

THE WESTLEYAN.

PUBLISHED UNDER THE DIRECTION OF A COMMITTEE OF WESLEYAN MINISTERS AND FRIENDS IN LOWER CANADA,
IN CONNECTION WITH THE BRITISH CONFERENCE.

"LET US CONSIDER ONE ANOTHER TO PROVOKE UNTO LOVE AND TO GOOD WORKS."—HEBREWS X. 24.

VOL. I.—No. 22.

MONTREAL, THURSDAY, MAY 27, 1841.

[NEW SERIES, No. 15.]

DIVINITY.

TROUBLES PREVENTED BY KEEPING THE TONGUE.

"Whoso keepeth his mouth and his tongue, keepeth his soul from troubles."—Prov. xxi. 23.

THE prudent government of the tongue, is a work of such difficulty, that few men have succeeded in their attempts to bring it into subjection. No man can any man expect complete success, in this arduous undertaking, without the grace of God. "For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed and hath been tamed of mankind: But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison." James iii. 7, 8. But, if a man cannot tame the tongues of other men, he should endeavour, by the grace of God, to tame his own; especially when he is in danger of reproaching and slandering his neighbour. If we cannot speak well of a man, let us say as little ill as the nature of the case will admit. To err on the side of charity, will bring us into no trouble; but to err on the other side may pierce us through with many sorrows. In this respect, "Whoso keepeth his mouth and his tongue, keepeth his soul from troubles."

We shall consider, First, wherein we should keep our mouth and our tongue; and, Secondly, how this will keep our souls from trouble.

I. WHEREIN WE SHOULD KEEP OUR MOUTH AND OUR TONGUE.

This passage may refer to excesses in eating and drinking, as well as to improprieties in conversation; and to keep the mouth may imply, that we guard against gluttony and drunkenness. It is a well known fact, that those who are well fed, and full of wine, are in great danger of talking at random. Strict temperance and sobriety, will be a considerable step towards a prudent government of the tongue. But, in this discourse, we shall confine ourselves to the keeping of the tongue.

The tongue should be kept from a "multitude of words." Great talkers, whether professors or profane, can scarcely avoid sin. He who cannot er has said, "In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin: But he that refraineth his lips is wise." Prov. x. 19. We sometimes foolishly imagine, that great talkers are very wise; but the reverse is true: For "a fool's voice is known by the multitude of words." Eccles. v. 3. Our words should be few, correct, neat, well-timed, and calculated to do good. Instead of studying to speak much, we should study to speak well. Even on religious subjects, a man may speak too much; for religion is better felt than it can be expressed.

Our tongue should be kept from slander. A slanderer is a child of the devil. The word *Diabolos*, rendered *devil*, signifies an accuser, a slanderer. He is a slanderer who "backbiteth with his tongue, and taketh up a reproach against his neighbour." Psalm xv. 3. This may be done either by fabricating downright lies, or by representing things worse than they really are. To slander a good man, by forging lies and calumnies, is one of the greatest crimes we can commit against him, except that of taking away his life; and, perhaps, in some cases, it would be a less evil to murder his body than his character: And the crime of representing a bad man worse than he really is, does not fall short of the other, in diabolical malignity. Both should be held in great abhorrence. If we rob a man on the highway, he has an opportunity of defending himself; but slander robs him of his character, without the possibility of self-defence.

We should keep our tongue from flattery. A flatterer is a deceiver, who bestows praise upon persons, who, in his own opinion, does not deserve it. This, if he reflect at all, must necessarily be a hateful task to himself, and, possibly may ruin him who is flattered. "A lying tongue hateth those who are afflicted by it. And a flattering mouth worketh ruin." Prov. xxvi. 28. We may commend a man to his face without flattery; but such commendations should never be given except in cases of necessity, and then they should always be strictly true. The flatterer favours upon us, and overwhelms us with unmerited praise, merely to promote his own interests; but the evil frequently falls upon his own head, as he seldom long escapes detection.

While we avoid flattery, we should keep our tongue from rudeness and incivility. Even in reproach, we should speak with Christian civility and tenderness. Some are so rude and vulgar, as to affront almost every person with whom they converse. Without something of this kind, they can scarcely think themselves honest or conscientious; but to call rudeness and vulgarity "honesty," is a strange abuse of words. Those who commend it may expect insult in their turn. Let us see how they bear it. Generally they render railing for railing; so that, when they are themselves concerned, this reputed honesty produces painful and sinful anger. "A soft answer turneth away wrath: But grievous words stir up anger." Prov. xv. 1.

Let us keep the tongue from profane conversation. The sacred name of God is profaned by common oaths and curses. Religion is profaned by ridicule and abuse. Sacred things, of every kind, are profaned by scoffs and jests. Solemn oaths may be taken upon solemn occasions, by the best of men; but common oaths are both sinful and scandalous. The common swearer may imagine himself very bold and daring; but, when God ariseth in judgment, how will he appear? He who ridicules and abuses religion, and makes sacred things the subject of scoffs and jests, will fall by the hands of Divine justice. Shimei cursed David, calling him a "bloody man," and a "man of Belial." 2 Sam. xvi. 7. Goliath of Gath, in a violent rage, "cursed David by his gods." 1 Sam. xvii. 43. But vengeance soon overtook Goliath; and Shimei, after the lapse of many years, died an untimely death.

The tongue should be kept from lying. God is a God of truth: The Devil is the father of lies: And all liars are his children. Nothing is more strongly recommended in the written word than truth: nothing is more reprobated in that book than lying. He who yields to this sin, only now and then, is filled with sorrow, and covered with shame; but he who is in the constant habit of lying, may be ranked amongst the most detestable of men. He hates himself; men hate him; and he is hateful to God. Such was David's hatred of this sin, that he said, "He that worketh deceit shall not dwell within my house: He that telleth lies shall not tarry in my sight." Psalm ci. 7.

It is necessary to keep the tongue from filthy and impure conversation. Such conversation proceeds from a corrupt heart, and it has a tendency to corrupt those who hear it. It is reckoned an impropriety in polite company, even where there is no fear of God: How abominable, then, when heard amongst professing Christians! There appears to have been something of this kind in the church of Ephesus: Hence we see the propriety of the following exhortation: "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers." Eph. iv.

29. A prudent man will not talk in this way himself, nor will he venture into the company of filthy talkers. A filthy talker should be shunned as a dangerous person; for while he ruins himself, he works the ruin of many others.

Finally, the tongue should be kept from foolish jesting. It is an awful thought, that we must give an account of every idle word in the day of judgment! Cheerful conversation may be both pleasing and profitable; but jesting is below the dignity of a Christian. When we consider that we are dying creatures, that the Judge is at the door, and that heaven and hell are before us; we shall see the folly and danger of foolish jesting. Can the jester be devout? Can he be in earnest for salvation? Is his heart right with God? Let conscience answer. Follow the dictates of conscience, and there will be an end of foolish jesting. We are now to enquire,

II. HOW THIS WILL KEEP OUR SOULS FROM TROUBLE.

Trouble flows from various sources. No conduct, no conversation, however excellent, can entirely exempt us from trouble, while we remain in this vale of tears. But we must allow, that many of our troubles arise from unguarded words; and, therefore, by caution in that respect, we shall avoid many and great troubles. This will appear by a careful consideration of those troubles which are occasioned by an ungoverned tongue.

The guilt which a man contracts by an ungoverned tongue, proves a source of trouble to his soul. In the silent hour of reflection, his words pierce him through with sorrow. What was said in a thoughtless moment may produce years of grief. Every transgression of the lips, adds to the load of guilt, till at length it becomes a burden "intolerable to be borne." Every precept, caution, and threatening, in the word of God, stings the reflecting sinner in the face, and fills him with guilty horror. Some, perhaps, may not feel the load of their guilt in the present world; but guilt, once contracted, must be felt either here or hereafter. All this trouble is avoided by keeping the mouth and the tongue.

An ungoverned tongue exposes the soul to trouble from men. The injured and offended, unless influenced by grace, will seek revenge. They will either appeal to the laws of their country, or try to retaliate in some other way. Suppose they do not go to these lengths, yet, their ill opinion of us, their attempts to shun our company, and a just representation of our character and conduct, will bring us into trouble. By this means we lessen the number of our friends, and add to the number of our foes. But the man who keeps his tongue, enjoys the sweet blessings of peace and friendship. He can look his neighbour in the face, and ask a favour in the time of need.

Many ruin their characters by neglecting to keep their tongues. They are viewed with suspicion, treated with neglect, and loaded with disgrace. Nor can it be otherwise: for if we hear a man slander his neighbour, we conclude he may slander us; if we hear him flatter, we think him a hypocrite; if we hear rudeness, we conclude there is ignorance; if we hear the sacred name of God profaned, we conclude that it proceeds from an impious heart; if we hear lies, we suspect the person even when he speaks the truth; if we hear a filthy talker, we suspect him of filthy actions; and when we hear foolish jesting, we conclude that the person is a poor trifler. Who can bear to be suspected, slighted, and despised? Is less of character nothing? Are we more willing to part with our reputation, than to bridle our tongues? If so, we may rest assured that trouble will be our lot as long as we live.