

This sense of delicacy has continued, and so purified the language of Christendom that in respectable society all defiling language is excluded from social intercourse.

In the burial of the dead there was a great difference between the early Christians and the heathens. I remember reading somewhere that in the third century the plague broke out in Alexandria, sparing neither heathens nor Christians. The Christians, dressed in white, walked in procession, singing hymns, and so buried their dead. The pagans, when any of their family died, fled from the house, leaving their dead unburied; while the Christians went to those heathen houses, brought out the dead, carried them on their backs, and buried them, but in silence.

Even to this day the change produced upon the rude heathen by their conversion to Christianity is strikingly to be seen in the matter of dress. A lady friend of mine went out to Zululand to visit

her sister, the wife of the medical missionary there, and became so much interested in the work of that mission and its progress that she determined to remain and work in it. After some years she came home to see her friends, and meeting her in Edinburgh, I asked her some questions about the mission. 'Do the women go naked, or do they dress?' 'The heathen women go stark naked, but when they become Christians they clothe themselves'; and she added, 'even the heathen women are learning to put on some covering.'

But of all the effects of the teaching of Christianity about the *human body*, the most remarkable is the building of hospitals and infirmaries for the sick and dying,—sometimes at enormous cost,—and providing them with the best medical officers and appliances, and this in all parts of Christendom—a thing all but unknown till Christianity leavened civilised nations on this subject.

## Sermonettes on the Golden Texts.

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### Strength and Weakness.

'Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.'—I COR. X. 12.

I. THE DEFINITION OF STANDING.—It means the opposite of everything that leans or receives external support. It is independence of surrounding circumstances, the power to dispense with them and overcome them. No greater mistake can be made than for one who is really supported to fancy himself independent. Such was the mistake of the Highland chieftain who, in the duel, threw aside his shield, thinking he could make his sword do double service after the manner of his Saxon adversary. The mistake led to his defeat and death. The power to stand must come either from within or from without. The former alone avails in the evil day. Confusion is here calamitous. Hence the plain warning: 'Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.'

II. THE DANGERS.—The points here emphasized are the possibility of falling and the importance of watchfulness. We are not warned against stand-

ing, but against the dangers that always attend it. We are expected to stand, but only in the right place, and in the right way. An illustration from the sea will help us to understand this distinction. When the Board of Trade investigates a case of shipwreck, no one asks *whether* or not fire burns and water drowns, whether rocks do harm to iron plates, or collisions are attended with danger. The question is simply as to how the fire broke out, whether the ship was in a seaworthy condition, why the vessel struck upon a certain rock, or which ship neglected the rule of the road. The vessel is not expected to suffer shipwreck. When she puts out to sea, perhaps to feel for the first time the pulsation of the great deep, every provision is made for a safe and successful voyage. The sailing orders are received and understood, and arrival at the desired haven is fully anticipated. It is an inspiring sight to look out upon such a wonderful creation of engineering art gliding swiftly seaward in the deepening darkness, with the signal lights in their proper places and the electric illumination flashing from every port.

But there are subtle currents to be allowed for: mist may come down and cut off the view, the very compass may be diverted, the officer may leave the bridge and seek the shelter of the funnel, too close an approach may be made in rounding a dangerous headland. How many are the possibilities of disaster! And as the Board of Trade, before giving to a candidate the certificate of master or officer, examines the resources of his seamanship, and asks what he would do under certain conditions of threatened collision, shifted cargo, dragged anchor, sprung mast, gaining leak, discovered fire, etc. The man who is best acquainted with the dangers of the sea will know best how to avoid them and overcome them. The thought of danger can only be dismissed after having been fully entertained. The danger becomes impossible only after being considered possible. The best guarantee for its absence is the recognition of its presence. So upon the sea of life. With such an element, ignorance brings no bliss to those responsible, and therefore it is never folly to seek the true wisdom.

This Golden Text is chosen in connexion with the life of Solomon, as teaching the great lesson to be learnt from a life that was characterised by special wisdom. Solomon might well have considered himself secure: yet how unmistakable was his failure. The height had been so conspicuous, and the fall was correspondingly complete. And the Bible not only declares the fact—it is no Book of hero-worship—but it also explains how it occurred. It gives us the three sadly familiar steps: evil entertained, evil loved, evil obeyed. First, outside influences, that should never have been so near, turned away his heart. Then the heart of its own accord went out towards the evil; then, lastly, the sin was enthroned and established and sanctified in the high place built for it.

Similar sequences may be traced in the selfishness that made Lot a citizen of Sodom. The indecision by which Peter came to deny his Master, and the loving leniency by which 'even Barnabas was carried away.'

III. THE DUTY.—Is it possible to stand? It must be. The gospel stands by its power to make us stand. Without this, the path of Revelation is no more to us than the orbit of Jupiter. There must be abiding victory over evil, and the possession of true sainthood. Christ was lifted up that He might draw all men unto Himself.

So supreme and satisfying was this victory, that the Lord Jesus, possessing it and moving towards the power of conferring it on others, was found impervious to the affronting temptation of the world's kingdoms and their glory.

IV. THE ONLY WAY.—How may I stand? *Stand having your loins girt.* The sweeping skirt might give dignity to repose, but it was an enemy to action. On the long march, or in the hour of intense effort, it had to be drawn up under the tightened belt. Expect action. Life must have exercise; energy, direction; and endowment, discipline. Salvation is not alone for self. There is a Cross to bear, and beyond that a joy is set before you: to avoid the first is to forfeit the second. *Stand, having done all.* This implies the discovery that all is needed. That discovery had not surely come in the heart that said to Jesus, 'Which is the greatest commandment?' It was as much as to say, 'I only want to know, for when I know I shall accept, and when I accept, I shall easily obey.' When the discovery comes, it tells us that the problem is rather one of power, and the weakness is in the will. The question is not about a thought, but about a Person: not merely a clear idea, but a complete Deliverer. 'Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?'

*If ye do these things, ye shall never fall.* But whom, in this picture of the saint, does St. Peter see supported by faith and transformed by love, whose heart has been made a dwelling-place for the things of the new kingdom? How little of the old self is left! It is a new creature that thus walks without falling. There is now independence, but it is all to the praise of His grace. There is standing, but it is in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made you free. *Made strong* indeed, but utter frailty is the only constitution that the healing power can work upon. The Graces stand and walk and live securely in the Palace Beautiful, but the sentry that guards the door by night and day is Weakness.

THEREFORE STAND.

### The Privations of Self-Pleasing.

'The drunkard and the glutton shall come to poverty; and drowsiness shall clothe a man with rags.'—PROV. xxiii. 2.

WE are familiar with the phrase, '*the pleasures of sin.*' The expression is not only the excuse of its

slaves, but also the admission of the Bible. Sin is credited with a certain power to give pleasure. The power to please is not in itself sinful. Pleasure is not essentially at war with piety. But we can speak still more familiarly of *the privations of sin*. The condemnation in this Golden Text turns upon the fact that sin fails on its own lines, in the power to please. Its promises are not kept, for the pleasures turn to pains. The gains to loss, the liberty to bondage. As the Lord Jesus did not disdain to sit at the table of publicans and sinners, so the gospel of surrender to the will of God can enter the lists with lawlessness, and allow itself to be tested by the same standard—the power to please. If the one commends itself by the pleasure it brings, the liberty it announces, the fellowship it creates, so also does the other. All that makes the one an incentive to the will, a gratification to the heart, an expansion to the life, the same is offered by the other also, but of superior quality and in larger measure. It is no ideal of dreamy conjecture, no far-away vision of things glorified within the veil, but it is a simple fact of to-day that asks only the proof of personal experiment. It was this assurance that the Lord Jesus gave when He said: ‘I am the Door; by Me, if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out and find pasture.’ So St. Paul writes to the Philippians: ‘My God shall supply all your need, according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.’

And so, in this passage in the Book of Proverbs, dealing with the gross indulgence of the bodily appetites, the decision is founded on what it gives and does, and to what it finally leads.

The protest against intemperance is—

I. AN APPEAL TO SELF.—This is the chief interest that in the condition described is held precious. Such gross indulgence is one of the lowest forms of selfishness. It is also one of the strangest. The glory of Nineveh and Babylon could make kings lunatic and turn sons into parricides. There was the temptation of dominion over others. But alcohol has a prouder position, for it reaches the same result without giving anything. It makes a man the bond-slave of his own body. The drunkard thinks to find life uplifted and invigorated by the power to which he commits himself, but the well-known result of intemperate habit is a tyrannical craving, that increases in intensity as the system becomes less and less able to bear it. The drunkard’s body becomes a

gnawing and clamorous kennel of desires that can only be satisfied by drunkenness, delirium, and death. Every town has its pathetic examples of the moral and physical havoc wrought in a life once capable of noble things. The horizon of life closes in so bleak and dark around him. And what a wealth of love and hope and patient ministry he drags with him to his grave! It is one of the saddest experiences in business and professional life, when a begging call or written appeal of abject want or shameless shuffling is received from one who was once master and benefactor. Something, perhaps, still survives of the gracious manner of speech and the distinction of style in writing—reminders of the old days of prosperity and social respect, and family happiness. It is a shame to refuse, and yet it is cruel to give. The saying has proved true: ‘He has come to poverty; he is clothed with rags.’

II. AN APPEAL IN CONNEXION WITH GOD AND MAN.—The Bible represents the drunkard and glutton not only as selfish individually, but as an unnatural son towards his parents. He has found something more precious than his love to those at home. In the law of Moses, the disobedient son found worthy of death is described in terms that explain the unnatural conduct. It was the lawlessness of the drunkard and glutton. This was one of the most shameful names that intense hatred could throw at the Lord Jesus.

A drunkard’s heart was a grave of all the family affections, and their happy unselfish ministries; it was a living tomb in which the names of loved ones were regretfully laid away, and gradually forgotten.

And in the same passage from which the text is taken, the exhortation urges the wise son not only to cause no sorrow to his father and mother, but also to keep himself all the day long in the fear of God.

And such has always been the plea on behalf of temperance, it concerns not only the health of the body, but also the happiness of the home, and the prosperity of the soul. Its first appeal is to the calamities of self, its second and mightiest is to the claims of others who should be dearer than self.

The reader of Dante shudders at the vivid description in the *Inferno* of the last feeble controversy of a lost soul with Satan. The poor debased human heart that has so often yielded and rallied, and groaned and given way again, is

finally entered by the Spirit of Evil, to be henceforth his alone and his for ever. What a retrospect of hopes and fears, of escape and thralldom the soul must pass through that is meant to live, but prefers to perish. How many defeats must be accepted before the soul can say to its enemy, 'Come and reign over me.' Who would not think well before beginning such a career; who that has entered upon it would not instantly turn, and at any cost fight his way back to liberty and true happiness.

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### 'Hark, the Herald Angels sing.'

'Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people.'—LUKE ii. 10.

I. The Gospel of the Incarnation is good BECAUSE IT IS TRUE. It tells a truth about God and about man. 'He was in the world,' that was God's doing; 'and the world knew Him not,' that was man's doing. It told of love and mercy on the one hand, and of estrangement and blindness of heart on the other. These two facts tell us why Christ came into this world.

II. And it is good because it is A GOSPEL OF GREAT JOY. The joy was found in the discovery of God's wonderful love. 'God so loved the world that He gave'; the wise worshipper on his way to the manger will find the star standing over that great truth. Christ was a gift. That is the joy of Christmas, and the inspiration of all its loving ministries.

Who asked or induced Him to come into this world? Let the manger tell us. There was no room for Him in the inn. This absence of welcome was the whole title of the invitation. Oh, when you think of that Life on earth begun in a manger, and ended in a borrowed grave, and when you recollect what heavenly glory He laid aside in order to accomplish His task, it is then that the heart fills with joy, a joy that is none the less sweet because it is so near to sorrow.

Sometimes things are not with us as we would like them to be. We have not been dealt with as we feel we have deserved; but what are these disappointments and humiliations compared with what took place at Bethlehem. Our rights, our human rights, have perhaps been turned aside; but He laid aside heavenly glory. How this makes our rough places smooth, and changes our mountains into a plain.

### III. *The celebration of the Nativity.*

We cannot now do homage like the wise men in the visible Presence of the Lord Jesus. But He said: 'Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto Me.'

And so for His sake the routine of life is broken up. The tide of brotherly feeling rises above the ordinary water-mark. Estranged friends are made to think at the same time of what was done for them in Christ's reconciling life. In the great social world it is remembered how One who was rich for our sakes became poor. And so love to Christ turns especially to those whom Christ treated with especial regard—the poor, the bereaved, the sick, the sinful, and those that have no helper. At this time the children come forward, for they were pre-eminently His when He was on earth. They know that there is nothing more pleasing to Him in glory than the offering of a young heart given to him in the sweet early days, and given to Him for ever.

And to those farther on in life it has its happy meanings: joys of hallowed memory, of faces that seem to return and voices that are heard again as the season comes round. There is the glad reminder also of other meanings: the new birth in our own hearts when we turned from dead works to serve the living God, and of the time coming when the visible Presence will be restored and those who are with Him will be found like Him.

And so to-day, among masters and servants, old and young, rich and poor, the Son of God is again making Himself the Son of Man, drawing the families of the earth together in the bonds of brotherly love.

Far and wide, by land and sea, in many climates, and among many nations, the Church of Christ is clothing herself with the beautiful garments of love and mercy and fellowship, because Christ is in her midst.

To look upon the world with Christ's eyes, to see men as those for whom Christ died, will always compel us to love even where love is not expected or understood. It teaches us to see a son of Abraham, even in unlikely circumstances; to recognise a daughter of Israel, though she be bowed down by infirmities; and where men may grudge to Lazarus the space on the pavement to hear the flutter of the angels' wings.

How differently men reach the birthplace of

Christ; how differently they are affected by the tidings. Some arrive in peace, like those dusty travellers from the East, after a long journey over the desert, after much anxious search. There is a special reward; they rejoice 'with exceeding great joy.' It is with others as with the shepherds—an instantaneous illumination, an instant decision, an irrepressible testimony.

With others the thoughts suggested are a great deep, and further thought discloses still greater depths. And these debates filled the heart of Mary, the one that had most cause to rejoice in the privilege of possession. Every type is needed.

'The Lord knoweth them that are His.  
He is able to keep what is committed unto Him.'

### The Purpose of Revelation.

'Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter. Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.'—ECCLES. xii. 13.

I. THIS IS THE LAST WORD OF THE PREACHER.—It is very simple and sufficient, very compact and comprehensive. Casket after casket of moral and spiritual truth has been opened, like those brightly-painted boxes from the far East that please and puzzle the children, until this at last is found,—the innermost enclosure and vital centre of all. Within this, form becomes substance and body passes into spirit. Inquiry can be pushed no further. It is the conclusion of the whole matter.

The trunk-line with its many branches here reaches the terminus. Through this main centre all messages of the moral telephone must pass. Here the technical terms of religious creeds and philosophical systems find a solvent, and return to the simple speech of men. It is the blood which our schools of medicine, after much searching, accept again as the residence of life. *Fear God and keep His commandments.* As a summary, it may be compared to the prospect spread before the traveller who looks down from the lofty hill of Hermon. Standing on the ruins of the sun-worshippers' temple, he looks eastward towards the home of Abraham and the land of exile: to the south he sees the plain of Esdraelon, the Lake of Galilee and the hills beyond it; to the west the Great Sea lies before him, the highway by which influences have gone abroad to make the earth beautiful and holy. It is a glimpse over the field

of Revelation. Such is this last word of the preacher; the summary of all his teaching. It is the seal that guards the whole alabaster box and preserves the perfume; it is like the innermost fold enwrapping the costly gifts at Bethlehem.

But it is a summary; and to find a meaning in it one must bring a meaning to it. What do I know of God? What do I wish to know of God? What is the fear of God? What are His commandments? How can I keep them? The value of this Golden Text will depend very much on the answer given to these questions.

II. IT IS MEANT TO BE REMEMBERED.—In the sermon that is preached and the Bible lesson that is taught much is forgotten almost as soon as heard. Usually, however, something arrests attention and remains in the memory, entering into the life and forming part of it. This remembered truth with which the hearer is blessed and the teacher satisfied will not be the same for all. There will rather be great diversity here, for the discovered affinity means that secret springs of the past life have been touched. Thus, when strangers went to worship in Mr. Spurgeon's church, it was often remarked afterwards that the preacher seemed to know that there was one present who had come from the ends of the earth to hear his words. The visitor seemed to find himself personally addressed. At some part of the service a word of rebuke, sympathy, or illumination was uttered that the visitor felt to be the word he was waiting for. So in the study of these Golden Texts and the reading of the selected passages for the last year's course, many things have been taught and quite forgotten; others are dimly retained; something is laid up for ever. It is hoped that the outcome of all has been towards one healthy, victorious, spiritual result—to fear God and keep His commandments.

The most familiar study of the Bible will always deepen our awe and adoration towards God, He is our Heavenly Father, and after the great gift of His only begotten Son, we know that He is willing to give every gift less costly than that is for our good. But He remains the Lord of all, and His ways are above our ways, and though His will be in the way of our welfare, it is still His will.

However familiar we grow with the history of His dealings with His people, we shall never forget that equally in His claims upon our obedience He cannot be mocked. As we learn what His commands call us to, and how they need purity of

heart for their perfect keeping, we learn that the knowledge of them is not merely in memory but in the daily life.

For this we find ourselves quite unequal; we have to lament our blindness, indolence, rebellion, delay, and hardness of heart. We discover that God must keep us if we are to keep His com-

mandments. And God will only keep what is committed unto Him. And we can love Him because He first loved us. His commandments are not grievous, for He sends with them the grace that can enable us to keep them. 'Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.'

## New Books for Young People.

### Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.

THE books that are published by the S.P.C.K. are as distinctly English as were the pictures of the late George du Maurier. Their very binding is English. And it has the charm of the rich warm English rural life, so that when they lie upon the table they suggest thoughts of comfort and contentment.

Even the books that belong to the nursery carry this unmistakeable charm along with them. Here are three: First, *Nursery Rhymes and Fables*, collected and illustrated by Walter J. Morgan, in which the collecting is nothing, the illustrating everything, for it is full of character which even the colouring does not smother. Next, *Friendly Joey*, by Mrs. Molesworth, also illustrated by W. J. Morgan; but here the literature is something as well as the illustrations, quite inimitable indeed for the little folk, as Mrs. Molesworth always is. And third, a *Scripture Picture Book*, full of realistic pictures, and large type, and strong binding for much use.

Rising in stature, we reach *Punch, Judy, and Toby*, two good children and a bad, whose history has been recorded by M. Bramston; and M. Bramston has actually made bad Toby the most delightful of the three. *A Little Lass and Lad* and *Whispering Tongues* are up the ladder a good long way, stories for the age when boys, and yet more, girls, can scarcely be supplied with books, for all that uncles and aunts and Christmas and birth-days can do.

And if it were not that we have four handsome volumes to come yet, we might be tempted to say we had reached the top of the ladder with *Smith's Weakness*, by G. Manville Fenn, and *His Level Best*, by F. B. Forester. It is hard to tell for what

age they are meant. But there is a nondescript age that most boys and all girls pass through, and no doubt these two are sent for that. They are stirring enough, besides, and not too terribly teachy.

Then come the four. Three are of the sea. The salt breeze blows from them. *Jack Beresford's Yarn*, by Harry Collingwood, and *Jack at Sea*, by George Manville Fenn, are surely attractive enough by their titles. But they are no less attractive in outward form and inward interest—not to be trusted in the hands of the boy whose passion for the sea must not be encouraged; but altogether suitable for the boy who has still to learn the important fact that Britannia rules the waves.

*The Romance of the Sea*, by Fred. Whympster, is the biggest book of the three, but we dare not say the best. Most instructive it certainly is, for it tells of all the wonders that are witnessed (and some that rarely are) by those that go down to the sea in ships. But then it is not a tale, and the cry is all for tales since the Public Libraries Act was passed.

One volume remains, *The Temptation of Ernest Ellerby*, by F. Lethbridge Farmer, just a good, sound, sensible, domestic story for the winter evening and the warm fireside.

### James Nisbet & Co. Limited.

It was Butler, was it not, who taught us to say that probability is the guide of life? It may be so—of grown-up life. But boys have not yet heard of Bishop Butler, and not yet learned to appreciate probabilities. When Gordon Stables writes a book about *The Pearl Divers*, he throws probability to the wind and gathers all the enterprising little boys to his bosom.

Nor has J. Macdonald Oxley more respect for