

THE DUTY OF LEADERS.

Far be it from one who is not and does not aspire to be a leader in the ecclesiastical sense to undertake to show the path of duty to those who are regarded as "men of light and leading," but the public statements of public men are public property and it is well that their statements should be examined carefully in private and not simply applauded in public. I venture, then, to call attention to the speech of the Rev. John Watson, D. D., (Ian MacLaren), delivered at the English Presbyterian Synod when he presented the report of Westminster College. My remarks will be based upon the report that appeared in THE DOMINION PRESBYTERIAN of July 12th, 1901. The thought that has been impressed upon my mind is that those who are leaders in church courts ought to speak soberly and not in tones likely to create panic in the common ranks. When the editor of the British Weekly tells the world that certain men are "plunging the cold steel into the very heart of Christianity", or Dr. Watson declares that "when he saw that surgery, proposing to make its experiments not on the body but on the heart, then he trembled not for health, but he trembled for life," the average man is likely to think that the battle is going against us and that defeat is near at hand. Surely these men do not believe this. They know too much of history and of life! Of course, we all agree with Dr. Watson's remark that "Their ministers ought not to come before their people with the suggestion of a doubt, but with the declaration of a conviction." Preaching is not debating; it is teaching Christian truth in positive constructive forms and heralding the presence and power of the King. I cannot follow Dr. Watson into a discussion of the fate and influence of parties in the Church of England; that would require a separate essay; but I must make a brief comment on the following statement: "People could take their choice and enter one home or the other, and he was haunted with the idea that if speculation were to go further, the one that would be the gainer was the Church of Rome." How remarkable that Dr. Watson should be "haunted with this idea. Being an uncommon man one would not have thought that he would have allowed anything so common to 'haunt' him. In 1678 Richard Simon published his Critical History of the Old Testament in which he tried to prove that the critical study of the Scriptures was fatal to the principle of the Protestants, so that side of the idea is not new. Then, is it not a well known fact that in times of intellectual stress there are many who flee to the Church of Rome for refuge? That is giving up rather than solving the problem of religious thought. Besides, as the case of the late Dr. St. George Nivart shows, the Church of Rome has its own difficulties. We at any rate are not likely to save men from the Church of Rome by proclaiming from the house-tops that we tremble and are dismayed.

Before I had seen the copy of the speech under discussion I was speaking with a minister of the Presbyterian Church of England about men "running with hare and hunting

with the hounds" and he asked me if I had seen Dr. Watson's startling speech given before the Synod. He was evidently taken aback by such a speech from a Broad Churchman.

Now, as to the Encyclopedia Biblica, why try to frighten the people by shouting in hysterical tones, and why pay so much attention to some of the flimsy newspaper articles it has provoked? The fact is that those who are students in a special sense of Biblical criticism must read this as well as other Encyclopedias, and must examine its statements and test the grounds on which they are made. I happen to know that Dr. Schmiedel said a few months ago that if the universal judgment of condemnation in England troubled him very little it was because up to that time it had been expressed without any attempt at argument. Speaking of a recent handbook for "Advanced Bible Classes", Professor Balon after acknowledging its great merits says: Cheyne's Encyclopedia Biblica, the most scholarly, as well as most recent authority on the subjects under discussion, is apparently excluded on the score of radicalism. Perhaps it might be as well to inform the student that a certain degree of supervision is exercised over his mental patriotism, lest he fall into the constant snare of the amateur—the notion that "he knows it all". There may be something of the pride of the scholar in the tone of this remark, but the fact is undeniable; this new dictionary cannot be ignored and its arguments must be met, not by loud shouting, but by patient argument.

"If any man said 'What did it matter?' that Abraham or Isaac or Jacob never lived, he answered 'it took away at least the beginning of that great history which culminated with the coming of Jesus Christ, etc.'" I am not now concerned with the critical question as to how far the old Testament account of the patriarchs is or is not actual personal history, but I do not see that the beginning of Hebrew history is destroyed by the view that in these lives there is much that belongs to later times. You cannot destroy the beginning of a real movement that has entered into the life of the world. You may have to construe it differently, but how can you destroy it? These stories in the most extreme view are a record and a revelation of life, though there may be difference of opinion as to the precise period to which the life belongs. Does the prosaic person who declares that Dr. McClure never lived destroy anything?

"They come to the statement of an eminent scholar that after looking into everything there were still nine sayings that could be credited to Christ, etc." This refers to Dr. Schmiedel, one of the contributors to the Encyclopedia Biblica. The article is no doubt an example of great learning combined with a very narrow kind of literary criticism. Here are statements upon it by a specialist in that department: "And yet we are inclined to think that much of the criticism passed

upon his work in many journals has been too severe. He does indeed account for some of the miracles by a hypothesis of materialization of figurative language, but only a superficial reading of his work would have led one to think that he believed that the only thoroughly credible elements of the Synoptists were the five or nine sayings which he regards as beyond historical doubt. The thing to be regretted is that Professor Schmiedel has not resolutely pursued his critical method and instead of magnifying minor discrepancies should not have indicated the great importance of material which in accordance with his own principles one would accept as genuine in the Synoptists. He believes in the historical Jesus of Nazareth, in certain of his miracles, and in the historicity of a resurrection; and his chief objections to the Gospels as they now stand, he holds, cannot affect the content of the teaching of Jesus as a whole, etc." Hence the case is not so bad as it looks from Dr. Watson's brief statement. If it were even worse than he states there, men are not popes, we do not bow at their dictation, the strength of their case is simply the strength of the facts and arguments they can bring forth. Impassioned appeals on general principles cannot meet this case; it can only be met by patient, persistent scholarship.

Dr. J. Watson is an able rhetorician as well as a writer of great literary skill and dramatic forces. I was one of the first in Canada to speak highly in private and public of his work in the sketches which afterward appeared in the well known "Briar Bush" volume, but this rhetorical does not kindle admiration. "It was most pathetic from the intellectual point of view that a man should attempt to settle such a question inside his little study with dirty, dusty windows, while, down the street of life outside was heard the tramp of the feet of the Church of God, trusting the Lord Jesus, and following him through time into eternity." Dr. Watson and the editor of the British Weekly may disclaim "obscurantism" but this kind of thing makes for obscurantism. The plodding scholar has his work to do just as much as those who tramp outside, and the windows of his study are not necessarily "dirty, dusty windows," either literally or figuratively. Though sometimes he may slip into a dogmatic tone he does not expect to "settle" one thing or everything by his individual contribution. He knows that he is more likely to unsettle things, but through such unsettlement the Church has moved on to a deeper view and a firmer grasp of the great verities of her faith.

Rev. J. R. MacLeod, of Three Rivers, is recruiting for a short time at Midland on the Georgian Bay.

The measure of a gift is in what is kept.—Alexander McKenzie, D. D.