

Pastor and People.

THE SLAUGHTER OF AGAG.

BY ALBERT E. S. SMITH.

I Samuel, xv.

"Surely the bitterness of death is past,"
Cried he whose safety Saul, the Sovereign, willed,
When all the blood of Amalek else was spilled,
And at his nation's grave he stood, the last.
But Samuel came, with countenance overcast,
With wrath aroused, and charity all chilled,
And there, before the Lord, was Agag killed,
Hewed into pieces by the Enthusiast.

Prophet of Love! whose covenant hath reversed
The tyranny that bruised the broken reed,
Be Priest of love, and bless where all have cursed,
Spread Thy mild rule till Hate itself be freed,
And be the King of Love whose wisdom first
Is pure, then peaceable, and saves indeed.

SILKEN BANDS FOR AN UNRULY MEMBER.

BY REV. J. A. R. DICKSON, B.D.

More trouble and sorrow come into human life from the unreasoning use of the tongue than from almost any other cause. An idle word is a spark that not infrequently falls upon a powder train, that springs a mine or explodes a magazine. There may have been no evil intention, no real malignity, no purpose to harm, but the harm is done all the same as if there had been. Fire burns irrespective of intention, and words work irrespective of the motive that prompts their utterance. To do evil one does not need to set himself deliberately to act in a certain way. Evil is so kin to us, so inbred that it requires no thought—only to curb and to crush evil is thought necessary. It is a truth that ought to be strongly emphasized—"Evil is wrought by want of thought as well as want of heart." And, as James saith, "The tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly member full of deadly poison." If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body." How can we attain this perfection? By thought and watchfulness. By keeping before our minds such considerations as will educate us to be silent at all times except when we ought to speak. There is a time to speak, and to discern that time is part of the highest wisdom. A loose tongue is an open floodgate. Perpetual talk is a mark of an uneducated mind. In much speaking great wrongs are sometimes done to innocent men. And so we read in the best of all books: "In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin, but he that refraineth his lips is wise." "A fool's voice is known by a multitude of words." Idle and incessant talk mark a man as possessing a poor judgment and an unregulated mind and devoid of understanding. He himself may imagine that he is the only wise man, but listeners judge otherwise. There is an old rhyme that is just a little storehouse of truth touching this matter. It runs this way:

If wisdom's way you truly seek,
Five things observe with care,
Of whom you speak, to whom you speak
And how and when and where.

Thomas Carlyle was while he lived—and he being dead yet speaketh—the prophet of silence. His oft-repeated maxim is, "Speech is silvern, silence is golden." And through his works pearls of truth on this theme lie scattered, which glorify "the greatness and truthfulness of silence." These are a few of them: "Silence is the element in which great things fashion themselves together." "The path of duty is silent for every well-drilled man." "Most things do not ripen at all except underground; and it is sad but sure truth, that every time you speak of a fine purpose, especially if with eloquence and to the admiration of by-standers, there is the less chance of your ever making a fact of it in your poor life." "Silence is the eternal duty of a man. He won't get to any real understanding of what is complex, and what is more than any other pertinent to his interests, without maintaining silence."

Another wise man in his essays, which every young person ought to read to furnish their minds with profitable thoughts, says, "Speech of man's self ought to be seldom and well chosen." I know one who was wont to say in scorn: "He must needs be a wise man, he speaks so much of himself." Bacon's thought runs in the line of the divine wisdom, "Let another praise thee and not thine own mouth: a stranger and not thine own lips." "For men to speak their own glory is not glory." With much else on his essay on "Discourse" Lord Bacon tells this story, that may become a silken band for some unruly member. "I knew two noblemen, of the west part of England, whereof the one was given to scoff, but kept ever royal cheer in his house; the other would ask of those that had been at the other's table, Tell truly, was there never a flout (a slight or insult) or dry blow (a sarcastic remark) given?" To which the guest would answer, "Sach and such a thing passed." The lord would say, "I thought he would mar a good dinner."

Dr. Samuel Johnson by the favour of James Boswell has some bands that ought never to be loosened from the memory, or lost from the heart. They are silken. There is in them nothing of his gruff churlishness. They are sweetly sympathetic.

"Never speak of a man in his own presence. It is always indelicate and may be offensive." "Questioning is not the mode of conversation among gentlemen. It is assuming superiority and it is particularly wrong to question a man concerning himself. There may be parts of his former life which he may not wish to be made known to other persons, or even

his own recollection." "A man should be careful never to tell tales of himself to his own disadvantage. People may be amused and laugh at the time, but they will be remembered and brought out against him on some subsequent occasion."

Every keen observer of human life will confirm the truth of these statements. They offer to our consideration important principles, which in every society are greatly needed. Would that they were greatly in demand!

Here is a special word for the professing Christian "If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain." Religion, then, godly fear, affects the tongue—it bridleth it. It calls upon a man to think whereunto the influence of his words may tend. He must not speak heedlessly, inconsiderately, idly. He must take thought. Why? Because of this all sufficient reason given by the Lord himself: "I say unto you, that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment; for by thy words thou shalt be judged, and by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned."

This is a saying to be written on the heart and held in everlasting remembrance. Many a good impression has been obliterated, and many a gracious thought springing up in the heart has been killed, and many a noble purpose has been defeated by an idle word spoken from a thoughtless mind. And by good people too. Parents have done this in reference to the influence of the morning or evening sermon upon the hearts of their children. And perhaps they wondered why their children were never converted. The parental talk at the dinner table was the hindrance. Instead of speaking well of the truth preached, the manner of the preacher was ridiculed and the good that was done to the souls of the young members of the family destroyed. One sinner destroyeth much good. What a responsibility some parents have in reference to this. It would seem as though there was no fear of good before their eyes. Words spoken in the family circle are like the tones of the famed Angelus, heard far afield, constraining souls to bow to their mystic power even there. They may be uttered without thought—that is their idle birth—but they live on to work weal or woe for long years to come.

Church members and even church officers often antagonize and neutralize the work of God by their own surly and sinful disposition. They can see no good in anything done by certain persons, and so they grumble and growl until the discontent of their spirit is woven into their face, and that becomes a picture to study. It is a perpetual proclamation of pugnacity and acerbity. A crab apple does not more truly tell of its sourness than such a face of its wickedness. Ah! me! the crooked and deep lines!

Spurgeon somewhere tells of a man who was deeply affected by a sermon preached by a godly minister, but from whose mind all conviction and concern was brushed away by hearing two deacons tearing the sermon to pieces. They held it up to ridicule, and as they did so the man was made to believe there was nothing in it. This is not a small sin. It is resisting the Holy Ghost, sinning against the Holy Ghost.

In the manifold intercourse of human life no duty is more urgent and imperative than this—the bridling of the tongue. And this prayer of an Old Testament saint may be offered every day with the best effect: "Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth: keep the door of my lips." That places confidence where it will always be respected, and from whence it shall receive the greatest help. They that in their difficult duty trust in Him shall never be confounded or put to shame. It is by reliance upon His grace alone that we are able to put silken bands upon our unruly member. Then shall we be able to do this

Give every man thine ear, but few thy voice;
Take each man's censure, but reserve the judgment.

CONSTITUTION OF THE TORONTO PRESBYTERIAN SABBATH SCHOOL UNION.

ARTICLE 1.—NAME.

The name of this Association shall be "The Toronto Presbyterian Sabbath School Union."

ARTICLE 2.—OBJECTS.

Its objects shall be, by mutual study, consultation, prayer and co-operation to render this department of the Church's work more efficient as a means of saving souls and advancing the Redeemer's kingdom and glory.

ARTICLE 3.—METHODS AND POWERS.

Amongst other methods for accomplishing these objects it shall be competent for the Union:

- (1) To institute a reference library for its members and make necessary rules for its control.
- (2) To appoint and instruct committees for the careful selection of suitable books and periodicals for use in Sabbath schools, and issue a catalogue of the same; to draft a simple Constitution for the guidance of Sabbath School Associations in our schools, or for any other business that may be overtaken best in that way.
- (3) To co-operate with congregations or the Presbytery in the establishment of new schools in needy centres of the city, or the suburbs of the same, or in finding workers and other aids where these may be needed.

ARTICLE 4.—MEMBERSHIP.

All Presbyterian Sabbath school workers, pastors, superintendents, assistants and honorary superintendents, secretaries and treasurers and their assistants, librarians and their assistants, and all teachers in such schools who shall comply with the terms laid down for membership shall constitute the

Union. All Sabbath school workers in any school shall become members of the Union when that school has paid an annual fee to the treasurer of the Union.

ARTICLE 5.—SECTIONS.

The Union may be divided into Sections of Superintendents, Secretaries, Treasurers, Librarians, Bible-class Teachers, Intermediate Class Teachers and Primary Teachers.

ARTICLE 6.—OFFICERS.

The Union shall at its annual meeting, to be held on the first Friday in January in each year (or on any other day fixed by a majority at any regular meeting when notice of motion has been previously given), elect by ballot a president, two vice-presidents, secretary, assistant-secretary and treasurer; also five persons to be associated with these as an Executive Committee, of whom five shall be a quorum. Any vacancy in such Executive Committee occurring during the year shall be filled in the same way, on due notice.

ARTICLE 7.—SECTIONS.

When it is desired to form a Section, the president of the Union shall call a meeting for that purpose by giving due notice, through superintendents, to all members who shall constitute that Section, and a majority of all such members of the Union may organize such Section by electing a chairman, secretary and treasurer.

ARTICLE 8.—SECTIONS.

When such section is formed it shall hold special meetings as occasion may arise, to consider matters of special interest and utility in its department of work; and it shall be the duty of all such sections to present to the Union, annually or oftener, if so required, a summary of its operations.

ARTICLE 9.—MEETINGS.

The Union shall hold monthly meetings on the first Friday of each month, at such place or places as the Executive shall arrange for, except during June, July and August, and may arrange to meet oftener. At the annual meeting reports of officers shall be presented and a general view of operations given. At these meetings social worship, interchange of thought, experience and methods, addresses on important subjects connected with Sabbath school work, Normal class or Institute drill, intercommunication respecting removals, special cases, etc., shall receive attention at the discretion of the Union and under the direction of the Executive.

ARTICLE 10.—DUTIES OF OFFICERS.

The duty of president, secretary and other officers, and the conduct of meetings and other operations, where not otherwise defined, shall be limited by the ordinary rules for the guidance of officers, meetings and operations laid down in kindred organizations.

ARTICLE 11.—ALTERATIONS.

It shall be competent by a two-thirds vote of the members present at any regular meeting to alter this constitution, if notice shall have been given at the preceding regular meeting of such alteration.

OBEDIENCE.

The spirit of obedience to His Father's will gave direction to our Lord's whole life and work; it was an active and governing principle throughout his entire history. We cannot think of a time or point to an occasion when He was not directly under its impulse and guidance. It was not in the season of youth, when, at the request of His parents, He left His Father's house, where He found it a joy to be, went down to Nazareth, and was subject unto them. Nor was it at the commencement of His public ministry, when, if on any occasion He might have manifested a spirit of reluctance, He suffered Himself to be led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. Neither was it in the Garden of Gethsemane, when His soul was exceeding sorrowful even unto death, and he prayed,—"O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass away from Me: nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt." From first to last; from Bethlehem's manger to Calvary's cross, He lived in perfect submission to His Father's will, so that He could always say, "I seek not Mine own will, but the will of him that sent Me."

In like manner obedience is a test of discipleship applied by our Lord to His followers. "Ye are My friends, if ye do the things which I command you;" and wherever the Spirit of Christ dwells in a man it will manifest itself in obedience to His will. It is true that in striving after this spirit of perfect surrender our best efforts fail of complete success, just as the youth commits many mistakes in the course of his education, or the traveller often slips his foot and suffers occasional falls in climbing an Alpine peak. But education of any kind, and especially that conducted by the Divine Spirit, whose mission is to lead into all truth, is for the purpose of correcting error and guiding to a perfect life; and where there is a willingness to be taught, and a disposition to learn, "it is acceptable according as a man hath, not according as he hath not." This is a merciful provision of the all-perfect one to meet the case of men encompassed with moral weakness and spiritual infirmity. Measured by the perfect law of God, which demands holiness in thought, word and deed, all come short. Not a day passes without our will being placed in more or less direct opposition to the Divine will, and upon no action can "perfection" be inscribed. But as in human affairs the motive determines the character of the action, so the desire to obey, as exhibited in an honest and earnest endeavour to live a God-honouring life, is regarded with favour by the eye of heaven.

A submissive will is what we must possess to follow Christ fully. It is this which constitutes the radical distinction between the obedience of morality and the obedience of faith. The moralist obeys not so much from principle as from policy; he does not keep the law of God because he loves it, but because he fears its penalties. Were he satisfied that disobedience would be as profitable, and as free from hurtful consequences as obedience, it is to be feared that his life would flow in a different channel from what it does. Apart from love to God the Spirit of true obedience cannot exist. The mind of Christ must be possessed before His life can be imitated. Only as men come under His power, do His laws become their delight. Only as they are ruled by His Spirit do they exhibit a life of holy obedience—loving what He loves, hating what He hates, and cheerfully doing what he commands. Thus only can they say:

Our wills are ours, we know not how;
Our wills are ours, to make them thine.

—Rev. George Rat, M.A., in U. P. Magazine.