

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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THE CHILD'S BIBLE EXPOSITOR.

NUMBER XXV.

We seldom allowed the benefit of Mrs. Arnold's lessons to be confined to her pupils, and the two opposite characters she had drawn from real life for us were very much talked of among our companions during the week. Our cousin, Philip, happened to be on a visit to us at the time, and, as usual, he very much disapproved the tendency of Mrs. Arnold's instructions, and expressed some intention of calling upon her, and expostulating with her on the high-flown, romantic ideas of right and wrong that she was putting into our heads, so very different from the allowed and daily practices of the whole world, and so much more suitable to missionaries and enthusiasts than to reasonable and rational members of society. That persons who were engaged in the daily business and intercourse of life, had nothing in common with such imaginary standards of action, and never could have; and those who adopted Mrs. Arnold's notions on such subjects, would be fit for nothing but monks and hermits, and had better give up all idea of mixing in society with their fellow-creatures. And, continued Philip, "if the Rector would just take a hint on the same subject, and preach more practical sermons, and not make religion such a difficult and disagreeable thing, I can tell him that he would have a larger congregation, and make a great many more converts than he does now; and, in my opinion, preachers who require so much from their hearers, and who make religion so repulsive and so unsuitable to all our habits and ways of thinking, have a great deal to answer for, and do much more harm than good."

Cousin Philip had joined a debating society since we had seen him last, and had learned to speak in a loud

voice and a very positive manner, besides using a great deal of gesture and emphasis, and he was now standing in the middle of our little parlour, with his back to the entrance, and did not perceive that the Rector and his lady were standing at the door, waiting until he had finished his speech before they came forward. He usually carried things with a very high head among us, and talked so largely of what he would say to Mrs. Arnold, and what he would tell the Rector, that I was quite surprised to see how much he was out of countenance when Mr. Arnold laid his hand on his shoulder, and begged him to proceed, as he was fortunately there to improve by his admonitions. Poor Philip blushed and stammered very much, but at last repeated what he had said about the sermons, though in a much less positive way than he had spoken at first. Mr. Arnold listened to him very patiently, and then replied, "that he was very correct in some of his conclusions, and he agreed with him perfectly; but that, unluckily for his hopes of popularity, he was not allowed to preach any other religion than that of the Gospel, and that he was bound to preach it as he found it in the Bible, and not to paint a fanciful religion of his own invention, to suit the tastes and inclinations of his hearers. And," continued the Rector, "our Saviour himself, whom you will perhaps allow to be a proper authority in such matters, does not invite his people to come to his kingdom through paths strewn with flowers, but to take up the cross and follow him; and such must be the doctrines preached by his ministers, however difficult it may be for flesh and blood to receive and abide by it. You object," said he, "to my wife placing before the children of the Sunday School such a standard of action as the world is not prepared to admit; but, my young friend, remember that 'the end is not yet,' and that both in her teaching and my own, we are not employed by the Prince of this world to make converts for him, but by the Saviour of souls, to point out the strait and narrow way which leadeth unto life."

"Yes," replied Philip "that is what I object to.— You make the way *too* strait and *too* narrow. People who have other things to attend to, and who cannot find time to study and understand all those little differences and distinctions as well as you do, are discouraged, and because so much is required of them, they will not attempt any thing. In short, when so much is expected from me before I can be admitted among good Christians, I must be content to take my chance with the rest of the world."

"Here and hereafter?" inquired Mr. Arnold.

Philip hesitated, and the Rector went on with his usual mildness and good temper: "This is too serious a subject to be treated with levity. If it has pleased God to make the way of life a narrow and difficult path, and, in many instances, to place our worldly interests and our obedience to Him, in apparent opposition to each other, would you desire that the ministers of His word, or those who undertake to teach it to the young and the ignorant, should wilfully lower the standard he has thought proper to establish, to meet the insolent indifference of those who are content to cast in their lot with the children of this world, and to take their chance, as you term it, with them."

"But," said Philip, "I cannot help thinking that the very good and pious people of the present day carry matters a great deal farther than is absolutely necessary. I grant that there are a great many others who are too indifferent on the subject of religion, but then there is always a medium, a sort of middle way between the two extremes, that would, as it appears to me, be better than running into either."

"You have read the Bible I suppose," said the Rector, "do you believe and acknowledge that it contains the revealed will of God?"

"Yes, of course," replied Philip, "I never thought of doubting it."

"Then," said Mr. Arnold, "you of course admit that it is the bounden duty of all Christians to make the Bible the guide and rule of their whole lives, and, as far

as in them lies, to fashion their principles and practices according to its holy law?"

"To a certain extent, certainly," said Philip, whose face by this time had become very uncomfortably flushed.

"Very well," resumed the Rector, "here I see is your aunt's Bible, will you just take a pen and ink and blot out any portions of it that you think may best be dispensed with."

"No, indeed," said Philip, "I should be very sorry to do such an act of daring impiety. I hope I am not so wicked as to commit such an action,—though I do not pretend to be much better than other people."

"Now, is it not astonishing," said Mr. Arnold, turning to my mother, "how blind and self-deceived are the children of this world, and how utterly out of proportion are their sentiments and arguments on subjects such as these. Here is your nephew, who professes to believe that the Bible contains the will and commandments of God himself, yet considers himself only bound to obey them to a *certain extent*, and yet he sees less daring impiety in this avowal and premeditated rebellion, than in the simple act of expunging a few sentences from the book itself. Come," he continued, putting a pen into Philip's hand, "be consistent at least. Here you have been teaching your little cousins to think their teacher and their pastor severe and exacting, because they strive to shew them the simple scriptural standard of right and wrong, neither adding to nor altering a sentence of what is written. You have been accusing me of making the path of life needlessly difficult and gloomy, and of discouraging and disgusting those who would gladly embrace the Gospel of Christ upon their own terms, though they refuse to accept it on His; and yet, I hope, you do me so much justice as to believe that I only preach such doctrines as I find in the Bible. You, it seems, could teach me a better method, and I am willing to learn. Take your pen and blot out or amend what you consider superfluous. You had far better do this than wilfully hide the truth from those who are looking to you for instruction and example,—better far,

than to pervert or change the holy law of God to please a worldly and self-seeking generation."

"The truth is," said Philip, "I have had very little leisure to study the Scriptures, and should be at a loss to point out any particular passage in them for alteration, even if I dared to do it; but this I know, that there are hundreds and thousands who think as I do on those subjects, for ten who are of your opinion and that of Mrs. Arnold."

"You mean, probably," replied the Rector, "that there are hundreds and thousands who, like you, never think at all on those subjects."

"That may be," said Philip, "but I should not feel that I was very charitable or Christian-like if I were to condemn so many of my neighbours as I must do if I were to think as you do."

"By being Christian-like, I suppose" said Mr. Arnold, "you mean acting and judging in conformity to the Gospel of Christ?" "Of course; and I believe that charity is said to be the first of Christian virtues, and is very much insisted upon in the Bible." "Most true. But then our Saviour himself tells us that the way which leads to destruction is broad, and that many are travelling upon it: and that strait and narrow is the gate which leadeth unto life, and *few* there be that find it;" so I suppose you will accuse the great Founder of our Faith of want of charity for preaching such harsh and unwelcome truths to his hearers." Philip not having any answer ready, the Rector went on after a short pause: "You are generally admitted to be a sensible and rather talented youth, and yet you perceive, my young friend, what mere nonsense you are betrayed into talking when you venture to give an opinion on a subject where you are so utterly uninformed as you are on this one; now before you discuss it again, let me earnestly recommend you to study your Bible carefully in a meek, teachable, and child-like spirit, and with a simple and sincere desire to understand and profit by it, and to comprehend the spirit as well as the letter of God's Holy Word. And

when you have acquired the knowledge to be found there, and only there, and are qualified to 'give a reason for the hope that is in you,' then if you find either my wife or myself deviating in our instructions from the simple truth, as it is revealed by our Saviour, by His Prophets and Apostles, I will thank you for correction, and submit gratefully to your reproofs."

"I had no intention of entering on such a discussion, or of giving you so much trouble Sir," said Philip. I never thought of venturing to dispute such points with you, who are of course so much better informed on them than I am." Here Amy could not keep silent any longer: "Oh, cousin Philip," she said, "were you not just saying what you would tell Mr. Arnold about his sermons, and what you would say to Mrs. Arnold about her lessons to us? Oh, for shame, cousin Philip, you only said such naughty things to us because you thought we would not know any better; was not that very wrong in you?"

The Rector smiled at Amy, and said, "your little cousin has anticipated something that I had to say, for I have really felt some fear of your influence with these young people, and that your levity of speaking and judging of things sacred, should in time affect the seriousness and earnestness with which they are entering upon their Scripture studies. Let me then entreat you to consider well how deeply responsible you will be, if you lead them to think lightly of the hopes and fears of a future state. It is not a question of life and death that rests on their receiving or rejecting salvation, on such terms as it has pleased God to offer it to his creatures, but a question of eternal condemnation or of eternal safety, and in this tremendous and awful alternative you have been thoughtlessly casting all your influence into the scale of this world's interests, for yourself as well as for them."

"You represent the matter in a very serious light," replied Philip, "and I dare say all you say is perfectly right, but I confess that I have no faith in any great appearance or profession of religion in young people;

when I arrive at your age I doubt not I shall begin to think on these subjects as you do; but for young people, young men in particular, there is something so unnatural and unsuitable in such sentiments, that I am always rather suspicious that there is some little hypocrisy, or at best a good deal of self-deception in the case."

"Well, certainly," returned the Rector, very gravely, "there is a great deal of fair reasoning in what you have said, and it is entitled to much consideration; as people *never die* until they are forty or fifty years of age, it never occurred to me before, how absurd it is in them to begin preparing for such an event before they have rendered themselves as unfit for it as possible, by devoting all the best years of their existence to the service of the world and its masters. To be sure, if there should happen to be any mistake in the matter, and by any unforeseen casualty such an extraordinary and unprecedented event should occur, that a young person should be called suddenly into eternity, we may easily persuade ourselves to believe that he will be admitted into everlasting happiness, in consideration of misused influence, perverted talents, disobedience, and contempt for the word and commandments of God, and a despised and slighted Saviour, or for adding insult to disobedience, and presuming to choose how much of the law of God he will adhere to, and how much he will reject. These you consider trifling responsibilities to accumulate upon your conscience in early life, and doubtless would not fear to appear before the judgment-seat of the Most High, though burdened with them all."

"You are too severe upon me, Sir," said Philip, "but I promise not to find fault again either with your sermons or your lady's teachings, if you will let me off this time."

"I have no wish to be severe," replied the Rector; "my earnest desire is, that you should learn to 'judge yourself that you be not judged.'"

"But, my dear Sir," said Philip, "if I were always to be thinking of such serious matters I should have no comfort of my life, and should be fit for nothing but a monk, or a hermit, or a Missionary. One must attend

to the affairs of this life I suppose, and as I have my own way to make in the world, I really cannot afford time for studying and thinking always about the next."

"By not thinking of these troublesome responsibilities you expect of course to get rid of them altogether?"

"Oh no, indeed I have no such expectation; but I may as well own that I am altogether in the wrong, for you have shewn me so much of my own absurdity and childishness that I am not disposed to exhibit it any further."

This acknowledgment, made as it was in our presence, satisfied our good Pastor that we should be in no further danger from our cousin's influence, and he said no more to him at the time; but I had reason to think that he afterwards took great pains in private conversations to impress him with more serious and rational views of his duties as a responsible being, and that his admonitions were by no means thrown away. I have thought it best to give my young readers the benefit of the Rector's remarks upon this occasion, because I have often since then, found my endeavours to lead my pupils to a serious and profitable study of the Scriptures, greatly hindered by the thoughtless interference of worldly people, who, having never given a thought to the needful preparation for eternal life, felt probably reproved and disturbed by seeing others younger than themselves, already awakened to the danger of carelessness and indifference. But it was not only the worldly and indifferent who took upon themselves to censure the instructions our Teacher conveyed to us in the two characters I have mentioned; there were others who accused her of having given an opportunity for the profane and irreligious to scoff at those who made a serious profession of piety, and having held up to ridicule and suspicion, a character distinguished by many practices essential to Christian consistency; and indeed, so much were some persons offended by this, that they removed their children from the school for a time, but as Mrs. Arnold went on quietly but steadily in the path she had marked out for herself, and persisted in teaching her pupils that "the tree was known by its

fruit," and that the covetous, avaricious, and cruel, could not be true Christians, let their professions and observances be what they would, the opposition was not of long continuance, and there were many who approved of her instructions, and supported her in her arduous task by kindness and encouragement.

So many of my allotted pages have been occupied by the conversation between the Rector and my cousin Philip, that I have left very little space for the lesson of the week; but as the whole object of these records is to lead my young readers to a serious application of the Word of God to their own daily lives, I trust that in availing myself of the admonitions of one whose efforts were consistently devoted to the same purpose, I shall be forgiven for the digression, and that it will be found neither misplaced nor unprofitable.

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

Mrs. Arnold.—Our Saviour having exhorted his disciples to heartfelt and sincere humiliation in the sight of God, to purity of heart, to peace and good-will toward all mankind, and to meekness and forgiveness, goes on to warn them against any display of those Christian graces for the sake of gaining applause from their fellow-creatures. The followers of Christ are required to obey Him for His own sake, and not for the love of praise and honour from the world; but should be ready and willing at all times rather to incur reproach and shame from the worldly and profane, than disobey or deny their master. The Pharisees, when they were engaged even in their private fasts, took care to go into public in such a neglected dress, and with such gloomy countenances, that every one who saw them could tell in what manner they were employed. It is probable that the short-sighted and unenlightened Jews shewed them great respect, and placed unlimited confidence in them in consequence of those strict observances, and that their covetousness as well as their pride was gratified by the effect produced on the people by all this parade and ostentation, for our

Saviour, after exhorting his hearers to avoid their example, and assuring them that all who are content to win the applause and good opinion of the world, must be satisfied to look for no other reward, proceeds to point out the danger of covetousness, and to shew them how much the Christian's best hopes must be sacrificed by a love of this world's treasures. It is indeed strange how much more anxious, even people who profess to be Christians are to secure their own worldly prosperity, and to gain the means of indulging in luxuries and superfluities, than they are in laying up their treasures in heaven; though every day's experience shews us how uncertain and unsatisfactory are all the pleasures and enjoyments of life, and no one even pretends to doubt, that at a moment's warning they may be called upon to resign them all; or be so disabled and reduced by bodily disease, that they may be incapable of feeling any gratification from the utmost success that can possibly reward their exertions. We hear a great deal of the self-denial and praiseworthy exertions of the missionaries, who go out to distant lands in the service of God, and who willingly leave their homes, and expose themselves to all the dangers of long and perilous voyages, unhealthy climates, the enmity of savage tribes, and all the other hazards to which they are certain to be exposed. Their names are known from one end of the world to the other. Their lives are published, and every written or spoken word that can be remembered of theirs is considered worth publishing and handing down from one generation to another. People look upon them as very extraordinary characters; some wonder that they could prevail upon themselves to make so many sacrifices, and endure so many dangers and hardships, simply from the love of God and a desire to extend the blessings of the Gospel to those lands that still "lie in darkness and the shadow of death." Others look upon them as deceivers and visionaries, and call their zeal enthusiasm; but to all they seem objects of interest or of curiosity, because they are actuated by motives that are sympathised in by so few of their fellow-creatures. They are laying up

their treasure in heaven, and are content to wait for their reward, and to take their Saviour's word for a sufficient security, that their labours will not be lost either here or hereafter. But how many thousands are there every year who go out from their own homes and countries, and are content to expose themselves to as many perils for the sake of this world's riches. I do not blame the enterprise which leads so many to leave their homes and seek for a provision for themselves, rather than lead idle lives, and become a burden to their relatives, and always admire and approve the active spirit which is ready to wrestle with difficulties and dangers in the pursuit of any object worth contending for. But I mention this difference in the views and feelings of even many sincere Christians, to shew how painfully deficient is our sense of duty to God and to our fellow-creatures. We feel no surprise that so many should risk their lives and spend their health and strength in the pursuit of this world's goods, because the object they are toiling for seems to us worth the sacrifice they are making for it; but we are amazed at the self-denying zeal of the missionary, who looks beyond this earth and seeks no treasure here, and this must be because we distrust our Saviour's promises, or because we have laid up our treasures here, and allowed our hearts to be bound up with them. It is idolatry and unbelief alone that clings to things temporal, to the exclusion of things eternal, and though we would be shocked and terrified if we were accused in plain words of such crimes as these, yet they must be hidden in our hearts, or we would never place so much value on what we cannot, at best, enjoy beyond a few short years, and care so little, and labour so little, for "an inheritance that fadeth not away, eternal in the heavens." The same lukewarmness in regard to the promised treasures in heaven, and the same covetous desires for riches, seem to have been among the snares of Satan, which were laid to destroy the saints and godly men of the olden times when the Scriptures were written, even as they are now, dangerous stumbling blocks in the way of God's people in the present day. In St. Paul's

first epistle to Timothy, he addresses him as a man of God, and yet sees it necessary to warn him against the love of earthly riches, and to remind him of the greater value of the prize for which he had been striving from his youth upward. Find the sixth chapter, Mary, and read from the ninth to the eleventh verse.

Mary.—"But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition.

"For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

"But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness."

Mrs. Arnold.—We will now close the lesson for today with another passage from the epistle, which shews that the tendency of these very riches, for which we are so ready to sacrifice every thing else, is to harden the heart, and to make us selfish, cruel, and unjust in our dealings with our fellow-creatures. Find the fifth chapter of James, Amy, and read from the first to the sixth verse.

Amy.—"Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you.

"Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten.

"Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days.

"Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth.

"Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton; ye have nourished your hearts, as in a day of slaughter.

"Ye have condemned and killed the just; and he doth not resist you."

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