Messenger and Visitor

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The Race Problem in South Africa and in Canada.

The reorganization of South Africa, after Paul Kruger and his Burgher Oligarchy shall have been disposed of, will be an undertaking which may well tax the best wisdom of British and Colonial statesmen. With British rule firmly established, it cannot be doubted that there will be for men of all races a larger measure of liberty, and the conditions for the expansion and development of the country will be immensely more favorable than they have been heretofore. But it must be recognized that the racial distinctions and animosities which have heretofore stood in the way of a united South Africa, and which constitute the essential cause of the present war, will not have disappeared as soon as the war is over, and Dutch ambition, as represented in the Boers and their Cape Colony sympathizers, is forced to bow to British supremacy. The persistence and the strength of racial feeling has been strikingly illustrated by the pronounced sympathy of all the peoples of Teutonic race for the Boers in the present war. In South Africa, as in Canada, the race problem constitutes the crux of the political situation.

It is doubtless true that the union of different strains of blood and diverse racial elements, may make for national symmetry and strength, but that can be only when these diverse elements are incorporated, amalgamated and unified, in a new national life. When diversities of race are perpetuated by different languages, separate schools and different literatures, nourishing diverse, and perhaps inimical, national traditions and ideals, the result must be to develop, if not active antagonisms, yet at least a condition of things unfavorable to harmony of feeling and unity of purpose. The social and political atmosphere will inevitably be charged with racial jealousies and suspicions, affording the demagogue and the hireling politician abundant opportunity to ply their unscrupulous trades.

Here in Canada we have doubtless the most favorable illustration which the world affords of diverse and unamalgamated racial elements working together under one government. Here are two races, each preserving and cherishing its own language, literature and traditions, educating its children apart and worshipping apart each from the other, and yet living together under one flag and one government, with a good degree of harmony, happiness and material prosperity. We heartily rejoice that this can be said of Canada, and we most sincerely hope and pray that there may never come a time when the relations of the two races in this country shall be less harmonious, and their feeling for the common flag less patriotic than they are today. The eloquent words of the French Premier of Canada when, the other day in his place in Parliamennt, he declared it to be the steadfast purpose of his life, from which nothing could ever move him, to promote unity, amity and harmony between the diverse elements of this country, deserved to be received, as they were, with hearty applause on both sides the House. But what occurred on that occasion in connection with the Bourassa resolution, as well as much else that has occurred during the last six months, should make it abundantly clear that, now as in the past, Canada has a race problem to deal with, the seriousness of which her public men cannot afford to ignore. The future holds contingencies for this country which may well engage the most serious thought of statesmen. However, looking at the past and the present, we shall do well, like Paul, to thank God and take courage. It is wonderful that these diverse racial and religious elements should have cohered politically with so good a measure of harmony and prosperity.

Of one thing we may feel certain, that under no other flag than the British, would the development of national strength which Canada has attained have been possible under such conditions. The marvellous national development of the United States has been promoted especially by three things, (1) An independent national life, (2) One language in Congress, in State Legislatures and in all courts of law and legal documents, and (3) A national public school system in which the children of all nationalities acquire education in the same language and imbibe a common national feeling. In Canada these conditions, so influential for national unity, have been absent. On the contrary we have a dual language system, we have separate schools, constitutionally established in some provinces and to a great extent practically recognized in others. We have not become, and we have not desired to become, an independent nationality, in which national traditions and racial distinctions might be largely merged and lost sight of. Those of British origin have remained thoroughly and intensely British, and those of French origin, while loyal to the British flag, have continued to be, to a very great extent, French in their sympathies, their traditions and ideals, as well as in their language. It would be folly to say that the race problem in Canada is one that need give us no concern. On the contrary it is the one thing above all others that must give us concern. It demands and will continue to demand the most patient wisdom of our best statesmen. Yet we gratefully recognize that Canadian unity has a real and a forceful significance. Today French and British Canadians are fighting side by side in South Africa, and some of them have found a common grave there where they fought for the Queen and the Empire. This patriotic blood, shed in a common cause, should prove a potent thing for the healing of racial differences and for cementing the bonds of nationality.

In the consideration of this subject we have been led considerably farther afield than we had intended, and of course any adequate discussion of so large a subject is impossible within the limits of a brief article. It will be seen, however, that the reorganization of South Africa under the British flag involves a race problem of much the same character as that with which we are so familiar in Canada. And while the success which has attended British rule in Canada goes to show that such a problem is not to be regarded as insoluble, yet our experience as clearly demonstrates that the problem will be greatly simplified if the people of South Africa can be persuaded to relinquish the idea of a dual system of language and accept the English as the only recognized language in Parliaments, Legislatures and Courts of Law. There is, of course, no reasons why the Dutch language should be perpetuated in the Parliaments and the Courts of South Africa, except those which are grounded in sentiment and tradition and have for their object the keeping alive of those old racial feelings which would constitute the most powerful influence against national and political unity.

The Conditions of Happiness.

The Bible lesson for next Sunday is full of seed thoughts. Every verse in it might be the text of a sermon, and some of them would afford themes for many discourses. It is significant that this peerless discourse of our Lord's was delivered in the solitude of the mountain. He had withdrawn himself for a little from the multitudes whose needs appealed so strongly to his sympathy. Freely and gladly his gracious power had been exercised on their behalf. He had healed their sick, and he had spoken to them of the things of the Kingdom of Heaven in parables and as they were able to receive his words. But because of their unbelief, their lack of interest in things spiritual and their thirst for the marvellous and sensational, they could not come very near to him, nor he to them. The gaping crowd seeking after signs and wonders and feeling little hunger for the bread which came down from heaven, is a phenomenon of our own times as well as that to which our lesson belongs. For the disciples who would come close to the Master, listen to his profoundest teaching and receive of his spirit, it is still necessary that they should leave the multitudes and follow him to the mountain top. They must draw near to him in the place of prayer where the few meet in his name; they must come close to him in the privacy of the closet, in the patient, reverent study of his word, and, most of all, in a daily life consecrated to his service.

It is of great significance that the word of our Lord to his disciples is a word of blessing. He calls men to him not for loss but for infinite gain. His word is in harmony with the Scripture that teaches that God made man in his own image and likeness, and gave him dominion over the works of his hands; it is in harmony with the word of promise to Abraham, that in him and in his seed should all the families of the earth be blessed; it is in harmony with the New Testament teaching, that Christ is the gift of God's love to sinful men, and that this gift of the divine love means the world's redemption; it is in harmony with the declarations of the apostles as to the triumphs and glories of the people of God. These words of Jesus stand forever opposed to the blasphemous pessimism of those who deny God's love and his purpose of grace unto salvation; they stand also as a perpetual rebuke to all faint-heartedness on the part of those who waver at God's promises and distrust his infinite love and grace. There is blessing for mankind. The race was created not for evil but for good. There is blessing inexhaustible and happiness beyond all human anticipation, for all who will seek and receive according to God's gracious purpose as expressed in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Everyone who studies this lesson must be impressed with the fact, that Jesus does not make happiness to consist in the things which are for the most part the great objects of human desire and endeavor. He does not say—Blessed are those who are possessed of the freshness and grace of youth, blessed are those endowed with physical strength and beauty. He does not say, blessed are those whose minds are cultivated,—the men of talent, learning, genius. He makes no mention of wealth, of worldly honors, power, authority, fame, as conditions of human happiness. He says rather that, lacking all these things, men may still be supremely happy, that those who suffer poverty, hardship and pain, those who are defamed and reviled by their fellow men and persecuted even to death, may enjoy the greatest welfare and experience the highest happiness, because of their fellowship with God and with his saints, and because of their inheritance in the Kingdom of Heaven.

It is to be observed that our Lord lays stress upon what men are and what they may become, rather than upon what they have and what they may acquire, as the condition of happiness. Here as everywhere he recognizes and teaches, that man's life consisteth not in the abundance of his material possessions. Not in anything adventitious, of which he may be dispossessed in a moment, but in the man himself, consists his real wealth and the conditions of his happiness. Further, it is not upon physical and intellectual qualities and endowments, but upon spiritual qualities, upon what is most divine in man, that our Lord places the emphasis when he considers what are the things which make for human welfare. They who are really blessed are the poor in spirit, the humble, the child-like; those whose hearts cry out for God, and seek, as the little child does, for parental love and protection; those whose spirits are lowly; those whose souls hunger not for earthly pleasures and honors but for God's righteousness; those who are merciful—as becomes those who have obtained mercy;—those whose hearts grow pure by converse with heavenly things, and whose growing purity of heart enables them to enter into an ever enlarging fellowship with God. They who hear these sayings of his and do them, our Lord assures his disciples, are building upon an eternal rock, from which no storm that can ever arise shall be able to sweep them away. The eternal foundations are beneath them and all things work for their peace. They shall be comforted and helped of God; they shall obtain mercy; they shall inherit the earth; they shall be satisfied; they shall see God; the Kingdom of heaven is theirs, and they shall be called the sons of God. Our Lord's idea of happiness stands in marked contrast to the world's idea. But in our deepest hearts is there not something which responds to these words of the Master and says—They are true. And if human life on earth were moulded according to these teachings of Jesus, would not the world be incomparably happier than it is?