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OF

TRACTS

ON THE

DOCTRINES, ORDER, AND POLITY

OF THE

✓
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

IN THE

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

EMBRACING

SEVERAL ON PRACTICAL SUBJECTS.

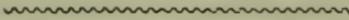
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SINS OF THE TONGUE.



“HE that lives not by rule, lives not at all,” has grown into a proverb; yet many have no settled plan and no fixed principles. They are at sea without a compass, and know not whither they go, but are borne along with every wind and current. This may be an easy mode of life, but can it be safe? Blinded by self-love, such may hope that all is well, but is there cause for such expectations? It may be as mischievous to have *no* principles as *bad* ones. A rule not followed is a mere notion, and governs no one.

These remarks apply to the use and abuse of the tongue. There is often a criminal carelessness about the moral quality of words. The subject is vast, and not well understood. Few know as well as they ought, and still fewer do as well as they know. Yet God’s word is plain. There are but ten commandments; yet two of them, one in each table, relate to our speech, and all the Scriptures give instruction on the same subject. True, the word of God does not determine the precise amount of speech to be used, leaving much to natural disposition, and to circumstances of time and place. But God has clearly told us what kind of words he approves, and what kind he condemns.

Mere reserve does not evince good principles. Some have learned somewhat to restrain their tongues, and yet have no right motives in doing so. Their propensities are

the same as before. They fear man, but not God. They dread trouble, but not iniquity.

The pen is subject to the same laws which are made for the tongue. What a man may not speak, he should not write. Indeed, writing evil things often does more harm than speaking them.

We may sin, not only by the words used, but also by the tones with which they are spoken, and by looks and gestures. The language of pantomime is universal, vigorous, and easily perverted. "A naughty person, a wicked man, walketh with a froward mouth. He winketh with his eyes, he speaketh with his feet, he teacheth with his fingers." Prov. vi. 12, 13.

Whenever we speak of sin or duty, levity is out of place. To avoid the former and do the latter is the highest end of learning. In such a subject mere curiosity is worse than idle. Here malignity may find a remark to condemn others, but wisdom will gain its chief end in amending one's own faults and avoiding wicked courses.

In many ways we may sin with our tongues. Laurentius enumerates as many sins of the tongue as there are letters in the alphabet. In his *Christian Directory*, Richard Baxter gives a list of thirty sins of speech, beginning with blasphemy. In expounding the *third* and *ninth* commandments, the Westminster Assembly make the number still larger. There is, therefore, no want of matter on such a theme.

Some speak too fast. Merely rapid articulation is not here intended. But statements made without reflection, though not designed to mislead, are a great evil. "Seest thou a man hasty in his words? There is more hope of a fool than of him." Prov. xxix. 20. The intellect of such is in a state unfriendly to accuracy of knowledge or statement. He seldom improves in mind or manners. He jumps at conclusions, and wishes others to do the same.

Others speak too often. When awake and in company they are seldom silent. "From morn to night the ceaseless larum rings." In the absence of things weighty, wise or true; trifles, folly, or falsehood serve their turn. It is a mark of intolerable self-conceit to be continually offering unsolicited opinions. Even the oracles of the heathen were sometimes silent, though paid for speaking.

Others say too much. Not content with stating what is called for, they proceed to tiresome and sinful lengths. They are neither "swift to hear," nor "slow to speak."

Others speak too soon. They do not inquire, listen and consider, but are ready to deliver their views at all times, and often in dashing style. "A wise man regardeth time and judgment," but they disregard both. "He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him." Prov. xviii. 13.

As "there is a time to speak," so "there is a time to keep silence." Eccles. iii. 7. One of these times is when you have nothing pertinent to say. Another is, when others are speaking. Did any family ever come to much good, where the young were not taught to be silent when the old were speaking, or where all the children were allowed to speak at once? Another such time is when we first visit a friend overwhelmed with affliction. Some sympathies are best expressed by silence. Thus, Job's friends "sat down with him upon the ground seven days and seven nights, and none spake a word unto him; for they saw that his grief was very great." Job ii. 13. When others are greatly heated by passion, it is usually best to be silent. A very good man wrote down this rule, "I will never talk to an angry man."

In general, men probably speak too much. The Scriptures warn us on this point. "A fool's voice is known by multitude of words." Eccles. v. 3. "A fool also is full of words." Eccles. x. 14. "In the multitude of words there

wanteth not sin." Prov. x. 19. Garrulity is not always innocent. Even good and wise men censure it. One of our proverbs is, "The fool's tongue is long enough to cut his throat." Babblers were never held in high esteem among a virtuous people. "Surely the serpent will bite without enchantment, and a babbler is no better." Eccles. x. 11. This odious character is often more or less acquired by those who suppose themselves unsuspected of it. Of many a man it is said, "He is not worth minding, he is always talking." This is a sign that all is not right. One may plead that he is a licensed character, and that he always was allowed to say just what he pleased. But it may be asked, Who signed and gave the license? Can it be produced? It never came from God, and good men would not dare to sanction what God condemns. If any man has such license, he forged it. By excessive talking professors of religion make sad the hearts of their brethren, and all men are less esteemed for it. The judgment of mankind is with Solomon, that "a fool uttereth all his mind; but a wise man keepeth it in till afterwards," Prov. xxix. 11; and that "even a fool, when he holdeth his peace, is counted wise; and he that shutteth his lips is esteemed a man of understanding." Prov. xvii. 28. Some one has well said: "He is not a fool that hath unwise thoughts, but he that utters them." Yet some can never be cured of this folly. To them silence is torture. Like one of the ancients they might say, "If I hold my tongue, I shall give up the ghost." Job xiii. 19. They know little of the peace and quiet of one who follows them not. "Whoso keepeth his mouth and his tongue keepeth his soul from troubles." Prov. xxi. 23. The troubles brought on by an unbridled tongue in this life are but a prelude to far worse in the next.

Excessive talking is frequently attended by loud speaking. The former betrays self-conceit; the latter impudence. One feature of as bad a character as is sketched in Scripture is

that "she is loud." Prov. vii. 11. "A foolish woman is clamorous; she is simple and knoweth nothing." Prov. ix. 13. It was a bright ornament of the character of the divine Redeemer that he was gentle and quiet, and did "not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street." Isa. xlii. 2. He was not a clamorous person, but meek and lowly.

Is the following a fancy sketch? When others were speaking, he was restless, and if ruled to entire silence, he was miserable. Ordinarily he seemed to have some amiable traits, but when others had the good sense to listen to his wit or wisdom, he was in a specially good temper. The more you attended to him, the louder and more emphatic he was. On nearly *all* subjects he knew something; on *many*, he knew much; on *some*, he was an oracle in his own esteem. When doomed to spend some time with those whose dignity restrained him, he might well have adopted the words of one who bears a part in the oldest epic poem extant: "I am full of matter, the spirit within constraineth me. Behold my belly is as wine, which hath no vent; it is ready to burst like new bottles. I will speak that I may be refreshed." Job xxxii. 18—20. Our hero wished to pass for a benevolent man. He was great at a public meeting. He commonly said something, and was full of promises in aid of the cause. To fulfil them was far from him. His children caught his spirit, though in his presence they were sometimes forced to keep silence. But when they had a chance, they lost no time. Even on his death-bed the same propensity was sometimes manifest, and he left the world without seeming to know that he bore the character of a babler.

One of his townsmen was little like him. He was a man of few words. When he did speak he was heard with marked respect. If others were impatient, it was because he was slow to utter his mind. His maxim was, "The

fewer words, the less sin." He thought much and weighed his words well. Far removed from sourness, he was given to self-communion. His prayers were brief, but fervent and comprehensive. His words were well ordered. He was not hasty to utter anything, especially before God. His sincerity was apparent. His word was as good as his bond or his oath. He was rarely required to explain or retract any of his statements; but if he had been mistaken, he frankly said so. His children, though sprightly and joyous, were neither pert nor impudent. They honoured gray hairs. In him "the effect of righteousness was quietness and assurance for ever." Isa. xxxii. 17. His end was peace. Survivors generally mentioned his name with honour. His family never blushed to own him as their former guide and head.

Would it not be wise for every man to say with a servant of God of the *seventeenth* century, "I am resolved, by the grace of God, never to speak much, lest I often speak too much, and not to speak at all, rather than to no purpose."

Our words should also be pure and chaste. How many narratives, anecdotes, songs, riddles, and questions are indelicate, and therefore unchristian! How many hints, allusions, inuendos, insinuations, and surmises are of this description! Nearly every thing in the form of double *entendre* falls under the same condemnation. Whatever pollutes the mind is wicked, and never without necessity to be repeated. This class of evils is vastly sustained by the stage, by works of wit and fiction, and by many popular ballads. Tradition also shows both fidelity and industry in transmitting impure sayings from age to age. Those who thus sin sometimes excuse their conduct by saying that "unto the pure all things are pure," but they seem to forget that "unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled." Tit. i. 15. This latter class constitutes no small

portion of mankind. The sow washes more frequently than the sheep, and yet is not clean. The nature of the flock is to avoid the mire. Shun those who are foul-mouthed. Never smile at their impurity. Never imitate them. "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace to the hearers." Eph. iv. 29. "But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, blasphemy, *filthy communications* out of your mouth." Col. iii. 8. "Be not deceived, evil communications corrupt good manners." 1 Cor. xv. 33. Many who greatly offend against these laws of speech, would be both surprised and displeased if their sin was charged upon them.

Another grievous sin of the tongue is flattery, which consists in undue or unseasonable praise. Few things are more ensnaring. Riches, talents, family, office, person, attainments, deeds of distinction, and even vices furnish occasions for it. Husbands flatter their wives, and wives their husbands; parents their children, and children their parents; ministers their people, and people their ministers, and all under the pretence of manifesting esteem. The poor flatter the rich, and demagogues the people. Yet all commendation is not flattery; but that which exceeds the truth is always sinful, and untimely praise, even when true, disgusts wise men and puffs up the minds of the simple. It was a good purpose of Bishop Beveridge, "I am resolved, by the grace of God, to speak of other men's sins only before their faces, and of their virtues only behind their backs." The only exception to this rule is that of necessity. Properly observed, it would banish a large part of social misery. Flattery is always an unkindness. "A man that flattereth his neighbour, spreadeth a net for his feet." Prov. xxix. 5. Those are good words of Elihu—"Let me not accept any man's person, neither let me give flattering titles unto men. For I know not to give flattering

titles; in so doing my Maker would soon take me away." Job xxxii. 21, 22. Paul says—"Neither at any time used we flattering words." 1 Thess. ii. 5. Courtly manners may require such words, but the truth, even bluntly spoken, is more pleasing to God. Almost all flatterers have some wicked design in view. "Discretion shall preserve thee from the stranger, that flattereth with her words." Proverbs ii. 16.

This is a great evil under the sun. Kings have their courtiers, and few are sunk so low as not at times to have their sycophants. Yet if a man is really displeased with flattery, it will seldom be offered. To be pleased with it is to become a candidate for shame, perhaps for ruin. Every human being is entitled to some respect. Even the guilty felon on his way to execution should not be mocked or rudely gazed at. Every well-meaning person is entitled to such treatment as will express approbation of his good character. But fawning servility is due to no mortal. "The Lord shall cut off all flattering lips." Psa. xii. 3. Among some "to be agreeable" is to be adulatory. This sin is one of the most degrading to him who practises it, and tempting to him who is flattered. It greatly hinders the proper giving and receiving of reproof. One who was famous in his day said, "I will do my best to cross any man in his sins; if I have not thanks of him, yet I shall of my own conscience."

Flatterers are quite sure to be backbiters. This is neither conjecture, nor the mere fruit of observation. The Bible so teaches. "He that goeth about as a tale-bearer, revealeth secrets; therefore meddle not with him, that flattereth with his lips." Prov. xx. 19. A defeated flatterer is a malicious slanderer. His principles are bad. He who will lie in your favour will upon a turn lie against you. He who will unduly praise, will unduly censure. Flattery and slander are branches of the same trade, and

are carried on by the same people. Those called in the Bible, "whisperers," belong to the same class. They go about their work by stealth. They often enjoin secrecy on their dupes. To them an evil report is music. They are often very cunning in avoiding responsibility before men, but God knows the filthiness of their hearts. Their career is sometimes long, but generally ends in open shame. They have sometimes poisoned the minds of many with their falsehoods. They often speak well of a man to his friends, but evil of him to his enemies. "He that uttereth a slander, is a fool." Prov. x. 18. A heathen once said, "The most dangerous of wild beasts is a slanderer; of tame ones, a flatterer."

Men sometimes pretend to know some great evil of another, but will not tell what it is. They know that the human imagination, appealed to mysteriously, can soon outrun any common scale of enormity, and so they set it to work. That such conduct is mean, cruel, and indefensible, few will deny. Yet how many practise it! And if, instead of going abroad with such or other charges against their neighbours men would go directly to them, how much evil would be prevented! "Debate thy cause with thy neighbour himself, and discover not a secret to another, lest he that heareth it put thee to shame, and thine infamy turn not away." Prov. xxv. 9, 10.

The law of love to man may be violated in speech without uttering a word that is not true. That no man is any better than he ought to be, is literally true, yet to say as much of any particular person is often slanderous in its effect, and may tear a good name to pieces.

Tale-bearing and news-carrying are species of slander, and are very mischievous. In this more than in most ways, one man may produce deep and extensive distress. Like the incendiary, who has fired a city and fled to an eminence to ravish his eyes with the progress of the ruin he has wrought,

the tale-bearer loves to embroil families and communities, and then, if possible, escape unnoticed and unhurt. Often he is found out in time to receive the frowns of the virtuous, but commonly not till he has engendered strife. Paul says such persons were found in his day, "And withal they learn to be idle, wandering from house to house; and not only idle, but tattlers also, and busy-bodies speaking things which they ought not." 1 Tim. v. 13. In the law of Moses is this statute, "Thou shalt not go up and down as a tale-bearer among thy people." Lev. xix. 16. "A tale-bearer revealeth secrets; but he that is of a faithful spirit concealeth the matter." Prov. xi. 13. Every man, family, and firm have secrets, which it does not concern others to know. If by accident, or in confidence, they come to your knowledge, reveal them not. To be a spy upon your neighbour is a low occupation, and he to whom confidence is not sacred, is truly debased. None but the imprudent are in the habit of telling their secrets. "If you would teach secresy to others, begin with yourself. How can you expect another to keep a secret when you yourself cannot?" It was a wise determination of a good man of the last generation, "In general, I will deal in secrets as little as possible."

Much social misery is owing to tale-bearing. "Where no wood is, the fire goeth out; so where there is no tale-bearer, the strife ceaseth." Prov. xxvi. 20. The dreadful effects of this vile practice are clearly stated in Scripture. "The words of a tale-bearer are as wounds; and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly." Prov. xviii. 8. Among the seven abominations which the Lord hates, four of them are, "a lying tongue, feet that be swift in running to mischief, a false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren." Prov. vi. 17—19. Lying in some form is a common attendant on tale-bearing. Useless strife always follows it. It argues a low mind, and a meddling disposition. And "he that passeth by and

meddleth with strife not belonging to him, is like one that taketh a dog by the ears." Prov. xxvi. 17. To others he gives trouble, while he has a large share himself. Very few men openly declare themselves candidates for contempt, but tale-bearers gain it without direct seeking.

If such persons met with no encouragement, they would cease their evil work. If none will dance, they will not pipe. Pity it is that they are not made ashamed of their evil course. He who listens to them is partaker of their sins. A good man "taketh not up a reproach against his neighbour." Prov. xv. 3. Tale-hearing is twin-sister to tale-bearing. "Where the carcass is, there the eagles will be gathered together." And where evil report is rifest, there will gather foul birds, which prey upon ruined character. How court-houses are crowded by this sort of persons, when matters of a scandalous nature are to be investigated! Their dolorous notes of regret do not even conceal their hypocrisy. Like sepulchres, their memories are full of dead men's bones and all corruption. If none would hear evil reports, none would be made. "The north-wind driveth away rain; so doth an angry countenance a backbiting tongue." Prov. xxv. 23. "It is not the lie that passeth through the mind, but the lie that sticketh in and settleth in the mind, that doth the hurt." Cowper says:

"Whoever keeps an open ear
For tattlers, will be sure to hear
The trumpet of contention;
Aspersions is the babblers' trade,
To listen is to lend him aid,
And rush into dissension.

Bishop Hall says, "As 'there would be no thieves, if there were no receivers,' so there would not be so many open mouths to detract and slander, if there were not so many open ears to entertain them. If I cannot stop other

men's mouths from speaking ill, I will either open my mouth to reprove it, or else I will stop my ears from hearing it; and let him see in my face that he hath no room in my heart."

"A good name is better than precious ointment." Eccles. vii. 1. Yea, "a good name is rather to be chosen than great riches." Prov. xxii. 1. Character is all the estate many have. To any man it is of great value. Everywhere and always human happiness much depends upon it. Compared with it, other possessions are paltry :

"Who steals my purse steals trash, 'tis something, nothing;
'Twas mine, 'tis his, and has been slave to thousands;
But he that filches from me my good name,
Robs me of that, which not enriches him,
But makes me poor indeed."

Who is the gainer by tattling or slander? He who utters either is greatly polluted. He who listens to either is an "eater of calumnies," as the Syriac calls Satan. He of whom either is uttered, does not thereby lose a good conscience, but he sometimes loses his temper, which is the source of much of his enjoyment; and sometimes he loses his good name, which is the best legacy he can leave his children. Both tattling and slander are commonly malignant, and always wanton. Nor is any one safe from these robbers. No lock and key, no armed sentinel, no life of usefulness, no solid worth can secure a good name from their attacks.

"No might, nor greatness in mortality,
Can censure 'scape; back-wounding calumny
The whitest virtue strikes. What king so strong
Can tie the gall up in the slanderous tongue?"

Well does the word of God describe such, "Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used

deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips." Rom. iii. 13. "There is that speaketh like the piercings of a sword." Prov. xii. 18. One asked a Spartan if his sword was sharp. He replied, "Sharper than calumny." The good of all ages have testified against these sins. One said, "The most abandoned and sordid minds have the least abhorrence of calumny. He who is but moderately wicked, dares not venture upon it. He who has the least particle of ingenuousness in his nature disdains it." Another said, "The malice of ill tongues cast upon a good man is only like a mouthful of smoke blown upon a diamond, which, though it clouds its beauty for the present, yet it is easily rubbed off, and the gem restored with little trouble to its owner." Were this the proper place, it might be well to consider at length how we should behave under such wrongs. One said, "The sparks of calumny will be presently extinct of themselves unless you blow them." In some cases this is true, but in all cases imitate Christ, and commit yourself to Him that judgeth righteously.

Detraction is a species of slander. It consists in taking away *something* from the character of another. It denies not *all* his merits, but it puts in many abatements, exceptions, and insinuations. It is a common sin with rivals, sectaries, and partisans. Sallust explains to us the motives of such; "By casting down others, they hope to rise to honour." But to prove that one man is base will not prove another noble or virtuous.

One of the meanest ways of sinning with the tongue is so to attack character that no fair defence can be made. Some will give no names, others will avoid all particulars, but yet both will so describe things as to give cruel thrusts. If called to an account, they meanly enough put you to the proof of their having said ought against you, and show the cunning of a fox in eluding a pursuit which is becoming hot.

The great difficulty in all evil speaking is that so soon as a man utters it, his pride and self-love pledge him to make it good. Unless compelled, he seldom retracts. To injure a man is the surest way to hate him, and to wish to have ground of justification in such a case is quite natural. Passion, once enlisted, is blind and obstinate. Most of the hard and cruel things said, would, but for this cause, be taken back. Detraction is seldom followed by retraction.

A fondness for the strange and marvellous is one of the sins of every age, and shows itself in speech. To forge a chain out of a gossamer film, to make a mountain out of a mole-hill, and to abound in the wonderful may make fools gape, but will cause wise men to fear. When such men speak soberly, they fail of gaining credit. Some of the most painful scenes witnessed in social intercourse arise from the love of big stories. Asseverations, and even oaths, do not secure belief in them. He who duly fears God, will take care neither to invent, retail, nor even listen to them. It is to be regretted that superlatives are so commonly in use. How many speak of others as the meanest, the cleverest, the wisest, or the kindest people they ever knew! How often do we hear such expressions as these: "This is the hottest or the coldest, or the darkest day I ever saw!" Perhaps these very people have said the same things oftentimes, and do not really mean what they say. They may not so much wish to deceive as to be impressive. True, all hyperbole is not unlawful. John xxi. 25. But this habitual use of it is out of place, weakens respect for our sobriety of mind, if not for our love of truth, and utterly fails of any good object. Exaggeration is said to run in some families. In giving solemn testimony there is often no little lying of this kind. President Edwards, the elder, wisely "*resolved*, in narrations, never to speak any thing but the pure and simple verity."

The spirit which leads men to the marvellous, often

guides them to boasting. As formerly, so now, "most men will proclaim every one his own goodness." Prov. xx. 8. So they boast of their exploits, property, influence, talents, charity, family, friends, and correspondents. Those "whose glory is in their shame," go further, and proudly tell of things which should crimson their cheeks. They seem to have one pleasure in committing a sin, and two in speaking of it. Men sometimes unwittingly let others know that they are knaves. "It is naught, it is naught, saith the buyer; but when he is gone his way, then he boasteth." Prov. xx. 14. Perhaps there are commonly too many words used in buying and selling. Many assert their large possession of qualities, of which they have little or none. And "whoso boasteth himself of a false gift, is like clouds and wind without rain." Prov. xxv. 14. Such a man is sometimes said to be *windy*, and he is a mere puff. "All such boasting is evil." James iv. 16. "Boasters" do not bear a high character for truth in other respects, and Paul enrols them among "backbiters, haters of God, inventors of evil things, blasphemers," and such like vicious characters. Rom. i. 30, and 2 Tim. iii. 2.

It is very important that we should avoid the extremes of excessive confidence or doubtfulness in our statements. Some men *conjecture, think, suppose, presume, guess, are not sure but* that things are or were thus and so, when they know it. On the other hand some *know, aver, declare most positively, are ready to make oath* about trifles and things in their nature doubtful. The first class is certain of nothing; the latter, of every thing. The one by seeming doubtful of plain facts well known to them, would hang an innocent man; the other would bring about the same result by speaking so confidently of things doubtful as to destroy their own credibility in other things. The rule is, obtain correct views, if you can, and express them modestly, but clearly;

but if there is room for rational doubt be not positive. If you know a thing, say so ; if you know it not, say so.

There is much sin committed respecting promises. Some promises are wicked, and should be neither made nor kept. If made, they are to be repented of. Some are rash, yet not wicked ; such are to be kept. Rashness is always a folly and commonly a sin, and so should be mourned over. But "he that sweareth to his own hurt and changeth not," is the man that shall never be moved. *Psa. xv. 4, 5.* But even in lawful and prudent promises, what slackness of fulfilment ! How few men keep all their engagements ! How little punctuality and promptness do we see ! If a man would be confided in by none, let him promise much, and perform little. There is no surer mark of general corruption than want of fidelity. "When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth ?"

Thomas Boston says, "Lies are of four sorts :

"1. Jesting lies, that is, when a person speaks that, which is contrary to the known truth, in a jesting or ludicrous way ; and embellishes his discourse with his own fictions, designing thereby to impose on others.

"2. Officious lies, that is, when one speaks that which is contrary to the truth, and the dictates of his conscience, to do good to himself or others thereby. *Job xiii. 7. Rom. iii. 8.*

"3. Pernicious lies, that is, when a person raises and spreads a false report, with a design to do mischief to another.

"4. Rash lies, that is, when a person utters that which is false through surprise, inadvertency, and customary looseness. *2 Sam. xiii. 30.*"

It is not necessary to be able to classify every kind of lying. The essence of the sin consists in an intention to deceive where we are under obligation to speak. If any thing is spoken, it should be the truth. Of every species

of this sin the old sayings are true, "A liar should have a good memory." "A liar is brave towards God, and a coward towards man." "A lie has no legs," and so cannot stand. Blessed is the man "that speaketh the truth in his heart." Psa. xv. 2. Downright lying, without an object, is perhaps not very common, though some such cases do appear. But equivocation, prevarication, Gen. xx. 9—16, wresting men's words, Psa. lvi. 5, and Matt. xxvi. 60, 61, disparagement of others, Luke xviii. 11, undue-praise of others, Acts xii. 22, 23, untrue commendation of ourselves, Luke xviii. 11, denying our own gifts, Exodus iv. 10, 14, exaggerating the faults of others, and making "a man an offender for a word," Isa. xxix. 20, 21, are kinds of falsehood, always having some guilt in them. In short, whatever is contrary to candor, fairness, and sincerity, should be avoided. It is to the great reproach of human nature that there should so often seem to be manifest pleasure in falsehood. "All liars shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death." Rev. xxi. 8.

Passing judgment before hearing evidence or argument, is a common sin. "All are not thieves that the dogs bark at." Many an innocent man is clamorously and falsely accused. To come out against the innocent or for the guilty is a great sin. "He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the just, even they both are abomination to the Lord." Prov. xvii. 15. A tumult or an uproar for or against a man is no proof. Nor are we innocent in justifying, when we should condemn ourselves. Luke xvi. 15. Confessions of sin in prayer, if not true, are very shocking to pious ears, and must be offensive to God. Making merry with the miseries of others is a great sin of the tongue and heart. "He that is glad at calamities shall not be unpunished." Prov. xvii. 5. We should be sorry both at the sorrows and sins even of our worst foe. "Rejoice not when thine

enemy falleth, and let not thine heart be glad when he stumbleth; lest the Lord see it, and it displease him, and he turn away his wrath from him." Prov. xxiv. 17, 18. None but men of fiendish dispositions allow the violation of this law.

Railing, reviling, and scornful words are also condemned in Scripture. "Render not railing for railing." 1 Pet. iii. 9. If another reviles you, set him an example of patience. Paul puts "railers" among "fornicators, covetous, idolaters, drunkards, and extortioners." 1 Cor. v. 11. When Jesus "was reviled, he reviled not again." 1 Pet. ii. 23. Of the early Christians Paul says, "being reviled we bless." 1 Cor. iv. 12. Our rulers in church and in state are to be spoken of respectfully. We read of some who "are not afraid to speak evil of dignities. Whereas angels, which are greater in power and might, bring not railing accusation against them before the Lord." 2 Pet. ii. 10, 11. Even "Michael, the archangel, when contending with the devil, he disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, The Lord rebuke thee." Jude 9. Let those who indulge in scornful language consider well the import of Matt. v. 22. "A soft tongue breaketh the bone." Prov. xxv. 15. "A soft answer turneth away wrath, but grievous words stir up anger." Prov. xv. 1. Quarrelling is one of the lowest vices, and "recrimination is the last resort of guilt." The late Dr Ebenezer Porter entered it among his solemn purposes, "When I am angry I will never speak, till I have taken at least as much time for reflection as Athenodorus prescribed to Cæsar." This was, "Always repeat the twenty-four letters of the alphabet before you give way to the impulse of anger."

Those in authority often sin by using tones and words of threatening. "And ye, masters, do the same things unto them, forbearing threatening; knowing that your Master also is in

heaven; neither is there respect of persons with God." Eph. vi. 9. While others sin by impudent and impertinent replies to their superiors. "Exhort servants to be obedient to their own masters, and to please them well in all things, not answering again." Tit. ii. 9.

Scolding is a kind of threatening without the power, or at least without the intention of punishing. It is finding fault in a surly manner. It is one of the most unamiable of domestic vices. It banishes peace, spoils the temper, and makes many a house the miniature of hell. Many "hard speeches" are uttered in this way. The effect on children and servants is so discouraging that they often become desperate, thinking it is of no use to try to please. Any unnecessary exposure and repetition of the faults of others is a sin. Prov. xvii. 9. It was a resolution of one of the greatest men of his day, "Never to say any thing at all against any body, but when it is perfectly agreeable to the highest degree of Christian honour, and of love to mankind, agreeable to the lowest humility, and sense of my own faults and failings, and agreeable to the golden rule; and when I have said any thing against any one, to bring it to, and try it strictly by the test of this resolution."

"Foolish talking and jesting are not convenient." Eph. v. 4. That is, they do not become Christians. "Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment." Matt. xii. 36. "Idle words" are words without effect, and are "frothy, unsavoury stuff, tending to no purpose, nor good at all." When Latimer, on his first examination, heard the pen of the notary who was writing behind a curtain, he was careful what he said, because he knew it might be brought against him at his trial. All our words will meet us at the tribunal of Christ.

The question is often asked, What rules should guide us in the use of pleasantry, humour, wit, satire, irony, sar-

casm, and ridicule? The following seem to cover all cases :

1. It is certain that all use of these things is not unlawful. The examples of Elijah, David, and Isaiah prove this. 1 Kings xviii. 27 ; Psa. cxv. 4—8 ; and Isa. xlv. 9—17.

2. Yet they are dangerous talents. They are edge-tools, and sometimes cut terribly. "Wit is folly unless a wise man has the keeping of it." It is, therefore, better to err in making a spare rather than a free use of them. To make a trade of any of them is contemptible.

3. They should never be employed to effect malignant or mischievous purposes, nor to put down truth, nor to defeat justice, nor to uphold wickedness. They should never be wielded against the serious misfortunes or afflictions of men, nor against the good name of any, nor on sacred subjects.

4. They should not be used unseasonably. To some minds they are always unpleasant. Unfitly employed, they sunder friendships. "He is not a wise man who will lose his friend for his wit ; but he is less a wise man who will lose his friend for another man's wit." Discretion is better than a *bon mot* ; and friendship is more valuable than fun.

5. In this, as in all things, "love is the fulfilling of the law." Whatever is not benevolent is not wise or right.

6. Their chief use should be to enliven the mind, to promote cheerfulness, to expose absurdities, to lash popular vices, to reprove self-conceit, and to show the enemies of God's word that these things are not solid tests of truth and righteousness.

7. "The wisdom of man lies not in satirizing the vices and follies of others, but in correcting his own." A deep sense of our true characters will commonly prevent us from too much severity against others, and from allowing our pleasantries to sink into buffoonery.

The Scriptures also condemn undue and untimely conver-

sation on worldly affairs, John iii. 31, and Isa. lviii. 13; all ill-natured, censorious remarks, though they be but surmises, Matt. vii. 1, 2; Rom. xiv. 4—13; and 1 Tim. vi. 4; all fiery, bitter wars of words, Prov. xviii. 6; Rom. xiv. 1; Phil. ii. 14; 1 Tim. vi. 4, 5; and 2 Tim. ii. 23—26. "The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God." James i. 20. They also forbid all murmurings and complainings against God, Num. xiv. 27, and 1 Cor. x. 10; all seductive, tempting speeches, Rom. xvi. 18; all defence and propagation of false doctrine, Matt. v. 19; xxiii. 16; Isa. ix. 14—16; Ezek. xiii. 18; Col. ii. 8, 18, 22; 1 Tim. iv. 1—6; 2 Tim. ii. 18; iii. 6, 8, 13; Tit. i. 10; Rev. xviii. 19; and all scoffing at sacred things. 2 Pet. iii. 3.

All profane oaths, speeches, and exclamations are forbidden in many parts of Scripture. From Sinai God said, "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain." Exodus xx. 7. In the sermon on the mount Christ said, "Swear not at all; neither by heaven, for it is God's throne; nor by the earth, for it is his footstool; neither by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King; neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your communication be Yea, yea, Nay, nay; for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil." Matt. v. 34—37. God's name was never intended to be used as an expletive in conversation. It is a great evil that it is so often used in exclamations of surprise, grief, or joy.

But there may be sinful silence as well as sinful speaking. A dumb devil is an evil possession. Ambrose says, "As we must render an account of every idle word, so must we likewise of our idle silence." Another says, "Strange is the disorder that sin has brought into the world; as in the tongue, which is often going when it should be quiet, and

often quiet when it should speak. Our tongues are our glory; but they are often found wrapt up in a dark cloud of silence, when they should be shining forth."

Our tongues should be used in acknowledging, adoring, praising, thanking, blessing, extolling, justifying, and supplicating God. We should honour him with our tongues in prayer, in sacred songs, in solemn vows, in humble confessions of sin, in solemn oaths judicially administered, and in professing the true religion. On all these points the Bible is full and clear.

We should also use our vocal powers in giving honour to whom it is due, Rom. xiii. 7; in charitable expressions concerning others, Heb. vi. 9; in readily acknowledging their good qualities, Rom. i. 8; 1 Cor. i. 4—7, and 2 Tim. i. 5, 6; in hearty and timely expressions of sorrow for the sins and infirmities of others, 2 Cor. xii. 21; 1 Cor. xiii. 7; in giving proper warning to the erring, Ezek. iii. 17—21; Col. i. 28; in pleading the cause of the poor and needy, Prov. xxxi. 9; 1 Sam. xxii. 14; in advocating truth, Jer. ix. 3; in speaking truth, Eph. iv. 25; in speaking the whole truth, when properly called to do it, Jer. xlii. 4; Acts xx. 20; and in confessing our sins and errors known to men, or committed against them. James v. 16.

Self is a poor theme of conversation, yet indifference to character is no fruit of piety. If unjustly accused we may like Job, David, Jeremiah, Paul, and Christ, defend ourselves. But no wise man says much of himself unless compelled, and then with modesty and a sacred regard to truth.

According to our station it is also our duty to give reproof, admonition, rebuke, and advice. Prov. xvii. 10; Psa. cxli. 5. True, every man is not to be reprovèd. "He that reproveth a scorner, getteth to himself shame; and he that rebuketh a wicked man, getteth himself a blot. Reprove not a scorner lest he hate thee." Prov. ix. 7, 8. Silence is often the best reproof, and the only wisdom. "I

will keep my mouth with a bridle, while the wicked is before me. I was dumb with silence. I held my peace even from good." Psa. xxxix. 1, 2.

"But if some proper hour appear,
I'll not be overawed;
But let the scoffing sinners hear
That I can speak for God."

The most essential quality in a reprover is meekness; next to this are love and humility. Even "sin may be sinfully reprov'd." Advice is often the best charity; yet "to advise much is a sign that we need advice." In giving advice, do not try to please, but to do real good. An adviser fills a very responsible post. "The greatest trust between man and man is the trust of giving counsel." Beware of the vanity of affecting to know things beyond your reach. Admonition and rebuke must not be untimely, unjust, severe, or bitter. "To him that is afflicted pity should be shown by his friend." Job vi. 14. "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver." Prov. xxv. 11.

And can any thing be more important than that our speech be such as to please God? "By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned." Matt. xii. 37. "What shall be given unto thee? or what shall be done unto thee, thou false tongue? Sharp arrows of the mighty, with coals of juniper." Psa. cxx. 3, 4. "A wholesome tongue is a tree of life, but perverseness therein is a breach in the spirit." Prov. xv. 4. "Death and life are in the power of the tongue." Prov. xviii. 21. "Heaviness in the heart of man maketh it stoop; but a good word maketh it glad." Prov. xii. 25. "A man hath joy by the answer of his mouth; and a word spoken in due season, how good is it." Prov. xv. 23. "As an ear-ring of gold, and an ornament of fine gold, so is a wise reprover upon an obedient ear." Prov. xxv. 12. One of the heathen

said, "Tongues cut deeper than swords, because they reach even to the soul." A religion which leaves the tongue uncontrolled is mere pretence. "If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridled not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain." James i. 26. After such representations, where is any thing to be added to convince men that here is a most weighty matter? If men will not be moved by arguments drawn from human happiness and human misery on earth, from the august scenes of the last day, from the miseries of future punishment, and the rewards of a life of piety, their case is beyond the reach of human skill.

Thus we get some just views of the number and heinousness of our sins, and of the necessity of divine grace both to pardon and to reform us. Left to ourselves we are undone and helpless. "If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body. Behold we put bits in the horses' mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body. Behold also the ships, which, though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth. Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold how great a matter a little fire kindleth! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity; so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature, and it is set on fire of hell. For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind; but the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be." James iii. 2—10. He who thinks he

needs not amazing mercy to blot out the sins of his tongue, is indeed blind; and he who thinks he shall easily cease to sin by word, knows nothing of the strength of an evil nature, confirmed by evil habits. If we have nothing else to repent of, surely our lips may well abase us. If we have nothing else to confess and bewail, surely each of us has reason to say with Isaiah, "I am undone, for I am a man of unclean lips." If in nothing else we are called to make restitution, have we wronged no one in words? If we can reform nothing else, can we not amend our habits of speech?

Yet, as Archbishop Leighton says, the conquest of these evils of the tongue "must be done in the heart; otherwise it will be but a mountebank cure, a false imagined conquest. The weights and wheels are *there*, and the clock strikes according to their motion. Even he that speaks contrary to what is within him, guilefully contrary to his inward convictions and knowledge, yet speaks conformably to what is within him in temper and frame of his heart, which is double, *a heart and a heart*, as the Psalmist hath it. Psa. xii. 2. A guileful heart makes guileful tongue and lips. It is the workhouse, where is the forge of deceits and slanders, and other evil speakings; and the tongue is only the outer shop where they are vended, and the lips the door of it; so that such ware as is made within, such and no other can be set out. From evil thoughts, evil speakings; from a profane heart, profane words; and from a malicious heart, bitter or calumnious words; and from a deceitful heart, guileful words, well varnished, but lined with rottenness. And so in general, *from the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh*, as our Saviour teaches. That which the heart is full of, runs over by the tongue; if the heart be full of God, the tongue will delight to speak of him; much of heavenly things within will sweetly breathe forth something of their smell by the mouth; and if nothing but earth is there, all that man's discourse will have an earthly

smell; and if nothing but wind, vanity, and folly, the speech will be airy, and vain, and purposeless. *The mouth of the righteous speaketh wisdom; the law of his God is in his heart.*" Psa. xxxvii. 30, 31.

Nor is it possible for us to effect a thorough change without diligence, watchfulness, and prayer. An unguarded mouth will pour forth folly and wickedness. Therefore after all David's resolutions and efforts he comes to God in earnest prayer and cries, "Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips." Psa. cxli. 3.

If you go on sinning with your lips, you either *will* repent or *not*. If you shall repent, you will have more anguish than all the vile pleasure of sin is worth. If you never shall truly repent, how sad your state for ever! And are we not all guilty enough already? Are not our iniquities fearfully multiplied? They are more than the hairs of our head. We cannot answer for one of a thousand of our offences. Even now our only hope is in the infinite mercy of God. How sweet are the words of Scripture to those who rightly feel their sinfulness! "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." "The blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, cleanseth us from all sin." Wonderful, wonderful are the compassions of the Lord. O that we may no longer abuse them, but by them be won to God, to love, to holiness in thought, word, and deed!

Would it not, therefore, be right for you to make these solemn resolutions?

1. I will steadily keep in view my latter end, and remember that soon I must stand before my Judge. I would not live a day or an hour in forgetfulness of the truth that all my thoughts, *words* and deeds are to undergo the scrutiny of Him, who is so holy as to hate all sin, and so great as to know all things, and so just as never to clear the guilty.

2. I will endeavour often to ask myself, How would Jesus

Christ speak were he in my circumstances? He has left me an example that I should follow his steps. His life is the law of God put in practice. If I walk in his steps I shall not err.

3. I will rely more and more on the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ to preserve me from sins of the tongue. I have too much relied on the strength of my own virtue and perseverance, and so I have failed. "O Lord, undertake for me."

4. I will constantly strive to have a deep sense of the importance of making a right use of my tongue. I will endeavour to avoid levity of mind, and so escape levity of speech and behaviour. By God's grace I will be serious.

5. I will often call myself to an account for my words during the day, and when I have erred, I will not spare myself from these severe, yet salutary answers, which my sins deserve. I will not justify, excuse, or extenuate the sins of my lips.

6. I will labour to have my mind stored with valuable information and reflections, that I may not be tempted to deal in gossip, and scandal, and idle news, and that my words may be instructive to those with whom I mingle.

7. I will endeavour to be more impressed with a sense of the amazing grace and mercy of God to me a sinner, in bidding me hope for his favour, notwithstanding all my offences. Thus I shall have alacrity and joy in resisting evil and seeking holiness.

8. I will labour to have a proper view, not only of the meanness, mischief and troubles of a loose tongue, but also of its great sinfulness in the sight of God. As an unbridled speech is a wickedness, I would avoid it, even if it brought me no temporal evil.

9. Above all things, I will seek to be thoroughly renewed by the power of the Holy Ghost. If he will make his abode with me, I shall be able to resist all sin, and overcome all

evil habits. To change my nature is beyond my power, but not beyond the power of the Sanctifier. My power is but another name for feebleness : his energy is irresistible.

10. I will strive to practise the wise rules which Dr. Watts so well suggests in his version of the xxxix. Psalm.

Thus I resolved before the Lord,
 Now will I watch my tongue,
 Lest I let slip one sinful word,
 Or do my neighbour wrong.

Whene'er constrained awhile to stay
 With men of lives profane,
 I'll set a double watch that day,
 Nor let my talk be vain.

I'll scarce allow my lips to speak
 The pious thoughts I feel,
 Lest scoffers should occasion take
 To mock my holy zeal.

Yet if some proper hour appear,
 I'll not be overawed,
 But let the scoffing sinner hear
 That I can speak for God.