

tongue from evil and his lips that they speak no guile; for the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayers." We have in mind the long life and good days of the simple patriarch, whose fate was so largely decided by the fact that he caught divine observation, that he ruled his own household well, and with that the all-perfect example of the Son of God, influencing us to a pure and guarded tongue. Again we discover that the apostle has had in mind language made familiar to all his countrymen by the use of the Psalms of David in the liturgies of the synagogues. On the other hand, St. James speaks dogmatically and personally. "The vile fire of an unwise babble is vain—the tongue is a world of iniquity, defiling the body and setting the passions on fire—itself too often set on fire of hell." This is fervid, if not scorching prose; it seems quite like a bitter personality. Some men—possibly more women—must have felt it to sting.

In the case of St. Peter, you rise to the heights of a loving philosophy, and by the natural instinct for the green pastures of divine contentment, you yearn to forget the strife of tongues and to hide in the pavilion of sublime and holy contemplation. In the latter case, the subject is not half so practical. You hear the somewhat stern rebukes of a teacher who is bent on leaving you no room for practical error. You feel that St. James has had to deal with babblers and busybodies in other men's matters in his own congregation, and has drawn his wisdom from some unpleasant experiences of quarrelsome believers. Considered in this light, the form of the precept is invaluable. Let us take it as one of the apostolic *pavo chalia*, a bit of every-day life, not unlike all other lives; not without its humbling application to our own hearts.

It is a very solemn thought that any one's religion may be nullified by his tongue. That man's religion is vain—*μάταιος*. It amounts to nothing. This result is effected, not by crimes that rouse or madden or destroy the

conscience; not by steeping the body in drunkenness; not by debauchery or bold villainies, but by an unbridled tongue; by a tongue left to itself. The metaphor of the writer is very striking as we meditate upon it. You seem to see a wild colt on the race-course. His owner is anxious for him to win, relies on his speed, and boasts of him to others. He has staked his all upon him. He has fed and trained him; he has done all for him—but *bridle* him. The animal life and wanton courage of the beast send him rushing along the track as swift as an arrow. He can win, that is plain to all the crowd—yea, win all the better for running light, for being at perfect liberty. Alas, how many a young man or woman has just his consciousness and exultant confidence! Only he is unbridled and unguided by a mind above his own, that can appreciate the amount of restraint necessary to success. The colt bounds and rushes along; now distances all competitors; now madly runs in the way of others; now scours along in pursuit of some who have gone ahead, and gains precedence only to feel again the wantonness of mere brute nature, and lose the race by excess of liberty. Such is the significance of the metaphor of the tongue without a bridle. A man's religion is thus made vain by the animal nature within him, not in its base and brutal side of vices and crimes, but by its better side—by lack of a bridle on that one member which is the index of his inner natural self. As the great ships driven of fierce winds yield to the touch of the governor's hands upon the smaller rudder; as we put bits in the horses' mouths that they may obey us, so with the tongue; a little member that boasteth great things, without the restraint of a spirit that can guide and guard it by a loftier principle than itself, becomes dangerous and destructive—a little fire kindling a great forest.

Note, if you please, that St. James held that the man has a religion—"that man's religion is vain." He is no brute nor infidel. He is a professor, a member of the Church. He has got-