

The Great Text Commentary.

THE GREAT TEXTS OF GENESIS.

GENESIS iv. 7.

'If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin coucheth at the door: and unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him.'

EXPOSITION.

'If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted?'—God seeks by private remonstrance to bring him to his senses concerning the danger which threatens him. The question (v. 6) is put to him to direct his attention to his own heart, and to the roots there to be found of his distorted gestures. When man has once made room for evil within, there is but one step from inward to outward evil-doing; the sinful act crouches greedily like a beast of prey at the door of his heart till he should step out and fall a victim to it.—DELITZSCH.

'If thou doest not well, sin coucheth at the door.'—Or *'sin is at the door* (cf. Pr 9th) *'a lurker.'* Sin is compared to a ravenous beast lying in wait for its prey; perhaps a lion is here intended (cf. 1 P 5th). This is the ordinary explanation of the verse. It is possible, however, that the text is corrupt. The mention of the *'house door'* is strange, and the lion can hardly be described as lurking outside the door of a dwelling-place. Dillmann suggests an emendation by which *'sin'* would be figuratively depicted as a woman who tempts or leads astray.—SPURRELL.

'Unto thee shall be his desire.'—The word translated desire is particularly appropriate to express the temptations by which sin entices and attacks the heart; it describes graphically the voluptuous delight with which the demon of allurements approaches human weakness and passion.—KALISCH.

'And thou shalt rule over him.'—Drive away and conquer the sin that is pressing thee by banishing ill-humour, and not allowing thyself to be hurried on to evil deeds.—KNOBEL.

In the concluding words *him* refers to the croucher, by which figure sin, as impelling to its own incorporation in an outward act, is represented. We certainly expect that God should rather require of Cain that he should suppress the passion fermenting within him; but the ruling over sin demanded from him consists in keeping closed the door which still forms a barrier between the ill-feeling and the criminal act, and in thus struggling to keep down sinful thoughts lest he should be driven by them into crime. Moral self-control is so far possible to the natural man even since the fall.—DELITZSCH.

METHODS OF TREATMENT.

I.

What crouches at the Door?

By the Rev. Alexander Maclaren, D.D.

In the world's childhood God spoke to men as to children. There were no words then framed to

express abstract conceptions. Men were taught by pictures. But childlike as they were, those early men had consciences, and they did understand one abstraction, and that was sin. They knew the difference between good and evil. God made it clear to Cain that his sacrifice was rejected because it was that of an evil-doer. The key to the meaning of the passage is to remember that it describes what happens after, and because of, wrong-doing. All depends on *'If thou doest not well.'* Then *'sin lieth at the door.'* The picture is of the wrong-doer's sin lying at his door like a crouching tiger ready to spring, and, if it springs, fatal. Then the words spoken to Eve are, by a bold metaphor, transferred to this relationship, and, in horrible parody of wedded union and love, we have the picture of the sin that was thought of as crouching at the sinner's door like a wild beast now wedded to him. It has a kind of tigerish, murderous desire after him, while he is to subdue and control it.

1. First think of the wild beast we tether to our doors by our wrong-doing. We talk of *'responsibility,' 'guilt,'* and *'consequences that can never be effaced.'* All these terms are implied in the metaphor. We are apt to think that when an evil deed is done it passes away and leaves no results. The lesson taught here is that every deed is immortal. Its guilt is on our heads. Its consequences have to be experienced by us. Your deed of a moment, forgotten as soon as done, lies there at your door. It is debited to your account, and stands inscribed against you for ever. Think how you would like it if all your deeds from your childhood, all your follies, your vices, your evil thoughts, impulses, and actions were made visible, and embodied before you. They are there though you do not see them yet. One day you will find out that they are. For this is the law, *'Whatever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.'* There is no seed which does not sprout in the harvest of the moral life. Every deed germinates according to its kind. We all have consciences. We all have memories. We all know how deeds long forgotten have an awful power of rising again after long years. Your memory has in it everything you ever did. You are writing your biography on

the fleshly tables of your heart, and one day it will all be spread out before you, and you will be bid to read it and say what you think of it. What an awful menagerie of unclean beasts some of us have at our doors! What sort of creatures have you at yours?

2. The longing of sin towards the sinner. A man is mated to his wickedness, and it has an unhallowed longing for him. Every evil done exercises a fascination over him which makes it easier to do it again. All sin has an awful power of perpetuating itself. As the prophet says of the doleful creatures in his vision, 'None of them shall want her mate.' 'None is barren among them.'

3. The command is also a promise, 'Thou shalt rule over it.' Cain knew what it was to war against the wild creatures and tame some of them for his use. And the Divine voice says, so rule over this wild beast that is threatening you. If men are not to be torn in pieces, they must master the animal that is in them. But can man do this? When the body can eliminate poison from its veins by its own energy. But what God commands God enables us to do. And the words point on through the ages to the fact that God's own Son came down from heaven, like an athlete into the arena, to fight with and overcome the grim wild beasts, our passions and our sins, and to lead them transformed in the silken leash of His love.

II.

By M. M. Kalisch, Phil. Doc.

1. It is evident that Cain's heart was no longer pure. It had a criminal propensity which made the acceptance of his offering impossible. Yet Cain was grateful to God. He brought Him of his produce as a mark of his gratitude. He valued His applause, and His displeasure cast a gloom over his soul. He must then have sinned against man, not God. Envy and jealousy had filled his heart when he contrasted his toilsome life with the pleasant existence of Abel. With incessant exertion and anxiety, dependent on the skies, he gained a scanty subsistence, whilst his brother enjoyed a life of security and abundance. And while he envied Abel's prosperity he despised his idleness. Hatred and jealousy took root in his heart. Joy at his own success was embittered by the aspect of his brother's greater affluence. How

could God look with delight upon an offering which the offerer himself did not regard with unalloyed satisfaction? Is not jealousy a sign of a dissatisfied mind? Could, then, Cain's gratitude be pure and noble? The rejection of his offering was a proof of Cain's sinful disposition.

2. It was an admonition to banish low sentiments from his heart. One evil deed is always the parent of other and greater sins. It is difficult to arrest the power of wickedness. Envy ended in murder. The noxious root matured a poisonous fruit; moral disease finished with moral death. Sin has the irresistible propensity of attacking the heart of man, and an eternal warfare is roused in his bosom from the moment that sin first enters it. But every human heart encloses the seed of evil, so this struggle agitates every man. It is the principal task of his spiritual existence to conquer in these combats. Therefore God said to Cain, more in encouragement than in reproach, 'Thou shalt rule over it'; it was still in his power to obtain a triumph; if he could not destroy the enemy he could disarm him and prevent his progress.

ILLUSTRATIONS.

Acceptable Sacrifice.—We know what the Cain offering is because we have presented the like ourselves. We have prayed; and then have complained, just as the Jews did, that it has all been in vain, that no good has come of it. We have made sacrifices, and we have wondered that we got no reward for them. Perhaps we have been angry that, being so good, we have not been more favoured by fortune and circumstances. Perhaps we have been angry that, trying so hard to make ourselves good, we have succeeded so little. Perhaps we have had a general notion that God could not be persuaded to be gracious to us and to forgive us, in spite of all the sacrifices we have offered, and that we must try others which are more costly. In all cases, *the countenance has fallen*; in all cases, we have gone forth with thoughts that were anything but gracious and brotherly to our fellow-men. We have thought of them as more in the favour of Heaven, on one ground or another, than we were; we have felt envious and spiteful to them, if we have done them no actual mischief. Assuredly, this is the Cain spirit in us all; assuredly, we have often been led by it; and if so, have we not had a proof, the clearest that could be given, that it was not an arbitrary Being we were opposing, but a righteous and gracious Being? Was not our sin that we *supposed* Him to be an arbitrary Being, whom we, by our sacrifices and prayers, were to conciliate? Was not this *the* false notion which lay at the root of all our discontent, of all the evil thoughts and acts which sprung out of it? We did not begin with trust, but with distrust; we did not worship God because we believed in Him, but because we dreaded Him—

because we desired His presence, but because we wished to persuade Him not to come near us.—F. D. MAURICE.

THE heathen had a notion that the gods would not accept the sacrifice of any but those who were like themselves; and therefore none could be admitted to the sacrifice of Hercules who were dwarfs, and none to those of merry Bacchus who were sad and pensive. An excellent truth may be drawn from this folly: he that would please God must be like God.—W. GURNALL.

THE offering of Cain was like a beautiful present, but there was no sorrow for sin in it—no asking for pardon—and so God would not receive it. 'Mother won't take my book,' once sobbed a little boy, holding in his hand a very beautiful little volume, prettily bound. It was a present, purchased with the pocket-money which he had been for weeks saving for his mother's birthday; and now she would not have it. But she did take the needle-book and purse which her little daughter presented to her. Why did she refuse the beautiful gift of her boy? He had been naughty—selfish, passionate, false,—and had not at all repented; and so, when he brought his offering, she put it gently on one side, saying, 'No, Charlie.' He turned away sullenly, muttering that he did not care, and beginning to cherish feelings of a bad kind towards his sister. But after a while he came to himself—stole into the room, flung himself on her shoulder, confessed his fault with tears, and found favour with his mother. By and by she whispered tenderly, 'You may bring your present.' So God acted with Cain, but he would persist in obduracy of heart.—W. ADAMSON.

Sin at the door.—Sin is like a wild beast, beautiful in outward seeming, lithe and graceful in its motions; its feet shod with velvet, its strength robed in a coat of many colours. It is like a stealthy, *crouching* beast, lurking in ambush, stealing unheard and unseen from thicket to thicket, or gliding softly through the long tangled grass, availing itself of every inequality of the ground, hiding behind every trunk or bush, approaching its victim like a fate—silent, invisible, unerring.—S. COX.

WE are all apt to be deceived by the imagination that when an evil deed is done it passes away and leaves no permanent results. The lesson taught the childlike primitive man here, at the beginning, before experience had accumulated instances which might demonstrate the solemn truth, was that every human deed is immortal, and that the transitory evil thought, or word, or act, which seems to fleet by like a cloud, has a permanent being, and hereafter haunts the life of the doer, as a real presence. If thou doest not well, thou dost create a horrible something which nestles

beside thee henceforward. The momentary act is incarnated, as it were, and sits there at the doer's door-post waiting for him; which being turned into less forcible but more modern language, is just this: every sin that a man does has perennial consequences, which abide with the doer for ever more.—A. MACLAREN.

THERE are laws in our personality which may be our salvation or our ruin. They may ruin us if we are ignorant; they will save us if we are wise. Now, of all these laws; there is perhaps none so important as the law of habit, according to which actions, by being often repeated, become, first of all, easier to be performed, and afterwards difficult, if not impossible, to be avoided. It is to this law of habit, I think, that the text refers, 'If thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door.' Sin is here personified and represented as a beast of prey ready to spring upon its victim. Our actions have a tendency to enslave us. The wrong *deeds* which we once voluntarily chose to perform are very apt to grow into wrong *practices*, which we shall at last perform mechanically, without any choice, or even in opposition to the most earnest desire to refrain. So when a man sins he may be fairly represented, in the graphic language of the text, as having called something into existence which, like an evil beast, is waiting to seize and devour him.—A. W. MOMERIE.

Unto thee shall be its desire.—These words are drawn from the previous chapter, where they refer to the holy union of heart and affection in husband and wife. Here they are transferred with tremendous force, to set forth that which is a kind of horrible parody of that conjugal relation. A man is married to his wickedness, is mated to his evil, and it has, as it were, a tigerish longing for him, unhallowed and murderous. That is to say—our sins act towards us as if they desired to draw our love to themselves. This is just another form of the statement that when once a man has done a wrong thing it has an awful power of attracting him and making him hunger to do it again.—A. MACLAREN.

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