

Selections.

DEFAMATION AND BACKBITING.

That of which I have spoken may be called moral lying, as contradistinguished from that kind of lying which I shall now proceed to mention, whereof if we are guilty, we subject ourselves not only to the penalties of religion in the next world, but also to the penalties of man in this world. The first of this kind of lying is slander. The motive which suggests it is, sometimes hatred, sometimes vanity. If it be hatred, it then falls under my division of an active lie,—a lie which is to affect others; if it be vanity, it falls under my division of a reflexible lie,—a lie whose fruits are to rebound upon ourselves. Both of them, however, in some cases, may be found operating together, and they are classed together by the general precept of the ninth commandment, "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour." If this false witness be borne by words only, it comes under the name of "defamation," or, in Scripture, "backbiting;" if by writing, it is called in the English law, "libel." Defamation and libels are punished in our courts of law by legal process—sometimes in the temporal courts, sometimes in the spiritual or Church courts. If money is sought, or other compensation in worldly things, the defamation is tried by the temporal courts; but if it be taken as a religious sin, then it is emphatically said to be tried "*pro salute animæ*"—for the "salvation of the soul;"—and he that is found guilty of the sin, is subjected to penance or excommunication, in order to bring him to repentance and a better mind. Putting aside, however, the law, as an inferior consideration to the Christian, and looking rather to things spiritual, let me set before you the common things which are done among us, which, rightly understood, are violations of the ninth commandment. The calling of names; the invention of stories; even reporting things which are true, if injurious to the reputation—and much more if untrue; aggravations of what is wrong; diminution of what is right; imputing what is good and praiseworthy to bad motives, in order to detract; insinuations, hints, or innuendoes, by which those with whom we converse may be led to suspect evil, though we are careful not to specify it; drawing forth into the light things which charity would rather hide; arguing from one or two suspicious circumstances, that the whole character is bad, and so proclaiming it; or where the general character is bad, and accidentally some good arises, in order that the bad may prevail, omitting to speak of it. These faults are developed in such vile customs as the following:—

- I. Writing anonymous letters.
- II. Writing letters of abuse to newspapers, and concealing your name.
- III. Writing pamphlets of abuse in which the author's name is hidden.
- IV. Making speeches before the public, as at the hustings or other public places, wherein party spirit is sure to prevail.
- V. Gossiping in public parties, and talking over your neighbours' affairs, by the rich in their drawing-rooms, by the poor in the kitchen or the hall.

All these are the ways of slander. They do injury on every side—to our neighbours, to ourselves, to society at large, to religion, to God. Sometimes they arise out of a merely talkative and interfering spirit; and though we do not intend to wound another, yet we really do so, by the mere want of a due government of the tongue, and the habit of being "busybodies." And "vanity," as I said before, is not without its place in this sin, though perhaps utterly unperceived by ourselves. "There is perpetually," says Bishop Butler, "and often it is not attended to, a rivalry amongst people, of one kind or another, in respect to wit, beauty, learning, fortune, and that one thing will incessantly influence them to speak to the disadvantage of others, even when there is no formal malice or ill design." The root of the matter is, that we must govern the tongue; for, as St. James says, "It is a fire, a world of iniquity, it defileth the whole body, setteth on fire the course of nature, and is itself set on fire of hell." (St. James iii. 6.) Suffer me to give you the following ruler, so that you keep your tongue and your ears, as well as your mind, free from this sin:—

- I. Never talk of your neighbours' affairs, or canvass their characters.
 - II. Never write an anonymous letter, or read one when sent to you.
 - III. Shun a tale-bearer.
- St. Paul well describes the mischief of a tale-bearer. "And withal they learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house, and not only idle, but tattlers also, and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not,"

And "backbiting" is set down by the same Apostle among those most deadly sins, either because it produces them or flows out of them. He mentions it in his description of the wretched state of the heathen world:—"Being filled with all unrighteousness . . . full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity." "*Whisperers, backbiters.*" Remember this denouncement, and wind it up by considering the sixteenth Psalm.—"Lord, who shall abide in Thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in Thy holy hills? He that walketh uprightly and worketh righteously, and speaketh the truth in his heart; he that backbiteth not with his tongue."

Of course it follows, that if lying by slander and defamation be punishable by the law, much more so must be perjury. In perjury we come close upon the confines of God Himself. Perjury is the most outrageous kind of lie, because it is deliberate and audacious. Other kinds may be accidental, may be momentary, may be temptations, which spring up we know not how; but perjury adds to all, this great fact, that we deliberately call God to come down from heaven and witness our lie. Paley says, "Perjury is a sin of greater deliberation. The juror has the thought of God and religion upon his mind at the same time. He offends therefore with a high hand; in the face, that is, and in defiance of the sanctions of religion. His offence implies a disbelief or contempt of God's knowledge, power, and justice, which cannot be said of a lie, where there is nothing to carry the mind to any reflection upon the Deity, or the divine attributes, at all. Perjury violates a superior confidence; mankind must trust to one another, and they have nothing to trust to than one another's oath; hence legal adjudications, which govern and affect every right and interest on this side the grave, of necessity proceed and depend upon oaths. Perjury, therefore, in its general consequence, strikes at the security of reputation, property, and even life itself. A lie cannot do the same mischief, because the same credit is not given to it." But however this distinction be made between false oaths and common lying, let us remember that it is a definition depending only upon the law. It is a legal, not a moral distinction; for if even the most trifling deviation from truth be a moral sin and acknowledged to be wrong, the greater deviations will follow on the same principle—not regarding the fact of one being punishable and the other not—but regarding Him in whose eyes the soul which is guilty of either is an abomination.—*Bennet's Letters.*

AURORA BOREALIS.—At the late meeting in Glasgow of the British Association for the advancement of science, Admiral Sir John Ross read the following paper:—"The communication I had the honor of making to the 'British Association for the Advancement of Science' at Belfast, on the interesting subject of the Aurora Borealis, being verbal, and therefore not entitled to a notice in the Association's valuable transactions of that period; but having subsequently repeated the experiments I then verbally mentioned, I can now confidently lay the account of them before the public, trusting that, when taken into consideration, they will be found corroborative of the theory which I published in the year 1819, and which led to a controversy that shall be hereafter mentioned. It having occurred to me that if my theory was true, namely, 'That the phenomena of the Aurora Borealis were occasioned by the action of the sun, when below the pole, on the surrounding masses of colored ice, by its rays being reflected from the points of incidence to clouds above the pole, which were before invisible,' the phenomena might be artificially produced: to accomplish this I placed a powerful lamp, to represent the sun, having a lens, at the focal distance of which I placed a rectified terrestrial globe, on which bruised glass of the various colours we had seen in Baffin's Bay was placed, to represent the coloured icebergs we had seen in that locality, while the space between Greenland and Spitzbergen was too blank to represent the sea. To represent the clouds above the pole which were to receive the refracted rays, I applied a hot iron to a sponge, and, by giving the globe a regular diurnal motion, I produced the phenomena called 'The Merry Dancers,' and every other appearance, exactly as seen in the natural sky, while it disappeared as the globe turned, as being the part representing the sea to the points of incidence. In corroboration of my theory, I have to remark that, during my last voyage to the Arctic Regions, (1850-1) we never among the numerous icebergs, saw that any were coloured, but all were a yellowish white; and, during the following winter, the Aurora was exactly the same colour; and, when that part of the globe was covered with bruised glass of that colour, the phenomena produced in my experiment was the same, as

was also the Aurora Australis, in the Antarctic regions, where no coloured icebergs were ever seen. The controversy to which I have alluded was between the celebrated Professor Schumacher, of Altona, who supported my theory, and the no less distinguished Monsieur Arago, who having opposed it, sent Monsieur Giscard Martens, and another to Hammerfest, on purpose to observe the Aurora and decide the question. I saw them at Stockholm on their return, when they told me their observations tended to confirm my theory; but their report being unfavourable to the expectations of Monsieur Arago, it was never published; neither was the correspondence between the two professors, owing to the lamented death of Professor Schumacher. I regret that it is out of my power to exhibit the experiments I have described, owing to the peculiar manner in which the room must be darkened, even if I had the necessary apparatus with me; but it is an experiment so simple that it can easily be accomplished by any person interested in the beautiful phenomena of the Aurora Borealis."

The veteran discoverer was warmly applauded.

HUMBOLDT.—On the 14th of September, Alexander von Humboldt celebrated his eighty-sixth birthday. His activity is said to seem as if inspired by youthful vigour; and he still continues to labour at his literary and scientific avocations, "with incredible force and endurance." So good in his health and in such excellent spirits does he seem, that hopes are entertained that he will still be for years to come the living leader of science, and still give valuable contributions to the treasures of knowledge. The extreme age of Humboldt, and his excellent health, afford a striking confirmation of the theory that nothing is so conducive to longevity as moderate activity in congenial pursuits. Let those whose callings are not of a nature to wear the soul, or who have no occasion to be particularly vexed or worried unless they choose to take example from Humboldt, and seek in a serene temper, and in constant, but not difficult and wearying activity, that health and happiness which cannot be derived from any other source.—*New York Abend Zeitung.*

UNGODLY MARRIAGES.

"Be not unequally yoked."

This was the particular sin for which God drowned the old world.

Some of Lot's daughters married in Sodom, and perished in the overthrow.

Both Ishmael and Esau married irreligiously, and were both rejected and turned persecutors.

The first blasphemer that was stoned by God's command is marked as an offspring of one of these marriages—his mother had espoused an Egyptian.

The first captivity of the Jews after their settlement in the Holy Land, is ascribed to this cause. The whole passage is very instructive. It is said that the remains of the nations were to prove Israel to know whether they would hearken unto the commandments of the Lord which he commanded their fathers by the hand of Moses. And the children of Israel dwelt among the Canaanites, and Hittites, and Amorites, and Perizzites, and Hivites, and Jebusites; and they took their daughters to be their wives, and gave their daughters to their sons, and served their Gods. And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord and forgot the Lord their God, and served Baalim and the groves; therefore, the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel, and he sold them into the hand of Chusan-rishathaim, king of Mesopotamia; and the children of Israel served Chusan-rishathaim eight years.

David married the daughter of Talmi, king of Geshur, by whom he had Absalom—the disgrace and curse of his family.

The fate of Solomon is a warning to all ages.

His son Rehoboam, that lost the ten tribes, sprang from one of these forbidden marriages—his mother was an Ammonitess.

The marriage of Ahab is thus awfully noticed; "And it came to pass, as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, that he took to wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Zidonians, and went and served Baal and worshipped him. But there was none like unto Ahab, who did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the Lord whom Jezebel his wife stirred up."

What was it that Ezra so grievously lamented, and so sharply reproveth? It was, that the holy seed had mingled themselves with the people of the land.

And what says the zealous reformer Nehemiah? Their children speak half in the speech of Ashdod, and could not speak in the Jews' language, but according to the speech of each people.—And I cursed them and smote certain of them, and plucked off their hair,