

4. How easy it is to find excuses for sin, and to lay the blame on others, or on circumstances, or even on Providence, as did Aaron!

5. Sin shall be punished severely. The slaughter of the idolaters was but a faint picture of the everlasting destruction from the presence of God which will follow wrong doing.

English Teacher's Notes.

I REMEMBER a poor lad almost destitute, and weakly from lack of nourishing food, so that he could get no remunerative work, for whom a friend interested and bestirred herself until arrangements were made for his emigration. The money was in hand for his outfit, and friendly care had been secured for him after he had crossed the Atlantic. The lad had expressed himself well pleased with the prospect, and the day was fixed for him to present himself. But when the time arrived he was wanting and could not be found. He was hiding himself in the slums of London, and the party of emigrants started without him. He lost a fine chance of being cared for and comfortably started in life. What was the reason? It was just want of faith. He did not believe that those who made the arrangements were desirous of his best welfare. He did not believe he should be well treated. He did not believe he should be better off than he was before. He would not launch into an invisible future. And so he brought disappointment on those who had befriended him, and loss upon himself.

Our passage for to-day shows us a similar mistake, not by an individual, but by the mass of the people of Israel. Every possible provision had been made for them by divine love. They had been taken into covenant with Jehovah and had promised to serve him. He had promised to be their God and to take them for his peculiar treasure, to supply all their wants, and bring them through the wilderness to a good land of their own. For forty days Moses had been on the mount, receiving instructions how to prepare for Jehovah's dwelling among them. Chap. 25. 8. And at length he came down, carrying in his hand the "tables of the covenant," (Deut. 9. 11; Heb. 9. 4.), written "with the finger of God" for his chosen people.

And what did he find? Not the apparently willing and grateful and obedient people he had left—not a people ready to receive all the good things God had to bestow on them; but a people gone back into Egyptian idolatry, with all its degrading accessories—the holiness of God forgotten—his commandments forgotten—his promises forgotten—his covenant broken. Although warned by God beforehand (ver. 7, etc.), the sight was so terrible to him in its reality, and seemed so hopeless in its prospects, that he cast out of his hands the precious tables of the covenant and shattered them at the foot of the mount.

Indeed, as far as the people were concerned, the outlook did not appear as hopeless as the case of

the foolish lad mentioned above. How could such a nation ever inherit the promises and fulfill the high vocation to which they had been destined? But "the things that are impossible with men are possible with God." Although this first rebellion was followed by failure after failure, yet in the end the nation was brought into the Promised Land.

But the immediate result to those who sinned was loss and judgment, the judicial slaying of three thousand, the visitation of the plague, universal mourning, and therefore Paul warns us by their example to "flee from idolatry." 1 Cor. 10. 14. And John, knowing that similar temptations to theirs beset the children of God, adds the warning contained in our Golden Text. "Little children, keep yourselves from idols."

How was it that this terrible fall came about? It was through failure of faith. Notice what they said to Aaron. ver. 23. They felt themselves forsaken. They could not trust an invisible, spiritual, Leader. They did not wish to give up the worship of Jehovah, but they thought they could do better than he had done for them; they could not confide in him and wait his time.

Failure of faith is at the root of all idolatry of our times. But there are many different kinds of idols. One person sets up the opinion of society as his guide or idol; he cannot trust the invisible God to guide him rightly. Another follows his own judgment or his own fancy, without ever asking what God would have him do; he does not believe the invisible God is near enough to care about him. Another must have a fine church and grand music; he can apprehend these things by his senses, and takes the enjoyment of these things for delight in the living God; he does not believe in a personal God who wants his heart.

But God was near when the Israelites thought him far off. He cared enough for them to note all they were doing. And he is near to the very youngest in the class—desiring the love and devotion of that heart, and ready to be the Guide and Keeper of that life. Why should any thing be allowed to usurp his place? "Little children, keep yourselves from idols." Amen.

The Lesson Council.

Question 3. Was the golden calf an Asiatic or Egyptian idol?

That the golden calf was molded after an Egyptian pattern there can be little doubt, as the Israelites, Aaron in particular, were familiar with Egyptian idols and idol-worship. *Muse*, the deity of Heliopolis, was a yellow or gold-colored calf-idol, the image of which was doubtless before the mind of Aaron as he fashioned with a graving tool the jeweled idol for the Israelites. Asiatic idolatry had not corrupted the life or faith of God's people before their arrival at Sinai, and in their despair or rebellion against Moses they sunk to the level of the Egyptian influence from which Moses had been appointed to preserve them. The lingering love of the Israelites all along their journey to Canaan was for Egypt with its idols, its lime-kilns, its mud bus, its degradation of life, its certainty of death. Asia did not corrupt them.—Rev. J. W. Mendenhall, D.D.

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