

called "The Seven Deadly Sins": Pride, anger, envy, impurity, gluttony, slothfulness, avarice.

Not so familiar to most of us is a list of deadly sins in Judaism, with idolatry first, adultery second, murder third, and in fourth place, gossip. Gossip, moreover, is defined in this list as any sort of rumor or report that would defame or mar the reputation of another human being.

Whether you put it in one position or another in the scale of sins, certain it is that we'll never deal with it seriously enough unless we see it as a wrong to be confessed and not merely as a weakness to be lightly admitted. Its ugliness and viciousness in God's sight must be faced. "It is reported . . . and Gashmu saith it," is one of the devil's trademarks.

II.

While Gashmu is in our spotlight, let's make a second observation regarding him. More than a symbol, he is a warning.

WORDS ARE DEEDS

He stands as a warning against the mistake that words are only words. The fact is that words are deeds. We dismiss the matter far too superficially when we say, "Words, just words! It's action that counts." Or when we give out with the remark, "Well, say it. You might as well say it as to think it!"

From one point of view—God's look into our hearts—that may be true. But from another viewpoint it is quite wrong. Once you have said it you have, in some measure, committed it to the public. You have loosed it into the stream of history. For the inescapable fact is that a word is a deed.

Furthermore, Gashmu stands as a warning that gossip is a way of doing damage that goes beyond all possibility of repair. Hear me carefully. I did not say that it goes beyond the possibility of your repentance or of God's forgiveness, but only that it exceeds even God's ability to wipe out its consequences.

THE WORM OF SUSPICION

Take an example of how subtle and far-reaching this can be. An army chaplain said that one day he was talking to another chaplain about a third—a colleague of both of them. When he remarked that the absent chaplain had been very fine and cooperative on the post, the chaplain being addressed replied, after a few seconds' pause, "Well, he feels that you have the ear of the higher-ups, and he's bucking for a promotion." What was the effect? The chaplain said that, although he resented such a remark and had no reason to believe there was the slightest truth in it, he found that the worm of suspicion had been placed in his mind. In spite of all he could do to talk himself out of it, he was forced to admit that it spoiled something fine in the friendship he had enjoyed with the comrade who had been downgraded in that momentary remark.

It's the old story of the peasant and the monk. The peasant, having told an unkind story about another, asked the monk what he could do to atone for his sin. "Fill a bag with chicken feathers," said the monk, "then go to every house in the village and drop a feather in each yard." The peasant did as he was told. Returning to the monk, he asked if this completed his penance. "No," said the monk, "you must now take the empty bag, go back to every house, and pick up the feather you dropped there." "But that is impossible," protested the peasant, "for by this time the wind has blown most of them somewhere else." "And so it is with your slanderous stories and evil words," replied the monk, solemnly. "They are easily spoken, but, no matter how hard you try, you cannot bring them back again."

That is the warning that I beg you see in the unpleasant figure of Gashmu. There are Gashmus in every

community and church. God forgive their sin! But—let it be said reverently—God Himself cannot undo all the effects of their sin.

III.

Let me add a more positive note: Gashmu can render us service not only as a symbol and a warning, but also—if you will forgive an overworked word—as a challenge.

EXAMINE OURSELVES

The bad example of Gashmu should serve as a stern summons to examine ourselves and our speech.

Ourselves! Why? Because the habit of gossip often reveals much more about you than it does about the person about whom you are carrying on your tittle-tattle. Many a woman has said concerning another woman who has a larger wardrobe than she, "Don't you think she overdoes her dressing?" without realizing that what she is really saying is, "I'm envious of her." And many a man has jibed concerning another, "Look at him—always hogging the lime-light!" without understanding that his real meaning is, "Look at me—I'm uncomfortable because his success is greater than mine!"

THE MIRROR OF THE CROSS

This behavior in people of the world is bad enough; in Christians, it is serious. It comes from our not holding before us the mirror of the Cross long enough for us to see—and be horrified at—this wretched egomindedness. Then, with self-awareness and conviction, to surrender wholly to the power of the Cross! Calvary is so hot a flame that when we consign ourselves to it, it sears to a cinder the self-importance that lies behind our gossipy tongues.

And then our speech—that, too, should be examined in the light of Gashmu's sorry spectacle.

LIVE ON THE HEIGHTS

Put your speech about others to three tests, said Alexander Whyte, if you want to live on the heights with your Lord.

Test One: Is it true? Do I know it to be true? If it is hearsay, the test is not passed. If it appears in print, the test is not necessarily passed. Many a misrepresentation has found the light of print that belongs to the darkness of the pit.

Test Two: "Is it necessary? Granting that it is true, is there any need of its being made the subject of idle chatter in this situation or before these people?"

Test Three: Is it kind? How does it fit in with our
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TRIBUTE

(Matt. 17: 24-25)

B. I. Morash

"Doth not your Master, tribute give?"

Peter answereth, "yea"

Caesar and the State demand

That the stranger pay.

The Lord in wisdom rules the earth,

Its mines, its forests, seas,

E'en the Savior, Lord of all,

Must Him, with tribute please.

The sea was a foundation laid

For earth's established cause,

And so, its fullness thereof is

To pay for labours laws.

Jesus, carpenter and man,

Labourer of God's hire,

In patient loving service

Fulfilled His God's desires.