

## “Deacon Lee and the Troubler of Zion”

Deacon Lee, who was a kindly, silent, faithful, gracious man, was one day waited upon by a restless, ambitious, worldly church member, who was laboring to create uneasiness in the church and especially to drive away the minister.

The deacon came in to meet his visitor, who, after the usual greetings, began to lament the low state of religion, and inquired as to the reason why there had been no revival for the last two or three years.

"Now, what do you think is the cause of things being dull here?"

The deacon was not ready to give his opinion, and, after a little thought, frankly answered, "I don't know."

"Do you think the churches are alive to the work before them?"

"No, I don't."

A twinkle was seen in the eye of the troubler in Zion, and, taking courage, he asked, "Do you think Mr. B a very extraordinary man?"

"No, I don't."

"Do you think his sermons, in the eyes of the congregation, are considered anything very great?"

"No, I don't."

"Then don't you think we had better dismiss this man and hire another?"

The old deacon started, as if shot with an arrow, and, in a tone louder than his wont, shouted,

"No, I don't!"

"You talk so little, sir," replied the questioner, not a little abashed, "that no one can find out what you do mean."

"I talked enough once," replied the old man, rising to his feet, "for six praying Christians. Thirty years ago I got my heart humbled and my tongue bridled, and ever since that I've walked softly before God. I then made vows, solemn as eternity, and don't tempt me to break them."

The troubler was startled at the earnestness of the hitherto silent, immovable man, and asked :

"What happened to you thirty years ago?"

"Well, sir, I'll tell you. I was drawn into a scheme just like this of yours, to uproot one of God's servants from the field in which he had planted him. In my blindness I fancied it a little thing to remove one of the 'stars' which Jesus holds in his right hand, if thereby my ear could be tickled by more flowing words, and the pews filled with those who turned away from the simplicity of the Gospel. I and the men that led me—for I admit that I was a dupe and a fool—flattered ourselves that we were doing God a service when we drove that holy man from the pulpit and his work, and said we considered his work done in B\_\_\_\_\_, where I then lived. We groaned because there was no revival while we were gossiping about and criticizing and crushing him, instead of upholding his hands by our efforts and our prayers, the very instrument at whose hand we harshly demanded the blessings.

"Well, sir, he could not drag on the chariot of salvation with half a dozen of us taunting him for his weakness, while we hung as a dead weight to the wheels; he had not the spirit, as we thought, and could not convert men; so we hunted him like a deer, till, worn and bleeding, he fled into a covert to die."

"Scarcely had he gone, when God came in among us by his Spirit, to show that he had blessed the labors of his dear rejected servant. Our own hearts were broken, and our wayward children converted; and I resolved, at a convenient season, to visit my former pastor and confess my sin, and thank him for his faithfulness to my wayward sons, which like long buried seed had now sprung up. But God denied me that relief, that he might teach me a lesson that every child of his ought to learn—that he who toucheth one of his little ones, toucheth the apple of his eye.

"I heard my pastor was ill, and taking my oldest son with me, set out on a twenty-five mile ride to see him. It was evening when I arrived, and his wife, with the spirit which any woman ought to exhibit toward one who had so wronged her husband, denied me admittance to his chamber. She said (and her words were like arrows to my soul) 'He may be dying, and the sight of your face might add to his anguish.' Had it come to this, I said to myself, that the man whose labors had, through Christ, brought me into his fold, who had consoled my spirit in a terrible bereavement, and who had, until designing men had alienated us, been to me a brother—that this man could not die in peace with my face before him. 'God pity me !' I cried; 'What have I done?' I confessed my sins to that meek woman, and implored her, for Christ's sake, to let me kneel before his dying servant and receive his forgiveness.

"As I entered the room of the blessed warrior, whose armor was falling from his limbs, he opened his eyes and said, 'Brother Lee! Brother Lee!' I bent over him and sobbed out, 'My

pastor!" Then raising his white hand he said, in a deep, impressive voice, ' Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm.'

" I spoke tenderly to him, and told him I had come to confess my sin and bring some of his fruit to him (calling my son to tell him how he had found Christ). But he was unconscious of all around him; the sight of my face had brought the last pang of earth to his troubled spirit. I kissed his brow and told him how dear he had been to me, and that I craved his pardon for my unfaithfulness, and promised him to care for his widow and fatherless little ones, but his only reply, murmured as if in a troubled dream, was, ' Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm.'

"I stayed by him all night, and at daybreak I closed his eyes.

"I offered his widow a house to live in the remainder of her days, but, like a heroine, she said, 'I freely forgive you, but my children, who entered deeply into their father's anguish, shall never see me so regardless of his memory as to take anything from those who caused it. He has left us all with his covenant God, and he will care for us.'

"Well, sir, those dying words sounded in my ears from that coffin, and from that grave. When I slept, Christ stood before my dream, saying, ' Touch not mine anointed, do my prophets no harm.' These words followed me till I fully realized the esteem in which Christ holds those men who have given up all for his sake, and I vowed to love them evermore for his sake, even if they are not perfect.

"And since that *day*, sir, I have talked less than before, and have supported my pastor, even if he is not a very extraordinary man. My tongue shall cleave to the roof of my mouth, and my right hand forget its cunning, before I dare to put asunder what God has joined together. When a minister's work is done in a place, I believe God will show it to him. I will not join you, sir, in the scheme that brought you here, and, moreover, if I hear another word of this from your lips, I shall ask the brethren to deal with you as with one who causes divisions. I would give all I own to recall what I did thirty years ago.

'Stop where you are and pray God, if perchance the thought of your heart may be forgiven you."

This decided reply put an end to the new-comer's efforts to get a minister who could make more of a stir. There is often great power in the little word "no;" but sometimes it requires not a little courage to speak it so resolutely as did the silent deacon.