

MODERN EPHRAIMITES.

SHORT SERMON BY W. H. ALI-WORTH, PARIS, ONT.

The children of Ephraim being armed, and carrying bows, turned back in the day of battle.—Psalm lxxviii. 9.

True courage commends itself to all. There is a sham courage, which wastes itself in words, shows itself on parade, and carrying arms in times of peace. The children of Ephraim were great soldiers in their way; they were fine on drill; being armed, and carrying bows—the instruments of warfare in their day—their parade was imposing.

Probably they were great talkers, about what they would do, how they would fight. But the time came when all their courage was needed,—the day of battle. It was not found when it was wanted. They "turned back in the day of battle."

Some people's religion is like a paper umbrella, good enough to look at, when it is not wanted, but of no manner of use in a thunder shower.

A painted fire is good enough when the thermometer is at 90, but it is of no practical value in cold weather.

Smith was an Ephraimite. He was a great temperance man, at the temperance meeting. He signed the pledge, and cheered the speakers. He denounced all drinking usages. But the day of trial came. He went from home; was asked to drink in company; all his temperance courage fled. His principles were good enough for show, but no good for use.

Jones was an Ephraimite. He thought he was converted, professed Christ, joined a church, was a most zealous Christian, till the day of trial came. There was a chance for making a large sum of money by a little fraud and slightly warping the truth. It was Jones' first trial, and his religion collapsed before it like a soap bubble.

Johnson too was an Ephraimite. He was a bold professor, and talked religion by the hour. With him it was: "We ought to do this," and "we ought to do that." He was very severe on what he termed weak-kneed Christians. He was not ashamed of his religion, not he, he said; he wore the heavenly panoply and was proud of his armour. He spoke at the fellowship meeting about the sword of the spirit, the helmet of salvation, and the shield of faith. You would have thought he was a hero—one of David's first three mighty men—but he did not know the day of battle was so near. The next day he was invited into worldly company, a little above him in position; he forgot his religion and denied his Lord. His wife invited a worldly companion to be their guest; they were ashamed to read the Bible, and have family prayer before her. The next day a party of worldlings were invited, out of respect for the guest. At the party, no respect was had for Christ. He was unceremoniously dropped out. Johnson did not fall in the fight of faith. He never even grappled with the enemy, but like the children of Ephraim turned back in the day of battle.

Jamieson and his wife were of the same tribe. Both were said to be very religious. They were great talkers. "Battling for the Lord," was their favourite song. But, like the descendants of Ephraim, they would not fight. They were weak as children in the hour of temptation. When requested to teach the young, visit the sick, assist the poor, or give to the cause of Christ, or do anything involving a fight with self, they turned back; they did not believe in that sort of religion. If they owed anything to God, of which they seemed to have some doubt, they hoped he would take it out in prayer and profession, as that suited them better. They were fine on parade, but no good in the day of battle. They belonged to the Mollusca class, soft and flabby.

If there is anything needed, more than another, in the present day, it is Christians with back bone, that can stand up before the enemy, and work and fight, as well as speak and sing, for Christ.

Turning back in the day of battle is cowardly, and traitorous. All such will be found at the head of the list of those who partake of the second death—Rev. xxi. 8.

BE FRANK WITH THE MINISTER.

"It is too bad." "What can we do about it?" "Can't do anything." "Speak to him, some one." "Who?" "Never would do in the world." "Would make a church row." "Well, it's too bad."

There was a little group before the church door, discussing some church question with very unaccustomed earnestness. The question was this:—

Our service opens with the long metre doxology, followed by an invocation. The parson, who is a universal favourite, then proceeds to find the morning lesson, which occupies but a moment. Belated worshippers, who have piously remained in the vestibule during the prayer, and of whom unhappily we have many in our country congregation, now begin to pour in, and "trouble begins." The minister, having found the lesson, stops, looks seriously—and some of us, if we are a little late, think severely—along down the aisles and waits, while the uninstructed in church proprieties turn to stare at the late comers and smile at the loud creak of the Sunday boots, and with confused haste seats are found and the service proceeds; the feelings of the minister and many of his flock ill-suited to the occasion, if facial expressions are any criteria by which to form a judgment.

The interruption had been larger and the interruption longer than usual that morning; and the dormant feeling had been fanned into quite a little flame by the fact that among the late comers was one wealthy family who had lately moved into the neighbourhood, whom our church is very desirous to secure, and who somebody said that somebody else said, that somebody else had heard, that some one else thought was mortally offended and would never come to church again.

"Sh!" said some one, "here comes the parson now."

The deacon and I had been standing on the inner edge of the little circle looking on. The deacon, silent hitherto, spoke up. "Hullo! Parson," said he, "look here a moment. We're discussing you."

I wish you could have seen the electricity gleam from the many eyes at the delightfully unconscious deacon, and the red flush mantle the faces; but the deacon had caught the crowd. If he had had a net and they were all fishes he could not have done it more effectually.

"Well," said the parson, coming up good-naturedly to the group, and greeting them all with one general and comprehensive smile. "What about me?"

"We don't like your way of conducting the service," said the deacon.

"Now, hold on, Deacon," said Mr. Greer. "Speak for yourself, please. I do like the parson's way of conducting the service. I care more for his service even than for his sermon; I often receive enough good from his prayers and his reading of a hymn to well repay me for coming to church."

There were several murmurs of assent, and the parson's face which had been suddenly clouded at the deacon's broad statement, as suddenly lightened again.

The deacon is a strategist; by his second sentence he had set the group to defending the parson.

"Well," said the deacon. "I will speak for myself: there is one thing we don't like about your conduct in the service."

"That is not quite so serious," said the parson. "What is it? Perhaps it can be remedied."

"Well," said the deacon, "a few of our people are sometimes a little late to church."

"A few of them?" echoed Mr. Greer. "Half the congregation."

"And instead of going on with the service you stop and wait for them all to get their seats."

"While we look round to see who they are, and how they are dressed, and what seats they are going into," said Mr. Greer.

"Seems to me," said the parson, good-humouredly, "that is your part of the conduct of the service."

"Now," said the deacon, "it seems to us that it

would be a great deal better for you to pay no attention to them, but go right on with the service."

"Why Deacon," said the parson, "it would be a positive profanation for me to read the Bible labouring all the time to drown"—here the parson looked stealthily around—"the creaking of Mr. Wheaton's boots, and the rustling of his daughter's silks; and they never come in till after the invocation."

"But consider," said the deacon, "your congregation. We could by an effort listen to you instead of the boots and the silks; but you give us nothing to listen to. And by the time the irruption of the—

the —"

"Goths and Vandals," said a prompter in the crowd.

"Is over," continued the deacon; "we might just as well not have had any doxology or invocation, for any effect that is left on our minds."

"I remember that Mr. Moody," said the timid voice of Mrs. Hardcap, "used always to give out a hymn and have the congregation singing when the doors were opened to admit the crowd. He was criticised for it once; and he replied that if he were once to let the audience get looking after the late-comers, it would take him ten minutes to get them back again."

"That is a good idea," said the parson. "We might do that."

"Then, another thing, Parson," said the deacon. "To be frank with you, you set us a bad example."

"I!" said the parson, more amazed than ever before.

"Yes," said the deacon, very serenely; "by your inattention during prayer."

"Why, Deacon, you amaze me!" said the parson. And he evidently amazed everyone else too.

"Yes," said the deacon; "this morning when we were singing 'Rock of Ages, cleft for me,' and if that is not a prayer I do not know what is, you came down out of the pulpit, walked down to my pew for a consultation with me—a very necessary matter, I know; but still it was a consultation during prayer-time and half the congregation were looking on and wondering what we were thinking about—and then you went back and took out your pencil and wrote something, I suppose some notes on your sermon, during the rest of the hymn. That's a bad example, Parson, for the rest of us."

"Well, Deacon, you're right," said the parson; "I never thought of it before, and I'm obliged to you. And as to the other matter," continued he, after a moment's pause, "I will see the chorister and try and arrange to follow Mr. Moody's plan."

"And I," said the deacon, "will see Mr. Wheaton and ask him if he can't get to church five minutes earlier. He never is five minutes late to the train; I wonder if his watch always oversleeps itself Sunday."

As the parson moved away to join his wife, who was waiting for him, the group turned on the deacon.

"How could you do such a thing, Deacon," they said with one voice. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself. What will the parson think!"

"My friends," said the deacon, "my father was a minister; and I know ministers pretty well. They don't like to be criticised any more than other men. But they can take it kindly—decidedly better than the average of men. The unkind thing to a minister is to let a little criticism grow into a great dissatisfaction without letting him know anything about it. The kind thing is to be frank. The parson will be much obliged to us all; much more obliged than if we had grumbled behind his back and kept silent before his face or than if we had appointed a delegation to wait upon him, as though he were a prime minister and we were his humble constituency."—*Laius, in Christian Union.*

THE richer one is in moral excellence, the nobler should he appear in kind consideration for all around him. Penuriousness and selfishness would bedim all his virtues, as rust will destroy the lustre of the most brilliant metal.—*Heubner.*