

Good Sunday Reading.

BIBLE QUESTION COMPETITION.

Although this competition is open to all the readers of PROGRESS, it is more especially intended to interest the young people—the boys and girls who are, or should be attending Sunday School. We have entrusted its management to one who is very competent to take charge of the department. In order to make the competition more interesting, the proprietor of PROGRESS will give One Dollar to the person who sends in the first correct answer to all the questions. We believe that this inducement will result not only in increasing the interest in the contest, but also in the acquisition of much information by those who search for the correct answers.

The following rules should be strictly observed:

RULES FOR COMPETITORS.

- 1. A prize of one dollar will be awarded every week for the first correct answer that reaches the Proprietor's office. If there is no correct answer the person who sends the first best answer will receive the dollar. In case two correct answers reach the office at the same time the dating stamps of the post offices at which they are mailed will be taken into consideration.
2. Competitors must write on one side of the paper only, giving name and address in full with each answer. These need not be published except in the case of prize-winners, and a non-ec-pleme may be adopted for publication.
3. The winner of a prize will not be eligible to compete for another for four weeks.
4. All replies must be received on or before Saturday one week after publication of the questions, thus allowing competitors a clear week for their efforts.
5. No post-cards can be received. All replies should be addressed to the "SUNDAY READING," Editor PROGRESS, St. John, N. B.

PRIZE BIBLE QUESTIONS.—No. 1.

- 1st. Give the temporary abode of a fugitive prophet.
2nd. The only parable in which our Lord mentions any names, give the names, and where recorded.
3rd. Winter—Give at least six quotations from the Old Testament in which the word "snow" occurs.
4th. From the book of Proverbs give a scriptural patent shield for warding off the sharp strokes of anger.

SERMON.

Good Gifts for Children.

The following sermon was preached by Rev. John Hunter in Trinity church, Glasgow, having reference to the meetings of the Sunday school convention there assembled. He selected as his text Matthew 2, "They offered unto him gifts, gold, frankincense and myrrh." The advent of any child into this world, he said, is an event full of great and solemn significance. It is a wonderful thing in itself, this child coming out of the eternities into the midst of all these visible things, and lifting up its cry amid this earth's many sounds. The birth of the poorest child has infinite mystery about it. I say infinite, for we feel that in its presence the wise man cannot find out its mystery into perfection. It cannot be fully explained by the laws which we can see, and trace and understand. There is something in it born not of the will of the flesh nor of the decree of the Holy Ghost in the poem of the sacred nativity only shows how much truer the imagination often is to the deeper facts of life than is the reason's colder part. It is true of every infant that comes into our world that it has something in it born in the Holy Spirit; that its true heredity from God; that it is not only a child of human parents but a child of God, inasmuch as it possesses from birth the germ of a spiritual life, a spirit akin to the Divine Spirit. It is not a strange thing that the wise men kneel in adoring wonder in the presence of the child born to be the Saviour of the world.

Looked at from another and profounder point of view, we may say that it is a strange thing that wise men do not always bow in awe and reverence before the sudden appearance of the divine in the human, before this everlasting incarnation of God in our world. The birth of a child is not only a marvel and miracle in itself; it is an event which is full of the promise and potency of immeasurable good or immeasurable evil. What a mystery of power for good or evil is hidden in the little child which the humblest mother holds to her heart. In some sense and degree every child that comes into the world is sent to be a Messiah—that is, to be a helper-on of God's kingdom upon the earth. Many children grow up to be helpers and fulfillers of the divine order of human life, but many, many, alas, grow up to hinder and defeat, to be a curse and not a blessing to the world. We trace what is called Christian civilization, the distinctions between ancient and modern society, the influences which are affecting most decisively the highest thought and deepest feeling of the greatest and most progressive peoples on the face of the earth, to the birth of a little child, the son of very poor parents, nearly 2,000 years ago.

In the history of the birth of Jesus, it is said that wise men from the east, whom later tradition transforms into kings, brought gifts to the cradle of the infant Christ—gold, frankincense and myrrh. The commentators are not quite agreed as to the significance of these Oriental gifts—you will have some difficulty in finding a single agreeable word which the commentators do use to the country from which the travellers came, and given for that reason: others say that they were gifts for a king and im-

plied the kingly state. But I pass by this not very profitable contention in order to ask and answer a far more serious question—what are the best and most fitting gifts for any and every child born into the world—born to be a king unto God, to rule over himself, and to be a bringer-in of God's kingdom upon the race of man is a right royal race, and there are certain gifts which every member of this race has a claim to when we consider the significance of its existence, its solemn responsibilities and its duties.

1. The gift of a sound organization, physical, mental and moral is a good gift for a child—one of the best of gifts. It has a right to be well-born. Children depend very largely for their chances in this world upon their organization. Their condition, and destiny, here on this earth, is often put almost beyond their control by the folly and wickedness of parents, who send them into the world badly organized. They have weak bodies, sluggish brains, ill-assorted faculties, dispositions and tendencies more or less strong toward evil, because the sins of the parents and the parents' parents are visited upon them. I never ponder it without feeling deep pain, and without being more and more persuaded that it is part of my duty as a minister of Him in whose eyes children were and are sacred, to speak of it now and again. We need much honest thinking and honest speaking on this question of parent-hood, and we must have it, if the sum of human misery and wickedness is ever to be considerably lessened in this world. The most serious and sacred functions and duties of life are concealed under a veil of mock modesty. Prudery is not purity, rather does it produce and hide much coarseness of thought and feeling. There is more than enough in the thought of marriage and parentage and their possible consequences to protect them not only from frivolous and coarse jesting, but to call forth profoundly serious thought. More thoughtful and earnest attention needs to be given to the law of inheritance which lends such solemn emphasis to every part of human life. It is in itself a beneficent and beautiful law, and will work for good, if we are good. He who made us expects us to do right and in the natural order of things, He has made no provision for wrong-doing. I once heard some one say that if he had the making of this world, he would have arranged that children should be born only as the reward of superior character and excellence. That the Creator, knowing as only Infinite Wisdom and Love could know the responsibilities of a Creator, did not so arrange the order of nature, is a proof of His faith in man. He takes it for granted that those who take upon themselves the unspcakably solemn responsibilities of fatherhood and motherhood shall make physical health, mental soundness, and moral excellence the condition with themselves. If a heritage of evil has been transmitted to us, then we ought to intercept it in its march. Let us not darken and curse unborn generations by our physical and moral defects. Every child that is born has a right to a sound organization. The better world for which we look and pray, and work will come chiefly through the better children born into it. Of such is the kingdom of heaven upon earth.

2. A second gift fit for a child, and to which it has a claim, is the gift of a good home. By a good home I do not mean a home where there is an abundance of what are called the good things of life, but a home where life is not such a constant and dreary struggle that it will hinder instead of help, depress instead of stimulate. It is a good thing that children should be prepared by their circumstances to endure hardships. It is not out of easy and luxurious surroundings our best and most useful men and women have come. It has been stated somewhere that for four generations in England no man became distinguished as physician or lawyer who had inherited an income of £200 a year. Circumscribed conditions are necessary to awaken and develop power. Children are not well cared for by being indulged and pampered. The fortunes of fathers had often been the worst of curses to sons. On the other hand, it is not good for men and women to be bowed and soured by grim struggle at the very outset of life; it is not the will of heaven that children should be born to receive proper and reasonable care. The home is not the home, yet the idea of a little avast of our children see in our eyes. Heads of families ought to do what they honestly can to make their homes attractive and pleasant—places that will elevate and educate taste and character by their surroundings, by their cleanliness, brightness, furniture, books and pictures.

3. Another great gift for a child is a sound, intellectual, moral and religious culture. It is a mistake, as a rule, to send children away from home for their education. Boarding schools, however good, are poor substitutes for a true father and mother's care. I have seen, during the time I have been a minister, some very promising boys and girls injured and spoiled by being removed at the most critical period of their development from the direct influences of home. The accomplishments of London and Paris cost too much when they cost the simplicity and innocence of your daughters. The early breaking up of families all over the country is one of the most threatening features of our modern life. This sometimes cannot be avoided, but it ought to be avoided when it can. The home is the most fundamental of human institutions, and in these changing and critical times we need to make more and not less of it. Children need their parents, and the parents need their children:

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Children have a right to their childhood. Do not be in too great a haste to make men and women of your children. Keep them back rather than rush them forward by formal parties, late hours, premature accomplishments, and other hot-house processes. The higher development of individual and social life depends largely upon the extension of the years of childhood. Hardly anything is so sad as the sight of the manhoodness of many boys and the womanhoodness of many girls. How much of the conversation, the tone, the atmosphere of home, and the books and magazines which children are allowed to read, have to do with these precocious developments—these all-knowing, cynical, pessimistic boys of 19, these girls flirting at 14, and dying

of disappointment at 16. Let children grow naturally, and hasten slowly. On the other hand, repressing development as well as forcing it is an evil. Children are injured sometimes by too much discipline, as well as by too little. It is not enough considered, that there is an individuality in a boy or girl as sacred as holy ground, and to be approached even by a parent with fear and reverence. The most that many parents do is to unmake their children, to destroy their individuality, and to make them copies of themselves. They get alarmed when they see that their dearest have a destiny of their own; they are slow to recognize in them new thoughts of God, new heirs of life, new and separate personalities. One of the saddest things in the world is the way love defeats its own end. Weak and selfish people may truly love their children, but their weakness and selfishness are seen in the kind of good they do for their children, and in the kind of influence they exercise upon their life. Before you can feel and act towards your children as you ought, you must first love them as God's more than they are yours, you must train them to be for what He would have them to be: fit them as far as you can for self-reliance, self-support, self-control, when they go out into that world where there is no father's hand to guide them and no mother's eye to direct. Many wrecks are made of young lives, because the habits of self-control and self-reliance are not built up within them. They so depend on external things to keep them steady that when these are changed and they are thrown upon themselves they fall and fail through weakness. A thorough moral training, training in obedience to just and reasonable requirements, and training in unselfishness and helpfulness, is a gift which no parent ought to fail to give to his children. He ought to give them, also, a true and noble ideal of life and duty; he ought to teach them to value character above everything else; to put truth, honesty, integrity, goodness above everything else, above all material advantages, above money, success, popularity, social position, a good marriage. A child claims at a parent's hands not only moral but religious culture. I would have the earliest lesson taught to be this: they are spirits, spiritual beings with faculties, which are as real as their bodily and mental faculties; that they are in idea and capacity children of God. Our fathers were not one degree too anxious to give their children a noble ideal of life and duty, the spiritual life. The only fault I find with much that calls itself religious training is that it is not religious enough. Filling a child's mind with anecdotes of Hebrew patriarchs and kings, and other Hebrew legends, and the like, does not mean much, and does not touch the roots of life. Children grow up into men and women, and fall into moral weakness and religious scepticism because the discipline of their moral and spiritual nature and life has been neglected. Why should not the spiritual and spiritual side of them be as well looked after, and be as carefully trained as the physical and intellectual side? If only a small part of the time and pains expended on athletics, languages, music, drawing and other things were given to training the spiritual faculties and affections, what an unspeakably good thing it would be for the children, and for the whole future of our Christian faith and Christian churches. Children have a right not only to religious teaching, but to religious influences—the influence of the highest and best thoughts of God, Christ, life, duty, immortality, the influences of the Christian church and of Christian worship, all the influences which are essential to the building up of a reverent and devout manhood or womanhood. The absence of early associations with the church, the things which endure, the symbol and witness, the absence of sacred memories, is a loss that can never afterwards be made good. I plead for association of children with the church, not as a substitute, but as an aid to parental influence. For more important than any direct teaching that may be given is the atmosphere of a worshipping church—the atmosphere of reverence, devoutness, faith and consecration of all highest things.

12. The best thing a child can receive is the gift of a truly righteous and religious life, to be lived in the presence of God, and to be bowed and soured by grim struggle at the very outset of life; it is not the will of heaven that children should be born to receive proper and reasonable care. The home is not the home, yet the idea of a little avast of our children see in our eyes. Heads of families ought to do what they honestly can to make their homes attractive and pleasant—places that will elevate and educate taste and character by their surroundings, by their cleanliness, brightness, furniture, books and pictures.

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