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SERMON.

Unusually Interesting Discourse Preached By Rev. J. A. Ross to the Congregational Church.

TEXT.—"Be not conformed to this world."—Rom. xii. 2.

"My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not." In a county in another state the jail, with commendable taste in the abandonment of clothing in the county, is all the appurtenances of a light and graceful architecture, with its large and airy windows surrounded by curved work, and nicely proportioned pillars supporting an elegant portico, and well built steps leading up to a spacious and attractive entrance. It stands beside the temple of justice, the court-house, a building not remarkable for striking architectural beauty, and in contrast with the fineness and lightness of the jail appears positively low and dingy. Here matters are reversed. The jail should have been the court house, and the court house the jail. The court house is as repulsive exterior seems to say to all honest men seeking their regard. You need not enter here. Any forbidding appearance warns you off from this dangerous place, where lawlessness sits on the bench and meets out the cruel judgments. Entering in its attractive exterior seems to invite all regions within its friendly walls. "Come, here is the place for you. Here you will find a ready welcome and comfortable quarters. My hall is the appearance tells that you will find nothing harsh or disagreeable within. This cell reminds me of sin. No doubt it has its dark dungeons, the cells of solitary confinement, and these I think is for the unruly and punishments proportioned to the degree of grade of crime; but you detect nothing of this on the outside no hint here of the existence of the terrible dungeon. It looks like any other building. So with the outside of sin. It looks beautiful to the eye, and harmless to the touch. It does not approach it not, neither are the powers of that prison-house. The serpent first tempted our common parents, and ever since sin has manifested its serpent-like characters. You [illegible] a serpent. It is so lovely, [illegible] with beauty, and its skin softer to the touch than any velvet. [illegible] you passed your hand [illegible] be careful not to touch that [illegible] or to [illegible] too near to admire that lovely animal. Its eye will fix you with terrible fascination; its bite [illegible] and death enough every form. So [illegible] appear beautiful at first [illegible] its glitter [illegible] entices the soul to [illegible] its [illegible] is certain death.

This is the dangerous form of sin I don't force. You did [illegible] would probably resist it. It entices. The devil cannot drive you to [illegible] he can only tempt you. From the beginning to this day it is [illegible] in the Bible. Now if you wish to entice a serpent had taken the [illegible] and compelled to force it [illegible] willing or unwilling, [illegible] it gently, and the serpent would have been bitten, not the [illegible] that old serpent, the devil, is [illegible] tool is that. He begin to work out of sight all that would frighten him away, and leave the rest to himself. This is just the way the devil goes to work to catch souls. He sets his trap in a favorable place, he baits its beautiful rosy cheeks, and persuades her to take only one bite to see how good it is. And at length she does consent, and suffers all the terrible consequences. And he succeeded so well that time, that he has been trying the same plan ever since, and, alas! too often with as good success. Did you ever sin at first in all its native ugliness, you would run from it as you would from a rattlesnake. But the danger is that the rattlesnake sounds his rattle before he bites; sin bites first, and rattles afterward. You are persuaded that it is so nice or so manly to do certain things. If sin was seen in all its terrible colors—if vice at once worked all its terrible results, none would be sinners. If the first temptation to drunkenness was a full debauch, which laid you in the gutter beside the hoggish swine; none would be drunkards. If the first to stealing was such an enormous theft as would send you at once to the degradation of the State prison; none would be thieves. If the first temptation to profanity was such a black and terrible oath as would make the very heavens above you darkly frown, none would be profane swearers. If the first temptation to lying was such an awful lie as would make your word forever after good for nothing, none would be liars. If at the first act of sin the bottomless pit were at once to open at your feet, and the [illegible] of darkness forever close round, none would be sinners, and this world could then not be what God intended it to be—a place of probation. If sin was seen at first as it really is, it would frighten. But the devil does not want to frighten: he allures. He holds back the frightful aspects, and only shows you a little of the more attractive features to allure you on. He draws little by little. He hides his strong net, and only shows you the light gossamer threads at the first. These you wear proudly; they are your ornament and your pride; they seem about you like threads of gold, but imperceptibly they grow; the gossamer threads become the means of an iron network, from which no struggles can free you. This enticing power or sin is well illustrated in a description by Mr. Beecher of the way in which they catch wild turkeys out West. Mr. Beecher was for a time in Indianapolis, and so became acquainted with Western life. He says, "Out in the West, when we wanted to trap turkeys, the foolishest birds in the woods, we used to build a great pen, and cut a channel leading into it so low that with their heads down they could walk under the lower bar. Now, the turkey is so simple that it never will stoop to go through a hole in order to escape. So when we had built the pen and cut the channel, we took corn and pounded it along, a little here and a little there, in the channel. And then the fools of turkeys would go gobbling it up with their heads down, till they got into the inclosure, and then they were caught—for when they had once lifted their heads they would not lower them again to get out where they had come in and they could not fly out." In this way Satan catches souls. He does not drive them; but toles them along after him. He does not at first show the cloven foot, but poses as an angel of light. He scatters the bait along the downward road to get them within the inclosure. At first he does not try to get the whole apple down their throats, if he can only persuade them to nibble a little at it, they will eat it themselves at their leisure.

My son, if sinners entice thee, this is the danger. The mischief lies in yielding to these enticements.

The devil is the great tripsetter—a deceiver from the beginning. He catches souls by guile. He entraps them, this is the thought often found in the Bible. Now if you wish to entrap an animal how do you go to work? You prepare your trap, you choose to it a favorable spot, you bait it with what you know the animal likes, you scatter some of the same bait as decoys to lure the animal into it; then keep out of sight all that would frighten him away, and leave the rest to himself. This is just the way the devil goes to work to catch souls. He sets his trap in a favorable place, he baits it, he scatters around the decoys; he keeps out of sight all that would fright en you, he hides his ugly self out of sight, and then you are so simple that you walk right, into the trap, and get caught. Wise as you think yourselves to be, he is wiser than you. You cannot match him in cunning. You cannot dally with him in any shape. Your only safety is to keep out of his way. Just so surely as you nibble at his bait, just so surely you will be caught in his trap.

Men are the decoys the devil uses. The sin is a little one. There in no great harm in it. Only do it this time. You will be laughed at if you are so very particular. You are now fairly in the scrape, and may as well brave it through this once. Well, it not so very bad after all. I do not see how you can help it under the circumstances. Such are some of his decoys. You will be a little lazy; you will tell a little lie; you are away on a visit, and will omit your morning and evening prayers for the present; ah! take care—you are nibbling at the devil's decoys; you are walking into his trap. Yes, and there are some men who think no more of themselves than to be the devil's decoys—some men who are fallen so low as to be bait for the devil's trap—some worthless men, who glory in beguiling the young and inexperienced into sin. What shall I say of such? Language has no terms dark and hateful enough to apply to them. To work for the devil—to try to gain adherents to his cause—to help him throw his net over inexperienced souls; this is their honorable employment. The devil's recruiting officers—this is their high dignity. Their crime cries to heaven for vengeance. Murderers of souls they are. Black as outer darkness is their guilt. The men who sail the seas beneath the black flag and skull and cross bones to rob and murder—the slavers that make their descent on an outraged coast, and by the light of burning villages drag off innocent victims to a hopeless bondage, unless during the horrors of the middle passage delivered by a merciful death, are almost guilt less compared with them. It is bad enough to be sinners themselves, but to try deliberately with plan and purpose to make others sinners, this is atrocious wickedness, even where wickedness reigns triumphant. Better kill the man at once than send the poison ed weapon into his soul. But I must not speak longer on this subject. My soul feels thunder at the thought.

Now the great danger lies in the first consent—not the consent to the great sin, but the consent to the little entice ment. After a while you can scarcely say no; it becomes a habit; you fall into it almost unconsciously, may be even when you know that this particular vice is ruining soul and body, you are helplessly driven along on a stormy career of passion. But at first the consent is freely given. And the first consent is like the letting out of water. Holland, you know is beneath the level of the bordering sea; hence the water would flow in and cover the land were it not for the protecting dykes keeping off the ocean. Now the Hollanders are very careful about these dykes. They are always kept in perfect repair; every little hole or leak is carefully sought and filled up—for were it allowed to remain with the water oozing through, the water would soon enlarge the hole and soften the embankement till the dyke flowed in, and the whole tract of country was overflowed. Their only safety is in stopping the little holes. So must it be with you. You must resolutely refuse consent in the first place. You must learn to say, No, when the devil comes with any of his enticements; and say it so loud that he will hear you. Don't mumble out a No that half means Yes. Don't say: "I had rather not; I am afraid that it is not just right, not just the thing for me to do. I should like to please, but I don't think I can," don't beat about the bush, or go on softening it, as it were slowly, as to cause little if any disturbance during the whole period of childhood.

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NOTICE.

The subscriber gives notice that she has been duly appointed administratrix with the will annexed of the estate of Samuel C. Batchelder late of Hampton in the county of Rockingham, deceased.

All persons indebted to said estate are requested to make payment, and all having claims to present them for adjustment.

ELIZABETH A. BATCHELDER.

Dated March 6, 1901.

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