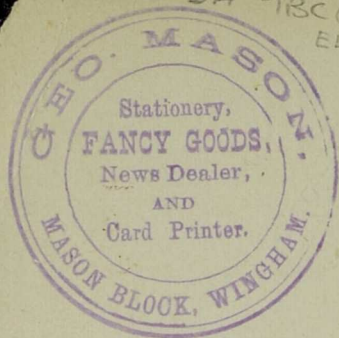


ELLEN AND CLARA



T. NELSON & SONS · LONDON · & · EDINBURGH

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from her Niece.



CLARA'S QUESTION TO HER TEACHER.



ELLEN AND CLARA;

OR,

Am I a Sinner?



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ELLEN AND CLARA.

CHAPTER I.

THE QUESTION ASKED.

"AM I a sinner, Miss Mary?" exclaimed a little girl, as her teacher took her place in Sunday-school. "Ellen Orrell says I am a wicked sinner."

"Gently, Clara!" said the young lady to whom she spoke, though she could not help smiling at the little girl's eagerness. "Do not speak quite so loud my dear. How came Ellen to tell you that you were a sinner? You have not been quarrelling, I hope."

"No, ma'am," replied Ellen, toward whom her teacher looked; "I did not mean to call Clara a sinner any more than the rest of us. I only said that we were all wicked sinners."

"And why did you say so, Ellen?"

"Because, Miss Mary, I have learned a verse in the Bible that says, 'There is none that doeth good, no, not one;' and besides you have often told us that we are sinners; but Clara says she is good, and she is not a sinner."

“I am a good girl, too,” said Clara, her little face quite red with impatience. “Mother says I am.”

“Well, my dear children,” said Miss Mary, “we cannot talk any more just now, for you see it is time for school to be opened. When we have an opportunity, we will try to find out which of us are sinners, and which are not: but now listen very attentively to what our superintendent says.”

The ringing of the little bell at the desk now hushed every other sound, and when the room was very still, the superintendent gave out a few verses of a hymn. When the children opened their neat little hymn-books and found it, both Ellen and Clara looked up at their teacher, as if they almost suspected her of having chosen it. It was indeed very appropriate to the subject of their conversation.

Clara did not like to sing the hymn after what she had said, and she stood silent, with her eyes fixed on the book, feeling rather uncomfortable, and she was glad when it was done, and they all kneeled down to pray. I do not know whether the superintendent had heard Clara’s exclamation when her teacher entered, and the short conversation that followed. Perhaps he had, for the form on which they sat was not far from the desk: but certainly the prayer which he offered was as suitable to the subject of which they were thinking as the hymn had been, and those of the children who listened to it felt it to be so.

I am sorry to say that it is not all the children in a Sunday-school who do listen to the prayers offered by their superintendent and teachers, and still fewer, I fear, try to join in them. How often I have been grieved

to see girls and boys, old enough to know better, and to feel how solemn a thing it is to come into the immediate presence of God to worship him, careless and inattentive, and even sometimes whispering and laughing in time of prayer! It is a dreadful thing to mock God; yet do not those children mock him, who kneel down before him, as though they meant to worship him, without ever remembering that his eye is on them; and, taking advantage of the moment when their teacher's eyes are closed in prayer, trifle as they would not do if she were looking at them? Remember, dear children, that although God sees you always, yet when you kneel down to pray, you are brought, by your own act, more especially into his presence. Remember too that it is for you that your teachers pray, and do not, by your inattentive and careless manner, show that you do not desire for yourselves the blessings which your teachers know you need, and which they earnestly ask for you.

Clara, I fear, had not been in the habit of attending to the prayers offered in her hearing every Sabbath, or she would have found out before this time that all were spoken of as "miserable sinners," and the mercy of God implored for all. But now her attention having been drawn to the subject, the humble confession of sin with which the superintendent commenced his prayer arrested her notice, and, though she knew the words to be familiar ones, it seemed almost as if she had never heard them before, so differently did they sound to her.

Though quite a little girl, she felt as though they were meant for her. Not that she felt herself to be a sinner, and wished to join in the prayer for mercy. No! Clara's heart was proud and hard; but she thought the super-

intendent meant both the hymn and the prayer for her, and she felt angry; and when she heard Miss Mary, as she knelt beside her, say at the close, "Amen," softly but distinctly, she felt vexed at her too; and before the devotional exercises of the school were over, and they were ready to commence their lesson, she was in an angry and unhappy state of mind, though no one had done anything to displease her. She was more determined than ever not to acknowledge (let what would be said) that she was a sinner.

CHAPTER II.

THE BIBLE CLASS.

As soon as they had taken their seats after the prayer, Miss Mary looked pleasantly around upon her class, and not seeming to notice the cloud on Clara's brow, she said, "Well, dear girls, here we are, all preserved by the kind care of our heavenly Father through another week, and permitted on this bright Sabbath morning to assemble in his house to read and study his holy Word. Can you tell me what portion of it our superintendent has just told us was the lesson for to-day?" This she said to see whether they had attended, for Miss Mary always prepared herself to teach, and of course she knew where the lesson was.

"The last eight verses of the eighth chapter of Genesis," answered several cheerful voices, though in a low tone, for their teacher had taught them always to be careful not to disturb other classes near them by

speaking or reciting too loudly, or making any noise which should attract attention, or interfere with the comfort of others.

In the well-ordered school of which I am speaking, anything approaching to confusion was rarely seen, and each class was now either quietly turning to the passage of Scripture which formed their lesson, or beginning to recite it to their teacher. The class to which Clara and Ellen belonged, though somewhat surprised that Miss Mary did not allude to what had passed before the exercises commenced, opened their Bibles without remark, and Clara's face brightened when she found that she was not (as she had feared) to be called on at once to say why she thought that she was not a sinner, for her conscience told her she was by no means free from sin.

While they are quietly pursuing their lesson, and things seem to be taking their usual course, without reference to the question with which we commenced, let us take the opportunity to learn something of the history and character of the class and of its teacher; something which may aid us to understand their investigations of a subject which even Clara feels is only postponed for a while, not forgotten nor dropped; for she, as well as the rest, remembered that Miss Mary said, "We will try to find out which of us are sinners, and which are not," and they have never yet known their teacher to forget or break a promise.

Miss Mary Lincoln had engaged in the work of Sunday-school instruction, feeling it to be not only a duty but a privilege to try to lead into the ways of holiness those of whom Christ said, "Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not." She knew that to be holy

was the only way to be happy, and that "the love of Christ constraining us" is the only motive strong enough to overcome the corruption of our fallen nature, and lead us to put forth a vigorous effort to obtain that "holiness without which no man shall see the Lord." Therefore she endeavoured in all her teachings to lead her class to look unto Jesus; to believe in him as the Son of God, the Saviour of sinners, that, "believing, they might have life through his name." The salvation of the children committed to her charge was her great end and aim, as it is of all faithful teachers.

The class which Miss Lincoln was now engaged in teaching had been under her care for some months; but though she had been unceasing in her endeavours to lead them to Christ, she had as yet seen no fruit of her labours. Her pupils were regular in their attendance, orderly in their demeanour, assiduous in the study of their lessons, and they really felt a strong affection for their teacher, but no one of them had as yet asked her, "What must I do to be saved?" or shown any concern for the welfare of the soul. They were young—some might have thought too young to think of these things; but Miss Lincoln knew that even little Clara, the youngest among them, was old enough, not only to die, but "to give an account of the deeds done in the body," and her anxiety for their salvation was increased by their own carelessness about it. Such was the state of affairs when Clara's question, "*Am* I a sinner?" threw a new light on the subject, and led her seriously to inquire if, on this point, her teaching had not been defective.

"Is it," she asked herself, "because I have not sufficiently urged upon them their sinfulness, that they are

so little moved by the love of Christ? Is it because they do not feel themselves to be lost, that they show no anxiety to be saved?"

A moment's review of her past course showed her that in all probability it was even so, and her first impulse was to take up the subject at once, and prove to them from Scripture the depravity of our race, and, from their own experience, their participation in it; to strive to make them feel their lost and ruined condition, and the utter hopelessness of trusting in their own righteousness. But a glance at Clara caused her to hesitate. She saw that the natural enmity of the little girl's heart was roused; and fearing to excite it still more, she resolved, after an instant's earnest prayer for direction, to defer the consideration of the subject until Clara should be more calm, and the others have less occasion to exult over the proof of her mistake.

Clara Hoover was a bright, intelligent child, of ten years old, and the only daughter of parents, who, as she said, told her she was good, on all occasions, and really thought her so. No more certain way to offend them could have been taken than to reprove Clara, or even suggest that she might need correction or restraint; and the poor child was growing up with an idea of her own consequence and her own perfectness truly lamentable. No wonder she was offended at the idea of being called a "miserable sinner."

Ellen Orrell, a girl of not quite fourteen, was perhaps the oldest of Miss Lincoln's pupils; and was, in many respects, Clara's opposite. Her parents were in the humble walks of life, and she, the eldest of a large family, was already earning her own living. Her oppor-

tunities of education had been very limited, nor was she by any means so quick as most of the others. But the grace of humility she possessed in no small degree, and her earnest desire to learn almost made up for the want of facility in acquiring new ideas. She was the only member of the class in regard to whom Miss Lincoln entertained any hope that the seed sown had as yet fallen into good ground.

The other members of the class were Sarah and Adelia Hunt, two little sisters who were always present, the younger attentive and docile, the elder often grieving her teacher by indifference almost amounting to disrespect: Emma Leiper, a sweet and gentle child, who loved Miss Mary too well ever to offend her willingly; and Hetty and Louisa Parker, two intelligent girls, full of mirth and mischief, and not always able to restrain their buoyant spirits, even in the Sunday-school.

Such is the class whom their teacher now hopes, with God's blessing, to convince that they are sinners, and in need of the Saviour, to whom she has so often tried to lead them. The morning's lesson is almost finished. Let us listen to the words with which Miss Lincoln is about to close.

"Can you tell me," she asks, "what lessons may be learned from this portion of God's Word? All Scripture, you know, is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. What lesson may we learn from the verses you have recited, and about which we have been talking?"

"That we ought to give thanks to God for his mercy," said Clara, toward whom her teacher looked.

“ Yes! Noah builded an altar to the Lord and offered burnt-offerings in token of his gratitude for his own safety and that of his family. What other lesson?”

“ That we are all sinners,” replied Louisa Parker, with a mischievous look toward Clara. “ The imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth.”

“ A sad and humbling statement, my dear Louisa, but it is God’s Word which makes it, and we dare not dispute it. I have not time to say more upon the subject now; these are the principal lessons which the verses for to-day contain. But I see it is almost time for the bell to ring, and I have a proposition to make to you. Would you all like to spend Thursday afternoon and evening with me?”

“ O! I would!” exclaimed Clara, forgetting at once the vexation which Louisa’s glance had renewed.

“ Thank you, Miss Mary, very much,” replied Ellen Orrell, timidly; and “ I should like to come,” and “ Thank you, Miss Mary,” were uttered by all the class with evident pleasure, for all loved their teacher, and were glad to be with her.

“ Then I shall be pleased to see you, and will try to make the time pass pleasantly: I want——” But the ringing of the bell suspended further conversation, and after singing the doxology, they passed into the church, accompanied by their teacher, to join in the services of the sanctuary.

CHAPTER III.

THE GREAT PHYSICIAN.

THURSDAY afternoon came, and, one after another, the little girls gathered in the pleasant parlour where their teacher waited to welcome them. They had all been there more than once before, and they felt quite at home. Miss Mary had always something which would interest them, and she could sympathize so entirely with their little pleasures and their different pursuits that all were pleased and happy. The afternoon passed very quickly, between looking over beautiful engravings, examining a cabinet of rare shells and curiosities, and a run round the neat little garden into which the parlour windows opened, now filled with gay autumn flowers. But though they enjoyed this last, perhaps more than all the rest, they were glad, when the cool autumn evening came on, to return to the parlour, where a small though cheerful fire was burning on the hearth; and Clara, springing with the freedom of a petted child into Miss Lincoln's lap, as she sat beside the fire, exclaimed, "Oh! how nice this is! I do love a little fire on the hearth so much. And now, Miss Mary, won't you tell us a story?"

"Oh do, Miss Mary! that will be delightful!" exclaimed the other girls, gathering around her in great glee.

"Place yourselves around me then," she said, smiling, "so that you can all enjoy the fire, and let me see your faces in its pleasant light, and I will try to tell you a tale which I wish you to understand and remember."

“Oh! I am so glad!” exclaimed Clara, as the others, obeying their teacher’s directions, seated themselves near her in the cheerful fire-light. “Is it a long story, Miss Mary?”

“Not very long, but I wish you to listen to it attentively, as I shall ask you all some questions about it when I have finished.

“There was once a beautiful island, covered with green grass and noble trees, and apparently supplied with everything that could make life delightful. There were fruit-trees and trees for shade. There were flowers to please the eye and fruits to gratify the taste. The sun shone bright and warm by day, and the silver moon made the night beautiful with her gentle ray. You would have thought that those who inhabited so lovely a spot must be happy, and perhaps, at the first sight, you would have supposed that they were really so.

“But this was not the case. The majority of the inhabitants of this fair island were sadly unhappy, and cared little about the beauty of the place in which they lived. Shall I tell you the reason? They were sick. And you know that those who are sick and in pain cannot enjoy fruits or flowers, the bright sunshine, nor anything that to others is so pleasant and delightful. Yes, the inhabitants of this beautiful country were cursed with a terrible disease from which none who lived there could escape. Every child who was born on this island, no matter how well it looked, or how healthy it appeared, had the disease in its system, and though for a while, perhaps, it would not show itself, yet, as the child grew older, it would become worse and worse, and if no means were taken to cure it, it would break out

violently, making the child miserable in itself and disgusting to others. One peculiarity of this disorder was that it commenced and raged most violently within. It did not always show itself on the surface to any great extent; indeed, some of those who were most terribly diseased, took such pains to conceal all outward manifestations of it, that no one would have supposed, from just looking at them as they passed, that they were not in perfect health. Others again tried to persuade themselves that no such disease existed, or at any rate that they were not infected by it. They were not sick, they said, and they laughed at those who lamented the ravages of the fearful malady, and tried to find a remedy for it."

"Why," exclaimed Clara, who had been listening with great attention, "I should think if they were sick they could not help knowing it. I always know when I am sick."

Louisa and Hetty Parker exchanged glances, and Louisa was about to speak, but Miss Lincoln replied—

"Perhaps so, Clara, but the people of whom I am telling you did not. The disease was not always painful at first, though, if allowed to go on, it soon became so, even till the whole head was sick and the whole heart was faint, and ending always in the most fearful death."

"Miss Mary," interrupted Emma Leiper, "was there no medicine they could take? Had they no doctor to cure them?"

"Yes, my dear. A number of years before the time of which I am telling you, there had been among them one who was called, by way of distinction, the GREAT PHYSICIAN. It was said that he had never failed to

relieve any who had placed themselves under his care, and though he had gone away now, he had left behind him a remedy which would be sure to heal all who took it, agreeably to the directions which he had given."

"Then why did they not all take it and get well?" inquired Adelia Hunt, eagerly. "Was it very bad to take, or could they not all get it?"

"All who wished to have it could obtain it," replied Miss Mary. "There was enough for all, and though it had cost the Great Physician an immense sacrifice to obtain it, he gave it to all without money and without price, so that the poorest had the same chance to be cured as the rich. As to its being 'bad to take,' as you say Adelia, there were a variety of opinions. Some declared that it was horribly bitter and nauseous, and that they would rather be sick all their lives than touch it. It made them worse, they said, only to think of it. While others (and these were generally those who had taken the most of it) asserted that so far from being unpleasant, it was sweeter than 'honey, or the honey-comb. However this might be, it certainly did them good. It gradually removed from their faces the ugly marks which the disease had made. It gave strength to their limbs, so that they could 'run and not be weary, and could 'walk and not faint.' It improved their sight, so that they could not only enjoy the brightness and beauty of the world around them, but could see across the seas which surrounded their island, a fairer and a lovelier shore, where sickness would never be allowed to enter, and to which they would be removed, if they obeyed the directions of the Great Physician. Was it not their own fault, my children, if, with such a

medicine provided for them, and such a prospect held out to them, they still continued to suffer with disease, and to die without any hope of reaching this beautiful land where their kind Physician had gone to be ready to receive them? They were sick and suffering to be sure, and till they were cured they could not hope to enter there, but he had promised a remedy for them. They were loathsome with disease, but he had opened a fountain, and his first direction to all who placed themselves under his care was, 'Wash and be clean.' Those who obeyed him were cleansed from all their former corruptions, and then the medicine which he gave them gradually purified their system, made them sound and well, and prepared them for admission to the glorious land to which it was the desire of their Physician to remove them.

"I have told you that some of the people would not believe that they were sick. There were others, however, who refused to believe that such a person as the Great Physician had ever been upon their island, or that the medicine which he was said to have provided could be of any service. Others again, who did not attempt to deny either their own sickness or the existence of the Great Physician, acted as though they did not believe in either. 'They were sick to be sure,' they said, 'but they were no worse than others around them.' When the disease had made greater progress, and gave them more pain, it would be time enough to attend to it, and to trouble themselves about taking the medicine. And so, with one excuse or another in their mouths, many, very many, of the inhabitants of the island remained the victims of this terrible disease, though the

fountain which would have cleansed them was ever gushing forth in their presence, and the medicine which would have cured them was offered them freely and continually by the messengers of the Great Physician.

"But couldn't he make them take it?" asked Clara. "Why didn't he make them wash in the fountain and take the medicine?"

"Ah! Clara, the Physician surely did his part when he provided the medicine and offered to cure the sick freely. It was not his fault if they would not come and be healed, had he done no more than this. But he really did a great deal more. He sent his servants to them, 'rising up early and sending them,' offering them the medicine, and urging them by every inducement to take it and live. Could he be expected to do more than this? Ah no! nor half so much. But there was this besides all the other peculiarities of the medicine, that it must be taken willingly, or not at all. No one could be forced to partake of its benefits. Parents who had felt its blessings, would bring their children; and all who had been relieved by the medicine, and who loved the Great Physician, would bring their friends, and use every method to persuade them to wash in the fountain and to take the medicine, but this was all they could do. They could not force them to do either. And too often the child and the loved one turned away from the healing stream and from the life-giving remedy, and from those who urged them with earnestness and tears to partake of it, saying, 'I am not sick, why should I take medicine? I need no cleansing, why should I wash in the fountain?'"

"And what became of them at last?" inquired Adelia.

“Did they not learn at last that they were sick, and that the medicine could cure them?”

“Not all of them, Adelia. For a long term of years, numbers refused to partake of the only remedy that could save them, and then the Great Physician returned, as he had promised to do when he went away. Those who had believed in him and had obeyed his directions were at once made free from all corruption, and taken with him to the beautiful land of which they had sometimes caught glimpses, and which he had purchased for them. The others—how shall I tell you the fate of those who had refused to be cured when the means were within their reach? To them thenceforth no cure was offered. They were left, without any hope of healing, to endure the agonies of a disease which became every day more and more intolerable, and which tormented for ever, but never—never destroyed its victims.”

Miss Lincoln's voice trembled as she uttered these words, and she paused. None of the girls spoke, and all were so still that she could hear their breathing. The room was feebly lighted by the flickering blaze of the fire, and she could see that each young face looked thoughtful and solemn, and Ellen Orrell's eyes were filled with tears. After a moment's silence, she continued.

“My children, do you understand my tale? Clara—Adelia, what beautiful land is this of which I have been speaking?”

Clara was silent, nor did she raise her head from her teacher's shoulder, where it had lain for some time, but Adelia replied in a low tone, “Is it this world you mean, Miss Mary?”

“Yes, it is this beautiful earth of ours. And what is the disease with which all are smitten?”

“It is SIN,” replied Hetty Parker, in a much graver tone than usual, and her teacher’s heart rejoiced at the seriousness with which she spoke.

“You are right, my dear child; and now, one question more. Have I spoken truly in representing this disease as so universal; in saying that of all who are born into this world, none escape the infection? In other words, are you and I, each one of us, are we all sinners, and do we feel ourselves to be so?”

None of the girls made any reply, and, after an instant’s pause, Miss Lincoln resumed—

“I will not press you for an answer to this question now. I would not have you own your sinfulness, if you do not feel it, but this matter is an important one. Do you not all think it of consequence that we should ascertain our real state before God?”

They all assented, and their teacher proceeded—“I have been trying for a long time to direct you to the Saviour, to lead you to the Great Physician. But none of you have as yet shown a disposition to seek him for yourselves. Perhaps this is because you do not feel that you need him—that is, do not realize that you are sinners. If so, let us study the subject together. I do not wish you to believe that you are sinners, because I tell you so. If you would like to find out what the Scripture says on this subject, we will make it our lesson on next Sabbath afternoon. You may find as many texts as you can, that speak of our sinfulness, and after that we will talk over the matter and try, if we are sinners, to find it out, that we may be willing to

wash in the fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness, and place ourselves under the care of him, 'who forgiveth all our sins and healeth all our infirmities.' And now, dear children, before we have the lights brought in, let us sing some sweet hymn which we all know."

"Shall we sing

'There is a fountain filled with blood?'

asked Ellen Orrell: and they all joined in singing this beautiful hymn, while Clara, as she sang it, with her little head still upon her teacher's shoulder, thought, "I wonder if that is not the fountain Miss Mary told us of in the story."

Just as they finished singing, the lamps were lighted, and they were called to tea, and though they were perhaps not quite so gay as if they had been engaged in less serious conversation, still they were all cheerful and happy, and the remainder of the evening passed as pleasantly though more quietly than the first part.

CHAPTER IV.

THE QUESTION ANSWERED.

"I HAVE found some texts, Miss Mary," said Clara, on the next Sunday afternoon; and her teacher was pleased to see that there was now no angry cloud on her countenance at the thought of being called a sinner, nor did any of the others seem disposed to remind her of what she had said the Sabbath before.

"I am glad you remember my request, my little

Clara," she replied; "and I hope we shall all learn something from the lesson we are about to study. Will you tell me, Sarah, what the subject of our lesson is?"

"Sin," she replied.

"Not so much sin itself, my dear child, as our own share in it. You do not doubt, I suppose, that there is a great deal of wickedness in the world, nor that there are very many persons, who, unless they live differently, can never go to heaven. This then is not what we wish to find out, but whether we are among those who, 'unless they repent, shall all likewise perish.' The question which each one of us is solemnly to ask herself, and to which we are earnestly to seek an answer from the Word of God, is, 'AM I A SINNER?'

"Suppose that I did not know myself to be a sinner, and that I came to you for information as to my real state; what passage would you show me, Clara, in answer to this important question?"

The little girl's Bible was open, and she read, without looking up, "They are corrupt; they have done abominable works; there is none that doeth good. The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men to see if there were any that did understand and seek after God. They are all gone aside; they are altogether become filthy; there is none that doeth good, no, not one."

"A very appropriate passage, my dear Clara, and one that declares, in terms that admit of no mistake, the sad fact of the universal sinfulness of our race. If we belong to 'the children of men,' on whom 'the Lord looked down from heaven,' we must of necessity be sinners, for the Bible being true, it declares of them that

there is none that doeth good.' In what part of the Bible do you find these solemn words?"

"In the fourteenth Psalm," replied Clara.

"And in the fifty-third Psalm, Miss Mary," said Emma Leiper, who sat next to Clara, "there are almost the same words."

"You are quite right, my dear. Can you tell me by whom these psalms were written?"

"By King David, I suppose."

"Yes; and did he feel his own individual sinfulness, or his participation in the evil which is thus charged on his fellow-mortals?"

"I think he did," replied Ellen Orrell, "for in the fifty-first Psalm he says, 'Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me;' and in the fourth verse of the forty-first, he says, 'Lord, be merciful unto me; heal my soul, for I have sinned against thee.'"

"Yes; and in the thirty-eighth and sixty-ninth Psalms, you will find the most humble confessions of sin and prayers for pardon, proving, conclusively, that David felt himself to be a sinner, needing continually the forgiveness and mercy of Jehovah. Is it probable that we need pardon less than he?"

No one answered, and Miss Lincoln resumed, "Have you any other passages to show me?"

"'The imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth,'" was read by Louisa Parker; who added, "that was in our lesson last Sunday."

"And a few weeks ago," said her sister Hetty, "we learned from the fifth verse of the sixth chapter of Genesis, that 'God saw that the wickedness of man was

great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.’”

“ Yes, even at that early period in the history of mankind, the natural tendency of his heart to evil had reached this fearful strength. We know how God punished the antediluvian world for their iniquity, and the apostle tells us, that ‘ the heavens and the earth which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.’ But it is not of the punishment of sin that I design now to speak ; this is not the subject which we are considering. We see that the corruption of our race was all but universal before the deluge, and David testifies that it was so at his day ; can you bring any passages to show how it was at a later period ? Did the world grow better as it grew older ?”

“ Did Job live after David, Miss Mary ?” asked Adelia Hunt.

“ No, my dear. He is supposed to have lived at a much earlier date.

“ Some think he lived even before Abraham’s time. The book called by his name is one of the oldest, if not the very oldest book in the Bible. But we will not on that account reject its testimony. Have you any text from it to read to us ?”

“ In the fifteenth chapter and the fourteenth verse,” answered Adelia, “ it says, ‘ What is man that he should be clean ? and he which is born of woman that he should be righteous ?’ ”

“ And yet we are told of this patriarch that ‘ He was a perfect man, and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil,’ and still he says of himself, ‘ I have

sinned,' and, 'How should man be just before God?' And of the race to which we, in common with him, belong, he exclaims, 'Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Not one.' Have not we at least as much reason as Job, to say, 'I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes?'"

"Can you add another to the passages already quoted?" continued Miss Lincoln, looking at Sarah Hunt, who after turning over the leaves of her Bible for a moment, read from Ecclesiastes vii. 20: 'There is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good and sinneth not.'"

"This is the testimony of Solomon, the wisest of men, and you observe how perfectly it agrees with that of his father David, and with all the other passages we have read on the subject. Have you any more proofs?"

"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked, who can know it?" read Ellen Orrell.

"'Who can know it?'" repeated Miss Lincoln, solemnly. "Remember, dear children, that it is of every human heart, of yours and of mine, that this is written—'deceitful above all things.' Can we believe it when it tells us that we are not sinners? 'Desperately wicked.' Yes; none but God can know how utterly vile it is, or how hopeless is our condition without his Almighty aid."

All were silent for a moment, and then Clara said, "Miss Mary, those same words that I read to you at first, in the fourteenth Psalm, are in the New Testament too; they are in the third chapter of the epistle to the Romans."

"Yes, Clara; the apostle Paul, who wrote that epistle quotes what David had written so long before,

as applicable to the times in which he lived. You observe, he begins it with, 'as it is written.' The state of men's hearts, it would seem then, had not improved in the days of Paul. The world was many hundred years older, but the people who inhabited it were still sinners in the sight of God."

"In the twenty-third verse of this chapter," added Ellen Orrell, "it says, 'For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.'"

"And here is a verse in the eighth chapter," said Louisa Parker, "which says, 'They that are in the flesh cannot please God.'"

"True, dear girls; and the apostle James tells us that 'In many things we offend all;' to which, John, the beloved disciple of our Saviour, adds, 'If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.'"

"And now, my children, we must close our lesson. We have seen by a reference to Holy Scripture, that our whole race are declared, on the authority of God himself, to be sinners in his sight, whatever we may be in our own; that 'not one' is excepted. And we have found the best and most holy men in every age bearing witness to the truth of these declarations, and owning themselves vile in the sight of God. Many other passages might have been brought forward; but enough, I think, have been read to prove the universal, all-pervading sinfulness of mankind, and our own undoubted participation in it.

"We have now taken a rapid and general view of the subject; sufficient, it seems to me, to convince us all of the truth of the apostle's words, 'If we say that we have

not sinned, we make him (that is, God) a liar, and his word is not in us.' Next Lord's-day afternoon, if we live, we will consider it more particularly, and try to bring its truth more immediately home to our own consciences."

CHAPTER V.

FIRST TABLE OF THE LAW.

SUNDAY afternoon found all the little girls in their places, and somewhat curious to know what their lesson was to be. They had asked Miss Lincoln in the morning, but her only reply had been, "I will tell you this afternoon." And after the introductory exercises of the school, they did not open their books as usual, but waited till she should tell them what to do.

"I told you last Sunday, that we would this afternoon consider the question, 'Am I a sinner?' more particularly with reference to each of ourselves. Though I am sure, that, after all the passages we read last Sunday, none of my little girls would venture to contradict the Bible by saying that they have not sinned; yet I am not so certain that you really feel the truth of its solemn declarations, and in your hearts acknowledge your individual sinfulness. We have learned, on authority which we cannot dispute, that all the race to which we belong are sinners. 'Death,' says the apostle, 'has passed upon all men, for that *all have sinned*.' Can any of you tell me the nature of the disease which infects all; in other words, *what is sin?*'"

No one replied, and after waiting an instant, she continued, "Turn to the third chapter of the first epistle of John, and read the fourth verse." They soon found the place, and Adelia read, "*Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law, for sin is the transgression of the law.*"

"We learn from this verse, then," said their teacher, "in what sin consists. It is the transgression of the law of God. Whoever has broken any one of God's commandments has committed sin, and is, of consequence, a sinner. Let us now turn to this law, which the apostle Paul tells us 'is holy, just, and good,' and examine our own hearts and our own lives in the light of its requisitions. In what part of the Bible shall we find it?"

"In the twentieth chapter of the book of Exodus," they replied, as they opened their Bibles at the place.

"You are familiar with these commandments," said Miss Lincoln. "You have all committed them to memory, and you are also accustomed to hear them frequently repeated, yet I fear you have not thought of them, and applied them to yourselves, as you should. Let us try to do so now, seriously and prayerfully. Who gave this law, Clara?"

"God spake all these words," replied the little girl.

"Yes; God, our creator and preserver, who has the most perfect right to command and to expect unquestioning obedience. How many commandments, Sarah, has he given us? and on what were they written?"

"There are ten," she answered, "and they were written by God upon two tables of stone, which he gave to Moses on Mount Sinai."

"Right; now which of you can tell me how many

of these commandments were written on the first table?"

"The first four of them, I believe," replied Ellen Orrell.

"Yes, those which relate to our duty to God are embraced in what is called the first table of the law. The remaining six relate to our duty to our fellow-mortals, and form the second table. These commands are all equally binding upon us. We cannot obey only those which we like and disregard the others. Do you remember the answer which the Lord Jesus gave to a lawyer, who asked him, 'Master, which is the *great* commandment of the law?' Let us turn to the twenty-second chapter of Matthew, and read from the thirty-seventh verse: 'Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.'"

"I heard the minister read that this morning in church," said Emma Leiper, as her teacher finished reading.

"But," said Louisa Parker, "those are not among the ten commandments which the Lord gave Moses."

"Not those very words, Louisa, it is true, but do you not see that in them Christ includes all the laws, giving no one a preference above another. That which he pronounces the first and great commandment contains the substance of the first table, for if we 'love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, and mind,' we shall surely keep the four commands which inform us of our

duty to him. So, in like manner, if we keep ‘the second, which is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself,’ we shall break no one of the six laws on the second table. Let us try this afternoon to examine the first table of the law, and ourselves in relation to it. Tell me, Hetty, what is the first commandment?”

“*Thou shalt have no other Gods before me,*” answered the little girl.

“Pause now, dear children, and ask yourselves, Have I ever broken this *law* of God? Have I had any God but the Lord? How is it with you, Ellen? Does your conscience accuse, or acquit you, here?”

“Miss Mary,” said the little girl, hesitatingly, “I know I am a sinner, but I do not think I ever broke this commandment. I never worshipped any God but the Lord.”

“I do not doubt that you suppose so, my dear Ellen; and probably you are all inclined to think that this first law of God is one which you have never broken. But let us look a little more closely at the matter. You have never, it is true, kneeled down and prayed to any but the Lord; but have you never, when apparently engaged in his worship, allowed your thoughts to wander to something else which you loved better than him? Is there nothing of which you think more constantly, and which you would rather possess than his favour? Have you always loved him with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength? If you have not, then whatever has prevented you from doing so, has stood to you in the place of God. Whatever you have loved better than you have loved him,—whether it has been your play, your dress, those who were dear to you, or yourself,—has

been to you in place of your God. Which of us dare say that this has never been the case with us? My dear children, *I dare not.*"

Miss Lincoln was very serious, and there were tears in her eyes, as she said this; but presently she inquired again, "What is the second commandment, Emma?"

"Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them—"

"That will do. Have you, Emma, ever broken this commandment!"

"Why no, Miss Mary! I am sure I never worshipped an idol, nor an image of any kind. I cannot be mistaken about this."

"No, Emma; you have been exposed to no temptation to do so. You probably never saw an idol, such as the heathen worship, and if you were to see one, your own sense, educated as you have been, and taught the commandments, as you were, as soon as you were old enough to learn them, would show you the folly of praying to a senseless block of stone. The *letter* of this command probably none of us have broken; but its spirit is the same as that of the first. If, enlightened as we are, we suffer ourselves to love and care for anything more than we do for God, we would, if no better taught than the poor heathen idolater, bow down as he does, to an image of our own creation. But we must hasten to the next commandment; will you tell me, Sarah, what it is?"

"Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God

in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain."

"What does 'in vain' mean?" asked Miss Lincoln.

"It means lightly, carelessly, does it not?" said Louisa Parker.

"It does. This commandment then, forbids something more than the grosser violations of it, which are unhappily so common, and from which we shrink with horror. I fear it is often broken by those who would be shocked were they told that they are in the practice of taking God's holy name in vain. I fear that there is not a Sabbath-school, where this sin is not committed on every occasion of meeting together. If, when we join our superintendent, or any other person, in repeating the Lord's prayer, 'Our Father, who art in heaven,' or any other act of religious worship, with wandering thoughts and a careless tongue, do we not break this command? And are we not among those whom the Lord will not hold guiltless?"

"I see you feel this, dear children, as I wish you should, and we will pass on to the next. Clara, will you repeat the fourth commandment?"

Clara shut her book, and repeated it word for word:

"Remember the Sabbath-day to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy man-servant, nor thy maid-servant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day:

wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath-day, and hallowed it."

"God blessed and hallowed—that is, he made holy—the Sabbath-day. Then surely man has no right to make it common, or to treat it as he does the six days in which he is commanded to labour and do all his work. God has *made* the Sabbath holy; we are commanded to *keep* it. Clara, how do you obey this law?"

"Why, Miss Mary, I come to Sunday-school, and go to church, and I do not play, nor learn my lessons, and—"

The little girl hesitated, for she could recollect nothing else which distinguished the Sabbath from other days.

"That is very well, so far as it goes, dear child, and I am especially glad to hear you say you do not learn your lessons on this holy day. I fear too many children, even of those who go to Sunday-school, spend the hours of the afternoon in studying the lessons for their week-day school, that should have been committed to memory on Saturday. I hope none of my class do so. But, Clara, is this all that is meant by the command to 'remember the Sabbath-day,' and may those of us who attend Sunday-school and go to church and do not play, nor do any unnecessary work upon it, feel that there is at least one law of God which we do not break?"

"I do not know, Miss Mary. Is there anything else I ought to do?"

"Let us turn to the fifty-eighth chapter of Isaiah, and see if the thirteenth verse will answer your question. Read it, Ellen."

(*Ellen reads.*) "If thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord,

honourable, and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words—”

“That will do,” said her teacher, interrupting her. “Does not this include something more than you mentioned, Clara?” asked Miss Lincoln. “How many of you, my children, can, from your hearts, call the Sabbath a delight?”

“I think I can, Miss Mary,” said Ellen Orrell, after a moment’s silence.

“I can too,” said Emma Leiper. “I do love to come to Sunday-school.”

“So do I,” added one and another, until all had spoken; and as their teacher looked round upon their bright young faces, and heard their eager voices testifying to the love for their school, which their constant attendance also indicated, her heart swelled with affection for them; and she prayed earnestly, though silently, that the interest thus awakened might be the means of leading them to love the Saviour.

“I believe you do, dear children, and it gives me great pleasure,” she replied. “I hope, too, that you love the day which our heavenly Father has set apart for his worship and service; and that you do, to a great extent, turn away your feet from doing your own pleasure on his holy day. But now comes the searching question, which I need to put, not only to each of you, but to myself—‘not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words,’ says the prophet. The commandment is exceeding broad. Do we, any of us, keep it in its extent and fullness?”

"Can't *you*, Miss Mary?" asked Clara, earnestly, looking up into her teacher's face.

"I try to keep it holy, Clara. I love the Sabbath dearly, and I desire to improve its hallowed hours; but there is no Sabbath evening comes on which I have not many wasted privileges and mis-spent moments to mourn over and to ask forgiveness for. Is it not so with you? Or have you no wandering thoughts while listening to God's holy word; no foolish, idle words, sinful at any time, but especially so upon the Sabbath, to repent of and confess before God?"

No eye was raised now, nor did any voice reply. All felt, though in different degrees, that in some, if not in all of these ways, they had broken the commandment, and they were silent.

"Let us now consider, for the few moments that remain to us," continued Miss Lincoln, "the first and great commandment, which includes all these: 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.' Do any of you think that you have kept this law, or are you convinced that in disobeying those which it comprehends you have transgressed it also? Tell me, Clara, have you loved the Lord your God?"

"I used to think I loved God," replied the child, "but now—"

Miss Lincoln waited a moment, but as Clara said no more, she remarked,

"But now you *feel* that by breaking his commandments you have proved that you do not love him as you ought. Is that it, my dear?"

"I trust you all feel so," continued Miss Lincoln, as

Clara assented, looking round upon the others, "and may the Holy Spirit fix this conviction in your hearts, and deepen it there, until, with your whole souls, you can join me in saying,

"In word, in deed, in thought,
I do not, cannot love thee as I ought;
Thy love must give that power, thy love alone,
There's nothing worthy of thee but thine own,
Lord, with the love wherewith thou lovest me,
Shed in my heart abroad, would I love thee."

CHAPTER VI.

SECOND TABLE OF THE LAW.

"I SUPPOSE we are going to study the second table of the law this afternoon," said Louisa Parker, as she took her seat among her companions, on the next Sabbath. It was quite early, and their teacher had not yet come, so she continued,

"I wonder if Miss Mary will make it out that we have broken all these commandments too."

"I expect so," replied Sarah Hunt. "For my part, I think we might as well acknowledge at once that we have, and save the time it will take to go over them one by one. Miss Mary is determined to prove us all sinners."

"For shame, Sarah, to speak so!" said Ellen Orrell. "Miss Mary only wants to show us what we really are."

"Well," said Clara, "I'm pretty sure that I have not

broken all these commandments. I never killed anybody, I know, and I never stole anything either."

The girls laughed, and Hetty Parker observed—"I should think we had all kept the sixth commandment anyhow."

"I don't know," said Ellen Orrell; "but if we have, it would not do any good except we had kept all the rest."

"Why not?" asked Clara.

"The Bible says," replied Ellen, "that if we break one law, it's just the same as if we broke them all."

"I don't think that's fair," exclaimed Clara; but just then their teacher entered, and as she did not notice Clara's remarks, nothing more was said until it was time to commence the lesson, when Miss Lincoln, before directing them to open their Bibles, inquired,

"What is it, Clara, that you do not think is fair?"

Clara looked a little confused, but after some hesitation, she replied, "Why, Ellen says that if we keep all the commandments but one, and break that, it is just the same as if we broke them all."

"That is not exactly true, and yet there is something so much like it in the Bible, that I suppose Ellen refers to that. Turn to the second chapter of the Epistle of James, and see what the tenth verse says about it."

One of them reads:

"For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all."

Clara, as soon as she had found the place, read it to herself, and looking up at her teacher, said, "But, Miss Mary, do *you* think that is fair?"

"Shall I tell you a little tale Clara?" asked Miss

Lincoln. "I recollect reading somewhere of a missionary in India, who in preaching to the heathen, and trying to convince them of their sinfulness, quoted the passage which has just been read. His hearers objected, as you do, Clara, and said that this was not justice. To convince them of its perfect fairness, he had recourse to an illustration. 'Suppose,' said he, 'you were upon the sea in a sinking boat, just ready to perish, and a chain were thrown you from the shore. By means of it you may be saved; but as you cling to it, and he who has thrown it attempts to draw you to the land, you discover that one of the links is broken. Would it do you any good to cling to the links which remain unbroken, or would the one that you had broken render all the rest useless?' The heathen saw that it would be folly to hope to be saved by a broken chain, and acknowledged the force of the illustration. Do you not see it too, my children? If we keep the whole law, God has promised to save us, as surely as the whole chain would have drawn the sinking man to shore, but if we disobey a single command, it is a broken chain which will avail us nothing."

This was taking the matter up in a way which Clara had not anticipated, and she looked very serious, as did the others. Miss Lincoln proceeded. "But I fear that if we could be saved by proving that we have kept one of the laws of God, instead of all, we should find even that impossible.

"We are now, however, about to commence the consideration of the second table of the law, which teaches us our duty to our fellow-men, and which our Saviour

comprises in the brief but important words, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.' I might speak only of this precept, for if we have not kept it, we have, in effect, broken the six comprehended in it. But as I have little doubt that of the most of these you think, as did the young man who came to Christ, 'all these have I kept,' it will be better to go over them separately, and see if this is the case. Tell me, Adelia, what is the fifth commandment?"

"Honour thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee."

"And what is it to 'honour our parents?'"

"To love, respect, and obey them," said Emma Leiper.

"Right; and do you do all this, Emma?"

"I love my parents," replied the little girl, "and I obey them almost always. Sometimes I do not do exactly what they tell me."

"And on these occasions, you break this commandment, do you not? Every act of disobedience, every disrespectful word or look, is a violation of the law, 'Honour thy father and thy mother.' I will not ask who of you have transgressed in this way, but who of you has not? If there is one among you whose conscience does not accuse her, let her speak."

All were silent, and perhaps they felt relieved when, instead of pursuing the subject, Miss Lincoln said, "We will then take up the sixth commandment."

"It is, *Thou shalt not kill*," said Sarah Hunt, toward whom her teacher looked.

"Have you kept this command, Sarah?"

"Yes," she replied, very decidedly, for on this point she felt quite secure.

"And you, Ellen"—

"I think so, Miss Mary. I do not think I ever even *wished* to kill any one."

"Miss Mary," interrupted Clara, "I am *sure* I never broke this commandment. I could not kill any one without knowing it, could I?"

"What do we call the person who kills another, Clara?"

"A murderer," she replied, "and I am not a murderer."

"Now," continued her teacher, without noticing the angry manner in which she made this assertion, "look at the third chapter of the First Epistle of John, and read me the fifteenth verse."

She obeyed, and after a moment read, though with visible reluctance, "*Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer*; and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him."

"Clara," said her teacher, mildly, "did I not hear you say one day, in speaking of a school-mate, something very much like this, 'I hate her; I will never speak to her again as long as I live.'"

Clara could not deny it, and her flushed cheek and confused look showed that she felt the charge, though she was still too proud to acknowledge its truth; and as she did not answer, Miss Lincoln went on to say, "Our Saviour alludes to this in his sermon on the Mount. Let us all find the fifth chapter of Matthew. Louisa, you will read for us the twenty-first and twenty-second verses."

“Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: but I say unto you, That *whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment*: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell-fire.”

“Do you not see,” asked Miss Lincoln, when Louisa had read this passage, “that, in the eye of God, any indulgence of feelings which lead to murder is a direct transgression of the spirit of the sixth commandment?”

“My children, if you have ever been angry without a cause, if you have indulged a feeling of hatred, a wish to injure any one who has offended you, you are guilty before God of breaking this law. It may be, he will hold you *more* guilty than the poor wretch who, never having been taught either to control his own passions or to know the will of God, commits, in a moment of fierce anger, the crime of murder, from whose actual commission your education and the circumstances by which you are surrounded alike restrain you. Remember, ‘the word of God is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart;’ and he will take into account, too, the temptations to which some are exposed, as well as the restraining influences of others. Sarah, do you still feel certain that you have kept this law?”

“No, ma’am,” she replied, somewhat sullenly. “I said, before we began, that you would make out that we had broken all the commandments, and I think it is of no use to go any further.”

“My dear Sarah,” said her teacher, gently, though grieved at the spirit in which the child had spoken, “it is God’s word itself that is showing you your sinfulness, and it is your own conscience which is attesting its truth. If I could prove you righteous, do you think I would not gladly do it? And it is not to you only that these sad, bitter truths are directed, but to me. I too am a sinner. I too have broken all God’s holy laws. The only difference between us is, that I know my state, and my inability to save myself, and I hope I have come to the Great Physician, who is able and willing to cure me. Should our study of this subject lead you to do the same, its end will be answered, and you will never regret having attended to it. But let us hasten on with our inquiries; we will not stop now, until we reach the end. The seventh commandment is—”

“Thou shalt not commit adultery.”

“This is a dreadful sin, and consists in a violation of the sacred laws of marriage. It forbids, however, all impure thoughts, as well as acts, and everything in conversation, or books, or songs, or pictures, that may tend to excite them.”

“What does the eighth commandment forbid, Hetty?”

“*Stealing*,” replied Hetty; “but I am sure I never stole anything.”

“Anybody that steals is a thief and a robber,” said Clara, who was getting a little over her vexation. “You do not think we are thieves, I hope, Miss Mary,” she added, coaxingly, laying her hand on that of her teacher.

“It is not I, Clara, who am to judge you. It is your state in the sight of God which we are trying to ascertain, and what you ought to think of yourself. Of one

thing, however, you may be very certain, that it is not because I doubt your honesty that I endeavour to show you how you have broken this law, as well as the others. '*Thou shalt not steal*' is the command. To steal, as you all know, is to take from another that to which we have no right. If this is done openly and by force, we call it robbery; if secretly, we call it theft. I hope you have none of you actually broken this law, though I have known children who would possess themselves of trifles belonging to others, without appearing to think it a sin. But if you have indulged the desire to take that which belonged to another, and been only prevented by the fear of detection and punishment, then you are not innocent in regard to this law.

"Let us pass now to the ninth commandment. Emma will tell us what it is.

"*Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour,*" replied Emma.

"To bear false witness against our neighbour, is to say anything against him which is not true," added Hetty Parker, to whom her teacher had looked for an explanation.

"Yes. Does it mean anything more than this?"

"It forbids falsehood of any kind," replied Ellen Orrell.

"Yes; those who would keep this law must always speak the truth in the love of it; must never attempt to deceive, no matter how strong the temptation to do so. Equivocation, exaggeration, misrepresentations of any kind, affecting the character or interests of others, are breaches of the ninth commandment. Speaking evil of others (a fault to which children are very prone), or

carrying tales abroad, which will bring them into reproach or blame, are among the ways in which the ninth commandment is broken. Whatever we do, falsely, which tends to injure others, whether friends or enemies, in their good name, or in their property, or in any other way, is also forbidden. I will not ask you, dear girls, if you have ever sinned in this way; let each one ask herself the question, and answer it to her own conscience as in the sight of God, Am I truthful in thought, word, and deed? Do I hate deceit and every false way?"

"There is but one commandment more, Miss Mary," said Adelia Hunt; "it is the tenth, '*Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his man-servant, nor his maid-servant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor anything that is thy neighbour's.*'"

"What is it to covet, Adelia?"

"To wish very much for something that is another's, I believe," was the reply.

"Yes; to desire—to long for it: this, then, is a sin of the thought. Louisa, have you ever committed it?"

"Yes, often, Miss Mary," she replied, with downcast eyes.

"I wonder who has not," said Clara, in a low tone.

"There are very, very few, if any, of our fallen race, dear child, who have not disobeyed this precept of the law. But the sin is no less offensive to God because so universal; the disease is no less terrible because all are afflicted with it."

"But, Miss Mary," asked Hetty, "how are you to help breaking this law? Can you help wishing for what you want?"

"Merely to wish for what you need, or for what it is

right that you should have, is not disobedience to this command. It is discontentment at our own lot, and envy at our neighbour's, that is forbidden; and of course all those feelings and acts which indicate any dissatisfaction with the arrangements of God's providence in their condition, in comparison with our's, are contrary to this law. It is by these covetous desires that men are prompted to bear false witness, and steal and kill, and commit other like offences; so that this last commandment goes to the root or inward source of the open sins which the others forbid.

"And, now, having reviewed all the commandments, let us pause for an instant and look back. Ellen, if keeping one of these laws perfectly would save you, on which of them would you rest your claim?"

"Not one of them," she answered promptly, and with much emotion. "I have broken them all."

"And you, Adelia?"

But Adelia shook her head, and attempted no reply, while her sister exclaimed angrily, "But we can't help breaking the law. Nobody can keep such strict commandments."

"Jesus kept them all, didn't he, Miss Mary?" asked Emma Leiper.

"Yes, Emma, the Lord Jesus kept them all: 'he knew no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth.' He kept the whole law, 'leaving us an example that we should walk in his steps;' he also endured the punishment of our transgressions of the law, 'bearing our sins in his own body on the tree,' that by his stripes we might be healed.

"Would that I had power so to place before you the spotless life of our Saviour, that comparing your own

with it, you might realize how fearfully fallen you are, and how impossible it is for you to be saved but through the efficacy of his atoning blood! Oh! when we see our Saviour patiently bearing insult and injury; moving among the vilest, yet contracting no stain of impurity; doing good continually to those who scorned and rejected him; weeping over the rebellious and persecuting city of Jerusalem; having the power and the right to command universal obedience, yet submitting to the abuse of the meanest of the people; exposed to all forms of temptation, yet yielding to none; and amid the storm of reproach and insult, the fearful agony of his wounded and lacerated frame, and the dreadful sufferings in which he yielded up his life, praying for his murderers, 'Father, forgive them;' and then compare with this, our own impatience under the slightest provocation; our ready yielding to temptation, and the eagerness with which we rush into sin: Oh! do we not see, can we help seeing—that we are indeed sinners before God; that there is indeed 'no good thing in us?'"

Miss Lincoln felt what she said, and none of her pupils were unmoved. But directly she resumed: "I have no more arguments to offer. If you do not now believe that you are sinners, I know not how to prove it to you. But I trust you do," she continued, looking round on their young faces—all serious, and some betraying deep emotion—"and if so, if, through God's grace, you can from your hearts say, 'Yes,' to the question, 'Am I a sinner?' there is another one no less important to be asked and answered: it is, 'How shall I be saved?'"

"If you wish to study this question as you have done the last, come to me on Tuesday evening next, and we

will make it the subject of earnest and prayerful inquiry."

The bell at the desk rang, and then the superintendent gave out this hymn.

"There is a God who reigns above,
Lord of the heaven, and earth, and seas,
I fear his wrath, I ask his love,
And with my lips I sing his praise.

There is a law which he hath made,
To teach us all what we must do;
And his commands must be obeyed,
For they are holy, just, and true.

Let me improve the hours I have,
Before the day of grace is fled:
There's no repentance in the grave,
Nor pardon offered to the dead."

After singing this hymn the school separated, and here we too will take leave of Miss Lincoln and her class; not without the hope that some dear child who has accompanied them in their investigation of the question, "Am I a sinner?" is convinced (as most of them were) that we are indeed lost and ruined in ourselves, and will find a scriptural answer to the question, "How shall I be saved?"

In the meantime, let our prayer be "LORD, HAVE MERCY UPON US, FORGIVE ALL OUR TRANSGRESSIONS, WRITE ALL THY LAWS IN OUR HEART, AND GIVE US GRACE AND STRENGTH TO KEEP THEM, FOR CHRIST'S SAKE.—AMEN."



Sara Bentley 1880

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