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Selwyn, D.D.: Volume 2
H. W. Tucker
Excerpt
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GEORGE AUGUSTUS SELWYN, D.D.

CHAPTER I.

NEW ZEALAND AND ENGLAND.

[1852-1854.]

THE Visitation on which the bishop was engaged in the summer of 1851-2, did not come to an end, as was mentioned in the last chapter, until March 29 of the latter year. It supplied many subjects of anxiety and of regret; the people had accepted Christianity eagerly and sincerely, but an emotional system of religion without a strict system of teaching and discipline had left them without backbone, moral or intellectual, and a time of reaction had set in. The young men fell away from Christianity, or declined to accept it, and the great mortality of the young children gave but small hope of the future of the Maori race. The confirmees were mostly middle aged: the children were uneducated, and the young men were growing up indifferent to Christianity, and despising the restraints of heathenism which their fathers had acknowledged: the missionaries, burdened with the charge of enormous districts, had been unable to give to the young that moral and social training which was necessary if Christianity was to be a power. Some of them gratefully acknowledged the bishop's efforts, and succeeded in establishing boarding-schools in their

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missions, and the people everywhere offered tracts of land for schools, if only the bishop could officer and superintend them; but, as he said, he could not officer them, and yet he knew that time was being lost, while he could only, like Marius, sit down and weep at the sight of a ruined Carthage.

While on this tour Mr. Abraham met the bishop at Mr. Ashwell's station, Taupiri, and found him literally in the midst of his work.

"He was in church examining, and at six o'clock he confirmed 200 men and women. This was his forty-fourth confirmation this tour, and completed about the 3,000 whom he examined almost one by one, and satisfied himself of their proficiency. Alas! alas! no young men or women. Out of the 3,000 only fifty perhaps were between sixteen and twenty-six. This is the result of no schools. The young people have utterly set aside Christianity and taken up nothing instead, but doat upon the vices of the towns, and horses, and whale-fishing. Here, however, the bishop's eyes and heart were gladdened by a school. Mr. Ashwell is a deacon of C.M.S. He has fifty girls and twenty boys under his charge, and devotes himself to the work most vigorously."

At another place on this Visitation the fruits of a good girls' school were apparent, and the case was the more interesting as the mistress was a Maori woman, the widow of a great chief.

When her husband died she fled for refuge from heathen habits to the Mission Station to which she became so valuable: her father-in-law came to mourn at his son's funeral, and she observed him sidling off towards a slave with his hand on his tomahawk, and she only just saved the slave from being sacrificed as "Inferiæ" to his son's "Manes." "This old man," wrote Mr. Abraham, "came to the bishop's recent confirmation, and seeing the bishop at the altar, and Mr. Maunsell at the reading desk, he, heathen as he was, walked up to the altar and assumed the vacant seat, saying, that the bishop was the great chief in church and he was next. Mr. Maunsell in vain tried to

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D.V. AND D.G.

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induce him to move, when just before the confirmation service the bishop beckoned to the faithful Rota, and in a moment he and another lifted the altar bodily over the rails, and shut the gate, leaving the old chief alone terribly disconcerted, and a laughing-stock to the whole community. The bishop's character for readiness of resource and promptness of action rose 100 per cent, and no man dares give himself airs near him. There may be some who would think this rather an irreverent way of treating the altar, but it would have been much more irreverent to have this old heathen giving himself airs there, and ejecting the priest from his place. The thing was done very quickly and quietly, and probably saved a general disturbance."

It must not be thought that the labour of these Visitations was confined to the toil of travel by sea and land, and to occasionally coarse and insufficient fare: there was the ever-present strain to fulfil the programme, to be able to add to the engagements which had been assigned to each date with the condition added D.V., the letters D.G., which were always inserted when the engagement had been kept. There was also the annoyance of living much in public, often in society that was barely congenial, and the lack of all opportunity, save on board ship, for study and privacy. On this Visitation there is an entry in the journal on Ash Wednesday. "Three hours quiet in the chapel between services," which shows how precious and exceptional the privacy was.

Easter was kept at Auckland, and on Easter Monday the bishop wrote a letter which is in truth a striking Easter sermon to his son in England.

AUCKLAND, *April 12th*, 1852.

MY VERY DEAR WILLIAM,

I can fancy you now enjoying your Easter holidays with one or other of the kind uncles and aunts, who are to you in the place of your parents; and I know so well their love for you that I feel sure that they have not omitted to teach you all that your dear mother and I have been teaching Johnnie at this holy season. It is this thought

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which makes us content to be absent from you in the body, though always present in the spirit; and, with such foster-parents as those to whom we have consigned you, we are sure that no one will accuse us of acting like the ostrich, in leaving its egg in the sand, either to be hatched by the heat of the sun, or to be trampled under the foot of the passing beast. But though I feel the most perfect confidence in my dear brother William, who has so kindly undertaken this charge, that he will teach you, as his own son, everything necessary to your soul's health, yet the sight of a father's handwriting, reminding you of my love towards you, will add force to the lessons which you are daily receiving, and to which I can add nothing new, except the peculiar efficacy of counsel given from a distance, and partaking therefore more of the nature of faith than of sight. It is at this season, when the great doctrine of Justification by Faith was first established by the Resurrection of our Lord, that I love to think of my unseen child as seeking for salvation by faith in an unseen God and Saviour. If I were with you, every day and every hour would bring with it some new anxiety; any sign of idleness; any hasty word; any want of reverence; any departure from truth; any disposition to vice; would cause at least a passing doubt, whether you were growing in grace, and increasing in wisdom, as in stature. But now at the distance of half the globe, all is happiness, because every thought is Faith: Faith in the Father who has adopted you for His own child: Faith in the Saviour who has taken you into His arms and blessed you: Faith in the Holy Spirit by whom you were born again to newness of life: and in a lower range, Faith in your uncle, that he will be to you a spiritual father: and Faith in yourself that you will not undervalue or neglect these gifts of God and of man; these blessings of heaven and of earth.

You will soon enter upon a life of peculiar trial—for a public school is a boy's first real acquaintance with the temptations of the world. If I were near you to watch the first effect of Eton upon your mind, what doubts and fears I should have, whenever I observed any sign of the effect of evil companions, weakening your own principles, and abating your love of God and of Christ. But now I can resign you with confidence into the guidance of your heavenly Father; trusting that He will not suffer you to be

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tempted above that which you will be able to bear. While you trust alone to His arm of strength you may sometimes without trespassing upon the Divine attributes, turn your thoughts to your parents and brother in New Zealand, and think that we are daily praying for you, that your faith may never fail; but that we may be all united in seeking salvation by the one appointed means; and thereby securing for us all a joyful meeting in the life to come through Him who as at this time rose from the dead for our justification.

Your most loving father,
G. A. NEW ZEALAND.

The Easter Octave was barely over when, on April 20, the bishop was again afloat in the *Border Maid*, on another tour. On May 26, when the *Border Maid* reached Auckland, the bishop was able to write in his diary, "End of Confirmation tour on which every DV has been marked with a DG to the exact day. Χάρις τῷ Θεῷ."

There was, however, little rest for the bishop; the approaching cold of winter warned him that the delicate Melanese must without delay be carried back to their native latitudes. He would gladly have been spared the voyage to and the sojourn in the relaxing air of the Tropics, but when the Trinity Sunday Ordination was over, no time was to be lost. One of the boys from Lifu, George Nelson Hector Apale, died on June 2, the bishop being "called out of chapel to commend to God the soul of our dear boy, the first-fruits of Achaia." Another Nengone boy, who had taught him much about his baptism, knelt by his side, while his cousin sat at his head, and exclaimed "Alas, my brother!" and the dying lad dictated a letter to his heathen father, declaring his faith and happiness. Another lad, Cho by name, was ill, and delay was impolitic. On the day after Trinity Sunday the bishop's log contains the following entry:—

June 7th.—"Went on board to hasten preparations for sailing, Cho's illness urging me. Lighted fires on board to smoke for rats. Packed up books and cleared cabin."

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And on June 8th there appears the following:—

“Went on board *Border Maid* to open hatches and replace books. Very few dead rats.”

On the point of sailing, a letter was written by the bishop to the Rev. Edward Coleridge, which is here given:—

AUCKLAND, *June 16th, 1852.*

MY VERY DEAR FRIEND,

On the eve of sailing on my fifth voyage to the Northern Islands, I write just one short line to deprecate your displeasure at the long interval which must occur before you hear from me again. In judging of my punctuality as a correspondent, you must bear in mind, that my year is now parcelled out into large portions, during one of which I am removed far from the range of all post-offices. It is quite possible that a space of six months should now intervene between two of my letters; a time I can assure you which passes over my head so rapidly, as scarcely to leave any distinct consciousness that any necessary duty has been so long postponed—so full of change of scene and of employment is the work to which it has pleased God to call me. But of this you may be sure, that both mind and matter bring you continually to remembrance; whether I travel by land or sea, or remain quietly at home, some evidence of your love is always before my eyes. This thought comes home to me now, when I am just signing the deed of sale of the *Undine*, and preparing to go on board the *Border Maid*—in both of which vessels you have so large a share—in the purchase of the one, and the equipment of the other. I part with a pang from the good little schooner, in which, without cost or parade, I could traverse the sea, protected by the God “Who tempers the wind to the shorn lamb,” and enables the smallest vessel to ride in safety over the stormy waves. Nothing but the necessity of carrying larger numbers of scholars would have reconciled me to the larger vessel, with its greatly augmented pecuniary responsibility: but as it must be so, I must endeavour that

“Nave ferar magnâ an parvâ, ferar unus et idem.”

One dear boy out of our thirteen has been taken to his rest; baptized on his death-bed by C. J. Abraham during my absence at the Bay of Islands, and blessed by me at

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ANAI TEUM.

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the moment of his departure. Another is now on board, dangerously ill, but with the hope that a few days' sail to the northward will restore him to health. Our cold winds in autumn always try the constitution of the island boys on their first visit: those who come for the second time appear to be acclimated. Even little Thol, whose life was despaired of in 1850, has spent his second term with us, without the least injury; and is grown into an active and robust boy. Mr. Nihill will stay about two months on Maré with his pupils, and I hope, after further acquaintance with the people, will be able to present some of them to me for baptism. He now speaks their language fluently. Do not expect rapid progress from us amidst these scattered stones of the tower of Babel; but pray for us, that our work may be blessed with fruit in the appointed time of harvest. From your affectionate and grateful Friend,
G. A. NEW ZEALAND.

On June 19th the *Border Maid* sailed, and a favourable wind soon carried the shivering Melanesians into warmer regions. At Anaiteum, as usual the first landing-place, the bishop put on shore the Presbyterian teachers, Mr. and Mrs. Inglis, who, with a horse and very much baggage, had had a free passage in the Church-ship from Auckland; the native lad whom Mr. Geddie, another Presbyterian preacher, had asked the bishop to take with him to Auckland in the previous year, was also landed here. At Mare or Nengone the Rev. W. Nihill and his native assistant, Henry Taratoa, were put on shore, together with some scholars. Mr. Nihill spent three months on this island with a view to preparing the way for the permanent settlement of English missionaries, and the bishop sailed northward, visiting amongst other of the Banks' islands, Santa Cruz, which had been one of the most dangerous spots in the Pacific. Here a favourite pupil was regretfully left on shore, the only clothed person among hundreds of naked heathens: "Still it was his home," wrote the bishop, "and God grant that in his simple way he may teach among his own people the true word of life." The Solomon Islands were afterwards thoroughly visited, and the bishop was received with

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cordiality at Malicolo, where in the previous year he had been in much peril.

The claims of these more distant islands and the short time that could be given to each of them satisfied the bishop that he was not equal to the due supervision of them while hampered by the care of New Zealand, and on August 20 there is the following entry in his diary :—

“The careful superintendence of this multitude of islands will require the services of a missionary bishop, able and willing to devote himself to this work.”

But some years elapsed before Mr. Patteson was consecrated Bishop of Melanesia.

On September 25th Nengone was again reached, and Mr. Nihill and his scholars came on board. These last were five in number ; among them was George Siapo, who had been a pupil of the bishop's for four years, having first attracted his notice when he went down to the bottom of one of the coral pits in his own island to fetch water for the stranger. He had been among the party on shore at Malicolo, in 1850, and had carried his water-barrel high above his head until he reached the boat ; he was now accompanied by his affianced bride and her companion, and thus the problem, how to provide the Christians of Melanesia with Christian wives, which had often exercised the bishop's mind, seemed to be in a way of being solved. The wish of Siapo to have his wife as well educated as himself showed also a great advance in his own Christian character : he had been ill during his stay at Nengone, and had contemplated the probability of never returning to his home, and this anticipation was indeed realised as he died at Auckland in January 1853.

On October 2nd the *Border Maid* sailed round the northern end of Lifu and took on board John Thol, an old favourite and companion of Siapo ; on October 21st she dropped anchor in Kohimarama, the college harbour. An English visitor who saw the bishop land at Auckland, and conduct his twenty-five youths and two young women, the representatives of almost as many languages, from the ship

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DUTY OF UNITY.

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to the college, declared that, saving in the weakness of bodily presence and the imperfection of speech, the bishop seemed to him more fully to realize the true conception of the Great Apostle of the Gentiles than he had ever thought possible. There was indeed another point of resemblance between the Apostle and the bishop, for since the day when St. Paul plied his needle and twine, few missionaries have more usefully exercised their skill in this respect than did the bishop, when out of a patchwork bed quilt he made with his own hands dresses for Wabisane and Wasatrutu, the Nengone girls, soon to be baptized by the names of Sarah and Caroline.

On his return the bishop preached a sermon, in which he insisted on the enlarged responsibilities which the increased number of heathen pupils laid on all who were concerned with them. One of those who heard it thus wrote his own impressions :—

Sunday, Oct. 31st, 1852.

The bishop preached from Zech. viii. 23, applying the prophecy, which was never literally fulfilled in the Jewish Church, to its spiritual fulfilment in the Christian ; and pointing out its literal fulfilment now before our eyes, when these heathen tribes, which people the sea, are ready to take hold of the skirts of the Christian, and say, " We will go with you, for we know that God is with you." This feeling, more or less clearly shown, is the spring and motive which lures these heathen tribes within our reach. This he illustrated by the figure of the magnet, and instanced, with some detail, the several principles of Gospel truth, which had been witnessed to in their late voyage. The lessons which he drew were striking. He spoke of Unity : that we cast not the stumbling-block of our own unhappy divisions before those who have yet to receive the first principles of our common faith ; and he spoke of his own endeavour to act in this spirit in all his dealings with the London Mission, concerning their work in these seas ; his willingness to aid and befriend them in all temporal concerns ; his desire that their work might be in parallel lines, not in opposition to each other, though it could not be in union. Then personally on each one of us, among whom

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these youths and children were brought for a season, the heavy responsibility was laid of influencing them for good or evil. They came amongst us civilized men, from their native Isles, with minds and intellects often dim and unused to exertion, but with every perceptive sense and faculty quickened to a degree of which we have no conception;—the eye, accustomed to track the step of every living creature, the flight of every bird in the air, the gliding of the many-coloured fish within their coral caves; the ear, awake in the dead of night to the slightest sound, which might warn them of the approach of an enemy. Youths trained in this constant exercise of these organs of sense, are quick to receive impressions through the senses. It may be but the motion of the hand, the glance of the eye, the expression of a countenance, and you may teach them evil which, though heathens, they know not:—it may be a word, and yet its consequences may remain through eternity. This was worked out; and then the conclusion, in the exhortation to a consistent Christian life, as an example to others, and as our own only peace.”

The year 1852 “closed in sorrow,” as the bishop entered in his diary on December 31. On the 14th of the same month John Thol had died, “My first Melanesian scholar, dear to me as one of my own children;” the *Border Maid*, which had proved ill found in gear and sails, had to be sold, and the proceeds the bishop felt bound to repay to the Australian dioceses which had purchased her; the great rise in seamen’s wages, consequent on the discovery of gold in Australia, would not allow him to commission another ship even if he possessed one. In this month the bishop completed the formal resignation of a portion of his diocese which was constituted, but not until several years had elapsed, the diocese of Wellington.

But amid all his anxieties the bishop had always been able amply to justify his plans, which cavillers both in England and at the antipodes had ridiculed. The time was now at hand when labour was to have its dignity acknowledged, and with something like triumph the Bishop thus told the story to Mr. Coleridge:—