

A Call to Separation

BY REV. ALEXANDER MACLACHLAN.
"Ephraim is joined to his idols, let him alone."—Hosea 17: 17.

There are very solemn words, which we take them, in the way in which they are generally understood is distinctly a misapprehension. They were not intended as a warning of the status of the divine dealings with an obstinate transgressor—there are no people about whom God says they are so wedded to their sin that it is useless to try to do anything with them—and they are not a commandment to God's servants to fling up in despair or in insult the effort to lend, to chastise and to afflict their evil doers.

They are generally read as if they were; as if here either the divine grace was withdrawing its own withdrawing, or as if the divine Spirit was forbidding the prophet to labor further for the people of Ephraim. But the context distinctly shows us that this is not the message; and the book in which they occur is one long pleading with this very Ephraim, just because he is "joined to idols."

Ephraim is another name for the northern kingdom of Israel; one of the two halves to which the nation was divided. Hosea himself was the prophet of the northern nation; and his whole activity was devoted precisely not to letting Ephraim (that is, his countrymen of Israel) alone. But it is the people of the other, the neighboring kingdom, that are addressed, and what is meant by letting alone is plainly enough expressed for us in the previous verse: "Though thou wouldst play the harlot, let not Israel be left." It is of the northern kingdom in the call "worship is held up as a warning to Judah, which is brought and commended to keep clear of all complicity therewith, and to avoid entangling alliances with "seceding Israel." This and this only is the purpose of our text—a plea with Judah to stand apart from association with evil doers. It is in fact an Old Testament parallel to Paul's vehement, indignant exhortation: "What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? and what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with the idolatrous? or what part hath he who is called by the name of God with idols? We therefore must separate from them who are not Christians, let them be as they will."—1 Cor. 5: 11.

So, then, if you are joined to it, you are joined to idols, unless you let Ephraim alone you cannot but become tainted with the idolatry which cleaves to him.

Now translate all that into plain English, dear Christian friends, and it just comes to this. It is a very bad sign of a Christian union with his chosen companions are people that have no sympathy with him in his religion. Of course, there are natural ties which we must not break. Of course there is a great deal of neutral ground which is common to us all. Of course, there are obligations of various kinds which compel association with people altogether irrespective of the deep things of their spirits in regard to religion. Of course, if the man next me has no share in the love which lightens my spirit, the first duty that I owe to him is to try to get him to share the blessing which I wish Christ to give through my poor faith.

All that has to be conceded at once. And all that being remembered, and influencing our conduct, I beseech you Christian professors here, for whose souls and degree I am anxious, to ask yourselves these questions—whether your associations with avowedly, or at all events, manifestly irreligious people do not go a great deal further than that; whether some of you do not on the whole prefer company in which their chosen companions are people that have no sympathy with him in his religion. Of course, there are natural ties which we must not break. Of course there is a great deal of neutral ground which is common to us all. Of course, there are obligations of various kinds which compel association with people altogether irrespective of the deep things of their spirits in regard to religion. Of course, if the man next me has no share in the love which lightens my spirit, the first duty that I owe to him is to try to get him to share the blessing which I wish Christ to give through my poor faith.

Those who believe in tolerating and engaging in the "innocent amusement" of card playing, poker playing, and other games of that sort, will please read and ponder over the following plain words from the Philadelphia Ledger, the editor and owner of which paper does not seem to be afraid of offending "good society" by his moral teachings. Would that the entire religious, as well as the secular, press of the country would follow the example of the Ledger.

There are so many ways in which girls are being misled, and seduced, and enticed to themselves and others that it seems a great pity that any of them should resort to the common vices of coarse men. That they do so in the evening entertainments of private and elegant homes and at the most fashionable summer resorts appears to be beyond question. And that the results will appear in unlooked-for denormalizations in the future of what is called good society may be set down as among the certainties of natural law. Young ladies may not be expressly susceptible to such gross and vulgar arguments, but they do not forget that the young men who gamble with them, and who appear to enjoy the fun, lose their respect for young ladies in the exact measure that the latter cease to be governed by fine womanly feelings and standards of character. But they may laugh at the shrewdness of a girl in a room of cards for stakes, but she is not the girl they will trust or honour or that they care to marry. That is an argument to the quick, and may find its way home. The man who marries a gambling girl is already an incipient sinner in a divorce court.

When you pray for a blessing for yourself or another, what do you mean? Happiness as a whole, do you mean? Or happiness and misery, and all the things that flow from a life misery now and lifelong comfort in consequence? Consider how you would long and work to secure a surgical operation for a poor friend who could not afford it. Yet this means weeks of suffering.

There are many sorts of remedies. There is the remedy, "Rest and keep happy," and that the doctor often gives when we go to him for relief. There are the remedies, privation of food, disagreeable medicine, cutting off of our engrossing occupations, painful working of sufficient to make the surgeon's knife we have a very fine doctor we can more readily submit to welcome, unexpected prescriptions. Yet even with the best of many mistakes, how much unnecessary pain! Remember Garfield and the bullet. But with the great Physician, there can be no mistake. The doctor we can more readily submit to welcome, unexpected prescriptions. Yet even with the best of many mistakes, how much unnecessary pain! Remember Garfield and the bullet. But with the great Physician, there can be no mistake.

That we should understand the process is not to be expected. Do you expect always to understand the doctor's prescriptions? I know a slight woman, a fine swimmer, who at one of our sessions reported last season, that a girl who was swimming, but in so doing the girl clutched at her neck and she had pulled them both under and she had to strike her senseless. It seems to be very easily and naturally done in the water—and the father, looking helplessly on as she dragged the child to land, his heart broken. So we in our daily cry against God when he is forced to give a sharp blow, quite ignoring what he fully believes, that he knows what he is doing and does it all in mercy.—American Messenger.

Victims.
"No, Mr. Stuart, I appreciate your kindness, but you know, I am a man; I cannot and will not believe a God of love could create such a stunted, misshapen creature as I."

"But Kenneth, you are speaking as though this life is all, instead of the portal to the real, true life beyond; and in the world to come, you will be found like unto His glorious body, you know."

"All that may be very true, Mr. Stuart, and as a minister it is quite proper for you to present that view of the matter," and a slightly sarcastic expression flitted over the young man's face.

It was a beautiful autumn day, and the two had met on an unfrequented wooded path. They had sought this place from different reasons; the clergyman that he might enjoy the solitude of the woods; the young man that he might get away from all companionship. His aversion to meeting people, however, did not extend to Mr. Stuart, who had so persistently and yet so delicately shown his interest in him that Kenneth rarely now repulsed him. They had come to a fence, and before climbing it Mr. Stuart turned and looked back. Upon the right a large clearing had been made, and just beyond it the eye rested upon a most enchanting picture. There were trees yellow and red, and a face with eyes all glowing with their brilliant smiles, and the rich reddish-brown of the oaks and still duller colors of the chestnuts served only to bring out into bolder relief the brilliancy of the maples.

Mr. Stuart, said a young man, suddenly, and he was looking at the trees and the sky, and well you may, for there is beauty everywhere; and yet the very same God that made all this loveliness made me, and look at me—yes! just look at me, Mr. Stuart, and he stepped forward a little, and with suppressed emotion, "I never wanted to be born," he went on bitterly. "My creation was forced upon me, and yet for such a gift I am supposed to be thankful. My father and mother try hard to hide the fact that all the love is given to my brother Rob, and that the pity is left to me." Then dropping the head dejectedly, as he saw his friend's eyes filled with tears, he added, "But, forgive me, Mr. Stuart, for pouring out my woes upon you. I have never spoken of them before, nor shall I again. I mean to 'die game,' come what may, and I will walk to the end of the world with you." And in a moment Kenneth had disappeared behind the trees.

Winter passed and the spring found Kenneth Hale a member of Mr. Stuart's family. The Hale's having gone abroad, after a painful persuasion, Kenneth had been induced to come and be with them. Night after night, before he came, had Mr. and Mrs. Stuart endeavor to devise plans by which the burden which was pressing so heavily might be lightened, but after their confiding words were: "Well, after all, we have no choice, and we must have a human touch sometimes; seems best the roughest handling." One plan, which was carried out. The day before Kenneth came, Mr. Stuart looked down from his study wall (with tender interest) at the gift of a sister who had been some three years in a foreign mission. It was a beautiful, little, round, iron safe, the lock of the door, it was an old engraving of the Saviour, outer-lying upon the cross, and underneath as were painted the words, "I have loved you for this."

The day after, Kenneth's arrival he awoke very late, and at the moment he felt a slight touch upon his arm, and he was startled by the figure of the patient, helpless sufferer came out into the room, and he could not length read the inscription beneath it. "I have loved you for this," the words thought strongly moved him. It seemed to him, as he lay there, that through the darkness and wretchedness of his soul a hand was outstretched and laid softly and soothingly upon him, and a voice said: "Did you think your Lord a hard and

cruel Master, misting out the conditions of life with an indifferent hand. Do not know what it is to be a Christian, unless you see if there is any sorrow in your heart."

For a few moments he seemed to rise in the clouds, but the old habit of thought slowly settled down over him and his comfort fled. But the influence lingered. In the stillness and quiet of the night, during his many wakeful hours, the thought of that cross and its holy burden, burden itself upon him, and he wondered at the effect these thoughts seemed to produce. The hard, bitter feelings which had been a pain within him for so many years seemed to retire for a time, and a wonderful peace to take their place. Strains of songs which Mrs. Stuart used to sing, as the twilight gathered, seemed to visit him in those midnight hours, and over and over again could he hear those words:

More heavy was Thy burden,
More weary Thy way,
O Lamb of God,
The sins of the world away,
Have mercy on us!

And yet all this time such had been the reserve of his life, he said nothing to his friends of the experience through which he was passing, and they could only hope that they were not indulging fancies when it seemed to them that the lines about the young man's face were becoming sterner and harder, and a look almost of restlessness occasionally appeared. He little knew he was being bound by "the golden chains of prayer about the feet of God," and yet he was conscious that influences were at work in his life which had never been felt before.

And at length the work was done. He hardly knew when the last barrier fell, and he laid himself down in submission at the Master's feet, and found that through subjection had become a victor. He only knew that he was willing to take up his life, with all its desirables and apparent incompleteness, and bear it patiently until the Lord should call him into the fulness of the life beyond.

He wanted his friends to know all this, yet did not find it quite easy to say it. One Sunday evening, as he was bidding them good night, he laid his hand on his friend's shoulder, saying simply, "Mr. Stuart, did you have me in mind when you wrote your sermon last week?"

Knowing his sensitiveness, Mr. Stuart, for an instant, felt inclined to evade the question, but then, remembering the man's face, he replied, "Yes, Kenneth."

"Well, supposing that I should tell you that I can accept every word that I can believe that some day I shall know the reason, and that a loving one, for all that has been withheld from me in this life, would you be glad to hear it?"

"Glad, Kenneth?"

They needed to say no more than that; their tones, the expression of their faces, told more plainly than any words the joy they felt.

He tried to tell them more, to express his thanks to them, but his voice faltered, and he hastily quitted the room.

There were no infidels in Charleston when the earth shook. God was felt to be the only sure foundation. Rich and poor, wise and foolish, white and black, alike were that followed the same God, and the same God was the impression only of a momentary one. The city is full of religious excitement still. The meetings on Sunday are described as a revival, and doubtless many earnest and effective sermons were preached in the open air, to the great joy of the people.

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The Value of Smiles.
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