



SUNDAY READING

BIBLE QUESTION COMPETITION.

This competition is open to all the readers of *PROGRESS*, but is more especially intended to interest the young people—the boys and girls who are, or should be attending Sunday school. The following rules should be strictly observed:

RULES FOR COMPETITORS.

1. A prize of one dollar will be awarded every week for the first correct answer that reaches *PROGRESS* office. If there is no correct answer the person who sends the first best answer will receive the dollar. In case two correct answers reach the office at the same time the dating stamps of the post offices at which they are mailed will be taken into consideration.
2. Competitors must write on one side of the paper only, giving name and address in full with each answer. These need not be published except in the case of prize-winners and successful competitors.
3. The winner of a prize will not be eligible to compete for another for four weeks.
4. All replies must be received on or before Saturday one week after publication of the questions, thus allowing competitors a clear week for their work.
5. No post-cards can be received. All replies should be addressed to the "SUNDAY READING," EDITOR *PROGRESS*, St. John, N. B.

I have much pleasure in saying that Master John M. Flewelling's perseverance has been rewarded with success, and name him as the successful competitor for Prize Bible Questions No. 7.

There were twenty correct answers received. First, I must mention Miss Katie Newham, of St. Stephen, whose answers were so clearly and thoughtfully given that they must always stand first in point of merit, but according to *PROGRESS* "Rules for Competitors," No. 3, she is not eligible for a few weeks yet.

The names of correct answers received are as follows: Master John M. Flewelling, Centerville; Miss Katie Newham, St. Stephen; Master Arthur J. Nesbitt, city; Master R. W. Knapp, city; Miss Norah Dunn, city; Miss Gertrude Davidson, city; Miss M. A. Stewart, Hampton; Miss Janie A. Ramsay, Newcastle; Master John T. Steeves, Hillsboro; Miss Bessie J. Jones, Moncton; Master Douglas G. Guest, Yarmouth; Master Archie B. Fraser, Chatham; Miss Melissa A. Thorn, city; Miss Bessie G. Curran, Buctouche; Miss Florence Boyce, Fredericton; Miss M. A. H., St. Stephen, and Miss Violet Kinnear, city.

NEANI.

Answers to Prize Bible Questions No. 7.

1. What is the heritage of God's children given by one of the prophets?
Ans.—No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord. Isaiah liii, 17.
2. Which fast is most acceptable to God?
Ans.—Losing the band of wickedness, undoing the heavy burdens, letting the oppressed go free, breaking every yoke, dealing bread to the hungry, bringing the poor that are cast out to our houses, covering the naked when seen, hiding not from our own flesh, is the fast most acceptable to God. Isaiah lviii, 6 and 7 verses.
3. Name a fellow laborer with Paul, who deserted him for the love of the world?
Ans.—Demas spoken of in Philimon 24th verse as a fellow laborer of St. Paul, forsook him for the love of this present world. 2nd Timothy iv, 10.
4. Give the name and trade of one who was the subject of the following expression: "The Lord reward him according to his works."
Ans.—Alexander. He was a coppersmith by trade. 2nd Timothy iv, 14.

PRIZE BIBLE QUESTIONS.—No. 9.

1. What things are related to show the severity of the famine during the siege of Samaria? And where foretold?
2. State what you know about Ezion-gaber?
3. Give the name of a Corinthian chamberlain?
4. Of whom may it be said, he was sorry he saw so long, rather than he was blind so soon?

SERMON.

"So Did Not I"—A Word For the Young.
Preached by Alexander McLure, from Nehemiah v. 15. "So did not I, because of the fear of the Lord."

There are few nobler characters, even among the many noble ones of the old testament, than Nehemiah, the restored leader of the exiles. He was no prophet—he was no priest—he made no pretensions to possessing divine commission, but he was a devout, resolute, sagacious man, with the fear of God in his soul, and Jerusalem graven on his heart. Prompt and practical, and with a strong dash of organizing, governmental instinct, there was yet a vein of poetry in him. He was bold and cautious, prudent, yet daring, full of ready resources, able to hold his tongue and bide his time, and deep below all this, there was a great fountain of enthusiasm which was called forth by the thoughts of God and of his land lying in desolation and ruin.

These touching words from his autobiography which I have read to you, have immediate reference to a very small matter, but yet they let us into the secret of a great part of his character. His predecessors, the representatives of a foreign dominion, had been in the habit of making a gain of their office, or at least charging the maintenance of the cost of their

court and household to the people already impoverished and ground down by exactions. Against this practice he makes a stand. It was a little thing, but Nehemiah brought a great principle to bear upon it; and though says he, it was a legitimate source of gain, and a recognized custom, though all my predecessors had done it, and though there was nothing but a sentiment to stand in the way of my receiving it, yet I could not do it because I feared God.

And thus we get from the simple words such great thoughts as these. How the loftiest motive may regulate the smallest duties. How religious principle, as we call it in our abstract way, "The fear of God," as Nehemiah called it, how that may interpenetrate and run through all life and find a field for its noblest exercise in the midst of commonplace and secular duties. How, wheresoever that principle is strong and vigorous, a man will have to make up his mind to sturdy non-compliance, to dare to be singular, to be unlike the maxims and examples of the people round about him, and however many, every good man will have to make up his mind to give up a great many sources of gain and profit and pleasure and advantage for no more tangible reason, than because a more sensitive conscience makes that which other men can do without winking, if I may so say, a crime intolerable to him.

It is possible, young men and women, to "make the most of both worlds;" but all true religion will keep a man back from a great many things which "the world" thinks "the best" that it has. "So did not I, because of the fear of the Lord." I think, then, I may venture to take these words, dismissing altogether now any further reference to their mediate occasion, as the basis of some very simple and matter of course, but, I hope, earnest and sincere appeals and exhortations to my younger friends who have come here to-night to listen to me.

1. First, let me put the main principle that lies here in these words. Nothing will go right unless you dare to be singular. "So did not I."

However common the practice, however innocent and recognized the source of gain, the multitude that approved it, and adopted it, was nothing to me. I had to stand on my own feet, and look through my own eyes, and be guided by my own conscience, and make my own choice, because I had to answer for it at the last. Everything will be wrong where a man has not learnt—and the sooner you begin to learn it the better for your lives here and yonder—the great art of saying "No."

I suppose I need not remind you that in all regions of life, and in many into which I have not the slightest intention of going tonight, that habit, in various forms, lies at the bottom of all that is worthy and noble and great and good, and its opposite leads to all that is ignoble, weak and erroneous. In the field of opinion, the lazy acquiescence with which men hand their ready-made cut and dried theories and thoughts from one to another, and never "look the gift-horse in the mouth," but swallow the thing whole, for no better reason than that contained in the cowardly old proverb "What everybody says must be true," is the fruitful source of error, hypocrisy, weakness and misery. Youth is the time to form opinions, or rather to learn truth. It is meant that you should now, with the honest use of all the power you can command, canvass and decide upon the babel of varying beliefs around you. That spirit of inquiry which is so often condemned in you may, indeed, degenerate into self-conceited rejection of things ordinarily believed, or into mere love of singularity, or in contented doubt of all high truth—but if it be absent in youth there will be no real certitude in age. No man has any belief but what he wins for himself as the captive of his own spear and his own bow. If we are building on traditional opinion, we have really no foundation at all. Unless the word received from others has been verified by ourselves and changed, as it were, into a part of our own being, we may be fool ourselves with creeds and professions to which we fancy that we adhere, but we have no belief whatsoever. You must learn to look with your own eyes, and not through the spectacles of any human guides, authorities or teachers upon the mystic, awful verities of this strange life, and upon the light that falls on them from the far-off Empyrean above.

But these are not the thoughts to which I especially wish to direct you. The chief field for the exercise of this resolute non-compliance with common practice is the region of moral action, in the daily conduct of your lives. There it is most needful that you should take this for your motto, "So did not I, because of the fear of God."

Beginning life as you are, you have already found out no doubt, how many people there are round about you, who are beacons rather than examples, and how many beckoning hands and enticing voices seek to draw you away. You have no doubt felt, and perhaps, some of you have gone far enough away to smile at yourselves when you remember—the shock of surprise and pain when first, issuing, it may have been, from the sheltered nest of your father's house and the companionship of a mother's purity, you plunged into this rough world and found yourselves in actual contact with people such as you had only heard of before—with profligates and scoundrels, and when you heard with your own ears lightly spoken words of unbelief and wickedness, loose talk and unclean jesting. The shock cannot last long. What comes after it? Has it been compliance or resistance?

Let me remind you how surely he who yields is wrecked and ruined. The absolute necessity for this sturdy resistance is plain from the very make of our own natures. There is a host of inclinations and desires in every man, which will hurry him to destruction unless he has a strong hand on the brake. "God gave them to thee under lock and key," and it is at our peril that we let them have sway. "I do it because I choose" is the fool's reason, and it is as fatal as foolish.

The same necessity is enforced if you think of the order of things in which we dwell. We are set in the midst of a world full of things which are both attractive and bad, and which, therefore, alluring though they may be to some part of our nature, are sternly prohibited by wisdom and lovingly forbidden by God. And if you go careering among the flowers and fruits that grow around you in the life that is opening before you, like town children, turned loose for a day in the woods, picking whatever is bright, and tasting whatever looks as if it would be sweet, you will poison yourselves with nightshade and hemlock.

But chiefly the need of saying "no" is enforced by the fact that every one of us is thrown more or less closely into contact with people who, themselves, are living as they should not, and who would fain drag us after them.

Young men, you know how much of that devil's work is done in pretty nearly every count-house and warehouse in Manchester, every day of the week; you know how many there are that curl up their lips at you if you shyly venture to speak the maxims that your father's teaching and mother's entreaties may have written on your hearts.

You know how many there are that say to you sometimes by articulate words, and still more frequently by example, "Come with us. Cast in your lot with us. Won't you go with us tonight to the theatre? Won't you go with us tomorrow to some other haunt of dissipation? What's the use of being straight-laced? Let's have our fling. Time enough to be better when we get old. No harm in sowing our wild oats now. All those old women's notions you have brought from home with you get rid of them." Most of you will understand what I mean when I say that if a young man comes into this city and takes his place at desk or counter, or on the benches of Owens college, and there forgets resistance, sturdy non-compliance, and heroic daring to be singular when evil tempts him, he is ruined body and soul.

That is not exaggeration, as anybody who watches for a few years has sorrowful reason to know. I have no doubt but that you could name instances of young men in your places of business—I could name many whom I have seen, some of them once occupants of these pews. I have seen them from the day that they entered their situations, fresh and buoyant, "Innocent of much transgression, and simple concerning evil." And I have watched them grow hard and reserved, gradually withdraw themselves from good and christian influences, exchange their simplicity for knowledge which was bitter, sometimes become pale and haggard and old before their time, and then they have disappeared. "Where is he gone?" "Oh, he got into a bad set, he has lost his situation, and is gone abroad." And sometimes the answer is, "Did you not know? he went home ill, and he is dead." Like some pleasure boat that runs out of harbor with a careless crew, flags flying and laughter sounding, and before she has well cleared the port is smashed to pieces on the sunny waters as they break over it in dancing foam. The lesson that is read you by these sad careers cut so short is surely that one "Resist." "My son, if sinners entice thee consent thou not."

Do not let yourselves be laughed out of your reverence for this book, and the God it tells you of. Do not let yourselves be coaxed or ridiculed into touching forbidden pleasures: Do not let yourselves be talked or frightened or swayed by the mere mass of evil example out of your true path, as the remoter planets may be perturbed by their orbits by that huge body which moves where the light is feeblest on the outer verge of the system. Stand fast on your own ground. If need be, take the grand old words for yours, which may be as nobly illustrated in the privacy of our narrow lives as they were in the Diet of Worms. "Here I stand, I can do naught else. God help me. Amen."

And if all around be unfriendly and it be hard to resist alone, remember "I am not alone, for the Father is with me."

And there are others of my congregation this evening less advanced in life to whom I would say the same thing. I see boys and girls here, home from school, perhaps, on whose hearts I would fain leave the same impression. You, children, know how in your little world—little as it seems to us, big as it seems to you—it is often very difficult not to follow companions and schoolfellows when they were doing wrong. I believe that it is harder for you than for us older people, to bear being laughed at, and not to do what everybody else is doing. It is harder for you than for us to look past what is round about you. But you know quite well that there are things done and said at school and in the playground that you would not like your father or mother to hear. Your father in Heaven hears them though, and that is worse. Do not you be ashamed to say "no" when you are asked to make one in such things. When any one says to you "come!" "there's no harm in it," you may, generally be sure that there is harm. You, too, have to fight a good fight, and to begin early to refuse to follow a multitude to do evil. You cannot begin too soon.

For us all, in every period of life, the necessity is the same. We must learn to say "no." We must dare, it need be, to be singular. Like the young Joseph, when you are tempted astray by seducing voices let your answer be "How can I do this great wickedness and sin 'against God.'" Like the young Daniel, when forbidden pleasures and questionable delights are urged upon your appetites, be "purposed in your heart that you will not defile" yourselves with them, and choose pulse and water with the relish of a good conscience rather than such dainties. Like the same Daniel, when the crowd are flocking at the sound of the sackbut and psaltery to worship some golden image, keep your knees unbent amidst the madness, learn to stand erect though you alone are upright

in the midst of a grovelling multitude, and protest "We will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou 'hast set up.'" Like Nehemiah, dare to lose money rather than adopt sources of profit which others may use without a thought, but which your conscience shrinks from,—and to all the various enticements of pleasure, and gain, and ease, and popular loose maxims for the conduct, oppose inviolable resistance founded on a higher law and a mightier motive—"So did not I, because of the fear of the Lord."

But still further, remember that not only does easy yielding to these enticements bring all sorts of moral confusion and failure into a man's life, but that such compliance is in itself weak and unworthy.

The appeal which I have been making to conscience may fall comparatively powerless on some of you. Perhaps one of another sort may have force. Surely, then, I may urge this consideration—that a shame it is that a man possessed of that awful power, which within limits and subject to conditions, God has given him, of shaping and determining his character, should let himself be shaped and determined by the mere pressure of circumstances and accidental associations. What a shame it is that a man should have no more volition in what he does and in what he refrains from than one of those gelatinous creatures that float about in the ocean, which have to move wherever the current takes them, though it be to cast them upon the rocky shore with an ebbing tide. Surely you are fit for something better than that? Surely it was not meant that you and I should passively receive and yield to any outward impulses? Modern theorists seem to think so. "Circumstances make character." The theory has its vindication, alas, in the actual lives of the great bulk of men; but that that should be so is only another proof of the weakness and depravity of humanity in which the will is paralysed and the conscience choice is so seldom exercised, and a man lets the world do what it likes with him. How many of us are conscious of yielding ourselves up to the influences round about us, with no better reasons than because they are there. You take on the color of what you feed on. Is that what God gave you a will for? You yield to the maxims that are common. Is it for that that God put a pair of eyes into your head, and a brain into your skull? You take the course of life that is forced upon you. Is that what you have got a conscience for, that you should be like those creatures in the lowest region of organized life whom the microscopist makes visible by feeding with some colored material which absorbs and tinges their whole filmy unsubstantial organization? And so you get the color of what you live upon. The world is your mistress and makes what it likes of you. "With her much field her speech she caught him to yield. He goeth after her straightway as an ox goeth to the slaughter, or as a fool to the correction of the stocks, till a dart strike through his liver—as a bird hasteneth to the snare and knoweth not that it is for his life." Surely there is nothing walks the earth more contemptible, as well as more certainly evil, than a man that lets himself be made by whatever force may happen to be strongest near him, and fastening up his helmet and unshipping his oars is content to be blown about by every vagrant wind, and rolled in the trough of each curling wave.

Let us say, finally, on this part of my subject, that another very solemn consideration may be suggested, enforcing the need of this vigorous non-compliance with the temptations around us, from the remembrance of what a poor excuse from wrong doing they will be found to be at last. "The inducements are there and I yielded to them." It is the old story. "The woman tempted me and I did eat." Yes, and the woman has to bear part of the blame. But how about "I did eat." Was there anything in the temptation to compel that? Was there any such mingling up of the two wills as that because she was wrong you must needs be so too? Was there any individuality in that fashion? Is there any such transference of responsibility as that a man can truly say, "O, it was not my fault, I was tempted?" Yes, you were tempted. Of course we were all that. "It was not my fault." Whose was it? Did that profligate fellow-clerk at the next desk make you go into that public house? Did that other one make you stain your purity? Did these associates compel you, young man or woman, to run with them into the paths of evil? Did that classmate, schoolboy or girl, force you to do wrong? "Everyone shall give an account of himself to God," and as for the companions and tempters, "They shall flee everyone of them to his quarter." (As the prophet has it about the evil allies of the evil city, when it came to its ruin) "and none shall save thee." Every man shall bear his own burden. Alone we shall stand before God: Let us have the courage to be alone here, and, when necessary, say "So do not I, because of the fear of God."

II. And now there is another consideration to which I ask your attention. If such thoughts as those I have been submitting to you, imperfect as they are upon such a great subject, may yet be taken as something like sufficient vindication of the principle that for all worthy, noble life, sturdy non-compliance and resistance is an absolute necessity, then there comes a second consideration.

You cannot resist the evil around you unless you give yourselves to God. "So do not I, because of the fear of God." I need not dwell upon the explanation of that phrase. I suppose none of us will misunderstand what is meant by it. No slavish dread, no mere far-off reverence, but a living regard for Him, which is at once fear and love, which sways and fills, and purifies the soul. We put it, as I said, into more abstract form, but gain nothing thereby when we say this resistance must be based upon "religious principles." We put it into a more distinctly new testament

form (not in the slightest degree varying the essential force and meaning) when we say this resistance must be based upon, and flow from, faith and love directed to Jesus Christ, who is the express image of the divine person and the communicator to us of the divine Christ, trusted in, loved, revered, obeyed, imitated—God in Christ alone strengthens a man for this resistance and non-compliance.

I need not spend your time in pointing out to you what we know well enough already, how, "by strength shall no man prevail." How in our own power we cannot successfully nor completely resist influences that pour in upon us. We never have been, and so we may safely conclude that we never shall be able to do so in our own power. You have tried it, how have you got on? Each man's experience in this matter is a transcript of every other's, as face answereth to face in a glass. And each man's experience is the same dreary record of partial success in checking some single specific manifestation of evil, and of entire failure in dealing with the deep source from which these come. The first lesson taught by all honest attempts to put in practice that commonplace of all morality of which I have been insisting—is the need of a firm anchorage without us, if we are not to drift on a lee shore. We must be made fast to something that is fast, if we are not to be swept like thisledown before the wind. It is easy to say resist but the command is bitter irony, unless we go on to say with the new testament, "Whom resist steadfast in the faith." No man, my dear brother, can stand in the slippery places where we have to go, unless he have the grasp of a higher and stronger hand to keep him up. No man will ever for a life time resist and repel the domination of evil unless he is girded about with the purity of Jesus Christ as an atmosphere in which all poisonous things fade and die, and through which no temptation can force its way. The only means of this steadfast resistance is a steadfast faith in Jesus as our Saviour. He has assured us that He will give us the victory. "Yea, he shall be holden up, for God is able to make him stand." In the strength of this promise I have the right to come to the footstool here and say, "However you may be encompassed by evil, however you may be drawn aside by evil examples, and by harmful associations, however difficult it may be for you to keep your footing in the midst of the rush and swirl of that great tide of sin, here is a hand that you may grasp, and grasping will be strong." And that, for three reasons, each of which is mighty, and all of which, taken together, are omnipotent.

In Christ we have an all sufficient pattern. I have been saying it at our peril that we imitate men. There is a man whom it is safe and blessed and noble and peace and love and perfectness to imitate—the man, Christ Jesus. There is a man to whom all the instincts which lead us to follow the example of men around us, and which so often lead us astray, may be directed without fear, yea, rather with the happiest results. There is no need why we should seek in any other a pattern when we can read "Leaving us an example that we should follow His steps." "So did I, because of the fear of God." So did I, because my Master had done it before me. The one command which contains the whole of christian duty, the whole law of moral perfectness attainable by man is "Be ye imitators of God, as beloved children, and walk as Christ hath walked."

That fear of God which is all transfused and mingled with the love of Him, gives us next an all-powerful motive. Love delights to please, fear dreads to disobey, and when the pressure strong and constant of these examples round about us is forcing itself in upon us, we have but to think of a nightier companion, whose smile is better than all other approbations, whose condemnation is a pain that no other approval can ever efface. "He endured as seeing Him who is invisible." And, finally, the fear of God strengthens us for resistance, because it gives an omnipotent power within ourselves whereby we resist. "The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free 'from the law of sin and death.'" We are not left to the following of an example that is set us from afar. That is the haldest notion, a mere humanitarian notion of the influence of Christ and His work. We are not left to the influence of the motives of love and fear built upon the recognition of His sacrifice, great and blessed as these motives are—that is a less imperfect, but still an imperfect conception of the gospel. The whole truth embraces both of these, and adds to them that mighty fact that we have a divine helper breathing His grace and strength into us. We have, therefore, not merely to urge you to imitate the example of Christ, nor only to commend to your faith the love of Christ, as manifested on the cross, that it may subdue by its constraining influences the hardness and loftiness of our own evil hearts, but we have to point to Christ who died for us as the source of all our hope and the sacrifice for all our sins, and the all-powerful motive of loving obedience to Christ who lives among us as the perfect Ideal of manhood; to Christ who is exalted to God's right hand as shedding forth this wonderful gift of a sanctifying Spirit, in whose strength we are strong, and by whose help we can resist. Therefore, because apart from Christ we have no wholly, trustworthily guide for even the most honest efforts, nor any motive powerful enough to counter work the baser inducements which the world offers to drag us down by, nor any inward power to lift ourselves by ourselves—a feat as impossible in moral as in bodily gymnastics—therefore, if we seek to resist, we must be "strong in the Lord and in the power of His might." "The love of Christ constraineth us, because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead; and that He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them and rose again."

Do not you go on this warfare at your own charges, nor while you are putting on the armor boast yourself as he that putteth it off. If you do, you will certainly be beaten, and led away from the field a prisoner. Forsaking self, trust yourselves wholly in Christ and having yielded your soul to Him as a sinful creature who needs pardon for the past as well as power for the future, let His love sway your heart, and let His example be your mark, and His spirit your strength. As the secret of all negative forbearance from evil take for your watch word, "So did not I, because of the fear of the Lord." As the secret of all positive allegiance to God, let your motto be "The love of Christ constraineth us." Then the noble picture of what a youthful soul may be fulfilled in you. "Ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the evil one." Wilt thou not from this time say, "My Father, Thou art the guide of my youth?"

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