

Deacon Lee

“Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm”

(Psalm 105:15)

Deacon Lee, who was a kindly, silent, faithful, gracious man, was one day waited upon by a restless, ambitious, worldly church member, who was labouring to create uneasiness in the church, and especially to drive away the Pastor. The deacon came in to meet his visitor, who, after the usual greetings, began to lament the low state of religion, and to inquire as to the reason why there had been no conversions for two or three years past. "Now, what do you think is the cause of things being dull here? Do you know?" he persisted in asking. The deacon was not ready to give his opinion, and after a little thought frankly answered, "No, I don't." "Do you think the churches are alive to the work before them?" "No, I don't." "Do you think the minister fully realises the solemnity of his work?" "No, I don't."

A twinkle was seen in the eye of this troubler of Zion; and taking courage, he asked: "Do you think Mr. B. a very extraordinary man?" "No, I don't." "Do you think his sermon on 'Their eyes were holden' anything wonderfully great?" "No, I don't."

Making bold after all this encouragement in monosyllables, he asked: "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 do not!" "Why," cried the amazed visitor, "You agree with me in all I have said, don't you?" "No, I do not." "You talk so little, sir," replied the guest, 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 you tempt me to break them!"

The troubler was startled at the earnestness of the hitherto silent, unmovable 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, 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 conscientious. We thought that we were doing God's service when we drove that holy man from his pulpit and his work, and said we considered his work ended in B–, where I then lived.

We groaned because there was no blessing, while we were gossiping about, and criticizing, and crushing, instead of upholding, by our efforts and our prayers, the instrument at whose hand we harshly demanded the blessings. Well, sir, he could not drag on the chariot of the gospel 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 power of the Spirit, 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 among us by His Spirit, to show that He had blessed the labours 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 he who toucheth one of His servants, 'toucheth the apple of His eye.' I heard my former Pastor was ill, and, taking my oldest son with me, set out on a twenty-five miles journey to see him.

It was evening when I arrived, and his wife, with a spirit which any woman ought to exhibit towards one who had so deeply wronged her husband, denied me admittance to his chamber. She said – and her words were 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 labours had, through Christ, brought me into His fold; who had consoled my spirit in a terrible bereavement; and who had, till designing men had alienated us, been to me as 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 armour was falling from his limbs, he opened his languid eyes, and said, "Brother Lee! Brother Lee!" I bent over him and sobbed out, "My Pastor! 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 to all around; the sight of my face had brought the last pang of death to his troubled spirit. I kissed his brow and told him how dear he had been to me. I craved his pardon for my unfaithfulness, and promised 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, and do my prophets no harm." These words followed me until I fully realised the esteem in which Christ holds those men who have given up all 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 her 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 my brethren to deal with you as with those who cause divisions. I would give all I own to recall what I did thirty years ago. Stop where you are, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you."

This decided reply put an end to the new-comer's efforts. There is often great power in the little word "No!" but sometimes, and in some circumstances, it requires not a little courage to speak it so resolutely as did the silent deacon.