

ACHAN'S FATAL COURSE

HIS HEART COVETED RICHES AND HE STOLE WHAT WAS GOD'S.

AND ALL ISRAEL STONED HIM

Powerful Sermon on the Sin of Covetousness, Which the Preacher Says Is Not Confined to Achan's Time—Its Genesis, Logical Progression and Culmination—A Type of the Sin of Every Age.

Entered according to Act of Parliament of Canada, in the year 1904, by William Bailey, of Toronto, at the Dept. of Agriculture, Ottawa.

Los Angeles, Cal., May 22.—The present sin of covetousness, its genesis, logical progression and culmination, is to-day the theme of the preacher. The text is Joshua vii, 25, "And all Israel stoned him with stones."

Few people have any adequate conception of the wealth and the luxury of the ancient peoples of the east. Ever and anon in our own day the newspapers contain accounts of the foolish extravagances of the sons of wealthy families, who show even greater genius in their ability to dissipate and scatter their enormous fortunes than their ancestors did in the accumulation of their wealth. By frequent repetition so prosaic and commonplace have these accounts become that special trains, private yachts and banquets costing ten and even twenty thousand dollars for a few selected friends attract the readers of the many newspapers hardly more than a passing notice.

Extravagant were the ancients in the matter of personal apparel. Pliny the elder makes mention of an instance he knew of a bridal dress which was made entirely of the most precious kind of pearls, which were strung together, costing over 40,000,000 sesterii, or about \$1,720,000 in American coin. Among the famous collections of persons' apparel exhumed from the buried cities of the east by Dr. Heinrich Schliemann, the noted German archaeologist, we find that the ancient peoples of Troy and Mycenae wore waistbands of gold, necklaces of gold and tiaras of precious stones, which glittered like the stars of midnight.

Extravagant were the ancients in the matter of food. The Roman historian and biographer, makes mention of one supper given in honor of Vitellius, where there were served up to the guests at one sitting 2,000 most delicate fishes and 7,000 birds, while one immense dish, called the "shield," was composed entirely of the brains of peacocks and parrots.

The traveler in the Far East as he roams through the ruins of ancient cities realizes how costly those ancient palaces must have been, even as from a broken column of the Alhambra you can infer how beautiful must have been the palaces of the Spanish Moors. So in imagination you may picture the costly vases of myrrhine, the priceless robes of silk, the heaps of Damascus rugs centuries old, the sword hilts jeweled with diamonds and other precious stones, the garments woven out of threads of gold and the empty treasure vaults, with their countless prizes scattered about the palace halls in untold profusion on the day that Jericho fell. Jericho was always noted among the ancients as a city of fabulous wealth.

But, though the wealth of this captured eastern capital was prodigious, yet not one atom of gold, not one yard of silk, not one rug, not one diamond, was to be taken by the Hebrew soldiers for their own use. God told Joshua he would give this city into his soldiers' hands, but all the spoils of war of this city were to be God's and God's alone. But the night after the battle one Hebrew soldier, instead of staying in his own company and doing what he ought to have done, allowed his sinful curiosity to get the better of him. He went out among the ruins on his own account and began to explore. Then, as he saw the piled up heap of wealth, his heart began to covet what was not his, but God's. When he thought no one was

looking, he stole a beautiful Babylonian garment, 200 shekels of silver and a wedge of gold and went and hid them in his tent. After many days this theft was exposed. Swift condemnation followed, and "all Israel stoned him with stones."

What interest can that ancient crime be to us of the twentieth century? It concerns us as a type of the sins of every age. Trace the progression of evil in Achan's time, and you will find the four stages by which sin still comes to culmination in the lives of the criminals of our day. From its inception to its tragic close it is ever the same, and, though in this world it sometimes escapes detection and punishment, in the end it incurs the righteous judgment of God.

The first stage in Achan's fatal course was what the apostle describes as "the lust of the eye." Achan's curiosity was excited. He wanted to see the wonderful treasures which were to be consecrated to the Lord. His first step in the downward path, which ended in his destruction, was taken when he rose from among his sleeping comrades, and, slipping past the guards, he wended his way among the shattered walls of the captured city. It was one act for Achan with sword and spear and shield to fight his way into that doomed capital, swarming with enemies, but it was another act, after the battle was won, for this brave soldier to arise at night and crawl past the sentinels and begin to examine the spoils which were not his and by right never could be his. It is one act, and a commendable act, for a young physician at the call of duty to go down to the place of evil resort in a large city to help some sufferer prostrated by physical infirmity. It is another act, and a very dangerous act, for a young man or a young woman, actuated merely by an idle curiosity, to join a slumming party to look upon vice and gloat over it as a spectacle. Sometimes temptations come to men in the ordinary walks of life, but in nearly every case, as with Achan, temptations to sin most successfully assail a man when that man is idling in a place where he has no business to be.

Let me illustrate my thought from an old scene in the Bible. How often has the downfall of David been the subject of the pessimist's diatribe! How he exults over the spectacle of the shepherd boy who conquered Goliath and climbed to the throne of Israel, yielding to his infatuation for a woman! "Yes, yes," he says, "men are all alike; the best of men are vile at heart. Here is the sweet psalmist of Israel, the perfect specimen of noble manhood, the man after God's own heart, so enslaved by his guilty passion, for another man's wife that he slays the husband to get possession of her. No man is to be trusted."

Is that your idea of men? Then, my brother and sister, you have not read human nature aright. All men are not bad. But all men will be bad if they do not stick scrupulously to the work God has given them to do. The reason David sinned was not because he looked upon "Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, the Hittite." The reason David sinned was because, like Achan among the Jericho spoils, he was idling at home instead of being with his army. In the first verse of the eleventh chapter of II. Samuel we read the secret of the whole sinful story: "And it came to pass after the year was expired, at the time when kings go forth to battle, that David sent Joab, that sentence means simply this: When the time of military campaign came—the time when David ought to have taken the field and led on his own troops to battle—he sent a substitute and stayed at home. The beginning of his danger was not in looking at Bathsheba, who was the wife of Uriah, the Hittite, but in being, like Achan, among the Jericho spoils, in a place where he had no right to be.

My brother, when God calls you to do a work, he will always give you strength to resist the sinful temptations incident to that work. But when you go to a place where you have no right to go, you are liable to experience that lust of the eye which may be the beginning of a long succession of other sins.

Young man, beware of the temptation to absent yourself from the post of duty. Beware, when Sabbath day comes around, if your minister does not see you in the house of God. You may say you are tired. You may

say you will stay at home and read the Bible and have your devotions in your room, but beware. In coming to a large city, do not let your new made friends entice you into a saloon, just to look at the beautiful pictures upon the walls, and the expensive mosaics on the floors, and the gorgeous rugs and the fine set banquets in the gambling halls. Sin so often begins in the looking on temptation that the safest course for every one is to avoid the spectacle of it as far as possible.

Achan's "eye step," in the next place, was followed by his "covetous step." We say that the sin of covetousness is only one step beyond the first sin. But the second step of Achan's sin is even more dangerous than the first stage. The lust of the eye is nearly always accompanied by hesitation and timidity. You can see that fear in the flushed cheek of the young man who stands upon the street corner debating within himself whether or no he will enter the place of evil resort to which his dissipated friends are persuading him. When the mind has taken the second step and desire is aroused, the hideous deformity of sin disappears, and longing sees in it only what is attractive and enjoyable. The second sin, the sin of covetousness, is blind to the scorpion's sting or the adder's hiss, or the tiger's paw or the shark's threatening fin lifted like the black flag of the pirate over a threatening sea of green. The "sin of covetousness" is a summer stroll through woods filled with the aroma of wild flowers. It is the soft couch under the shadows of the overhanging tree branches, over which the satanic spiders are spinning a few beautiful silken threads which in time may become as strong as links of steel.

Ah, Achan on that fatal night may not have gone forth with the premeditated idea of stealing that goodly Babylonian garment and the 200 shekels of silver and the wedge of gold, but after his eyes had rested on the gold and the silver and the goodly garment desire was awakened, and his longing to possess them became irresistible. "Oh," he said to himself, "I wish I had that garment! How beautiful it would look hanging from my shoulders! I wish I could have that lump of gold. It would protect me against poverty. All the days of my life, and why should I not have them? There are so many spoils of war here these few treasures will not be missed."

Is not Achan, going to the place of execution, the history of almost every sinner? "Eye sin," first step; "covetous sin," second step. What we would like to do nearly always precedes what we will ultimately do if we get the chance. My brother, like Achan of my text you and I can trace the degeneracy of our lives, if they are degenerate, by our evil thoughts, which always precede evil actions. What we think, we will ultimately speak; what we desire, we will ultimately do.

Oh, the sin of covetousness! Beware! Beware! Evil thoughts are only a step from evil actions. Are we not all in danger of the covetous sin? Would you tell a lie for 10 cents? "No," you emphatically answer. "No, of course not—of course not." Would you tell a lie, just one little lie for \$100? "No," you answer again, but not so emphatically.

Would you tell a lie for \$10,000—a lie which in one sense would not hurt anybody, but which would be a quizzical way and say, "Please don't ask me." Well, I do ask you. I ask you, not for the purpose of giving you the offer, but of finding out what is the condition of your thoughts. Achan coveted 200 shekels of silver and a wedge of gold which must have been worth at least \$10,000 in our money. He coveted them, without the idea of hurting any one else, yet for that sin of covetousness, which was the forerunner of other sins, Achan had to die. Beware, O man, how you allow your evil thoughts to live. Achan's "eye sin" was followed by Achan's "covetous sin," and his "covetous sin" was followed by his "stealing sin," which was the final step in his downward path.

But now, in following the four fatal stages of Achan's sin, we find that his third step—the "finger step"—changes him before the world from an honest into a dishonest man. No sooner does Achan hide that Babylonian garment under his soldier's cloak and hug that wedge of gold and bag of silver under his arm than before man, as well as God, he becomes amenable to human law. Once he was a criminal at heart, but not a criminal in act—in his own consciousness and in God's sight a thief, but before his fellow man an honest, upright man. No one knew that under that fair and respectable exterior there lurked the plunderer.

It is an awful catastrophe when a man by direct sin of commission ruins the long record of what the world has regarded as an exemplary life. In the old Strasburg Cathedral there is a famous clock. There are not only the time of day is told, but the eclipses of the sun and moon are calculated for all time. There you can see the twelve apostles bowing before the Saviour and hear Peter's cock crowing, after the fisherman apostle had denied Christ thrice. There are the symbols of childhood and youth and manhood and old age. It is a wonderful clock—wonderful in all its various mechanisms. But history tells us that this clock was in ruins for many years. It was in ruins up to 1842. Why? After the first mechanic had constructed it, in a fit of rage he completely destroyed it because the magistrates of Strasburg were going to put out his two eyes so that he could not build another clock like it for any other city. Thus, like the old clock builder of Strasburg, many and many a man by one sinful act, can destroy all the usefulness and the work of a lifetime. Achan's first sin was his "eye step." Achan's second sin was his "heart step" or "thought step." Achan's third sin was that which drove him at once out of brotherly fellowship with man. It was his "finger step" or his sin of commission. Cannot you read the stages of progression in the words of the human tragedy, "I covet," "I look," "I took," "I

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haps we can translate it in even a better way: "I looked," "I desired," "I did."

But now, after the "finger step" has been committed, comes the fear and the horror. Aye, the "covetous step" may lead through an embowered garden. The buzzards may there be feathered in the gorgeous colors of a yellow breasted, black tipped oriole. The "finger step" may be a leap, a jump, an impulsive bound, but no sooner is that fourth step taken than comes the "foot step," or the stealthy fugitive step. As soon as Achan, the thief, got possession of this gold and silver and this Babylonian garment he did not know what to do with them. He could not wear the cloak; he could not spend the money; so, like a coward, he skulked away and went and hid them in his tent.

Shn nearly always makes a coward out of a man. Achan did exactly what our first ancestor did in the garden of Eden after he had sinned. No sooner was that forbidden fruit eaten than for Adam the heavens seemed to be overcast. He not only slunk away and hid in the thickets as a cowardly hyena would run away from the hounds, but when God called him forth he did even a meaner act than that. He turned and tried to throw the blame upon the woman by his side as he said, "Yes, I did eat, but the woman whom I gave thee to be with me, she gave me, and I did eat." Oh, my friends, the criminal unconsciously reveals himself. The accusing voice of his conscience saps his manliness and robs him of his open demeanor. If there is not an honest heart in a man, his face and his bearing will not be honest. The lowered eyelids, the trembling hand, the shuffling foot—all reveal the error of his past.

A despicable sin always makes a coward out of a man—without an exception, always, always. Sin by its very nature is only another name for cowardice. No sooner did Achan take the gold than he ran away and hid it; no sooner do you sin against God, than, like all other sinners, you try to get as far as possible away from God.

Shall we follow on and see the end of this human tragedy? Shall we stop and watch the twitching limbs of the Hebrew apostate, who is being stoned to death by his late comrades in arms? No, I would not for one minute have you look at the death agony and the eternal despair. Death by execution is too terrible for any human eyes to witness, unless it is our duty to witness it. To-day, I would not lead you forth to where Achan is uttering his moans, but rather would I close this sermon with this thought: Terrible as sin is in its nature and its effects, there is a divine remedy for it. God, in his infinite pity, has had compassion on the sinner and has stretched out his hand to rescue him from his ruin and his despair. Not only does he offer pardon to the sinner, but deliverance from the power of sin. "Sin," he says to all who put their trust in Christ, "shall not have dominion over you." Though, like Achan, you may have fallen under its power, if you come to Christ and put your faith in him, you shall be saved. There is salvation for you, and peace for you, and eternal life for you, through the blood of Jesus Christ who loves you and who has given his life for you in order that you might live.

A Japanese Mimic.

A jolly little story is told by a contributor to an English paper about a curious faculty the Japanese have of imitating animals. "I remember some years ago," she says, "being at a Christmas juvenile party when a nephew of the mikado was present. The young prince got himself up by means of a muff, a sable mantle and a boa for a tail to look like some extraordinary feline and then crawled into the room where the Fells domestica was enjoying the hearth rug before the fire. There was something so sinuous and lifelike in his movements that the wretched grimaldin almost flew up the chimney with terror."

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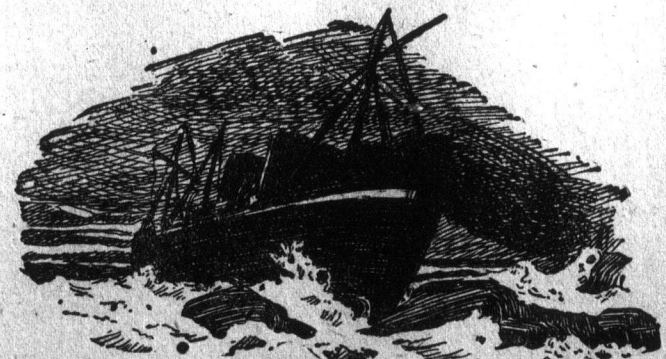
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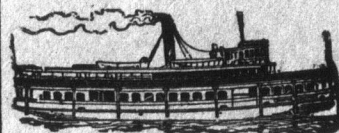
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