

Children's Department.

HONEST LABOUR AND TRUTHFULNESS.

AT the time of the late Crimean war we used often to hear of Sinope, a beautiful city in Anatolia, on the southern coast of the Black Sea, inhabited chiefly by Russian noblemen and gentlemen. It is a very ancient city, for we read of it in the third century, when the district around it was called Pontus in Asia Minor. Though Pontus was at a great distance from Jerusalem, yet the good news of the Gospel reached it early. Dwellers in Pontus were witnesses of the descent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, and listened to St. Peter's first sermon. Some of them may have been numbered among the three thousand who were pricked by it to the heart, and were the same day added to the Church; and certainly St. Peter's first Epistle was addressed amongst others to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus. When we add that Aquila was born in Pontus, we shall have brought forward every notice of it in the New Testament.

History gives us few particulars respecting the progress of the Church in this remote district, but we read that, at the beginning of the fourth century, a Christian was living near the gate of Sinope, lowly in station, but eminent for his virtues. His name was Phocas, and by cultivating his garden he not only maintained himself, but earned enough to show hospitality, and to relieve the poor, so that in the city and throughout the neighbourhood he was called "the Charitable Gardener." Many starving beggars, who had asked relief in vain from the rich citizens of Sinope, found a friend in him. He would wash their feet (as the customs of the East required), and give them bread to eat, making known to them at the same time the true bread from heaven and the water of life. Phocas was in one respect less happy than we are; he cannot have had a Bible of his own, for copies of that holy book were in those days rare and costly; nor could he perhaps have read it had he possessed one. But there was a book, also written by the Finger of God, whose pages were ever spread out before him. As the poet truly tells us,—

"There is a book who runs may read,
Which heavenly truth imparts
And all the lore its scholars need,
Pure eyes and Christian hearts.

"The works of God above, below,
Within us and around,
Are pages in that book to show
How God Himself is found."

The heavenly teaching of this book, which we sometimes call the book of nature, was not lost upon Phocas. He led a Christian life of industry and charity, working with his hands the thing that was good, that he might have to give to him that needed.

His native country of Pontus, and indeed the whole of Asia Minor, were at this time subject to Rome, and the head of the Roman Empire was Diocletian, a tyrant so proud and impious that he called himself brother to the sun and moon, and, putting on gold and silver sandals, used to order the people to kiss his feet. In the year 303 this emperor began to issue edicts for the persecution of Christian. First he commanded the churches to be pulled down, and all copies of the Holy Scriptures to be burnt, and then he dismissed from his army all soldiers who would not offer sacrifice to idols. His next step was to imprison all Christian bishops and priests, and, finally, Christians in general were arrested on suspicion, and the choice given them of sacrifice to idols on the one hand, and tortures and death on the other.

When the persecution reached this stage, Phocas was at once impeached as a Christian, and his religion being well known, a trial was not considered necessary. He was, in fact, condemned unheard, and executioners were despatched

from a neighbouring town with orders to kill him on the spot wherever they might find him. These executioners, on arriving at Sinope, were not able to get into the city; the gates were most likely closed for the night, as was the custom in ancient cities, and still is in some foreign countries. Seeing strangers in distress, Phocas opened his doors to them, and at his invitation they thankfully agreed to pass the night under his roof. He prepared them the best supper he could, and so won their confidence that they told him their business at Sinope, and asked him whether he knew this Phocas, and where they should find him. Without betraying any surprise or distress, he replied simply, "I know the man, and will direct you to-morrow where to find him;" and supper being over, he conducted them to their bed-chamber, and went out into his garden to prepare for his approaching end.

The idea of flight does not seem to have presented itself to his mind. He had passed his word to the strangers to show them the man they sought, and doubtless his soul glowed with the thought of laying down his life for his Master. So taking up his spade, the spade by whose help he earned his own bread, and that of the stranger and the poor, he dug himself a grave, and prepared everything for his burial. The rest of the night he spent in making ready for his departure from this world. Sleep he needed not who so soon was to sleep in Jesus. At dawn of day he went to the soldiers, and told them that Phocas was found, and was in their power whenever they pleased to apprehend him. "This is good news," they said, "and we are greatly indebted to you for your diligence in the matter. Tell us now where we may meet this man, that we lose no time in executing the justice of the emperor upon the blasphemer of our gods." "He is in your presence," replied Phocas, "I am the man."

The executioners gazed at him without a word, and as he stood awaiting his death-stroke, they trembled before him. There was a pause, which Phocas broke, first by telling them he was indeed the man they sought, and that he was more ready to suffer death than they were to inflict it. Then, recovering from their astonishment, they fell upon their victim, and struck off his head.

Thus was the simple Christian gardener added to the noble army of martyrs. In later times a church was built at Sinope, perhaps on the site of his garden, and called after his name. His story too was put into verse, and sung by the mariners in the Black Sea, and when it moved them to follow his example and care for the poor, they used to set apart some portion of their gains for them, and call it "Phocas' part." We also in our far-distant island may learn from the gardener of Sinope the lessons set forth in to-day's Epistle,—industry, almsgiving, and truthfulness.

MEMORIAL OF INFANT YEARS.

SOME ACCOUNT OF S. J. W., WRITTEN ON HER FOURTH BIRTHDAY.

THE object of this Paper is to procure some recollections of her infancy, and the proficiency she had already made in the elements of knowledge.

Being a weak and delicate infant, she required much tender care and assiduity on the part of her mother. However, by the good providence of God, she continued comparatively healthy till the Spring of 18—, at which time she began gradually to decline, and remained in a very languishing state during the Summer. At this time our city was suffering from a second visitation of cholera, more dreadful than the first; and numbers were every day swept off; while our dear child still continued to waste away.

This was, indeed, a time of anxiety and trouble, when the most hardened sinner could not fail to lift up his heart in fervent gratitude to Almighty God

for being preserved through the night, and spared to see the light of another day.

Often and often have I walked through the garden, or up and down the room, with my infant child across my arms, so weak and feeble as to be unable to lift up herself. I remember one day in particular as I was thus walking through the room during a severe thunderstorm—my wife giving way to anxious thoughts and apprehensions,—I thought I saw a glowing animation suddenly spring up in our dear child's face as she lay in my arms, so that I could fancy her better even then; and from that moment I began to conceive hopes of her recovery. Nor were we disappointed. For as the summer declined, and the weather became cooler on the approach of autumn, she evidently began to amend, and we soon had the satisfaction of seeing her in a great measure restored. Still she continued very delicate, and though previous to her illness she had attempted to walk, she could not even now stand without support; nor did she again endeavour to walk alone for a considerable time afterwards. Nevertheless, though weak and delicate, her intellect began rapidly to improve, and we were soon again amused with her innocent prattle.

In justice to Dr. R. who attended her, it must be said that he paid her the most unremitting attention, and did all that medical skill in such a case could do to restore the little sufferer, in whom he appeared to take a lively interest.

When our dear child was about two years old we thought she might attempt to learn the letters of the alphabet. For this purpose we purchased a box of circular cards, with the letters on one side, and the figure of some object or animal on the other; and to our great surprise and delight, she became acquainted with all the letters in the course of a few days. The usual mode of proceeding was this: the cards were spread out before her, and she was told to find out and to fetch to us any particular letter, which soon had the effect of making her familiar, not only with the letter, but the animal of which it was the initial, as we usually asked, what animal was on the other side of the card, and what letter stood for it? By this means a certain proportion of useful knowledge was acquired, without the memory of the child being burdened with the alphabetical order of the letters, which, at this stage of instruction can be of no manner of service. In this way, then, the ice was broken, and the fountains of knowledge opened to our little enquirer.

I have been particular in recording this first attempt to instruct the infant mind, because I am persuaded that it is the most successful method that can be practised; and it also shows that the mind of a child, even at this early age, is fully capable of receiving instruction; and, therefore, there can be no good reason why parents should neglect this important duty, for the first five or six years of their children's life, as they commonly do, for at this time the child is learning something, whether good or evil is another matter.

When about three years of age our little dear began to read, and continued steadily to improve ever since. Her understanding and answers at once surprised and delighted us. For what parent is there who can behold unmoved the first attempts of the infant mind in acquiring the rudiments of knowledge, or whose heart does not glow with secret joy and gratitude on beholding these early buds of promise? It is at all times a pleasing task to trace the first steps in the path of learning, and particularly so to the parent, who is the guardian of his children's hopes and prospects, both in this world and in that which is to come.

The mode which we pursued with our child is altogether different from the common and tedious routine of fettering the intellect by every dull and tedious process which can be devised. One day when she was about three and a half

years old, she read for me some fifty lines out of the columns of a newspaper; and since that time she has read several little works quite through, such as "Parlay's Tales of Europe, Africa, America, Sea Islands," &c., together with a great number of hymns and lines of poetry, in which she appears to take particular delight. She has also the faculty of telling little stories about little boys and girls, to such a degree that our powers of invention are often put in requisition in order to gratify the curiosity of our little auditor, who generally repays us by the recital of some little tale of her own. She seems so fond of personifying every object that each of her dolls has a specific name given to it, as "Ellen" (which seems to be the favourite), "Fanny," "Caroline," and a "Little Black Girl." At another time she collects a number of cotton spools and calls them her children, and caresses them with the kindest attention.

The first books of any size which she read regularly over was "Barbauld's Lessons," and this when she was scarcely three and a half years old. She has also been in the habit, for some time past, of praying regularly every day, and not unfrequently requests me to go into some other room to pray with her; and often during the day she drops down on her knees and begins her little prayer; and if she happens to be reading any book in which a prayer is contained, she wishes to read it on her knees, and says, "Papa, I must kneel down, for I know it is a prayer." She often says, "I do not like the Jews, for they crucified our Saviour, but I love my Saviour." Her remarks concerning Heaven, death, and her poor little sister E. M., are often in the highest degree serious and affecting; and I confess that my own coldness and deadness in religion are often reproved by her simple declarations of love to God and to Jesus Christ, especially when she says, "Papa, let us go and pray." She has read many entire chapters in various parts of the Bible, and sometimes takes her verse in turn when we are reading aloud together.

The object of these remarks is not to gratify pride or vanity, but, as I before observed, to preserve some memorial of her infant years, and to mark her progress in knowledge. Whatever advances she has thus early made, are entirely owing to the goodness of that God who maketh even infant lives to praise Him, and under God, to the assiduous and tender care of her kind and dear mother, who spares neither labour nor pains to instil into her infant mind the principles of piety and virtue. May God bless our feeble exertions, and enable our dear child—should she be spared—to "remember her Creator in the days of her youth," and to live a life of holiness here, in order that she may live a life of happiness hereafter.

She has only been once to church, yet, about four months ago, and conducted herself as well as could be expected from a child so young. For as soon as we were seated in the pew she took her hymn book, which she happened to open at the Evening Hymn, and commenced reading aloud the first line, as follows: "Glory to Thee, my God, this night," &c., as she had an idea that she ought to read her book at church. She has since frequently expressed a wish to go again, and promises to behave herself very well; so I have told her that as soon as Spring returns, and the days become warmer, we will take her to church again.

With the new year she commenced reading the Psalms, daily, morning and evening, to her mother. This has been to her the most trying duty she has as yet performed. A few days since, after finishing the Psalms for the day, she said, "Mamma, I am always glad when I come to Amen, for then it is over," alluding to the Gloria Patri. One Sunday evening as we were reading the Bible aloud, each a verse in turn, she was sitting in her mother's lap, regularly reading her verse as it came round. At length she came to a dif-