

Good Sunday Reading.

BIBLE QUESTION COMPETITION.

Although this competition is open to all the readers of PROGRESS, it is more especially intended to interest the young people—the boys and girls who are, or should be attending Sunday School. We have entrusted its management to one who is very competent to take charge of the department. In order to make the competition more interesting, the proprietor of PROGRESS will give One Dollar to the person who sends in the first correct answer to all the questions. We believe that this inducement will result not only in increasing the interest in the contest, but also in the acquisition of much information by those who search for the correct answers.

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 These need not be published except in the case of prize-winners, and a non-descript name may be adopted for publication.

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 efforts.

5. No post-cards can be received. All replies should be addressed to the "SUNDAY READING," EDITOR PROGRESS, St. John, N. B.

PRIZE BIBLE QUESTIONS.—No. 1.

- 1st. Give the temporary abode of a fugitive prophet.
2nd. The only parable in which our Lord mentions any names, give the names, and where recorded.
3rd. Winter—Give at least six quotations from the Old Testament in which the word "snow" occurs.
4th. From the book of Proverbs give a scriptural, patent shield for warding off the sharp strokes of anger.

SERMON.

Good Gifts for Children.

The following sermon was preached by Rev. John Hunter in Trinity church, Glasgow, having reference to the meetings of the Sunday school convention there assembled. He selected as his text Matthew 2, ii.: "They offered unto him gifts, gold, frankincense and myrrh." The advent of any child into this world, he said, is an event full of great and solemn significance. It is a wonderful thing in itself, this child coming out of the eternities into the midst of all these visible things, and lifting up its cry amid this earth's many sounds. The birth of the poorest child has infinite mystery about it. I say infinite, for its suggestions are of infinity. The wise man feels that in its presence he truly stands on holy ground. By searching we cannot find out its mystery into perfection. It cannot be fully explained by the laws which we can see, and trace and understand. There is something in it born of the will of the flesh nor of man, but of God. The ascription of parentage to the Holy Ghost in the poem of the sacred nativity only shows how much truer the imagination often is to the deeper facts of life than is the reason's colder part. It is true of every infant that comes into our world that it has something in it born of the Holy Spirit: that its true heredity from God: that it is not only a child of human parents but a child of God, inasmuch as it possesses from birth the germ of a spiritual life, a spirit akin to the Divine Spirit. It is not a strange thing that the wise men knelt in adoring wonder in the presence of the child born to be the Saviour of the world.

Looked at from another and profounder point of view, we may say that it is a strange thing that wise men do not always bow in awe and reverence before the solemn mystery of life, before this constant appearance of the divine in the human, before this everlasting incarnation of God in our world. The birth of a child is not only a marvel and miracle in itself; it is an event which is full of all kinds of wonderful possibilities, full of the promise and potency of immeasurable good or immeasurable evil. What a mystery of power for good or evil is hidden in the little child which the humblest mother holds to her heart. In some sense and degree every child that comes into the world is sent to be a Messiah—that is, to be a helper-on of God's kingdom upon the earth. Many children grow up to be helpers and fulfillers of the divine order of human life, but many, many, alas, grow up to hinder and defeat, to be a curse and not a blessing to the world. We trace what is called Christian civilization, the distinctions between ancient and modern society, the influences which are affecting most decisively the highest thought and deepest feeling of the greatest and most progressive peoples on the face of the earth, to the birth of a little child, the son of very poor parents, nearly 2,000 years ago.

In the history of the birth of Jesus, it is said that wise men from the east, whom later tradition transforms into kings, brought gifts to the cradle of the infant Christ—gold, frankincense and myrrh. The commentators are not quite agreed as to the significance of these Oriental gifts—you will have some difficulty in finding a single thing about which the commentators do agree; some say that they were gifts peculiar to the country from which the travellers came, and given for that reason: others say that they were gifts for a king and im-

plied the kingly state. But I pass by this not very profitable contention in order to ask and answer a far more serious question—what are the best and most fitting gifts for any and every child born into the world—born to be a king unto God, to rule over himself, and to be a bringer-in of God's kingdom upon the race of man is a right royal race, and there are certain gifts which every member of this race has a claim to when we consider the significance of its existence, its solemn responsibilities and issues.

1. The gift of a sound organization, physical, mental and moral is a good gift for a child—one of the best of gifts. It has a right to be well-born. Children depend very largely for their chances in this world upon their organization. Their condition, and destiny, here on this earth at least, are often not almost beyond their control by the folly and wickedness of parents, who send them into the world badly organized. They have weak bodies, sluggish brains, ill-assorted faculties, dispositions and tendencies more or less strong toward evil, because the sins of the parents and the parents' parents are visited upon them. I never ponder it without feeling deep pain, and without being more and more persuaded that it is part of my duty as a minister of Him in whose eyes children were and are sacred, to speak of it now and again. We need much honest thinking and honest speaking on this question of parent-hood, and we must have it, if the sum of human misery and wickedness is ever to be considerably lessened in this world. The most serious and sacred functions and duties of life are concealed under a veil of mock modesty. Prudery is not purity, rather does it produce and hide much coarseness of thought and feeling. There is more than enough in the thought of marriage and parentage and their possible consequences to protect them not only from frivolous and coarse jesting, but to call forth profoundly serious thought. More thoughtful and earnest attention needs to be given to the law of inheritance which lends such solemn emphasis to every part of human life. It is in itself a beneficent and beautiful law, and will work for good, if we are good. He who made us expects us to do right and in the natural order of things, He has made no provision for wrong-doing. I once heard some one say that if he had the making of this world, he would have arranged that children should be born only as the reward of superior character and excellence. That the Creator, knowing as only Infinite Wisdom and Love could know the responsibilities of a Creator, did not so arrange the order of nature, is a proof of His faith in man. He takes it for granted that those who take upon themselves the unspeakably solemn responsibilities of fatherhood and motherhood shall make physical health, mental soundness, and moral excellence the condition with themselves. If a heritage of evil has been transmitted to us, then we ought to intercept it in its march. Let us not darken and curse unborn generations by our physical and moral defects. Every child that is born has a right to a sound organization. The better world for which we look and pray, and work will come chiefly through the better children born into it. Of such is the kingdom of heaven upon earth.

2. A second gift fit for a child, and to which it has a claim, is the gift of a good home. By a good home I do not mean a home where there is an abundance of what are called the good things of life, but a home where life is not such a constant and dreary struggle that it will hinder instead of help, depress instead of stimulate. It is a good thing that children should be prepared by their circumstances to endure hardness. It is not out of easy and luxurious surroundings our best and most useful men and women have come. It has been stated somewhere that for four generations in England no man became distinguished as physician or lawyer who had inherited an income of £200 a year. Circumscribed conditions are necessary to awaken and develop power. Children are not well cared for by being indulged and pampered. The fortunes of fathers had often been the worst of curses to sons. On the other hand, it is not good for men and women to be bowed and soured by grim struggle at the very outset of life; it is not the will of heaven that children should be born to perish, born into homes where they cannot receive proper and reasonable care. The home is not the home, yet the idea of a home cannot be independent of the house. Heads of families ought to do what they honestly can to make their houses attractive and pleasant—places that will elevate and educate taste and character by their surroundings, by their cleanliness, brightness, furniture, books and pictures.

3. Another great gift for a child is a sound, intellectual, moral and religious culture. It is a mistake, as a rule, to send children away from home for their education. Boarding schools, however good, are poor substitutes for a true father and mother's care. I have seen, during the time I have been a minister, some very promising boys and girls injured and spoiled by being removed at the most critical period of their development from the direct influences of home. The accomplishments of London and Paris cost too much when they cost the simplicity and innocence of your daughters. The early breaking up of families all over the country is one of the most threatening features of our modern life. This sometimes cannot be avoided, but it ought to be avoided when it can. The home is the most fundamental of human institutions, and in these changing and critical times we need to make more and not less of it. Children need their parents, and the parents need their children.

They are better than all the ballads That were ever sung or said, For they are the living poems, And all the rest are dead.

Children have a right to their childhood. Do not be in too great a haste to make men and women of your children. Keep them back rather than rush them forward by formal parties, late hours, premature accomplishments, and other hot-house processes. The higher development of individual and social life depends largely upon the extension of the years of childhood. Hardly anything is so sad as the sight of the manliness of many boys and the womanishness of many girls. How much the conversation, the tone, the atmosphere of home, and the books and magazines which children are allowed to read, have to do with these precocious developments—these all knowing, cynical, pessimistic boys of 19, these girls flirting at 14, and dying

of disappointment at 16. Let children grow naturally, and hasten slowly. On the other hand, repressing development as well as forcing it is an evil. Children are injured sometimes by too much discipline, as well as by too little. It is not enough considered, that there is an individuality in a boy or girl as sacred as holy ground, and to be approached even by a parent with fear and reverence. The most that many parents do, is to unmake their children, to destroy their individuality, and to make them copies of themselves. They get alarmed when they see that their dearest have a destiny of their own; they are slow to recognize in them new thoughts of God, new heirs of life, new and separate personalities. One of the saddest things in the world is the way love defeats its own end. Weak and selfish people may truly love their children, but their weakness and selfishness are seen in the kind of good they seek for their children, and in the kind of influence they exercise upon their life. Before you can feel and act towards your children as you ought, you must feel that they are God's more than they are yours, you must train them to be for what He would have them to be: fit them as far as you can for self-reliance, self-support, self-control, when they go out into that world where there is no father's voice to guide, and no mother's word to direct. Many wrecks are made of young lives, because the habits of self-control and self-reliance are not built up within them. They so depend on external things to keep them right that when these are changed and they are thrown upon themselves they fail, and fall through weakness. A thorough moral training, training in obedience to just and reasonable requirements, and training in unselfishness and helpfulness, is a gift which no parent ought to fail to give to his children. He ought to give them, also, a true and noble ideal of life and duty; he ought to teach them to value character above everything else; to put truth, honesty, integrity, goodness above everything else, above all material advantages, above money, success, popularity, social position, a good marriage. A child claims at a parent's hands not only moral but religious culture. I would have the earliest lesson taught to be this: they are spirits, spiritual beings with faculties, which are as real as their bodily and mental faculties; that they are in idea and capacity children of God. Our fathers were not one degree too anxious to awaken in boy and girl, youth and maiden, the spiritual life. The only fault I find with much that calls itself religious training is that it is not religious enough. Filling a child's mind with anecdotes of Hebrew patriarchs and kings, and other Hebrew of doubtful example, does not mean much, and does not touch the roots of life. Children grow up into men and women, and fall into moral weakness and religious scepticism because the discipline of their moral and spiritual nature and life has been neglected. Why should not the moral and spiritual side of them be as well looked after, and be as carefully trained as the physical and intellectual side? If only a small part of the time and pains expended on athletics, languages, music, drawing and other things were given to training the spiritual faculties and affections, what an unspeakably good thing it would be for the children, and for the whole future of our Christian faith and Christian churches. Children have a right not only to religious teaching, but to religious influences—the influences of the highest and best thoughts of God, Christ, life, duty, immortality, the influences of the Christian church and of Christian worship, all the influences which are essential to the building up of a reverent and devout manhood or womanhood. The absence of early associations with the church and the things of which the church is the symbol and witness, the absence of sacred memories, is a loss that can never afterwards be made good. I plead for association of children with the church, not as a substitute, but as an aid to parental influence. Far more important than any direct teaching that may be given is the atmosphere of a worshipping church—the atmosphere of reverence, devoutness, faith and consecration of all highest things.

4. The best thing a child can receive is, the gift of a truly righteous and religious life constantly lived in its presence. Compare with the influence of spirit, character, example, how poor and cheap is all religious instruction, and counsel; mock morality, artificial solemnity, and make-believe devoutness will not do. Our formal tributes to virtue and religion will be of little avail if our children see in our eyes the gleam of mercenary cunning; if they see us denying the spirit of our prayer by meanness and selfishness; if they see us in the actual order and conduct of life putting selfish and worldly interests before the things which are Jesus Christ's. How can any man of us hope to have any real influence merely by taking airs. An unblemished goodness is not possible to anyone, but we can all, parents, ministers, strive to be and do what we bid others be and do, and it is the sincere and faithful striving that stimulates others to follow. Let our children see that our faith in God, our love to Christ, our sense of duty, are things to which everything in our daily life yield; let them see that we aim constantly at what is true and right rather than at that which is pleasant and profitable; let them see that truth and right mean more to us than any earthly success, and that we rate character above popularity, and the praise of God above the praise of men, then "trust in all things high will come easy to them, and, though they trip and fall, they shall not blime their souls with clay." Blessed are the children on whom their parents bestow these great gifts—a good organization, a good home, a good training, a good influence and example. Their path surely must be that of the just, which is as the light of the dawn that slineth more and more unto the perfect day.

A Prayer for Children.

Our Father in Heaven, look down upon us, Thy little children, and help us to worship Thee. Put out of our minds all foolish thoughts. Teach us Thy will concerning us, and incline us to learn. May we love Thy truth and seek to live by it every day.

A Prayer for Children.

Our Father, we know that Thou dost hear us when we pray. The sound of voices is heard by Thee, cared for by Thee, interpreted by Thee, and Thou missest not the cry even of a little child.

A Prayer for Children.

Our Father, we know that we need have no fear of Thee. Though we are often very bad, yet we know that Thou lovest us even in our sins, and art always trying to make us better. Thy thoughts toward us

are full of pitiful and tender love. Thou hast spoken to us by the sweet and gentle Jesus, and he has told us that Thou art kinder than the kindest, better than the best, and that there is ever room in Thy heart and in Thy home for the little ones of Thy making and loving. Our Father, we thank Thee for all the good and beautiful things we find in and around our life. Thou art very kind to us, and Thy gentleness makes us great. For food and raiment; for the love of parents and friends; for our work and play; for our school and books; for the Sunday and its worship and teaching; and for all Thy tender mercies we thank Thee. Our Father, help us to show our thankfulness for Thy merciful and unwearied care by ever seeking to please Thee in all things. Help us to fight against our faults that they may not grow into bad habits which will cling to us all our days. May we always speak the truth and never be guilty of deceit. May we be kind and gentle, and not easily angered. May we never neglect our duties, but always learn our lessons and do all our work as in Thy sight and for Thee. May we think little about ourselves, but ever strive to do what we can for others, and to hurt no one by word or by deed. Thy beauty shines in cloud and flower. Oh, let it shine in our lives—that beauty of thine which is only beautiful. May we grow more like Jesus every day we live, and become children with whom Thou art ever well pleased. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Beatitudes.

Minister—Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
People—May the word of Christ dwell in us richly in all wisdom and power.
Minister—Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.
People—May the word of Christ dwell in us richly in all wisdom and power.
Minister—Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.
People—May the word of Christ dwell in us richly in all wisdom and power.
Minister—Blessed are they who do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled.
People—May the word of Christ dwell in us richly in all wisdom and power.
Minister—Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.
People—May the word of Christ dwell in us richly in all wisdom and power.
Minister—Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.
People—May the word of Christ dwell in us richly in all wisdom and power.
Minister—Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God.
People—May the word of Christ dwell in us richly in all wisdom and power.
Minister—Blessed are they who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
People—May the word of Christ dwell in us richly in all wisdom and power.
Minister—Blessed are they who hear the word of God and keep it.
People—Amen.

A Short Prayer.

Merciful Father, whose life is Love, whose Will is Right; not for ease we pray, but for strength to cease to do evil, to learn to do well; for grace to keep clean and simple our hearts, and to live dutiful and blameless lives. From all sin, and the fear that is born in sin; and from every evil thought and purpose, and from wishing anything by which another may be harmed. Good Lord deliver us.

Prayer for Lent.

Almighty God, who givest us our quiet seasons of thought and prayer, help us now and at all times to find in Thee our true peace. Save us in the hour of trial, deliver us from evil thoughts and desires, and from the tyranny of outward things. May we learn of Christ to be strong and brave in the struggle with temptation, and to overcome even as he overcame. Amen.

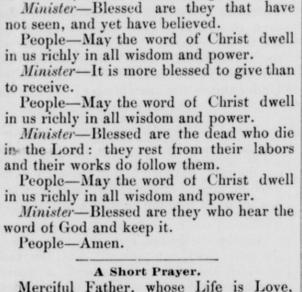
A Prayer for Children.

God bless the little children, The faces sweet and fair, The bright young eyes, so strangely wise, The bonny silken hair. God gave the little children, The angels at the door, The music sweet of little feet That patter on the floor. God help the little children, Who cheer our saddest hours, And shame our fears for future years, And give us winter flowers. God keep the little children, Whom we no more can see; Fled from their nest and gone to rest, Where we desire to be.

J. P. Horrs.

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