



## PLAYING WITH FIRE.

**L**ITTLE L. was a bright boy of about four years old. One night, on his nurse putting him to bed, he observed that she placed the box of lucifer matches on the mantel-piece, and after she had left the room the thought occurred to him that he should like to strike one of the matches, and try to make it burn. He had often seen the servant light the matches, and he did not know why he should not do the same. The thought soon led on to the deed: he got out of bed, reached down the box, got into bed again, and struck a match. It blazed; and while the child was admiring the beautiful flame, the chintz curtain of his bed caught fire. He then jumped out of bed, and ran out of the room, to the head of the stairs, screaming with fright. Meanwhile, the people in the street, seeing the flames through the window, were loudly knocking at the door to give the alarm; and the father, hearing the cries of his child, rushed upstairs, and having first placed the child in greater safety, proceeded to tear down the curtains with his hands. He succeeded in putting out the fire, but, in so doing, so severely burnt his hands that he suffered much pain for many days.

This conduct on the part of the boy might have led to very serious consequences, while yet the blame attached to it would be modified by the fact of his age and inexperience. The same, however, cannot be affirmed on behalf of many a one whose whole life is frequently, in another infinitely more serious sense, but one continued scene of playing with fire:



for what is crime, and what are many of these vices in which men frequently indulge, but fires which, if not quenched, will burn down to soul destruction? To mention a few of these, there is—

**STRONG DRINK.**—Is not this a fire which, if permitted to obtain the mastery, will destroy both body and soul? And, indeed, has it not destroyed its thousands and tens of thousands? Is any biography more terrible than that of the drunkard? Did not God say of old, “Wine is a mocker, and strong drink is raging—and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise?”<sup>1</sup> but, heedless of these words, are not many deceived by it? Does not the love of drink bring many men down to premature death? Is it not written, “Woe to men of strength to mingle strong drink; strong drink shall be bitter to them that drink it!”<sup>2</sup> But do not men mingle and drink this liquid fire, even while witnessing its dreadful effects upon themselves and others? And do they not *play* with this fire by going into the way of temptation instead of avoiding it? Look at another fire, that of an—

**UNBRIDLED TONGUE.**—The old words are still true of this most unruly member: “Behold how great a matter a little fire kindleth. And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature, and it is set on fire of hell.”<sup>3</sup> This is a fearful description by the pen of inspiration of the work of an unsanctified tongue. The tongue itself is said to be a fire; and, truly, the destruction, ruin, and misery it has effected are beyond all calculation. Character, domestic happiness, usefulness are constantly being consumed by it. Death and life are said to be in the power of the tongue; and there are but few to be found who

<sup>1</sup> Prov. xx. 1

<sup>2</sup> Isaiah v. 22, xxiv. 9.

<sup>3</sup> James iii. 5, 6.

nave not suffered from its influence. Well might the psalmist of old inquire, "What shall be done unto thee, thou false tongue?"<sup>1</sup> And yet men play with this dreadful fire, forgetful of their own sufferings, and those which they often thoughtlessly inflict upon others, and of the solemn truth that God hates a proud look and a lying tongue; and that he that has a perverse tongue falls into mischief. Think of another fire—

**FALSE WORSHIP.**—What is this but a fire which has consumed its myriads! One of the sins of God's ancient people for which they were so severely punished is thus recorded by Jeremiah: "They built the high places of Baal, which are in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to cause their sons and daughters to pass through the fire unto Molech;"<sup>2</sup> and although we do not now set up idols of wood and stone, yet what are all those inventions which corrupt the simplicity of divine worship, and so hide the truth which sanctifies and saves the soul, but fires, the smoke of which hides Christ, and leaves the soul to be consumed by the fire of priestly idolatry as it sinks into the arms of darkness, superstition, and death? Dear readers, beware of playing with these modern idolatries, lest God should say of you as He did of His ancient people, "And the destruction of the transgressors and of the sinners shall be together, and they that forsake the Lord shall be consumed, and the strong shall be as tow, and the maker of it as a spark, and they shall both burn together, and none shall quench them."<sup>3</sup>

**PRIDE AND SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS.**—These are fires which have brought death to numbers. How many are there who, if through the sparks of a few fancied virtues or good deeds they can light up a little fire to kindle hope in their guilty consciences, are often perfectly satisfied. But God will say of all such

<sup>1</sup> Psalm cxx. 3.    <sup>2</sup> Jer. xxxii. 35.    <sup>3</sup> Isaiah i. 21.



efforts, and of all such sparks, however men may play with them, and charm others with their brightness, "Behold, all ye that kindle a fire, that compass yourselves about with sparks: walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks that ye have kindled. This shall ye have at my hand; ye shall lie down in sorrow."<sup>1</sup> Oh may we therefore beware of these sparks, all of which will be quenched by the night of death, and which only dazzle to destroy.

But how can we be saved from this? How can we be saved from the terrible fire of sin, both within and without us? What will quench this fire? Nothing but the grace of Christ. And how can we obtain this? By seeking the influences of the Holy Spirit, promised to all who ask His gracious help. By renouncing all *self-trust*, and, by simple faith, receiving and resting upon the atonement and the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ as the only ground of our acceptance and peace with God. The faith which does this will save the soul from both the guilt and power of sin, and so fill the heart with the love of God that the love of sin will be killed in the soul. Oh cease, reader, to play with the fire of sin, and hasten to that smitten Rock, whence issue those life-giving waters which will cleanse your heart and conscience, and impart such strength to your soul, that not only will you cease to play with sin, but become a victor over its treachery and power, both within and without.

<sup>1</sup> Isaiah l. 11.

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