

PRINCIPLES AND PROVERBS

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CONTENTS

PREFACE

PART I PRINCIPLES

Chap.		Page
1	GUIDANCE IN LIFE	1
2	BALANCE	8
3	THE WEIGHTIER MATTERS	16
4	"THE HEART IS DECEITFUL"	24
5	"A LYING TONGUE"	33
6	THE BLESSEDNESS OF GIVING	39
7	THE CHURCH OF GOD IS ONE BODY	47
8	THE BRETHREN OF CHRIST ARE THOSE WHO DO THE WILL OF THE FATHER	53
9	PLOUGHING AND LOOKING BACK	60
10	THE PRINCIPLES GOVERNING FELLOWSHIP	68
11	THE SCRIPTURAL PRINCIPLES GOVERNING CONTROVERSY	81
12	THE MEANING OF SACRIFICE	90
13	APPLICATION OF PRINCIPLES	101

PART II PROVERBS

1	THINGS NEW AND OLD	115
2	PROVERBS REFERRING TO GOD	121
3	WISDOM AND KNOWLEDGE	128
4	THE HEART	135
5	STRIFE	142
6	COMPANIONS	148
7	PARENTS AND CHILDREN	156
8	DILIGENCE AND SLOTH	164
9	SPEECH	171
10	JUSTICE	179
11	BLESSING	187
12	MERCY AND KINDNESS	194
13	CONTROL OF TEMPER	200
14	SERVICE	206
15	THE SEVEN ABOMINATIONS	212
16	A WISE MAN'S HEART	219
17	"REBUKE A WISE MAN AND HE WILL LOVE THEE" ...	227
18	"WHOSO DESPIETH THE WORD SHALL BE DESTROYED" ...	233
19	WISDOM FOR EVERYDAY LIFE	240

PART I.
PRINCIPLES

CHAPTER I

GUIDANCE IN LIFE

If a man is well equipped with a knowledge of principles he is in a favourable position for dealing with all the difficulties of life. He may find himself confronted by entirely new circumstances. There may be nothing in empirically gained knowledge to throw the slightest light on his path, but he can nearly always find a principle to help his judgment.

Principles are like stars, constant and comprehensive, but not local or particular. The pilot with only local knowledge may guide the ship through the well-known channel and into the old port, but a knowledge of the stars is necessary when sailing in unknown seas. If a pilot should mistake a foreign port for the one he knows and attempt to guide the vessel according to the old rules he will bring it to disaster. Ships of various kinds have been wrecked through such mistaken confidence. Oftentimes men have ignored principles and have applied the lessons learned in former years to circumstances that are totally different. They have even quoted the words of former leaders in a manner that would horrify such leaders could they rise from their graves and witness the application.

It is sometimes a valuable exercise to turn away from the troubles and perplexities of the moment and look at general principles. Cease for a time from strife regarding the matters which may have been agitating us most and examine the fundamentals of truth regarding which all should be able to agree. It is of course hardly possible at any time either to

PRINCIPLES AND PROVERBS

write or read with entire impartiality. Only a few men have a passionate desire to be on the side of truth, although all men want truth to be on their side. In discussion, arguments are selected according to the purpose they will serve, and very few disputants of this world would be honest enough to make candid confession if they chanced to think of a point materially weakening their position. So in dealing with principles the inevitable tendency is to think of those first which supply a foundation for one's own position, while in reading there is the equally strong temptation to accept or reject according to the probable bearing of the principle advanced on the particular prejudices uppermost for the moment in the mind of the reader.

Let us frankly admit this weakness of our common nature and then try to be as honest and fair as we can. Let us admit at least the abstract possibility that we might be wrong, and that the close examination of principles is necessary to correct us. If you think that the greatest fault is that we have forgotten the foundation lesson of all and are woe-fully lacking in love and mercy, do not on that account refuse to consider the sterner principles that may be urged. Recognize the abstract possibility that a man might be so anxious to show his love for mankind as to forget his duty to God. If, on the other hand, your favourite passage of scripture has been, "First pure, then peaceable", do not get angry at the repeated exhortation, "Love one another", for love is always the greatest thing in the world, while anger is not always even pure. With an effort we may be able to examine principles with a mini-

num of prejudice and with human feeling so well in hand that real benefit may be gained.

What do we mean when we speak of a principle? The word is closely allied to the word first, but we employ it in such a sense that we can speak of first principles without tautology or contradiction. A principle is first in the sense of having to do with the foundations or beginning of things. One principle may be the basis of many laws or rules of conduct. But although principles are causes they are generally seen last of all. We climb up to an appreciation of them through many stages, and if we were dependant on our own observations life would be too short for us to grasp a single one of them.

A child looks out on the world and sees objects. Strictly speaking, all that a baby can do in starting thought processes is to experience sensations. From this beginning the process of thought is the same in all cases of progress through successive stages of development. We experience sensations and remember what we have sensed, we compare sensations and remember our comparisons, we classify and remember our classifications. Then, having produced a kind of platform of well tested knowledge, we can build up again to a still higher plane.

A child soon begins to act on some classifications based on observation and comparison. We should think a boy very stupid if he needed to tumble off every elevated object he encountered before knowing that there was any danger in climbing. A normal child having experienced a number of painful bumps in falling from chairs and tables will remember the lessons when he first has

PRINCIPLES AND PROVERBS

opportunity to climb a tree. He will recognize a tendency for all unsupported objects to fall downwards long before he hears of the law of gravitation.

In this matter adults often reveal less capacity for learning than children. They have the advantage of books containing all the accumulated wisdom of mankind, and beyond all this and permeating a great deal of it, there is the instruction that has come direct from God, yet the knowledge is very little used. Life is full of avoidable evils through men ignoring principles or rules of conduct which are perfectly well known, and which have had their wisdom demonstrated in every generation.

Sometimes the individual failure is so obvious that almost all observers smile at it. I recall two instances of this kind in which the facts were related by the victim when sufficient time had passed for him to join in the amusement. The first was of a capable business man who lightheartedly put his name to paper and became surety for another without even knowing the full extent of his commitment. As is usual in such cases, the one thus assisted failed to pay his way, and the guarantor was for some weeks on the verge of ruin, not knowing when the crushing blow would fall. While in this worried condition he one day opened the Bible to find a little consolation, and almost the very first passage he read was one in Proverbs warning men against the very folly he had committed. "What a foolish man I am", he thought. "I have carelessly brought myself into this trouble, when all the while the whole matter is explained in the Bible in the most up-to-date manner. If I had read it before I might have been warned."

The other case was that of a young man who, when returning home one night, chanced to pass a low part of the city where there was a quarrel between man and wife. The young fellow, perceiving that the woman was being ill-treated, gallantly went to her assistance. He was, as he expressed it, "getting on very nicely" in his contest with the man when the ungrateful woman came up behind and hit her champion on the head with a saucepan. According to his own account, the young man spent a carefree hour in the gutter before he came back to consciousness of this painful life. Then, as he limped slowly homeward, he began dimly to recall to memory certain maxims regarding the un wisdom of meddling with strife that does not belong to us.

Perhaps we are confident that we should be wiser than this, and so far as these particular instances are concerned the boast may be justified. But do we not all fall into similar errors quite as inexcusable and some of them provocative of more wide-spread evil? If a man's error causes a derangement of many other brains, the consequences are perhaps more serious than if it had ended merely with a concussion of his own. And there are many failures to apply well-known maxims which result in widespread confusion of thought with seemingly endless action and re-action of wrong thinking and wrong feeling.

We have read many times that "A soft answer turneth away wrath, but grievous words stir up anger." We know that the proverb is true. We may desire that wrath should be turned away, the stirring up of anger may be the last thing in the world that

PRINCIPLES AND PROVERBS

we should want, yet when the occasion comes how many of us can find the soft, healing words? How many can resist the temptation to use grievous words if we chance to think of something which we consider apt and telling, and which in any case gives relief to the feeling of the moment?

We know that all judgment has been committed to the Son of God and that we are warned not to judge each other. We can all remember the instruction so easily when men try to measure our faults with the unfairness which is nearly always characteristic of human judges. Yet how difficult it is to refrain from judging others. There is a difference of opinion, and human mentality shows at its worst. Instantly there is a tendency to judge motives, to exaggerate faults and to utter condemnations in a manner as if the Lord had never spoken. Some judge the faults or the supposed faults of weaker brethren. Others are busy judging the judges. It is difficult to steer a proper course, but we all are quite well acquainted with the guiding principles. Our difficulties would nearly vanish if we consulted principles more.

We all know that *balance* is a first principle of life. Scripture tells us to be temperate and moderate and sober. We know from experience and observation how serious it may be for a man to become unbalanced and to be obsessed with a special line of thought. But we are all liable to such obsessions, and it is just at such times that we are least interested in the principle of balance. We may easily become indignant with the man who tries to remind us of it. "This is not the time to speak of moderation and temperate thought", we would say. "This is a time

of crisis when all our energy should be concentrated on ——” whatever dominates our thoughts for the moment.

The fact is that our natural tendency is to ignore just the principles that we most need to study and to dwell on those which have most influenced us in the past and best seem to support our thoughts of the moment. The best corrective will surely be for us to look at as many principles as possible. Let us consider them all as fairly as we can. It will be too much to hope that the writer can be entirely unprejudiced in the presentation or that his fairness would be admitted by all readers in any case. It will be too much to expect that readers will be able to divest themselves entirely of prejudice and to be as much interested in the principles they most need to study as in those they have emphasized too much. We can, however, make an effort in the right direction. To set an example to the others who are palpably wrong, let us study scriptural principles and rules of conduct as if there were a possibility that we were wrong ourselves. If we make such an effort, a series of chapters on principles may be productive of a little good. Perhaps it would be unreasonable to expect more than this.

CHAPTER 2

BALANCE

Readers need not object to Balance being chosen as the first principle for extended consideration. Balance expresses in a single word the scriptural idea of moderation and sobriety, of avoiding self-righteousness or being righteous over much. It involves a recognition of the difference between camels and gnats and the danger of failing to recognize defects in our own eyes. The principle applies all round, and a fair consideration of it may deal salutary blows with impartial severity to writer and readers.

The truest and most important of principles reveal themselves as distinct from all lesser rules of human conduct in that they shoot through from one plane of thought to another and prove equally true in all. This is unmistakably the case with balance. Whichever plane of thought we consider, material, mental, moral, or spiritual, lack of balance involves lack of stability. The townsman who attempts to assist in the hayfield discovers that the principle of balance is of first-class importance in piling up a load of hay. If he tries his hand as loader, his first attempt will probably excite the derision of the countrymen on account of its lack of balance. As the wagon rolls homewards every shake of the conveyance will render the situation worse. The ill-balanced load will preach sermons with every awkward rut, if observers only have understanding eyes. Possibly the complete collapse of the whole load, with damage to life and property, will provide the final peroration.

The principle applies to everything on all planes of action and with all degrees of importance. We want a well balanced load or building, or business, or book, or lecture, or man, or woman.

It is obvious that the most interesting and important application of the principle is the personal. A community is made up of individuals. Businesses are run and books are written by men and women, including the business of the Truth and books expounding divine principles. If improvements are to be effected, therefore we must begin with individuals. A reader may say, "Begin with yourself", and this is excellent advice. We all need a little introspective care in this matter. If a man is not conscious of ever having been at all unbalanced it is probable that he has never been anything else. It is like the matter of sound and successful work. "If you have known yourself to fail", said Ruskin, "then you have some reason for trusting your consciousness of success." Everyone knows that little good work can be expected when everything is procalimed as great. A Sunday paper used to print posters announcing that a notorious individual had written for them an article "the greatest that had ever been printed". Readers could be almost sure that one still greater would follow next week. The claims were so extravagant that last no one took any notice of them.

In the same way, a man who is never conscious of being at all unbalanced will not impress us as a sound judge. On the other hand, we may sometimes be positively startled to find that one who has revealed himself as altogether exceptional in the soberness of his judgments, will make confession

PRINCIPLES AND PROVERBS

that he has at times been most deplorably unbalanced. We ought not really to be surprised at this combination. It is the acute sense of balance that informs the individual of his error and, properly used, brings about the poise, the fairness, the judicial and comprehensive view of the good judge. If we are able to say of two men that the only difference between them is that one knows he is under the influence of prejudice and the other does not know, we really affirm that there is *all* the difference between them.

Even on the physical plane it is the power to detect a deviation from the normal that enables us to keep our balance. A child learns to walk through taking note of these warnings and the punishment which follows if they are unheeded. If a man drugs himself with strong drink the sense of balance is deadened and he falls. If a man is in vigorous health, and with no drugs in his blood, he may deviate from the vertical with every step he takes, and yet never be really unbalanced because he knows exactly what he is doing. The sense of balance—which some authorities regard as a separate sense as real as sight or hearing—responds to slight deviations and supplies the corrective.

Under abnormal conditions the sense may fail us. Airmen have said that when flying at night over water, they have sometimes turned upside down without knowing it. A pilot has deemed that he was flying swiftly onwards with an even keel, and then has discovered just in time that he was falling toward the sea at the speed of an express train.

There is a startling resemblance between the physical and the mental in this matter of balance.

Men may lack the acute sense that others possess, or they may lose their natural capacity through various influences. They may be drugged by false doctrine or by feeling. Either love or hatred may effectively spoil the sense of balance. We cannot go far, however, with such a list of opposite qualities. Pride will upset the sense of balance, but humility will not. Anger will, but good temper will not. Envyings, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, most of the evil tendencies of the flesh will sadly disturb the balance of the best of minds. Joy, peace, long-suffering, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance, the fruit of the Spirit, will tend toward a proper balance of the mind. Even love, when properly directed by the over-ruling love of God, will influence in the same direction. It is only the weak human love that may cause prejudice and lack of balance.

Perhaps some readers may feel that in a Christian community the works of the flesh will be so little in evidence that we all ought to be able to maintain well balanced minds. This should be so, but unfortunately never has been. The apostles show that the works of the flesh were rampant in the early ecclesias, and we have no reason for supposing that human nature is any better now. Under the influence of the Truth men may conquer the grosser passions of humanity. They may reach a plane in which the excesses of human nature at its worst cease even to attract, but at the same time the more subtle and dangerous of fleshly taints may be positively accentuated. Strife about words to no profit has been connected with religion more than anything else. Such strife is placed by the Apostle as one of the works of the flesh, and it is greatly

PRINCIPLES AND PROVERBS

disturbing to mental balance. Pride, one of the worst of all fleshly evils, has often assumed its very worst form in the Churches. It has so many disguises elaborated in the deceitful human heart, that men may easily be self-deceived, claiming to be humble, to be jealous only for truth, and they may be only partly conscious or even quite unconscious of the consuming arrogance that has unbalanced them. That this has been so in the history of Christendom cannot be disputed. The scribes and Pharisees would have denied that they were proud, or at least have claimed that theirs was only a proper pride in the Law of God. In reality it was a fleshly pride that led them to the frightful sin of rejecting the Messiah. So it has been with popes and priest and dissenting ministers right down to the feeble-minded man who issues a leaflet, with his portrait on the front page and an egotistical account of his conversion.

Are we immune from the evil? Is there no danger that we may allow pride, well disguised, to take possession of us even in the work of the Truth? Tom Hood declared that the proudest of all prides swells in a self-elected saint. Certainly in the claim of saintship there is most room for disguise. There is danger that we may swell with pride in the consciousness of saintship and the possession of superior knowledge. There is danger that arranging brethren in an ecclesia may magnify themselves as well as their office. There is danger that agitators may take pride in successful agitation even though it is destructive. It is possible for individual critics to join in strife with the proud conviction that they alone can end it, or with proud contempt to stand aside from strife that they despise. It is possible for

brethren to judge each other thus proudly and for whole ecclesias to thank God that they are not as others.

Of all the evils of the flesh pride will most upset balance, and when men are unbalanced pride is most effectually disguised.

These, then, are some of the main causes for lack of balance in individuals or communities. How can we guard against them? How shall we detect a lack of balance in ourselves? That is obviously the first step toward restoration. There is one way if we have the honesty to use it. It is to test ourselves by principles rather than by incidents. We can then apply the principles to matters in which we are relatively free from pride and prejudice or whatever evil quality has caused the lack of balance.

This method will readily be recognized as the true one if we take an extreme illustration. Suppose that a brother has given too much attention, say, to the book of Daniel. He often refers to the book and speaks of it whenever he can. So far he may do well. To specialize is often helpful, and one who has exceptional knowledge of a particular subject can help others. This brother, however, drags in the book of Daniel when quite different subjects demand attention, and we begin to feel that he is lacking in balance in the matter. When he demands that candidates for baptism must have a knowledge of this particular prophecy far greater than that of the average brother we are sure that he is becoming harmfully unbalanced. How can we correct him? Probably the first effort to restrain will give him the impression that we seek to belittle the book of Daniel. He will rise passionately to the defence and

PRINCIPLES AND PROVERBS

quote the words of Christ, "Whoso readeth let him understand", as if we were trying to oppose them. In this way he will become more unbalanced than ever. If, however, he can only be persuaded to consider principles and for a little while to escape from the microscopic examination of his favourite subject, he may be restored to a proper frame of mind.

Some knowledge of the Word of God is necessary before one can be baptized, but not a profound knowledge. The new members are only babes in Christ and they can still learn. Moreover, the knowledge required is of the Word as a whole, not one part more than another. You do not require that they must know all about the temple of Ezekiel's prophecy or that they must have a mature understanding of the Law given through Moses. They must know and believe first principles and they must be ready to continue learning from the Word.

If led to think of these matters the extremist may begin to realize that any attempt to find a principle on which to base his teaching would inevitably lead to confusion. Unless he is hopelessly unbalanced he will come to recognize that he cannot demand such thorough knowledge of all the Bible, and therefore he cannot in reason demand it of the one part that most interests him.

This appeal to principle and the choice of an example free from immediate prejudice, is the best way to restore balance. It is as difficult for most men to take an impartial view of a subject in which they are greatly impressed as it is for parents to be unprejudiced in the affairs of a favourite son. If parents unreasonably complain that their son has

been shamefully treated, our best answer is to persuade them—if we can—to contemplate an exactly similar case with someone else's son. If brethren unreasonably accentuate one feature of truth, our best course is to induce them—if we can—to look at another phase of equal importance.

If we are called upon to move in any matter that is agitating the Brotherhood there must be an underlying principle of action, and that principle will cover many other incidents. Is the principle sound? Are we prepared to apply it, not only to the one feverish topic of the day but to everything else where it is properly applicable? If we are not so prepared, if we are inclined to resent the introduction of other matters, and are even reluctant to consider principles at all in the matter, there is a serious lack of balance somewhere. If we are wise we shall try to find a principle and examine it thoroughly, for by so doing we shall be finding the true balance of sobriety, temperance, and a sound mind.

There is another phase of this subject, too important to be considered at the end of a chapter. It has to do with the weightier matters of the law which are so often neglected and the lesser matters which are made to weigh too much. It has to do with the ever-difficult task of inducing people who read the Bible to take notice of its plainest teaching, and the almost impossible task of convincing people that the eternal Laws of God are of more weight than the traditions of men.

CHAPTER 3

THE WEIGHTIER MATTERS

When there is a failure to maintain the principle of balance, the greatest danger is that the very first principles of right conduct may be neglected, while all attention is bestowed upon matters of little importance which for the moment chance to loom large.

This indifference to essentials and scrupulous whitening of exteriors is such a common failing of humanity that we can gather lessons from almost all parts of history. The essentials do not change. They can be expressed in a few laws, perfectly beautiful, appealing to our intelligence so completely that no man dares to call them in question. They are never disputed, but they are continually obscured and thrust into the background by mutable man-made laws.

The essential duties enumerated by the prophet Micah are substantially the same as those laid down by Christ. The prophet declared that the ideal was "to do justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with God." Christ declared that the weightier matters of the law were judgment, mercy, faith and the love of God. Justice and judgment here surely have the same meaning. There can be no doubt as to the meaning of mercy. An infidel might be humble, but mere humility is not all that is required. A man cannot walk humbly with his God apart from faith. Conversely, if a man has the true faith and a proper appreciation of the love of God, he will be guided to the true humility. Why is it that these principles,

though never disputed, are nearly always neglected in favour of something which seems large in human affairs just for the moment, but which, after the lapse of a century or so, is seen even by men to be of little consequence ?

The Pharisees would not have disputed the fundamental principles laid down by Micah. They might have been quite able to point out the faults of their forefathers in neglecting those principles. They were blind to their own faults, however, as men are nearly always. With the deceitfulness of the human heart they were able to satisfy themselves that all their worst actions were due to a zeal for God. It was zeal for the law that made them want to stone the sinful woman ; a punctilious regard for the Sabbath that caused them to condemn the works of healing on that holy day ; and doubtless after the crucifixion, many pious adversaries of the Lord went home to their families each man "proclaiming his own goodness", and explaining that his apparently severe action was only a righteous zeal for God.

How can we escape from this frightful self-deception which makes men become so unbalanced that they put too much emphasis on relatively small duties and neglect the weightier matters of the law ? We are all liable to fall into such errors, and the causes are so different in different generations that unless we maintain a very clear view of principles, the faults of men in the past do not enlighten us as to our own mistakes. We see clearly that there was lack of balance in former days. We are under no misapprehension as to the relative size of ancient gnats and camels. It is the near gnats under the microscope of our present concentration that seem

so large, and if once we make a mistake all the instincts of the deceitful human heart tend to exaggerate it, in the effort to build up defences of our judgment.

The first step we must take if we desire to avoid such evil is to impress the mind with a clear recognition of the possibility that we may have erred. We must try to recognize this as a practical possibility, not merely as an abstraction. Here again the factor of time effects great changes. Even the span of an individual life is enough to enable us to correct our judgments. A man can be far more just and impartial in reviewing his actions of ten years ago than those of yesterday. In bitter controversies of the past there always seemed absolute conviction of right and the most vehement expressions of sincerity, even by those who were working havoc. In some instances the passing of a decade sufficed to effect a complete change of view, and brethren in private conversation have heard some pathetic admissions of mistaken judgment and vain regrets for evil wrought.

There is an explanation of this obtuseness, but an effort to lay bare some of the deceitful labyrinths of the human mind would lead away from the present subject. We may be able to examine the wicked and deceitful heart a little later, but for the moment the subject is the principle of balance in relation to the weighty matters of God's law. In this matter we shall probably find help by taking a distant view rather than by introspection. When we are painfully crawling up a steep hill it may seem the greatest object in all the landscape ; but at a distance of a few miles it is perhaps invisible, or only

seen as one of many insignificant hillocks at the foot of a great mountain.

In the same way we obtain a truer view of human duties and privileges when we can look at them without the prejudice which comes with personal contact. We can easily imagine that two Pharisees might agree as to the great principles laid down by Micah. They might so fully agree, in fact, that their minds would never be agitated over these essential virtues. Truths admitted by everyone may become dead truths. The mind grows along the line of its activities. That is why men always tend to exaggerate the importance of matters to which they have given much attention or which have been the subject of their discussion. Our two Pharisees might have a lifelong dispute over some matter of ceremonial washing or of keeping separate from others of their nation. In the most natural manner they would exaggerate the importance of these subjects while the essential principles on which they agreed received no attention. In the final result they might do unjustly, hate mercy and walk arrogantly without God, though never for a moment denying that the prophet Micah was right.

Christ's condemnation of the Pharisees was mainly because of their arrogant assumption of righteousness and their merciless treatment of more unfortunate sinners. He continually urged the importance of the essential principles of right conduct rather than the exteriors to which they devoted attention. He told them that in their zeal for little duties they had neglected the weightier matters of the law—judgment, mercy, faith and the love of God. He told them that if they had known

PRINCIPLES AND PROVERBS

the meaning of scriptural injunctions regarding mercy they would not have condemned the guiltless, and he told them—no doubt it seemed to them a most scandalous statement—that the grosser sinners of humanity, harlots and publicans, should go into the Kingdom of God before them.

To his disciples the Lord gave similar instruction. The 25th chapter of Matthew gives more consecutive teaching on this subject than has been generally recognized. The very emphatic lesson concerning positive virtues follows the parable of the talents. What are the real talents? Are they not the opportunities to give to the least of Christ's servants the life-giving bread and water and the protecting garment? In the parable the one who hid the money and brought upon himself the disapproval of his lord is not represented as a waster who had spent his talent in having a good time in service to the flesh. He hid the money because he feared his lord as a hard man who would want to reap where he had not sown. It was only logical that this servant should be condemned out of his own mouth. If his lord was a hard man, expecting to reap where he had not sown, surely he would demand to reap where he *had* sown. The unprofitable servant apparently hid the talent he had received and then puzzled his brains trying to produce something for which his lord had not asked, but which it was assumed that—being a hard man—he would demand.

Is not the history of Christendom full of such anomalies? The fruits for which Christ asks have not been rendered, but tremendous efforts have been made to produce fruit where Christ has never

THE WEIGHTIER MATTER

sown. It is the worst of all the ill effects of lack of balance, and the danger threatens us all the time.

The picture of the judgment which follows puts all the emphasis on the positives. The righteous are approved for doing good, not merely for abstaining from evil. The rejected are condemned for their neglect of duty, not for evil they have wrought. "Come, ye blessed, because ye have fed the hungry, given drink to the thirsty, visited the sick and clothed the naked with a garment. Depart, ye cursed, because ye have not done these things." The principle is laid down that what we render or fail to render to the least of Christ's servants provides the measure of our attitude toward the Lord himself.

In the final day of judgment we shall not be able to excuse sterility in these essentials by reference to our strenuous labours to produce fruit for which Christ never asked. If any such excuses came to mind we should surely think of the unfaithful servant in the parable and become dumb. We have not a hard master who will demand fruit where he has never planted, who will require a personal rectitude of super-refined separation which he never commanded; but we have a just Master who will require the performance of those essential duties that he so patiently explained. If we give bread and water, either natural or spiritual, to servants of Christ who hunger and thirst, we give to the Lord himself. If we neglect our opportunities to give, we neglect Christ. If we sin against the brethren and wound their weak conscience we sin against Christ, and assuredly if we cut off those whom he approves we cut off Christ.

PRINCIPLES AND PROVERBS

It is strange that some fail to realize even the possibility of sinning in this matter of cutting off brethren who have offended or are supposed to be of unsound views. We have heard earnest members defend what seems to us an extreme in the matter of withdrawals, by saying, "I grieve for this but I dare not imperil my salvation by fellowshiping one who is not sound on this point." As if there were many scriptural reasons for dreading utter condemnation if we fellowship one who is not quite sound in his understanding of duty; but no fear whatever of imperilling our salvation by cutting off and condemning and even traducing those who differ from us in judgment but are still hearty believers in the Gospel of Christ and the magnified and holy scriptures in which that gospel is enshrined. It is difficult to see how such a conception of the will of Christ has arisen. It cannot be from Christ's treatment of his immediate disciples. It cannot be from the letters to the ecclesias which give us much instruction as to ecclesial relationships if only we will receive it. The idea that there is safety in severe judgments should not be gathered from the letters of the apostle Paul, for though he commands disciples to withdraw from those who walk in a disorderly manner, from fornicators, from those who work not at all, and who do not conform to his righteous teaching, he is almost as explicit as the Lord himself in warning us of the danger of condemning ourselves in judging others.

The truth is that we might imperil our salvation either by an extreme toleration or an extreme of separation. We must take the whole counsel of God and apply the lessons to the circumstances of our day

THE WEIGHTIER MATTERS

as honestly and faithfully as we can. We must not be drawn to extremes in a competitive zeal for purity. We must certainly not allow a feeling of resentment at the repudiation of our judgment to make a difference of judgment the end of all fellowship. We must certainly try to avoid the horrible blight of a kind of party politics, with its astute manœuvres, its personalities and its unholy alliances for a common offensive. We must be taught of God and try with all our powers, at whatever cost of loss of friends or of personal humiliation, to take the course which Christ would approve so that if we have to go before him this year we shall be able to claim that we have really tried to be faithful stewards. We are weak and erring, with fleshly desires and many evil taints which make us sadly in need of divine mercy; but let us be able to claim that in the administration of his truth we have at least been honest, caring nothing for the counsels of mere men, but trying with all our powers to put the weighty matters of God's law in the right place. In short, let us be able to claim that we have paid attention to the essentials that Christ explained so patiently, instead of hiding away our talent and wasting our energies by hard exactions regarding which he has not spoken.

CHAPTER 4

“THE HEART IS DECEITFUL”

Bible teaching concerning the heart of man is even more unpopular than Bible teaching as to the purpose of God. We are told that men are defiled, not by food that they eat but by the thoughts that spring from within; that from the heart evil thoughts arise leading to evil deeds; the man who trusts in his own heart is a fool; the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. These questions are therefore raised—Who can understand his errors? Who can know the heart of man?

It is obvious that the heart is here used to mean the deepest recesses of the human mind regarding which we know so little. A human being is a complex creature. Even faculties which have been regarded as purely physical are so closely interwoven with the mental and reveal such complexities of action and reaction that wise men hesitate to proclaim that any part of the body is quite without influence on our mentality. To this day we use the word heart as meaning the centre of feeling and affection. It covers that part of the mentality which lies deeper than intellect and which often proves stronger than intellect and will combined.

Using the word heart in this sense, many thinkers have perceived that it is a very important part of our mental make-up, but the Bible has to lead the way in revealing how deceitful the heart can be. Once warned we should experience no difficulty in seeing what the scriptural condemnation means or in finding illustrations of the truth taught.

Nearly all the wars and disputes and wrangles that have disgraced mankind come from fleshly lusts more or less disguised with the palaver of the heart's deceitfulness. The higher the plane on which men profess to act the more deceitful the heart becomes, for more disguise is needed. The Huns, taking possession of Roman cities, would probably not trouble to deceive themselves as to their objects. Christian nations, animated by similar lusts, deceive themselves much. They take up the "white man's burden", and sometimes make such a skilful mixture of motives, with a basis of genuine ideals, that some very vile actions seem to be sanctified and the perpetrators are thoroughly self-deceived. The bitter disputes and cruel controversies in Christendom have only been rendered possible by this deceitful wickedness of the human heart. The same may be said of the compromises and conclusions which have allowed the Truth to be obscured.

It is probable that in the abstract everyone will admit the accuracy of this statement, and if some rather unkind critics chance to read these last few lines they will say, "Ah, this is true, and just hits off the case of the writer. A peace-at-any-price man, willing to compromise the Truth rather than offend any of the brethren."

If this criticism—which has actually been passed—is indeed a just estimate, the writer of these lines certainly presents an extraordinary instance of self-deception. He has greatly admired the peace-making capacity of some who have gone to their rest, but he has never been conscious of much natural aptitude in that direction. Rather has life been a constant struggle against a natural tendency

PRINCIPLES AND PROVERBS

which he has always regarded as unmixed diabolism—a tendency toward intellectual cruelty, a readiness to be sarcastic and cutting in dealing with those who cannot see truths or duties which seem clear enough, a tendency to be impatient when men hesitate to accept a position which—from the individual point of view, of course—is the only one tenable.

It would be strange if the expression of these tendencies was all misdirected effort, or if the entire struggle was a subterfuge of the deceitful heart to cover an ingrained love of peace at any price. Still stranger if some other writers who express themselves with such unrestrained vehemence are really lovers of peace who cultivate sarcasm and invective to overcome their weakness!

No, we cannot accept such ideas. There are some laws which govern the heart's deceitfulness and one of them is that in our wrestlings with the devil we shall overcome the obvious and easy deceits first. We cannot expect to understand and conquer the most complex deceitfulness of the heart, if we have not even begun to consider its most glaring perversities.

What is meant by a peace-at-any-price man? It is quite a promising field of inquiry in dealing with the heart's deceitfulness. A man who aims for peace at any price must surely be indolent, if he has so little regard for principles that he will yield them all for the sake of peace. We cannot suppose that his patience and meekness under rebuke are the result of a rigid self-discipline. We cannot suppose that a brother who has failed to grasp the first principles of the Truth will have succeeded in the most difficult task of all, subduing and controlling the diabolism

of a naturally active mind. A supine peacefulness can only be the result of indolence.

Now take the case of one who, whatever his faults, is not lazy, one who for over thirty years has worked unceasingly in the service of what he conceives to be right. Can he be described as a peace-at-any-price man? He may differ from you in his understanding of duty, but he must assuredly have some principles for which he will strive to the last breath, or why should he sacrifice so much in this incessant work?

There is a possible answer to this question, an ugly answer, but one which we do well to face, for we are human and not immune from any of the failings of mankind. The ugly answer is that it is possible for a man to give a lifetime of unpaid work to a cause, though all the while the real driving power is a love of prominence and prestige and the praise of men. We must face the ugly fact that there is danger of such fleshly desires being in part the motive power in our own work. If such were the driving force a man might be willing to sacrifice principles for the sake of peace; but most emphatically he would not be a peace-at-any-price man. He would be the quickest to resent criticism, to be careful for his prestige, and to be severe in his treatment of those who should spurn his advice.

The truth is that all men of activity are naturally quick enough to strive. Contradiction calls forth contradiction, extremes beget extremes, bitterness causes bitterness. If our well considered advice has been spurned we naturally expect the rejecters to get into trouble and it is equally natural to be pleased when the trouble comes. We may have escaped from

PRINCIPLES AND PROVERBS

this diabolism, but we do well to examine and prove ourselves in the matter. The heart can so easily deceive us by putting a varnish of piety on its ugliest motions. Men may refuse to admit that they rejoice when an opponent comes to grief, because they know that such rejoicing is wrong. A considerable element of the ugly feeling may be there nevertheless. Some men are conscious of the unholy influence and make an honest attempt to escape from it. Others yield to the influence and protest that they are moved solely by zeal for righteousness. They may easily be the victims of such complete obsession that in their zeal they become definitely unrighteous in word and deed. Under the stimulus of opposition we may come to regard men as the enemies of God merely because they reject our advice.

We truly must recognize the danger that a love of peace may lead to unfaithfulness in the administration of God's Word; but we must also remember that the most persistent of fighters may be equally unfaithful for a much uglier reason. Even if he escapes from the subtle poison that is always generated by strife, he may nevertheless be destructive. Instead of following Paul the apostle he may only emulate Saul of Tarsus, and without Saul's excuse. Scripture warns us against both dangers. There have been men who have been indolent in the performance of God's work and have praised themselves for their love of peace. There have been others who have done evil with both hands earnestly, and have said, "See how zealous I am." In either case the deceitful human heart furnishes them with ample disguises, and "so they wrap it up."

THE HEART IS DECEITFUL

The deceitfulness of the heart is sometimes so extraordinary that its perversities become positively farcical. It presents such a mixture of comedy and tragedy as to make devils laugh and saints weep. For instance, it is a common tragedy for a difference of judgment to result in debate, strife, bitterness and division. The members of a family are divided. They still worship the same God, cherish the same hope, hold to all the old principles; but on a point of judgment they are separated as by a wall of ice. Economic law, which does not recognize these disputes, makes them meet at the same table; but the head of the house declines to give thanks to God in the presence of the members of his family who are cut off from ecclesial fellowship.

Such a situation has arisen more than once. Indeed, under certain conditions a student of the heart's deceitfulness would expect it. What is the explanation? The stern parent who takes such a course would doubtless claim that it is a matter of principle. It is painful to him; but as a matter of conscience he cannot give thanks to God on behalf of those who, by their unfaithfulness in judgment, have cut themselves off, etc., etc.

If once again we adopt the method of testing these professions in connection with something remote from the prejudice and passion of controversy, the matter may be viewed in a truer light. Presumably the apostle Paul will be accepted as a model. We read that he took bread and gave thanks in the presence of all a ship's company. The "all" included a number of soldiers who were murderers at heart as the context shows. Have we ever ex-

PRINCIPLES AND PROVERBS

perienced any difficulty in understanding the apostle's action? Assuredly not. We recognize that in publicly giving thanks to the Giver of all good he was not associating himself with the evil men in the company. We have all acted in a similar manner when business acquaintances have met at one table. We have given thanks as usual without feeling in any way compromised by the fact that the visitor was far removed from the true Faith, or perhaps not a man of faith at all. Why then should anyone cease to give this open expression of thanks to God because of the presence of brethren who are—as may be thought—misguided as to the application of a recognized principle, but so sound on fundamentals that they would easily pass the stiffest examination that has ever been required of candidates for baptism?

Again, a minority in an ecclesia is cut off because members feel unable to support a severe measure disfellowshipping certain other meetings. The members of the minority wish to meet in obedience to the commands of Christ and they ask for the loan of some furniture that is available, the property, perhaps, of the ecclesia. A stern secretary writes in answer refusing the request and adding: "The furniture was bought for the servants of God, not for those who cast God's word behind them."

It is easy to understand that a difference in judgment as to the merits of a remote and complicated dispute might be very annoying to a determined majority; but it is difficult to understand anyone describing such difference in judgment as casting God's word behind the back. Still more difficult is it to see how anyone would seek to justify

the attitude taken in refusing material assistance. If an affable but irreligious neighbour chanced to have a meeting in the same building, and asked for the loan of a few chairs, we can hardly imagine such a refusal, with such a reason.

Why is it that in so many instances the slight divergence makes a greater breach than complete opposition? That men are kinder to those with whom they have no affinity than to a brother who proves unexpectedly recalcitrant? Why the refusal of grace before meat in the presence of brethren who are supposed to have erred in judgment, though it is granted in the presence of strangers whose error is fundamental? The answer to these questions is scorchingly obvious. We have no feeling against the affable business man who will not discuss serious subjects, we feel resentment against the attitude of the brother who ought to see eye to eye with us but who proves disappointing; and feeling is the basis of so much evil speaking. The tendency to exaggerate his fault and represent that as a matter of conscience and principle we must administer pin pricks is simply childish diabolism, disguise it as we may. The desire to give a crushing answer to the one who attacks us personally (I am as liable as anyone to this feeling) is simply the old fleshly blow for blow on the mental plane. The use of sacred things for the purpose of administering a pin prick is like hitting a man on the head with a Bible.

We must not plume ourselves on our refusal to give blow for blow if we simply apply the principle on the physical plane where we do not happen to be put to the test. Probably few of us were much deterred by Christian precept when we were

PRINCIPLES AND PROVERBS

schoolboys, and since we left school probably no one has ever struck us a physical blow to test whether we would turn the other cheek. On the mental plane, however, we have had blows innumerable. How have we endured them? When a critic in making a personal attack lays himself open to a crushing rejoinder which would do no good, however pleasant it might be to us and our friends, can we resist the temptation? Do we try? The deceitful heart will furnish us with ample disguise if we want it. We may hit back and persuade ourselves that our resentful feelings are all motions of zeal and piety. There is no end to the evil that might be wrought on such a basis. The commandments of Christ present an ideal so far above us that if we deceive ourselves sufficiently to start such evil work we can easily find glaring faults in every man who presumes to judge us. Many, however, do try to strip the heart of its disguises and to apply the command, "turn the other cheek", on the mental plane. They recognize that the feeling of resentment when brethren prove disappointingly obdurate is a fleshly feeling and the inner man must be on his guard. If the feeling is denied expression it presently subsides. How can we be angry with beings as frail as we know ourselves to be? Man is more than half mere feeling even at his intellectual zenith, and in time of strife he is far removed from the zenith. Only at the judgment seat of Christ will the secrets of the heart be revealed. There will be no feeling of resentment then for personal wrongs. If Christ can forgive our sins, it will be a sheer joy to find that he can also forgive others whose vision has been different and who have sinned in other ways.

CHAPTER 5

“A LYING TONGUE” (Prov. 26 : 28)

The proverb “A lying tongue hateth those that are afflicted by it” is certainly not a principle of human conduct to light our way through life; but it is a primary fact of human weakness which we need to recognize. Keen observers in each generation discover the fact for themselves, and sometimes remark on it as a paradox. Yet it was more perfectly stated in the Proverbs of Solomon than ever by writers of later days.

The converse truth has also been noted, although perhaps not put in this definite form—the truthful tongue loves those who are blest by it. There is nothing so fruitful of love as the practical works of love. Action sometimes has to precede feeling. Works of love may be undertaken only from a sense of duty, or for the love of Christ, and eventually the worker will develop a genuine love for the unattractive people who benefit by his labours. This is a more attractive subject than the one set forth at the head of this chapter, but for the moment we will not be allured by it. For a little while we will consider this remarkable fact of our common nature—that man is predisposed to hate those who are injured by his actions or his words: that just as he is restrained from doing evil to anyone more by the thought of benefits conferred than of benefits received, so, in many instances at all events, the injury he has wrought is the most potent cause of hatred.

PRINCIPLES AND PROVERBS

In dealing with scriptural maxims, men often miss the lesson intended by altering the names given to ugly things and assuming that the rude words of scripture cannot apply to them. What Christian will admit in so many words that he hates anyone or that he has told lies? We know so well that these are such ugly things that we must either avoid them altogether or cover them with a respectable mask. A man tells what the Bible would call a lie, but he calls it a legitimate inference or a logical extension of the argument. He hates his brother and calls it a righteous feeling of resentment. Even the most horrible cruelties of the Spanish Inquisition were never set forth by the perpetrators in all their naked ugliness. Heretics were so evil that the only chance for their souls was for the body to be burnt or buried alive, that the frightful sufferings might perchance purge the evil while at the same time offering a warning to other offenders. The perpetrators of these abominations would never have admitted even to themselves the ugly truth that they were full of the very worst kind of pride and lust for power, and the more they misrepresented their enemies the more they hated them.

Seeing that human nature has sometimes descended to such depths of depravity it is wise for us to examine this subject carefully and not miss the lesson by finding deceptive masks for evil things. We must not make the examination simply to find applications of the ugly truth to those who have disappointed us by taking a course which we disapprove. Very likely such applications can be made, but that is primarily the responsibility of the guilty individuals. It is a much more practical

question for us whether we have been in any measure at fault.

We can extend the principle laid down by the wise man, and if we prefer use modern and polite words. We will not talk of lies, but have we ever been in the least degree unfair in our dealings? We will not talk of hatred, but have we any feeling of dislike, of aversion, of strained relationship towards any whom we have criticized?

We will engage in a little close analysis of the human heart to throw light upon this subject, and to assist self-examination. Few people are aware of the extent to which intellect is swayed by feeling. Those few who are aware, try to keep as free as possible, so that their judgment may be just even where affections are not engaged, and not unduly generous even towards those they love. The majority of people, however—and oftentimes some of the most capable of men—are swayed by feeling to a degree bordering on absurdity.

It has been stated that a certain prominent statesman was converted from red-hot republicanism almost to conservatism by a royal appeal to feeling—no argument, nothing in which the intellect was invited to participate. King Edward, when he was Prince of Wales, went out of his way to shake hands publicly with the firebrand, and all the republican convictions bolted out at the back door, nevermore to reappear. The story may well be true, for it is not more extraordinary than changes we have seen. There are times when a man might be adamant against all the arguments of reason, but like warm wax in the hands of one who could touch feeling. Assail him with the most convincing logic

and he is more than ever determined in his opposition. Invite him home to tea and ask his opinion on a pet hobby of his quite remote from the vexed question at issue, and he finds the logical arguments for himself and yields the position without a struggle.

It may well be questioned whether it is legitimate to use a knowledge of psychology to mould men to one's will, but it is well to take note of the fact that it is often done, and then to ask ourselves whether we are much under the influence of feeling.

Suppose a test case. A highly respected friend is accused of sin. He is alleged to be guilty of an offence which is quite out of harmony with his reputation but, through human infirmity, not by any means impossible. We do not want to hear the evidence; we are indignant at the accusation, and are quite sure that it is false. If the reports are persistent we should simply go to our friend and tell him of the slander so that we might have his all-sufficient assurance that the stories told were untrue. But supposing that in some way the friendship had been broken previous to the reports being spread. Supposing that the rupture had been caused by the highly respected one administering a stinging rebuke to us. Supposing that we first heard of his alleged frailty while still feeling resentful of his strictures; would that make any difference to our judgment? It ought not to make the slightest difference, but it probably would. As a general rule we shall be safe in expecting a change of feeling to make a difference in a man's judgment of such matters, though there has not been the slightest change in the truths on which judgment ought to rest. The more complete the rupture and the stronger the feeling of resent-

ment, the greater the readiness to believe evil of the old friend, or to see evil where none exists. Then we have the familiar and pitiable spectacle of the brother offended seeking out grounds of accusation that he would have regarded as childish before ill-feeling beclouded his judgment.

If we can recognize that such processes are carried out in the deceitful human heart, we may penetrate a little further to examine the more subtle matter of the lying or the unfair tongue hating or disliking those who are afflicted by it.

Self-justification is a common instinct, and that is probably the basis of it all. We naturally and perhaps to a large extent subconsciously set up defences against criticism from anyone, even from our own better sense. In a controversy, a man makes a statement injurious to an opponent. A friend of the opponent might call it a wicked and deliberate lie. An unbiased observer might call it a very unfair and misleading statement. Even some of the critic's friends and supporters might regret the statement and say that it goes too far. The critic himself will admit to himself that it was certainly severe; but—here come the defences—look at what he has said and done to deserve it. Thus the natural tendency arises to seek out the worst offences of the one attacked, and to put the worst possible construction upon them all to justify the severity. Surely such a quest is the direct path to hatred. "I was severe, but then, he deserved it. In fact, he deserved more than I gave him if I think of all the ill that he has done." So the harsh and untruthful critic works up evil feelings to justify his cruelty. If the one attacked or any of his friends are unwise

PRINCIPLES AND PROVERBS

enough to retaliate with similar unfairness, the defences are assisted and the original falsehood seems completely justified. So the devilish work goes on until sins are piled mountains high, and the original cause of dispute is lost to sight.

It is well to know something of these worst deceptions of the evil heart, but it is not a subject over which one would choose to linger. We would rather turn to the other side of the picture and consider the growth of love through rendering service. It is all covered by the great saying of the Lord Jesus regarding the blessedness of giving.

CHAPTER 6

THE BESSEDNESS OF GIVING

“It is more blessed to give than to receive.” Here we have a principle that is beautiful as well as being true. It is partly recognized by almost everyone, although too often it is only seen in its least important aspect and applied in the worst possible way. The most selfish and shameless of profiteering traders might quote the saying as he gives a penny to the child of one of his victims. Possibly even then he would need someone present to witness the gift before he would be conscious of any blessedness in the act. Many times the saying has been applied to gifts under circumstances only differing in degree from this extreme illustration.

Of course, the principle applies to money just as the exercise of charity involves a proper use of the unrighteous mammon, but it is only one phase of the matter and by no means the most important. Money has almost ruined the word charity, so that to most people it expresses an idea as cold and hard as coins and as soiled and ragged as treasury notes. In the same way the blessedness of giving is pictured in many minds after the manner found in a child's book of illustrated proverbs—the affluent and well-dressed man giving a coin to the ragged child, blessed because he gives the cold coin of cold charity instead of being subjected to the humiliation of receiving it.

Even with money there is a possibility of blessedness in giving, far beyond the reach of such a picture. It is found by the one who distributes

PRINCIPLES AND PROVERBS

without ostentation, one who with delicacy and tact does good by stealth, making charity the warm and human power that it ought to be. One who is kind and not puffed up with the pride of possession, but with a recognition that all riches come from God, uses his wealth as a trust, with God as the only witness.

The principle, however, can be applied more effectively in other fields where it has not often been recognized. Human life is a long round of giving and receiving. The idea is popularly expressed in the words, "give and take". Many philosophers have been wise enough to perceive that one of the great causes of toil in human life has been the greedy desire to take without giving. Such selfishness ends by being self-destructive. Those who persistently refuse to serve become parasites no longer capable of serving, while those who bear a burden too heavy for their strength may have their life of service unduly shortened. It can hardly be described as a matter of giving then. Their service is taken from them until the very life has been thrown away. There is no blessedness in that, either for those who take or those who have all taken from them. True blessing is found in free giving and receiving, the giver being more blessed of the two.

It has perhaps not often occurred to men to apply this principle on the spiritual plane, yet that is where it proves most completely true. There are many vigorous men who have only grasped the principle on the lowest plane of thought and perhaps have not applied it correctly even then. They can make their way in life and will take care not to be beholden to anyone. They would not take gifts;

they are independent, so they think. Then when they feel the insufficiency of the flesh and need some spiritual help they are often harshly critical of those who minister. They want spiritual food and think that someone ought to have it ready for them, dished and served and almost predigested. They want to take and are not prepared to give anything.

Such men sometimes think that they give all that is required of them in giving money. This has been one of the great errors of Christendom,—the attempt to buy that which is “without money and without price”. It is true that the apostle Paul says something regarding spiritual and carnal things which seems to suggest reciprocity in these matters. We must not put his teaching upside down, however. He says that Gentiles who are partakers of Israel’s spiritual riches have a duty to minister in carnal matters. He certainly does not suggest that carnal wealth can buy the spiritual treasures. The two kinds of riches are on a different plane. The currency is different and there is no known rate of exchange. The wealthy man who goes to his chapel with a feeling that he can purchase anything and a readiness to give of his abundance if the service pleases him, is not likely to receive any real spiritual food. He is not in the right condition to appreciate it. Possibly husks please him best. If so he can buy what he requires.

The fact is, it is hardly possible to receive true spiritual ministrations without first giving or being ready to give. This is seen if we think of three different types of men such as might be found in any community going to a Sunday morning service

PRINCIPLES AND PROVERBS

for the breaking of bread. The first goes as a matter of custom but in a very critical spirit, neither radiant nor receptive. He expects the reading will be bad and the singing execrable. The exhortation is sure to be the last word in unprofitable dullness, and the whole tone of the meeting is depressing rather than helpful. The second man goes in a receptive frame of mind, hungering and thirsting after righteousness, anxious to obtain some good from the meeting, but never reflecting that he has any responsibility in the matter of giving. The third goes quite as hungry for spiritual food as the second, but anxious to give as well as to receive. He will contribute his full quota of the right spirit even if there is no opportunity to give in any other way. If there is further opportunity to give he will be found ready.

It seems certain that the first-mentioned member will gather no spiritual wealth even if an unexpected mine is brought to light. He will probably be a potent influence in bringing about the depressing atmosphere that he deplors. We might on first thought assume that the second will only receive, leaving all the blessedness of giving to the third. On further reflection, however, we must conclude that members of the second type actually give, even though they are not conscious of the fact. It is hardly possible to hunger and thirst after righteousness without giving. Imagine the experience of a hard worker who from a sense of duty goes to minister to the depressing ecclesia of which he has had previous and painful experience. Imagine the difference it makes in administering the Word if instead of an audience composed entirely of critical and groaning dead weights, he finds some new faces

THE BLESSEDNESS OF GIVING

obviously intelligent and receptive, men and women hungering after righteousness in fact. They give a renewal of strength although they do not utter a word and although their only thought is a desire to receive.

It is much better, however, that there should be conscious effort in giving, because then the work will be sustained in spite of disappointments. We have probably all at times fallen into the error of wanting merely to receive and then we have been disappointed. We have felt in need of spiritual help and the help has not been forthcoming. We have been sad and depressed and our whole being has cried out for the ministrations of someone with almost super-human qualities of insight and sympathy. No such being has appeared; ministrations have been on commonplace level. Possibly we have found that those with whom we have come in contact have expected to receive help with hardly a thought of giving. Then we may be inclined to complain. We seek the less blessed part and we fail to find it. In such distempered condition we are asking for such comfort as Christ gave to his disciples right under the shadow of the cross and just before they forsook him and fled.

Perhaps the side thought just expressed cuts to the root of the matter. In our distress we need the ministrations of one in still greater trouble but with the strength and will to help us in spite of it all. Ought we not to feel rather ashamed when such a truth is brought home to us? Surely we can imagine some of the disciples so feeling when they recalled to memory those last words recorded in the latter half of the Gospel of John. The Lord was

giving when he had such need of receiving. He was comforting them as the last hours flew by to bring his supreme trial. It was still the more blessed part, but assuredly it was a hard one to choose.

The condition of mind we have just been considering is far removed from that healthy hunger for spiritual food which by its very zest and evidence of receptiveness gives strength to those who minister. Yet the same general principle applies. We must all be prepared to give such wealth as we possess and as God has filled our store. Babes in Christ are giving well, even if they only give attention. Men and women are expected to give more than this. Not only is it the more blessed part but often enough it is the only way of life. All kinds and grades of giving may be good, and it is good always to be receptive in spiritual things. The only wrong attitude of receptiveness is that unreasonable demand for super-human ministrations and the carping criticism of the best that poor mortals can be expected to give.

Perhaps some readers would ask for some more practical suggestions as to how they can give. There is sometimes a sad tendency to suppose that the only gifts of service of any account are those that are open and prominent. As a matter of fact the value of such work is discounted just in proportion as it is alluring to the flesh. Surely there is no difficulty in finding work to fill up a hundred lives if we had them. Usually the best kind of giving is that most ready to hand, for in making such choice we really get to work instead of dreaming about what might be done.

We have heard of young sisters banding together for quiet, unobtrusive labours in rendering occasional help to overloaded mothers; cheerful,

friendly visitors who would call on older sisters, not to waste time where it was already too scarce but to render help where it was needed. Such work required tact, of course. It would never be easy and certainly not attractive to the flesh, but it might easily prove a most blessed form of giving. In such everyday matters opportunities for giving can be found without any need for searching and often it is in such prosaic matters that hearts are most touched as well as hands being eased. The cup of cold water is an expansive symbol.

If brethren have a keen desire to give in the more prominent matters of ecclesial life there is ample opportunity for them. Give the right spirit and the right thought. Apply the golden rule when your duty is to listen and give attention. You may be called upon to pray or read; be prepared to give of your best then. Too often the harsh critic of ecclesial ministrations has failed utterly when he has been called upon to play the relatively easy part of reading. He has read from the book of the Law indistinctly and has not given the sense or caused those who hear to understand. If brethren are anxious to give in the work of the ecclesia let them learn to read well. Verily work shall be found for them and they shall receive as well as give.

Another instruction which surely applies to all kinds of giving is to be found in the apostle's words to the Corinthians regarding the necessary collection of money: "Not of constraint but willingly, for the Lord loveth a cheerful giver."

Perhaps we have not applied this admonition in any extended field, yet surely there is no reason why we should not. It is a principle and applies on

PRINCIPLES AND PROVERBS

every plane. Sometimes we have been guilty of rebellious gloominess in our work though not in the matter of money. We would give to the collections as we are able and give cheerfully, remembering the apostle's admonition. Then we might fail utterly on a more important plane and never reflect that we were at fault. "Plenty of letters this morning and not a single one of any interest. All miserable requests for lectures!" The rule should be, of course, to give such service as we are able and to give cheerfully, just as in the matter of giving money.

It is nearly always possible to give even though one should be so bereft of strength and substance that work of any kind seems out of the question. A brother who for many years has been bedridden and hardly able to move a muscle has more than once sent forth a cheering and strengthening message just when it was much needed. It is hardly possible that he can realize the potency of such giving. It reproves the false feeling of faintness on the part of those who are relatively strong. Such messages are a clarion call to all who are really alive. Truly there are men, magnificent animals, who on the spiritual plane need to be carried everywhere and there are human wrecks who help to do the carrying.

Ah, if only we could have an ecclesia with everyone intent on giving, what a transformation it would make—brethren neither pulling down that which once they built nor supinely waiting to be fed; but all active, all giving and anxious to serve. A little fasting and special prayer in such a meeting might bring a direct message from Heaven as in the days of Daniel.

CHAPTER 7

THE CHURCH OF GOD IS ONE BODY

Of all Scriptural principles, this may seem the simplest. Almost any brother or sister could expound it, could exhibit the beauty of the apostle's simile and reveal the folly of any member being either puffed up with an impression of superior office or depressed by lack of qualification for any particular form of service. Eye and ear and foot and hand all have worthy parts to play. A well equipped mouth is of no service if it fails to arrive at the place where it is wanted. The feet have to bring it. It may follow therefore that an inferior mouth would render better service if only it could be supported by better feet.

The principle is recognized at least in theory, and it needs no further theoretical exposition. Is it recognized in practice? Do we realize the object "that there should be no schism in the body"? Have members "the same care one for another"? So that if "one member suffer, all the members suffer with it"?

The apostle truly presents a high ideal, but it is the ideal at which we must aim if we want to be saved. All that we are told of the judgment seat tends to show that the supreme test is in these matters. If we are repudiated then, it will be because we have failed to live the Truth and not for inability to understand it. We are told that some will be punished for errors committed without adequate knowledge of their Lord's will; but assuredly it will not be because of inability to understand. It is our duty to know our Lord's will.

PRINCIPLES AND PROVERBS

The necessary instruction is given to us, and if we fail to hear and understand it is almost certain that an obstinate self-deception is at the root of the difficulty. Such obdurate self-deception is deserving of stripes.

A simple test will probably prove to all who are able to receive instruction that they have far to go in pursuit of the apostolic ideal. Have we the same care one for another? If one member suffers do we all suffer in sympathy, or if one member is honoured do we all rejoice? The natural tendency of the flesh is in the wrong direction under each of these headings. It is natural to have care for those who are the objects of our especial regard, and to be indifferent to all others. Of course, there will be special friendships in the Brotherhood, with different degrees and even different kinds of love. This is inevitable, and not at all incompatible with true fellowship. It is well to understand the distinction between the two words. Friendship is individual and peculiar. You cannot have ten thousand close friends. Fellowship is collective and comprehensive. You can be in true fellowship with any number. Friendship is at liberty to make selection of special companions. Just as a man in the Faith is at liberty to marry whom he will "only in the Lord", so is he at liberty to choose his special friends, assuming, of course, in both cases, that the desires are reciprocal and that the choice made is in harmony with the other commands of the Lord. Fellowship does not give us such liberty. We fellowship each other on the basis of the one Faith, and this may draw together men and women who are utterly different in taste and temperament. These differences will inevitably affect our choice of

THE CHURCH OF GOD IS ONE BODY

special friends but they ought not to affect our "care for one another" in the fellowship of the Gospel. The point can be illustrated without departure from the most ordinary experiences of life. If a brother or sister who is a very dear friend shows signs of weakness and a need for special help, we are ready to give any amount of care and attention to nurse the feeble one back to healthy faith. We would reprove any impatient critic, and find plenty of scripture to assist our advocacy of gentle methods. What long-suffering, patience, gentleness, and compassion are shown in our great example! How many injunctions there are to be kind, considerate, and forbearing! But are we quite as ready to think of these passages if the straying sheep is one whose personality repels us? Are we as ready to sacrifice rest and comfort in trying to assist the unattractive wanderer?

The question whether brethren attract us or repel us personally does not in the least degree affect the truth of their being members of the One Body, and we ought to have the "same care one for another", because of our fellowship in the Truth, unaffected by the affinities and preferences which belong to human personality. This, of course, as with many others duties, is unnatural. The natural tendency is to be "partial" in judgment. We may be quite innocent of showing any undue respect to the man with a gold ring or disrespect toward the one who is poorly clad, yet we may fall into an exactly similar error on a different basis. A dear friend has erred. Well, we remember how forbearing our Lord was with sinners. We must restore him in the spirit of meekness. One who always repelled us has erred. We remember how Samuel treated Agag; we

PRINCIPLES AND PROVERBS

remember the apostle's instructions to withdraw from those who are disorderly. We must be valiant for the Truth.

It is not suggested that all are under the sway of such fleshly instincts leading to such partiality of judgment. This, however is the natural tendency, and it is questionable whether even those who are most conscious of the weakness have overcome it entirely. Has there never been a time when in dealing with a friend, you have shown a consideration and patience far beyond anything you can muster for that other offender who does not interest you or possibly repels you? If there has been any such partiality, has it been an instance of weakness in dealing with a friend when you should have been valiant for the truth; or has it been harshness in dealing with another when you should have remembered the meekness and gentleness of Christ? True fellowship demands that we should have the same care one for another "that there be no schism in the body". When we are least inclined to remember the rights and the interdependence of members, then we should try our hardest. When we are least attracted to members we have the best opportunity for increasing the duties of fellowship. Where our sympathies are least engaged we have the best opportunity of showing that we can be impartial, having the same care one for another.

It is easier for us to conform to the Apostolic command under the second heading we have mentioned. We can suffer with those who suffer, more readily than we can rejoice with those who are honoured. The suffering, however, has to be near and obvious, or we can easily forget and ignore it.

We have heard of the millionaire who was so touched with the pitiful story of a caller that he said to a servant, "Send this poor fellow away at once, or I shall have no appetite for dinner." Perhaps there are many even in the Brotherhood who would find it too painful to regard the lives of their fellows very closely. A tragedy in the house of a next-door neighbour will cast a gloom over us when a far greater tragedy in a distant land hardly affects us at all. In the same way we shall be partial in our treatment of brethren near and distant unless we make a great effort to enlarge our sympathies.

When we are called upon to rejoice with the member who is highly honoured, the task is still more difficult, especially for some natures. There are men who could sympathize with a friend's misfortune and even make a generous effort to assist him; but they can never forgive him for being successful. The jealous feeling is well disguised, of course. They fear that the friend's good fortune will turn his head and spoil his character, and we may rest assured that they will find ample confirmation of their worst fears, act how he may. Such people are capable of killing an old friend with pin-pricks; shaking their heads all the while, and deploring his supposed weakness.

It is only too true that even brethren are often very unkind to each other without ever owning the fault or recognizing the tortuous self-deception which leads to the cruelty. The evils in the world are reproduced among those who are supposed to have come out from the world. It is easy to forget that there are any obligations in connection with the One Body or that if we sin against any of the

PRINCIPLES AND PROVERBS

members we sin against the Head. The One Body is formed on the basis of the One Faith; the essentials of which remain as in the days of the apostles. They do not change from year to year with the exigencies of human policy. Faith has been corrupted repeatedly both by the neglect of essentials and by the additions of human ideas. We must hold fast to the Word which is the only true light. It does not matter what men may think or say of us; what would the Lord have us do? That is the supreme test and it is well for us to use it now in the day of opportunity and before the day of judgment. If we can really bend our spirits to "learn of him", we find at once that our duties are constructive and that they begin with the nurture and care of the One Body which is being developed on the basis of the One Faith.

CHAPTER 8

THE BRETHREN OF CHRIST ARE THOSE WHO DO THE WILL OF THE FATHER

There are many writers and perhaps even some thinkers who would readily fall into error if asked to describe the true Christadelphian. In the Brotherhood there has been a very natural tendency to put the emphasis upon the subject that is to the front at the moment; and in times of controversy the true Christadelphian is known by being on "our side". The word, however, means brother of Christ, and as the Lord himself gave us an explicit definition we should experience no difficulty in recognizing a much fuller meaning. "Whosoever shall do the will of my Father who is in heaven, the same is my brother and sister and mother."

This is a principle of first importance. It is so fundamental and so simple that it is continually ignored. There is nothing in the nature of paradox in this statement. It has long since been recognized as a truism that men rarely think seriously of principles that are fundamental and obvious. Such truths are accepted as a matter of course. Every man wants to have truth on his side and it becomes quite natural to assume that it is there, especially when feeling is strong. In the same way men can readily persuade themselves that God is on their side, even while they are violating every command He has ever given. The warring nations and churches all cry "God is with us", even though they could not advance a single argument to show that they are with God. Individuals are just the same. A man will

PRINCIPLES AND PROVERBS

profess his firm belief in providence and relate a remarkable experience to prove the fact of divine intervention in human affairs. He tells us how a series of extraordinary mishaps prevented him from sailing in a boat in which he had booked a passage. After full details of how others were helped by circumstance to catch the boat while he was prevented, we reach the rich conclusion that the boat went down with all on board. We should be accounted rude if we inquired how such selection could be regarded as an evidence of providential intervention. He takes it for granted that if God interferes in human affairs at all, a special care for him will inevitably be a first charge to the angels, while the lives of other men will be a matter of comparative indifference.

In similar manner, men assume that God will come into line with their feelings in time of controversy. Their differences are stimulated by opposition; they work themselves up to passionate attack or defence. Then if they think of God at all they assume that He will be angry with those who oppose them. They are falling into just the error of the striving nations. They are not trying to be on the Lord's side but rather assuming that the Lord will be with them.

We do well, then, so far as we are able, to break away from human passions and prejudices and test ourselves by this first principle. What is the will of the Father in heaven? We who believe the Bible have plenty of instructions to guide us in life. We must get the answer from the "Word" and not from our own hearts. In some respects, ecclesial life is sure to resemble the political or commercial world,

for we find the same elemental facts of human nature; but, as we value God's offer of life, we must find a much higher standard of conduct.

If we venture to criticise brethren and urge them to take a course contrary to their inclination, we are sure to get some hard knocks. That is a matter of universal experience. It is equally natural that we shall receive commendation and support from those who are still more critical. In such circumstances there is a great danger that we may run to extremes, just on the lines of political parties. A man's estimate of any situation is so easily biased by personal feeling. Resentment of harsh and unfair words will often play a potent though entirely hidden part in framing a policy. Then, when a party has been formed, when once a decision has been taken, the natural tendency will be to support the party and attack all opposing parties by fair means or foul.

Possibly some readers will exclaim, "On what a low plane you put the matter! Political parties are doubtless developed in this manner; but in the Truth it is different!"

Certainly it ought to be quite different; but we are dealing with the same human nature, the worst of which nearly always comes to the front in time of strife. We can only make ourselves different from the world by taking heed to the words of Scripture. They are plain enough. We must not suppose that the words regarding the evil human heart and the worthlessness of flesh only apply to other people. We are all of the same nature. The most dangerous men are those who are never conscious of being on a low plane. They can mistake

PRINCIPLES AND PROVERBS

the motions of sheer diabolism for a righteous and worthy zeal. The elements of diabolism are in us all. Often they may be aroused into activity and they will blend with ideals in the most complete manner. There is enough of the genuine to hide the spurious, and unless we apply the acid test base metal will pass off as gold.

Are we doing the will of the Father in heaven? That is the real test. It is not a question of doing what we assume ought to be His will. It is not enough to find in our hearts general desires and aspirations in the right direction. Is the work we are doing now in accordance with the *revealed* will of God? Are we engaged in the works of love, dispensing the bread and water of life, doing good to all men, especially those of the household of faith? Are we crucifying the flesh by enduring evil treatment without retaliation, leaving vengeance of all degrees to the Lord?

It is so easy to be self-deceived in these matters. If men revile us they are doing harm to the Truth. We can soon persuade ourselves that an effort to crush them and make them appear contemptible is simply in the interests of the Truth and not a matter of retaliation at all. This is simply one of the familiar disguises of the heart. Its shallowness is revealed by the fact that sometimes we have such a personal and enduring affection for certain men that when they are unfair to us we have no desire to retaliate or to say anything that would wound. We never feel then that there is any command in Scripture to make us more severe as a matter of duty. A simple statement of the Truth as we understand it does not need the personal hits so dear to

the old man of the flesh. If men watch for iniquity in us and make us offenders for a word, or for a possible inflection they choose to put on a word, we must not retaliate by watching for iniquity in them. Sometimes brethren who criticise us lay themselves open to attack by the most amazing inconsistency. It would be easy to raise an agitation which would cause the critics trouble and perhaps even make them appear contemptible. By all worldly standards such retaliation would be right; but would it do any good to the cause of the Truth? Would such work please our Father in heaven? That is the only test that matters.

In these days of divine silence, and in the absence of visible authority, we have to choose for ourselves what course we shall take and to what manner of work we shall devote our strength. We must try to be honest and free from self-deception in making the decision. Shall we best do the will of our Father in heaven by building up those who have found the saving faith, but who need the helping, sympathetic hand as sorely as we need it ourselves; or would the Father be better pleased if we devoted our energies towards pulling down that which once we built? There are thousands of brethren and sisters who need exhortation, there are millions of fellow creatures who have never heard the Gospel. There are some hundreds who are separated from us by points of disagreement, although if taken individually we should all alike pass the most severe examination devised by any brother of a generation ago. Here we have a choice of fields in which to labour. It might be possible, even easy, to attack

PRINCIPLES AND PROVERBS

the last-named class and skilfully raise such agitation that strife would rage where now there is peace, and we might gain a few adherents out of the wreckage. We may feel that something would be gained even though a few babes should be slain in the struggle. We might easily be tempted to such a course by the natural instinct of retaliation, disguised and out of sight. Sometimes drastic ways may be legitimate, and we can soon persuade ourselves that as we are convinced of the soundness of our position, the possible gain of a few will justify the means. What is the revealed will of our Father in heaven? Would He desire us to raise strife in such quarters, to expose the naked inconsistency of some zealous but mistaken men in order that a few who already hold and practice the One Faith might obtain a better knowledge of human values? The Word condemns such strife and places the sower of discord among brethren as the apex of abomination. It tells us to preach the Word, to be instant in season and out of season; to reprove, rebuke and exhort with long suffering. It presents us with a series of letters to the churches showing where responsibility lies, and how we should trust each other. It gives us a picture of the judgment seat, with the whole emphasis put on positive and constructive work. It warns us repeatedly against judging and condemning each other, and of the danger that we may be guilty of greater errors than those we condemn. It lays down the principle that men may be doing good work even though they "walk not with us". It tells us that the servant of the Lord must not strive but be patient, long suffering and apt to teach.

THE BRETHREN OF CHRIST

There is an immense field of constructive work before us. Every pound we can spare and every talent we can muster can be devoted to work that we know is right. Truly it is easy to find out the revealed will of God, and the one who shall do the will of the Father in heaven is the true Christadelphian.

CHAPTER 9

PLOUGHING AND LOOKING BACK

“No man having put his hand to the plough and looking back is fit for the Kingdom of God.” A few weeks ago in a time of transit troubles, a brother who earns his daily bread as a ploughman started to walk to the Sunday morning meeting. This involved a tramp of nine miles, and, but for the kindly forethought of another brother who drove out to meet him, he would have had to walk the entire distance. After the meeting he quite unconsciously presented me with this article, neatly packed up in a single sentence. Speaking of the words quoted at the head of the chapter he said : “Only a ploughman can understand those words in their full meaning. While he keeps his eyes fixed on the mark at the other side of the field, he can plough a straight line; but if he looks back even for a second he misses the mark and the line grows crooked.”

This presented a new thought in connection with the well-known figure of speech. I had always thought of the looking back, as meaning the wandering of desire toward old associations and old ambitions. The full meaning seemed to be that when once a man is enlightened and starts work for Christ there must be no tardiness and dragging of feet. If he tires of the work and desires to return to his former darkness he is not fit for the Kingdom of God. The ploughman with his technical knowledge and experience sees a deeper meaning. He must have no doubt as to the object at the end of his line, and he must keep his eyes riveted on the distant mark. If

he loses sight of that even for a moment his ploughing is spoiled.

It has been suggested that in the East two thousand years ago ploughing was only a primitive scratching of the ground in which the straight furrow would not be of much importance, and that consequently we should not draw from the figure of speech a meaning based on modern methods. This is not a valid objection, however, if the meaning drawn is helpful. In dealing with ordinary writers we must certainly keep our interpretation of their work within the limits and practice of the time when it was written. Ordinary writing is very soon out of date and the figures of speech are often unintelligible. It is different with the Bible. It comes from God, it is never out of date, and it reveals prescience in so many matters that we need not be surprised if even its metaphors suit the modern world better than the ancient. If the servants of God find help from a possible meaning of scripture, the helpful thought was there even though no one saw it for two thousand years. "Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world."

Surely the thought we are considering is a helpful one. It is not enough that we should keep our desires from wandering back to the world. Like the ploughman drawing out his first furrow, we must keep our eyes on the distant mark. If we lose sight of our final objective, either by looking back at our own past history or by too critical a survey of other men's ploughing, our line will certainly not be straight. We shall help our fellow ploughmen more by setting an example of good work than by shouting at them; and surely our desire is to help.

PRINCIPLES AND PROVERBS

The use of the phrase "final objective" suggests a further extension of the figure. The skilful ploughman may be able to draw a straight line to the single object on which his eyes are fixed. The beginner needs further help and often finds it necessary to put a series of marks all in line. This is the principle of "the limited objective", the value of which has been demonstrated repeatedly. Instead of having only the one ideal which may sometimes seem so far removed from human frailty that progress is impossible, we have a series of limited objectives all in line with the final goal and leading to it. The inexperienced ploughman can in this way maintain a straight line. For him the limited objectives are necessary. In the absence of such aids he might unconsciously waver to right or left even though his eyes were fixed firmly on the final mark. And all the while there is the danger of a momentary lapse; a glance to right or left even though he does not look back. A very little distraction may spoil the work of the inexperienced ploughman.

With the limited objectives to assist him the work is easier. He can see the final mark with the minor marks all in line with it, and as the stages are successively reached and passed there is a consciousness of progress along the true line.

In the ploughing for Christ we are none of us experts. We need all the help we can find to keep the line straight, and the principle of the limited objective leading to the final goal is of vital importance for us. Christ has provided us with some of these aids. In the liberty we have in Christ it is possible to find many more. In our meetings, our reading and writing, in the more private efforts

PLOUGHING AND LOOKING BACK

which we only mention to the closest friends, and in mental struggles which we perhaps do not mention to any man, we have limited objectives. If we have planned our work well these waymarks help us. There should be no mistake as to the final ambition of life but we need some minor ideals to lead us to it. If the Lord delays his coming what are our immediate objectives for this year, this month, this week and this day?

Let us here note that apart from the clear instructions given in the Bible we have liberty. We can set up our own marks. It is no part of our duty to mark out the furrows for other ploughmen, although it is assuredly Christ-like to help them when we can. But while we are in large measure at liberty to choose our own waymarks, when once they are chosen it is obviously the right thing to observe them. When the ploughman has marked out his course he is surely a foolish or careless man if he ignores the marking. We are not bound by any humanly devised system of reading Scripture, but if we decide that a certain system will be helpful to us we should surely be foolish if we failed to maintain it. Beyond the general warning not to neglect the assembly of the saints we have no scriptural rule as to the number of meetings we should attend. In some towns, where there is a meeting of some kind almost every night, it might not be wise to attend each one. When we have made our choice, however, as to what meetings will help us, it is the part of true workmen to be as regular in our observance as circumstances will permit.

The writing of this article has been interrupted by attendance at a week-night meeting. It was a

PRINCIPLES AND PROVERBS

helpful meeting, and can surely rank as a true limited objective in the straight line for the Kingdom of God. A fortnight ago I missed the meeting, with no better excuse than a complete forgetfulness until it was too late. The activities which drove it from the mind were healthful and good in themselves; but that does not alter the fact that a limited objective was missed. The ploughman had set up a stake a little way ahead to keep his line true and then he forgot all about it. The most serious feature of such a lapse is that it prepares the way for further lapses. That is how brethren go astray. Whoever heard of one who, having once been enlightened, turned away merely as the result of a careful examination of the Truth?

We never knew one of Christ's ploughmen to gaze straight ahead and decide that the final objective was not worth while. He begins to waver through missing perhaps the least important of the limited objectives. Thus he may set up marks of his own that are not in line with the final object. Presently when he looks ahead there is no final object visible and he may soon be persuaded that there never was one. His line has deviated and he is looking in the wrong direction.

Perhaps there was a time in the Brotherhood when we were too little prepared for the prolongation of mortality. It seemed unnecessary to prepare much for battling with a world that was so soon to pass. We are nearer to the end now but there is much more education in worldly wisdom. Sometimes, while older brethren are overworked, the young ones are too busy to render assistance—special studies, the passing of examinations, the

securing of necessary degrees. These are all limited objectives and unfortunately the final object to which they stand related is limited, too. But although these ambitions bounded by mortality are not the most obvious guides to the Kingdom of God, there is no reason why they should lead anyone astray. Keep them all in the true line and then they may be even used as helps. Here is a rule for all of us to observe. We are sure to have objects in mortal life in things not essential but not forbidden; not the "one thing needful" but still free from offence so long as they are kept in their proper place. We may desire to pass an examination, or to improve the home, or to give our children a better chance in the world than we had ourselves. These are all limited objectives. Let us take care that we keep them all in the true line, so that even if they fail to help they will not hinder.

Sometimes progress is stopped by doubts as to what shall be the next objective. Shall we start on a great work, and if so what shall it be? Shall we study a special part of scripture such as the Law of Moses and master that? Shall we make ourselves acquainted with original languages to enlarge our understanding of the Word? It is necessary sometimes to weigh such questions in our minds, but we must not allow too much time to be lost through such cogitations. The time during which the amateur ploughman marks out his course is not productive. The plough may be still, but time is on the wing and the day will soon be over. We must not delay our work by hesitating between a number of objects, all of them equally good as waymarks. What would be thought of the ploughman who wasted half the

PRINCIPLES AND PROVERBS

morning trying to decide between the merits of a stick and a white stone as marks for his straight line? Quite a lot might be urged in favour of either mark. The stick in vertical position rising from the ground would surely be better than any flat object. On the other hand, the white stone would shine better than any stick. Which shall it be? If a man could be so foolish as to hesitate and hinder with such a problem we would exclaim, "Use either, use neither, or use both; but what ever you do don't waste time over it." We cannot imagine a ploughman being so foolish; but, on the higher plane, men often waste half their lives trying to decide between the merits of possible activities. They take these limited objectives too seriously. The excuse of such aids is that they are known to be limited. The final objective is immeasurably greater. If the ploughman puts up minor marks of such prominence as to obscure his view of the final mark they hinder him instead of helping. The best marks are those that lie near to hand and to which we can apply ourselves immediately.

Even apart from the waste of time involved in the search for more remote objectives it often happens that when they are found they are less helpful than the little duties that were near to us. Many men are like a ploughman who should waste half the available time in searching for hedge stakes in a distant field in order that he might mark out his straight line in a worthy manner. Having found at last the objects that please him he sets them up without caring about the straight line. He loses sight of the distant mark and spends the remnant of his little day zigzagging after objects that should have

PLOUGHING AND LOOKING BACK

been merely means to an end. "In all things consider the end." We must never lose sight of the end even for a moment in ploughing our furrow that leads to the Kingdom of God. When we set up limited objectives to help us we must always remember that they are limited.

Our ploughman brother who suggested these thoughts does not need the way-marks when he sets out the work for his ploughing in the literal field. With no guide but a mark in the distant hedge, doubtless he can draw a line straighter than most of us could plough even with stakes set up every few yards of the way. In the ploughing for Christ, however, we are more on a level and we all need way-marks to help us. When he set off to walk to the morning meeting the ploughman was aiming at a limited objective in the straight line for the Kingdom of God. Nine miles seems a long tramp only to reach a waymark and with the possibility that there may be hundreds more of such marks before the end. When we consider the end, however, we can see the matter in its true proportions. At the end of mortality's day, if the line has been drawn straight and true there will be something more to show than a well ploughed furrow across a field, and the goal reached will be very different from a mark in the hedge.

CHAPTER 10

THE PRINCIPLES GOVERNING FELLOWSHIP

The question has been raised whether it is possible to find scriptural principles to give us clear and unmistakable guidance in the matter of fellowship. Of course, there are some obvious truths which are recognized by all men and women who are scripturally enlightened. There are errors of doctrine and offences of practice so serious that all enlightened men and women would agree that we cannot fellowship them. There are, on the other hand, errors so slight that no one would think of making them a cause of division. Between the two extremes there is more debatable ground and the difficulties arise in determining where the line should be drawn.

In time of strife there is a natural tendency for men to exaggerate and indulge in parody. It has been so in the brotherhood. "If you are going to tolerate this", one party says, "you may as well fellowship a man who does not believe the Gospel, or one who steals." "If you are going to cut off for this", another party may reply, "you may as well withdraw from a brother because he does not agree with you as to the king of the North, or because he has been known to visit a Natural History museum."

Such efforts of satirical exaggeration may relieve the feelings of disputants, but for every other purpose they are worse than useless in a serious discussion. They simply present the familiar spectacle of extremes begetting extremes, and they

THE PRINCIPLES GOVERNING FELLOWSHIP

lead to a chaotic condition of the mind in which principles are ignored and men form arbitrary judgments according to their feelings for the moment and the subject which is most to the front.

Perhaps the first scriptural principle that we should note in this matter is that God sometimes leaves men to try them and prove all that is in their hearts. Even when the Apostles possessed the power of the Spirit in such large measure, they were not relieved of this difficulty of forming judgments. There was a difference of opinion between the Apostles Paul and Peter as to how far Jewish prejudices might be conciliated in the attitude taken toward Gentile believers. Evidently the Apostle Peter was in the wrong, withdrawing himself from some of the Gentile brethren, not on principle but for fear of what some of the Jews might say. Inspiration did not relieve these men from the onus of individual judgments and decisions or they would not have experienced the trials and temptations necessary for the formation of character. In writing their epistles, however, the Holy Spirit was their constant guide, and these writings bear witness regarding the truth of this dispute. The epistles of the two men are in agreement. There is no disputing there.

We may assume then that in these days also it is the will of God that we should experience some difficulty in applying scriptural principles to the circumstances of our own times. We must try to be honest and faithful in our application and on our guard against the fleshly feelings that so continually come to the front in time of strife.

PRINCIPLES AND PROVERBS

There is another principle that needs to be mentioned before considering what the Bible has to say regarding fellowship. All should pay earnest heed to the scripture now cited and reflect upon the truth stated regarding human weakness.

It is wrong to "watch for iniquity", and yet in time of strife it is the most natural thing in the world to do. If a fleshly politician is angry with another over a dispute in parliament, how delighted he is if he can find some discreditable story about his rival. How ready he is to believe the ill report and to put the worst possible construction upon it. It may have nothing whatever to do with the original quarrel, but that does not matter. Anything will serve as a weapon in the fight.

This is, of course, sheer diabolism, but unfortunately it is characteristic of human nature, and we are all tinged with it. It comes out the worst when a man is half conscious of having a weak case and is making desperate efforts to convince himself that he does well to be angry. If he believes in the Bible he needs then to remember that all who watch for iniquity and make a man an offender for a word shall be cut off (Isa. 29 : 20). It is usually an easy matter to collect reports derogatory to any man or any body of men. There is quite a temptation to use these "make weights" in time of controversy, especially if the original cause of dispute is slight. One on the defensive can be kept busy chasing the false reports and unfair interpretations, but never succeeding in catching one before the next is on the wing.

In a court of law a litigant is tied down to the actual charge. It is useless for him to try to fatten

out his suit by all sorts of complaints remote from the original accusation. We are free from any such legal restrictions now, but it is well to remember that we have to go before a judgment seat far more searching than any ever set up by man, and for "every idle word" that we have spoken we shall have to give account. Do not let us watch for iniquity, then, either in those we accuse of specific errors or in those who accuse us. Such watching inevitably leads to countless idle and evil words.

Coming now to the matter of fellowship, we cannot make a better start than by taking all the passages of Scripture in which the word occurs. Truly it is not safe to assume that a word is used in the Bible in exactly the sense that men employ it now. The story is told of a theologian who, when challenged to show any scriptural warrant for the modern ceremony of confirmation, made a full list of all the passages in which the word confirmation occurs, and triumphantly exhibited it as conclusive proof. This was foolish as an argument, for he was assuming a meaning for the word quite remote from the original intention of the writers. Nevertheless, an earnest seeker after truth might have found that list of passages very helpful as showing the manner in which the early believers were confirmed in their faith.

We desire to use the word and to treat the doctrine of fellowship in accordance with scripture teaching. We may find benefit therefore in considering all the passages in which we have the word in our English rendering of the New Testament. In each case sufficient is quoted to bring the teaching to the memory of all persistent readers of the word.

Any who fail to remember the connection can easily find the passages.

Acts 2 : 42.—“Continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship and in breaking of bread and prayers.”

1 Cor. 1 : 9.—“God is faithful, by whom ye are called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ.”

2 Cor. 8 : 4.—“The fellowship of the ministering to the saints.”

Gal 2 : 9.—“They gave the right hand of fellowship.”

Eph. 3 : 9.—“The fellowship of the mystery.”

Phil. 1 : 3-6.—“I thank God upon every remembrance of you always in every prayer of mine for you all, making request with joy, for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now.”

Phil. 2 : 1.—“Fellowship of the Spirit.” (Connection of idea, comfort, love, and mercy in Christ).

Phil. 3 : 10.—“Fellowship of his sufferings.”

1 John 1 : 3.—“That ye may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ.”

1 John 1 : 6.—“If we say we have fellowship with him and walk in darkness, we lie”; verse 7, “But if we walk in light . . . we have fellowship one with another and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.”

In addition to these passages there are one or two other examples where a slightly different word is given the same English rendering.

2 Cor. 6 : 14.—“What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness?”

THE PRINCIPLES GOVERNING FELLOWSHIP

Eph. 5 : 11.—“Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them; for it is a shame even to speak of those things that are done of them in secret.” (Fornication, uncleanness, covetousness. See context.)

Surely these passages give us explicit teaching of vital truths that are often forgotten.

The fellowship to which we are called is a fellowship of the Gospel. It is a fellowship with the Father and the Son, and it is a fellowship *to which God has called us* (1 Cor. 1 : 9). This is, of course, quite in harmony with the statement of the Lord Jesus: “No man can come unto me except the Father who hath sent me draw him.”

Surely these passages should lead us to the conclusion that fellowship in the Gospel is a sacred matter not for a moment to be treated like the ordinary fellowships of the world. If men have been called to this fellowship by God Himself, we need clear scriptural ground before we cut them off from it.

We will next consider the commands regarding the matter of withdrawal. There are two of these commands that have often been quoted with very little regard to the context. “Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness”, clearly may involve withdrawal, and it has been quoted in that connection. The context, as we have already seen, speaks of the works of darkness in question, evil wrought in secret of which it is a shame even to speak.

The other command referred to is the admonition to withdraw from those whose walk is disorderly (2 Thess. 3). The context shows that the

PRINCIPLES AND PROVERBS

immediate reference is to men who did no honest work, but were "busybodies". The Apostle goes on to say in more general terms, "If any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother."

There was the explicit command to withdraw from the one who so grievously offended in Corinth, and one of the objects stated and made clear in both the letters of the Apostle to that church was that the sinner himself might be brought to sincere repentance and salvation.

There is another direct command as to withdrawal in 1 Tim. 6. The immediate reference is to the perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds eager for worldly gain rather than godliness. There are several commands which clearly require a refusal to fellowship those who have not the doctrine of Christ or who depart from any element of the Truth. It should not be difficult to form a sound judgment as to where to draw the line in these matters. As Dr. Thomas remarked, the first principles of the Truth are few and simple. Moreover, they are so opposed to all fleshly wisdom that from the natural standpoint they do not seem attractive. If men are prepared to accept them at all, it should not be difficult to accept them as a whole.

In actual experience, the divisions on doctrinal points in these latter days have illustrated this fact. New theories have been brought forward and have come into collision with first principles. The unity of first principles has been revealed in the strongest light. Where the right spirit has prevailed the new

THE PRINCIPLES GOVERNING FELLOWSHIP

idea has been repudiated as soon as its true character has been revealed. Sometimes, however, there is a wrong spirit; worse still, there is personal feeling. Then there is hardly a limit to the possibilities of evil that may surge round the dispute or of the monstrosities into which the confused thought may grow. An illustration of what is meant was furnished some years ago. A well-known brother put forward an idea in a Bible class, and although he was quite unconscious of the fact, he raised an issue affecting a principle of God's dealing with men. An older brother took the matter up in the right spirit, and after some discussion the younger student of the Word saw his way more clearly and repudiated the idea that he had expressed. Some years later, the one who had instructed him espoused the discarded theory, and with hidden causes at work to urge him forward, he elaborated it until division was inevitable for the sake of purity and peace. It is doubtful whether anyone living now holds the theory as it was put forward in time of strife. It played its part of mischief and destruction, and then it passed into the shadow of forgotten things.

For many years there has been unanimity among us as to the first principles of the Truth. New theories which menaced those first principles and caused division have not endured for the final judgment. They have perished of their own weakness, and if any of the pamphlets which caused such havoc are still extant, they are only retained as curiosities, not quoted by a single living soul as standard expositions of the Truth. There is a lesson for us in this.

PRINCIPLES AND PROVERBS

Another series of scripture injunctions that we do well to call to mind in connection with the matter of fellowship is in condemnation of contention. We are required to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints, but we are not expected to contend among ourselves. Strife and debate are ranked among the evil works of the flesh (2 Cor. 12 : 20; James 3 : 14-16). In the letter to the Galatians there is a terrible warning as to the results of such strife (Gal. 5 : 15). We must be careful then to see that our contending is for the Faith and not merely a strife of words to no profit.

Yet another series of commands must be remembered. "Judge not, that ye be not judged. With what measure ye mete it shall be measured to you again." "Judge nothing before the time until the Lord come who will bring to light the hidden things of darkness" (1 Cor. 4). "Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? To his own master he standeth or falleth" (Rom. 14 : 4). "Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law and judgeth the law. But if thou judge the law thou art not a doer of the law but a judge."

Some might despairingly raise the question, How can we reconcile these very serious warnings against judging each other with the plain commands to have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness and to withdraw from those who are disorderly?

The answer is that the very plainness of these commands helps us, for Scripture passes judgment on such matters. Truly we have to apply the judgment of Scripture, and there is danger of mistake in

THE PRINCIPLES GOVERNING FELLOWSHIP

the application. It is the will of God that such responsibility should be ours and we must discharge the duty as faithfully as we can. We must try to remember the teaching of the Word as a whole, and we must be honest in the application of specific rules. If one quotes the passage regarding unfruitful works of darkness, things done in secret "of which it is a shame even to speak", and applies the passage to one well reported of for good works, the only real complaint against him being that he is too reluctant to be severe with offenders, surely it is evident that in such an application there is the most amazing perversity. If one in resentment of a difference in judgment as to the precise application of these commands denounces his brother as guilty of disorderly walk, repudiation of the faith and re-crucifixion of the Lord, it is difficult to believe in such a case that there is even an attempt to find righteous judgment.

The time has come to use great plainness of speech regarding this vital matter of fellowship in the Gospel. There has been much failure to realize the sanctity of the fellowship of the Father and the Son to which God has called us. There has also been a failure to understand the real meaning of brotherly love. It has been thought of as a weak, sleep-inducing sentimentality which may stand in the way of faithfulness to God.

An amazing but most illuminating comment was made by a brother who advocated withdrawal from some who were alleged to be no longer worthy of fellowship. There were doubts, he said, as to the faithfulness of these brethren, so let us "give to the Lord the benefit of the doubt, and cut them off". It seemed that any tendency toward maintaining

PRINCIPLES AND PROVERBS

unity was regarded as sentimental weakness, the motion to withdraw was zeal for the Lord. It seemed that there was no recognition of the possibility that we might sin against God in wrongful cutting off of members called by Him to the fellowship of the Gospel. If there were doubts as to the standing of those accused, we should be giving the Lord the benefit of the doubt by cutting them off!

Surely everyone should know that we can give nothing to God but the tribute of our obedience, that we can only learn of Him through His Word, and that all the commandments are equally authoritative. And surely everyone must know that for every one passage of Scripture commanding withdrawal from workers of evil, there are scores of commands to love and to be forbearing and long-suffering; exhortations to be meek, temperate, kind, courteous, pitiful, to comfort the feeble, build up the weak, restore the faulty; to be rooted and grounded in love, to bear one another's burdens, to esteem others better than ourselves; to do all things without murmuring and disputing, and to be at peace among ourselves.

When we urge the law of love we do not mean sentimental human affection with all its partiality, its inconsistency and blindness. We mean love after the pattern set by the Lord Jesus who died for a church full of imperfection and who, under the very shadow of the cross, gave comfort to his faulty disciples. This law of love so incessantly urged upon us in the Word of God is the most soul-searching and the most difficult of all the commands. It involves a crucifixion of the flesh far more complete than that which comes to us from the bitterest

THE PRINCIPLES GOVERNING FELLOWSHIP

criticisms of misguided opponents. If we ignore these commands while giving an extreme and unjustifiable application of the command to withdraw from the disorderly, we sin doubly. We sin in that which we do and that which we neglect.

From the testimonies cited, it is surely safe to draw the following principles.

1.—Fellowship in the Gospel is a fellowship with the Father and the Son, *to which God calls us*. It is therefore a sacred matter to be treated with reverent care.

2.—If we join ourselves to the world we join that which God has ordained to be separate (2 Cor. 6).

3.—If we cut off brethren from fellowship without scriptural warrant we put asunder that which God has joined (1 Cor. 12; Eph. 5 : 30).

4.—We must at all times remember the warnings against judging each other and the countless exhortations to love and forbearance.

5.—There are times when on the judgment of the inspired apostles we are called upon to withdraw from offenders. From those who turn from any element of the Faith (2 John 10); from those who by perverse disputings cause wrath, strife of words, railings, evil surmisings (1 Tim. 4 : 6); from those who are guilty of moral offences (1 Cor. 5 : 11); such to be restored in love after repentance (2 Cor. 2 : 7, 8,).

6.—That all unrighteousness is sin, but there is a sin not unto death. Many such offences are to be reproved or rebuked and left to the judgment of the Lord (1 Tim. 5 : 20; Titus 1 : 13; 1 Cor. 4 : 5).

PRINCIPLES AND PROVERBS

7.—That in this sacred fellowship with the Father and the Son we can have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus will cleanse us from all sin.

Are these principles helpful? Are they fairly stated? If you think not, then take your Bible, put in a few hours' study yourself and try to draw up a more faithful summary. Add such scripture as you think may be necessary, but do not ignore any of the testimonies referred to here.

In time of strife some may agitate that we cut off some of the Lord's servants who are judged beforehand to be unworthy. Some may be frightened by the suggestion that to decline shows them to be weak in the faith. Well, "to the law and the testimony", that is the only guide. Have these brethren denied any element of the faith? Are they guilty of perverse disputings which are making your ecclesial life impossible? Have they been guilty of any of those moral lapses mentioned by the apostle? In short, is there any scriptural principle which justifies you in saying, "These men were called by God to the fellowship of the Gospel, but they are now taking such a position that Scripture requires me to take the extreme step of cutting them off"?

Perhaps there is no one charge that can so easily be tested, but rather a multitude of alleged offences which in the aggregate are regarded as providing a cause. Beware of these "many and grievous charges". It is easy to bring charges against any body of men to show that their general standard of conduct is inferior to that of others. Whether true, half true, or wholly false, such accusations are difficult to judge. Fortunately we are not called upon

THE PRINCIPLES GOVERNING FELLOWSHIP

to judge. Rather are we required to refrain. We have responsibilities in our own ecclesia to make it a real light-stand, but there is nothing in scripture to suggest that we are called upon to make a detailed examination of the way of life in other towns. Smyrna was not held responsible for the sins of Laodicea, and Smyrna would have been at fault if it had attempted to pass judgment. It was the Lord who judged.

Brethren need not be distressed by the thought that they are bound to pass judgment when others have fallen out. We need not take sides at all, indeed there are disputes in which those at a distance cannot possibly take sides. If some brethren in misplaced zeal insist on an unscriptural division, the whole responsibility lies with them. If they cut our brethren off they cut us off. Clearly we cannot seek their fellowship while they have cut off the body to which we belong. It is equally clear that they alone can repair the breach. We can say with perfect truth, "We have not cut you off, you have cut us off." The old man of the flesh hates to make such a confession, but it expresses a distinction which may make all the difference between life and death in the day of account.

If there is in these days a Laodicean church, the Lord will pass judgment on it. He is the only one qualified, and God has committed all judgment to him. We need to be very careful how we even form an opinion on such matters. A thousand times more careful how we speak and write.

CHAPTER 11

THE SCRIPTURAL PRINCIPLES GOVERNING CONTROVERSY

It seems clear that man is by nature a fighting animal. Wars recur between nations as soon as the people have recovered sufficient strength, and have had time partly to forget the horrors of the last struggle. The men who succeed in business are the men who love the fight of it. Politicians turn their disagreements into fights with as much unfairness and injustice as in actual warfare. Even games are all struggles, and most men cannot understand the pure pleasures of artistic achievement without any contest as to who wins.

This being the natural tendency of the flesh it is not surprising that the same fighting spirit is found in connection with religion. It need occasion no surprise if men who do not fight either with guns or fists, and who take no part in the struggles of politicians, are apt to be especially violent. It is certainly true that religious disputes have often resulted in a bitterness and uncharitableness more sinful than the errors which caused the strife to begin.

It is important therefore for us to remember the principles laid down in scripture for our guidance in these matters. If brethren could saturate their minds with the perfectly clear principles stated and reiterated in the Word, it might put an end to nearly all the destructive disputing, merely by the removal of all unnecessary provocation.

The first point to emphasize is the fact that strife and debate are treated as essentially evil things.

THE SCRIPTURAL PRINCIPLES

Thus in writing to the Corinthians the apostle took the fact that there was envying, strife and division in the Church, as clear evidence that the members were still carnal minded: "For ye are yet carnal; for whereas there is among you envying and strife and division are ye not carnal and walk as men?" (1 Cor. 3 : 3).

In writing to the Galatians the same apostle includes strife in a list of evil things summarising the works of the flesh: "Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God" (Gal. 5 : 19-21).

Truly the word strife appears here in a terrible list of evils with a terrible penalty threatened. We do well to make a very critical examination of our own conduct to make sure that any variance, wrath and strife existing in the ecclesias now, shall not be aggravated by any wrong action or wrong words of ours.

In writing to Timothy the apostle Paul again denounces strife. He refers to the evils which come from strife of words and perverse disputings (1 Tim. 6 : 3-5). Then in the second letter he gives this positive instruction: "But foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strifes; and the servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meek-

ness instructing those who oppose themselves” (2 Tim. 3 : 23-25).

If anyone should raise the question how we can avoid strife in view of the wrong attitude taken by others, we surely have the answer in this positive instruction. If we are convinced that those who oppose us are doing wrong and that in faithfulness to the Truth we must contend with them, we have ready to hand a splendid test of our discipleship. We have an opportunity to be gentle, patient and meek in instructing those who oppose themselves. If these qualities could be cultivated all round it might soon be found that there was no need for any further argument. Wrongdoing would accept the necessary reproof and wrong thinking would be corrected. The apostolic method would remove all the fuel that feeds the destructive fire. The railing, striving and impatient disputing, the personal hits and retorts of the carnal mind, continuously add fuel to the fires of wrath until even some who try to obey the teaching of the Word may perish in the flames.

The apostle Paul gave us example as well as precept. After the position of the Gentiles had been determined there was still much prejudice among the Jews, causing difficulty for disciples who feared the criticism of men. The apostle Peter was at fault in withdrawing himself from some of the Gentile believers apparently as a concession to the prejudices of certain Jews who had recently come to him. The apostle Paul “withstood him to the face.” Fortunately we are told what he said: “If thou being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?”

Here was the essence of the argument forcibly but gently expressed. It truly showed an aptitude for teaching and meekly instructing, and it had the right effect.

It would have been possible to have brought a formidable indictment against the apostle Peter if one had cared to use carnal methods. He might have been reminded that he at one time had spoken against the idea of Christ dying at all, and had called forth a rebuke from the Master. At a later period he used the sword and had to be reproved again. Later still he forsook the Lord and denied him even with an oath. If in addition to the undoubted facts of Peter's weakness all derogatory reports regarding him and his associations had been collected, it might have seemed to the fleshly mind a crushing blow to the influence of Peter and all his connections.

We simply cannot imagine the apostle Paul using such methods. He was ever ready to remember his own dark past but not that of others. When it was necessary to reprove the brethren he did so with gentleness and patience. Though he had authority such as none of us possess, he "besought them by the mercies of God" (Rom. 12 : 1). He "besought them" to follow him (1 Cor. 4 : 16). He besought them by the meekness and gentleness of Christ (2 Cor. 10 : 1). He said: "I will very gladly spend and be spent for you, though the more abundantly I love you the less I be loved" (2 Cor. 12 : 15).

This was in writing to an ecclesia which was very faulty, and against which a very formidable accusation might have been made.

The whole tenor of the apostle's teaching is as outlined in the fifth and sixth chapters of the letter

PRINCIPLES AND PROVERBS

to the Galatians. We must overcome the flesh and all its works; we must bring forth the fruit of the spirit; but we must at the same time remember that we are all sinners who can only be saved through grace. Those who are spiritually minded must thus be ready to restore offenders in the spirit of meekness; considering themselves lest they also be tempted; bearing one another's burdens, and so fulfilling the law of Christ (Gal. 6 : 1-2).

There is further instruction regarding necessary controversy in the writing of the apostle Peter: "Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous: not rendering evil for evil or railing for railing: but contrariwise, blessing" (1 Peter 3 : 8-9). "Be ready to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear" (verse 15).

"All of you be subject one to another and be clothed with humility" (chapter 5 : 5).

Such instructions require emphasis in time of controversy, for then it is that we are in the greatest danger of forgetting them. We may be stung by an unfair criticism and we think of a crushing reply. The flesh would call it a righteous reproof, but Scripture calls it rendering railing for railing.

We are perhaps in a position to quote from a past utterance of an opponent, a cutting criticism of one of his present supporters. The quotation would not help or guide anyone a fraction of a degree in the right direction; but it might tend to cause division among those who do not agree with us. The flesh would call such a quotation skilful tactics; Scripture calls it sowing discord among brethren.

THE SCRIPTURAL PRINCIPLES

It is easy for men to deceive themselves into thinking that unrighteous and unjust extremes are simply the evidence of their zeal for truth. Even a readiness to listen to the accused is regarded as weakness. Such extremists cry shame on the very effort to be fair, and in their determination to have no compromise with error they sometimes exaggerate faults, and so grossly misrepresent the objects of their attack that they become guilty of offences worse than all the error against which they are trying to fight.

We must not fall into the mistake of taking an extreme view even of the extremist. God has been merciful to such men in the past, and we must be merciful now even in our thoughts. We may state most emphatically, however, that it is wrong to exaggerate the faults of anyone or to find ugly and misleading names with which to label those who do not quite see eye to eye with us. It is quite possible to be valiant for the Truth and zealous for the Lord without being unfair even to those who are mistaken, and it is always wrong to be unfair. In faithfulness we must point out the danger that in great zeal for the jots and tittles of the law men may lose sight of the foundation principles. All their faith and works may become valueless through lack of charity.

The need for a clear perception of the scriptural principles governing controversy is shown by the tendency toward unrighteous exaggeration even on the part of those from whom better things would be expected. A few days ago we read some words written by a critic who has usually shown a sense of responsibility in the use of words. Yet there are exaggerations which tend to foster strife without the

PRINCIPLES AND PROVERBS

slightest suggestion as to the restitution of the offenders. It declares that the belittling of the commandments among us had become an open sin.

This is a very definite and severe judgment, which presumably includes the present writer in its sweeping condemnation. What does it mean? Is there any effort or desire to restore us "in the spirit of meekness", or are we too evil for that? If we "belittle the commandments of Christ" to the point of "open sin", what hope can we have of forgiveness unless we can be restored? I have just recently been through the four Gospel records in an attempt to classify all the commandments of the Lord Jesus and apply them to present experience. It is easy to find commands which are very imperfectly observed. The repeated command to love one another even as he has loved us (John 13 : 34) has been repeatedly broken. The commands not to lay up treasure on earth and not to seek the riches of the Gentiles are so foreign to the spirit of our age that we only grasp them with great difficulty, and so far no one has been found to rend the ecclesias on this issue. It is quite certain that our critic does not mean these matters. He probably refers to the vexed question of a decision as to where to draw the line between reproving, rebuking or withdrawing from an offender. Is there anything in the commands of Christ to suggest that one who takes too lenient a view of his brother's offences is to be condemned and repudiated? I know of no such command. There are plenty of warnings that those who take too severe a view of a brother's offences will themselves be dealt with severely. There are warnings against judging and against the natural tendency to see the

THE SCRIPTURAL PRINCIPLES

defects in the eye of a brother while remaining unconscious of greater defects in ourselves. If some among us err in their unwillingness to take the most severe of all measures against offenders, if they carry too far the commands to be patient and to restore offenders in the spirit of meekness, it cannot in fairness be described as "belittling the commandments of Christ."

The use of this expression is to be explained in the same way as the many far worse attempts at argument which we sometimes hear. It is a natural emanation from strife and debate.

It is not fair, it is not true; but it has the doubtful merit of being severe, and therefore it is made to serve. It is so easy to be led into the use of such expressions, and we must not make any man an offender for a word, but we do well to sound a warning. Be pitiful, be courteous, be gentle, be meek, be honest. Cultivate charity and love, and remember that for every idle word that you speak you shall give account in the day of judgment.

CHAPTER 12

THE MEANING OF SACRIFICE

“Without shedding of blood there is no remission of sins.” The doctrine of atonement involved in this scriptural principle is one of the most important and in some respects one of the most difficult of all the primary truths connected with the Gospel. Nowhere else is it so easy for men to get out of their depth, and there is no other subject that proves so tempting.

There is certainly danger that vital truths affecting the sacrifice of Christ may be called in question or may be obscured by wrong teaching on this subject. There is far more danger that a destructive strife of words should arise through men getting out of their mental depth in an effort to measure the mind of God. Dr. Thomas once remarked that the elementary truths regarding redemption were few and simple and no reason could be given for them beyond “the fact that God wills them”. If a candidate for baptism revealed a sound knowledge of these simple truths and of this simple explanation of them, we should not dare to “forbid water”.

Suppose that having rendered a satisfactory confession of faith on all other first principles the candidate said: “I believe that God required a perfect sacrifice before He could forgive sin, and that He provided the One capable of rendering that sacrifice. He sent forth His Son, the Lord Jesus, made of a woman, made in all points like his brethren, tempted in all points as we are, but by virtue of

his divine parentage so superior to us morally that he was able to render the perfect sacrifice required and thus to secure redemption for himself from sin-stricken human nature and both forgiveness and redemption for those who come to God through him in the way appointed." Should we dare to forbid baptism because the candidate was unable to explain why God required a perfect sacrifice, or why He demanded the shedding of blood before sins could be remitted?

If we are quite agreed that an understanding of these simple elements is sufficient for one to enter the Covenant, surely it is a tragedy if brethren become divided simply through the effort to see further. It may be even worse than a tragedy, for it sometimes leads to destructive strife in which extremes act and re-act upon each other, the disputants getting further and further out of their depth, while the vital duties of life are neglected.

We would not suggest for a moment that being agreed on the simple and elementary truths we should be content to go no further. Certainly we must push on and gain all the knowledge of divine things that is possible. Discussion of such matters may be very helpful if conducted by brethren who have grasped the more elementary teaching of the Word regarding human conduct. This, however, is certainly a subject in which we do well to be swift to hear and slow to speak; we may venture to suggest, still slower to write. So much sin lies at the door of the man who invented printing.

It may be helpful to take note of the main causes that have led brethren astray when they have tried to probe deeply into the doctrine of atonement. We

PRINCIPLES AND PROVERBS

may then be on our guard at least against these particular dangers.

One cause has been through the tendency to confuse the shadow with the substance. Brethren have reasoned that the types of the law suggested such and such necessities and the sacrifice of Christ had to conform. The truth is, of course, exactly the other way. The work of Christ was the very central feature of the divine purpose and all the shadows of the law had to conform to it. The Apostle in writing to the Hebrews, truly reasons from the types forward to Christ, but he makes it plain that Christ is the substance. *We* recognize the writings of the Apostles as of precisely the same authority as the Old Testament Scriptures. We do well therefore to take their plainest language as our guide and see that our understanding of types and symbols falls into line.

A second cause of confusion is the tendency to seek an explanation according to a human conception of logic and legality. Many years ago we had to point out that while human laws might often have effects far removed from the intention of the law makers, this could never be the case with the laws of God. We cannot recognize any distinction between the divine law and the divine will. When God makes a law it is the expression of His will for the time to which it applies, and it is made with a full knowledge of all its effects (see Acts 15 : 18). We can hardly suppose that any brother would ever dispute this proposition; but some have reasoned as if they never thought of such an idea. We do well therefore to remind each other of this simple truth,

which forbids us to make any distinction between legal necessities and the divine will.

A third cause of confusion has been through the persistent use of phrases that are sometimes misleading. Some staunch brethren in upholding the truth that Christ bore our sin-stricken nature have used language suggestive of an automatic cleansing by death. We could easily have rival camps in this matter, disputants on each side being totally unconscious of the ambiguity of their own language but too acutely conscious of the worst interpretations that could be put on the language of opponents.

Earnest brethren and sisters, anxious to hold the truth, have sometimes been perplexed and almost distracted in the strife of words, beyond their power to understand. The havoc that such strife may cause is perhaps best illustrated by the fact that one of the most capable men we ever had among us, in his efforts for legal logic ended by teaching justification for sin without faith, and we were all slow to realize the full enormity of the position. I well remember the surprise and even consternation of one of his supporters when he was first shown this feature of the case.

Even now there is the same disposition towards legal reasoning regarding types and shadows with the clear principles of Scripture neglected. Although disputants would deny the charge, it is a fact that some of them persistently lose sight of the fact that all things in God's dealings with this world centre round Christ. The reason that all things under the law were cleansed by the offering of blood, was that all things in the age to come will be through the sacrifice of Christ. In reasoning with Jews it might

be necessary to invert the argument, but we who are privileged to know the substance of God's great purpose must never lose sight of it.

What is the literal truth revealed in the New Testament as to the meaning of sacrifice? It is that God *forgives sins* and offers eternal life on the basis of the perfect sacrifice effected by Christ in his life and death. Whatever figurative or partly figurative language the Bible may use, this is the real meaning. Washed in his blood, our sins laid upon him, a bearing of our sins in his own body, the purchase of his blood, the ransom, his being delivered for our offences, the just for the unjust—all such expressions must be understood in harmony with the literal truth that God forgives. Transgressions of the divine law can only be put away by the forgiveness and forbearance of God. Physical uncleanness of nature can only be put away by the power of God. The sacrifice of Christ is the divinely appointed basis in which God in mercy and forbearance offers forgiveness and redemption to sinners (Rom. 3 : 23-4, 4 : 7; Eph. 1 : 7; Col. 1 : 14; 1 John 1 : 9, 2 : 12).

If we desire to probe further and ask the question why did God require such a sacrifice as the basis of the forgiveness offered to humanity, we shall never find any answer through the various interpretations of the law or by talk of the penalty due to sin. Divine law is simply an expression of divine will. It was not the will of God that man should sin, but it was the will of God that man should be a free agent and that death should be the wage of sin. It was the will of God that the human race having been defiled by sin should have no access to His holy presence except on the basis of a perfect sacrifice.

And it is the will of God that we should respond to the gracious invitation and be saved on the basis He has provided (1 Thess. 5 : 9). If we ask why God required such a sacrifice, we must seek a moral explanation. It is no answer to quote the law which expresses His will.

Guided by Scripture we can find a moral explanation that satisfies every demand that the intelligence can make. The perfect sacrifice was required that the flesh might be effectively repudiated, that sin might be conquered and condemned, that the righteousness and holiness of God might be declared, and that sinful man should be humbled without a particle of ground for boasting being left to him (Rom. 3 : 23-27, 8 : 3; Eph. 2 : 1-9).

God made it clear even in ancient times that humanity could not approach to Him at all except with humble faith and on the basis of blood shedding. He gave a law that emphasized the sinfulness and helplessness of His people (Rom. 8 : 15, 5 : 20). He made it clear that when sins were put away by sacrifice they were really forgiven (Lev. 4 : 20, 26, 31, 35). He promised a deliverer who should "make an end of sin", and "bring in everlasting righteousness" (Dan. 9). When the fullness of time was come He revealed that scheme of love into which even the angels had desired to look. He made selection of a virgin of the house of Israel and produced from her one who should be strong for the great work required. So the flesh was repudiated even in the birth of Christ, sin was conquered and condemned in every act of his life, and finally he freely rendered the last obedience even unto death that he might be raised from the dead to immortality and glory as the cap-

tain of our salvation—made perfect through suffering (Heb. 2 : 10). To him much was given and of him much was required. The lights and shadows inseparable from the formation of a character needed to be intense in the probation of our great Captain. He worked out his perfection and salvation by the strength God gave him, and thus through him God opened the way of life for us. Here is the sin nature that had produced only helpless sinners, controlled, condemned and finally put away by the strong Son of God in his perfect obedience of life and death. On this basis humanity can approach the holiness of the Creator and men of faith though sinners can be exalted to the divine. On this basis of the sin nature conquered, repudiated and condemned by the one God made strong for Himself, God forgives. That is the real meaning of atonement.

It is hardly possible to imagine anyone who had ever caught even the most fleeting glimpse of this vision turning back to the pitiful speculations of men as to supposed legal necessities. There are those in the world who think that the real body of Christ never rose, but remains eternally dead as the price due to God or the punishment due to sin ! It would be difficult to make any comment on such an idea while preserving the language of decorum. The brethren are doubtless proof against such monstrous teaching. Let them keep far from the narrow reasoning that leads in that direction. The New Testament describes the sacrifice of Christ in plain and literal language. Let us interpret all figures and symbols by reference to the plain statements. God—who knows the end from the beginning, who does according to His will, but who “cannot deny

Himself"—God provided the means for condemning and overcoming sins on the basis of which He with much forbearance forgives those who please Him by their faith.

Much controversy has been caused by the question as to whether Christ offered for his own cleansing. It has been largely a war of words, due on the one hand to a fear of saying or subscribing to anything derogatory to Christ and on the other hand perhaps a tendency to relapse into the old exaggeration of "original sin". There ought not to be a minute's difficulty in dealing with the question and securing agreement.

When we speak of "sin" in the flesh we use the phrase just as the Apostle used it in Romans 7. Obviously it is a derived or secondary sense of the word, for the primary meaning of sin is transgression of divine law. It is a similar extension of meaning to that of the word "death" for poison when they said, "there is death in the pot". The Apostle speaks of a law in his members which wars against the laws of God and leads to transgression. He calls this physical weakness "sin" in the flesh or "sin" that dwelleth in me. It is the diabolos in human nature, the natural desires of the flesh which, if they are allowed to "conceive", "bring forth sin". We need not argue as to whether there is such a law. We all know it only too well. We are born with it and if we give way to any sin we correspondingly strengthen the evil desire in that direction and thus make "sin" in the flesh more active.

To suppose that an extraordinarily pure and righteous man would feel this weakness less than others is a huge mistake. The truth is the other way.

It is the thoroughly fleshly man who is unconscious of the sinful law in his members and who probably would not understand what the Apostle meant. The man with the highest ideals and the most spiritual mind will feel the struggle most. To suggest that Christ was tempted in all points as we are and yet without this law of sin in his members is to proclaim a complete contradiction. It is like saying, "Except that he was not tempted at all!" Suggestions from without are no temptation to us if they do not appeal to something within. Christ bore just this same defiled nature that we bear or he could not have been tempted as we are and therefore could not have condemned and conquered sin. Christ bore this quality in the flesh, but he never allowed it to conceive even to the point of sinful thought. Therein was the most terrific struggle and the most portentous victory of all human experience. It is easy to understand that with his ideals, and his standards of rectitude, the weakness of the flesh would be so distressing that even the most startling language of the Psalms is comprehensible.

Now whether we take the plain language of the Apostles (Heb. 9 : 12; 10 : 20) or the prophecies and types of the law, the teaching is that all things were to be cleansed by the perfect sacrifice and that no one of Adam's race should have access to the Most Holy place except on the basis of that sacrifice (Lev. 16 : 2-14—note seven times of sprinkling).

Some have caused confusion by arguing whether Christ's offering for himself was "only a matter of obedience to God" or whether it was something more. What do they mean? Obedience to God is carrying out the will of God. What can

be required beyond this? Surely we are all agreed that Christ, "the beloved son", "the servant in whom God delighted", and the one who "always did his Father's will", needed no *forgiveness*. Surely we are also agreed that he needed *cleansing* from the sin-stricken nature in which he wrestled with and conquered the diabolos. There could be no forgiveness for personal sinners except on the basis of the perfect sacrifice, *for this was the will of God*. There could be no cleansing and immortalizing, no entry into the Most Holy by any of Adam's race except on the basis of the same perfect sacrifice, *for that also was the will of God*. Christ came to do God's will, he was obedient in all things even unto death, and so with his own blood—in other words, on the basis of his perfect offering—he entered the Most Holy "having obtained eternal redemption."

The truth is that when brethren who are agreed as to these fundamentals still argue and suspect each other of being "unsound", they are really in their minds raising that old question of many years ago, "Supposing Christ had been the only one to be saved, would he still have had to die a sacrificial death?" Everyone ought to have learned long ago that this question is not legitimate. It is asking, "If the will of God had been totally different in one direction, would it have remained the same in another closely related matter?" There is only one proper answer to such a question. No one knows what the will of God would have been if His purpose had been other than it is, and only a presumptuous man would claim to know.

We have to do with the purpose of God as it is and as it is revealed to us. These truths are so simple

PRINCIPLES AND PROVERBS

and withal so beautiful that unless brethren insist on a misleading form of words making for strife, there should be no difficulty in agreeing.

The will of God determines everything. It was the will of God that none of our sin-stricken race should enter His holy presence except on the basis of the most complete repudiation of the flesh involved in a perfect obedience even unto death. He provided the strength necessary for this great work and it was for this purpose that Christ was born. Thus through the blood of the everlasting Covenant he was brought again from the dead. With his own blood he entered the Most Holy place, having obtained eternal redemption, and we, if we are faithful, can stand at last "washed from our sins in his blood" and covered with his righteousness. All these figures meaning that God accepts, forgives and cleanses His people on the basis of the perfect life and death of His Anointed Son.

CHAPTER 13

APPLICATION OF PRINCIPLES

A series of articles running through a magazine necessarily lacks the final revision, excision and re-arrangement that is possible in the preparation of a book. We cannot know beforehand how far thoughts will extend or when the editor may call a halt. The series, however, has one advantage, in that criticisms and comments come to hand while the work is in progress instead of all arriving after the book is complete. It may be possible, therefore, to correct some misapprehensions and to meet, or try to meet, some objections.

The most disappointing messages have been some rather ill-tempered comments assuming that these articles are designed solely as a contribution to a current controversy. Some critics seem to take it for granted that any writer will try to make his principles dance attendance on his practice instead of trying to make practice conform to principle. Well, human nature, even with divine light to guide it, is truly bad enough; but surely we are not all so completely ruled by the flesh. It simply would not be worth the trouble of writing if friendly readers were merely on the lookout for hits at opponents, and unfriendly readers only interested in the problem of hitting back. At the beginning of this series it was suggested that the fair enunciation of Bible principles might "deal blows with impartial severity at readers and writer."

There has certainly been no conscious deviation by a hair's breadth through the recollection of

principles that have been violated by self or friends, and there has been far more feeling of concern for the application of principles in the future than for the failure to apply them in the past. In varying measure and in different directions we have all been guilty. The past is dead and irrevocable; but the present is living and plastic. If, therefore, we can assist ourselves and each other to pilot scriptural principles through the "latent mazes" of the complex human heart, a better course may be shaped *now*, even if the heart proves too deceitful for anyone to make a frank confession of past errors.

It is a mistake to regard this series as an outcome of recent controversy. It is rather an effort to present a sketch of a larger idea that has been in mind for many years. More than ten years ago an exhortation, "To all parts", was written and published. The writer was convinced then that the gravest danger to the brotherhood was in the tendency for men of different temperaments to get into opposing grooves and criticise each other; the worst fault on both sides being just in such ill-tempered criticism. (This is assuredly almost a quotation from the article of ten years ago.)

It was perceived as a law of human nature that extremes beget extremes, that in time of strife men always lose their sense of proportion, almost always misrepresent and very often become so unfair as to bar and bolt the door to peace. It was recognized that there were literally hundreds of possible differences of judgment, any one of which, if thrown into the arena of fleshly controversy, might be magnified so as to cause strife, division and the cessation of constructive work. The conviction was

formed that in a brotherhood of frail mortals with no visible head and in an age of almost universal self-confidence and self-expression, there was vital need for a broad and comprehensive knowledge of principles. We must know human nature as well as being acquainted with the commands of God.

Above all, the conviction was formed that a clear perception of abstract truth was the essential prelude to sound and fair judgment of concrete matters. He who knows men may be able to understand a man. One who is acquainted with the abstract possibilities of self-deception may be able to recognize the signs of prejudice and deceitful reasoning even in himself. The more clearly we have in mind those great principles taught in the Word of God the better chance there will be that we can take a comprehensive view when one phase of truth is predominant and there is gross exaggeration in "the strife of tongues."

This touches another matter which might be described as a principle. Men persistently exaggerate with the idea that they help their cause. They may be right, considering it simply as a human cause. A man may command attention by exaggerating when no one would notice a plain statement of truth. But if our desire is to do right in the sight of God and to make "righteous judgment" in the work committed to us, exaggeration is utterly evil. If one has committed a fault an exaggeration of his offence tends to cover it and to prevent reparation. Any inclination towards contrition is at once dried up by the unfair charges. Accusations which everyone might have seen to be true are completely lost in a

torrent of accusations that almost everyone knows to be false.

This is the way of the devil's party warfare. Men divide into opposing camps trying to think the worst of each other and so intent on the war of words that they lose sight of principles altogether. The time past ought to have served brethren for such strife. It belongs to the world, and we ought to avoid such methods as we would avoid the plague.

There has been some comment on the matter of judging. It has been suggested that some brethren quote "judge not" in trying to shirk a duty. Reference has been made to the manner in which idolatry was put down in ancient Israel and the responsibility of all to take their share in such righteous judgment.

Well, surely no one has denied that we have to "judge righteous judgment". If Christ had meant to forbid any such effort on our part he surely would have said, "Judge not at all", instead of putting the matter as he did. Perhaps there are some brethren who have fallen into the error of supposing that the Lord forbade the use of judgment altogether in dealing with fellow man. It is to be feared, however, that many more have fallen into the opposite and more serious error. Perceiving that Christ's words could not be understood in the absolute sense they have ignored them altogether and even object to their being quoted. There is vital need at the present time for repeated emphasis of these words; not merely for the rebuke of a few, but for the benefit of all. We all need to understand the words and to remember them.

Christ did not say, "Judge not at all." He said, "Judge not, that *ye be not judged*. For with what judgment ye judge ye shall be judged, and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again." It is another way of saying that God will have judgment without mercy on those who show no mercy. It applies to all matters of judgment, and it surely touches the spirit in which judgment is made as much as the act itself.

When Christ delivered the faulty woman from her accusers, he did not justify her action. He did not oppose the judgment that she had sinned or that according to the law of God stoning was the penalty. In a properly regulated State it would be good for the people of God to have such sins put down in such drastic manner. But then if the State had been properly regulated and the law of God honoured, the woman would probably never have committed the offence. The intolerable thing was that in a time of general faultiness, and with no effective lead for the people of God, there should be a sudden excess of zeal for slaying just one among many equally guilty. Christ met the situation in his inimitable way. "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her." None condemned the woman then, and the Lord, who was without sin and who alone among the sons of men might dare to face "judgment without mercy", did not condemn her either.

A perfectly clear principle emerges from this precept and example regarding judgment, and assuredly it is a principle which needs to be emphasized continually for the benefit of all. Our tendency is to be so blind to our own faults and so

PRINCIPLES AND PROVERBS

acutely conscious of faults in others. There is such danger of being "partial" in judgment; in other words, allowing the deceitful human heart to influence the intellect. There are times when our understanding of Scripture calls upon us to judge and perhaps to repudiate the words and actions of our fellows. At such times especially must we remember the precept and example of Christ.

The illustrations of drastic action in ancient Israel are rather difficult to apply in these days when the circumstances are so different, and from the days of the old Puritans until now very faulty arguments have been developed on these lines. Surely the brethren must know that we are not living under the Mosaic dispensation. It was stated by Moses that all who refused to hear the great prophet should be cut off. Christ was the prophet promised, but when two of the disciples wanted to call for summary judgment on those who refused to receive him he reproved them: "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of Man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them."

Even in the days of drastic and summary punishment the approved leaders of Israel were willing to accept explanations of matters they judged to be wrong. When the altar was set up by the two tribes beyond Jordan the rest of Israel prepared to make war on the apparent infidelity. But they gladly accepted the explanation that the altar was only intended as a witness and was in no sense to be used for worship contrary to God's law. Was the building of this altar entirely justifiable or was it absolutely wrong and the explanation a subterfuge, or was it an act which could not be put

in either extreme category? Unwise, indeed, in view of Israel's weakness, but a pardonable error in view of the explanations?

We might not all agree in judgment on the matter even now, with all the advantage distance lends in freeing the mind from bias and prejudice. It is possible that some in Israel thought the explanation unsatisfactory and lame. They all agreed, however, not to make war on their brethren, and assuredly they were right in that.

There were other occasions of more serious departure from rectitude when summary justice was meted out. Puritans and others have often quoted the drastic judgment on men who despised God's law to justify their violence toward men who repudiated their opinions. Do not let us fall into such miserable error. In these milder days of "saving men's lives" it cannot be right to count brethren as enemies to be hated, because they differ from us in the judgment of matters which are not defined in Scripture.

Some who quote the severe provisions of the Mosaic law may suggest that just as Israel was required to be united in condemning a departure to serve other gods so we must be united in resisting the preaching of another gospel. Surely we can all agree with this! We must, however, try to "judge righteous judgment" and preserve a sense of proportion in the use of words. There are many brethren who are doing and saying that which is wrong and unjust, but they are not repudiating the Gospel; neither are they bringing upon themselves the curse of God by preaching another gospel.

The danger is not that Christadelphians will preach another gospel than that they have received. The danger is rather that the vital duty of preaching will be neglected and hindered through the waste of money, time and energy in unprofitable strife. We shall be judged at last by the word that Christ has spoken, not by the partial and prejudiced words of erring man. I know of no picture of the judgment seat showing any rejected through their toleration of weak brethren, or for their toleration of those who would tolerate weak brethren. There is a terrible picture of some confident disciples being rejected through their failure to dispense the bread and water and the covering garment to those in need.

Most confidently and earnestly would we urge this thought. The vast majority of people in the world are in prison, without a garment and perishing for lack of the bread and water of life. Where are the real differences between us to justify the hindering of this great work to which we are called? We have the life-giving treasure, in faulty earthen vessels it is true, but we have it and we are responsible for its proper use. Why such wasteful war of words in these closing times of the Gentiles, with more naked millions of Adam's sons than ever peopled the earth before all needing garments, and some even knowing their need?

Even though some readers may dislike the views expressed in these chapters, surely all must admit that a little light has been thrown on Bible principles and a little service rendered in calling attention to Bible teaching. Surely everyone must recognize that there was need for emphasis of the fact that we have been called by God to the fellowship of the Gospel,

and that this involves fellowship with the Father and the Son. On this basis it must be conceded, in theory at least, that we must not cut any members off from our fellowship unless we have a clear scriptural lead. In other words, the extreme course of withdrawal should be on a scriptural principle which can be stated and consistently applied as a principle.

It may be urged that some cases of transgression are so complex that it is impossible to make a consistent application of rules. The Bible shows that some sins should be reproved, some publicly rebuked (1 Tim. 5 : 20), and some should be repudiated with the extreme step of withdrawal from the offender. How can frail mortals agree as to the category in which any complex instance of faulty conduct should be placed? We are commanded not to be unequally yoked with unbelievers (2 Cor. 6 : 14). Surely the only honest interpretation of this command is to recognize that it applies to all kinds of yoking, whether bondservice, marriage, business partnerships, clubs, societies, trade unions, or federations.

We must assist each other to avoid all such entanglements as much as we can, and when there is a flagrant violation of this principle of separation and we are called upon to judge, then especially must we remember the Lord's words regarding judging. There are many different degrees of offence in this matter, and inevitably there will be much difference in judgment. We have no scriptural authority whatever for cutting off our brethren for differing from us in judgment as to the proper application of a recognized principle. Brethren clearly transgress when they go to extremes in condemnation of one

PRINCIPLES AND PROVERBS

particular form of yoking with the unbeliever, while taking no notice of other forms of the same error.

It may be there are some who are ready to make an effort to be consistent in these matters. They are ready to make the clean cut line and require all in their fellowship to agree to the righteousness of its incisive judgment. All workers in doubtful positions must cut clear from the alien connection at whatever cost in wages or pensions. All business men with unbelieving partners must dissolve partnership at whatever cost to their businesses. We could always respect those who really suffer loss for conscience sake; but there would never be agreement as to just where the line should be drawn for other people. Twenty points of dispute could be raised in as many minutes. The only result of such an attempt at consistency would be protracted and destructive discussion with the inevitable hindering of essential duties and with the warping of intellect and character which always comes with a prolonged wrangle.

Suppose you decide, as most brethren apparently have already decided, that business partnerships are not so serious yokings as marriage or bond-service to the State, it must still be remembered that the man who takes a business partner cannot plead either primitive passion or the pressure of authority by way of excuse. He wants to make money, so that even the motive is questionable. We cannot believe that anyone would claim that *all* cases of alien marriage must be treated with the utmost severity while *all* cases of alien business partnerships must be passed as legitimate.

To take a simple illustration. A brother in a wild and lawless part of the world meets a virtuous

APPLICATION OF PRINCIPLES

and teachable woman who has been led by a misleading offer of work into society which is intolerable. He believes that she will certainly obey the Truth as soon as she can thoroughly examine it, and he marries her so that she can go with him to a more favourable environment. Another brother in an orderly town far removed from all such temptations has been earning a comfortable living, but with the hope of making a fortune he enters into partnership with a worldly and unscrupulous man. Which of the two is the greater offence ?

The question then may be raised: If each offence has to be dealt with on its merits and human judgments differ, how can we have a consistent application of scriptural principles ?

The answer is that we can have it by taking note of *all* scriptural principles instead of exaggerating the subject of the moment and neglecting everything else. The letters to the ecclesias make it quite plain that in the application of scriptural principles one ecclesia is not held responsible for the faults of another. The apostle lays down the rule that we must in love be subject to one another. This means the rule of the majority which is the only possible rule among brethren in the absence of the Master. When an offence has been committed, then the ecclesia must decide whether it calls for ecclesial action and whether action should take the form of rebuke or withdrawal. If opinions differ, then "do not fly off at a tangent because you cannot have your own way" (Dr. Thomas).

"In love be subject one to another." When an ecclesia insists on withdrawing from an offender, if some members feel that the action is too drastic they

PRINCIPLES AND PROVERBS

have the right to decline the responsibility of such action while "submitting" to the decision of the majority. This is the scriptural rule and it is the only workable way.

A contrary rule has been enunciated that all members must actively support a motion of withdrawal or else themselves be cut off. This is a new idea and it is as unworkable as it is unscriptural. There is no probability that the slightest attempt will be made to apply it consistently. If it were applied the result would be small meetings with one dominating personality in each and no Christianity in any of them.

On the other hand, if there is a comprehensive understanding and continued recollection of scriptural principles, each ecclesia will face its responsibility of judging "matters that pertain to this life", as the Lord requires. It will reprove and rebuke as need may arise with all long-suffering and patience. All members will be subject to one another in love. If need be they will withdraw from an offender, but with the hope of restoring the guilty one (1 Cor. 5 : 5). If one is treated too severely he will "suffer wrong" rather than embroil the whole brotherhood in a dispute the merits of which can only be judged by the Lord himself.

It is by preaching the Gospel to the poor, by strengthening the feeble and comforting the weary; by holding forth the Word of Life, the garment for the naked, bread and water for the hungry and thirsty, the message of life for those in prison—that is the way of life for us.

PART II.
PROVERBS

CHAPTER 1

THINGS NEW AND OLD

God has given instructions to His servants in many different ways; He has spoken "at sundry times and in divers manners", as the apostle puts it, and He has chosen very different instruments to convey the messages. The perfection of divine wisdom was revealed in a divinely perfect man who is to us "wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption." Divine wisdom has also come to us through very imperfect men who have been "wisdom" and warning.

In many ways the most remarkable example of divine instruction coming through a faulty man is in the writings of Solomon the son of David. Solomon would seem to have been the most favoured of mortals; the son of a great king and the heir to the throne, coming into power at the most favourable time in his nation's history when all enemies were subdued and when even Egypt sought alliance with the growing strength of Israel. Solomon had wealth in abundance, he had bodily health and such vigorous mentality that according to Jewish tradition he could speak all the languages known in his day. Finally, in addition to all this God granted to him a special wisdom so that he became a vehicle for the conveyance of divine instruction to mankind. He is the supreme example of the ease with which natural blessing may be turned into spiritual curse, of how a man who knows may fail to perform, and of how the treasures of divine knowledge and wisdom may

be contained in an "earthen vessel" which perishes even while it conveys imperishable truth.

In writing of the Proverbs there is no difficulty in applying the lessons to the circumstances of our own time. They are astonishingly "up to date". There is vitality and freshness in the Scriptures after all the centuries that have passed since the words were written. A sermon only a hundred years old seems old-fashioned and dead, but the words of scripture are continually new and living. They keep pace with a growing intelligence, yielding further messages as we are able to receive them. "The dark sayings of the wise" often seem perfectly clear and simple. They do not in any way obscure truth or confuse the mind of a reader. They are simple in the first message that they yield, but that is not all that they contain. The darkness is in hidden depths.

The Proverbs are not intended merely for one class of reader or one grade of intelligence. Their appeal is universal. "A wise man will hear and increase in learning, and a man of understanding will attain unto sound counsel." Indeed in this as in so many human lessons, those who would seem to need the instruction least get the most out of it, while those who need it most refuse to listen. This incongruity is noted in the first chapter of the book. It is the wise man who hears and increases his knowledge. "Fools despise wisdom and instruction."

There is a fundamental truth regarding the human mind which everyone ought to know and which in all probability everyone will claim to know when once it is mentioned. We refer to the fact that the mind is so constituted that we are bound to

learn gradually. Some can take the successive steps much quicker than others, but it is always by steps that we make any advance. The best way of learning, in fact the only satisfactory way, is in the manner of a child. It involves much repetition; we pass repeatedly over the same mental track, but each time makes it a little deeper, a little clearer, and perhaps carries it a little further. A man has so much in his mind that he may be able to put thoughts together much more rapidly than is possible for a child, but in this essential matter of forming really fresh impressions, our aptitude diminishes as we grow older. There is no such thing as sudden enlightenment, for we are not able to receive it. It is possible to concentrate a great amount of instruction in few words, but those few words are unintelligible to a man who is unprepared. We have heard lectures which would express a great mass of truth to hearers who were well prepared, but the only definite impression made on a complete stranger was a headache. Indeed, as we have often remarked, a book entirely filled with new ideas would be as unintelligible as one written in an unknown tongue. Take a text book regarding some technical matter that you have never studied and you will make nothing of it. It may be an excellent book giving all the main facts that are known concerning the subject under review. It would be sudden enlightenment if you were able to grasp the meaning of it all at a single reading, but that is impossible. If you want to understand it you have to learn in the ordinary way, gradually building up from that which you already know and with much repetition as know-

ledge is extended. In other words, you have to learn in the manner of a child.

It is worth while to emphasize this truth, for so many people in later life, and perhaps especially in this generation, become impatient of instruction that might help them. Some teaching is rejected because it is new and they can make nothing out of it, everything else is despised because it is old and they know all about it. With less aptitude for receiving new impressions than was once theirs, they decline to pass with childlike interest along a well trodden path of thought and so they never carry it any further.

This is not an age for serious reading. Millions of people with all the advantages of modern education pass through life without ever reading a single good book. They read a great deal of trash and perhaps Macaulay's dictum is true that it must be a very bad book to be worse than no book at all, but this is only a negative recommendation. Much can be learned by good reading if the student is willing to learn in the manner of the inquiring and interested child, pleased to renew acquaintance with that which is well known and anxious to understand that which seems new and obscure.

One who tries to write with the sole object of serving and helping must have two questions before his mind. Can I give some instruction or suggest thoughts that will be helpful? Can I write in a manner sufficiently interesting for people to read? It is easy to do either of these things alone but difficult to combine them, yet the combination must be effected if we are to achieve our purpose. The Lord Jesus suggested the right way. The instructed scribe must be like a householder bringing forth

from his treasures things new and old. They must not be all new or no one would understand, but if possible some of the treasures must be new at least to some readers. It may be possible, too, to show the old in a new light so that even those who have forgotten how to learn may be stimulated into a revival of interest. It is not merely in the matter of humility that we need to become like children. Those who seek the Kingdom of God also need the childlike interest in things both new and old and the child's readiness to learn, step by step, carrying the old thought a little further.

It would be possible to write of the Proverbs taking everything that appealed to us in the order in which it appears and making such comments as might be suggested by thought and experience, but while such a method might present valuable instruction it would be too disjointed and lacking in form to be interesting or helpful. Many of the chapters are obviously collections of isolated sayings with no aim at consecutive thought. It is as in so many other parts of the Word. The lessons are given "line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little." It is "the honour of kings to search out the matter" and put the littles together.

A first really helpful exercise may be found in an effort to classify the Proverbs under various subjects. Writers would differ from each other in their chosen headings and probably would not make the same selection of proverbs, but it is certain that any instructed scribe who makes this attempt at classification will find himself with material to fill a volume and with the wisest of sayings as a foundation for each subject.

PRINCIPLES AND PROVERBS

We have made a rough classification under the following headings: God, Wisdom, Fathers, Companions, Justice, Mercy and Kindness, Speech, The Heart, Conduct, Service, Fools, Strife, Anger, Pride, Sloth, Prosperity, General, Special.

This classification gives far more proverbs than we can deal with under some of the headings and yet leaves over twenty that we have had to put under General and about seventeen ranking as special.

We hope to be able to present at least some of the thoughts suggested by this analysis, for they should be both instructive and interesting.

CHAPTER 2

PROVERBS REFERRING TO GOD

A critic once remarked with rather cruel sarcasm, that no one ever doubted the existence of God until the theologians attempted to prove it. There is a measure of justice in this reproach. Theologians have attempted to be wise beyond that which is written, and their representation of God has not been successful. It is not surprising that there have been harmful reactions from these excesses.

The proverbs of Solomon differ from proverbs of merely human origin in their continual reference to God. His existence, His supreme wisdom, His power, and His absolute prerogatives, are presented as fundamental truths, needing no demonstration and only in need of reiteration because of the forgetfulness of man. We can only think of one suggestion of an argument in the modern sense of the word; the reference to the seeing eye and the hearing ear, both being the work of God. This argument is more definitely expressed in the words, "He that made the eye, shall he not see? He that made the ear, shall not he hear." It is the only argument of modern type that we can remember finding in the Scriptures as proof of the existence of God. The reasoning will appeal to all thoughtful people. The organs of sight and hearing are so complex and there are so many external conditions necessary before they can function, that it would be preposterous to imagine that all the essential things came together by chance.

This kind of argument is unusual in Scripture, however. The truth regarding God is presented,

PRINCIPLES AND PROVERBS

not in subtle arguments according to a human conception of wisdom, but in demonstration of the spirit and power. Our conviction of the existence of God is not based upon philosophical arguments, however good they may be, but upon the fact that God has given us messages far beyond the knowledge of man or the power of man to fabricate.

It is strange that some modern writers have lost faith in the Christian religion because they find the universe so much greater than they had supposed. They suggest that the God of Israel was on a level with other divinities each supposed to preside over the destinies of a particular nation, helping them in their wars with others. We could understand the men of Tyre falling into such an error with their external and only partial view of Israelitish affairs. It is probable that Jezebel the Tyrian princess used arguments very similar to those of modern unbelievers. In every land that the men of Tyre visited they would find local divinities quite unrecognized in others parts of the world, but wherever they sailed the sun appeared in the sky, giving warmth and life in every country. Jezebel and her friends would argue that this was the true god visible everywhere and in all the world the giver of food. The people of Israel, however, were given some idea of the greatness of the universe made and sustained by God. They were given the most explicit instructions that they must not worship sun or moon, for these were created things made by the God who had called the Israelites to be a peculiar people for Himself. It was a grievous offence to "limit" the Holy One of Israel. His power was described as infinite and His understanding beyond

PROVERBS REFERRING TO GOD

searching; the earth and all the host of Heaven were made by Him. If men will remember the many divinities of ancient Egypt and Assyria, and then read the contemporary Israelitish description of God in the Psalms, they may begin to appreciate the mighty contrast between the religious conceptions of the most highly cultured of the ancient Gentile nations and the revelations made to Israel.

In these days scientists startle us with their descriptions of distant stars, and some people have actually lost their faith in God through the staggering conception of stars so distant that the light takes thousands of years to reach us. Such figures do not disturb us, for in very early days we were confronted with a problem beyond all comparison more overwhelming. Make the figures as terrifying as you will and it is at least possible to conceive of them so long as there is a limit. Make the universe as old as you will and it is possible to understand such great periods if there was a beginning. Time without beginning and space without end were the ideas that staggered us. In thus contemplating infinity we are faced with two alternatives one of which must be accepted although both seem impossible. In our experience all things must have a beginning, but we are forced to believe that the first cause always existed. In our experience the largest of objects or the greatest of distances are limited, but we are forced to accept the idea that space is unlimited. We could use the language of the popular scientist and talk of light years and light centuries and light millenniums. We could invite him to use his well developed powers to imagine something moving so much faster than light that it

PRINCIPLES AND PROVERBS

could reach his most distant star in a second. Then imagine its speed doubling every second and proceeding with such acceleration out into space for millions of years until all the paper in the world could not find room to express the figure even in light millenniums.

A man might lose his reason trying to grasp the idea of unending space or attempting to imagine how there could possibly be a limit. We cannot understand this matter any more than we can search the mind of God. We are finite beings but we are intelligent enough to grasp the fact that there is infinity around us. We are imperfect beings but we are intelligent enough to form the concept of perfection. This is the true conception of God, infinite and perfect.

The first reference to God in the Proverbs is in the well-known saying, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge." This may be regarded as the beginning of the proverbs, for the previous six verses have merely set forth the object of the book, calling upon the wise to hear and understand. The first real proverb, then, is this clear call to fear God. There is no suggestion that it is easy to understand even this. In the second chapter we are told that if we will receive the words of the instructor and lay up his commandments in our minds so that we incline our ears and apply our hearts to wisdom and understanding; if we lift up our voices and cry after understanding, seeking it as if searching for hidden treasure, then shall we understand the fear of the Lord and the knowledge of God (Prov. 2 : 1-5).

There can be no doubt of the enthusiasm with which men will seek for hidden treasure. Even the

PROVERBS REFERRING TO GOD

most indolent of sluggards would dig his garden if he thought that bars of gold and silver were hidden under the soil. This is the manner in which we should seek for wisdom and knowledge that we may understand the fear of the Lord.

The word fear does not refer to that fear that is cast out by love. It is a word signifying reverence. It is the fear that a child may bear toward a good parent. A fear of offending or grieving, a fear of being unworthy, a fear of the reproachful look which may sometimes hurt more than the primitive rod. Using the word fear in this sense we can understand the words of the Psalm: "There is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared." It is because God can pity and forgive that He may be revered and feared in this sense.

We are not confused by the use of the same word with different meanings. There is affinity even where there is dissimilarity. There is a fear which goes with hatred, and there is a fear which is only felt by love. A completely brutal man will have no fear of losing the love and respect of his fellows, for these blessings have never been his. He fears physical pain and practically nothing else. The fear of the Lord is a totally different fear which could not even be explained to such a man. Men who can love their friends may perceive a little of the truth, the full understanding is reserved for those who seek for wisdom as for hidden treasure.

The Proverbs tell us to trust the Lord with all the heart, to honour Him with our substance and to be properly exercised by His chastening rod. We are to be in the fear of the Lord all the day, remembering that all things come from Him, and that with

Him is perfect wisdom. If we find a measure of that wisdom we shall find life and obtain favour of the Lord (8 : 35).

There are two particularly interesting statements in the Proverbs regarding God in His dealings with the children of men. One is the oft quoted passage, "It is the glory of God to conceal a thing, but the honour of kings is to search out the matter." We should not have anticipated this thought, but all experience shows that it is fundamentally true. Men have often found that all their attempts to understand the laws of Nature have only opened up a vista of increased complexity. Last century the materialists were in the ascendant and for a time imagined that they were on the point of explaining everything. Now they are discredited and it is acknowledged that the universe is far more mysterious than our forefathers ever imagined. Last century the food experts thought that they knew all about the subject of nutrition; then, through the practical failure of their theories, vitamins were discovered, and now experts who certainly know far more than their predecessors, admit as Mr. Eustace Miles once wrote: "We really know very little about the matter." At one time the ductless glands of the body were regarded as useless, now they are found to be so mysteriously important that some investigators have claimed that they are practically everything.

As in Nature so in the written Word, God has concealed things and has called upon His servants to exercise their minds in searching for the treasures of divine wisdom. It has always been "line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little." Faithful men and women try to put the

littles together and in the process find the mental exercise which brings their minds nearer to God.

The other remarkable passage is in chapter 21: "The heart of the king is in the hand of the Lord: as the rivers of water he turneth it wheresoever he will."

This is another way of saying that God rules in the kingdoms of men, a doctrine found in all parts of Scripture. Even the wicked are used as the divine sword for the punishing of other wicked. The proverb, however suggests more than this. It gives us a glimpse of the process by which the hearts of kings may be turned. It is not by a direct influence such as would make a man into a machine. It is rather as we turn the course of water, placing obstacles here and removing them there to guide the stream as we desire. The Scriptures furnish many illustrations of this principle. The King of Egypt was influenced by that which he saw and heard. The partial success of his magicians hardened his heart. The Syrians were driven from Samaria by the sound as of a host approaching. It was not in the heart of the king of Assyria to perform any work for God, but he was lured by the prospect of spoil and the hope of power. There have been illustrations of this truth in our days, nations deterred by obstacles or encouraged by easy success have taken their proper places in the world; for the heart of the king is still in the hand of the Lord, turned like a stream of water into the channel designed for it.

CHAPTER 3

WISDOM AND KNOWLEDGE

Cowper wrote, "Wisdom and knowledge far from being one, have oftentimes no connection."

The poet was trying to express the truth that wisdom is superior to knowledge, but in his statement of the difference he went too far. There is bound to be a connection, for although it is possible for men to have knowledge without wisdom, no one can be wise without possessing knowledge. Wisdom makes use of knowledge as mind makes use of matter. It is superior because it is comprehensive. A newborn babe begins life without knowing anything of the world he has entered and without any of the qualities that may come with experience. He cannot possibly be wise until he has knowledge—knowledge of the difference between good and evil, knowledge of the God who has called him into being, and knowledge of the way of life. Wisdom is revealed in the proper use of that which is known. The One who is perfect in wisdom has also the perfection of knowledge.

Wisdom is always good, but there is such a thing as the knowledge of evil. It can never be an advantage to lack wisdom in anything, but there are matters in which it is a blessing not to know.

The apostle Paul wrote, "knowledge puffeth up." He was not condemning knowledge, but simply stating a truth. Knowledge of the right kind is excellent, but even it may tend to inflate the individual who possesses it. Men may be puffed up even by their knowledge of the Scriptures, es-

pecially if their reading has been ill-balanced. Much charity is needed to guard against this evil and to make knowledge lead to edification.

There are people who will say that it is only the dangerous "little knowledge" that puffs men up, while those who have studied deeply are truly humble and never boast. This thought has been stated often, but it is not true. Indeed it would be difficult to define the words of such a saying. All the knowledge of mankind is only little. The most ignorant and the most cultured are only separated by a few degrees. It is quite true that intelligent people perceive the ugliness and folly of blatant boasting and so if they boast they do it more skilfully. Or it is possible for a man to feel himself so superior to the common run of humanity that he finds no pleasure in the admiration of the multitude. His detachment is a form of pride, and he may fall into the worst of errors by being puffed up against God.

For all ordinary people it is most natural to find a certain pleasure in the possession of knowledge that is denied to others. The child's open triumph with the delighted affirmation "I know, I know!" is only the natural expression of a pride which we conceal in later life. Men and women do not feel such keen pleasure in little triumphs, and they may be so self-deceived as to imagine that they are completely above such childish weakness. Often, however, circumstances conspire to reveal the inflation that is there even in those who would claim to be quite free from it. Even in dealing with the oldest and most dignified of men, a diplomatist remembers this human vanity.

PRINCIPLES AND PROVERBS

An active business man once told us that in early days he made this discovery by accident. He was trying to sell certain articles to engineers, and was finding it very hard work. One day, aside from his business he thought of a very interesting engineering problem which baffled all friends to whom he put it. One of these friends suggested that there was probably one man in the country who could solve the problem, the head of a very large firm, why not write to him? The young man hesitated to be so bold, but at last he wrote, stating his problem. He was invited to make a call. The big man received the youth quite graciously in his office and explained the interesting difficulty. Then having given full satisfaction by his superior knowledge and ability, he began to question the youth as to what he was doing in life, and ended by giving him a good order. There is a sequel to this story which illustrates a worldly wisdom, hardly falling within our subject. The young salesman having found by accident that exalted men were children at heart, changed his method of approach and played on this human weakness. He took advantage of this flattering thought of superior knowledge, the truth noted by the apostle that "knowledge puffeth up."

In some measure all men are subject to this weakness, but if they are instructed in the knowledge and wisdom that has been divinely revealed, they are aware of human vanity and so are on their guard. Knowledge and ignorance are only relative terms. It is said that in rural England a century ago, a man who could read and write was accounted a scholar, although in other circles the same man would have appeared as an ignoramus. In the same

way the man with the greatest reputation for learning in all the world might seem deplorably ignorant to the angels. It is possible even that some of those with the greatest reputation would appear more foolish than their less capable fellows, just as we have noticed when we have chanced to overhear the conversation of children, the cleverest boy talks the worst nonsense, for there is no one to check him, or call in question his assertions.

Wisdom is needed to guide our steps, or knowledge will only bring increase of sorrow and a greater capacity for folly. Wisdom begins with the fear of the Lord and it ends with obedience to all His commandments. It can make use of knowledge on this mortal, material plane, while recognizing that there are other planes unknowable to us now. "Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom, and with all thy getting get understanding" (Prov. 4 : 7).

In the first chapter of the book of Proverbs we are told that "wisdom crieth aloud in the streets, she uttereth her voice in the broad places, she crieth in the chief place of concourse, at the entering in of the gates" (1 : 20-21, R.V.).

Considered as a "dark saying of the wise", this is provocative of thought. We very rarely have a literal shouting of words of wisdom in the streets of a city, or in the broad places of human activity, but when we remember that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, we can see a definite meaning in the saying. In ancient Israel and in the modern world the idea of God is before men all the while even though human thoughts fail to turn to Him. In our time we can hardly live for a single day with-

PRINCIPLES AND PROVERBS

out Christ being brought before our minds, and through Christ, the Father who was manifest in him. Even the daily newspaper utters the call of wisdom in spite of its low aim and its native foolishness. The date it gives is from the birth of Christ, the record of human vanity confirms the teaching of Christ, while often, especially in these latter days, there is an item of news which shouts of the purpose of God to those who can understand.

Even apart from these matters the call of wisdom can surely be heard in the ordered wonders of the universe in which we live. Man's cheerful acceptance of the earth as his home proclaims that in his heart he recognizes that there is a Creator. Would he feel comfortable on a ship with no captain? A hundred thousand tons of metal and wood driving through unknown seas at thirty miles an hour and no one in control? How then should he feel when he realizes that he is all through life on a vessel weighing millions of tons and going through space at sixty thousand miles an hour? Of course men believe that someone is in control. The stability of the earth and its long continuance, the facts of human consciousness and human ideals, the wonders of chemistry and the wonders of life all combine to prove that there is a mind far above that of man. Human intelligence is just sufficient to contemplate these things and to make some response. Wisdom is thus calling to the sons of men in the streets, in the broad places and at the entering in of the gate.

The Proverbs, however, do not suggest that it is easy for men to secure wisdom even though the first call is so loud and insistent. We have to incline our hearts to understanding, to cry after discernment

and to seek for wisdom as for hid treasure; then may a man understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God. Then wisdom may be a tree of life to us (2 : 1-5).

There is much food for thought in this contrast between the first loud call of wisdom to the sons of men, and the diligent search which is necessary before we can find the real treasures that wisdom can yield. The study of nature will not carry men far. "The mysterious universe" offers new complexities as men advance in knowledge. The investigations of men are like the attempt to reach a goal which is moving from them faster than they can run.

God can only be known as far as He has chosen to reveal Himself. He has revealed that He is "a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him". Just as there are treasures and stores of wealth in the material world to reward the diligent labours of men, so there are spiritual treasures for those who search diligently in the Scriptures that have been handed down to us. In the only way possible or desirable in this mortal condition we shall find God if we search for Him with all the heart.

In the book of Proverbs there are many contrasts drawn between wisdom and foolishness, most of them easy to understand. From the many passages we choose one because it contains hidden depths and may arouse helpful thoughts.

"Every wise woman buildeth her house, but the foolish plucketh it down with her hands" (14 : 1).

Perhaps this has a meaning even on the most material plane. Some women take steps to improve

PRINCIPLES AND PROVERBS

their houses as time goes on, while others let everything go to ruin. We have even heard of people breaking up some of the woodwork of their houses and burning it through foolish indolence or still more foolish anger. On a slightly less material plane we have noticed the extraordinary difference between the woman who builds a home of confidence, unselfishness and love and the one who pulls a home to pieces by suspicion, jealousy and a generally negative attitude. On a higher plane still, the saying is true of the corporate woman formed through the ages. Those who desire to be constituent members of the bride to be, must be wise. They must build the house and not pull it down.

CHAPTER 4

THE HEART

We use the word heart now with the same meaning that it bears in the language of Scripture. We refer to the deeper part of the mind where character is formed. A man may believe the Gospel in the sense that he gives intellectual assent to the argument presented to him, yet with such shallow belief that he may quite fail to play the part of a Christian. To use an old phrase, "he is convinced but not converted". If, however, he goes further and believes "with all the heart", it will be "unto righteousness" (Rom. 10 : 10). "Ye shall seek me", said God through the prophet Jeremiah, "and ye shall find me if ye search with all the heart."

In this sense the word heart is frequently used in the Book of Proverbs. "My son, give me thine heart, and let thine eyes delight in my ways" (23 : 26). Death and destruction are before the Lord: how much more the hearts of the children of men (15 : 11). And referring to the undesirable patron, "Eat and drink, says he, but his heart is not with thee."

All these passages may contain hidden depths, but the main meaning needs no interpretation. The word heart is used just as we employ it now. We may know what a man says, what he does and how he appears to us, but we do not know what is in his heart; how he thinks and feels. Does that smile cover an opposite feeling which would better be expressed by a scowl? Are those smooth words genuine, or are they intended to deceive? We

cannot know what is in the heart of another man. We may be deceived even as to what is in our own, but all hearts are open and naked to God. "The fining pot for silver, and the furnace for gold; but the Lord trieth the heart" (17 : 3). In the work here mentioned the object is to clear away the dross whether in the fining of metals or of human hearts, but the proverb does not suggest that there is a perfect analogy. Rather does it imply a difference. Metals may be purified by men with fining pot and furnace, but the heart can only be tried and cleansed by God. The process of fining is far more complex and wonderful than anything that can be effected with metals. It is not merely a matter of removing dross, but something quite new has to be introduced; new hopes, new desires and in fact "newness of life."

In this trial and preparation of the heart man must be responsive. There is a profound meaning in the words "The Lord God hath opened my ears, and I was not rebellious." Some men are rebellious even to the extent of making void the word of God. God gave to Saul a new heart so that he began his reign well, but he became rebellious and his heart turned to evil. His fall furnishes an excellent illustration of the proverb, "A sound heart is the life of the flesh, but envy is the rottenness of the bones."

Perhaps he illustrated another proverb, well known to all readers though not much heeded in the world: "He that is proud of heart is an abomination to the Lord." The expression proud of heart surely refers to a quality deeply ingrained in character. It is not a superficial pride easily perceived by observers. A very shallow pride is sometimes spoken of

as vanity, and while that can never be a virtue it is often too slight to be accounted a vice. We are all apt to reveal a little of this superficial pride, especially if we are unexpectedly able to accomplish something in a field beyond the scope of our natural talents. A hopelessly unmusical young man who managed to play a hymn tune probably felt far more elated than did the young Mozart when at the age of fifteen he accomplished a feat beyond the power of any man living. Men come to perform their appropriate work as a matter of course, but it is amusing sometimes to observe the childish glee with which a really capable man will for the first time master a task which happens to be difficult for him but is quite easy to others.

A proud heart means something deeper and far more serious than this. It may go with an appearance of humility. It may be so well covered that even the individual is deceived. It rarely expresses its pride in words; it will on the other hand often use words to justify the proud act or attitude which is the real expression of character.

Sometimes, however, pride is naked and unashamed, expressing itself openly and taking pride even in its nakedness. There is such an expression of a proud heart when a man declares his determination "not to ask favours of God". This naturally goes with the decision that life is too evil to call for any thanks to the Creator. The proud heart gives no thanks for any blessings that have been received and scorns to ask for any blessings to come. It resembles the attitude of a ne'er-do-well, sponging on his friends all the time and yet affecting to despise them;

PRINCIPLES AND PROVERBS

too proud to ask them for any favours but not too proud to take without asking.

We depend upon the favour of God for every breath we draw, why then not ask for anything that we need? The proper attitude is shown to us in Scripture, and it is far removed from pride of heart. In everything give thanks, ask freely for all that you need, but always remember that in the sight of God you are a mere child, often wanting that which is not good, and very rarely understanding spiritual values.

Another way in which pride of heart is revealed is in man's reluctance to admit that he has been in the wrong. Obstinacy is one of the outward signs of the abomination within. How much havoc has been wrought by unwise insistence on "what I have said I have said". How rarely do we find the man who can be firm as a rock on matters of principle and yielding in matters of personal preference. It is much easier to find men who are naturally weak as water, but who are able to sustain a frozen rigidity when their personal pride is touched.

"The heart of the wise teacheth his mouth", says the wise man; and again: "The heart of the righteous studieth to answer: but the mouth of the wicked poureth out evil things" (15 : 28).

This surely means that a wise and righteous man will bring all the powers of his mind for the choice of right words that will help the hearer. Feeling, as well as intellect, is engaged in the work. He does not "pour out foolishness", neither does he present a cold and apathetic statement of truth. "From the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh", but all the time he is "studying to answer", guarding the door of his lips, so that he shall use right words.

A foolish man may speak from the heart, without studying to answer and with no guard on the door of his mouth. Then his words only express the feeling of the moment. There is a pouring out of foolishness the consequences of which may be very evil.

Perhaps the most searching and significant passage in the book of Proverbs is in the fourth chapter. "Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life." There are hidden depths in this passage giving excellent counsel to those who will give heed.

We have known people to raise foolish difficulties, actually asking "How can I keep my heart with such diligence if the heart means the part of the mind where character is formed? I am the heart and the weaknesses of the heart are my weaknesses."

The appropriate answer to such an objector is to ask if he has ever heard of or ever tried to practise self control? If not, this subject is too advanced for his consideration, but if he knows exactly what is meant by self control, there should be no difficulty in beginning to understand this exhortation to be diligent in controlling the heart.

A man may control his natural impulse to commit a rash act merely because he fears the consequences. He may exercise such control for the better reason that he fears to disobey God or to injure man. He may make a more constant and diligent control of the heart in order that his character may develop in harmony with the divine will, and this regular guidance of thought and feeling is what is meant by keeping the heart with all diligence. The inmost thoughts of the heart have the greatest

PRINCIPLES AND PROVERBS

effect on character. "As he thinketh in his heart, so is he", or so will he be (Prov. 23 : 7). These inmost thoughts are necessarily the most effective, for they are with us all the time and they are always genuine. Even the most loquacious are sometimes silent and the most honest sometimes conceal thoughts by words. But the inmost thoughts of the heart are with us in all our waking hours, and possibly even during sleep, and those inmost thoughts are subject to no prudential restraint except the laws we impose upon them for our own good. The momentary act of self control may have little or no effect upon character, but the continuous and diligent control of deed, word, and thought may have a great effect and indeed mark the difference between death and life.

This is just the problem set before us in the wise saying, "Keep thy heart with all diligence". We can control deeds and words, and in large measure we can control thought. We know perfectly well that in the myriad thoughts which flash through the mind there is the usual admixture of good and evil associated with all things human. Some thoughts are noble and elevating carrying with them an influence for good. Some thoughts are evil and if encouraged will lead to sin and death. Some thoughts are definitely good and helpful even if not noble and elevating. Some thoughts are mean and petty and will degrade the character even if they are not sinful.

No normal being can prevent unworthy thoughts from flitting through the mind as they are presented from outside or thrown up from the subconscious, but every normal being can decide

which thoughts to encourage and which to reject. We have that which has been described as a spot light of attention which we can turn on to any line of thought we care to choose. We have a power which has been described as "awareness", and we are not merely the creatures of mood and feeling. If a thought takes shape in the mind we are usually quite aware of its quality. Is it noble, good, useful, legitimately interesting or amusing, weak, foolish, or definitely evil? We could place most thoughts in one of these categories.

Even if feeling is aroused, we are aware of the feeling and its tendencies. We can choose whether we encourage the feeling or thrust it from the mind by something more worthy. Sometimes men say with Jonah, "I do well to be angry", when they are aware that they are not doing well at all. Often they exaggerate a grievance knowing that they are exaggerating. They can control such matters if they will.

Even thoughts which are soon forgotten may leave a permanent effect on the tablets of the heart, so that there is need for constant vigilance. A man who is wise enough to give heed to the words of greater wisdom will soon learn how to make use of his awareness and his powers of self control. He will not merely aim to control his actions in the hour of supreme trial, when yielding to impulse might lead to disaster; he will encourage the right kind of thought every day, making the right choice in little matters where the task is easy, and so building up stores of strength and character for the hour of trial when the right choice is difficult. All this and much more is suggested by the words, "Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life."

CHAPTER 5

STRIFE

We may well seek the instruction of the wise man regarding strife, for it is an ever present evil in human life. Nations have warred with each other all through history, using all their power to wound and destroy. In times of temporary international peace there has always been the strife of rivals seeking wealth and power in the markets and in the seats of the mighty. Even in the Christian Church there has been bitter strife among men claiming to be the servants of the Lord, willingly forgetful of the fact that the servant of the Lord must not strive but be gentle and patient and apt to teach.

We do not need the apostle's words to convince us that such strife is an evil in human life. Not only does it prevent constructive work by its greedy absorption of human energy, but it has a definite and obvious influence for ill on the minds of those who engage in it. Men who aim to be fit for the Kingdom of God only need to have a little experience of such strife and sometimes they become hardly fit to live even in the kingdoms of men.

In the book of Proverbs we have the following statements regarding strife :—

“Hatred stirreth up strife: but love covereth all transgression” (13 : 10). “A wrathful man stirreth up strife.”

“By pride cometh only contention.” Or more definitely in the A.V.: “Only by pride cometh contention” (13 : 10).

“The beginning of strife is as when one letteth off water: therefore leave off contention, before there be quarrelling” (17 : 14, R.V.).

“He loveth transgression that loveth strife” (17 : 19).

“It is an honour for a man to keep aloof from strife; but every fool will be quarrelling” (20 : 3).

“For lack of wood the fire goeth out: and when there is no tale bearer, contention ceaseth” (26 : 20).

“He that passeth by and vexes himself with strife belonging not to him is as when one taketh a dog by the ears” (26 : 17).

From these we may gather that to be fond of strife is a sin; that the main causes of harmful strife are pride, hatred and wrath; that the course of strife is like the breaking forth of water, very difficult to stop when once it starts; and finally that the right way is to stop the argument before it reaches the quarrelling stage.

There is a fund of wisdom in these simple thoughts, and they would make a great difference to human life if men could always remember and apply them.

There is no need to raise difficulties over the use of the words. We have to contend earnestly for the Faith once for all delivered to the saints. It is only honest in fact for us to uphold that which we think is right and true in all matters whether we are dealing with the world or the brotherhood, but surely we appreciate the difference between the earnest contention which can yield good results and the strife which is definitely evil. We can remember meetings in which there was much argument, different points of view being presented and the discussion

PRINCIPLES AND PROVERBS

waxing quite lively, yet the results of the meetings were excellent, all members gaining something with no element of bitterness to mar the effect. We can remember other meetings in which discussion became contention and contention degenerated into quarrelling which might continue without cessation as long as disputants had sufficient breath to be uncharitable. Such strife could not be of the slightest good, for no one was willing to be influenced by it. Pride, hatred and wrath have all been in evidence at such a time. These and other evils fostered by strife are able to drag men and women down to eternal death.

Often it is possible to see the warning signs long before the water breaks forth. Then, even if we have to let an opponent have the last word or the last hundred words, it is wise to leave off contention before it degenerates into quarrelling. If the opponent is a reasonable man, he will think of the ideas we have presented, and if there is any cogency in our arguments, they will have much more effect on him in this quiet meditation than in the heat of battle. When the subject is raised again we may find that he states his position rather differently in an effort to meet our arguments. It is conceivably possible that we may find some reason for restating our views in rather different language. As the result of quiet thinking instead of noisy strife, there may be a better understanding of matters on both sides. If this clearer view does not enable us fully to agree, it may at least enable us to reach an honourable cessation from strife.

There are differences of conviction which forbid fellowship, which may even prevent association, but

there is no reason for them to cause quarrelling. If men differ from us as to the God whom they worship, the hope they cherish, or the rule of faith they observe; if we are certain that they are wrong in their conception of duty or their attitude toward divine revelation, we cannot join with them or in any way sanction their error, but there is no reason for us to feel in the least degree angry with those who are so unfortunately blind. The only insistent reason for us to speak to them is that we might convince them of their error, and all experience shows that the strong argument gently presented is the one that will prevail. It is the soft answer that turneth away wrath, and it is the soft tongue that breaketh the bone (25 : 15). There is no incongruity in these apparently opposing thoughts. The gentle and reasonable answer to angry declamation will calm the storm. The fire of anger will die down for lack of fuel, or the irate man will make an effort to calm himself for very shame. At the same time the reasonable appeal, gently stated, will sometime prevail even against ossified determination.

We ought to be so well instructed that in large measure the reactions of opponents can be anticipated. If we present an argument which seems to deprive a man of a cherished hope, it is natural for him to be angry. If he cannot find an answering argument a personal hit may serve instead. In public debate with shallow supporters, the personal hit may be appreciated and applauded most, but whether in public or private, we ought not to retaliate, however tempting an opening may present itself. Sarcasm may destroy the individual, cursing both him that gives and him that takes, but

PRINCIPLES AND PROVERBS

it can very rarely assist toward a better understanding of truth or effect a change of mind in one who has been in error. Angry words only do good when they are gently answered. Then they may play a part in reproving the one who used them.

It is a strange fact that men are often more disposed to lose temper over a slight divergence than over a great one. A narrow-minded theologian may be quite affable with an atheist, but bitterly resentful toward a brother worshipper who ventures to deviate by a hair's breadth from his conception of rectitude in faith and practice. The Jews hated the Samaritans far more than they hated barbarians. The Lord Jesus administered a stinging reproof to this uncharitableness when he chose a Samaritan as an illustration of the neighbour who was to be loved.

Sometimes men who would deny that they have any feeling of bitterness, and who perhaps in truth are actuated by good motives, nevertheless do harm by contending too much. They are so imbued with the conviction that their exact way of looking at things is the only right way, that they will go to almost any lengths in the effort to enforce it. In ecclesial life this type of brother is the author of much harm. It would be so much better if he would be content to state his opinion, trying to persuade others to the same way of thinking, arguing the matter when it is "a time to speak". When a decision has been taken he should submit, for that is "a time to keep silent". If he is honestly convinced that a vital principle has been breached he may be right in withdrawing altogether, thus finding peace of mind for himself and leaving peace behind him. If no such

principle is involved let him remember that we all have to be subject to one another in love. It may be an evil that matters should not be conducted in the best possible way—that is, *his* way—but strife and discord among brethren are still worse evils.

Alas! We have known many such troubles and we have no great hope that either this or any other appeal will do much good. There are men who will agitate until they swamp the boat rather than have the sails set in any way other than their own. There are many occasions in life when “it is an honour for a man to cease from strife”, but this is an honour to which many men do not aspire.

The wise man says that one who meddles with strife not belonging to him is like one who takes a dog by the ears. This surely would be bad for the dog and bad also for the one who interfered. The intervener can rarely do any good in such a matter and he may easily do harm. Probably the only way in which such interference can end the original dispute is by turning the wrath of both combatants upon the would-be peacemaker.

The instance has been quoted earlier of a young man who took the part of a wife who was being beaten by a brutal husband. The wife, for whose sake he was fighting, came up behind and hit him on the head with a saucepan. When he came to his senses in the gutter, he vaguely remembered having read something in the Proverbs which might have warned him. In other fields men often receive a succession of less literal blows without ever perceiving that they are at fault, or remembering the wise words that might have instructed them.

CHAPTER 6

COMPANIONS

It is true now as it was in the beginning of human life that it is not good for man to be alone. It does not follow that at all times and in every instance a wife is the best companion, although this divine appointment is incontestably best for normal times and normal men. For the apostle Paul in his great work, it was better to remain single, and as he said, "Every man has his proper gift of God." Even the apostle needed a companion, however, and he was careful to make choice of the right man.

It is to be feared that most people exercise very little thought in this vital matter either for themselves or their children. The young ones as soon as they begin to talk, need companions of similar age, but usually there is very little choice. The first companions are either neighbours or school-fellows with whom the children chance to be thrown in contact. At a later stage may come a second choice taken with equal promiscuity from office or workshop. Then perhaps the supremely important life partnership is formed based merely or mainly on physical attraction. There is not much help to be expected from such companionship as this.

It is possible, however, to improve even a difficult situation, and even grown-up people may exercise some choice in companions who will help them, even if it is too late to begin well. They may be able to assist their children to make a better start in the choice of friends, so it may be possible to render a little service to readers of all ages by putting to-

gether the sayings of men through whom God has spoken, and calling attention to the wisdom of their instruction.

Speaking of sinners who use enticing words, the wise man says, "My son, consent thou not. Walk not in the way with them, refrain thy feet from their path." He gives many solemn warnings to youth regarding the stranger who uses flattering words. As a general principle he states, "he that walketh with wise men shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed." He counsels us to go from the presence of a foolish man. He says "cease, my son, to hear the instruction that causeth to err from the words of knowledge." He says "make no friendship with an angry man: and with a furious man thou shalt not go." He counsels "Eat not the bread of him that hath an evil eye, neither desire his dainty meats . . . His heart is not with thee."

There is nothing ambiguous or halting in this advice. We must be just, kind and polite to all people, but we must be careful how we make friends. Especially must we beware of strangers who use flattering words, the flattering woman being the most dangerous of all. It is good to seek the companionship of the wise and avoid the friendship of the foolish. The plea of trying to help people is sometimes used as an excuse for seeking an undesirable companionship which is attractive. We cannot help men by going to perdition with them, but we may help them by taking a firm stand and setting a good example. The words of Scripture admit of an attempt to help even when dealing with fools. "Go from the presence of a foolish man when

PRINCIPLES AND PROVERBS

thou perceivest not in him the lips of knowledge." This implies an effort to help but counsels us to withdraw if there is no response.

The fact is that in all companionship there is a tendency to conform. We cannot remain for long in genuine companionship with those whose tastes are totally different from our own. Difference of temperament may be an advantage to friendship but difference of taste is an obstacle. If there is a fundamental difference in the most important matters of life, true friendship cannot be long sustained, and that is why the call of the Gospel has separated families and often caused bitterness. Friendship may continue if the difference of taste or conviction can be progressively diminished. One who has been called by the Gospel often tries to continue in friendship with one who only hears the call of the world, but inevitably there is either a progressive loosening of the friendly tie or a change in the individuals. The worldly man may be transformed for Christ or the disciple of Christ may be conformed to the world. Possibly there will be a change on both sides, resulting in a luke-warm compromise of no value from either point of view. It is a terrible truth that "The friendship of the world is enmity with God."

The wise man's counsel is for all ages. Let us try to instruct the foolish man, but if there is no sign of response let us withdraw from his presence. One who makes himself an acceptable companion to such a man is almost certain to be corrupted while completely failing to do any good. The acceptability of his companionship depends upon his conforming to the mental and moral standard that is

understood and appreciated. If he so conforms he encourages and supports folly, and the mere fact that in other circumstances and other company he can play a different part does not carry the slightest influence for good.

We must always remember scriptural definitions when we are trying to apply scriptural lessons. There is no room for doubt as to who are the wise and who are the foolish from the divine point of view. In all parts of the Word we are told that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." A worldly wisdom which ignores God is only folly temporarily disguised. Every one can see that in the affairs of this life there are times when an imposing store of learning is useless while a little special wisdom and knowledge may save life. In a stormy sea we should choose the boat manned by able seamen even though they were ignorant and unlearned men, rather than the one manned by men who had never handled an oar, even though they were the most learned of scientists. So in the ocean of human life, men who serve God are better companions than those who ignore Him whatever their knowledge of other matters may be.

It is pleasant to have the companionship of friends with charming manners or with wide interests and a capacity to converse well. Poor human nature often finds a vain pleasure in association with those of higher rank or reputation even if they have no personal merits. The first necessary qualification for suitable companions, however, is that they must be wise, and the beginning of wisdom is to fear God.

PRINCIPLES AND PROVERBS

Some brethren shake their heads with sad foreboding over the great increase in the general standard of education. In so far as we can choose companions for our children, should we do well to avoid people with scholastic attainments and seek the society of young people in our midst who either for lack of ability or lack of opportunity remain undistinguished in worldly learning? Such a thought has taken shape in some anxious minds, but it is not a wise thought. It is good to have a wide general knowledge, for in addition to the intrinsic value of truth, such knowledge often throws light upon the Scriptures, while a general ignorance may prevent a man from accepting or from understanding the message of the Gospel. If any readers doubt the truth of this proposition they have only to think of the most ignorant man they ever met and it will not be necessary for us to argue the matter. Or we may take a pleasanter illustration. Think of a well developed child just beginning to talk. What would be the use of trying to interest the one-year-old in the way of salvation and the Hope of Israel? He must use his senses and form percepts and concepts as he gradually gains a knowledge of the world he has entered and the speech of those who can instruct him. What is this but general knowledge, absolutely essential before one can grasp the special knowledge which comes from divine revelation? Perhaps one may say, "Yes, general knowledge is necessary up to a point, but beyond that it is full of danger."

It would be very difficult to say just where the danger line can be drawn, and no two men would agree on it. Surely it is much easier and far more accurate to put the matter in positive form. Let us

ask our young scholars to study the Scriptures more and not merely ask them to study other things less. There may be an inevitable connection between the two ideas, for giving more attention to one line of study may be at the expense of another. It makes a great difference to our mental attitude, however, if we put the matter in the right way.

It used to be supposed that certain foods produced disease. Then it was discovered that the evil was caused not by taking something unsuitable but by the lack of something essential. A member of a polar expedition would not escape from scurvy by reducing his ration of preserved meat. He could only escape by taking some other food containing the essential vitamins, the lack of which had been the cause of the trouble. In the same way our young people will not benefit by studying general subjects less unless they study the supremely important subject more. When a man has once grasped the Truth as we know it, he will never become weak in faith as the result of studying it, but he may easily become weak through neglecting it. The neglect may be due to the rival claims of other studies, or of business or of pleasure, or it may be the outcome of sheer indolence. In every instance the evil is in the neglect. Given an equal expenditure of mental energy in the study of the Word and the man of wide general knowledge is a better companion than the one who has lacked the opportunity for such education. His sympathies are broader, his understanding deeper and his faith better founded. If he is properly thankful for his superior opportunities and if he is humble as an educated man should always be, he is the best of

PRINCIPLES AND PROVERBS

companions, able to "sharpen the countenance of a friend."

There is danger in this increase of education, however, and the instinct of those who fear it is right. The danger is well illustrated by everyday experience in business offices. Boys and girls who have been to better class schools often feel themselves superior to the common run of mortals. Having received a smattering of instruction regarding matters which are quite beyond office requirements, they assume that they are well grounded in simple essentials, and unfortunately this assumption is often hopelessly mistaken. Repeatedly we find that such workers cannot write a simple letter or work a simple sum.

There is something in the nature of a parable in this matter. It is just possible that young people brought up in our Sunday Schools may make an equally wrong assumption of being well grounded in the truth of the Gospel. They may gain some elementary knowledge in early days without ever having their interest sufficiently aroused to get a proper grip of the subject. A little later in life their interest in the acquisition of knowledge is properly aroused, but unfortunately in other fields, connected only with a world the fashion of which passeth away. They take it for granted that having been brought up in Christadelphian home and Sunday School they know all about things that are taught there. They may end by repudiating a faith that was never in them and by criticising truths that they have never understood. They may then be the worst possible companions for impressionable young people who are influenced by them.

Let our young people who have such great opportunities bring their best powers to bear upon the things which are of the greatest importance. Let them make sure that they have an adequate understanding of Christian foundations before they either accept or reject the offer of Eternal Life. Let them gain at least as good a knowledge of the Scriptures as they need in those other subjects to gain the degrees or diplomas that are of use in the world. Let them beware of the worldly associations that are opened up to them by distinctive work in any worldly field, remembering that some of the cleverest men are fools in their conduct even judged by a worldly wisdom which is itself foolishness with God. In short let our young people preserve a sense of proportion, gaining in wisdom as they gain in knowledge and making a wise choice of their friends. The well educated will then be the best of readers and speakers, the strongest in faith and the best of companions to help those who have been granted less ability or less opportunity.

CHAPTER 7

PARENTS AND CHILDREN

If we thought of Solomon as a writer with nothing better than a worldly wisdom empirically acquired, we should probably not seek his advice in family matters. The ostentation of an oriental court would provide the worst possible atmosphere for such a study just as the experience of a prince would be the worst training for ordinary mortals. It is because we believe that the wisdom of Solomon was divinely bestowed that we seek his counsel.

There are not very many direct references to parents and children in the book of Proverbs but such passages as appear are very definite in character. The instruction to fathers is indeed so emphatic that everyone knows of it and the present generation is up in arms against it. Solomon advised the use of the rod; he regarded children as born outside of Eden and bringing forth folly as the ground brings forth weeds. "Spare the rod and spoil the child" is a saying known to everyone. Solomon was even more definite. He declared that a man who spared the rod hated his son. It is hardly possible to think of anything more emphatic.

In interpreting "the dark sayings of the wise", however, we must not always insist on the literal even where the literal could easily be applied. No one would take this reference to hatred in a literal sense, for it is quite certain that a destructive leniency is usually the expression of a genuine but foolish love. The saying means that the effect of parental weakness is so bad that it is akin to hatred in its effects

even though love is the cause of it. The saying is intelligible and forceful but not strictly literal. Why then insist on nothing but an actual rod and physical pain in the other part of the saying? Correction may be made by word and look and in a hundred different manipulations of circumstances, some of which may be more effective than the rod, although even that may sometimes be necessary.

One of the sayings of Solomon seems exactly to express this idea. We should paraphrase it in this manner in modern speech. "Correct and chasten your son when he needs it and do not be put off by the fuss he makes, for even if you find it necessary to use the rod it will not kill him." ("If thou beatest him with the rod he shall not die.")

This has become a very unpopular doctrine in our days. The modern idea seems to be that children should be left to "express themselves" without the cramping effect of correction either by word or rod. The result is often a personal monstrosity as hideous as the creations of modern artists who with a similar disregard of the old rules try to express themselves in their art.

There are signs now that a reaction is setting in. A magistrate recently made the confession that the children's court is a complete farce. Boys can stand plenty of lecturing and be amused by it. Most of those who are brought to the children's court have already been ruined by the negligence of their parents. They will not be reformed by the belated advice of magistrates and missionaries.

The doctrine of Solomon is that foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of correction will drive it away. We must train the

PRINCIPLES AND PROVERBS

twig while it is quite young and then there will be hope of it developing aright when it is older and less tractable. If we neglect this educational work for our children we are playing the part of an enemy and the effect will be like that of an enemy's hatred and not of a parent's love. This is very wise instruction however unpopular it may be in our time.

Here again we must not insist on a too literal and complete application of the proverbial teaching. "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it" is a statement of general tendencies and not of an inexorable law. Human beings are neither machines nor plants. They have a power of choice; they can respond to good influences or they can be rebellious. Some very good men have had a bad early training and some very bad men were given every opportunity in the instruction of their early days. One of the surprising discoveries made by each successive generation is that children differ from the very cradle. We can remember many years ago two families beginning family life at about the same time. The advent of the first baby had very different effects in the two homes. One home remained placid and well ordered; the child was brought up according to the book of rules and apparently without protest. The parents went to meetings and carried on with all their former duties. The other home was so disorganized by the arrival of the firstborn that it might have been smitten by an earthquake. The parents never dared to take the baby to a meeting and often were not able to get there themselves. The happy and placid parents with the well-ordered child looked askance at this dislocated home.

They were more censorious than sympathetic. If they pitied the unfortunate pair it is to be feared that the pity was more akin to pride than to love. "Those unfortunate people simply do not know how to bring up a child. Look at the way we do it." Then nemesis visited the complacent pair in the form of another child, and they in their turn made the discovery that babies differ. The second child knew nothing about the scientific book and did not want to know. He—or she—had come to make a stir in the world and apparently believed in the virtues of an early start. Thus unkind criticisms were appropriately rebuked and another of life's lessons was painfully learned.

Yet although there are these great individual differences the general principle laid down by the wise man holds true. Folly is in the heart of a child, all need correction and guidance. We cannot be certain that success will attend our efforts, but we can be quite certain that we are right in trying to correct and instruct our children. The early training is the most important part of human education.

In all these matters "wisdom is profitable to direct". Children need very different treatment if all are to have a good start in life. Herein lies the folly of those idealistic reformers who talk of all being given "an equal chance". The wisest father in the land cannot be sure of giving that equal chance even to his own children, so there is not much hope of officials being successful with the children of other people.

There are some horses that will put on their best pace at the mere sound of the whip, while on the

PRINCIPLES AND PROVERBS

other hand we have known an old pony to stop by the wayside and begin to eat grass while the angry driver was thrashing him. Similarly there are children who are pained and perhaps made ill by a single sharp word, while there are others who will take a wicked delight in seeing how far they can trespass without endangering their little skins. To treat them all alike is criminal folly. In all cases the rod of correction is needed but many different kinds of rod can be used. The sensitive and quickly responsive child should be treated gently, while the other type should be taught that physical pain may follow too quickly on the heels of reproof to admit of any safe experiments in rebellion. Reason should be used with all types as soon as ever it is possible. Even the boy who has been most troublesome in his earliest days may with growing intelligence prove so amenable to reason that he becomes tractable just at the age when more placid children are becoming awkward.

When children reach the age of reasonable response the duties of parents increase rather than diminish. There is the world to face with all its pitfalls. Some of the great decisions of life have to be made. There are children who have been almost ruined in their early teens or even earlier than that. There are parents who seem to think that it is well to allow the problem of good and evil to be expounded by the progeny of the serpent. They leave some of the most important mysteries of life to be explained by the worst companions the children ever meet. A moral indolence is the cause of this evil.

The establishment of parental authority and the maintenance of a proper respect will be mainly

through the wise handling of the little events of life. Ordinary human experience is made up of small incidents which are of little importance in themselves but which can have great effects for good or ill in the development of character and in the establishment of right conditions for greater issues. Many parents fail in these ordinary trials through making a feeble surrender of their own laws. A wise father once gave this excellent and terse advice to a mother. "First cut out about ninety per cent. of your prohibitions, and then rigidly enforce those that remain." The principal difficulty in this matter—in fact nearly the whole of the difficulty—is in the early stages. Children are quick to detect signs of weakness, and if parents try to prohibit nearly everything and then weakly give way if there is sufficient protest, the children soon learn how to gain their ends and they rapidly develop the diabolism that is within them. On the other hand, if they learn that "No" means "No", and that whining expostulations bring punishment instead of reward, they soon learn to make the best of the ample liberty allowed to them; they cease even to seek after forbidden things and they learn the lesson of obedience. Incidentally, we may remark that they are much happier than the whiners as well as being much pleasanter.

It should go without saying that if parents desire to have well behaved and well trained children, they must not be like petulant children themselves. If they desire a reasonable and consistent recognition of parental authority, they must be reasonable and consistent in framing their rules. If parents give way to temper and temperament, if rules depend upon the mood of the moment so that a transgression may

PRINCIPLES AND PROVERBS

be a crime or a joke according to the condition of the parental liver, they cannot reasonably expect that the children will feel any genuine respect for them.

If fathers hold aloof, they ought not to be surprised if they fail to gain the children's confidence. If they pretend to maintain a rigid asceticism which is far removed from their actual behaviour they need not be surprised to lose the children's respect, for it is almost certain that the breach between theory and practice will be observed by the rising generation. More than one father in the Brotherhood with puritanic zeal has confiscated the boy's books, condemning them as "rubbish", and then has been caught reading them himself with evident enjoyment. The discovery of his weakness has never been mentioned to him, but others have heard of it and probably he has observed and deplored his loss of influence without ever knowing the cause. If fathers ever read the children's books, let them do it openly: then they may be able to lead the young mind to better things, able to guide as they command respect.

We are living in days of unusual freedom in the home. Young people sometimes speak to their parents in a way that would have shocked a former generation, but we are not at all sure that the change is for the worse. Sometimes in these days a very genuine and respectful love is concealed by apparently disrespectful words. In former days sometimes disrespect and resentment were concealed by hypocritical words of deference. There can be no question as to which we should prefer of these two possibilities. Companionship between parents and children is certainly good. Children often come to

have more knowledge and they may even be wiser than their parents, but if there has been a reasonable companionship there is still the respect due to age and the influence that is born of love.

There are many passages in the Book of Proverbs which might be taken in a personal sense as the instruction of a very wise father to a well-beloved son. May we not reasonably take them as from the Father in Heaven to children who may be old according to human standards but who still need much guidance ?

“My son, if thou wilt receive my words . . . My son, forget not my law . . . My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord...Hear, my son, the instruction of a father . . . My son, attend unto my wisdom.”

As with the natural father and son, love is the ruling principle both in giving and receiving instruction. The establishment of a law for mankind was an expression of divine love. The love of God will constrain us in our response. Perhaps even on this highest plane there is an application of the saying that “a wise son maketh a glad father.” It is written that in the affliction of Israel God was afflicted, and the Apostle says, “Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God.” On the other hand we have the statements that God was well pleased with the Lord Jesus, that He is well pleased with the sacrifices of praise and obedience. Indeed, we are told that this is the ultimate object of creation.

If we can thus apply the personal language of the Proverbs and as sons and daughters make a response ruled by that reverential fear which goes hand in hand with love, we may find a very moving influence in these appeals to “my son.”

CHAPTER 8

DILIGENCE AND SLOTH

One who desires to learn from the book of Proverbs must be quick to see in himself any trace of the evil tendencies that are there condemned. He must not always be on the look-out for extreme types. He should remember that he is probably as strange a mixture as any other man, and without being an extreme example of either good or evil he may often furnish illustrations—sometimes painful, negative illustrations—of Solomon's penetrating wisdom.

We never have any difficulty in observing such things in others; rather is it difficult for us to refrain from observing, yet although illustrations of various weaknesses are constantly before us, we rarely meet an extreme type. We may never encounter a complete fool according to the full definition given, but we often witness a measure of folly even on the part of those who are usually wise. In the same way we may never find a complete and hopeless sluggard, but we often see a strange, occasional slothfulness even in usually industrious men, and so it is possible that we may find it in ourselves.

It is written of diligence that it maketh rich, that the hand of the diligent shall bear rule, that the substance of a diligent man is precious, that the soul of the diligent shall be made fat, that the thoughts of the diligent tend to plenteousness, and that the man diligent in his business shall stand before kings.

It is written that sloth will lead to poverty, to want and to destruction, that a sluggard is like

smoke to the eyes of those who employ him, that he is brother to a waster, and finally we have that well known passage calling upon him to learn from the insect world, "Go to the ant, thou sluggard, consider her ways, and be wise."

So far the lessons are obvious and comment might seem to be superfluous. We might easily read all these passages and thinking only of extreme types quite fail to derive any benefit. We are workers not idlers, diligent not slothful, and so we might feel that in these matters no reform is necessary. There are some passages regarding sloth, however, which will make us seek for a deeper meaning. A wise saying is often purposely made too extreme to be literally applicable to any man. It is intended for all readers and therefore is not designed to make a perfect fit for any. No sane man would purposely "walk on hot coals", or "take fire in his bosom", but there are many who in a metaphorical sense play with fire and are scorched. There are some who are wise enough to hear the words of wisdom and intelligent enough to apply them to their own experience. They see the evil possibilities in careless action and deliver themselves while the heedless "pass on and are punished". Just as men may be warned against a thousand follies by the admonition, "Do not play with fire", so we may be warned against the evils of sloth and stirred up to a consistent diligence by the extreme pictures presented in the book of Proverbs.

The sluggard roasteth not that which he took in hunting. It grieves him even to bring his hand to his mouth. He turns on his bed as a door turns on its

PRINCIPLES AND PROVERBS

hinges. His garden is overgrown with weeds and the wall broken down.

We can hardly suppose that any hungry man would think it too much trouble to roast the meat taken in a strenuous chase. We cannot suppose that any hungry man in sound health was ever too lazy to bring his hand to his mouth, nor have we ever encountered one who was attached to his bed quite as securely as a door is attached to its hinges. All these sayings are lively caricatures of human weaknesses. There are men who would regard themselves as models of diligence and yet who are apt to tire of their labours just when the most energy is needed. They are like the man who will not trouble to roast that which he took in hunting. Sometimes they seem full of energy, and then when a good work is nearly completed lose interest in it and after a period of inactivity go in chase of something else. They are good hunters but poor cooks. Can we see any trace of this weakness in ourselves ?

The door turning on its hinges may serve a useful purpose, allowing entrance to a room while keeping out the wind, but the sluggard turning on his bed performs no service of any kind. This seems like a caricature of a man who cannot make up his mind. Is indecision really one of the effects of sloth ? We can imagine that men who experience difficulty in making decisions would answer this question with an emphatic No. They spend much mental energy in their careful weighing of arguments and so they multiply the tasks which a sluggard would scheme to avoid. They would attribute their difficulties to an excess of caution, never to sloth.

Well, let us first take a simpler and more obvious meaning for the proverb. Many people find that bed pulls in the morning and the labours of the day seem unattractive. It needs an effort to spring up and face the cold water, but having once taken the plunge no one wants to return to bed. If we are determined not to be sluggards we rise at the proper time and overcome our sleepy indolence. In the same way with almost every task or duty, unless we are very much interested in the work there is a natural reluctance to take the plunge. The first step is the hardest in nearly everything. Even in such a simple matter as the writing of an article this rule applies. We may feel sure that there are possibilities in a certain subject or idea and some day we will write of it. Once started the work may be easy, but before we begin thought is necessary and we are reluctant to make this mental plunge. This is one form of indolence. It is like that of the sluggard on his bed. On the other hand there are some people who in this matter of writing would get a start very quickly when the idea first occurred to them, but they soon get tired and often fail to complete the work. They are like the sluggard who fails to roast that which he took in hunting.

Returning to the matter of delayed decisions we must at least admit the possibility of the trouble being due to a form of slothfulness even if the effect of it is to cause more work than was necessary. The most important decisions of life are usually the easiest because they have to do with clear issues of right or wrong. The difficult decisions—for Christians at least—are those in which no clear principle of right is involved. They are relatively unim-

portant for the same reason that they are difficult. Why then spend much time over them? There may be many pros and cons which have to be considered in the effort to make a wise choice, but it is not possible for human beings to be sure of taking the best course however carefully they weigh the evidence or however long they delay the decision. In such matters all that is necessary is a little hard thinking and then a decision on the basis of the judgment formed. Those who hesitate and delay, in the majority of instances are merely putting off that day of hard thinking. They are not really weighing the evidence with the diligence they would like to display, they are merely deferring the mental work. There is a danger that the hard thinking will never be done and that after all the delay, there will be at the last a hurried and bad decision, forced by circumstance and pressure of time.

There is no doubt considerable mental strain in putting off a decision. The problems calling for settlement hang round the mind and worry it even if the real thinking is persistently delayed or crowded out altogether. It is quite possible that a certain type of slothfulness is the real cause of this indecision even though the mind is thereby subjected to a far greater strain than would be involved in a diligent attack and a direct settlement. Few things are more wearing to the mentality than the dangling ends of problems needing a decision. It is far better to clear them away promptly. Yet they must be properly dealt with and with due exercise of thought. It is possible in this matter for slothfulness to cause quite opposite effects. Some men make hasty decisions while others are too slow. In each extreme there may

be the same underlying cause. The decision may be hastily made or persistently delayed merely to avoid the labour of thinking for which it calls. The hasty man has the better part, for he troubles no more until perchance he encounters the evil consequences of a bad decision. The hesitating man torments himself all the time with good intentions and wears himself out with protracted half thoughts, yet his final decision may be just as bad as the other.

If a man can detect any trace of this slothfulness in himself he may perhaps overcome it. If hard thinking is needed let him promptly get down to hard thought. Form a judgment and make a decision on the basis of facts known, and then there is no need to suffer either from the tangling worries of work deferred or vain regrets for decisions made. The matter was well considered without undue hurry and without delay, the decision at the time seemed wise, and as no one knows what would have happened had some other course been taken we cannot be sure that we have acted unwisely even if the results are disappointing. There is no place for vain regrets, which are only weakening in their effect.

The wise man went by the vineyard of the sluggard and found it overgrown with weeds and the wall broken down. Then he considered the matter and received instruction even from this negative example. He gives us a beautifully poetical summary of his conclusions. "Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep. So shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth, and thy want as an armed man."

Here the literal meaning is obvious enough and there is no difficulty in applying the description just

as it stands. The main danger of wrong application would be from those who have had little experience of gardens. They might judge a man as slothful when he had only been away for a short holiday or a few days of illness. The garden, however, is only an illustration, and there are lessons in this rapid growth of weeds. Wherever the surface of the soil presents itself seeds will fall and weeds will grow. Wherever there is unoccupied surface of mind, impressions will be made and thoughts will develop. Wrong thoughts seem as hardy as weeds while right thoughts are like rare and tender plants. Just as weeds, unless they are eradicated in the early stages will quickly run to seed and increase the evil, so it is with wrong thoughts in the mind.

Here we will mention one point of correspondence between garden and mind which so far as we are aware has not been developed before. Just as dirt has been defined as matter in the wrong place, so a weed is a plant in the wrong place. Some may think that the most troublesome of weeds would not be desirable anywhere, but this may be due to our lack of acquaintance with their properties. It is an undeniable fact, however, that a plant which may be in certain circumstances a valuable growth for mankind, will be a weed if it gets into the wrong place, hindering the development of other plants and doing no good itself. In the same way thoughts which are quite good in their appropriate place, may be as weeds when they are allowed to obtrude at the wrong time. There is much work for the diligent in so developing the mind that thoughts can be kept in order.

CHAPTER 9

SPEECH

Words can wound like the piercing of a sword, a tale-bearer is often a messenger of destruction, and by "harping on a matter" the best of friends can be separated. Whispered scandals are dainty morsels that go down sweetly to the appetite, but in such words there is often sin. Life and death are in the power of the tongue, therefore we must put away from us perverse lips and make our words as a well of life. A soft answer turns away wrath and overcomes that which seems as hard and unyielding as bone. The man who guards the door of his lips and often remains silent when the impulse is strong to speak, saves himself from many troubles.

We must debate our cause with the one concerned and not disclose it to another, for such indirect speech is shameful and infamous. Words can wound and words can pierce and words can be sinful, but words can be as a tree of life. How good is a word fitly spoken !

In the above passage we have simply presented some of the wisdom of Solomon in modern language. It makes a brief but extraordinarily full exhortation. If we pay heed to the instruction it may save us from many mistakes. Sometimes men become so disgusted with futile talking that they fall into the error of despising words. "What is the use of mere words?" they say. "We want action, not speech."

Truly there is a time to act rather than to speak, but of what value will action be unless it has first been instructed by words? Human thought cannot

PRINCIPLES AND PROVERBS

proceed far without speech. Beyond the very limited animal plane of feeling and observation, we need words not only to express our thoughts to others but to make them definite and coherent even to ourselves. We may not put our inmost thoughts into finished language as in giving an address to others, but words play an enormous part in shaping the most private of thoughts even when we make no attempt to form orderly sentences.

Words are needed to tell us of the will and purpose of God, and words are equally necessary to inform us of the discoveries and the opinions of men.

The mind of man consists of will, thought, and feeling, and these three things are expressed by words. An honest man always states that which is in his mind, but he is under no obligation to state it all. "A fool speaketh all his mind", heedless of what the effect may be. A knave sometimes uses words that do not express himself, he is only intent on impressing the minds of others. A just and wise man speaks as he thinks and feels, but guards the door of his mouth so as not to express too much. He may think that one to whom he speaks is foolish, but it is not wise to say so. He may know that some of his hearers are knaves, but it is perfectly honest to treat them as honest men. He can only have two motives in speaking, to express himself and to influence other people. Usually the second object is much the more important, so self-expression must be controlled lest it should interfere with the real object of speech.

In thus "guarding the door", the control of feeling is quite as important as the control of thought. Feelings are often strong and they reveal themselves in the tone of voice as well as in the form of words.

Anger, indignation, scorn, fear, hatred, amusement, contempt, all are expressed so readily both in tone and word that many people reveal such feelings instantly even if they are unable to express any coherent ideas. The kindlier feelings of love, admiration, gratitude and appreciation are not quite so obtrusive, and if it is desired they can be concealed more readily.

In this matter of guarding the door of the mouth feeling causes the greatest difficulty. A man may discipline himself so as to be circumspect in the use of words. He may go further and avoid any ebullition of impotent rage. Anger unrestrained so often makes itself ridiculous that a capable man determines to keep cool. Yet feeling may clearly reveal itself even then. It is possible to maintain an icy coldness with far more bitterness than ever lived in the warm expressions of wrath. Indeed, when we read the passage, "There is that speaketh like the piercing of a sword", we do not think of an obviously angry man expressing his indignation with a warm energy that will soon exhaust itself. We think rather of an icy bitterness, hard and cruel as steel, a concentrated and frozen anger expressed in speech which has not the excuse of being hasty but which wounds like the piercing of a sword. Such speech is the expression of an evil feeling which has been polished instead of being suppressed. There are people who in this matter of words repeat the vulgar error often revealed in human relationships. Anything may pass as long as it is well dressed.

A Christian should not allow evil feelings to prevail for a moment. Bitterness ought not to be in the mind, and if through faulty thinking it is there,

PRINCIPLES AND PROVERBS

it certainly should not be expressed. Bitterness expressed engenders the same evil in others. Like all vile things it is far easier to cause than to cure. It does not exhaust itself as does the burst of honest anger. It may even thrive on its own activity and become worse as it expresses itself and provokes ill feeling in others. Moreover, the soft answer is not quite so effective against this cold poison as it is against open anger. A Christian has a hard task when in addition to the suppression of his own natural resentment he has to win the sympathy of one who is coldly and cruelly antagonistic, all the while trying to wound and provoke by the use of polished words.

We can bring ourselves into line if we frequently raise the question what is our aim in speaking? Speech may be with the object of giving instruction, or putting questions to receive instruction, or it may be in the ordinary amenities of social life. We can think of nothing else unless it is mere self-expression, a talk for the love of talking. Where is there room for any ill-feeling to be expressed in any of these opportunities for speech? In the ordinary amenities of life there is surely every reason for good feelings which may be revealed freely with only good effects. If anyone is so unfortunate as to find ill-feeling at home, then a desperate effort should be made to avoid any aggravation of it. Words provocative of anger are always out of place in the home, but they are especially to be deprecated when such provocation has already begun. If a little fire started in a dry corner of the house, no man would be fool enough to throw petrol on it. It is strange that men should often be so ready to feed that more terrible

flame, which, as the apostle James says, is set on fire of hell. Homes have been wrecked and lives made sad by the folly of hasty and ill-tempered speech. It is perfectly true, as the wise man says, that there is more hope for a fool than for a man who is hasty in his words (Prov. 29 : 20).

Where then would words expressive of bitter feeling be appropriate? Certainly not in asking questions to receive instruction and equally certainly not when trying to instruct. There is need for a word of warning here. It is when we are trying to impress our opinions on others that controversy is engendered and controversy often provokes bitter speech. Opponents are so foolish and unreasonable! Opposition is trying to the temper, especially if we do not quite see how to answer an opponent's argument while still, of course, being quite convinced that he is in the wrong. It is a great mistake, however, to reveal any trace of bitterness in either word or tone. If there is any cogency in the criticism to which we are subjected, it is good for us to be instructed by it, and we ought to be grateful for the help. There may be a measure of truth in an opponent's contention even though his general conclusions are wrong. We must recognize that measure of truth, and then our position will be strengthened and polished as the result of hostile criticism. If our opponent's argument is mere sophistry, there is great need for us to keep calm in order that we may think clearly. There is need for gentle and circumspect speech in order that those in error may be rightly influenced.

It is strange that so few learn the lesson of moderation and sweet reasonableness in speech, for

PRINCIPLES AND PROVERBS

all know that they themselves are not influenced by truculent declamation. Over-emphasis defeats its object. We laugh at the letter in which nearly every sentence is underlined or at the speaker who thumps the desk and by exaggerated rhetoric seeks to give weight to his argument. At the best he only excites a good-humoured contempt. The man who is coldly and cleverly sarcastic arouses a very different feeling, but while he may seem to triumph in the hour of discussion, no good result comes from his cleverness.

The fact is that most men judge the value of an argument from the wrong side. They appraise the efforts of their spokesman by their own reactions instead of trying to determine what the effect will be in the opposite camp. It may be pleasant to hear vigorous and emphatic declamation in the presentation of ideas that we hold. It may be even pleasanter to hear biting sarcasm at the expense of those who hold doctrines that we repudiate. On the other hand, it may seem disappointing to hear our cherished beliefs presented in mild and temperate language, or to hear a perfectly fair and sympathetic review of that which we detest. If, however, we desire to persuade men and to turn them from darkness to light, the exercise of a little imagination ought to teach us that the declamation and the sarcasm are worse than useless, while the sympathetic understanding will pave the way for conversion and the mildly stated argument will linger in the memory and be a moving force long after the dust of controversy has cleared away. It is the soft answer that breaketh the bone.

There is much need for the words of wisdom regarding slander and tale bearing. A personal

tit-bit of private information goes down so "sweetly" that one may become a party to slanderous conversation before there is a proper realization of its trend. It is to be feared that there are moralists who while studiously refraining from slanderous talk themselves, think it quite legitimate to draw out the resources of one less scrupulous. This can be done quite skilfully even under the guise of a gentle reproof. A mild defence of an absentee may be presented in such a manner as to bring out all that can be said against him. The suggestion of possible defence for his conduct may call forth further information as to his perfidy and proof that he really had no defence.

Such talk is evil even if the allegations are true, but it is far worse when they are untrue. And it is possible for a statement to be true in point of fact but completely false in its implications. There may be an undisclosed fact behind that which is observed, changing the entire meaning of the matter. Charles Lamb tells of a boy at the Blue Coat School who by his strange aloofness and furtive movements aroused the suspicions of his comrades. When they found that he was in the habit of collecting scraps of discarded food and taking them somewhere away from the school, they concluded that he engaged in weird rites and that there was something wrong with his mentality. Finally they tracked him and discovered that the boy's parents were starving in a garret near to the school and he was keeping them alive with the despised crusts of bread.

Coming nearer home we can remember a sister who excited criticism because of her extravagant clothing. In slanderous conversation her husband

PRINCIPLES AND PROVERBS

was pitied for having such an extravagant wife. It was perfectly true that she wore dresses of far more expensive quality than she could properly afford to buy. It was also true that the dresses came from a wealthy relation who cared nothing for the Truth but was pleased to pass on her dresses to a poorer sister long before they showed signs of wear. The hard working husband was not conscious of needing any pity in the matter !

It is possible even for an outstanding act of Christian charity to be so disguised by the suppression of facts that it is presented as an act of cruelty and criticised accordingly. A man who at the risk of his life jumps into a river to save another from drowning may have to use some force and even apparent violence to save the struggling man. We can hardly imagine that even a prince of slanderers would describe the violence and suppress everything else, but that is just what many self-righteous critics would do in the more complex matters of human life. Save a man from drowning in the commercial river and if you have to use any force to stop his dangerous struggling, that use of force is apt to be the one matter observed and reported.

Oh, the tongue, that little member so potent for good or evil ! Words of life are expressed by it, yet death is equally within its power. The "word fitly spoken" is compared to the most beautiful sight in Nature, while the ill word of bitterness can only be likened to the hell-born spark which starts a raging fire. Let us "guard the door of our lips" lest a hasty and unwise expression should pass or even the tone of voice should be provocative of ill. "If any man speak, let him speak as the Oracles of God."

CHAPTER 10

JUSTICE

It may be remarked that in these occasional papers there is not much attempt to take subjects in their proper order, or Justice would have come earlier. It is one of the elementary virtues, it was recognized and cultivated by some of the pagans in ancient times, and in every generation there have been indignant protests against that which has been regarded as unjust. There have been many different standards to which the concept of a just or exact measure could be applied, so that men of different ages in the world's history might fail to understand each other if they could be brought together. A modern Christian has a far higher standard of justice than that of an ancient Roman, but there may be a sense in which there is less of justice and more of cant in his application of standards to the practical realities of life.

A Roman might conquer a desirable land and show no mercy to those who resisted him, but he would not try to give his predatory enterprise the appearance of altruism. Judging between his servants he would try to be just, but if he wanted new lands from men who were not Romans, he would regard the want as sufficient to justify the appropriate action. Modern men will often make an elaborate pretence of acting from purely altruistic motives. They take new lands for the benefit of the natives. They "take up the white man's burden" and they give the black man the opportunity to take up the white man's vices. Whether good or evil

predominates as the result of these enterprises, it is certain that the driving force behind them is not the desire to help the inhabitants of the lands so conquered.

With similar self-deception in the ordinary affairs of life, men will form a judgment, and then seek for arguments to justify it. If they treat a man as an enemy they will seek out reasons for hating him, although perhaps protesting all the time that they do not hate, for Christ condemned the word.

It is in this prevailing atmosphere of cant that the most injustice is found and there is the most need for the searchlight of truth. All people know that justice is a fundamental virtue and all want to have justice on their side. A man must not be wrongfully accused, his rightful possessions must not be taken from him; we must not use a false balance or false measures in our business transactions. There is no need to emphasize these elementary lessons in dealing with Christians. There is a very real need, however, to point the lessons in another field where there is so much more possibility of disguise. Men who would scorn to tamper with literal weights and measures will sometimes almost make a virtue of dishonesty when they are not dealing with material things. A military man wrote a book describing the manner in which he had worked up feeling against the enemy in time of war by the suppression of some facts and the distortion of others. He gave an open record of how he had committed abomination and he was "not ashamed neither could he blush". Sir Philip Gibbs, in his *Realities of War*, relates that in one of the minor engagements of the great conflict with Germany in 1914-18, when the

British suffered a severe reverse the Germans behaved well. They allowed a breathing space to bring in British wounded and even helped in the work, especially "one heroic German doctor", who laboured incessantly. "I reported the matter at the time", wrote Sir Philip Gibbs, "but I was not permitted to publish it."

He made no comment on this prohibition and this was perhaps a wise reticence, for it is difficult to see how an honest man could make an appropriate comment without running the risk of being put into prison. There is something peculiarly vile in such a systematic perversion, misrepresentation and suppression in the effort to intensify hatred of the enemy. When such cultivated negation of the first and most important of Christian principles is made in a reputedly Christian country and with every pretence of Christian virtue it may well produce a mental nausea in men who try to be just.

It is not only in the wars of nations that men treat their opponents with cultivated injustice. The same ugly dishonesty is displayed in nearly every controversy. It is of course difficult to be entirely just and there will always be differences of opinion and mutual recrimination whenever men have definite convictions and strong feelings. If we have had any experience of such matters we shall expect to be misrepresented in time of controversy. We shall be misunderstood however lucid we are, and we shall be accused of unfairness however just we are. These are evils inherent in human strife, and we accept them as the general rule. Sometimes, however, we come into conflict with one who while disagreeing with us and feeling strongly on the

PRINCIPLES AND PROVERBS

matter in dispute, nevertheless is evidently trying to be fair. He may not entirely succeed, or at least we may think that in some measure he fails, but we are conscious that unlike the majority of controversialists, he is at least trying to be just. If we also try there is mutual respect and at least the possibility of mental progress.

When there is a general election for Parliament we may learn some negative lessons in this subject. The spectacle is like a real life satire of itself, all the native ugliness, meanness and moral depravity of man being emphasized as in the manner of a bitter parody. There is rarely any attempt to be just or even to be decently truthful, while often there is a studied effort to be unjust, by misrepresentation, suppression, distortion or even as the late Lord Balfour described it, by "frigid and calculated lying".

We who look on with disinterested impartiality can see the ugliness of it all, we can appreciate the truth of the scriptural description of sinful flesh, and brethren should be able to profit thereby in their own inevitable controversies, just as a vicious man may sometimes be shocked into decency by the contemplation of one even viler than himself.

In this subject of justice as in other matters, one extreme may beget another. There are "patriots" who cannot be just to the enemy and there are internationalists who cannot be just to their own country. There are parents who always think that their children are in the right and there are parents who always judge their children to be wrong. This last fault is no doubt a rare one, but there can be no question as to its existence.

Even apart from such extreme prejudices and such complex reactions, there is much lack of justice in the homes where every virtue should begin. There is unjust severity and unjust laxity. Mothers are constantly cruel to the sons they idolize. The "folly bound up in the heart of the child" is cultivated and encouraged instead of being driven out. Finally it may become too big to be driven out even by the drastic rod of the world. Fathers, too, are often at fault, although not so much with their sons. They have the opportunity for wider observation of the ill effects of home spoiling, and so if they are wise they may be on their guard and more conscious of human weakness. He was a wise man who said, "It's a good thing that I never had a daughter. I should have made a hopeless little fool of her." Contemplating the harmful reactions of extremes we may well sound a warning to those parents who remember the old severity of family life and who now tend to go too far the other way. We have seen and commented upon the results of some of these modern theories. We may here point out that the extremes either way are unjust.

There is opportunity every day to exercise ourselves in the use of just weights and just measures. Everyday experience may be in trivial matters which are soon forgotten but our reactions to these things are remembered. The little experiences pass away but they help to mould characters which remain. How many men in the business world pass irritably through each day of trial, so constantly complaining that unjust blaming becomes a habit. Some sensitive souls under their control suffer and chafe, while others who are hardened, shrug their

PRINCIPLES AND PROVERBS

shoulders and say, "Whatever we do we shall probably be wrong, so why trouble anyway?" Thus injustice ends by making all corrections futile. Such an unjust task-master blames his servants for taking a course which is only proved wrong by the development of events which no man could possibly have foreseen. Indeed, we frequently witness this kind of petty injustice in all phases of life. "Why ever did you not do thus and so?" the petulant question is put when an unexpected event proves that certain preparations were desirable. But supposing that the course now recommended had been taken and the subsequent march of events had been quite different, what then? Equal blame, of course, for having made unnecessary provision for a possibility which never materialized.

He who is just or unjust in that which is least will probably be just or unjust in that which is greatest. Most of us have our trials in the little matters of life; in these minor trials character will be made or marred and according to our reactions we shall be judged.

Perhaps the vilest exhibition of injustice noted in the Proverbs is expressed in the well-known saying, "A lying tongue hateth those who are afflicted by it." There have been modern writers who have observed this perverse wickedness of the human heart and have commented upon it with surprise, apparently unaware that it was mentioned by Solomon nearly three thousand years ago. We can observe the principle at work even when we should not like to speak of lying tongues. When controversy arouses feeling and there is even only a mild form of the usual misrepresentation and unfairness of statement,

there we see the ugly law at work. According as men are unfair and unjust in their language so their feeling of dislike will develop until it may become hatred in reality whatever other name they might find for it. On the other hand if we try to be just even to those who do not treat us with justice; if we try to be fair even to the most unfair of opponents, we shall bear no ill feeling even to those who wrong us. Hatred is bred by being unjust far more than by being treated with injustice and love is developed by serving more than by being served.

We are told in Proverbs 21 : 3, that to do justice and judgment is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice. In fact we may assume that unless a suppliant at least makes an effort to be just his sacrifice would not be acceptable.

David in his last inspired words said, "He who ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God." Such a just ruler has been provided and it was he who offered a perfect sacrifice in both life and death.

The children of Israel needed to be reminded many times of this primary virtue of justice. Each time they soon forgot or failed to learn the lesson properly. Repeatedly they were called to justice by the prophets and passionate protests were made against their unequal ways, their selfishness and lack of consideration for the rights of others. Kings, priests, scribes and theologians all have their peculiar way of perverting justice and equity. Often men have done great injustice while trying with self-righteous zeal to enforce a straitening law of their own devising. A primary law given by God has been breached in the effort to enforce a recommendation

PRINCIPLES AND PROVERBS

of man. After all that the prophets had said, Christ needed to explain the law of justice again. His contemporaries were zealous for their traditions but they neglected the weightier matters of the law of God, justice, faith and love. They were eager to lade men with heavy and unnecessary burdens but they could not apply the just balance and just measure to the affairs of spiritual life.

So has it been in later days. There has often been a passionate zeal for rectitude in little matters of form and expression, resulting in bitter criticism and often injustice to fellow labourers. We have a strong conviction that when the Just One passes the final judgment, some well-meaning but self-centred men will be reprovèd because they have rigorously enforced so many rules of their own and have been neglectful of justice, mercy, faith and the love of God.

CHAPTER II

BLESSING

There are some passages in the book of Proverbs so complete and so significant that they seem to call for separate and special treatment. They are passages which bring to mind many other testimonies of scripture and many phases of the strife between spirit and flesh. They seem to condense the lessons learned by study and experience into a very few words which can be remembered. Sometimes the words carry with them instruction, which, apart from such impressive association, might be forgotten or neglected. Sober and salutary thoughts are brought to mind and we benefit by the contemplation of the proverb even if experts could prove that the passage was wrongly translated, or that we had a faulty understanding of its primary meaning.

Such a passage is in Proverbs 10 : 22. "The blessing of the Lord, it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it."

The words may not express much to one who is on the threshold of life, full of health and vigour and with no personal memories of real sorrow. Such a vigorous youth may indeed know that this is a sad world, but he does not bring the fact home to his imagination. He does not realize that merely human life is always a tragedy, and he might resent the fact being pointed out to him. He would perhaps fail to see the connection between blessing and sorrow or to understand what blessing of the Lord could be peculiar in this matter. He might even reason that the blessing of the Lord sometimes

PRINCIPLES AND PROVERBS

seemed to bring more evil in its train than the blessings which men seek for themselves. Surely God spoke through the patriarchs, yet the blessing which came to Jacob resulted in his being an outcast for many years. He was ill treated in the land of his exile and he fared still worse when he returned to his own country. His wife died, his sons for the most part proved unworthy, and the one virtuous one was taken from him. Esau on the other hand without either birthright or blessing, founded a dukedom in the land of Edom and became so wealthy that he wanted nothing more. His experience confirmed the early decision that his birthright was no good to him and taught him that even the blessing was not of temporal value. Where then was the blessing of the Lord which maketh rich and to which sorrow is not added ?

In a sense, of course, all good things can be described as the blessings of the Lord, for all things come from Him. There is, however, a very special blessing which comes from God, bringing spiritual riches free from all reactions of evil. All who understand the birthright and blessing which came to Jacob will perceive the distinction. Men of the world who have condemned Jacob for taking advantage of his brother's faintness have thought of the birthright in terms of modern inheritance where the first-born takes all the property. The patriarchs had no lands and houses to bequeath. The birthright despised by Esau had nothing to do with such mundane things, as the sequel shows. It was a sacred honour of leadership in the service of God, and Esau sold it for a mess of pottage. This is a matter which critics do not understand. Those who have been most

severe in condemning Jacob and his mother for the deception practised upon Isaac would probably have felt far more sympathy with them if the aim had been to secure temporal riches. If the father of a family in blind folly were on the point of destroying all the family fortune, such critics would feel that a measure of deception might reasonably be used and the end would perhaps justify the means. They can find no excuse for the woman who had received a message from the angels regarding her son Jacob and who feared that her husband, in blind partiality for Esau, was about to repudiate the divine word.

This blessing was prophetic, affecting the descendants of the two men, but in its personal bearing it meant something very much more than the acquisition of flocks and herds. Material blessings, however real and desirable they may be, always bring an accompaniment of sorrow. It is a blessing to live as a human being, but "man is born to trouble". It is a blessing to have good parents, but the better they are the sadder it is to lose them, and go they must. It is a blessing to have health and strength, some say the greatest of personal blessings, but the strong man who has never ailed feels most keenly the loss of strength when his time comes. It is sad for a man to be cut off in his prime while still he had seemed capable of doing good work, but it is still sadder for him to live on until all powers have failed. Yet in merely human life it is one end or the other for all of us. It is a great blessing for a man to find a "help" "meet for him". The Proverbs express this thought more than once. "Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of the Lord." Yet from this blessing arises the

PRINCIPLES AND PROVERBS

most poignant sorrow that a human being can experience, for the years pass by like the turning of the pages of a book, and the time of inevitable parting is only a few leaves further on.

It is a great blessing to have children, yet all parents experience the addition of sorrow, for even if the children all live, even if they are strong, virtuous and fortunate, they have nevertheless entered an evil world, the way cannot be all smooth for them and parents must share their troubles and anxieties as long as life may last. So even at the best there is an addition of sorrow and too often we do not experience the best. Disease and death or folly and misfortune so often add to the sorrows of parents.

If we wanted to imagine a human being who should be free from all such pain, we should have to think of one without blessings, without friends or companions; one leading an animal life and finding it hard work to live at all. He would have no real sorrow because he had no real joys, and death would not be an enemy, because life had never been a friend.

Sometimes we have seen the close of an unusually serene and happy life. It seems that nearly all possible blessings have attended. Husband and wife have spent an ideal married life and have grown old together without any serious failing of their mental powers or any of that hardening angularity which so often mars the last chapter. They have grown mellow with the advance of years, and when nearly all of their generation have passed away, they have lived feebly on, commanding the love and respect of all who knew them. Then one day the messenger of

death has arrived, hastening as if to make up for delay. One of the lives is taken by disease and the other flickers out through the shock of parting. "They were lovely and pleasant in their lives, and in death were not divided", as we heard quoted over the grave of such a pair. A sympathetic observer remarks on the sadness of the end. The one spared by disease could not survive the shock of separation after so many years of close companionship, and so quickly followed to darkness and silence. It is rightly described as sad, and yet it is the best that human life has to offer. It is far more sad to be torn in two while there is still sufficient strength to survive the shock and so live on. Saddest of all perhaps for life to become so painful that death is a release.

It is good sometimes even for youth to face this unattractive truth. It may tend to moderate the harshness of youthful judgments, and it may help in the cleansing of a young man's way. How can we ever be unkind to a creature so frail as man? How can we waste any of our precious moments with the end of life so near? Above all, how can we be indifferent to the call of God to whom all things belong?

The poet Hood perceived the tragedy of human life, and the sorrow which accompanies all ordinary blessings. He sang :—

"The sunniest things throw sternest shade,
And there is even a happiness
That makes the heart afraid."

Again he wrote :—

"Even the bright extremes of joy
Bring on conclusions of disgust,
Like the sweet perfume of the may
Whose fragrance ends in must."

It is so with all ordinary blessings of life, but not with the special blessing offered by God to all who will hear His call. Spiritual riches which can be ours even now, bring no conclusions of disgust or sadness, nor any fear of being robbed. They will not save us from the sorrows of human life, but they will help us to bear the pain. They do not arrest the process of decay in the dark streets of a Gentile city, but they give us hope of a better city to come.

The patriarch Jacob illustrated the truth of the matter in the "few and evil days" of his pilgrimage. He was not cast in heroic mould as a warrior or a king to be admired of men. He was "a plain man dwelling in tents", without much animal courage or worldly skill. His virtue was the only one that will count in final issues. He had faith in God and tried to serve Him. All temporal blessings brought him sorrow. The good parents from whom he had to part, the riches which aroused the jealousy of kinsmen, the wife who was taken from him, the daughter who brought shame, the wicked sons who caused him such grief, and the virtuous one who unwittingly brought the most pain of all. When he saw Joseph again, now honoured and powerful, his eyes were growing dim with age—and the time for another parting was near. It seemed almost that with the end of bitter trials came the end of life.

Yet although Jacob perhaps had to endure more pain than ever came to his worldly brother, he was upheld by a spiritual blessing which brought no reaction of evil. He was sustained through all his life by the consciousness of divine control. Even in the time of final parting there was hope, well grounded and sure. He is among the few who are

mentioned by name as certain to be in the Kingdom of God.

Such spiritual blessing may be ours, bringing no addition of sorrow but helping us to bear the evils which are our natural inheritance. It is a comfort to know that God has matters in hand, and the contemplation of the coming Kingdom would be some consolation even apart from the hope of personal participation. Some permanent good will come out of temporary evil, some of our fellow creatures will be chosen and redeemed from among men, and the purpose of God will be accomplished. This thought is a consolation even though we remember the words of the Lord Jesus, "Many are called, but few are chosen."

We need not fear, however, that we shall be excluded if we really desire to be in the Kingdom of God; even though we are plain men dwelling in drab villas and cottages, with little of the hero in our make-up, and nothing in our characters to command the admiration of the world. If we follow the patriarchs in their one outstanding virtue of obedient faith, we shall be guided to the other things needful. Our names are not mentioned in the Scriptures nor in the rolls of human fame, but they are written in the Book of Life.

CHAPTER 12

MERCY AND KINDNESS

It is a general convention to speak kindly of those who are beyond the reach of cruelty. Often a tirade of splenetic invective has been stayed by the news that the subject of it had met with sudden death. We might reasonably suppose that men who can be merciful to those who have ceased to live would extend their kindness to those under sentence, and as we all have the sentence of death in ourselves we should be protected from cruelty by the misfortune of our nature. History shows, however, that human beings have been sadly lacking in this quality of mercy. Some men and women have been deliberately and purposefully cruel, taking a fiendish delight in the infliction of pain. Others have been almost equally cruel through selfishness, stupidity, greed, fear, thoughtlessness or irritability.

Mercy was one of the qualities enjoined in the earliest days. It is one of the first expressions of the law of love. It is one of the attributes of God, although divine mercy may often be conditioned by facts too high for man to understand. The first proclamation of the law through Moses emphasized the mercy of God, although often this has been forgotten while harsher words are remembered. "Visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation" has often been quoted and its justice called in question. Some have noticed the explicit instruction in another part of the Law, that the son should not be punished for the father's sin (Deut. 24 : 16), and have supposed

that there was want of harmony. The error of such critics has been due to an imperfect reading of the text. If the complete passage is read by one who has a good knowledge of Scripture a perfectly harmonious meaning emerges. "I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me, and showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me and keep my commandments."

There is no suggestion of punishment due to wicked parents falling upon righteous sons, nor of favour due to righteous parents coming to sons who are rebels. The visitation of evil is on those who hate God and the mercy is for those who love and obey Him. The point of contrast is between the short period in which evil parents can be a curse and the many generations in which righteous parents may be a blessing. The wicked descendants of such men as Saul and Ahab suffered for the sins of their fathers during a few generations. God is ready to show mercy to the Jews for the sake of parents who lived thousands of years ago. Rebels will be purged out (Ezek. 20), but those who are willing in the day of Messiah's power will be brought into the bond of the Covenant, not because of their worthiness but because of the covenant God made with their fathers nearly four thousand years ago.

It is strange that men should be so slow to learn a lesson which would seem to have such a natural appeal to us in our weakness and imperfection. Many teachers in the land of Israel emphasized the need for kindness and mercy while crying aloud against the prevailing cruelty. The Lord Jesus

PRINCIPLES AND PROVERBS

taught this lesson afresh, but without much effect, for he suffered at the hands of men as cruel as any of their fathers. He did not expect any great improvement as the result of his teaching. He predicted that the reign of cruelty would continue, and so it has been through history. Very few have learned the lesson even now.

The wise man said, "Let not mercy and truth forsake thee. Bind them about thy neck, write them upon the table of thine heart."

That is the final object of all good writing. Much that is written on paper is destroyed without even being read. Even commandments written and engraven on stone have been neglected until the stones have crumbled into dust. But when the commandments of God are written on human hearts, the final object of writing has been achieved. Words written on paper, parchment or stone, or words spoken by inspired lips have then been received by the senses, understood and approved by the intellect and the thoughts expressed have been, in some measure at least, woven into the character.

We read that "he that hath pity on the poor lendeth to the Lord" (Prov. 19 : 7). On the other hand, "he that oppresseth the poor reproacheth his maker" (Prov. 14 : 31). "He that stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he also shall cry and shall not be heard" (21 : 13).

Perhaps some readers may think that there is not much need to stress these thoughts now. Who in these days and in this land would oppress the poor? We are living in times when the corporate conscience of the community has been aroused as never before and much provision is made for the

unfortunate, sometimes even placing them in a position more favourable than some of the hardly pressed tax-payers who are supposed to need no assistance. Even now, however, all the tendencies reproved by the wise man remain with us. A poor man is still sometimes ill treated just because he is poor. Many employers of labour are guilty in this matter although they might indignantly protest against the accusation. They pay good wages to greedy shouters or to men backed up by powerful unions. They forget the claims of a quiet and efficient worker as completely as a healthy man forgets his liver. So it sometimes happens that some of the best of servants work on in silence until they are broken by the increasing load. They are underpaid because they are uncomplaining, and they are uncomplaining because they are so poor that they dare not run the risk of making any protest. In others words, they are oppressed just because they are poor.

The majority of men and women have no opportunity to play a great part in the world either for good or evil. The average man cannot be a great tyrant any more than he can be a great philanthropist. His orbit is restricted and he has no opportunity for display. Perhaps this is why there are so many tyrants in mean streets and shabby homes. It is possible that some men who are most disappointing in workshop and home would be ostentatiously kind if they lived in the public light. It is certain that some who can imagine themselves playing the part of the benevolent prince cannot even be kind hearted paupers in their own homes. The majority of Christ's disciples have always been

PRINCIPLES AND PROVERBS

chained by circumstance and subject to superior powers. They have only been able to put farthings into the divine treasury. They have been one talent servants and so have had especial need to remember the lesson of their prototype in the parable. Their kindness or cruelty will be revealed in the little matters of everyday life. It is futile to wait for a great opportunity in this as in all other things. The opportunity is with us every day, for every day we come into contact with our fellows.

It is written of the virtuous woman that "she openeth her mouth with wisdom, and in her tongue is the law of kindness". Surely this suggests abundant opportunity. Everyone knows how cruel words can be, but no one can follow their complex reactions or trace their final effect for evil. Sometimes we see enough to make us afraid. Unkind words have been unkindly remembered and have formed a permanent influence for evil. There has been much unchristian retaliation in words even among those who would never come to blows. Often the permanent effect of such ill words has been worse than that of blows. Gentiles have fought fiercely and afterwards have been friends again. Sometimes men claiming to be disciples of Christ have not only used cruel words, but have remained bitterly hostile to each other for the rest of life.

In trying to enforce this lesson of mercy and kindness in the little things of life it is well that we should all examine ourselves with unusual scrutiny, for it is a matter in which the worst offenders may be the least conscious of any fault. Moreover it is a matter on which even the closest friends find it difficult to speak openly. Probably many of us have

been pained more than once by the spectacle of a good man or woman spoiling the effect of many virtues by a thoughtless or irritable unkindness of speech. There is even such a shadow over many homes. Sometimes there is open retaliation, leading to serious evils. Sometimes the unkindness is all on one side endured by others in silence, but felt just as much. There are offenders who are partly conscious of their fault and try to excuse it by saying, "I know that I am hasty sometimes, but it is only my way. It is a perfectly natural expression of temper and is soon over." That which is perfectly natural, however, may also be perfectly devilish. It is well to remember that a flame which only lasts for a few seconds may make a scar that will remain all through life.

On the other hand, we have met disciples of Christ who seem to remember that they will be judged by their words. The law of kindness is in their tongues even if they reveal no depths of wisdom and knowledge. Their speech may be platitudinous and their gifts mere cups of cold water, but they yet may wield a wonderful influence for good. There will be men and women in the Kingdom of God, who if they at all remember the former things and for a moment look back to the pit from which they were digged, will call to mind the fact that when God first began to "draw" them to His Kingdom, the first influence was through the cheerful words of a humble neighbour in whose tongue was "the law of kindness."

CHAPTER 13

CONTROL OF TEMPER

Seneca wrote three books on anger, and yet Macaulay doubted whether all his philosophy ever kept anyone from being angry. Solomon only wrote a few wise sayings, but many have learned from him. "He that is soon angry dealeth foolishly" (Prov. 14 : 17). "He that is slow to wrath is of great understanding" (verse 29). "He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city . . ." (16 : 22).

This reference to the strength of the man who can rule his own spirit goes to the root of the matter. All men have bad tempers, but some are wise and strong enough to exercise control.

It is natural for men to be selfish and to be angry if their interests are menaced. It is natural for them to resent any slight to their dignity or criticism of their work. Wherever we can observe human nature in the raw there are many scenes of ill-temper, bearing a humiliating resemblance to the quarrels of wild animals. The anger caused by selfish disputes is manifest all through Nature. With due respect to Dr. Watts, we have to recognize that even "birds in their little nests" do not always "agree". It has to be admitted, however, that birds and beasts may often give us lessons. Man, with all his power of understanding, and with all the lessons that he has received, is the worst offender. His selfishness is greater than that of any beast, going far beyond the needs of the moment. His anger is more cruel and longer sustained. Often it is fostered and

encouraged as in time of war. And in his search for weapons to slay those who have roused his wrath, man is immeasurably worse than any of the lower creatures could possibly be.

When men have been unrestrained either by fear of their fellows or by any remonstrance of conscience in their own breasts, they have proceeded to terrible extremes of cruelty in the expression of their anger. The wrath of an autocratic king is proverbially terrible. In ordinary life men are restrained by fear. Anger cannot find its natural expression for fear of reprisals which might come from an angry enemy or from the majesty of the law. Nations and individuals are often "willing to wound but afraid to strike." They are curbed by the dread of a conflict the end of which they cannot foresee but which will be certain to bring much pain and evil. In less serious issues angry words are often restrained by the fear of ridicule. Anger will often make men foolish and there are always cruel opponents ready to laugh. Protected by the law they find pleasure in goading the victim to further expressions of impotent rage. Sometimes they go too far and the angry one, casting off all restraint and blind to consequences, gives full vent to his rage. There have been tragedies caused by such cruel and foolish feeding of a foolish anger.

Men who are well instructed either in Christian principles or in a purely worldly wisdom, restrain their anger in its expression of both deed and word. They recognize and possibly envy the power of the man who can keep cool. When provoked, they try with more or less success to conceal any warmth of resentment that they may feel. Is Christian principle

the basis, or is it merely a worldly wisdom? Is anger really restrained or is it merely transmuted into a cold and deadly bitterness, possibly worse than the original passion? Anger can take many forms and find many different ways of expression. It may be a hasty ebullition quickly evaporating, and, if circumstances are favourable, leaving no bitterness behind. Sometimes after such an explosion men are better friends for having quarrelled. There is grave danger in this quick boiling of anger, however. It is so easy for something to be done or said, the effects of which will linger all through life. Lives have been lost and lives have been ruined through only a few moments of unrestrained anger. Words hastily uttered and meaning little more than an expression of momentary annoyance, may have enduring effects with such complex action and reaction that no one could possibly trace their course or even guess the sum of the evil wrought. A man of hasty temper may soon forget the words that gave relief to his angry feelings. He might be appalled if he could know the full effect of his momentary loss of control. One who is naturally of quick temper and hasty speech may well take to heart the Spirit's warning. Let him learn to be "slow to wrath", to rule his spirit and to guard the door of his mouth.

Anger is not properly controlled when a man is cool in the pursuit of revenge. It has become more evil, for instead of being merely a matter of feeling, it has engaged the intellect and the will, so that such a man can act a part with skill and subtlety. It is still anger, by reason made more deadly. We have scriptural authority for this judgment, for Jacob so described the cold craftiness of two of his sons,

“Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce; and their wrath, for it was cruel.”

So in less serious issues, in which words are the only weapons, a man may congratulate himself on having controlled his anger when he is only finding a more satisfying way of relieving his feelings. He thinks of something cruel to say and he chooses the manner of speech which will make it sting most. So he is cool and collected, not because he has properly ruled his spirit, but because worldly wisdom has taught him a more effective way of striking a blow. There is as much feeling of angry resentment behind that icy bitterness of speech as was ever revealed by hot and hasty words. The ill feeling is as strong and it lasts much longer.

Anger is properly controlled and the spirit wisely ruled when a man is not only cool and reasonable, but when he is able to take the right course despite any dictates of outraged feeling. There is such a thing as righteous anger just as there is such a thing as “perfect hatred”. It is possible as the apostle suggests to be angry and not to sin. One who rules his spirit and controls his anger will be able to take the right course. When his anger is roused he will not only remember the power of cool and collected thoughts but he will remember Christ. If reproof or protest is needed he will give it, if the situation calls for a gentle answer he will find it. If the subject is one in which “silence is golden”, he will “guard the door of his mouth”, even if he has thought of a most witty and crushing answer. This is a testing point for many. It is just when we are cool and collected that we think of the scathing answer that would make an opponent writhe. Will it do

good to let him have it? Or is it just one of those barbed sayings that can do no possible good, only serving to relieve the feelings of the one who speaks, and amuse careless hearers? If it is in this category it is far better suppressed, for scathing words are never without effect. If they do no good they always do harm.

There is much cause for righteous anger in the world: the travesties and misrepresentations of religion, the hypocrisy of politics, the perversions of justice, and the abomination of modern warfare. Cruelty and injustice often go hand in hand with professions of kindness and mercy; an affectation of extreme righteousness is often used as a cloak to cover dishonesty. There are still men who try to thwart good work while parading their excessive piety, whether in zeal for the Sabbath as in the first century, or in some more modern way. Yet these evils do not often excite a righteous anger. When we find an angry man he is not often protesting against the prevalent perversions of divine law. Far more frequently it is a matter of personal interests or personal feeling. The anger of worldly greed and pride is manifest every day while righteous anger is a rarity. It is not quite unknown, however. Brethren have sometimes been stirred up by flagrant perversions of truth and have done some of their best work in a spirit of righteous anger. How good it would be if this was the only kind of anger ever known among us.

Unfortunately there has often been unrighteous anger even in the work of the Truth. A little disagreement and a little contradiction, and anger is soon manifested whether naked and unashamed, or

whether clad in a few tawdry rags of alleged principle. Sometimes it is a quick ebullition, disturbing and painful, but soon over. Sometimes it is an anger transmuted into the cold bitterness of a lasting enmity such as the hatred the Jews bore to their nearest neighbours. It is possible that the final verdict on such ill feeling will be similar to that of the dying patriarch on his two sons. "Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce; and their wrath, for it was cruel."

CHAPTER 14

SERVICE

We must never permit ourselves to reject or neglect a true principle merely because it has been abused, neither must we be impatient with one who tries to assess true values merely because so many self-seekers have dishonestly used the idea for their own ends.

The word Service has been grossly abused of recent years. "I serve" was the motto of an emperor who led his people into a disastrous war and then deserted them in the evil hour. "Service" has been the continual cry of business men whose real aim has been profits, and while it is undoubtedly true that service is the leading principle for success even in the business world it is certain that the best service has not been rendered by those who have most used the word.

The wise man says, "There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, and it tendeth only to penury."

The truth of this saying is illustrated frequently on every plane of life. One who gives freely, whether of his possessions or of his energy, is supported and helped so that he has still more power to give, while one who with niggardly reluctance seeks to conserve his resources finds at last that there is a leakage which reduces him to penury even though no one has gained by his loss. There is no inevitability about this process, however. A greedy man cannot work out a profitable scheme of carefully calculated generosity. He cannot render service with a stipu-

lation for deferred but increased wages. If he makes any such attempt he is apt to be treated as was the negro who tried to stage a fall into the rich man's coal cellar. A man who had accidentally so fallen had been generously compensated, but the negro purposely following suit broke his leg and was put in prison for trying to steal coal.

Service must be spontaneous in a desire to help or a desire to follow Christ. It may lead with painful reality "in the steps of the Master", or it may bring increase of power and opportunity with rich reward even now for the present life. If, however, service is rendered with the wrong motive it will not be long sustained and the reward of such insincere labour is "neither here nor there."

Solomon wrote approvingly of the man who is diligent in his business. "He shall stand before kings, he shall not stand before mean men." This is surely true now in a greater degree than when the words were written. Business men are no longer despised by the aristocracy. Rather does it seem that in these days aristocrats desire to pose as business men. Captains of industry can stand in the presence of kings and speak with a freedom unknown in former times. It is only fair and just to admit that many such men have brought the law of service down to the material plane. The most successful have gone far beyond the need for money and possibly even beyond the love of it. They have been moved by a passion for doing something supremely well so that the service they have rendered has been an end in itself. Often they offer an example to those who claim to work on a much higher plane.

PRINCIPLES AND PROVERBS

On every plane of thought and action there are certain essential qualities of service which we may link with some of the words of the Proverbs. One of the most important is promptitude. A small piece of bread while a man still lives serves him better than a well stocked larder after he is dead. Solomon puts this thought very definitely. "Say not unto thy neighbour, Go, and come again and to-morrow I will give, when thou hast it by thee."

Procrastination has ever been the enemy of service. Delay detracts from the value of the work and may even render it useless. If then we are in a position to give anything that will help our friends and neighbours, let us give at once while we have the will and they have the need.

The world is full of tragedies caused by unnecessary delays. Men have died while those who could have saved them have argued as to the best way of doing it. Or it may be that those who were well equipped for giving help have died while making up their minds to begin. So in less serious issues and in all kinds of service, time is a prime factor. We must "work while it is day. The night cometh when no man can work."

It is useless for young people to dream of the great service they will render some day. It is far better to make a start immediately on something near at hand and within the scope of present powers. Even if you have a great idea of real value but beyond the range of immediate possibilities it is still practicable to start work at once. The principle of the limited objective comes to our aid in this. If we were unable with our present strength to establish a home for the aged and unfortunate, we could even

to-day give cheer and help to a few who are near at hand. This may be regarded if we will, as a first step in a much larger project, doing a little good and enlarging our knowledge at the same time. We cannot immediately write the great book which shall bring conviction and wisdom to all readers, but we may make a first step in the form of a preliminary essay which will be good exercise for us and perhaps give a little help to a few of our fellows. Thus with a series of limited steps we may accomplish something even now without any surrender of our great ideal of service, but rather making it more practicable. The great work of philanthropy or of reason may never be realized, but we shall have accomplished something better than idle dreams.

Men have sometimes gone through life without ever rendering any real service, their failure being due not to a lack of right desires but to an inflated idea of what their life work should be. If they had applied the principle of the limited objective they would have insured that something would be done although perhaps far less than their ambitious projects.

Another essential of service is a willingness to wait for results. We might link this with the passage already quoted, "There is that scattereth and yet increaseth", or we might call to mind words from the book of Ecclesiastes. "In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thy hand: for thou knowest not which shall prosper, this or that, or whether both shall be alike good."

This is true in agriculture, as every gardener knows. It is also true on a higher plane. We sow seed by our words and actions morning and evening,

PRINCIPLES AND PROVERBS

and we do not know what the effect will be. It is hardly possible, however, for a human being to live without having any influence on his contemporaries. He either helps or hinders them. He either serves, or he is a drag on the wheel. Sometimes the best service a man can possibly render is in the influence of a good example.

The possibility of rendering service even in the ordinary amenities of life is beautifully expressed in that well-known passage, "Iron sharpeneth iron: so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend" (Prov. 27 : 17). This suggests that even those of equal knowledge and ability can sharpen each other. It is not necessary to have a qualified teacher to enable us to learn. A man's ideas are "right in his own eyes, but his neighbour cometh and searcheth him." The neighbour may not be of equal calibre with the one he so "searches" and yet his criticisms may be of great value. The original idea may need a good deal of modification to make it sound, and the explanatory words may need much clarifying to make them fully intelligible. We may often be surprised at the failure of our friends to appreciate a good thought or to understand language which seems perfectly clear to us. If we are to render service our thoughts must be such as can be appreciated and our language must be easy to understand. A very humble critic may serve us well by misunderstanding us, if he tells us of his difficulties.

Solomon goes further than this in suggesting possibilities for personal service. He says, "Rebuke a wise man, and he will love thee." To one of wide experience this might be taken to imply that there are very few wise men. Even with a little wisdom,

however, we may take the lesson to heart and become wiser. It is unquestionably true that the man who shows us where we can improve, serves us better than the one who gives indiscriminate praise. So even a rebuke may be a gesture of love evoking the gratitude of a truly wise man.

What a difference it would make to life if all people were moved by the ideal of service as it is expressed in the book of Proverbs: to build the house and not pull it down, to be diligent and not slothful, and to be ready to take the humble place rather than to seek the best seat (Prov. 25 : 6-7). Beyond this is the very Christian idea of readiness to give even when the natural instinct would be to withhold. "If thine enemy hunger, give him bread to eat; if he be thirsty, give him water to drink" (Prov. 27 : 21).

There are a few such servants of God in the earth even now, seeking to serve and not to shine; ready for any good work however unpleasant and never anxious to take the post of prominence. They are the type of men to whom the king will say "Come up hither."

CHAPTER 15

THE SEVEN ABOMINATIONS

“Haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that are swift in running to mischief, a false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren.”

This may seem a negative subject, but at least we have a positive and definite affirmation that the Lord hates these things, and as the seven evils are prominent in the world we may do well to look at them for a little while in all their ugliness, that we may hate them, too.

It is not difficult to see the evils in other people. Haughty eyes are detested by all who are scorned by them. They are hated by those who—possibly on a lower plane—are just as haughty themselves. The haughty manner is detestable when viewed from below and ridiculous when viewed from above. It is always indicative of a failure to remember God. It is a hateful assumption of superiority on the part of a weak and foolish animal. Herod was a good example of a haughty man, and his fate was an appropriate rebuke.

A lying tongue is condemned even by liars. Everyone hates to have dealings with an untruthful man, and even the most untruthful of men will usually retain sufficient perception of values to resent being called a liar.

It has been well said that the essence of a lie is in deception. If we put forth a parable, saying that a certain man did thus and so, there is no falsehood

even though the story is entirely fictitious. We tell it as a parable and there is no deception. If on the other hand we remain silent while false statements are made, our silence may be taken to "give consent" and we may in effect be guilty of falsehood even though we did not speak.

There are many harmful lies told by men who would greatly resent the suggestion that they were liars. A slight exaggeration may have all the effect of a lie. In this matter a little may be worse than much. Extreme exaggeration does not cause much harm. It is a foolish form of speech but it does not deceive. A slight exaggeration, on the other hand, may be believed, the statement may be passed forward and again exaggerated, until by the contributions of several faulty tongues a destructive lie is produced.

Hands that shed innocent blood come third in this list of evils. Again there will be a readiness on all sides to condemn such violence, but it only needs a little national excitement or national greed for the majority of people to be anxious to transgress. Men who have no personal quarrel and who are entirely innocent of offence against each other will make haste to shed innocent blood regardless of sex or age.

A heart that deviseth wicked imaginations might be regarded as being covered by the expression a lying tongue. It is not quite the same, however. Wicked imaginations may often find expression in lies, but they can be very evil even if they never reach the tongue. Even the most active of men are sometimes still, and the most talkative are sometimes silent, but thought and imagination are with us always even when we are asleep. Envy, anger,

PRINCIPLES AND PROVERBS

bitterness, pride and many other evil things may build up wicked imaginations which destroy the character even if they never find expression in word and deed. It is perfectly true that love leads to the fulfilling of the law, but it does not follow that a formal observance of the law leads to love. Herein lies one of the dangers of negatives. A man may refrain from many things because of his respect for law. He may even deny himself many legitimate blessings in a zeal for separateness. At times he may refrain from speech lest he should transgress the law in dealing with his brother, and yet all the while he may be building up wrong thoughts in his heart and God who looks upon the heart may be displeased.

The expression "feet that are swift in running to mischief", probably covers a wider ground than is usually recognized. Men do not regard the word mischief as applicable to any of the enterprises in which they desire to engage. We all know the type of man to whom the words obviously apply, but we are all loth to recognize the possibility that we ourselves might be at fault. In ecclesial life we may be quite certain that dissensions and disputes will sometimes arise. Some members will do their utmost to minimize the evil, trying to correct error but carefully avoiding anything which might aggravate ill feeling. They will try to restore calm judgment and to prevent the stormy strife which tends to accentuate differences and bring out the worst that is in human nature. In short they are peace makers. It is of course possible that love of peace might lead them into a harmful tolerance of evil. The Lord is their judge. There are other men who give a very different impression and from whom we expect anything

rather than the motions of peace. It is possible that they are moved by a commendable zeal for righteousness, and again we say, the Lord is their judge. It is possible, on the other hand, that peacemakers may be accounted faithful, either because of or in spite of their gentleness; and it is possible that some men who in all their uncompromising pugnacity have claimed to be zealous, may be condemned in the final judgment as men whose feet were swift to run into mischief.

The sixth hateful thing is a false witness. This is not quite the same as the lying tongue which came earlier in the list. A false witness may be less definitely false than the ordinary liar of the world and yet be more evil. In ordinary life a man may tell a lie to save his skin or his reputation, and hateful as the lie always is, there may be some measure of excuse for him. A witness, however, stands in a position of peculiar responsibility whether in the Law Courts or the Church. He stands before God to tell the truth and to suppress nothing. In the Law Courts this fact is impressed upon him, in the Church he should need no reminder. "I have not shunned to declare the whole counsel of God", said the apostle Paul. A heavy responsibility rests upon those who claim to be witnesses for Christ. We must neither hold back vital truth nor put forward anything that is false or doubtful. We must be faithful witnesses always remembering the living power of the One for whom we testify.

The seventh abomination is one who sows discord among brethren. In this form of speech we may reasonably assume that the seventh added evil is the one that is most abominable of all in the sight of God.

PRINCIPLES AND PROVERBS

“Behold how good a thing it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.” It is like the melting snow of Mount Hermon which feeds the river Jordan and gives life to the promised land. The final blessing of eternal life will come to brethren who dwell together in unity. What a hateful thing to sow seeds of bitterness in a united family and so cause unnecessary strife! Yet with human nature unredeemed such evil is inevitable. “It is impossible but that offences shall come”, said the Lord Jesus, “but woe unto that man by whom they come.” The Lord knew what was in man and needed not that any should tell him.

But would any man deliberately try to cause division and strife among those who had been at peace, with no object in view beyond the accomplishment of such evil? It would be contemptible work even from the world’s standard, and no man likes to excite contempt. But why go naked to such work when there are so many garments ready to hand? A man who feels bitter can so easily find a covering by which even he himself can be deceived. Even the best of human beings are faulty both in knowledge and conduct, and so it follows that an enemy can easily find a pretext for his attack. He can effectually cover almost any kind of diabolism under a cloak of righteous zeal.

Even the immediate disciples of Christ were not faultless, and we need not expect those who came later to be any better. In a healthy Christian brotherhood those who are strong help to bear the infirmities of the weak, and those who are well taught in the Word communicate to those who need instruction, with all patience and humility. Christian

THE SEVEN ABOMINATIONS

discussion leads to better understanding, fuller agreement and a higher standard of conduct. Men and women who have been called by a belief in the Gospel and a genuine love of Christ can compose their differences and work together in harmony even though they are of very different temperament.

Often, however, the flesh rises up in discussion and the spirit of Christ is forgotten. Fleshly controversy nearly always accentuates the differences which called it forth. The most evil time is when a man of strong personality becomes disaffected and bitter just at the critical moment when a genuine difference of opinion has arisen. The difference supplies him at once with cloak and weapon. He can easily deceive both himself and others. He hardens some in their original error and provokes others to increased opposition. He would claim and perhaps come to believe that his motives were pure and his actions commendable when all the time he is industriously sowing the seventh abomination.

A great temptation comes in time of strife when there is an opportunity to set our opponents against each other. It may be legitimate diplomacy when the strife we cause is directly related to the matter under discussion. The apostle Paul set the Pharisees and Sadducees against each other over the subject of the resurrection. It is possible sometimes to end a wrangle by showing that the logical result of the agitation is to destroy the agitators. Often, however, such subtlety is used in a manner not at all legitimate. An attempt is made to besmirch the characters of opponents and to prejudice them against each other in matters far removed from the original dispute. In such action there is no attempt to end the strife or

PRINCIPLES AND PROVERBS

to teach any lesson. The effort is merely to relieve embittered feelings and perhaps to justify harsh action previously taken. It is the instinct of a fleshly man to malign those whom he has already wronged.

The sower of discord often does far more harm than appears on the surface. Every student of human nature knows how the opinions and feelings of the average man may be moulded by suggestion either for good or for evil. A good word in season may not only turn away wrath, but may change the entire trend of thought. A sower of discord on the other hand may so exacerbate feeling and through feeling so poison judgment that foolish ideas may be pushed to the point of conflict and division, though in the calm of twenty years later no one on earth would tolerate them.

In ecclesial life there have been many differences of judgment which have called for calm and sober thought. Often the result of brotherly discussion has been agreement, perhaps with better understanding on all sides. It needs no unusual power of observation to perceive that at least some members have been wise, fully conscious of danger and trying by forethought to guide the ecclesia aright. It needs no prophet to realize that at such a time, a sower of discord might have produced a heavy crop of poison, if evil work had synchronized with evil moment.

If we desire to be in the Kingdom of God we must be on guard against the abominations in all their disguises. If we develop the positive side of Christian character they will give us little trouble. The seven seem to make a formidable gang, but they are easily put to flight by love.

CHAPTER 16

A WISE MAN'S HEART

“A wise man’s heart is at his right hand but a fool’s at his left” (Eccl. 10 : 2).

This passage is not from the book of Proverbs but it is in similar style and as with so many of these “dark sayings” of the wise it expresses a great wealth of meaning in a few words. We need not think of a strictly literal meaning. In the physical sense we all have our hearts at the left hand but this has nothing to do with wisdom or folly. The saying refers to something much deeper, in which perhaps the natural tendency is also toward the left, for “folly is bound up in the heart of a child”, but it is possible for words of instruction or the rod of correction to drive out the folly and bring wisdom.

There should be no difficulty in understanding the saying or in finding a thousand illustrations of its truth in human life. An examination of many passages of Scripture shows that the heart is referred to as the centre of the affections; just as in our day. “Love the Lord thy God with all thy heart.” “My son, give me thine heart.” “Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life.” “If riches increase, set not thy heart on them.” And so in many other passages. There is a similar correspondence between ancient and modern usage with the expression right hand. The most notable use of the words is in the description of the Lord Jesus at the right hand of God, all power and judgment having been committed to him. In these days we speak of our best and ablest supporter as our right

PRINCIPLES AND PROVERBS

hand man. We also use the word left with converse meaning. We speak of a left handed compliment, while among the multitude "over the left" is a well-known expression used in a sinister sense. We need not marvel at this for the very word sinister means left, a fact which we may well remember while considering the passage under review.

For the heart to be at the right hand means that all our affections and emotions shall be well placed, helping and supporting us in the work of life. For the heart to be at the left hand means that feelings are wrongly placed, entangling and hindering, preventing good work and possibly even dragging down to destruction. Emotions which are quite good in themselves may be a hindrance if they are not properly guided. They may run counter to our life's work, they may throw us out of balance just when a sober poise is most urgently needed, they may warp our judgment or vitiate our reasoning. They may even lead us to forsake the path of duty altogether. In all such faults whether the evil influence is great or small, the heart is at the left hand.

Perhaps some people would resent the lesson because Solomon went so sadly astray himself. It is perfectly true that he provided a terrible illustration of his words. His heart was definitely at the left hand when through the pride and ostentation of an eastern throne he came under the influence of pagan women. Probably it provides another illustration of the saying if a reader through a strong feeling against the faulty king should ignore the lessons that come through him. Solomon's wisdom and knowledge came from God, his character was his own. In common with all other men he had a

power of choice, like other kings he was subject to great temptation. He sinned, and his error is recorded with the searching knowledge and the cold accuracy of the inspired writings. It is good to take warning from his fall, but it is wrong to allow his lapse in any way to dull our appreciation of the instruction which God sends through him.

Sometimes men have put forward the plea that in these impulses which are particularly described as "affairs of the heart" no exercise of choice is possible. It is argued that reason plays no part in the matter, that men "cannot help themselves" and their affections may go in defiance of discretion, expediency, and law. If it is true that any men are so completely the slaves of feeling and passion, the proper course is to keep them under lock and key with experienced keepers in attendance. Men with their hearts so definitely at their left hand are insane and a danger to society. Sane men and women know perfectly well that reason plays a very large part in these matters, that even mere expediency is often sufficient to extinguish the early flame of passion even apart from law. When the law of God operates upon a responsive heart, even a wrong thought is nipped in the bud.

A wise motorist sees that his brakes are in good condition before venturing among the hills. At the top of a steep incline he engages the engine with a low gear and maintains a slow pace so that he is in no danger of losing control. A foolish driver sometimes neglects these precautions. When he has left the road and is going over the precipice it is true that he cannot stop. He should have applied the brakes much earlier. So is it with human affections.

PRINCIPLES AND PROVERBS

If there is need for a check—and a Christian knows perfectly well when such need arises—the sooner he applies the brakes the easier it is to stop. If on the first consciousness of need he applies them with the energy of religious passion there will be no danger. It is only when the first quickening of interest and feeling is pleasant and a man toys with that which he knows is wrong, that the way of escape becomes more and more difficult and feelings get right out of control.

In a normal human being the will plays the part of a schoolmaster using reason and judgment to instruct the feelings. As a man thinketh in his heart so will he be. Thoughts of some kind are busy in every conscious moment. We are not always acting or speaking, but while we are awake we are always thinking. It is possible indeed that thought is active even in sleep. It is easy then to see what a large part thought must play in the formation of character and, looking a step further, we may realize what a wonderful opportunity for development is offered, using the thought of to-day to give strength for to-morrow.

A man who says that he cannot help his feelings is like one who complains that he cannot move a heavy stone when all around him are levers and fulcrums waiting to be applied. Men are usually reasonable in their contact with material things. If they cannot realize their desires by immediate action, they look around for the right implement to help them and with wonderful patience and tenacity they will continue their labours until they secure the desired result. They are not often so anxious to develop worthy character and so do not make the

same kind of effort. There are just as many useful implements for the work, but there is not the same ardent desire. Many men are content to remain on the animal plane with feelings uninstructed and passions unrestrained, in other words, with hearts at the left hand. There are some, however, who can recognize the beauty of a better character and who can perceive how many levers are ready for their use. Let them ignore the dead past and labour to bring their hearts to the right hand, thus becoming wise. Often the way of self-discipline is the way of happiness even within the narrow limits of mortal life. It is certainly so in those human relationships which are popularly referred to as "affairs of the heart". When there is no restraint placed upon natural affection there is the most domestic misery. Where there is the most rigid observance of Christian principles there is the most happiness and the greatest freedom from the ills to which flesh is heir.

There are many other directions in which the heart needs instruction and guidance. It is possible to make a formidable list of human feelings each with its converse. Love, hatred; courage, cowardice; hope, despair; and so forth. It is possible to make a list of evil feelings which do not seem to have a definite converse although they are all negations of love: jealousy, envy, bitterness, malice. It is easy to see how the good, positive feelings may help and how the evil negatives may hinder, but while the proper treatment of all these is obviously included in the wise man's words, his "dark saying" goes far beyond this. It is possible for the good feelings to be a hindrance if they are not kept in their proper place. Still more remarkable, it is possible for an emotion

PRINCIPLES AND PROVERBS

which might be regarded as evil to become a help if it is kept on the right side. Have you never heard a speaker whose words have been winged and fired by a touch of righteous anger? Anger never getting the mastery and with no personal bias but coming in definitely on the right hand and imparting a force to the words such as nothing else could give. Even jealousy may be good if it is a jealousy for divine things; a "godly jealousy" as the apostle calls it.

Perhaps it is in connection with some minor matters that we may find the greatest opportunity for improvement and the most need for warning. So many of our feelings may either help or hinder and often a very little effort of self-control will make all the difference between left and right. What can be a better quality than sympathy? It is the handmaid of love and it supplies the key to the human heart. If we want to help people we must understand them and there can be no true understanding without sympathy. Yet there is great danger of this feeling swinging to the left. We may sympathize with the sinner so much that we follow him in sin. Or if we avoid this error, our feelings may nevertheless be so enlisted that we are weakened in the course of duty. It is hateful for a man to be cold and apathetic, but it is nearly as bad to go to the other extreme.

It is good for us to be moved by the sorrows of others and it is well for us to remember that human life is a tragedy, but we must keep our feelings in this matter well at the right hand to help us in our work. Unless we are careful they easily slip to the left and we become entangled among a lot of emotional loose ends which prevent good work and do good to no one. A speaker spoils the effect of his words if he

breaks down through excess of emotion or even if he makes his audience fear such a failure. Doctors and nurses would not perform their work well if they were lacking in human sympathy, but if they were moved too much by the sight of suffering they could not do their work at all.

Imagination is usually classified as part of the intellect, and this must be accepted as correct. It is, however, that part of the intellect which lies nearest to the subconscious and is most closely connected with the feelings. When neurotic disorders are cured by suggestion, it is through the imagination that the nerve centres are reached. When the reason is most moved by feeling it is usually through the imagination that the intellect is touched. So an ill-directed imagination may injure the body while an ill-controlled imagination may becloud the mind. Imagination well developed and controlled may be one of the greatest powers for good. Uncontrolled it becomes like a runaway engine, a danger to itself and to all things in its path. Nothing can be more ruinously effective in making the heart swing to the left.

It has been noted in religious revivals that emotionalism has often been carried to a harmful extreme. Reason has been swamped by it, and in some instances has failed to recover. Good results have only been temporary, while evil results have been permanent. Sometimes the ordinary restraints of religion, law and custom have been snapped by extreme emotion and with a tragic perversion an emotional storm which began with religious passion has ended as far away from true religion as anything could be. As a protest against such emotionalism

some have gone to the opposite extreme of cold reason, mistrusting even the effect of a hymn or anthem which quickens the pulse. In the one instance the heart has gone definitely to the left and in the other it has been stifled so as to be neither left nor right. A palpable mistake, surely. By all means let us engage our reason, especially when God says, "Come, let us reason together". But when we are satisfied that we are following truth, let us bring our emotions into line and have their support. Let us "sing praises with understanding" and let it also be with our "whole heart". When the Psalmist exclaims, "Praise the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me bless his holy name", it is only another way of saying, Let me bring my heart with all his powers to the right hand that it may help me to serve God.

One who has a good right hand man to help him is in a favourable position. Even without such a friend we may find good support if our emotions are right. Reason need never be clouded and judgment need never be warped, but if a pure heart is at the right hand the will and intellect may be supported by a force greater than either.

CHAPTER 17

“REBUKE A WISE MAN AND HE WILL LOVE THEE”

Have you ever met such a wise man? The saying obviously implies that a rebuke is needed and that it is given in the right spirit, but even so we find it difficult to think of men who will properly appreciate its value when they are the subject of it. Experience shows that all men hate to be censured and those who say that they do not object to hostile criticism are usually the most impatient of all. Few men can accept a reproof in the true spirit of Christian humility and even some who can be helped by criticism nevertheless feel resentment against the critic. If we desire to be wise we must clearly try to escape from this natural reaction, for it is as evil as many other natural things.

The apostle Peter suggests that even if we learn to accept reproof with meekness, there is no credit due to us if such reproof is deserved. It is only when we are meek in the affliction of unjust condemnation that we have accomplished anything of value. This seems rather a hard saying, but it is good to bear it in mind, for there is so much possibility of faulty self-judgment in this matter. Some men never seem conscious of being in the wrong. They will admit the abstract possibility of error, will perhaps with a display of abstract humility state that they have often been faulty, but it is never in the particular matter in which they are called in question. The fact of being accused seems to call up reserves of defensive argument that swamp all capacity for sane

self-judgment. The more they think of the criticism the greater the flood of self-justification and the blacker the appearance of the one who has dared to condemn.

If such men are quite incapable of perceiving the fault of the moment, it is good for them to remember the apostle Peter's words, and then they may try to be patient, although unconscious of error. A forced meekness in the face of attack may have the unfortunate effect of endowing them with a particularly harmful kind of subjective halo, but it will at least keep them cool, and while they are cool, reason may have a chance to enter. Presently the matter in question will slip into the past, and they are prepared to admit that they may have made a few mistakes in former days, so perchance this may rank among them. It is only the present tense that is always perfect.

One of the most remarkable examples in Scripture of a man being meek in the face of fierce criticism is that of David in exile. He accepted the curse of Shimei as something well deserved. He refused to retaliate or to allow his servants to strike a blow on his behalf. He neither forgot nor forgave, however. Of course no man, however wise, could be expected to love such a critic as this, for although in a sense it was true that God had sent Shimei to curse David he did not come either with the right message or the right motive. He was only one of many wicked men whose evil conduct brought the divinely decreed punishment upon the erring king, just as other wicked men have on a larger scale worked the divine purpose with nations. David recognized this

truth, and so was humble in the face of unjust accusation.

Kings have not often been meek in such circumstances. Usually they are so surrounded by flatterers that adverse criticism is very rarely heard, and when it does find a path to the throne it is represented as the treason of enemies. It must be extremely difficult for a king to understand his errors.

There is an opposite danger for prominent men who are exposed to the full fire of criticism. They are obliged to develop some protective mental armour or they would be overwhelmed. Even in the Brotherhood this is true, and one does not have to be very prominent to find it so. A naturally sensitive man would have his feelings so lacerated that his power for work would fail unless he was able in some measure to become indifferent to criticism. Here lies his peculiar danger, fully expressed by that word indifferent. He may ignore scores of ill-tempered and foolish letters without hating anyone or feeling any resentment against the misguided writers, and then with this growth of tolerance he may equally ignore the most faithful of reproofs or the wisest of constructive criticisms. Thus he neither hates the foolish detractors nor loves the wise reprover; he ignores them all.

When it is impossible to pay attention to everyone it is sometimes difficult to pick and choose. The first step toward overcoming any danger, however, is to be aware of it, and it should not be difficult in this matter to take the first step. Aware of the danger of being case-hardened against all kinds of reproof, we shall at least make an attempt to

discriminate between friend and foe, for even if there is only one wise man among a thousand we desire to pay heed to that solitary wise man. Equally do we desire to prove our own wisdom by loving him for his reproofs.

This ideal of being meek and even grateful in the presence of rebuke may be applied in a wider sense than we have yet considered. The principle surely holds good when there is no visible reprovcr but only the "rod of circumstance." As the apostle says, "no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness to them which are exercised thereby." One who is wise enough to love a faithful reprovcr will surely be exercised aright by apparently adverse circumstance. We have repeated assurance of divine control in the lives of faithful servants of God. The brief but intimate records of Scripture show us how often the apparent triumph of evil has been divinely regulated for the development of character in righteous men and women. The apostle tells us that "all things work together for good to them that love God and are called according to his purpose."

Circumstance often gives us some hard blows; how are we exercised by such chastening? There may be no visible reprovcr to love or hate, but there is ample scope for our reactions either way. Sometimes men are embittered by adverse experience. Their ambitions have been thwarted, their hopes disappointed, their feelings lacerated, and they become resentful and morose. If they claim to be servants of God they will of course not admit that they are guilty of the folly of reproaching Him, but

that is really what it amounts to. How else can such an attitude be interpreted if it is recognized that the divine hand plays a part in their lives? It is bad to become apathetic or to develop a pagan brand of stoicism, but it is even worse to become querulous and complaining. We must learn to be sad without being bitter, to be tired without being despondent, and to be humble without being weak.

It is not good to make a parade of a presumptuous confidence that God is regulating everything in our lives, but it is good in the hidden recesses of our own minds to recognize the fact that as there is nothing too great for God to accomplish so there is nothing too small for Him to see. Even the trifling vexations of life may play a part in forming us. If God takes note of us at all there can be nothing in our experiences so small as to be insignificant. Our finite distinctions between great and small would seem lost in the presence of the infinite.

Even from the point of view of a human being it is obvious that our conceptions of great and small may be completely mistaken. Viewed in retrospect the events of life change their meaning. Some incidents which hardly excited any attention at the time of their occurrence, are seen to have had a far greater effect than some of the apparently important issues which once exercised us so much. This idea was suggested by Kipling when he wrote

“If you can meet with triumph or disaster,
And treat those two imposters just the same.”

Until the final judgment is passed we do not know which are the triumphs and which the disasters of life or whether indeed either of the words

PRINCIPLES AND PROVERBS

is appropriate for any of our experiences. There has been no disaster in our lives if the Lord approves at the end, while as for triumph, that surely is his rather than ours. The words of the poet are not adequate, however well they sound. Yet we may draw a lesson from them. If a semi-pagan ideal of manhood should cut out all complaints and vain regrets, how much more should a living faith in God teach us to struggle on with cheerful confidence, always remembering that the sternest of critics or the hardest of circumstances may best evoke our gratitude?

A test for our wisdom is to be able to accept reproof whether it comes from a candid friend or from the circumstances of life. A still higher test is in being able to love the friend for his candour, and for the tribulation of adverse circumstance to increase our love for God.

CHAPTER 18

“WHOSO DESPISETH THE WORD SHALL BE DESTROYED”

Through faith we understand that the world was formed by the Word of God, for He spake and it was done. Through faith also we know that the Word was made flesh and dwelt among men when Jesus came as an exact expression of the will of God. The Word of the Lord came through prophets of old and through them to all Israel. Again the Word of the Lord came through the apostles, for Jesus said, “He that heareth you heareth me and he that heareth me heareth him that sent me.” The matter is put negatively too; he that despiseth the apostles despises both Christ and the Father who spoke through him. This agrees with the rather terrible words quoted from the book of Proverbs, “Whoso despiseth the Word shall be destroyed.”

We may perhaps find a lesson even from purely human relationships. A wise parent makes much allowance for childish weakness, forgetfulness and folly, but always insists on obedience. The parental instruction may be forgotten or absurdly misconstrued but it must never be despised. Parents are very foolish if they differentiate between the disobedience which leads to disaster and the equally deliberate disobedience which apparently does no harm. There are many who fall into this error. If the child's defiance brings no apparent evil consequence it is allowed to pass. If it results in some destruction of property or other loss to the family exchequer, a completely improper and carnal anger

brings forth the rod. Such punishment cannot be called correction. It is only a vent for ill temper, an expression of petulance rather than of principle. If there has been a deliberate defiance of parental ruling, punishment should be swift and certain, whatever the consequences of disobedience have been. Children soon learn to obey a justly applied strength, although not as soon as they learn to take advantage of unjust weakness.

This insistence on obedience, with swift retribution for offence, coupled with mercy for weakness or forgetfulness, is found in all parts of scripture. It offers the explanation for differences of treatment which have puzzled some superficial readers. The king who was an adulterer and almost a murderer was punished but forgiven. The man in the wilderness who gathered sticks on the Sabbath day was stoned to death. From the human point of view it might seem that the one guilty of grave sin was forgiven while the other had to pay the supreme penalty for a very little error. If we look deeper, however, the matter appears in a very different light. God forgave the man who yielded to the weakness of the flesh. David lived on to suffer and be taught of God. The man who despised the law died without mercy, for he was not willing to learn and not worth teaching. It was no momentary weakness of the flesh which led him astray, but rather a strong and stubborn defiance of a law which had just been given. He despised the Word of God and he was destroyed. David never despised the Word, but he fell into error which made him despise himself, a very different matter. His sin was "ever before him", and the weakness of human nature was

fully acknowledged. Concerning the Word he wrote, "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring for ever; the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold, sweeter than honey or the honey comb. Moreover, by them is thy servant warned, and in keeping of them there is great reward."

There are truly varying degrees even in mortal sin and there are different ways of perishing. Some despisers live out their mortal days and pass away without ever understanding either their error or its consequences and without ever gaining enough knowledge to make them responsible. They will never know the value of that which they have rejected. Others will see the exaltation of that which they have despised and will have a brief moment for chagrin if not for remorse.

It is obviously a worse sin to despise the Word of God when it comes with unmistakable evidence of divine power than to neglect or despise it in a time of Gentile darkness and divine silence. The destroyer of flesh is active all the time, however, and only the Word of God can save us. So when men die it is only the natural end, "the way of all flesh". If a drowning man despises the life-belt which is thrown to him, he perishes, whatever his reasons for refusing. We are all like drowning men, God alone can save us, and so in every instance those who despise His Word will be destroyed whether as rebels

against the light who will be condemned in the day of judgment, or as animals who recognize nothing but the powers of Nature and who by the powers of Nature will be brought to nothing.

It has often been suggested that the worst despisers of our day are some who pose as leaders of Christian thought. The most violent tirades of downright enemies are less offensive than the insidious attacks of those who pretend to be friends. We noticed the other day in a famous historical work the astonishing statement that according to the Scriptures Yahweh had given gods to the heathen nations of the world. It was part of an argument to the effect that the Bible taught the existence of gods many and lords many. The passage cited was Deut. 4: 19.

Could perversity go further than to quote such a passage with such an object? The whole context reveals a meaning exactly the reverse of the idea put forward by the historian. The Israelites were reminded that the gifts of heaven were not entirely for them. God had made sun and moon for the benefit of all nations, but these natural objects were not on any account to be worshipped.

We are accustomed to the perversity of critics when they deal with matters of prophecy. The critics of Daniel, having it firmly in mind that the book was a forgery written after the events it professed to foretell, have made repeated efforts to fit the prophecy into their false scheme, and have swung from one absurd interpretation to another and back again to discarded folly rather than admit the obvious fact that the fourth great empire was that of Rome. In their efforts to prove the book false

they have surely come as near to blasphemy against the Holy Spirit as is possible in these days.

The Word of God has often been despised by men whose general character has commanded the admiration of their fellows. Abner, the captain of Saul's army, was a prince among men. He was brave, chivalrous and so completely above mean and underhand methods that he had no suspicion of such meanness in others. He was of the type that men admire but he paid little heed to the Word of God. Evidently he knew that God had chosen David to be king but his own tardy decision to act in conformity with the divine plan was provoked by anger at a false accusation. He was perfectly open even then, in effect challenging Saul's feeble son to stop the movement if he could. Moved by anger at Ishbosheth's ingratitude, Abner openly affirmed his intention to "do as the Lord had sworn to David."

We cannot withhold a feeling of admiration for this "prince and mighty man in Israel", but we remember that the name of Abner is not mentioned in any list of worthies whose example we should follow. He might have been equally brave in his contact with men and yet have "trembled at God's word". As it was he despised the Word and so he died "as a fool dieth".

There are many men in our days who treat the Word with contempt because they never even begin to see its message. Without being presumptuous, we may say that if some learned men knew a tenth part as much about our position as we understand of theirs, their occasional references to the Scriptures would become much more respectful. They might not be convinced of its truth, for "all men have not

PRINCIPLES AND PROVERBS

faith", but they would begin to understand some of the reasons which induce faith in others. They might still be "despisers" and still doomed to "perish", but there would be an element of "wonder" which might save them from the folly of being scornful.

The description in Isaiah 28 of the Word of God coming line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little, is exactly accurate even in the relatively complete form in which we have the message now. Those who are weaned from the milk, in other words those who are well instructed in the Gospel of the rest and refreshing God has prepared for His people, can gain instruction from the fragments and grow by the use of them. Scornful men who "will not hear" of these things find the fragments a cause of stumbling. They despise the Word and they will be destroyed.

This may sound harsh, but it only seems so to those whose entire outlook is presumptuously wrong. If we thought of all men as heirs of eternal life by the accident of birth, it would certainly seem hard for them to be deprived of their inheritance for anything but a serious offence. When we realize that man is of animal nature, mortal as the humble creatures over which he rules and sinful in a way which is impossible for them, we are more inclined to marvel at the thought that any human being can ever be made divine.

The apostle tells us that the body of sin will be destroyed. This is an absolute rule, and will apply in every instance. If there is nothing more than a body of sin, the end of mortal flesh is the end of the individual. If there is something more, it is the

WHOSO DESPISETH THE WORD

Word of God that has produced it, and the same Word may renew and develop it until there is a "new man", worth saving and fit for life.

Apart from this divine offer of mercy through the Word we know of no hope of enduring life. Wherefore whosoever despiseth the Word, whether with scornful repudiation or with careless neglect, will go the way of all flesh. The body of sin will be destroyed.

CHAPTER 19

WISDOM FOR EVERYDAY LIFE

It seems impossible to leave the Proverbs without writing a few words on some of the minor comments regarding ordinary human life. There are many wise and penetrating sayings which may not have any direct bearing on our duty to God but which are helpful in human relationships. As life on the human plane is inevitably the first stage of our journey, anything which can help us to live wisely may prove of eternal value. Unwise action even if it is not sinful may load us down with heavy and unnecessary weights.

Many generous and impulsive men have suffered severely and have loaded themselves with trouble through being surety for a friend. Some who have thus suffered have read the comments in the book of Proverbs when it was too late and have exclaimed at their folly in neglecting such wise instruction when it was all the while ready to their hand. The writings of Solomon in this matter seem astonishingly up to date. If a man is surety for a stranger he will smart for it. If he is surety for a friend he is ensnared by his words, and the best thing for him then is to go to his friend and make him as sure as he can. In so many instances the borrower of securities is a careless, cheerful muddler who, having secured a loan that will help him for the moment, gets on with the pleasant work of spending it without a thought for the day of reckoning or for the kind friend who has pledged his word. Sometimes an earnest appeal may stir him up to a sense

of responsibility and a little straight talk may be better for him than the money.

When a borrower wants his friend to stand surety for him he always makes it clear that no payment will ever be demanded. It is only a matter of form to put an honoured name to paper and thus render a great service, without ever having to pay anything! On the other hand, there are cynical men of business who would say that if you sign you will almost surely have to pay and the more the borrower protests the more certain his failure. This seems to have been the experience of men three thousand years ago. We need not draw a lesson tending to meanness. It is good to give or lend as we are able, but we may say very emphatically that if a man is not in a position to give or lend to his friend he certainly is not in a position to be surety for him.

It is interesting to note the expression "strike hands" in this connection. It suggests that without any signature, the offering and acceptance of the hand would constitute a bond which no one would repudiate. We may sometimes see in English cattle markets a custom which is probably a survival of that to which the wise man refers. Two men will be haggling over the price of a beast. Finally the vendor, having made a concession, declares that he will take nothing less. He holds out his right hand, stating the price, and perhaps with quite a dramatic indication of finality. The buyer, with no show of enthusiasm, and without saying a word, strikes the outstretched hand with his own palm and the sale is effected. Surely a survival from three thousand years or more.

Having mentioned such a buyer we may observe his methods and then follow him home. He has not said much during the negotiations and all that he has said has been to depreciate the value of the thing offered. It is a poor beast and he is not at all anxious to buy. When the sale is effected, however, and he goes home with his purchase, it is quite probable that his tone will change completely. It was the best animal in the market and he only gave such a figure for it ! Just as Solomon observed three thousand years ago. "It is nought, it is nought, saith the buyer, but when he has gone his way then he boasteth."

"Much food is in the tillage of the poor, but there is that is destroyed for lack of knowledge." Here is another saying which seems to have no direct bearing upon our duty toward God but which is a very penetrating comment on human life. How often we notice the most deplorable waste and extravagance among people who are apparently poverty stricken. They perform a double wrong in that they injure themselves and their more reasonable fellows, for nothing more readily dries up the springs of benevolence than the discovery that people whose apparent poverty has excited our compassion are indulging in extravagances such as we could not afford for ourselves. There is a natural but unreasonable tendency to group all the indigent together and to suppose that they are all alike in thriftlessness. This is a cruel and mistaken judgment, for there is no more uniformity of conduct among the poor than among the rich. Some are poor because they are greedy and idle, never learning a better way in spite of many lessons. Others are poor because

circumstances have been unkind to them, never giving them a chance in life. They fail not for lack of industry or even lack of ability but through absence of opportunity in this cruel world of selfish competition. They may become weak because they are out of work and then be denied work because they are weak. Only those who have had a taste of such hardship (possibly quite unknown to their friends) can properly understand and sympathize.

This, however, is not the side of the picture to emphasize, for there is nothing more weakening to the moral fibre than self-pity. There are many men, now of mature age, who are glad that in their young days there was no out-of-work pay, and not much in-work pay either. When circumstances kicked them out of home and town and necessity ruled, without any right of appeal, that they must go to strange parts and to work they hated, it seemed hard and evil, but as there was no escape they made the best of it. In retrospect the hard experience is seen to have been the best of training. If such men sometimes seem rather severe in their treatment of modern unfortunates it is not necessarily because they lack sympathy. It may be because they see farther, sympathize more deeply and seek to give the kind of help that will strengthen.

The words of the wise man go farther than appears on the surface. Lack of knowledge which often results in destruction, still more persistently prevents production, or spends so foolishly as to cause unnecessary want. We can remember a strong minded woman who kept a little shop in a very poor neighbourhood and ruled her customers like a queen. "You don't want that", she would say,

PRINCIPLES AND PROVERBS

almost indignantly, when a customer tried to make an unwise purchase. "This is what you should have." As she gave a measure of credit, she was able to dictate and her customers benefited. Apart from her advice their lack of knowledge would have squandered resources in things unnecessary.

The moral to be drawn is clear enough. It has to do with the matter of wise choice on both sides. A divine law was given in early days. It was breached by Solomon. It was re-stated and emphasized by the apostles, and we recognize it now. The claims of some moderns that human feeling cannot possibly be ruled by divine law is wicked nonsense. We have to subdue feeling in obedience to human law or even to human convention. If we are sincere in our faith, divine law is much stronger. If it is applied immediately, our wayward fancies will never be strong enough to make a serious conflict. The Scriptures can guide us in this as in everything else. There ought never to be an unhappy marriage in the brotherhood. A scripturally guided choice and scripturally guided conduct will bring all the blessing that is possible in mortal life. The sorrows that come will be in spite of our love and never because of it.

"He that tilleth his land shall have plenty of bread, but he that followeth vain persons shall have poverty enough." This thought applies not only to the tilling of the land but to all humble callings which will give bread. From such humble security men are lured in every year that passes, and many of them follow vain persons to poverty and sorrow. Closely following this passage—in the next verse—we have the warning against making haste to be rich.

The exhortation is needed now as much as ever. Often those who are most bitter in their criticisms of the rich are those who have tried hastily and unsuccessfully to follow in their wake. The Government has had to warn people against "share pushers". All such swindlers use a golden bait, and it is surprising how many people who ought to know better have succumbed to their blandishments. There are still plenty of fraudulent enterprises even on the right side of the law, and men ready to take the money of those who "make haste to be rich".

Some readers may feel that such matters as these are hardly worthy of mention as having no bearing on the great issues of life and death. This is a superficial judgment. Such matters are mentioned in Scripture and particular attention is drawn to them as warnings to those of later days. The very ordinary incidents of every-day life may play a terribly vital part in our training. If the Israelites were condemned for murmuring when they lacked bread in the wilderness, how shall we escape if we complain merely because we are unable to live according to the standards of Gentile luxury? Often a lack of knowledge leads to lack of faith.

There are many passages which give good advice for domestic life. Man is counselled to live joyfully with the wife of his youth and never to be beguiled by the flattery of a stranger. Solomon's wisdom came from God and was commended by the Lord Jesus Christ. His deeds revealed the weak surrender of a mortal man who was unable to sustain his part faithfully in the great position to which he was called. His pitiable failure was a negative illustration of the truth of his words, for assuredly he

PRINCIPLES AND PROVERBS

was not a happy man. On the other hand, thousands who have followed his advice have found—

“Domestic happiness, thou only bliss
Of Paradise that has survived the fall.”

Thousands more have discovered that if they break away from divine law, even in thought, the straying fancy will take toll of their happy days, while if they stray still further they may make hopeless shipwreck of life. We are all human, all weak. How good it is to pay heed to the words of wisdom and “live joyfully”.

We have only been “placer mining” among the gold reefs of the Proverbs, but for the moment we must leave them. All Scripture has been handed down to us from our ancestors and so all may be included in an exhortation “which speaketh to us as unto children”.

“My son, keep thy father’s commandment, and forsake not the law of thy mother: bind them continually upon thy heart, and tie them about thy neck. When thou goest, it shall lead thee; when thou sleepest, it shall keep thee; and when thou awakest, it shall talk with thee. For the commandment is a lamp; and the law is light; and reproofs of instruction are the way of life” (Prov. 6 : 20-23).