

No. 18.

Vol. I.

THE CHILD'S BIBLE EXPOSITOR;

OR

Lessons and Records of the Sunday School.

BY MRS. LEONARD.

"When thy word goeth forth, it giveth light and understanding
unto the simple."—PSALM cxix, VERSE 130.

TORONTO, SATURDAY, MAY 15, 1841.

This Work will continue to be Published regularly every week as soon as a sufficient number of Subscribers is obtained to meet the expense of publication.

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tempted by the utmost power and most insidious arts of Satan, and was then, as he is now, "touched with a feeling for our infirmities;" but he looked from the present transient indulgence to the painful retribution reserved for hardened and impenitent offenders, and no language could more forcibly impress upon the minds of his hearers the terrors of the alternative. The manner in which these verses are to be understood seems to be, that if we find that by looking upon any forbidden object our eyes are leading us to offend against God, it would be far better for us to become blind from that moment, than incur the risk of falling into sin and being condemned to eternal banishment from the presence of Him who is of too pure eyes to behold iniquity. A great many of the persons who then listened to our Saviour's words were poor and labouring people, who earned their subsistence by their own industry, and to them the loss of a right hand would have brought poverty and want with it; but yet our blessed Saviour, merciful, kind, and compassionate as he has always been, speaks of this loss as a very trifling misfortune indeed, compared with the ruin of the immortal soul through the indulgence of sin. He who knew so well the value of the never dying soul that he consented to suffer the most painful and lingering death, to open for us a way of salvation, tells us that it is better to sacrifice a right eye or a right hand, and that these members should perish, than that our whole body should be cast into hell. You all know that a very short time ago a person in this village was in danger of losing her life through the effects of a cancer, which had been found incurable through any other means than an amputation; there seemed no alternative left for the sufferer

but to submit to an extremely painful operation, or to die. You know that she availed herself of the only means left of saving her life, and though she suffered very severely at the time, she is now restored to perfect health, and is very happy that she did not shrink from the only means that were left her of being cured of her disease, from any weakness and cowardice, and the dread of present pain. You all think how very much better it was for Mrs. Lee to endure a great deal of pain at once, than to go on day after day suffering from a disorder which was soon to carry her to her grave; and now do you see the application you are to make of this circumstance to the lesson you have been learning. It may sometimes happen that the temptations which Satan throws in your way are so powerful, and his persuasions so insidious, that it will require as great an effort of resolution to overcome them as was necessary in the case we have mentioned; but this will furnish no excuse for not resisting them, and as you cannot do it in your own strength, you must seek it from Him who is "mighty to save;" for you know that "the wages of sin is death," and as surely as a cancer neglected and suffered to carry on its ravages on the human body, will at last find its way to some vital part, and terminate the earthly existence of its victim, more surely will indulged and unrepented sin reap the wages of eternal condemnation. Now knowing this truth, is it not far better to shew at least as much value for our immortal souls as for our perishing bodies? and if we are ready to submit to the most painful operations to save our lives, and to sacrifice any of our limbs in which the seat of a mortal disease may be fixed, to purchase a few uncertain years of earthly existence, is it not still

more reasonable and more incumbent upon us to sacrifice what we value most on earth, rather than offend our God by retaining possession of it? Now turn to the eighth chapter of Romans, Elizabeth, and we shall find in the eighteenth verse what was St. Paul's opinion of the comparison between the value of all we can relinquish for the sake of our duty in this life, and that which is offered to our acceptance through our Saviour in the world to come.

Elizabeth.—"For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."

Mrs. Arnold.—Read the thirteenth verse of the same chapter, Harriet, and you will find there the same admonition, though conveyed in different words with that which you have learned in your lesson.

Harriet.—"For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live."

Mrs. Arnold.—We must now pass on to the remainder of your lesson; but we will find another direct and important proof that our Saviour's words will only admit of the interpretation that has been given them, for this is always done most unanswerably by comparing his precepts, delivered at different times to his followers, with each other, and in doing this we shall be struck with the wonderful consistency which links them all together in one holy and unchanging law. Find the eighth chapter of St. Mark, Lucy, and read from the thirty-fourth to the thirty-seventh verses.

Lucy.—"And when he had called the people unto him with his disciples also, he said unto them, Whosoever

will come after me, let him *deny himself*, and take up his cross, and follow me.

"For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it.

"For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?

"Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"

Mrs. Arnold.—The next two verses of your lesson are intended to reprove the careless and unprincipled manner in which the marriage tie was contracted and dissolved, by the loose interpretation of the Mosaic law, as admitted and inculcated by the Scribes: upon any slight cause of disagreement or disgust, there was nothing necessary but that a husband should give his wife a writing, by which he resigned all claim upon her, and then both parties were at liberty to contract another marriage, which might be as lightly held; while the law of God as explained by the authority of our Saviour prohibits these separations, except under very aggravated circumstances of provocation and unworthiness. The next injunction is one which has caused some difference of opinion between very sincere Christians, and there are some who look upon it as so decisive that they scruple to take the oaths required from witnesses in a Court of Justice. These scruples, when sincere, are deserving of respect, and therefore an allowance has been made in the provision of the law for those who professedly entertain them. The arguments made use of on the other hand by equally pious Christians against a literal interpretation of those words, are so founded on other portions of the Word of God, as seem to prove beyond

a question that our Saviour intended to prohibit profane and unnecessary swearing, and all idle and irreverent use of the name of God, or any trifling or tampering with things sacred to him,—to remind his followers that not only their souls but their bodies were the property of him who gave them both, and that the more simple and sincere they were in conversation or “communication” with each other, the more consistent would be their words with their Christian profession. It appears by the example of St. Paul, that a solemn invocation of the name of God to witness the truth of an assertion is not unbecoming a Christian, or contrary to the will of Him whose chosen and inspired servant he was. Turn to the second Epistle to the Corinthians, Amy; and read the twenty-third verse of the first chapter.

Amy.—“Moreover I call God for a record upon my soul, that to spare you I came not as yet unto Corinth.”

Mrs. Arnold.—Another instance is found in the first Epistle to the Thessalonians. Find it, Susan, and read the fifth verse of the second chapter.

Susan.—“For neither at any time used we flattering words, as ye know, nor a cloke of covetousness; God is witness.”

Mrs. Arnold.—Had the apostle interpreted the words of our Saviour, as some scrupulous persons do, he would never have been justified in using these expressions, nor yet, as he has done in many instances, adjuring the members of his churches to a consistent Christian course, in the name of Jesus. We are, besides this authority of St. Paul, led to conclude that there can be no offence committed against the law of God by the solemn pledge of an oath between parties, who are interested in dis-

covering the truth, by finding that this method of settling disputed questions was not only allowed, but commanded by God himself, through his servant Moses. Look for the twenty-second chapter of Exodus, Mary, and read the tenth and eleventh verses.

Mary.—"If a man deliver unto his neighbour an ass, or an ox, or a sheep, or any beast, to keep; and it die, or be hurt, or be driven away, no man seeing it:

"Then shall an oath of the Lord be between them both, that he hath not put his hand unto his neighbour's goods; and the owner of it shall accept thereof, and he shall not make it good."

Mrs. Arnold.—In the beautiful prayer of Solomon, at the dedication of the temple to the service of the Most High, we find the custom of taking oaths, as in the presence of God, mentioned without any expression of disapprobation, provided they be taken with a clear conscience, and strict regard to truth and justice. Find the eighth chapter of the first book of Kings, Charles, and read the thirty-first and thirty-second verses.

Charles.—"If any man trespass against his neighbour, and an oath be laid upon him to cause him to swear, and the oath come before thine altar in this house:

"Then hear thou in heaven, and do, and judge thy servants, condemning the wicked, to bring his way upon his head; and justifying the righteous, to give him according to his righteousness."

Mrs. Arnold.—These instances, and many others which may be found in the scriptures, prove that our Saviour's prohibition extended to careless and needless oaths, taken without a due sense of their solemnity, and

the use of unnecessary asseverations and pledges in common conversation. Every Christian must lament that so sacred and solemn a pledge should ever be exacted as a mere matter of form in common business transactions, or except in cases where it is unavoidably necessary, and that it should be administered or taken lightly, without due preparation and deep reverence and strict self-examination. Every precaution should be taken, that by no possible error arising from want of knowledge, or from any unfair prejudice or partiality, or from regard for our own interests, or those of our friends, we should ever fall into the awful guilt of calling God to witness that which is not strictly true. Those who take the oaths required, and those who administer them, should keep in view the solemn nature of the transaction, and think seriously of the value of the soul which is pledged to the truth of that which is sworn to. This admonition of our Lord should also make us all very careful not to acquire a habit of using even strong expressions in conversation, though they may not seem to include any allusion to sacred things. It would indeed be well for the Christian world, if all its members were so free from reproach that a simple asseveration—a yes or no—would suffice at once to set any question at rest; and whatsoever is more than this, clearly springs from many evil causes,—the frequency of duplicity and deception—the careless breaking of promises—the thoughtless trifling with truth, and selfish disregard of the interests of others, where they are in any respect opposed to our own. Had not this evil existed in the human heart in the early days of the Mosaic dispensation, the solemn pledges required by the law would have been needless, and the commu-

nication between man and man might have been simple and sincere, and sufficient without them. The Jews were in the habit of common and profane swearing, without being taught by their instructors that they were guilty of an offence, in any loose or innocent expression, or in trifling with things sacred, unless they broke a positive oath pledged to the Most High. o They swore by heaven and by the earth—by Jerusalem, and by their own heads; but our Saviour reproves all these expressions, and explains that they are all beyond the power of any human being, and the property of God himself, so that none of his creatures have a right to trifle profanely with them—that heaven is the throne of the Most High, and the earth his footstool—that Jerusalem is his own city, and that their own persons were formed by him, and subject to his power, and therefore it was idle and profane to swear by any part of them.

And now, my dear children, it is time to consider what profitable instruction you may derive from the long lesson you have committed to memory in the last week. You must by no means be content with learning the words, without carefully laying to heart the instruction they are intended to convey, and endeavouring to establish for yourselves a rule of action which shall have the bible and the bible only for its standard. You have learned, what indeed every scripture lesson is calculated to teach you, that not your outward actions only, but the inmost thoughts of your hearts, are to be regulated by the law and word of God; and that it is far better and safer to sacrifice what is as dear to you as a right eye, or a right hand, or even the eye or the hand itself, than continue in a course of indulged and unrepentant

sin; and remember, that even if pardoned at the last, through the mercy and goodness of God, through repentance and heartfelt sorrow, for Christ's sake, yet the memory of a wilful transgression of the commandments of God, must be in itself a bitter punishment to any but a hardened and heartless offender; and that a very short subjection to the dominion of Satan, in the indulgence of evil passions, may be a source of grief and sorrow to the last moment of your lives. But as the infirmities of our nature will cling to even the most faithful and devoted followers of Christ, while they continue on earth, and not a day passes in which some evil temper or rebellious passion does not interpose in some way or another with the peaceful serenity of a Christian course of life, it is consolatory to trace in the admissions of the most favoured servants of God, the proof that they have been tried and hindered in their progress, even as those of the present day. And we may find in the writings of the apostles, that they too rested all their hopes on the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ, and not on any obedience or piety of their own. St. Paul, who was the chosen servant of God, and who may be considered as the most perfect example of holiness that was ever shewn by any mere human being, laments again and again the strength of those evil propensities by which he was encumbered. Look for the seventh chapter of the epistle to the Romans, Amy, and read from the eighteenth verse to the end of the chapter.

Amy.—"For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not.

"For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do.

"Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me.

"I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me.

"For I delight in the law of God after the inward man:

"But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.

"O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?

"I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin."

You must not fail to remark in this passage, the distinction that is made between indulged and unrepented sin and that which is felt to be the burden and the hindrance of a Christian's life, and that you may neither presume on the one hand nor despond on the other, you must carefully examine yourselves to beware whether with St. Paul you can say with sincerity that you "delight in the law of God," though you may be unable, through the infirmity of your nature, to live constantly in accordance with its holiness and purity—if so, you will often be led to exclaim as he did, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" and to be thankful that, through Jesus Christ our Lord, a deliverance has been provided, and you may then think with hope and comfort of those words which you will find at the ninth verse of the tenth chapter of Romans, and with which we will close your lesson for to-day.

"That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved."

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