that the HOLY SPIRIT of GOD the only Sanctifier, Guide, and Guardian of His Church, is entitled to all our Love and Adoration."

"Certainly," I replied; "no one, who believes the Scriptures, can doubt this."

"And is not this," he said, "the very doctrine of the first part of the Creed; 'that the Father is GOD, the Son is GOD, and the Holy Ghost is GOD; and yet they are not three GODS, but one GOD In like manner, if any man inquire for the very foundation of Christian hope and consolation, surely it is the doctrine that GOD our SAVIOUR took on him our frail and mortal nature; that He was 'perfect man,' as well as 'perfect GOD.' Without this doctrine, the peculiar hopes and consolations of the Gospel fade away and disappear. Now this is the great truth pressed on our thoughts in the second part of the Athanasian Creed, where we are taught boldly to maintain that 'the right faith is, that WE BELIEVE AND CONFESS--not believe only, but believe and confess--that our LORD Jesus CHRIST, the Son of GOD, is GOD AND MAN.'"

"Yes," I answered, "it is difficult to imagine how any one who acknowledges the truth of the Scriptures, can deny and question this. But you must, I am sure, be aware, that many people object, that this doctrine is not simply stated, and so left to every one's own conscience to approve, but that attempts are made to

draw out distinctions and explanations, which are not in the Scripture, and which no one can understand; and then, after all, people are made to say, that whoever does not believe all this, has no chance of salvation."

"Sir," he replied, "there is a verse in the Psalms, which seems to give an answer to such objectors; 'if I should say like them, I should condemn the generation of GOD'S children.' No one will dare deny that those who framed this Creed, and those who put it into our Prayer Book, were good and holy men, sincerely anxious for the honour of ALMIGHTY GOD, and for the salvation of men's souls. It was surely, not their fault that these distinctions and explanations, (if they are to be so called,) became necessary, but the fault of rash or loose-minded people, who attempted to corrupt the hearts of the simple with their false distinctions and false explanations.

"Against such, the Church, as a good parent should, warns her sons in the strongest terms; and if stronger terms could have been found, no doubt she would have used them.

"And it seems to me, that it is not at all the intention of the Church, in this Creed or any where else, to endeavour to explain what is above human comprehension; but only to warn us that quibbled and pretended distinctions have been made of old, and will be again against the essential doctrines of the Gospel; and that, come in whatever shape they may, they are to be opposed at once with a sharp and strong denial; to be at once, and as the Article says, 'thoroughly' rejected.

"And the absolute need of some such strong impenetrable fence appears from what I have heard, that there have been Church people, and even Clergymen, who denied these doctrines, and, (as might be expected,) scorned this Creed. How they could reconcile their conduct to their consciences, it is not for me to say; but it is plain, that if the fence were taken away and weakened, the danger to the fold would be much increased."

"I fully agree with you," was my reply; "but you know those who dislike this Creed assert, that the 'Fence,' as you call it, is much sharper and stronger than it need be; and that it would be better to have no 'Monitory Clauses' at all, than any expressed in such strong, and, as they call them, violent terms."

"Sir," he answered, "you know that in different places of the New Testament, we are taught that adultery, fornication, drunkenness, and other such crimes, are entirely unsuitable to the Christian Profession, and that persons who are guilty of them do in practice renounce the Gospel.

"Now supposing it should be thought well by the Governors of the Church to set forth a solemn warning to profligates thus worded:--

'Whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he avoid the crimes of adultery, whoredom, drunkenness, and blasphemy; which crimes, unless every one do carefully abstain from, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly.'

"And if then were to follow some solemn admonitions, setting forth, (according to the sense, though not in the very words of Scripture,) the necessity of self-denial, mortification, and constant communion with ALMIGHTY GOD in prayer and at His holy table, so that the affections may be kept set on high and heavenly things; and all concluding thus:--

'This is the rule of Christian Purity, which except a man observe faithfully he cannot be saved;'

"Do not you, Sir, think such warnings would be quite agreeable to Scripture and to Christian charity?"

"Indeed I think so," I replied.

"And yet," he proceeded, "supposing such an admonition as this were to be made by authority, and ordered to be printed in all the Prayer Books, and to be read twelve times a year in every Church in England, do you not think there would be a great out cry against it; and that many people, when it was going to be read, would shut their books, or perhaps go out of the Church?"

"It is too probable," I replied, "considering how little account is now made of crimes of this kind, even by many who are thought religious people. Indeed, I have understood from a person I can rely upon, otherwise I could not have credited it, that one of the objections which Mr. Cartwright himself brought against the Prayer Book, was, that in the Litany, fornication is termed 'a deadly sin.'"

"It is strange, indeed, Sir," said he, "and sad to think that any one who believes the Scriptures could offer such an objection. But it confirms an opinion I was going to express to you. For if a good kind of man, as Mr. Cartwright is said to be, objects to the Litany on such grounds, how much more is it to be expected that such an admonition as that which I have spoken of, would be frequently scorned and hooted at.

"And then," continued he, "supposing such an admonition as this had been made and used in the Church for hundreds of years, and it were now to be left out in the reformed Prayer Book, would not such a measure give great satisfaction and encouragement to all the loose dissolute people throughout the country?"

"That cannot be doubted," I answered. "But there is one objection, (absurd enough to be sure,) which people offer against the Athanasian Creed, which you have not noticed, perhaps because you had never heard of it.

"The objection I mean is, that this Creed leaves no allowance for unavoidable ignorance, or bad education; nor any chance even for persons of weak doubting minds, no, not for idiots, or children, to escape from its heavy censures.

"It is, obviously, an absurd objection, yet it is what people do urge, and people too who make pretension to reason and religion."

"Sir," said he, "I can never suppose that any really conscientious person, whose mind was free from Prejudice, could offer such an objection.

"It must be quite plain to all candid minds, that as in the Scripture itself, so in the Church Prayer Book, we are always instructed to believe that our merciful GOD makes allowance for our weakness and blindness in matters of knowledge and faith, as well as in other things. As in the Scriptures, so in the Church Prayer Book, we are always taught, that occasional doubt and perplexity are no proof of want of Faith; that he truly believes who acts (if I may so say,) upon trust, who, like Abraham, the father of the faithful, 'obeys, and goes on' obeying, 'not knowing whither he goes;' knowing only, that if he follow GOD'S guidance, he must be right.

"It is too always taught, as in the Scriptures, so in the Prayer Book, that upon true repentance, sincere faith in the blood and Mediation of the One Redeemer, and entire submission to the Guidance of the One Sanctifier, it is, I say, always taught, that the door of mercy is open even to the most inveterate sinners,

whatever the nature of their sins might have been; unless indeed the sin against the HOLY GHOST be considered an exception; to guard Christians against which, may be supposed one great and surely charitable purpose of this Creed.

"How then," he proceeded, "can the Church with any show of reason be called 'uncharitable,' which with this evangelical doctrine implied in all her Services, uses occasionally the strongest language of warning (or even of threatening,) against fatal sins and errors, if by any means she may preserve the souls committed to her charge stedfast in the faith, 'the faith which was once delivered unto the saints?'"

"Yes," said I, "once for all, never to be changed or frittered away in base compliance with the ever-varying customs and fancies of worldly and self-conceited men."

"And, Sir," he proceeded, "I put it to myself in this way. What a fearful thing it would be for a person on his death-bed to deny the SON of GOD, the only Redeemer, and the SPIRIT of GOD, the only Comforter? Now the Church Prayer Book considers us all as it were on our death-beds, or at least but a little way from them. The Services for the Visitation of the Sick, and the Burial of the Dead, come very close after Baptism and the Catechism. As we should wish to die, so the Church would have us live. If it be an awful thought to pass into Eternity in wilful ignorance or negligence of the essential truths of the Gospel, is it not also an awful thought that people should spend this their probationary time in such ignorance or negligence? And again, I would ask, can the Church be called, 'uncharitable,' which earnestly and incessantly, and in the plainest, strongest words that the English language can supply, warns her members of their danger in this respect?"

"Certainly, Richard," I replied, "what you say is most worthy to be thought on by all persons who find fault with this Creed. But I wish you to recollect, that many of them take what they call 'high ground' in their argument. They confidently assert that it is, 'bigoted,' 'unscriptural,' 'unchristian,' and other such hard names, to pretend that 'modes of faith,' (that is their term,) are of any great importance, or indeed of any importance at all; that if a man's life is in the right, his faith can't be wrong; that of course adultery and those kind of things are forbidden in the Testament, but that there are few passages, (or as some of them say) none at all, which can be brought forward in support of the opinions put forth in the Athanasian Creed; much less (they assert) can any passages be found, denouncing so heavy a foe against those who reject these opinions."

"Sir," he replied, with more than even his usual energy, "I will be bold to say, that there are as many passages in the New Testament, distinctly proving and supporting the great doctrines put forth in the Athanasian Creed, as there are passages expressly forbidding adultery, and other such crimes. But supposing it were otherwise, it really does not appear to me, that the case would be different, Gambling is not in words forbidden, (so far as I can recollect,) in any part or passage in the Old or New Testament; yet no one doubts, I mean, no serious thinking person, that it is one of the most fatal habits a person can get into.; not because it is expressly forbidden in any part or passage, but because it is against the whole Gospel; utterly inconsistent with a Christian's practice."

"Now, Sir, it really does appear to me, that to deny the great doctrines contained in this noble Creed, is not merely to go against express passages of Scripture; passages, I mean, wherein our LORD JESUS, and the Blessed SPIRIT, are spoken of as GOD; but more than this, it is against the whole Gospel, utterly inconsistent with a Christian's faith."

"Well, Richard," I said, "the considerations you have suggested are certainly such as should lead all Christians to pause before they encourage in themselves or others any dislike of this ancient, and as you justly call it, this noble Creed."

"Sir," he replied, "in my poor judgment it is indeed a noble, a magnificent confession.

"But still, noble and magnificent as it is, if it, or any part of it, were against Scripture, or against Christian Charity, I, for one, should not be easy till it were put out of the Prayer Book.

"How happy then am I to think that it breathes the very spirit of pure Christian Charity; of Love, more than parental; of Love like His, Sir, who so often would have gathered His children together, as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, BUT THEY WOULD NOT!

"Yes, Richard," I said; "and often as this tender yearning anxiety for men's souls is displayed in the conduct and words of our adored Master, I have frequently thought it nowhere more strikingly appears, than in that pathetic chapter of warnings to which you refer, the 23rd of St. Matthew; a chapter truly of admonitory clauses."

"Sir," he answered, "it might almost be expected of those who rashly accuse the Church of uncharitableness for retaining the Athanasian Creed, that they should also wish to have that chapter left out of the Calendar; as indeed I have heard that they do wish many of the Psalms to be omitted on some such ground.

"But it is now time for me to wish you good evening; hoping, Sir, that I have not taken too great a liberty in thus speaking out my opinions, or wearied you by staying too long."

"Richard," said I, "once for all, believe me it is one of the chief comforts and encouragements I have, to be with you at Church and at School, and to talk with you on these great subjects."

OXFORD,

The Feast of the Epiphany.

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