

Messenger and Visitor

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Religious Tyranny Unchristian.

One who studies the beginnings of Christianity, as given in the brief narratives of the evangelists and in the Acts of the Apostles, cannot but be impressed with the fact that the most stubborn and bitter opposition which Christ, His apostles and His church encountered came from those who assumed to speak and to act in the name of religion. Jesus Christ and the glorious revelation of truth and grace which He brought to the world had to sustain the malignant and persistent opposition of the men who, by tradition and profession, stood forth as the representatives of the largest revelation of spiritual truth that God had previously given to the world. It was not the plain people, comparatively uninstructed in the law and the religious traditions of the nation, who rejected Christ. It was not the world power represented in the Roman government that demanded His death. It was the rulers and the elders, under priestly and Pharisaic influence, who condemned and crucified the Son of man. The authority which apprehended and sat in judgment upon Peter and John was essentially the same as that which had sent their Master to the cross, and as the apostles stood in the presence of the august Sanhedrin, it must have been recalled vividly to their minds, how, a few weeks before, their Lord had stood where now they were standing and had received the sentence of that Court professing to give judgment in the authority of God. These priests and rulers, this learned and reverend theocratic council, the acknowledged representatives of a divinely given system of religion, the guardians and interpreters of all that had been given through Moses and the prophets, were yet so spiritually blind as to reject with scorn and bitter hatred all that revelation of truth, of grace and saving power which was offered them in Christ Jesus. Him they crucified and His apostles would have received like treatment at their hands but that a prudent fear of the people now restrained them. It was this same priestly power that slew Stephen and scattered the Jerusalem church. It were well if it could be said that in the attitude of the Jewish leaders toward Jesus and His gospel we have the only instance which history affords of priestly and ecclesiastical authority rejecting the counsel of God against itself. It is terrible to reflect how often the example of the Jewish Sanhedrin has been followed by councils which claimed authority not only in the name of Moses but in the name of Christ, and how, by those who have professed to be the custodians and the authoritative teachers of all Christian doctrine, Christ's saints have been tortured and slain. The world—even the Christian world—has been slow in learning that the gospel of Christ means liberty—liberty for reverent thought and conscientious action, and not a religious tyranny by which the necks of Christian believers are placed under the heel of ecclesiastical authority. It is reason for great gratitude that the Christian world, in these later centuries, has been able to receive much light in this matter and that light grows and men come more and more to understand how unrighteous and unchristian it is to attempt in the name of God to constrain the beliefs and consciences of men. Baptists claim, and justly, to have done not a little to advance the cause of religious liberty in these later ages. They have preached it and have lived up to their preaching. They have many times suffered for its sake. Let us be always true to our profession and our record in this matter, and while we hold with all firmness the truth as we conceive it has been delivered to us, let us not, in small things or in great, be unwilling to accord to others the right of conscientious action and conviction.

Light and Shadow.

The Bible lesson for next Sunday is one of light and shadow,—glorious light and terrible shadow. We see the church now become a "multitude," united in heart and soul, having full fellowship in material as well as spiritual things, the apostles with power bearing their witness to the resurrection of their Lord, the spirit of brotherhood so close, so generous and practical that no one calls any of his worldly possessions his own, placing them at the disposal of the apostles that everyone's need may be supplied,—and the grace of God resting abundantly upon all. It is a picture full of light and blessing as if the heavens had been opened and that first Christian community had been bathed in a glory like that which some of the apostles saw on the Mount of Transfiguration. It is surely a marvellously bright and gracious picture as seen in contrast with the wide, dark background of an evil world. How sad it seems that any shadow should intrude upon so fair a scene! But a shadow does intrude—a dark and traitorous form rising up within the church, more terrible in its power to blight and curse than all the malignant opposition of the Sanhedrin, the rage of unreasoning multitudes and the might of heathen world powers. It is the baleful shadow of hypocrisy, lifting up its false face among the disciples to disturb and mar that holy fellowship.

Among the matters which call for particular consideration in connection with the lesson is the contrast which is presented between Barnabas on the one hand and Ananias and Sapphira on the other. Barnabas was so named by the apostles, it would seem, because of his power to exhort and encourage the hearts of others. He is elsewhere described as "a good man and full of the Holy Ghost." He was a man of mighty faith and sterling honesty of character. The two characteristics belong together. The man who has not faith enough to be honest is sadly wanting in the essential element of Christianity. Barnabas was a man who believed with all his heart that Jesus Christ was the Son of God. Without this faith he could not have been the "son of exhortation" that he was. It was this profound faith that made him determined to give himself unreservedly, with all his powers and possessions, to the cause of Christ. Doubtless when Barnabas sold his Cyprus estate and laid the price at the apostles' feet he acted with singleness of purpose. It was the pure fruit of his love for Christ and the church. In Ananias and Sapphira on the other hand, we have an example of a wholly different character. Without the faith of Barnabas, they covet the esteem with which that good man is regarded in the church. They have a possession which they sell and bring a part of the price, professing that it is the whole, thus tempting the Holy Ghost and calling down the judgment of Heaven upon their wicked deed. Dr. McLaren suggests that it is not improbable that at the outset Ananias and his wife intended to present to the church the full price of their estate, but when the time came, their trust in God was not sufficient to enable them to complete the surrender they had covenanted to make, and so, with a lie in their hearts, they went to the apostles, keeping back part of the price. Just here it seems right to ask the solemn question, how many of us, men and women in the church today, are giving to the Lord that whole-hearted and true-hearted service which Barnabas gave, and how many on the other hand are failing to fulfil that which we covenanted with God and are wickedly keeping back a part of the price?

One lesson most important, and very obvious in connection with this passage is God's hatred of all falsity. Falseness is not a thing of the tongue or of the lips only, it is of the heart, the purpose, the life. All unrighteousness is hateful to God. As it was in the old dispensation so it is in the present and shall be to eternity. Christ came not to take away one jot or tittle from the law of righteousness, and this stern and terrible rebuke of falsity, standing at the beginning of the church's history, should be heeded as a warning for all ages. We are not to suppose that the sentence of death was inflicted upon this miserable man and woman by Peter in accordance with his judgment of the character of their deed and by virtue of his apostolic authority. It was rather the judgment of God, marking His abhorrence of all hypocrisy. Ananias and his wife had not sinned in ignorance; their consciences had doubtless sharply reproved them for their acted lie, and when they saw that the thing was not hidden, but that the Holy Spirit had revealed it to Peter and the church, they felt themselves suddenly brought before God's judgment throne and their souls shrivelled up in that awful, consuming light of truth. There is no escaping that judgment throne and that awful light in which the secrets of all hearts shall be revealed.

The Life and Times of Sir Leonard Tilley*

Mr. Hannay's recently published *Life of Sir Leonard Tilley* has already received favorable notice at our hands. The author had previously achieved an enviable position among the historical writers of Canada, and his latest volume cannot but add to his fame. Mr. Hannay is master of a style excellently adapted to historical discourse. It is the perspicuous, somewhat diffuse, yet vigorous, style of a writer whose purpose is to be understood rather than to be elegant, but who never fails to clothe his thought in pleasing as well as lucid language. The author has paid somewhat more attention to *The Times* than to *The Life* of his subject, and the sub-title of the book, "A Political History of New Brunswick for the past seventy years," is fairly descriptive of its character. Naturally an author with Mr. Hannay's familiar knowledge of the political affairs of the province, and with his historical instincts, would feel inclined to give the *Life of Sir Leonard*, and especially his public career, its proper historical setting. By doing so he has added materially to the value of the book.

The first chapter of the book is one of especial interest, giving a birds-eye view of the condition of New Brunswick about the time of Sir Leonard Tilley's birth, 1818. Compared with some other parts of this continent, we of these Maritime Provinces have generally been regarded as a somewhat slow and unprogressive people, but the younger people who read this chapter, and get fairly before their minds a picture of what the country was eighty years ago, will be astonished at contemplating the change which the advance of art and science and the progress of social and political reforms have wrought within the period of a single life time. In 1818 the population of the province did not exceed 50,000, and that of St. John city was less than 6,000. Two years before steamers of a primitive character had begun to run on the river. Of railways there were of course none till long afterwards, and the highways were few and of inferior character. Postal service was meagre and expensive. To send a letter from St. John to Halifax, or even to Dorchester, cost nine pence. The people of the different towns and settlements, accordingly, had little intercourse with each other directly or indirectly. The sailing ship was the only means of communication with the lands across the sea. The life of the people as to their houses, their furniture, their clothing, their agricultural methods, their schools and religious services, was all so different to what we are accustomed to today, that to read Mr. Hannay's graphic account of life in New Brunswick, as it was within the memory of men now living, seems like being transported into a long past period of history. There were some three or four weekly papers in the province at that time, but the days of telegraphy and of the newspaper in its more modern sense were not yet. The use of liquor was general and its consumption, considering the population, enormous. The yearly consumption of Jamaica rum, according to the figures given, was, in 1819 and 1820, nearly 500,000 gallons per annum, besides considerable quantities of other liquors. Religiously the province was largely under Episcopal domination, but the pioneer preachers of other denominations—the Baptists and Methodists especially—were pushing forward against difficulties and making their influence felt in many places.

In political affairs the province was reporting progress from year to year. In the period between Mr. Tilley's birth and his entrance into politics in 1850 as a member of the provincial legislature, the struggles against Imperial domination in provincial politics were going on and the boon of responsible government was being won. Mr. Tilley was in the Legislature in time to participate in the final victory.

The events which led up to the confederation of the British American provinces in 1867, and the steps by which that union was brought about are narrated at some length, and form a valuable feature

*The *Life and Times of Sir Leonard Tilley*, being A Political History of New Brunswick for the past seventy years, by James Hannay, author of *A History of Acadia*, St. John, N. B., 1897.

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