

THE
SINFUL LAUGH.

BY

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“Fools make a mock at sin.”—PROV. xiv. 9.

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Mrs. MASON was walking in the garden with some of her children, when her eldest son, George, came up with a smiling countenance, which made one of his little sisters ask him if he had seen any thing to amuse him?

He replied, "I have been greatly amused by the tricks and contrivances of Bob, the servant boy, to get out of a scrape."

"What has he done?" said Mrs. Mason.

"Why, Mamma, he has often been suspected of taking fruit as he passed through the garden; but as he always denied it, and as there

was no proof against him, nothing could convince me of it, till the gardener and I discovered Bob stealing some apples and hiding them among brambles in the hedge. When Bob was asked whether he had not been taking apples from a particular tree in the garden, he stoutly denied it, and desired us to look in his pockets, and in every place about the house and garden in which he could have hidden them. And he spoke with such a steady face, that unless he had been seen to do it, nobody could have thought it. After a great deal of questioning, in which, I think, he told nearly as many lies as could be spoken in the time, he was taken outside the fence, and the apples shown to him. But still he denied it, until the gardener and I told him of our having seen it all. I shall never forget the figure that he cut!" and George laughed

again, in which he was joined by the other children.

Mrs. Mason shook her head, and having reached the end of the walk she seated herself in an arbour, desiring them all to surround her. "Bob has done a very wicked thing, my dears," said she.

"Very wicked indeed, Mamma: it is quite shocking to think of it," said one.

"Yes," added another, "there was both thieving and lying;"

"And ingratitude," observed Mrs. Mason, "for he has been very kindly treated here, and enjoyed every indulgence."

"Worse than that, if you knew all, Mamma," said George. "He bore false witness, by throwing the blame on an innocent person, and took God's holy name in vain, wishing to be punished by Him if he had done it."

“How shocking!” cried the children.

“George,” said his mother, “what is the abominable thing that God hates?”

“Sin, Mamma.”

“What caused Adam to lose his happy and holy state? What brought death into the world? What crucified the Lord Jesus, and daily grieves the Holy Spirit?”

“Sin, sin, is the cause of all,” said the children.

“It is true indeed, my dears; and now tell me what you could find in this frightful sin to laugh at.”

The children looked, one upon another, and all, at last, on George, who coloured and said, “I did not laugh at the sin, but at the ridiculous figure which he made on being found out.”

“This unfortunate boy bore a fair character,” said Mrs. Mason; “he was supposed to be honest,

and to fear God: you thought well of him—did you not—as one who, in his humble sphere, wished to serve the Lord, whom you also profess to serve?”

“To be sure I did, Mamma.”

“Well, in an unexpected manner, all this is proved to be a mistake. God is dishonoured, His holy name blasphemed, His sacred law broken, and a soul, of which you hoped that it belonged to Him, proved to be under the power of satan, and in danger of everlasting death. Is it so?”

“Yes, Mamma: I am afraid it is.”

“The angels who never sinned, are represented as rejoicing in heaven over one repenting child of Adam.—Are they not?”

“Yes,” said Mary, the eldest girl: “in the fifteenth chapter of Saint Luke’s gospel, our Lord says so.”

“And why should they rejoice?”

“I think, Mamma, that you have told us their constant employment and happiness being to praise and glorify the Lord God Almighty, then how very delightful must it be to them to see a soul snatched from the tyranny of satan, and added to the number of those happy spirits, who will join them in their work of praise for ever and ever.”

“Yes,” added Catherine, “and we are told that they are ministering spirits, sent forth to minister to them that shall be heirs of salvation. Heb. i. 14. So they must take a great interest in what is going forward below.”

“No doubt, my dear,” said her Mamma. “Christ is the object of their adoration; for it is written—‘Let all the angels of God worship Him.’ Heb. i. 6. And in heaven their song is—‘Worthy is the Lamb that was slain.’ Rev, v. 12. The salvation of souls being the very

object of the mighty work in which that Lamb was slain, it must be the great delight of those holy and loving angels, to see their Lord thus glorified in the saving of a soul.

“Now tell me, how is satan described, and what is his employment and desire?”

The children considered for some time; at last one of them answered, “Your adversary, the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.” 1 Peter v. 8.

“Moses endured, as seeing Him who is invisible,” observed Mrs. Mason. “Like David, he set God always before him. Oh! that we had more of that precious faith which looks to things unseen and eternal! My children, you have drawn an awful picture, and a true one, for it is given in the very words of Scripture. First, there is the All-seeing, All-observing, Jeho-

vah, who compasseth our path, and our lying down, and is acquainted with all our ways. Ps. cxxxix. 2. And who says, 'I know the things that come into your mind every one of them.' Ezekiel xi. 5. Then, there are the holy angels, who continually behold His glory, and rejoice in His favour, longing to see us made partakers of the same blessedness, and to be sent on messages of love to poor fallen man; and, lastly, there are the devil and his angels, busily employed in laying snares for our feet, and exulting in every sin committed by us, because it dishonours God. At once the tempter and the accuser, satan, opposes himself, with all his dreadful power and cunning, to every human being who seeks the kingdom of God. 'The serpent who beguiled Eve by his subtilty,' follows each of Eve's children with the same cruel intention; and those whom he

leads to transgress, it is his delight to devour. Oh! what need we have, to help and encourage one another. What cause to watch over ourselves and our brethren—to pray for one another, that we may be healed of this dreadful disease, sin, and to give heed to the beautiful injunction of the Apostle:—‘Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness, considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.’ ” Gal. vi. 1, 2.

These words appeared to sink very deeply into the minds of some of the children: George in particular, hung down his head, and appeared much distressed. His mother observed it.

“Does my dear boy see now wherein he has offended?”

“Yes, indeed, Mamma. I have

sinned very greatly. I have brought myself into shame, worse than that of the unfortunate little boy, Bob, for I know so much better than he does, what is right; and I was bound to set an example to others, that they should not jest at sin, but mourn over it. I was the first to laugh at it, and that encouraged the servants to do the same."

"And by so doing," said Mrs. Mason, "you taught them to make light of what God abhors: besides, this was the very way in which to harden the offender. Instead of exciting humility, it would be sure to rouse his pride, and make him eager to witness in those who made a mock of sin, some transgression that should enable him to triumph over them in turn."

"The Scripture says, 'Fools make a mock at sin,'"—Prov. xiv. 9, observed one of the boys.

"True, James. And I wish you

had called that Scripture to mind, the other day, when you were so much amused by the reelings of a drunken man in the street.”

“Why Mamma, was there any harm in that?”

“Is not drunkenness a sin?”

“Yes; but not such a *great* sin as stealing, or taking God’s name in vain.”

“All unrighteousness is sin—all sin is hateful to God, and every impenitent sinner lies under His curse. It is one of satan’s most cunning devices to persuade us that there are distinctions of great and little sins: and another of his contrivances is, to mix up with the crimes of men something that to our weak and wicked nature seems laughable. Who would smile at a barbarous murder?—And, alas! how many there are who will smile to witness the staggering gait of an intoxicated man. Yet, He, who has said, ‘Thou

shalt do no murder,' has also placed drunkenness next to murder, in the awful list of those things which keep men from the kingdom of God. Gal. v. 21. We call sins great or small, according as they affect the welfare of mankind in general, and of ourselves in particular, but, 'My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For, as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.' Isaiah lv. 8, 9. His thoughts and His ways are alike unsearchable, except as He has revealed them to us in his word : but I have shown you from that, how exceedingly hateful to Him is every sort of evil ; and, therefore, how displeasing in His sight must it be, that we dare to make a jest of sin in any shape."

"I hope that I shall never do so

again," said George. "It did not occur to me that there could be so much harm in a laugh."

"No good thing can arise in your mind," replied his mother, "but by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit; for the 'imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth.' Gen. viii. 21: and, 'Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?—Not one.' Job xiv. 4. If you neglect to pray for the help of Him who alone can enable you to understand, and to remember, and to practise what the Scriptures teach, you must expect to be constantly led away with the error of the wicked.

"This boy, of whom you were telling us, has done a very sinful deed, and I shall consult your Papa, when he comes home, how we are to deal with him. It will be our endeavour to set before him the greatness of his sin against God—against his own soul, and against

his fellow-creatures. It may be that repentance will be given unto him, and we shall then know it, by his bringing forth fruits meet for repentance. If not, we must follow David's rule, 'he that telleth lies shall not tarry in my sight.' Shall we not grieve, that our adversary, the roaring lion, has thus seized a poor wretched straggler from the fold of the good Shepherd? Shall we not use every means, by prayer, by exhortation, by example, to induce him to seek deliverance out of his paw? And if he be finally devoured by him, shall we not yet more deeply grieve for it, adoring the grace that makes us to differ, and laying to heart the admonition which says, 'except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.' Come, let us return to the house: first, to pray for this sinful child, and then to counsel him. It would be a dreadful thing, if the Lord should

see cause to address us with that
 wrathful remonstrance : ‘ Shouldest
 thou not have had compassion on
 thy fellow servant, even as I had
 pity upon thee ?’ ”

My Saviour, shall my laughter rise
 At that which drew thee from the skies,
 To groan and suffer here—
 That scourg’d thy tender flesh, and bound
 Thy bleeding brow with thorns around,
 And drove the cruel spear ?

Sin wrung the bloody sweat from thee ;
 Sin nail’d thee to the cursed tree ;
 Sin chok’d thy gasping breath !
 My sin, the sin of all my race,
 Veil’d thy bright glory in disgrace,
 And bow’d thee unto death !

Whene’er transgressors cross my way,
 Still let me for the sinner pray,
 But be the sin abhorr’d :
 O teach me from my soul to fling,
 And tremble at the hateful thing
 That crucifi’d my Lord !