

SIGNS OF SPIRITUAL DECLINE.

1. WHEN you are averse to religious conversation or the company of the heavenly-minded Christians.
2. When from preference, and without necessity, you absent yourself from religious services.
3. When you are more concerned about pacifying conscience than honouring Christ in performing duty.
4. When you are more afraid of being counted over-strict than of dishonouring Christ.
5. When you trifle with temptation, or think lightly of sin.
6. When the faults of others are more a matter of censorious conversation than of secret grief and prayer.
7. When you are impatient and unforgiving towards the faults of others.
8. When you confess, but do not forsake sin; and when you acknowledge, but still neglect duty.
9. When your cheerfulness has more of the levity of the unregenerate than the holy joy of the children of God.
10. When you shrink from self-examination.
11. When the sorrows and cares of the world follow you further into the Sabbath than the savour and sanctity of the Sabbath follow you into the week.
12. When you are easily prevailed upon to let your duty as a Christian yield to your worldly interest or the opinions of your neighbours.
13. When you associate with men of the world without solicitude of doing good, or having your own spiritual life injured.

CUNNING OF A FOX.

SOME fishermen on the west coast of Ireland were in the habit of going to a small island, a few hundred yards from the main land, in quest of bait. The island was inhabited by a large number of rabbits, and could be reached at low tide by wading, the water there being only a few inches deep.

One morning they went in their boat quite early, it being high tide, and on landing saw a dead fox lying on the beach. The fur of the animal was all bedraggled, and he seemed to have been drowned. One of the men remarking that his skin was worth something, pitched him into the boat.

Procuring their bait they returned to the main land, and the man who had possessed himself of the fox seized him by the tail and flung him on shore. As soon as the animal struck the beach he picked himself up with considerable agility for a dead fox, and shot off like a flash up among the cliffs, while the men stood staring at each other in mute astonishment.

The men concluded that he had crossed over to the island during the night, when the tide was low, in search of rabbits, and finding in the morning that he was cut off from the main land, counterfeited death, with the expectation of thereby procuring a passage to the shore in the boat, an expectation which was fully realized.

SETTLED FOR EVER.

SOME persons are always confessing, and reconfessing, repenting, and re-repenting, and never can look upon any of their religious experience as a settled and accomplished fact. A writer represents a minister to whom a deacon told over his tale of perpetual dolour, as saying:

"Deacon, I remember your son stoutly rebelled against your authority some time ago, but afterwards felt sorry, and repented of his sin, and humbly asked your forgiveness. Did you forgive him?"

"Of course I did."

"What did you forgive him for?"

"Because I could not help it when I saw how sorry he was."

"And does he still ask forgiveness?"

"No—no! Nothing is said about it. It is all settled for ever."

"Now, do you believe that you can be better to your father than God is to you? He pardons like a father."

It is easy for a father to forgive his erring son. And sin once forgiven is settled for ever between them. If the wanderer should come every day asking forgiveness for what was already forgiven, and pleading for mercy when mercy had already been shewn, would not feel both injured and insulted?

When the prodigal son had worn the best raiment, and eaten the fatted calf, and had received such tokens of his father's pitying and accepting love, would it have been fitting for him to plead with tears for forgiveness and acceptance? Would not every petition have been a proof that he doubted his father's sincerity, and disbelieved his words of loving welcome? What excuse could he have made for thus marring the joyousness of that festal hour in which the father said, "This my son was dead and is alive again, was lost and is found?" Would it have been fitting in him to have refused a place at the feast because he was

unworthy, or to have hidden away in some corner, in shame and tears, while his father's heart was glowing with affection for his repentant son?

Children's Department.

LITTLE TEMPLES.

"Ye are the temples of God."

Jesus, can a child like me
Thine own living temple be?

Yes, Thy Spirit day by day
In my heart will deign to stay.

Then that heart must ever be
A fit dwelling-place for Thee.

Naughty tempers, thoughts of sin,
These things must not enter in.

But a temple is a place
Built for constant prayer and praise,

And the teaching of Thy Word;
Am I such a temple, Lord?

Yes, if all I do and say,
In my work and in my play,

Shall be gentle, true, and right,
Pleasing in Thy holy sight.

Help me, Lord, for I am weak;
Make me hear when Thou dost speak.

Cleanse my heart from every sin.
Make me beautiful within.

May Thy presence from above
Fill my heart with holy love.

Then shall those about me see
That the Saviour dwells in me.

"IF I SHOULD DIE BEFORE I WAKE."

"MOTHER, every night when I go to bed I say, 'Now I lay me;' and do you know, mamma, though saying it so often, I never thought what it meant until Fanny Gray died? I asked nurse if Fanny died before she waked, and she said, 'Yes she went to bed well, and had a spasm in the night, and died before she knew anything at all.' 'Now, mother,' continued Rena, 'I want you to tell me about 'Now I lay me,' so that when I say it I may think what it means.'"

"Well, Rena," said her mother, "I shall be glad to tell you. What does it mean when you say, 'Now I lay me down to sleep?'"

"Oh! that means, mother, that I am just going to lie down in my bed, to go to sleep till morning."

"Well, then, as you lie down to sleep what prayer do you offer to God?"

"I pray the Lord my soul to keep. I want the Lord to take care of my soul while I am asleep, and take care of me all over, mother. But, mother, if I should die before I wake, would the Lord be taking care of me then? Now, it seems to me when Fanny died that God did not take care of her that night, and so she died."

"O no, Rena! God did take care of her. The little verse says, 'If I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take;' so you see God took little Fanny's soul to Himself; and when she woke she was in the arms of the blessed Jesus. Now, Rena, when you say, 'Now I lay me,' I want you to think in this way: 'Now I am going to bed and to sleep, and I want the Lord to take care of me. If I am not a good child, and do not pray to God, ought I to ask Him or expect Him to take care of me? Let me lie down feeling that I am in the Lord's care, and if I should die before I wake, that still I am the Lord's child; and I pray that He may take my soul to dwell with Him.'"

"O, mother! I will try and remember. Why, I used to say it slow, and clasp my hands, and shut my eyes, and yet I did not think about it. Thank you, mother dear. Please hear me to-night when I go to say my prayers."

Ah, little children, are there not a great many, who, like Rena, say their prayers without thinking what they mean—mere words, with no meaning in

them? God cannot listen to such prayers. They are not for Him "unto whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid." Think of what I have written about little Rena when you say, "Now I lay me," to-night; and pray that God will watch over you, waking and sleeping.

ZIP COON.

Did you ever see a raccoon? I am going to tell you about one that was sent from the South as a present to a lady whose name was Isabella. He was called Zip Coon, and a very wise coon he was. Zip had a long, low body, covered with a yellowish hair. His nose was pointed, and his eyes were bright as buttons. His paws were regular little hands, and he used them just like hands. He was very tame; he would climb up on Isabella's chair, and scramble to her shoulder. Then he would comb her hair with his fingers, pick at her ear-rings, and feel her collar and pin and buttons. Isabella's mother was quite ill, but sometimes was able to sit in her chair and eat her dinner from a tray on her lap. She liked to have Zip in her room; but, if left alone with her, Zip would jump up on the chair behind her, and try to crowd her off. He would reach round, too, under her arms, and steal things from her tray. Once the cook in the kitchen heard a brisk rattling of tin pans in the pantry. She opened the door, and there on the shelf was Zip. There were two pans standing side by side. One had Indian meal in it, and the other nice sweet milk. In front of the pans stood Zippy. He had scooped the meal from one pan into the milk in the other pan, and was stirring up a pudding with all his might. He looked over his shoulder when he heard the cook coming up behind, and worked away all the faster, as if to get the pudding done before he was snatched up and put out of the pantry.

Zip was very neat and clean. He loved to have a bowl of water and piece of soap set down for his own use. He would take the soap in his hands, dip it into the water and rub it between his palms; then he would reach all round his body and wash himself. It was very funny to see him reach way round and wash his back. One day, Isabella, not feeling well, was lying on her bed. Zippy was playing around her in his usual way. Pretty soon he ran under the bed, and was busy a long while reaching up, and pulling and picking at the slats over his head. By and by he crawled out; and what do you think he had between his teeth? A pretty little red coral ear-ring that Isabella had lost several weeks before. Zip's bright eyes had spied it as he was playing round under the bed. So you see Zip Coon did some good that time. When Zip grew older, he became so cross and snappish that he had to be chained up in the woodshed in front of his little house. On the door of his house was printed in red letters, "Zip Coon; he bites."

MUST.

A PAPER of Instructions, with regard to "Her Majesty's Journey," contains minute directions about the duties of various persons, and ends with the following "Note:"—"Station Masters and Heads of Departments must hand a copy of this Notice to every person interested, who must read it carefully, and act up to and obey the instructions. No excuse of want of knowledge of these instructions can be admitted for any failure or neglect of duty."

Here are several things that "must" be done:—

1. Those in authority *must* with their own hands deliver the authorized documents to each person whom it concerns.
2. Every person who gets a copy *must* read it, and *must* read it carefully.
3. Every person, having read his instructions, *must* act up to and obey them.
4. Every person *must* be held responsible in case of failure to act up to the instructions, or neglect to obey them.
5. Every person *must* know the meaning of the instructions.

A useful lesson for those who can see its meaning

1. Take care you get your instructions about religion from persons who have authority from God to guide your soul.

2. "Read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest" the words of eternal life.

3. Be not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work.

4. You must answer for yourself at the last: "we *must* all stand before the judgment seat of Christ."

5. You will be "without excuse" if you neglect to know God's will and to do it.

One lesson—the sum of it all—Do not make excuses. For when God calls, no other voice should be heard. It is not a question of convenience or choice: you *must*.