

No. 21.

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.

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TESTIMONIALS.

From the Church, January 30.

We fear that we have been remiss in not punctually acknowledging the receipt of three numbers of "THE CHILD'S BIBLE EXPOSITOR," by Mrs. Leonard,—which have been issued, with characteristic neatness, from our Diocesan Press. We have already expressed our favourable opinion of this little work, in noticing the first number, with which we were some time ago favoured. It contains much instruction that must be peculiarly beneficial to Sunday School Teachers, and we should be glad to see a copy in the hands of every one who has engaged in this interesting department of Christian duty. The publisher will oblige us by transmitting two copies regularly to our address.

From the Utica Gospel Messenger.

We have received the first three numbers of this weekly effort to be useful. It is in the 12mo. form, neatly printed, each number having 12 pages besides the cover, and issues from the press of Henry Rowsell, Toronto, U. C. We judge that this little work will prove a useful addition to the means of religious training. The instruction is imparted in the way of familiar conversation, and from the specimen before us, is aimed as well at the heart as the understanding. We tender our thanks to the excellent friend who has sent us the numbers before us, and hope the effort will be duly encouraged.

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THE CHILD'S
BIBLE EXPOSITOR.

NUMBER XXI.

Lesson from the first to the sixth verse of the sixth chapter of St. Matthew.

Mrs. Arnold.—Connected with the duty of inquiring into and relieving the wants of our fellow-creatures, you find in your lesson to-day a very useful admonition against seeking the praises of men as your reward for the performance of this duty. There is indeed no one of our duties so liable to be made an excuse for vain-glory and self-love, for it is one which so generally engages the esteem and admiration of others, that people who are covetous of praise, are induced very often to make great personal sacrifices, for the sake of gaining a character for benevolence and charity, and are at the same time so unconscious of their own corrupt motives, that they look upon their performance with as much approbation as they expect to obtain from others. Like all our other works, those are too often snares of Satan to lead us further and further from the paths of sincerity and humility, and to strengthen in our hearts the sins of presumption and self-righteousness; but believe this, my dear children, that you are never in greater danger of incurring the anger of God than when you think

highly of yourselves, and begin to feel as if your own works could, even in the remotest degree, entitle you to salvation; thus fancying yourselves, in a manner, independent of that which has been purchased for you by the death of your Saviour Jesus Christ. Your only safety is in the knowledge and full sense of your own unworthiness to claim the least favour from your Heavenly Father, except through the merits of his Son, and that you have no refuge from the sentence of eternal condemnation but that which is secured to all true believers in the Rock of Ages. It is to guard us against this destructive love of praise, as a motive of action, rather than that simple and humble duty to God and unmingled love for our fellow-creatures which ought always to influence us, that our Saviour has forbidden all ostentatious displays of benevolence, and has exhorted his people rather to conceal their good works from all but Him who seeth in secret, than to make any exhibition of them which may win praise from men. The excellent practice of establishing public benevolent institutions and of associations for charitable purposes, should not be considered as infringements of this command of our Saviour, unless in the cases of any vain-glorious persons, who put down their names with large sums annexed to them, for the purpose of exhibiting at once their wealth and liberality,—of this we are not called upon to judge in any case, except in our own; but those who are habitually charitable and liberal in private, are certainly less liable to the reproach of ostentation, in giving large sums to public benevolent purposes, than persons who generally reserve their donations for such occasions; but here again we must always be on our

guard against the indulgence of harsh and ill-natured conjectures, as to the motives and conduct of our neighbours. The very persons of whom we may be inclined to say that their public donations are intended to make a fair appearance in the eyes of the world, while no one ever hears of their doing good in private, may be of those who do not let "their left hand know what their right hand doeth," and we may ourselves be guilty of a sinful want of charity while we permit ourselves to think or to speak severely of them. It is often necessary in public subscriptions that, for example sake, every one should give as liberally as he can afford; and we see some names, with very large sums of money attached to them, at the head of a list, and further down some of humbler fortunes, who give of their little store such a pittance as they can spare from their own necessities: to us there seems a very wide difference, but in the eyes of Him, who sees the heart, there may be none.— The thousands bestowed by him who is blest with wealth and abundance, may be given in as pure and humble a spirit of love and obedience as the mite of the poor widow, and a trifle may be given to save appearances, by those who can ill afford it, and who care very little for the object they are contributing to support. All those things, my dears, you will see depend upon the secret thoughts and feelings, of which none can judge but God himself and your own consciences. It is necessary that in all these duties you should have a fixed and settled principle, and you can never attain to this without the full conviction that the springs of good and evil are in your own hearts and minds, and that when those are regulated by the unerring standard of God's

own holy word, you may safely leave your outward actions to speak for themselves. Act according to your consciences, in obedience to God and a sincere desire to please him, and, without falling into any of the self-righteous and ostentatious observances of the Pharisees, you will be as a "City which is set on a hill" and which "cannot be hid." We have many instances of almsgiving mentioned in the Scriptures, but they are seldom mentioned as having any merit in themselves, but always as connected with sincere devotion, and therefore pleasing in the sight of God. Find the tenth chapter of Acts, Elizabeth, and read from the first to the fourth verse.

Elizabeth.—"There was a certain man in Cesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band,

"A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway.

"He saw in a vision evidently about the ninth hour of the day an angel of God coming in to him, and saying unto him, Cornelius.

"And when he looked on him, he was afraid, and said, What is it, Lord? And he said unto him, Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God."

Mrs. Arnold.—Here you see was one who had taken heed that his alms should not be given for his own glory, to be seen and applauded by his fellow-creatures; but they had been offered in humility and with many prayers, and it had not been said of him, as it is of those who seek only their own selfish purposes, "Verily, they have their reward;" but his prayers and his alms had gone up

as a memorial before God, and his Father, who seeth in secret, was himself about to reward him openly: for Cornelius was a Roman, and one of those who were despised by the Jews, as being unfit for the children of Abraham to be associated with, yet he was chosen by the Most High as an object of his special favour, and directed by the angel to repair to the place where his admission to the Christian Church was to take place, and to the person who had been appointed to instruct him in the way to everlasting life. There have been hypocritical and hollow professors of religion, and persons whose highest ambition it is to be seen of men, in all ages, and we find a description of them in the book of the Prophet Ezekiel, which may well be applied to the same characters in all generations of men. Find the thirty-third chapter of Ezekiel, Lucy, and read the thirty-first verse.

Lucy.—"And they come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they shew much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness."

Mrs. Arnold.—The practices and principles of the Pharisees, opposite as they were to the true spirit of the Scriptures, had been taught as the only rule of life to the misguided Jews, and therefore at all times we find our merciful Saviour labouring to impress on the minds of his followers the fatal errors into which their authorised teachers were leading them. He calls them "blind leaders of the blind," and in all his instructions constantly warns them to beware of "the leaven of the Pharisees," their self-righteousness, their ostentation, their selfishness,

and the destructive perversion of the Word of God, to suit their own purposes and minister to their own pride and ambition. Those people had, as it appears, distributed their alms in public whenever they had the greatest number of spectators to witness their parade of benevolence; and our Lord, in speaking of this practice, compares it to those public exhibitions which were then common in the streets, when the actors in theatrical representations always sent a trumpeter before them to call the audience together to witness their performances, and plainly intimates that as the players were performing a part which was not their own, and supporting a character they had assumed for their own honour and profit, and which they would throw aside as soon as the exhibition was over, and return to their usual habits, so the hypocrites, whose public display of righteousness was so ostentatiously paraded "to be seen of men," would return in private to their own practices of extortion and covetousness. The words which follow this comparison are very forcible indeed, for the word "verily" is never used in Scripture except to enforce upon Christians the positive certainty and truth of what is asserted; it is equivalent to the strongest oath that could be sworn by the authority from which it comes, and when spoken by our blessed Saviour it may be taken as the solemn assurance of God himself that the promise or the threat can never be revoked or recalled; and from this unchanging word we learn that the charity which has no other object than the applause of men shall reap no other reward, but that the alms that are given in singleness of heart and simple obedience to the will of our heavenly Father, and pity for the wants of our fellow creatures, shall be received as a memorial

before him, however secret they may be from others; and however ungrateful may be those who receive them, the motives from which they are offered will be the only question on which our responsibility will rest. Before we leave this subject, however, let me point out to you how necessary it is to be guided in this duty by the faithful dictates of conscience, both for the sake of others and for our own. There is no true charity in giving merely from the indulgence of an indolent disposition to save the trouble of refusing, or of inquiring into the actual claims of persons who ask our aid, since by this carelessness we are likely to exhaust our means of usefulness, and having expended all we have to spare upon the undeserving or upon those who do not really require assistance, we may have cause to reproach ourselves that our own improvidence has left us no power to relieve actual distress; for this reason, you ought not to give indiscriminately, and without enquiry; give food or clothing sufficient to relieve the present suffering, if it is in your power, and then examine personally into the claim on your bounty, and ascertain whether it is one which you are in duty bound to answer. It may very often happen that the claimant has little merit to recommend him, and that his misfortunes and want spring from intemperance and vice; but even here a Christian will not feel justified in refusing aid to a suffering fellow creature. The question naturally arises in a mind accustomed to faithful self-examination, If *I* had no blessings but such as *I* deserve, what would be my situation at this moment? and in humble imitation of Him who "sends his rain on the just and on the unjust" alike, the followers of Christ will not be extreme to

mark what is done amiss by their erring brethren, nor take upon themselves to judge and condemn and punish those whose offences must be answered to the same Power that is to sit in judgment upon their own. I once had a very severe lesson on the necessity of great care and circumspection in dealings of this nature, and as it may be useful to you I will tell you all about it, though it is a subject I do not like to speak of, nor can I ever think of it without feeling a portion of the sorrow which it has cast from time to time over my whole life. When I was very young, I was permitted by a wealthy and charitable lady, whose infirm health prevented her from being personally active in her benevolence, to recommend to her such objects as I knew to be in want, having first ascertained what were their claims as to character and circumstances, and in what manner they might be most effectually relieved. I had a great many applications in consequence of my interest with this lady, and as I had not learned the duty of caution, and my charity was rather an impulse than a steady principle, I am afraid that though I went through some forms of enquiry upon most occasions, a great many of my friend's donations found their way to the dram-shop, or were wasted and unvalued through means of my inexperience. However, as I always acted for the best according to my judgment, such as it was, I do not very much reproach myself if such accidents did sometimes happen. Upon one occasion a very neat, pretty looking girl, of about sixteen, came to me for assistance for her mother and a young family of brothers and sisters. Her mother was (as she said) a widow, and in very infirm health, and she was herself the eldest of a family of six, and had been obliged to leave a place in the country to come and nurse her

mother in her illness. They were in great distress, and had neither food nor fuel, and were very badly off for clothing. To my enquiries she answered that a medical gentleman whom she named had visited her mother, and thought her in a very dangerous state; that they lived in a small cottage on the outskirts of the town, and that her name was Lucy Smith. I gave her some trifling relief, and promised to visit her mother in the course of the day, and to see what assistance I could get for her from my friend; and after she had gone I was pleasing myself with the idea of all the nice and useful things I should be able to take them, and how soon their condition would be comparatively comfortable, when the medical man whom the girl had mentioned came in, and I told him of what I was engaged in. He seemed very angry, and said that the people who lived in that house were the most wicked and abandoned wretches in the place; that the only illness of the woman was caused by the most disgusting intemperance; that she had no daughter and no young children, and was not in any respect an object of charity; and that the people about her were not such as I ought to have any conversation or intercourse with. He lectured me rather severely upon my habit of visiting such people and places, and drew such a picture of the impropriety and danger of the practice that I was quite terrified, and began to think that I was altogether wrong in my proceedings, and that it was safest and best to have nothing to do with poor people, who, according to his account, were all more or less vicious, and with very few exceptions, impostors and deceivers. In a fit of virtuous indignation I gave immediate orders that if Lucy Smith called again she should be told that I had made enquiries about her,

and would have nothing more to say to her ; and I went immediately to my friend and told her that the family in question were very bad, wicked people, and that if they applied to her for relief she must not be imposed on by their representations. She was very ill at the time, or her usual candid and charitable judgment would probably have been exerted in favour of these poor people. As it was, she was incapable of thinking or acting, and merely told me to be careful what I did, as my means of relieving the distressed involved me in heavy responsibilities for such a child as I was to sustain. In a day or two afterwards I heard that Lucy had called again to say that her mother was worse, and that they were all in great want, and that on receiving my message she had gone away in tears. Some time after this the doctor called again, and I mentioned to him what I had done ; he seemed to have almost forgotten what he had said to me, and looked rather confused. At last he said, " You told me the woman's name was Jones, did you not ? " I said no, that her name was Smith. " Oh then," said he, " I was altogether mistaken. Mrs. Smith is a very decent, respectable woman, and I heard yesterday that she had moved into that house since the Joneses have left the place ; they were a very bad set, and the town is very well rid of them. I am almost sure, my dear, that you called the people Jones, when you spoke of them before." I will not tell you, my dear children, all that I suffered for my terrible failure in duty upon that occasion ; if grief would have atoned for it I should have washed out my offence with many tears, but they came too late. The poor woman was dead, and her family was scattered ; they had suffered all the extremes of cold, and hunger, and want, in every shape, for their

first application for charity had been to me, and my cruel and ungracious conduct had discouraged them from seeking for other aid. It was small consolation to me that another was more to blame than I was, and for a long time I felt so much remorse and self-reproach that my life was absolutely miserable, and I neither could enjoy the blessings that I possessed, nor feel as if I had any right to the smallest of them. When I thought how cruelly and unjustly I had treated a poor destitute family, who but for my rash and uncharitable judgment might have had every comfort that kindness and liberality could have purchased for them, poor Lucy's meek and sorrowful face haunted me perpetually; and even to this day I cannot recall the circumstance without the most painful regrets, though it occurred more than twenty years ago.

Amy.—But what made the Doctor tell you such stories about the poor people? He must have been a very ill-natured, wicked man.

Mrs. Arnold.—He was a very thoughtless one, my dear, and in such cases the consequences are exactly the same, whether they proceed from thoughtlessness or ill-nature. He had attended a woman named Jones, in the house I described to him, a short time before, under the circumstances he mentioned, and all he had told me was precisely true, but he was mistaken in the name.—He had also visited poor Mrs. Smith, when she lived in another part of the town, and had he given the subject a little consideration, would have been able to distinguish between them. But there are many people, who, having often been imposed on, are ready at once to form the most unfavourable judgment in the case of every poor person who applies to them, and to magnify the smallest

ground of suspicion into a positive certainty of their unworthiness, which, I need not tell you, is contrary to the injunctions of your Saviour, and a mode of acting directly opposite to the whole spirit of Scripture, and therefore cannot be otherwise than wrong.

The remainder of your lesson alludes to a custom which is still common in Eastern countries, though it is so unlike any thing that we ever witness in our own land, that there seems at first sight very little danger of falling into such an error; but although we may not be tempted to stand at the corners of the streets in the performance of our devotions, so that we may be seen by a great many people, yet we may be in danger of being actuated by the same spirit which led the Pharisees to make those vain exhibitions of piety. We may often be in danger of attending to religious duties rather for the sake of appearances than from love and obedience to God; and we may learn to be satisfied with those external observances, because they are sufficient to satisfy other people, who know less of us than we know of ourselves.—Religious feeling and duty will take us to the public worship of God independent of any other motives, but there is always reason to fear that we may be carried there by other considerations, and it requires constant watchfulness to guard us against this profanation of the house and the services of Him who cannot be deceived by any outward show. Your next lesson is one which most of you have probably committed to memory long ago, but familiar as are its words to the hearts of all Christians, we shall find it profitable to examine ourselves carefully, whether in using them we have not often been guilty of “drawing nigh to God with our lips, while our hearts were far from him.”

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