

ON "CALLING EVIL GOOD."

"As in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man."—
Prov. xxvii. 19.

Mary. Did not one part of Mr. A.'s sermon remind you, Aunt Lucy, of the text last Sunday, "Woe, unto them that call evil good, and good evil?"

Aunt Lucy. It did not, Mary; but I understand what you mean. You refer to his reproof of those who excuse the profane and irreligious, by saying, "After all, such a one has a good heart."

Mary. Yes, Aunt Lucy, surely this is an instance of calling evil good, and one in which I am conscious I have often offended; but, Aunt Lucy, did Mr. A. mean that men's hearts are all equally wicked?

A. Lucy. Not all equally wicked *now*, but all equally corrupt when *born into this world*. The sin of Adam has entailed the same fatal consequences on *all* his children, and *equally on all*.

Mary. But some persons seem to have by nature a much worse disposition and character than others.

A. Lucy. There is nothing more difficult and impossible for us to decide upon than the different degrees of guilt in man. The corruption of human nature will show itself in different ways in different characters. In one person it appears in a violent temper; in another in a weakness, which gives way under any temptation, and ends perhaps in a more fearful state of sin than in the other case. Yet this difference gives us no true ground for supposing that they were not, when born into the world, equally "far gone from original righteousness," as our Prayer-Book expresses it.

Mary. Mr. A. said very truly, that we are apt to consider those sins the most heinous that offend most against the interests of man.

A. Lucy. Yes; and besides this tendency, there are some sins that are secret in the heart, and do not appear outwardly to man. Pride, envy, malice, and covetousness, are reckoned in holy Scripture as works of the flesh, along with murder and adultery: and yet they are not so *outwardly offensive* in most cases; and even where we know that they exist, we place them in a much lower rank in the scale of sin.

Mary. The great and important difference then is, the degree of grace and strength afforded to us by God, to enable us to overcome the corruption of our evil natures.

A. Lucy. Yes; we are taught in our Catechism, that at the time of our baptism, we are "called to a state of salvation," we are made "the children of grace;" such is the blessed regeneration that then takes place. *Before* baptism, we are the children of wrath. *In* baptism, we are born again, and become children of grace.

Mary. The grace given at baptism is given in an equal degree to all who are baptized?

A. Lucy. To all who are baptized in infancy; and to all those who, in riper years, come with the necessary qualifications of repentance and faith.

Mary. It is after this time then that the difference arises?

A. Lucy. From the time of our baptism, the degree of grace bestowed upon us depends, as our Saviour tells us, on the improvement we make of that which is given us. "He that hath, to him shall be given; and he that hath not, from him shall be taken away even that which he hath."

Mary. This is a very serious thought! Who can tell how much strength and assistance he has lost through his own fault and negligence!

A. Lucy. None of us can tell, my dear Mary; and all, even the best among us, will feel sure, that many good thoughts, suggested by God's Holy Spirit within us, have been suffered to pass unheeded; many good intentions have been left unfulfilled; many means of grace slighted or unimproved.

Mary. Instead of grieving over the corruption of our nature, we should grieve over the consequences of our own negligence.

A. Lucy. It is most necessary and useful for us to bear constantly in mind that we inherit from Adam a corrupt and sinful nature. Such a recollection will serve to keep us humble and watchful; and will also make us thankful to our blessed Saviour, who delivered us from this wretched state of bondage. It will teach us to judge of others by the only true standard. A *good heart* cannot be found, except where it is renewed, and made good by the work of God's Holy Spirit; and such a heart will be known by the fruits of the Spirit.

Mary. Will not this view of the universal and equal corruption of human nature make us more severe in judging others? I used to think that some were *naturally* born more wicked than others; but now I seem to feel that it is all their own fault, and *they* need no more excuse than others.

A. Lucy. We must not make *false* excuses for our neighbour any more than for ourselves: but we need not be severe, and we should always make allowance for whatever appears to be a person's natural infirmity. We shall do this the more readily, if we consider that infirmity only as a glass, in which we see the corruption of our own nature reflected. *They* may be sorely tempted to give way to ill temper and discontent, while we may be naturally cheerful and good tempered; on the other hand, *they* may be steady and prudent, while we are fond of money and idle pleasures.

Mary. I understand; the degree of corruption will be equally great, though shown in different ways. What was the other expression that Mr. A. objected to, besides that of "a good heart?"