

Pittsfield, Mass. Feb. 14, '09.

Subject,- The Value and the Limitation of Allégiance to
Religious Leaders.

The subject that I have in mind this morning is one that is closely related to the subject that we considered two weeks ago to-day,-The Use and abuse of Bibles,-- . Indeed we might designate the theme of this morning ,-The Use and The Abuse of Christs. The way in which a movement of an kind , having its inception in the life of a great leader of men, at first responds to the touch of his moral dynamic, & and at length crystalizes out into a hero- worship cult, devoid of all the original purpose that gave it significance , offers us food for serious reflection. No one who is at all acquainted with the history of moral and religious progress can fail to observe the fact that every great popular move-

ment has developed its leader, in whom it finds a more or less adequate expression of its underlying purpose, has followed his directing influence, realized to a certain extent its initial purpose, and then slowly sunk to the level of a hero worship cult, nourishing itself on the sentimental reflections of past glory, and allowing itself to become atrophied into a passive non-creative sort of an existence. An illuminating sort of an illustration of what I have in mind is afforded us by the spectacle of the past week, in the ~~MAN-
KINIXKXKX~~ services commemorative of the anniversary of the birth of Lincoln. Sixty years ago Lincoln was just growing into the position where as leader of a great moral awakening, he was directing the movements of the establishment of a new national ideal. At the time of this anniversary, when we are

facing problems no less momentous than he faced, nothing has impressed me more than the tendency to convert these services into a sort of a sentimental worship of a demi-god. While we gain in the satisfaction of contemplating the heroic aspects of his life, yet we lose in over-emphasizing that side, and in over-look~~ing~~ing the essential attitude that makes his life vital as a moral leader to-day. I think that we are all impressed with the fact of our own moral problems, and what is more we are all ~~XXX~~ anxious to make our contribution to their solution. The contemplation of the life of Lincoln from the point of view of hero-worship, leaves us in the frame of mind such as the jews habitually had, that frame of mind that is forever looking for the coming of a messiah. We feel our own incapacity, our own lack of training for the plain tasks to which our time calls us.

The result is discouragement, and the inevitable looking for the coming of the God appointed Messiah. While just the opposite should be the effect. We should feel impressed, not with the sense of the vast chasm that separates us from the leader, but with the fact that adherence to simple human principles has enabled the leader to accomplish what he did, and that adherence to those same simple human principles that are in us as they were in him, will enable us to make not a great, but at least a worthy contribution to the work that is before us. We should feel the uplift, the call to the ~~XXXX~~ fulfillment of the function of life in all its various relationships. We want not the worship of the hero, but we want to receive something of the dynamic of his moral purpose, absorbed into our own being, and through us transformed,

and transfigured into the living reality of our life work.

Herein is a thought that I wish to apply to the concrete problem of our relation to religious cults. How far ~~XXXX~~ should our allégiance to religious leaders be carried? All history bears witness to the fact, and indeed it is not pure assertion to say that every great movement in ~~X~~ the direction of moral progress, or indeed any change, has always been associated with some great personality. Within the last 50 years we have witnessed the establishment of the doctrine of evolution. How closely that movement has been identified with Charles Darwin is apparent. Indeed in the ~~XX~~ mind of many Evolution and Darwinism are synonymous, but one does not detract from the worth of Darwin to say that he is not wholly responsible for the discovery and the statement of that doctrine. We may class him as the leader or rather

a leader of a great intellectual movement that has had its rise and has become established during the last hundred ~~XXX~~ years. The name of Wesley is almost synonymous with the Methodist movement. Cromwell stands for the active side, and Milton for the intellectual side of the great puritanism. Calvinism, Lutheranism, each take their name from their leaders, as do the great monastic movements of the middle ages. Mohamidanism is forever wrapt up with the name of the leader, as is Buddhism with the name of its leader. So also do we find the same thing true in Christianity. But because we thus associate the name of the leader with a movement of this kind, we must be careful not to look upon the leader as the cause, of the movement. That is far from being true. Indeed it is almost entirely false. Much more true is it to say that the movement produced the leader, and even that is not

true to fact . The fact seems to be that all these great movements that make for a deeper appreciation of life and its relationships have had their origin in unknown lives. They have involved a new a growing ideal. The increase and the spread of the movement has created an atmosphere. Then someone, feeling the pulse of the times in which he has lived, has ~~XXXXXXXX~~ come to the front, giving expression to the as yet but half understood and half formulated ideals, has become the leader, and the director of the movement. Thus it is established. The leader is not the cause, but he plays a conspicuous part, and is indeed a large and contribution force. Thus it was with the rise of Christianity. The interplay of national ideals, had caused a modification and a fusion of existing forms and standards. Judaism was being modified by Grecian influences, and by roman life. Out of the

influence of the one upon the other, there must come changes. Jesus felt the pulse of this new universalizing process, he gave expression to it, and became the leader of its first great outward manifestation. He was not the cause, but the product of the movement, making his own large contribution to it. If we could get back into the atmosphere of the time in which he lived, we should come upon men in whose minds there were strange wild thoughts, high ideals which ravished their very beings. Lead by the hope of making ^{these ideals} ~~them~~ vital to all men as they were to themselves, their realization ~~XXXX~~ became the absorbing passion of their lives. Do you imagine for one moment that the men who became the disciples of Jesus simply left their work to follow blindly the chance dreamer that came along and told them to follow him. ? Things do not

happen that way. Back of it all is the setting of unrest, and longing idealism. He spoke to them as one having authority, not because he spoke of something new to them, but because he was speaking to them ~~KNOW~~ of , and clarifying for them ~~thougths~~ and ideals that were not foreign to them. The shepherd had come , and the sheep knew his voice. The disciples followed him, not because he asked them to, but because they recognized in him one to whom their own hopes and aspirations found expression. They followed his lead. It was not a servile obedience to a master who ruled by some alleged supernatural power, but the generous loyalty to one in whom they saw the embodiment of a common ideal and a common purpose. The influence of the dynamic of a great personality upon those who give their voluntary allegiance to its leadership is one of the inspiring ~~things~~ of human life. But in

interplay of personality, the gospel is one of give and ~~take~~ and take. We see the tremendous outpouring of personal influence from the master mind, taking in its grip and holding by a powerful hand of the spirit, and directing with the insight of sympathy, those minds that have given it voluntary loyalty but we forget the constant inflow of inspiration and ~~and~~ loyalty that comes to the master mind from those in whom ~~XX~~ there is also hope, aspiration, and loyalty. No Lincoln ever lived and wrought, but that he had behind him, not only to support and to assist, but to furnish inspiration and aspiration and hope, to enthuse with confidence, and assurance, that great army of men and women to whom he was the incarnation of their hopes, their courage, their life. No Christ ever lived and wrought for the good of man, but that behind him, furnishing him with the daily food of his

moral and ~~XXXXXXXX~~ intellectual life, that great background of men and women , like unto the leader in hope, like unto the leader in ~~KXXX~~ aspiration, like unto the leader in consecration, bone of his bone , flesh of his flesh, blood of his blood, soul of his soul. Perhaps the disciples and the followers of Jesus did not fully understand the full significance of his purpose, but anyway their loyalty and their hope is reflected in the loyalty and the hope that appears in the life of him as their leader. Thus it always is in ~~XX~~ this great drama of human life. The virtue and the nobility of the leader are but the incarnation of the virtue and the nobility of those who , in wholesouled allegiance, give themselves to be lead. Before them as the great guiding principle , the source of their common dynamic, is the vision , always the vision of a new heaven and a new earth. Into one body

are they moulded by the discipline of purpose. Like a great army they follow their way, their leader before them, at once lead and being lead. If perchance he should fall, there arises some Paul to take the words of command as from his very mouth as he falls, and still the great army moves forward with an irresistible force, irresistible because it is charged with the dynamic of human life and human progress. Let leader after leader fall, the progress can no more be stayed than can the progress of the stars in their course. It is all a part of the great cosmic process, the fulfillment of the very function of being. Such is the relation of leaders to followers.

I now pass to the specific question of the relation or rather the proper ~~XXXXXXXX~~ significance of the person of Christ to the religious life of our own time. Once with a

spontaneous enthusiasm, men rallied around the leadership of Christ, recognizing in him the embodiment, and the effective agent of their idealism. That love, that devotion, that response of the common people, who heard him gladly, is a ~~XXI~~ tribute not only to him who was listened to, but to those who listened. Since that day when he spoke to the multitude with authority, great abuses have arisen in the cult that have attempted to honor him and to continue of that fellowship that had its spontaneous uprising in the fullness of time. The spirit has been forgotten. A cult of hero worshippers, not entirely devoid of a sickly sentimentalism, have usurped the place of those who accorded him in the early days their spontaneous loyalty. To them, among whom he moved he was the beloved leader. To their followers he became the supernatural agent of God. As days passed by and hero worship took the ~~gē~~

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place of honest loyalty, more and more he became removed ~~fr~~
from the life of men, becoming in turn ¹⁸¹ ~~XX~~ a demi-god, and ~~x~~
then very God himself, until at last like the disciples of
old they knew only that he had been taken from them, but ~~XM~~
they did not know where he was laid. Such the situation to-
day in the great body of the Christian church. We still acc-
ept the name that is connected with ~~J~~esus, many still pay ~~K~~
him a formal worship as to a God, or a hero, but the vital
influence of him as a help in common every day human life is
gone. All this is the natural result of the long continued
effort of lifting him up above the common level of life, so
that men looking upon him, have become discouraged, and could
see their only the supernatural being the latchet of whose
shoes they were unworthy to unloose, who had in him some
strange power that made an impassible chasm between him and
the common life of man. For the sake of a great lifeless

useless demigod, they have destroyed one of the greatest human souls that ever responded to the glorious impulse to human life, and that ever held himself true to a noble ideal. Thus we have not only limited but in a large measure destroyed the true influence that the founder of Christendom should exercise over the life of men. It may have been necessary at one time to do this, but certainly it is no longer necessary. Let us cut away the abuses of allegiance, and if we may feel the true human pulse that was in the life of Jesus and those who heard him gladly, that new impulse to life that has marked an era in the history of mankind.

In so far as man rises above the commonplace animal existence, he does so in response to an irrepressible impulse to realize a truer grandeur of life than he has yet lived. Before him is the vision of truth unknown, of goodness not

yet realized, of beauty as yet undreamed of. To feel the ~~the~~ deeper undercurrent of this great pulsating humanity, to swim galliantly in the great current of human progress, to feel the call of the finite to its universal consecration, and to fulfill, joyously, in pain and in pleasure, the great functions of human life,-- that is life.

In that life, we get wisdom, inspiration, uplift, vision, even consecration itself, from those among whom we live, from those who have lived, in many ages and climes. Wherever we get that help, whether in the man who lives to-day, or in the man who lived hundreds of years ago, it is a help not because the person who gives was removed from us by some great unhuman power, but because he is akin to us and has touched the simple true cords of the symphony of human life. Those who have lived, received and they gave.

It is for us to receive and to give. We owe no man or person any homage above that of the respect and the love of one man to another in the giving and the taking of the moral and spiritual helps of human life. Whatever there is on the life of Jesus that gives courage, insight, uplift, that helps to make life nobler, and the world better, let us take it, and be thankful that he and many another has lived true to simple principles of human life. But we must not forget that we, too, are human beings destined to fulfill the functions of human life as were they, and that they can demand naught of us that in any way impoverishes the full exercise of the powers of human life that are within us. In our relationship to uplifting personalities, we are to be guided by the same principle as in the ~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ relationship to sacred writings. Those writings that inspire us, are inspired, and

we take from them as we have need, Those personalities that inspire and uplift us, they are for us our Christs, our anointed ones. In the high thoughts that they inspire in us, in the nobility of purpose ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ with which they infuse us, in the personal integrity that they exact of us , is the true and righteous expression of our deeper appreciation for the lives that they have lived. In the handiwork of our ~~XXX~~ craft is our prayer.