

Animal Teachers

Being Talks on Animals of the Bible

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PREFACE

The number of visitors to the gardens of the London Zoological Society is an indication of the general interest taken in the animal creation, while any one standing for a short time at the turnstile cannot fail to notice the large proportion of juveniles that enters. In walking round and seeing the different animals in captivity, far from their native haunts, with relatively no freedom, a vivid contrast is suggested by recalling the first garden, where perfect freedom was enjoyed by every creature, with a man set in the position of superiority. The simple yet majestic language of scripture clearly indicates the position: “And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth” (Gen. 1:26).

If man was given this high station, it is indeed a chastening thought that Satan used the medium of an animal to compass the downfall of man, and to instil doubts as to the wisdom and goodness of his Maker into the mind of the creature.

“The serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?” (Gen. 3:1). Never more than at the present day is the great enemy of man endeavouring by the repetition of this same question, “Hath God said?” to pave the way for infidel thoughts. May each of us be able to answer the question by quoting from the Bible: “God. . . hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son” (Heb. 1:1-2).

Surely as we look at the serpents in the reptile house, and experience a feeling of repugnance, we would do well to remember that according to legend this reptile was once one of the very fairest and most beautiful denizens of a wonderful world. This was probably in the mind of our great English poet Milton, when in his “Paradise Lost” he gives the following description of the serpent in the Garden of Eden: “Pleasing was his shape, and lovely.”

If the animals of the Bible can teach us some homely lessons—applicable to old and young alike, yet simple enough for a child to follow—this little book will not have been written in vain.

CHAPTER 1: THE LION

(Read: Proverbs 30:29-31; Revelation 5:1; 1 Peter 5:8-11; Daniel 6; Isaiah 11:4-9)

The Lion has justly been called the King of Beasts. His power, fierceness, and boldness are well known, but these attributes would not alone give him his proud title. In aspect he is magnificent, the full roar for which he is so noted is grander than the voice of any other beast, but with all these qualities is also a nobleness not found in any other beast of prey.

No animal can strike terror to the heart of a lion, even the fierce and strong buffalo falls an easy prey to the courageous king of beasts. We could hardly term him noble if he were bloodthirsty, but he is not, for a lion will not kill except when hunger drives him to do so to provide his food. He is no more bloodthirsty than the butcher who slaughters the bullock or the sheep for his own dinner, he does not kill for the sake of killing, and in this he is surely nobler than some human beings who chase and kill for the mere joy of it. A lion may capture his prey, but he will not worry it or tear it to pieces like the wolf, or bear, and if he takes an animal in readiness for an evening meal, so long as that animal does not resist he will not do him any harm. This has enabled many a hunter to escape with his life after being surprised and caught by the king of beasts, for by lying apparently perfectly still, but quietly and imperceptibly moving a tiny bit, by slow degrees he has been able to reach his rifle, and then make a bold bid for life. Or he might just choose to remain perfectly still until some friend came to the rescue. Magnificent, fierce, and courageous, but noble as bold, we need not fear contradiction when we assert that this wild beast is assuredly the king of beasts.

Is it any wonder that the ancients stood in awe of the king of the jungle and desert? Need we be surprised that there are so many allusions in the Bible to the fierceness and strength of this fine creature?

The hunter today, even with his modern rifle and various safeguards, still has a very deep respect for the lion, so that we must admire the boldness of David when he attacked a lion without the help of any weapon.

I now propose to divide the rest of my talk into four sections, and these will be:

- (1) The strength of the lion.
- (2) The roaring of the lion.
- (3) Curbing the lion's power.
- (4) The tame lion.

(1) The strength of the lion

“What is stronger than a lion?” is a Bible question (Jud. 14:18), and we need not depart from the Bible to find an answer, for we read in Proverbs, a book full of many wise sayings on a number of different subjects, that the lion is the “strongest among beasts, and turneth not away from any.” Accordingly with such evidence we can quite definitely describe the lion as the strongest of all fierce and strong wild animals. Most of us would like to be strong, but strength can be used in two different ways, either to defend the weak and to help others, or to destroy that which is good and to further one’s own selfish ends.

Is it not food for thought that both the greatest Friend of man, his Saviour, the Lord Jesus Himself, and also man’s greatest foe, the one who seeks to destroy everything that is good in him, Satan, the devil, are both likened in different parts of the Bible to the lion, and in both cases there is the suggestion of the strength of this creature?

In the fifth chapter of the Revelation there is a wonderful picture of a scene in heaven, witnessed by the Apostle John, who was very troubled because there was no one there able to open a book that was sealed with seven seals. Then we read in the words of scripture: “And one of the elders said unto me, Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof.” We next see “a Lamb as it had been slain” in the midst of the throne, who was successful in opening the sealed book, and all heaven became vocal in His praise; indeed, every creature in heaven, on the earth, and in the sea joined to say, “Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.” Thus we see one and the same divine Person spoken of as a Lamb—surely the “Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world”—and also as the “Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David,” speaking of the divine strength and power that was in Him, as well as of His royal and kingly position.

He is the One who can meet every difficulty and can overcome every enemy, even that great enemy Satan, whose strength is surely great enough to justify his being likened to a roaring lion. But, thank God, when the Lion of the tribe of Judah meets the roaring lion, the former must prevail.

We have said that the lion never seeks its prey unless when hungry—Satan, the “roaring lion,” is always hungry, and therefore ever seeking fresh victims, the sheep and lambs of the Lord Jesus Christ.

(2) The roaring of the lion

The lion's roar is majestic in its grandeur. Who has heard it in the evening at the London Zoological Gardens without being affected? How much finer must it sound amidst its more natural surroundings in the jungle! It strikes terror to the heart of big beasts, and how the graceful antelope trembles at the sound!

Naturalists say that the lion only roars when he is sure of his prey, and this is rather confirmed by the words of scripture, for if we turn to Amos we read: "Will a lion roar in the forest, when he hath no prey? will a young lion cry out of his den, if he have taken nothing?" (Amos 3:4).

If the roar of the lion then means that this great and strong beast is sure of his prey, what a very solemn thought is conveyed in the verse that states, "Your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour." Is he also sure of his prey? He would seek to destroy your soul, to take away all happiness from you, while promising you happiness and everything else you want. He may assume the garb of the lamb, he may quietly seek to get you into his toils, but all the while he is the roaring lion, and if he is confident of his prey, he is gloating over your anticipated fall. That is what his intention is, but we must not be taken unawares, and so the apostle tells us to be on our guard, "be sober, be vigilant" and we shall then be aware of his approach. And when he attacks us we should be ready for him, for our passage goes on, "whom resist steadfast in the faith."

The human voice has a profound influence on dumb beasts, and it has been reported that a few words spoken in a tone of command, without any sign of fear, have been known to arrest a lion in his attack, and in just the same way a voice has a wonderful effect on the roaring lion, the devil—it is the voice of faith, the voice of quiet and dependent trust on the One who is mightier.

When down on this earth our blessed Lord was able to resist the wiles of the devil by the word of God, and three times He said, "It is written," until in the end the devil left Him.

We need therefore have no fear of our greatest enemy if we resist him, if we are steadfast in the faith and put on the "whole armour of God." We shall then prove that behind his bold front he is really a coward, and we shall be victorious, we shall know what it is to be "more than conquerors through him that loved us."

(3) Curbing the lion's power

If the lion is the strongest of beasts, as we have proved, it is a wonderful thing to be able to curb that power, greater even than resisting it, great though that assuredly is.

There are cases in the Bible of lions being miraculously restrained from attacking man, but undoubtedly the most marvellous and the best known is that of the prophet Daniel. We all know the story of how he was true to his God, knowing that if he bowed his knee to Him, and was seen so doing, he ran the risk of being thrown into a den of lions that had been made hungry by being denied food for some time. He might have argued that he could pray to God in secret, that he could pray without even kneeling down, but he knew that by so doing he would really be denying the God in whom he trusted. So as he had been wont to do in the past he kneels where he can be seen and lifts his heart in prayer. His enemies report him to the king, and he is condemned to the dreadful punishment and is cast into the lions' den. But there is One who is mightier than the lion, and He will not allow His faithful servant to be touched.

When the king came, and fearfully called to see if by any miracle Daniel had escaped, how it must have moved him to hear those words: "My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths." Truly God can curb the power of the fiercest beast.

No need to say the lions were not hungry, for we have proof that they were, for when Daniel's enemies were thrown in, they were pounced upon and eaten before they reached the bottom of the den.

Daniel might have been called upon to suffer death in this way, but his trust was in God. In later days in the city of Rome that dread cry, *Christianos ad leonem* ("To the lion with the Christians!") was heard, when the Roman emperor was trying to destroy Christianity, and in these cases God did not intervene, but allowed His servants to suffer for Him, and instead of Christianity suffering, the patient and quiet heroism of the martyrs proved the reality of their faith, there being many converts as the result.

What a comfort it must have been for these martyrs to think of Daniel, and to feel that God could curb the power of the strongest of beasts if it were His will.

But how all this shames us, does it not? How often we are afraid to confess the name of the Lord Jesus, not because we should be cast among hungry lions, but just because some one might laugh at us! If we think of the prophet Daniel and his fearless behaviour in a day before God's love had been revealed by His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, surely our confidence will be increased, and we shall not be ashamed to stand alone, if need be, among those who do not own Him, and would even have His name disowned by others, and His followers destroyed if only they had the power to do it.

You have all read “Tom Brown’s School Days,” and must remember how the delicate new boy Arthur made Tom feel himself such an arrant coward, because he had never dared to kneel down before his schoolfellows to pray before going to bed.

(4) The tame lion

If it is more wonderful to curb the power of the lion than to resist it, it seems to me that it is still more wonderful to tame the lion, in fact to give it a new nature.

Yet there is a day coming when the fierce beast of prey will be no longer fierce, when the gentle lamb will no longer fear the dread lion. That will be in the day when the Lord Jesus Himself rules this earth—in the millennium. We often talk of the blessings of the millennium, when there will be perfect order, and absolute happiness, but how often do we realise that that day may not be far distant. You may say that there are no signs of its approach, that men and nations fight and strive for mastery as much as ever, but that in itself is a sign of its approach, for the millennium will be ushered in by such a period of strife and lawlessness that men will long for a deliverer.

If that deliverer is none other than the Lord Jesus, if He is to be the great ruler, can we think of wild beasts tearing harmless animals to pieces in that day? Let scripture itself give us the picture: we shall have to turn to the eleventh chapter of the prophet Isaiah, where we find that it is stated of the Lord: “With righteousness shall he judge the poor,” and in that day we shall find “the calf and the young lion together,” and all in such perfect harmony that “a little child shall lead them.”

The truth that the lion is no longer a beast of prey is implied in these passages, but if further proof is needed we can go on and read: “the lion shall eat straw as the ox,” while of this poor sin-stricken world we read: “the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.” What a lovely picture of millennial peace and happiness.

The One who can curb the lion’s power can also change his nature. Let me ask you a personal question: Has He changed your nature? You may answer that you are not fierce and do not need taming, but there is in each one of us that which prompts us to hasty actions, to do that which will harm, to say that which will wound, and it is only by putting our trust in the Lord Jesus, who went to Calvary’s cross to bear our sins—yours and mine—that we shall be able to have that new nature that will be in keeping with the state of affairs that will obtain when He rules in righteousness. Let us pray that we may even in these days have some of the knowledge of the Lord.

CHAPTER 2: THE BEAR

(Read 2 Kings 2:23-25; Proverbs 17:12; 28:15; Lamentations 3:10; Revelation 13:1-2)

The bear is another beast of prey, but it is not a noble animal like the king of beasts, it does not need to kill men and animals for its food, for it cannot be termed a carnivorous creature, that is, one that is entirely a flesh eater, as it largely lives on vegetables and fruit, so that there is not the same excuse for it to slay as for the lion. The lion devours its prey, the bear kills for the sake of killing; indeed, it will not touch a man who is already dead, and men have saved their lives when hard pressed by a bear by pretending to be dead, and not even breathing when the slayer sniffed round them.

The Bible bear is the brown bear which gradually gets whitish in colour as it grows older; it is still found in Palestine, although very much rarer than it used to be.

Now it is a very bad thing to kill for the sake of killing; but it is something like children saying unkind things solely for the sake of hurting. How much harm may be done, how much unhappiness caused by the unkind word intended to wound. Do not be like the bear.

The bear is indeed a slayer, it took a lamb from David's flock, but David rescued the poor little helpless creature, and the would-be killer became the killed. Later David said that if he could kill a bear without help, he would also be able to kill the dread giant Goliath, that champion of the Philistines. The secret of it all lay in his trust in God, and God gave him strength. How terrible, how fierce the bear must have seemed to the young shepherd, how sharp his claws were David knew; he probably also thought how cross it would be to have the lamb snatched from its very jaws. How strong was its paw, with one blow of which it could fell a man to the ground, yet David knowing all this took no weapon, but boldly laid hands on the great beast and killed it. What a lesson for us in the power that may be in us, if only we trust in God and go forth in His strength. Difficulties vanish and we triumph, but not by our own might; it is by the strength of One who is mightier.

There are three points to be noticed in connection with the animal we are considering, and there is also a lesson of no mean importance that thoughts of this wild brute may teach. Let me now give you my headings:

- (1) The bear's restlessness.
- (2) Its destructiveness.
- (3) Its affection for its young.
- (4) A lesson in manners.

(1) The bear's restlessness

This dread animal is for ever roving about, ready to kill for the mere sake of killing, lying in wait (Lam. 3:10), ever ready for mischief, so that Solomon speaks of it as a “ranging bear.” What a sad picture! It calls to my mind that well-known saying, “Satan finds some mischief still for idle hands to do.” I think ranging generally implies a lack of purpose, and if you are in a restless state, having finished your lessons or other work, and feel that you do not know what to do, perhaps you copy the bear and range up and down the room, finally getting into mischief, so that you may need a word of warning, “Don't be like the bear.” The bear may have been used by God as an instrument of judgment, for God can use whom or what He will—but the bear ranging about and on mischief bent may meet a very sudden fate.

It is a bad thing to be restless, to be dissatisfied. We all have our work to do, be it little or great, we can have ambition, but this should not make us restless, and we should remember that if we would do great things we must begin by doing the smaller ones. A boy said he wanted to be grown up so that he might have responsibilities, but he could not face the responsibilities of manhood unless he had first satisfactorily realised the duties of youth. We can only advance step by step, line upon line, and the boy who would be a brilliant mathematician must first master his simple arithmetic; the girl who would play the most fascinating music must first pass through the elementary stage of the art.

We cannot be spiritually great without commencing at the beginning. The knowledge of a Saviour's love may bring peace and happiness, may give us the comfort of sins forgiven, but there must be a steady advance if we would learn something of the deep things of God.

Ranging without purpose does not accomplish anything good, therefore let us rather pray for purpose of heart, for true constancy. It will imply effort, self-denial, and putting others before ourselves, but it is worth it.

Think of the great contrast between those who have the meek and quiet spirit, and the roving, ranging, restless, dissatisfied people we so often meet.

(2) The bear's destructiveness

Look at those terrible claws when next you see a bear, and think of the damage they could perform! We have already been reminded that the bear kills for the sake of killing, it has a destructive nature, it is a joy to it to rend things in pieces, and to bring about destruction as its cruel sport.

A terrible empire that is yet to arise, one that disowns the true God, is foretold in the Book of the Revelation, where it is likened to a beast, no beast that we could recognise, for it has no less than

seven heads and ten horns, and is like a leopard, with feet of a bear and a lion's mouth. Truly a terrible monster! "The feet of a bear," with those menacing claws, surely we do not need to draw on our imagination much to understand that this means that the dread empire of the future will be a destroying one, destructive of everything that is good.

In a vision of Daniel another kingdom is compared to a bear, and though the vision itself would be beyond your comprehension, when you read that this bear is told to "Arise, devour much flesh," you will agree that again we have the thought of destructiveness.

Have you ever pulled a beautiful flower to pieces, have you disfigured a tree by carving initials on its old trunk, have you ever wantonly damaged some book, perhaps even torn pages from a Bible or hymn book? Few young people would be bold enough to say "No." Let me put another question, and ask if you could perfectly restore one of those things you have destroyed to its original form. This time certainly all must answer "No."

But there is even a worse form of destructiveness that we might well consider. Have you ever laughed at a school chum for saying his prayers at night or for reading a few verses of the Bible when he gets up in the morning? Perhaps you will say this is not a form of destructiveness. Think a while! By such behaviour are you not trying—without perchance realising it—to destroy his faith, to make of no account those lessons he has learned in a Christian home?

Rather let us agree to do our best to preserve that which is good, never to be destructive, but to seek to follow the One who went about undoing the works of the devil.

(3) The bear's affection for its young

The bear has at least one good point. We have seen some bad ones, very bad ones, and it is therefore all the more welcome to find that inside that shaggy beast there beats a loving heart. The baby bears rely upon the protection of their mother, who does not fail them; she is particularly fierce when she has young to care for, as our scriptures have shown us, and woe betide the man who ventures to lay hands on the little ones.

The mother bear's main object in life seems to be to protect her children, to shield them from all harm, and if need be to sacrifice even her life for them.

The affection of the bear for her young is mentioned in three different places in the Bible, and I think that when we get repetitions of this sort we are quite safe in assuming that special importance attaches to the subject.

But, you may object, there does not seem much to concern young people in all this, you could better understand it were I to ask your mother to consider the bear. Wait a moment! Have you no younger brother or sister? Are they never entrusted to your care? Do you protect them from evil? Do you seek to shield them from bad companions? And do you by your example help them to do that which is good?

A girl was once told to look after her younger brother and sister when her parents were out, but she was very fond of story books, so that no sooner had they left than she settled down in an armchair with one of her favourite books, and did not hear her brother leave the room. A terrible shriek rent the air! He had played too near the dining-room fire, and when his sister rushed in she found him in flames! Too late she realised her mistake, but as the little boy lay in hospital how bitterly she repented that she had betrayed her trust in a way that might easily have led to the death of her brother.

The bear has young entrusted by God to its care, and it shows real affection to them; may all of us prove our trust equally well!

(4) Manners

Perhaps never more than at the present day do we need to encourage good manners; we often find instead rudeness and a lack of consideration which we cannot but know is not right. We may laugh at the way that in days gone by children addressed their father as “Sir”; we may say that it is better to love one’s parents than to fear them, and be aloof from them. Certainly “perfect love casteth out fear,” but let us take care that we do not go to the other extreme, and copy the example of those who do not profess to be followers of the Lord Jesus.

But to return to the bear! How terrible it would be to meet the ranging bear without any weapon for defence! How awful to be unable to escape or find any help! Think for a moment of those children who met that great and good prophet Elisha, a man who had grown up in God’s service. They dared to make fun of the man of God; how shocking! “Go up, thou bald head!” What a way to address any one, let alone a servant of the most High; rudeness indeed! They thought they could safely taunt the prophet, their fast young legs would soon get them away if he came after them, so on went the cry, “Go up, thou bald head,” making fun of the wonderful way in which. Elijah had gone up to heaven. Little did they know how near their punishment was, and perhaps we too imagine we can be rude, disobedient, make fun of God’s people, or be thoughtless, without punishment. But what happened?

The very characteristic of the bear, its desire to slay, is seen in the awful finish to this story. Two she-bears came and tore forty-two of these children. If they had been two lionesses they probably would have slain two, and then delayed to eat them, thereby giving the others a chance to escape. But the bear, the wanton slayer, accounts for no less than forty-two. Think of the forty-two children, merry, careless and mischievous—then jeering at the man of God. What a sudden and terrible judgment. We must surely learn two lessons: (1) that God looks after those that serve Him, and (2) that He will not allow mockery of sacred things.

It may be you find it hard to keep from laughing at something a preacher says, or at some action of your school-teacher. If so, I would ask you to think of those children and the she-bears.

From this sad story may we desire that our manners more fit those who would seek to follow a Lord who was always gentle, good and kind.

CHAPTER 3: THE FOX

(Read Judges 15:3-5; Song of Solomon 2:15; Lamentation 5:18; Matthew 8:19-20; Luke 13:31-35)

The fox is an animal that is found in very many parts of the world, and the species inhabiting Palestine is not unlike its cousin of the English country-side. It burrows in the ground and is noted for being sly and cunning in the way in which it catches its prey.

Nothing good is said of this creature in the Bible, and seldom is anything good heard of it in this country, where it is regarded as vermin on account of the manner in which it robs the poultry hens, and makes itself a veritable plague to the farmer.

None of its vices however, are very apparent, for it is a handsome animal, clad in fine fur, and though its intelligent face is somewhat marred by a cunning expression, yet taken altogether it must be admitted that the fox is a good-looking creature. In the same way many young people have been favoured with good looks, with straight and supple limbs, well formed and fashioned in every way, but, perhaps, they too, like the fox, give no indication of the bad habits and evil thoughts that lie hidden away in their hearts. The God with whom we shall all have to do is “no respecter of persons,” He sees us all through and through, each of us can consequently say on the darkest night when we are alone and in bed: “Thou God seest me.” What does He see? Does He see the same picture that your friend, your brother or your sister sees? Listen “Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart” (1 Sam. 16:7). By a similar test we should find that the subject of this chapter is bad—bad in every respect. If you applied the test to yourself, I to

myself, what should we find? What I should like to find would be some of the beautiful fruit of the Spirit, comprising: “love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and temperance.”

But let us return to the fox. I am sure there is no animal, bird, or even fish, in the Bible that could not teach us some lesson, and as we have now got into the habit of making a few definite headings, let us proceed to do the same for the fox. I propose to speak to you about:

- (1) The wantonness of the fox.
- (2) Its cunning.
- (3) Its home.
- (4) Its associations.

(1) The wantonness of the fox

Wantonness is defined in the dictionary as “indulgence to excess,” and I think this describes the fox of the Bible. We may often read in the newspapers about a fox making a raid on some farmyard, and destroying a large number of fowls and chickens, far more than it is ever likely to need for food. It is indulging its passion for killing birds to excess. In this respect it is a far greater offender than its distant relative the bear. Nor is it content with the slaughter of the innocent, for it also makes a descent on the vineyard when the grapes are ripening and are nearly ready to be gathered. In the Song of Solomon you have already read, “Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines: for our vines have tender grapes.” Ah! yes! Even the little foxes are culprits, and must be caught and destroyed before they grow up and become still greater adepts in the ways of wantonness and destruction. And what of the vine?

Let us turn to the New Testament for a few moments and we shall find that the Lord likens Himself to the vine, for does He not say, “I am the true vine” (John 16)? Assuredly He does, but He proceeds to say, “ye are the branches.” I should like you to think of this, because then you will realise how dependent the branches are on the vine itself, which feeds them with the necessary sustenance, and in just that way the Christian is dependent on his Lord, and without His support will soon fail.

Now proceed a step further. What do we expect to find on the branch? “Fruit,” you all say at once, or perhaps “grapes,” when we talk of the fruit of the vine. Come now, our picture develops—our Lord looks for fruit too, and what fruit can you suggest? Surely the fruit of the Spirit of which we have already spoken.

Once more we will return to the fox, and what does he do? He seeks to destroy those tender grapes, those grapes that have been so carefully nurtured—and now, the little foxes are here to destroy my pretty picture. What are these little foxes? I think we might look upon them as the small temptations, the little almost unnoticed influences for evil with which all Christians are beset. A school-friend asks you to go somewhere or do something of which you know your parents or Sunday school-teacher would not approve. Ah! only one of those little foxes, you may think, a very little one perhaps, but the little foxes are bent on destroying the tender grapes. They are agents of Satan to deprive your Master of that fruit for which He is looking. *“Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines: for our vines have tender grapes.”*

(2) The cunning of the fox

Everyone knows that the fox is cunning; we often hear people say, “As cunning as a fox”—it is proverbial—but it is not a nice reputation to have. During fox-hunts this cunning has often baffled the hounds as well as the huntsmen, so many and varied are the schemes of Master Reynard. But to be likened to a fox, to have the name of being cunning and sly, is far from good, and we should be very surprised if a king or some one in high places were to be called a fox. Yet king Herod, who was a mean man and very unsuited to high office, was seen in his true character by our Lord, who, when the Pharisees would have persuaded Him to flee for His life as the wicked king wanted to kill Him, said with all the majesty of divine assurance: “Go ye, and tell that fox, Behold, I cast out devils, and I do cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I shall be perfected.” He would not cease from those good works as long as it was His Father’s will that He should continue. “He went about doing good, for God was with him.” No earthly power, be it king or emperor, could turn Him aside from His pathway of devoted love.

What a terrible description of a king—“that fox.” A man, who with great opportunities for good, had no high motives, but rather was of a sly and crafty disposition, only wanting to see Jesus in the hope of witnessing some miracle. But, as might be expected, our Lord did not satisfy such idle curiosity, and we know that later on king Herod, the highly favoured, came to a most miserable end. Once again I would remind you that God is no respecter of persons, “the rich man in his castle, the poor man at his gate,” the king on his throne, the beggar at the street corner, of all it is equally true, “Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart.”

May none of us ever deserve to be called “that fox.”

(3) The home of the fox

The crafty, cunning fox has a home of its own making. It burrows in the ground, and near by has its larder, where it hides its stolen food, its ill-gotten gains. How it touches our hearts when we read those words of the Lord Jesus about the foxes, “The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head,” especially when we ponder who the Speaker was—the Maker of the world, of the universe. We should have expected that if He came to earth it would have been as a mighty emperor, the highest in the land, and One to whom every king would bend the knee, and yet we know at His birth there was “no room” for Him in the inn!

Again, let us consider another occasion after the Lord Jesus had been preaching and teaching in the temple, the seventh chapter of John ends by relating that “every man went unto his own house.” Yes, each had his home to go to. The division of chapters here is very bad, so we will go on and read the first verse of the next chapter, “Jesus went unto the mount of Olives.” We can be fully assured that when He was alone on that mount, He was communing with His Father in heaven, whose will He was fulfilling in every step of His pathway.

Is your heart affected by those sad and solemn words which tell us that the fox had its home, but our blessed Lord, the Son of God, had no home down here in this world, He was rejected? He has no place in the world today, except in the hearts of those who love Him. These are His words, “Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.” Would you not like to open the door of your heart, give Him a welcome, and show Him by your love that if He had nowhere to lay His head when here on earth, you are one of those who would like to make a home for Him.

Just dwell for a moment on the contrast between the home of the fox, and every man having a home to which he could go, but the Lord of life and glory with no home on earth. How great is His love and grace! Let us each seek to make room for Him.

(4) The associations of the fox

Wherever we read of this beast we find nothing pleasant associated with him, it is generally rather a scene of utter, dreary desolation, nothing good for God or man! In the Lamentations we read, “The mountain of Zion, which is desolate, the foxes walk upon it,” so the fox is associated with a desolate mountain, and yet that very mountain, the mountain of Zion, should have been full of song, the praises of Jehovah should have been heard everywhere, but instead of this, foxes were the only occupants of the place. We read about the message to “that fox,” Herod, and in connection with

what was said then, our blessed Lord in the tenderest grief speaks to that favoured city Jerusalem, saying, “Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.” How sad it is to read of these places, which should have been to the praise of God, just noted for their desolation; nothing in them that is desirable. The very name of fox in Scripture seems linked with desolation; indeed, on one occasion foxes were actually used for the purpose of spreading desolation, for we read that Samson caught three hundred foxes, took them two by two, tail to tail, and having tied lighted firebrands to them, sent them thus among the growing corn of his enemy, the Philistines, to destroy their crops, and in this way they spread desolation.

How sad it is to think of a land once fair and smiling but now laid waste and desolate; many a fertile plain was thus ruined during the Great War. Trees were destroyed, branches shattered and scarred by gunfire—but sadder still is the picture of hearts that were once warm with affection for their Lord and happy in His service, but have now become cold and barren.

In writing to the church at Ephesus it was said, “I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love,” and we know how this state grieved our Lord; if we lose our first love for Him, our hearts too will become cold towards Him. May it never be true of us that our hearts are desolate, thus becoming a fit place for the foxes—some of those horrid little foxes—to come and make their homes.

May our talk about the ways and habits of the fox rather preserve us from similar failings ourselves.

CHAPTER 4: THE CAMEL

(Read Genesis 24:61-64; 37:23-28; 1 Samuel 30:16-17; 1 Kings 10:2; Isaiah 30:6; Matthew 19:21-26; 23:23-24; John 4:10-14)

The camel was an animal often used in Palestine, for it was specially fitted to carry loads across desert country. The number of camels a man had was a means of telling how rich he was, and as nowadays we might hear some one say that Mr. Smith is worth ten thousand pounds, in olden days it would have been said that he owned so many camels.

In the history of Job we find that among his possessions were three thousand camels, and after he had been tested by Satan he lost all his wealth. But God taught him many a lesson of trust and confidence, and when he had learned that not only could he trust God fully, but could even bless

Him for all his troubles, then his wealth returned to him doubly, for we read that he had six thousand camels (Job 42).

The camel is often spoken of as the “ship of the desert,” for just as we embark on a steamer when we want to cross the ocean, in a similar manner when a man desires to cross the desert sand he employs a camel for the purpose. In several of the Bible stories we read of the camel. We know that when Abraham sent for Rebekah, who was to be the wife of Isaac, camels were used for the journey. When Isaac was in the field looking for the return of his servant, in the distance he sees Rebekah riding on her camel, and when she sees him she gets off, they meet, and soon after are married.

The next Bible story in which the camel has a place is not so happy a one, for it is the well-known one of Joseph being sold by his brothers. They had thrown him into a pit, and while he was there, a company of Ishmaelites ride by on their camels, and are stopped by the wicked brothers, who sell the poor boy, who is lifted up on to one of the camels, and is soon on his way to Egypt, where he will one day be able to save his cruel brothers from a terrible death of starvation. I should like to suggest four different points in connection with the camel which it may be helpful for us to talk about for a short time:

- (1) Its load.
- (2) Its speed.
- (3) Its endurance.
- (4) Its size.

(1) The camel’s load

The camel was one of the first animals to be used by man for carrying not only goods, but also themselves. We have thought of Rebekah and Joseph travelling on their backs, and in other places we read of the camel’s “furniture,” this being the frame that is put on its back for the load to be put on, while the prophet Isaiah speaks of the “bunches” of camels, or as we should now say, “humps,” and on them was to be found treasure.

What wonderful things were found on the camel’s hump! Think of the queen of Sheba coming to visit the great and wise king Solomon, with numerous camels all bearing spices and other choice things as a present for the king, and to show him how highly she thought of him, and how she felt he was worth the very best presents that a rich queen could bring.

And so the camel was always being useful to man, he was doing for him things that could not be done by himself, carrying burdens that would be too heavy for man, that would break his back. It is

a very great thing to be able to help some one else. We are told, "Bear ye one another's burdens," that is, help one another.

A poor old woman trudging along with a bundle of logs she had spent some time gathering for her fire, and feeling very weary, was seen by a schoolboy, who was also tired after an afternoon's football. He felt he must help, and cheerfully carried her load, and she was so grateful to him, while he had the joy of knowing that he was helping to bear her burden.

If you should see some one who is sad, some one in trouble, and you can cheer and comfort them, and speak to them of a Saviour's love, you too will be bearing their burden! What a terrible burden Christian had on his back, those of you who have read the "Pilgrim's Progress" will remember, and how he lost it all when he came to the cross. This was only possible because the Lord Himself had borne the burden, and so those who believe in Him are freed of all the burden of sin, for "surely he hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows."

(2) The camel's speed

Movement is necessary to keep us alive. It is by a brisk walk that we make the blood flow freely in our veins, while if we stood still in the cold, we should get colder and colder, and in the end get frozen to death. Many people have died when they might have lived if only they had kept moving. It is so with the Christian, who should not stand still, for he should not be content to remain today where he was yesterday, he should want to draw closer to his Saviour and advance along that pathway that leads up to God. I like to think of the Apostle Paul, who compared himself to a man running a race and pressing towards the mark. He did not look back, but was always looking forward to the day when he would have completed his earthly journey and be for ever with the Lord he loved.

Then there is another kind of movement, a getting away from all that is displeasing to God, fleeing from bad companions, avoiding all evil, and certainly if we have not the power to overcome evil it is safer and better to run right away from it.

You may say I am forgetting all about the camel, but it is not so, for I have had him in mind all the time, and I fancy I see him hurrying over the desert, not even stopping to eat, but just snapping up mouthfuls of the coarse grass as he hastens on, one thing and one thing only before him, and that being to reach the end of the journey. How swiftly he goes! Do you ask me what reason I have for saying this? Let us prove it from the Bible, and look up Jeremiah 2:23, where we shall read of the dromedary (a sort of camel) as being swift, and we find a similar statement in Isaiah 66:20.

There is a story in the Bible, one I have asked you to read, which proves the speed of the camel, for we read that the only Amalekites who escaped from David were those who were fortunate enough to be able to mount camels, and so hasten to a place of safety. There was no delay, they fled, stopping for nothing. And so I hope we shall flee from evil with the speed of the camel, and flee to the right place saying, in the language of scripture, “Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life” (John 6:68). Let us hasten to our Lord, who will care for us and keep us from all harm.

(3) The camel’s endurance

The Camel is particularly fitted for its work of crossing the desert by the provision God has made for it, in that it can go for days without drinking. It takes water when it can and then makes use of it little by little during its tiring journey over the desert. If it only drank enough for its immediate needs it would fail miserably when it came to the severe test of the desert with its lack of supplies. It would be a poor steamer which left its home port without enough coal for the voyage, and our “ship of the desert” is well prepared when it starts on the journey.

You have read the true story in John 4 of the poor woman who went day by day to the well of Sychar to get water for her needs. When our Lord addressed her He spoke of giving water that would prevent all future thirst! What wonderful water! He called it living water. In the last chapter of the Bible we read these words, “And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely” (v. 17). I think this speaks to us of daily refreshment, and the more we read the words of the Lord, the more we think about Him, and follow in His footsteps, the more we shall know what this living water is, and the more we shall enjoy it.

It has sometimes been said that this world is like a desert to the true Christian, who is told to “love not the world,” and if for a moment we think of it as a desert that we are crossing we can ask ourselves whether we have enough living water to enable us to make the journey. Have we put our trust in God? Can we rely on His guidance? May each of my young readers know what it is to be able fully to trust a Saviour’s love.

(4) The camel’s size

Perhaps when you have been at the Zoo, and seen a camel with children on its back, you have thought what a big beast it is. But size is not everything, and our Lord said that unless the great and wise of the earth became as little children they could not enter the kingdom of heaven.

Our friend the camel is used as an object lesson, to show us how different God's thoughts are from ours. We should all naturally think more of a rich man than a poor one, and yet if you read your Bible carefully you cannot fail to notice that it is generally the poor who come in for the blessing. Do you remember how the young man who wanted to follow the Lord Jesus could not decide to say good-bye to all his wealth, for when he was told to sell all that he had and give it to the poor, he turned away sadly and we read of him no more. Sadder still was the case of that other rich man who thought only of his own happiness and comfort, but God called him a fool and told him that that very night his soul would be required of him. No wonder that our Lord, turning to His disciples, said that it was extremely difficult for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. He went on to say a very strange thing, which was, that it was "easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven." Some people think that He spoke of a small gate into Jerusalem known as the "Needle's Eye," through which a camel could just squeeze by going down on his knees, when all the riches on its "furniture" had been removed!

"Humble we must be, if to heaven we'd go,
High is the roof there, but the door is low."

Yes! wealth will be of no use to us, "but with God all things are possible," and the redeeming love of the Lord Jesus has opened the way into heaven.

When next you long to be richer, think of the words of our Lord in the sermon on the mount: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven," and then instead of wishing to be richer you will want to be like the man that God wants to serve Him, for He says, "to this man will I look, even to him that is poor" (Isa. 66:2).

We may learn yet one more lesson from the size of the camel, and that is to be real, not to pretend to be better than we are and not to find fault with others when we are really worse ourselves. Our Lord spoke very severely of the scribes and Pharisees, calling them "hypocrites," that is, they pretended to be something that they were not, and He said they "strain at a gnat and swallow a camel." This may seem difficult to understand, but it meant that they were very, very careful about the little things which really did not matter so much, and then did something that was really very wicked, and were not even sorry for it. Outwardly they might seem all right, but inwardly they were all wrong, and God looks at the heart. You might appear very religious, you might seem to be listening carefully to all a preacher was saying, and yet have your thoughts far away, you might be a hypocrite. Whatever you are, be real. If we carefully read over the passages we have read, I think we shall be glad God has told us so much about the camel, and I trust we shall want to be helping others,

bearing their burdens, and always remembering how our blessed Lord has “borne our griefs and carried our sorrows.”

CHAPTER 5: THE CONEY

(Read Leviticus 11:5; Psalm 104:18; Proverbs 30:24-26; Matthew 7:24-29)

Very different from the large, fierce and powerful beasts we have talked together about is the pretty little coney; not much larger than a rabbit, but far more knowing, and capable of running for a short time at a high speed. It is thought to be the same as the Syrian “hyrax,” a swift animal, whose flesh is tender and is known to be fit for human food.

At first sight it might be thought that the Bible would not teach us many lessons about so small a creature, but God is able to teach us many lessons in ways we least expect, and just as when He was teaching His servant Elijah we read that when the Lord passed by there was a “great and strong wind,” followed by an earthquake, and then by a fire, but the Lord was not in any of these, but in a “still small voice” that came after the fire, and from that gentle voice he heard words of comfort—he was told that although he thought that every one had gone after strange gods, really there were seven thousand others who were faithful to the only true God—so in a like manner we may be taught by the little creature that would scamper away if a little child came in sight.

There are three things that I specially want you to remember whenever you think of the coney, and these are

- (1) Avoiding temptation.
- (2) Seeking refuge.
- (3) Learning true wisdom.

(1) Avoiding temptation

The coney is suitable for food, indeed by many it is regarded as a delicacy, a toothsome morsel, and from it could be prepared a meal that would tempt even a sick person. And in spite of this the coney was not to be eaten, it was called an unclean animal. Most of you will remember the test for a clean animal, not only must it chew the cud, but it must divide the hoof. It is not enough to do one or the other; unless it passes both tests it must be called unclean. When we look for a spiritual meaning to

these things, chewing the cud means making good those things that we have heard or read, letting them become part of ourselves, of our life, while the parted hoof speaks to us of a separate pathway, and I hope you will know more of this in days to come.

The Jew had to learn obedience to God's law, and though he might be tempted, particularly if he was very hungry, to have a coney nicely roasted for his dinner, knowing what an appetising meal it would be, he had to learn to resist the temptation, or very terrible would be the punishment that he would suffer. Useless for him to argue that there was no good reason for a savoury dish being denied him, foolish for him to say that he saw no harm in eating a coney, for God had said that it, in common with its brother the hare, and the huge camel, must not be eaten.

What are we to learn by this? I think we may realise the necessity for resisting temptation, for obeying God's word without question, and thinking of the old saying that "happiness lies in obedience," and if children remember that they are told to obey their parents, how much more should they obey God.

Do you ever find yourself saying, "What is the harm in doing this or that?" Would it not be happier to ask instead, "What is the good of doing it? Shall I bring glory to the name of the Lord by my action? Am I obeying His word, studying it, feeding on it, thinking about it?" If we do this we shall be more likely to resist temptation, and to be true to the Lord who gave His life for our sake.

(2) The coney's safe retreat

Our little friend lives among the rocks, it is extremely quick and agile, and can leap from rock to rock. Its home is there too, and a very good home it is. Rocks speak to us of firmness, of solidity, and of stability, that is, they cannot easily be moved. Some short texts which concern rocks, and suggest shelter and strength can easily be remembered, such as: "Lead me to the rock that is higher than I," "Thou art my rock," "Upon this rock I will build my church"; while if you read the story of the house built on the rock you will see how safe it was when the storm came.

The coney is a feeble little animal, and if it depended on its own strength to defeat its enemy it would soon come to grief. It does not rely on itself, but on the protection offered by the friendly and solid rock. Here its very smallness is its strength, for when it is pursued by an enemy, it can make straight for the rock, and hide itself in a narrow cleft, where its larger enemy cannot come; it is safe from attack. Does not the great Apostle Paul understand this when he says, "When I am weak, then am I strong"? Why? Because the more he realises his own weakness, the more he feels the strength

of another, of a Lord in glory, from whom he can hear those beautiful words, “My grace is sufficient for thee: my strength is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor. 12:9).

What a great thing then it is to feel our own weakness, our insufficiency, and that “in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing,” because then we can know something of “the strength of One that really is strong, we can hide behind the shelter of the rock, and “that rock is Christ”!

May each one of us know what it is to have our feet set on a rock, and pray the prayer found in the words of the hymn that begins

“Rock of ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee.”

When next you are singing these beautiful words, try and think of the little coney hiding itself in the rock, safe from all its enemies, with no strength of itself, but knowing where true safety can be found. “Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.”

(3) The wisdom of the coney

Is it not strange that this very small animal should have been selected by Solomon, the wisest of all wise men, as one of the wise animals. We might have expected the lion, the king of beasts, to be mentioned, we might have chosen several wise animals, but who would have thought of the coney?

Not only are they called wise, they are “exceeding wise.” What praise from the wise man! And yet listen, he goes on and calls them “but a feeble folk”! This seems rather strange, and yet it is not so strange as it appears, for their wisdom lies in the fact that they know they are but a feeble folk, they know their weakness, but they know something else, they know where true strength is to be found.

You all remember how the youth David triumphed over the giant Goliath, the lad who knew his weakness was able to defeat a powerful warrior, but only because his trust had been in God.

In the last book of the Bible we read of the church at Philadelphia being specially praised, not on account of any notable greatness, but just the opposite, “for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name.”

At the end of the Old Testament, when everything seemed going against the will of God, we read of the few who loved the Lord, speaking to one another of the things that were precious to them, and though in the eyes of men they were but feeble folk, they really had their feet set upon a rock, and

the Lord Himself looked upon them as His jewels and says, “They shall be mine . . . in that day when I make up my jewels” (Mal. 3:17).

Coneys are difficult to catch. They are always on the alert. When they are feeding one of their number is on the watch, and if there is the slightest sign of danger he gives a signal, and immediately they all disappear amid the fastnesses of the rocks. Surely we shall all agree that here is exceeding wisdom, and it will be well if we all profit by the example of this animal, and find shelter where true safety is to be found.

Remember we are in a world where we are beset by many dangers, by difficulties, by temptations, and we can very soon do things that we should be ashamed of unless we have in us a watchful spirit, and are bearing in mind those words of our Lord, “What I say unto you, I say unto all, Watch.”

The coney is only mentioned four times in the Bible, but I hope you will agree with me that even the humble coney can be our schoolmaster, and help us to think right thoughts, and to put our trust where true safety is to be found.

Goliath learned how wrong it was to trust natural strength, and I hope all of us can say:

“Poor and feeble though we be,
Saviour, we belong to Thee!
Thine we are, Thou Son of God,
Thine, the purchase of Thy blood.

Boundless wisdom, power divine,
Love unspeakable, are Thine;
Praise by all to Thee be given,
Son of God, and Heir of heaven!”

CHAPTER 6: THE ASS

(Read Numbers 22; Deuteronomy 22:10; Judges 19:19; 2 Chronicles 28:15; Proverbs 26:3; Zechariah 9:9; Job 11:12; Matthew 6:25-end; Luke 8:26-36)

The ass mentioned in the Bible is a very much finer animal than the ass we know in this country. It is treated more as we treat the horse; it is looked upon as the friend of man, some asses being particularly prized and very valuable. It was largely employed as a beast of burden, in the same way

as the camel, and also represented the wealth of the owner. Camels and asses are frequently mentioned together, and the number of asses a man had also showed how wealthy he was.

There were several different sorts of asses, but all of them were not useful, for we frequently read of the wild ass, which was very difficult to catch, as it is wilder than most wild animals, and also exceedingly hard to tame. For this reason it is spoken of as a picture of man's natural birth (Job 11:12), and even as the wild ass is of no use to man, so the man or child who does not know what new birth is cannot be acceptable to God. The Lord Jesus said to Nicodemus, who was a very good man, that he must be born again if he wanted to enter into the kingdom of God, that is, he must have a new nature. So, if the ass is to be useful to man he must be tame, the wildness must disappear, and he must become subject to his master. A very beautiful illustration of the way in which the man who is wild by nature can, under the influence of the Lord Jesus, become just the opposite is to be found in the verses I asked you to read in the Gospel of Luke. Here we see a man who was so fierce and wild that every one was afraid of him, and who could not even be bound with chains; so savage and strong was he that the strongest chains were not powerful enough to curb him, and he was a terror to the whole of the neighbourhood. But what wonders are wrought by a few words from the Son of God! The wild man is sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed, and in his right mind, and he wants to stay with the One who has done so much for him, and to try and be of some service to Him.

I wonder how many of my young readers are wild and thoughtless, going their own way, and not troubling whether they are pleasing to the Lord or not. Are they like those wild asses, careering about the desert, doing no good to any one, and as likely as not to fall a prey to the lion or some other cruel beast?

I would rather turn to the other side of the picture and see what the tame and useful ass can teach us, and to make it easy to remember I will divide the lessons as follows:

- (1) The ass's bridle.
- (2) The voice of the ass.
- (3) The reward of the ass.
- (4) A great privilege.
- (5) The unequal yoke.

(1) The ass's bridle

Among the many wise sayings of the great king Solomon we read, "A whip for the horse, a bridle for the ass, and a rod for the fool's back." How very necessary it is that we should have correction

and punishment, but remember all the time that it is true that “whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth” (that is, “punishes”).

It is even as our parents punish us *because* they love us, and *because* they want us to realise how serious it is to do wrong, so also we need the correction that God gives us, and if we are foolish now, one day we shall be able to look back and say how glad we are that the rod of correction has been felt by us.

But in the bridle I think we have quite another thought, and that is the thought of direction or guidance. What would happen to the ass that had been tamed if it had no bridle? It would not know which way to turn or where to go. So it is with us, if we are left to ourselves, without direction, we shall soon go wrong; we too must be guided. The ship that has no rudder is in a very bad way, and in similar sad plight is the Christian boy or girl who does not know where to find guidance. The Psalmist says, “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light to my path”; assuredly he knew where to get his direction, and the same is true today, three thousand years later; we can get our guidance from the word of God, from the Bible. With what joy the Apostle Paul said to the youthful Timothy, “From a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.” If we read our Bibles we shall learn what God would have us to do, we shall know His mind, and then instead of needing the rod for the fool’s back, it will be true of us as of Timothy, that we have true wisdom. Let me ask you then to read your Bible carefully and prayerfully day by day, and not to let anything stop you from doing so.

Before going for a summer holiday perhaps your father buys a guide-book to the place at which you are going to stay, and perhaps studies it before you go away. On your holiday when you are all out walking there is some doubt as to which is the right way to go. Your father takes the guide out of his pocket and soon says, “This is our way!” and you go on boldly relying on what the guide-book says. So the Christian has a true guide which can never fail to lead him in the way everlasting.

(2) The voice of the ass

Would you not like to hear an ass talk? “What a very strange question,” you will surely say; you have heard an ass bray very likely, but none of us has ever heard words similar to those we use coming from the mouth of the ass. Yet on one occasion an ass saved a man from certain death by using language that her rider could understand. King Balak tried to persuade the prophet Balaam to curse the children of Israel, God’s chosen people, but God forbade him to go to Balak. The king thereupon offered him great wealth, and in the end he saddled his ass and set out to do so. An angel

with a drawn sword stood in the way, whom the ass saw, though the man did not, so that when the ass would go no further, Balaam was very wroth and struck her three times. In the end the Lord gave the ass a human voice, so that she could reprove her master, who then saw the angel who would have slain him, and was sorry for his sin, and instead of cursing the people he blessed them. An animal was thus used as God's messenger, and we must learn that God can use whom He will, from which young people can take comfort, as they may be and often have been used to help others when obedient to God's voice. Think of the boy Samuel who said, "Speak, for thy servant heareth," and he became one of the greatest of God's prophets, and was used to convey His message to the aged priest.

(3) The reward of the ass

The ass that is kept for service has not to fend for itself as does the wild one, nor is it liable to be pounced on by some fierce beast. If it helps man, man cares for it, and in the words of scripture, "There is both straw and provender for our asses," that is, there is a comfortable bed of straw for the tired creature to rest on at night, and plenty of good food—for that is the meaning of "provender." A good master who has been out for a ride on his animal makes sure that his steed is well looked after before he himself will sit down to a meal.

If we are thoughtful for the dumb beasts that work for us, how sure we can be that our heavenly Father will care for us, His children, and if we seek to be in His service we shall not be without a reward. The One who said, "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: yet Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these," went on to state that God would give us food and clothing and all that we need. "Take no thought for the morrow," He says, meaning that we should not be over anxious, for we should rest, assured that God cares for His children.

I remember hearing of a Christian lady who was so reduced in circumstances that she had not even a meal to put on the table for her children when they returned hungry from school. She remembered the passage you have read in Matthew, and kneeling down asked her heavenly Father for His help. As the family sat round the table, a knock was heard at the door, proving to be a present from some unknown friend, which gave them all they needed. Surely we can trust Him in all things!

(4) A great privilege

A bully is always disliked. Those of you who have read “Tom Brown’s School Days” will remember how the bully Flashman, the enemy of all who were weaker than himself, was hated and feared. But how good it is to meet those who are ready to support the weak. Our friend the ass had this privilege, though he did not know it—as often we ourselves, who ought to know better, fail to realise our privileges—for on one occasion it is recorded, when those who had been taken captive were released, that all the feeble of them were carried upon asses to their brethren in Jericho. What a delight it was to those poor captives to be home again! They could not have stood a journey on the camel with its rapid stride, and rolling gait, but the more steady ass could bear the feeble ones on its back. When you are tempted to brush aside one who cannot fight for his rights, think of the asses carrying home those that were feeble

But if this was a privilege, there was another ass which had a far greater one, for it was upon an ass that the Lord Jesus rode into Jerusalem. Think of it, more than five hundred years before it happened, the prophet Zechariah had foretold this event, and the words are so beautiful that I must quote them: “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass,” and in the twelfth chapter of John’s gospel we read how absolutely this came to pass.

Supposing in the reign of King Henry V, about the time of the Battle of Agincourt was fought, some one had said that in 1918 Allenby would defeat the Turk, and march into Jerusalem, how amazed we should have been when it came true! We do not think enough about the wonders of all the prophecies that have been fulfilled.

It is natural to think of our Lord as being just, He could not be unjust, but let us also think of Him as bringing salvation and ask ourselves whether He has brought salvation to our hearts. Then just think of the lowliness of that perfect One who could say, “Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart,” and try to be more like Him, although it is not easy or natural to us.

(5) The unequal yoke

Our last thought is a very serious one, and is indeed different from taking the yoke of our blessed Lord and Master. “Thou shalt not plough with an ox and an ass together” is one of the commandments in Deuteronomy, and if you have a reference Bible, you will notice you are referred to 2 Corinthians 6:14, which reads, “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers.” This is our lesson. Different sorts of animals were not to be yoked together for service in the fields, and so

we have to be very careful about our companions. It has often been said that “A man is known by his friends,” and this is just as true of boys and girls. If Christian boys have for their friends those that do not love the Lord Jesus, they will be led into all manner of temptation, they will do things for which they will be sorry, and they may be led astray and come to grief in the end. Lot chose his friends in the doomed city of Sodom, and only just escaped the most terrible judgment. Peter, who associated with those who did not own his Lord, actually denied Him, and we cannot be too careful in choosing our friends. Sad indeed are the histories of many who have made bad friends, but I will not distress you with them, but rather say that there are many who are ready to own how thankful they are for true Christian friends. But above all remember that “There is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother”: I think you know who He is.

One there is above all others—

O how He loves!

His is love beyond a brother’s—

O how He loves!

Earthly friends may fail or leave us,

One day soothe, the next day grieve us,

But this Friend will ne’er deceive us—

O how He loves!”

CHAPTER 7: THE SHEEP

(Read Exodus 12:1-10; Isaiah 53:6-7; 1 Kings 22:17; Psalm 23; 100:3; Luke 15:3-7; John 10:1-15; 1 Peter 2:25; Revelation 5:12)

We now come to one of the clean animals of scripture, and the one most frequently met with in its holy pages, indeed there are over three hundred references to it.

This creature is first mentioned in Genesis, where we read that Abel was a keeper of sheep, one of which was used for the first sacrifice to God, an offering that was accepted by Him, because it spoke to Him of the death of His dear Son, the Lamb of God, who came into this world to die in order that we might live.

Through the whole of the Old Testament we read a great deal about the numerous sacrifices that the children of Israel had to make, sheep and lambs being more frequently offered than other animals. It

is not easy simply to explain the meanings of all these sacrifices, but perhaps one day you will understand them. For the present all that I will ask you to remember is that they suggested the perfect sacrifice for sin, the Lord Jesus Himself. Sinners find shelter by the blood of Christ in the same way that the children of Israel were sheltered behind the blood of the Passover lamb, when the angel of death that slew the Egyptians passed by those houses that had the blood sprinkled on the door-posts.

In connection with the sheep I want you to think of four things:

- (1) Its waywardness.
- (2) Its helplessness.
- (3) Its death.
- (4) Its place of safety.

(1) Its waywardness

We often speak of the foolishness of sheep, we see the aimless way they move about, how they scatter in all directions, and have frequently to be brought together by the sheep dog. I remember one day in Scotland thinking how foolish sheep were, when I saw a drover trying to make them cross a gangway on to a steamer; they could not be driven, but he caught hold of one, and dragged it, although it kicked and struggled, on to the steamer's deck. Imagine my surprise to see all the others, who saw the dislike of their companion, follow across the plank without any trouble. What a foolish set, I thought!

Sheep are soon lost, and once lost they have no idea of finding their way home, they get further and further away, and in the end die, or are devoured by wild beasts.

In many places in the Bible people are spoken of as being like sheep. How sad the picture of God's earthly people that we read of in 1 Kings 22:17, "I saw all Israel scattered upon the hills, as sheep that have no shepherd," while in that wonderful fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, which you read before we began our talk, we see that we have all gone astray like sheep, we have turned every one to his own way. What a very sorrowful thought, and yet how true! We have our Lord to guide us and keep us, and yet how often we just go our own way and please ourselves, regardless of His will.

In the parable in Luke's gospel the poor lost sheep could not find its way home, but the kind Shepherd went out, braved all the dangers, was not turned back, but went on until He found it. I wonder have all my readers known what it is to be lost and found by One who loves them and to whom they can pray at night:

“Jesus, tender Shepherd, hear me,
Bless Thy little lamb tonight,
Through the darkness be Thou near me,
Keep me safe till morning light.”

(2) Its helplessness

But if sheep be wayward, if soon lost, if they scatter over the hills, are they so protected, or are they so fierce and powerful that they can drive off their foes? Of course not, the youngest child knows this. A whole flock can be driven away by a child. One day I was amused to see my little girl, when only three years old, driving before her a flock of sheep. They are quite helpless, and a very easy prey to all the wild beasts that hunt them for their food. Remember how sheep were taken from the flock of the shepherd David, who like a good shepherd rescued his defenceless charges from the clutches of the wild beast. Having thought of all these things, having remembered that we are like sheep, helpless and unprotected, surely we should be more ready to turn to God to protect us and overcome our foes, even as David of old slew the lion and the bear.

When our Lord sent out His disciples on their mission it was as “lambs amongst wolves,” and so if we try to live as Christians in a manner well pleasing to God, we shall have our enemies around us, but we must always bear in mind that we have One ready and willing to defend us.

(3) Its death

In the death of the sheep we see the climax of its helplessness! But what wonderful thoughts are connected with the death of the sheep; it is frequently used in the Bible to speak of the death of our Lord, who was “brought as a lamb to the slaughter.” We can truly and reverently say that He could not save Himself, because He was obedient unto death, He was doing what His heavenly Father sent Him to do; He could not defend Himself, He was truly God’s Lamb, but He went into death willingly, in order that we might have life, everlasting life.

All the thousands of sheep that perished on the Jewish altars could not take away a single sin, but the death of Christ makes it possible for all our sins to be washed away, so that John the Baptist, when he saw our Lord, was able to say, “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.” Is it not wonderful that our blessed Saviour should be likened to the gentle and harmless little lamb? Indeed, in the Bible we read of Him many, many times as the Lamb of God, and in the

Book of the Revelation He is spoken of as the Lamb no less than thirty-two times. You may not be able to understand a good many of these texts, but read them all the same.

Whenever a lamb or sheep was killed for a sacrifice it had to be perfect in every way, “without blemish” the Bible calls it, for anything that was to point on to the perfect sacrifice, must itself be as perfect as possible.

If our Lord was likened to a Lamb, He also likes us to be like the gentle lamb, but do not forget there are wolves around, though if we truly trust God I am sure we shall be able to have a song of praise in our hearts and to use those wonderful words in Revelation 5:12, “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.” May each of us delight in these words.

(4) Its place of safety

Our last thoughts are of sheep as a picture of the children of God, cared for by Him, and watched over in every way, so that their lot is a very happy one. Two specially beautiful passages in the Bible, one in the Old and the other in the New Testament, speak of sheep in the care of the Shepherd, I mean Psalm 23 and John 10.

In the picture that begins “The Lord is my Shepherd”—a marvellous word-picture it is—we see the difference between the sheep of the Bible and those in this land: the Bible sheep were led by the shepherd, not driven, they knew and loved their shepherd: “My sheep hear my voice,” says our Lord, and “He calleth his own sheep by name.”

And where would He lead them? Beside the still waters, where everything is peace and quietness, where they can find plenty of refreshment, where there will be no thirst, and no hunger either, for the sheep lies down in green pastures, not only pastures, but green pastures, rich, growing grass, the favourite food of the sheep, food and drink in abundance.

When does the sheep lie down? Only when it has eaten enough, when it is completely satisfied. Our blessed Lord will give us food for our souls, He will indeed satisfy us with good things. But all the best food would be of little avail if the helpless sheep were for ever fearing an enemy; the good Shepherd, however, takes care of His sheep, for we know “The good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.”

The poor wandering little creature in the parable did not have a chance to be lost on its way back, for the good Shepherd “when he hath found it, layeth it on his shoulders.” Could you think of any safer place?

In the fold are many other sheep under the care of the good Shepherd. In the same way we should delight to be found with others who love the Lord Jesus, for it is as we are near Him that we hear His word. It was Mary who sat at Jesus' feet, who heard His word, and so it is the sheep that know His voice that will follow Him and ever be in His safe keeping.

What a contrast between the wayward and lost sheep and the one under the direction of the good Shepherd. May it be true of each of us in the words of the Apostle Peter: "Ye were as sheep going astray, but are now returned to the shepherd and bishop of your souls."

CHAPTER 8: THE OX

(Read Exodus 32:1-6; Deuteronomy 5:14; 25:4; Psalm 50:10; 144:9-15; Proverbs 15:17; Luke 15:18-24; Philippians 4:10-13)

Oxen are very frequently met with in the pages of holy writ, not only mentioned as oxen, but also as cattle, bulls, cows, calves and heifers—all members of the same big family, and all used by the Jews not alone for purposes of sacrifice, but also largely employed where we should use horses for pulling carts and wagons or for ploughing the fields. When we leave England we find today in many of the continental countries that much useful work is still undertaken by these creatures.

We have considered the sheep in connection with the offering of sacrifices to God—richer people would bring an ox—and so in this chapter I propose rather to look at some of the other ways to which the ox may profitably lead our thoughts.

If treated in an intelligent manner oxen can be trained to pull heavy loads, and in the Bible the idea of patient power seems frequently indicated by them. It is not hard to imagine teams of them drawing up material for building purposes when the Jews were established in the "land flowing with milk and honey." Certainly it must have been a land of much cattle, a land of plenty if only the people had recognised what they owed to the God who had delivered them from the hard taskmasters of Egypt. But alas! How soon they failed to remember their God, and then how their enemies inevitably triumphed over them.

On one occasion even the sacred ark of the tabernacle fell into hostile hands, but it did no good to its temporary owners, on whom an awful plague immediately fell, so that they decided to place it in a new cart to which were harnessed two "milch kine"—or, as we should say, cows—that had never

done work of this sort before. And these kine, although deprived of their calves, brought the ark safely and miraculously back again without human guidance.

I propose now that we shall have four separate little talks suggested by the contemplation of this animal, and for the sake of simplicity, let us have four distinct headings, as follows:

- (1) God's claims.
- (2) Work and its reward.
- (3) Idolatry.
- (4) Contentment.

(1) God's claims

Has it ever occurred to you that God has definite claims on each one of us? You may wonder how such a thought is suggested by oxen, so I will satisfy your curiosity at once. In Psalm 50 we read that God says, "Every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills." An Israelite with a large number of well-favoured cattle on the mountainside might proudly point to them and say, "*My* cattle, *my* oxen"—but think a moment, the psalm clearly states that the cattle upon a thousand hills belong to God. What does this mean? Surely that the Israelite held them, as it were, in trust for God, and God expects each one of us to use our possessions in His service. Oxen were an expression of the wealth of their owners, even as today in South Africa the Boer farmer will harness *all* his oxen to his wagon—thereby giving an idea of wealth, and many of the Jews' wealth in those days was measured by the amount of livestock they possessed.

Are we not often ready to assert our claims over our own things, do we not often find ourselves saying with an air of great satisfaction, "That's mine, all mine," and often if asked to share it with another may be tempted to say, "Why should I? it's mine!" But if it is yours, remember it is really God's, He allows you to hold it for Him. "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof." How much there is that we all have that we do *not* use in His service! We are too ready to stand up for our rights, but do we consider enough God's claims on us, God's rights over us and all that we have? I think that if we did, we should less frequently use that big "I," and we should be far more ready to share our cherished possessions with others.

Think of the "cattle upon a thousand hills" belonging to God, when you are considering all the good things you have, and then it may lead you to think of others who have not so much. I have heard of young people who, whenever they were given a new toy, immediately gave one of their other toys to Dr. Barnardo's or some other organisation that endeavours to brighten the lives of children not so

favourably placed. Let us hope that in so doing they, were recognising God's claims. And above all remember that "the Lord loveth a cheerful giver."

(2) Work and its reward

The ox worked and worked hard; it is no easy job for a team of oxen to plough a big field or to draw a heavy load, but patiently the big beast set about and plodded through its work. When David the psalmist was looking forward to a day in which the voice of the people would be loud in the praise of Jehovah, he exclaimed, "Happy is that people whose God is the Lord," and one of the things he looks for in the ideal state is "that our oxen may be strong to labour"—ready to work for the good of man; and what a good thing hard work is! Even if "all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy," it is still more true that all play and no work would make him absolutely miserable, dull and stupid. The ox was kept for the good work it could do; we get a thought of this in the parable of the wedding supper, where one of the guests made the excuse that he could not go to the feast because he had "bought five yoke of oxen" and he had to go and prove them, that is, he wanted to find out whether they were fit for hard work. Quite a wise thing to do, but what a very poor excuse for absence! Let us see that no such feeble excuse is used by us for neglecting the things of God.

How thoughtful God is for all His creatures! He knew that it would be necessary for man to have rest from his daily toil, and he wanted him to have one day in which he would be able to remember his God. But His goodness did not stop here, it even extended to the animals, for in the fourth commandment of His law, relating to the Sabbath, after saying that man must do no work, He goes on to add, "nor thine ox, nor thine ass"—the ox must be allowed his day of rest too, and dire would be the consequence to his master if he harnessed his ox on the seventh day. We, too, have our one day of rest in our Sundays: do we make good use of it?

But one thought more: "Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn" is another of God's laws, still further showing how He cared for the animals. He saw that greedy masters might try to stop their oxen from having a mouthful or two of food when hungry as they worked in the fields. I think we have very definite proof of this, for when this commandment is quoted in 1 Timothy 5:18 it goes on to say, "And the labourer is worthy of his hire." If God thus cares for the welfare of the ox, surely He will not let us go without our reward if we work in His service—not that we should work for the sake of the reward, we should rather work for love of Him.

(3) Idolatry

The first idol that we read the children of Israel worshipped was a calf, a calf of gold, made from the golden earrings that were brought out of Egypt, proof of the wonderful way in which God had saved His people. You remember how God said to the Israelites, “I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.” “Thou shalt have no other gods before me;” this was a definite command, and we should have expected obedience on the part of His chosen people, but instead of this, as soon as Moses, their leader, had ascended the holy mount, they decided to make the golden calf. Hastily they gave up their golden earrings, and these were melted down, the molten mass being fashioned into the shape of a calf. Then they actually bowed down to this graven image saying, “These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.” Such is the human heart! Such is yours and mine! Is it any wonder that Moses was angry when he came down, or that he hurled down the tables of stone so that they broke? Is it any wonder that a plague came and vexed the people? Then Moses put that searching question, “Who is on the Lord’s side?” May I too put that same question to you today: “Who is on the Lord’s side?”

I know you are thinking that you would not have worshipped that golden calf, you would not have been guilty of idolatry! But what is an idol? Let me give you my definition: “An idol is something that takes the place of the true God.” Does not that come home to each one of us? A man may make wealth his idol. Think of the rich man who had much goods laid up for many years, and said to his soul, “Take thine ease, eat, drink and be merry,” but God said, “Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee.” He had made an idol of his wealth, but others may similarly devote their lives to pleasure. Many there are who seem to live only for pleasure, leaving God out of their thoughts.

Truly idolatry comes nearer home to than we often imagine.

Sport, business, and many other things, quite right and proper in their place, may become idols unless we are watchful. If this were not so the Apostle John in his letter to Christians would not have said, “Little children, keep yourselves from idols.” We all need this preservation, not once in a way, but daily, hourly.

(4) Contentment

How little real contentment we see around us nowadays. A writer for one of the big London newspapers took special notice in some of London’s busiest thoroughfares lately and found that not one in ten of the people who hurried by looked happy and contented. Surely discontent is written on

many a face today. Every one seems to want something new, some new pleasure, some new thrill, some new pastime, but true joy and happiness are lacking.

King Solomon, knowing the value of contentment, said in one of his proverbs, “Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith.” Certainly a dinner of herbs does not sound a very attractive dish, but the choicest banquet is absolutely ruined where there is strife, when contentment is absent. The ox was given to us for food, the stalled ox was specially fattened for the table, but all to no purpose when contentment was missing.

How different is the allusion in the parable of the prodigal son, who realised that he had sinned, and returned home repentant, to be welcomed by the father who said, “Bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat and be merry.” There was truly a scene of contentment and joy.

In another section of this one great parable we read, “There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.” I wonder how much each of us knows of the spirit of confessing our sins at the feet of One who is “faithful and just to forgive us our sins”? This One, our Saviour and Lord, can give spiritual contentment.

The Apostle Paul could say: “I have learned in whatsoever state I am therewith to be content”; he said he “knew how to be hungry,” yes, and be content to be hungry. When we read of all the hardships he was called upon to suffer, all the persecution, surely we can but marvel at the divine grace which was evident in all his life, but we find the key to it in his own words: “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me”; “all things”—there is no limit to that, and I think you will agree that in his life this was no idle boast.

It has been said that millionaires are the most miserable of all people, they have everything that money can buy, but how little that is worth having can be purchased, certainly true contentment never came that way. “Give me neither poverty nor riches,” said one who knew the vanity of wealth. Surely great happiness is to be found in a knowledge, a personal knowledge, of the Lord Jesus, the One who will give us strength to do what we are called upon to do, who would say to us, “My grace is sufficient for thee,” and if we put our trust in Him and none in ourselves, we may be able to know true contentment and say, “I have learned in whatsoever state I am therewith to be content,” and so to be ever to His praise and glory.

“O keep us, love divine, near Thee,

That we our nothingness may know,

And ever to Thy glory be

Walking in faith while here below.”

CHAPTER 9: THE DOG

(Read Deuteronomy 23:18; 1 Samuel 17:3; 2 Samuel 9:8; Psalm 22:16-20; Isaiah 56:10-11; Matthew 15:26-28; Revelation 22:15)

The Bible has nothing at all good to say about the dog, absolutely nothing in its favour, for it is rather taken as suggestive of wickedness, wantonness or greed in the different passages in which it is mentioned. Perhaps no other animal is so entirely condemned—unless indeed it be the dog's near neighbour, the fox—and it appears to be utterly useless, except for performing the most loathsome work.

This seems very strange when we consider what friends we make of our dogs, they often appear almost human in their intelligence and in their devotion to their masters, so that they are very highly esteemed and are kept as pets more than any other animal.

But in Palestine it is very different; there the dog is an outcast, he prowls about the streets by night, devouring any refuse he can find, shrinking away at the approach of man, yet even so he serves a useful purpose, for he eats up a good deal of the filth that is thrown out into the street. He is an unkempt, untidy and unclean-looking beast that no one wants to see at very close quarters. This is the dog of the Bible, this is the animal we are thinking about, so we must banish from our minds thoughts of the well-favoured and beautiful dogs that live in our homes, and think of the mean, scraggy and disreputable beast that prowls about the streets of the city, making night hideous by his disturbing noise (Ps. 59:6).

This dirty and objectionable beast can, however, teach us some very useful lessons, and there are some points that I want you specially to try and remember

- (1) The dog's outside place.
- (2) The dog's greed.
- (3) The dog's one chance.

(1) The dog's outside place

We have already said that the dog is a very despised animal in the Holy Land; let us now see whether we can prove our words by reading from the Bible. You have already found some of the passages, but there are many others. Think of the proud Philistine giant Goliath, as he challenges the hosts of Israel, a splendid man as he stands there arrayed in full armour, and ready for battle! He is

full of pride, trusting entirely in himself, and when the shepherd lad appears, great is his indignation, and he exclaims in fierce contempt, “Am I a dog?” little realising that in the eyes of God he was no better than a dog, for was he not daring to defy the armies of the living God? We all know the story of how he perished like a dog soon afterwards.

To such an extent was the dog despised and loathed, that even the price of a dog was not to be brought into the house of the Lord, and it was described as being an abomination to the Lord.

The dog is never found in Scripture associated with anything that is good, always with wickedness, so that we read in Matthew 7:6, “Give not that which is holy unto the dogs”—dirt and filth are his portion.

The Psalmist likens the company of the wicked to dogs, and says in his distress—and we find in his words a wonderful picture of the sufferings of our Lord and Saviour—“dogs have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked have enclosed me,” and soon after he cries out alone in his deep distress, “Deliver. . . my darling from the power of the dog”—that is, preserve him from the wicked.

The dog is the last animal mentioned in the Bible, but it is still in the outside place, and in that wonderful city of God spoken of in the last chapter of Revelation we read “without are dogs,” they can have no place in that which is holy, this city can have in it only those “that do his commandments,” no wickedness can intrude. In the words of the hymn:

“There is a city bright,
Closed are its gates to sin,
Naught that defileth.
Can ever enter in.”

How terrible to fall into the power of this nasty brute, it was one of the things most dreaded; it meant being left alone to die, and then to be devoured by these foul brutes. God never allowed His servants to fall into their clutches, but when men were disobedient, when they set themselves against God, He sometimes allowed their end to be a very wretched one.

The great king Ahab, who had thought he could oppose God, be unkind to His prophets and escape punishment, perished miserably in the end, and his blood was licked up by the dogs, as it flowed out of his war chariot. More terrible still was the fate of his wicked queen, for when men went to bury her they found nothing but her skull, her feet, and the palms of her hands, for the words of the Lord as spoken by his prophet Elisha had come true, “In the portion of Jezreel shall dogs eat the flesh of Jezebel.” What an awful end!

Surely this terrible picture should increase our desire to avoid the company of the wicked, and prompt us to pray that we might be “delivered from the power of the dog,” for if we are found in the company of the wicked, if our companions hinder us and keep us from good, then our end will be even as the dog in the outside place. “Without are dogs.”

(2) The dog’s greed

The dog of the Bible is horrid, not only in what he eats, eating up as he does the filth of the town, but he is also horrid in the way he eats; he is greedy and does not know when to leave off eating, and goes on until actually sick—what a disgusting picture! We read of the blind watchman of Isaiah being likened to “greedy dogs which can never have enough”—but this is not the end of this horrid picture, for we read in more than one passage of the dog returning to its vomit (Prov. 26:11). How loathsome, and how revolting!

You may well ask me not to show you so disgusting a picture, you may say it is too filthy, that there is nothing to be learned by it. You already know how a greedy boy or girl is disliked everywhere, they are not wanted, they have few friends—you think there is no need to draw your attention to the greed of the dog, and to point to a moral in connection with it.

But we must go a stage further, and I will ask you to think of the dog as representing the wicked, and then see how the picture develops. Wicked boys and girls go on in their wicked way, they feed on nasty things, by which I mean they read nasty books, delight in vile pictures, evil thoughts and unclean actions. Then perhaps someone comes along and makes them realise the sinfulness of it all, and there comes a desire to make a fresh start, and they believe they will get rid of their past wickedness, they feel sick of it all, they know it has done them no good, so they determine to “turn over a new leaf,” as it is called. Alas! how often their good resolutions fail and they get back to their bad ways again, so like the disgusting behaviour of the dog to which we have alluded.

It is only when we acknowledge that we cannot do anything to make ourselves better, and that we shall only keep on stepping back into our bad ways, and that the best thing we can do is to appeal to some One who is stronger than ourselves—then, and not till then, will the characteristics of the dog disappear, and we shall become more like the “sheep of the pasture.”

(3) The dog's one chance

In one incident in the Bible we read of the dog as being no longer outside, but where is he? Not in a very prominent place surely; he is under the table, hidden from view, and dependent entirely on the grace of his master for the food that he gets.

Surely we can learn much from this. Most of you who read these pages will be Gentiles, and as such you have no claim on God. The only people who had any right to expect a blessing if they kept God's law were the Jews.

Now look at the picture of the Gentile woman who tried to get our Lord to do something for her daughter by appealing to Him as Son of David. As a Gentile she could not thus call Him, she could not expect anything, and so He had to tell her that His mission was to the house of Israel. But her sense of need was so great that again her voice is heard: "Lord, help me." What a splendid little prayer, a prayer of only three words, and yet what a lot there is in it! Our Lord could not be indifferent to it, but He still had a lesson to teach. He tells her it is not right to take the children's bread and give it to the dogs, by which He meant that a Gentile could not expect the blessings that God had promised the Jew. The poor woman is not angry at being likened to the horrid and despised dog, she accepts the position and practically says, "I am indeed a dog, I have no claim on your compassion" but she says that even the dogs eat of the crumbs that fall from their masters' table. By acknowledging her insignificance, and counting only upon His goodness and grace, she takes the lowly place and then gets the blessing and hears those wonderful words, "O woman, great is thy faith."

In the Old Testament we read of a man who took the place of a dog, Mephibosheth, who is not content with calling himself a dog, but says he is a dead dog! What could be worse? He says thus that he is worthless, that he cannot expect anything but punishment from the great king, so that anything he receives will be due entirely to mercy and grace. We next see him treated as one of the royal princes, "for he did eat continually at the king's table."

What can we learn from the man who called himself a dead dog, and the woman who took the place of a dog ready for the smallest fragments that fell to her lot?

I think if we realise that we are all sinners before God, quite unable to help ourselves, that we are in the outside place, but that God is full of love and grace, and that "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son," and if we pray that simple little prayer, "Lord, help me," and then confess, "I am indeed no better than a dog, I am always sinning, but I know that the Lord Jesus came

to die for sinners, and so for me, and I will put my trust in Him,” then indeed we shall be brought to know what it is to be sitting at the King’s table, and enjoying all the good things to be found there.

So the dog’s only chance lies in trusting to the grace of his master, and I think the writer of those lines,

“Nothing in my hands I bring,
Simply to Thy cross I cling,”

had the same thought in his mind, that all his trust was in his Redeemer, and that he could not do anything to help himself.

CHAPTER 10: SOME OTHER ANIMALS

(Read Psalm 32:8-11; Matthew 8:28-end; Jeremiah 13:23; John 10:1-18)

Our friendly talks on animals of the Bible are drawing to a close, but there are a few more about which I should like to have a little chat.

There is one creature that can hardly be passed by in silence—the serpent—for legend affirms that this was one of the most beautiful of all the animal creation, and clever as it was beautiful. Its very attractiveness made Satan choose it as his agent when he wanted to tempt man to disobey God. By means of this beautiful creature, which was wise (the Bible says “subtle”), he suggested to Eve that it was possible for her to have what God had denied. Eve was tempted and fell, we all know the sad story—but the serpent did not escape unpunished, for its beauty was taken from it and for ever after it was destined to crawl and wriggle on the ground.

In its present form we regard the serpent as a reptile, and so it passes from our sight, just warning us as it goes of the folly of being misled by good looks or a pleasing exterior. Shakespeare, the greatest English poet, truly says:

“So may the outward shows be least themselves:
The world is still deceiv’d with ornament,”

but the whole truth is better and more forcibly expressed in the words of Scripture in a passage which I have already quoted in an earlier chapter, but to which I must again draw your attention: “Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart.” I fear all of us are often misled by judging by exteriors only.

There are four more animals that I want to bring to your notice, namely:

- (1) The horse.
- (2) The pig.
- (3) The leopard.
- (4) The wolf.

(1) The horse

It might have been thought that an animal which we hold in as high esteem as the horse, one of the friends of man, would have been deemed worthy of a chapter to itself, but the ordinary domestic duties, which are undertaken by the horse in our land, as we have already noticed, largely fall to the lot of the ass and the ox in Palestine.

The Bible does not give the horse a very high place, for it is usually associated with warfare rather than peace; indeed, a definite command was given that when a king was appointed he was not to multiply horses to himself (Deut. 17:16), while in the conquest of Palestine there was much slaughter and maiming of horses by the children of Israel.

That the horse was largely used in warfare cannot be doubted, for they not only drew the war chariots, but were also employed as cavalry. After the Egyptians had been engulfed in the Red Sea, Moses and the children of Israel in their song of, rejoicing used these words: "I will sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea" (Ex. 15:1). The great prophet Elijah, who had fought so many battles for Jehovah, was taken up into heaven in a chariot of fire drawn by horses of fire (2 Ki. 2:11).

In the Book of Revelation (chap. 6) the horse seems to speak of God's power, and in that sixth chapter we read of four horses of different colours, white, red, black and pale, the white speaking of the victory of the Lord Himself, while the red seems to suggest bloodshed and the taking away of peace from the earth, the black signifies famine, and the pale horse the plague and pestilence that so often follow warfare and famine.

From a verse in the Psalms we can learn a definite lesson, for we are told, "Be not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding," and we find they have to be kept in order with bit and bridle, whereas God would look for an understanding heart in us, He does not want to use the bit or the bridle or the rod of correction, He would like us to be so in the knowledge of His will that He can say to us, "I will guide thee with mine eye." Even as a son in sympathy with a parent can discern

his wishes by just a glance, so God would have us in full sympathy with His thoughts. *“Be not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding.”*

(2) The pig

The pig was forbidden to the Jews as being one of the “unclean” creatures; and we regard it as dirtier in its habits than most other animals, indeed, we sometimes hear of people being called “pigs” when they are particularly unpleasant in their habits.

The Lord Jesus performed many miracles which gave men back their health or life, but only two are recorded where destruction took place, these being the withering of the fig tree, and the devils being allowed to go into the “herd of many swine,” which thereupon ran down a steep place into the sea and were drowned.

Why did He permit the destruction of these pigs? I think it was because the Jews had no right to keep them, for in so doing they were disobeying God’s law. When the owners saw the fate of the pigs, did they realise their sin? No, their only thought seems to have been that they had lost a source of income, so that instead of confessing their fault and seeking forgiveness, they besought the Lord Jesus that He would depart out of their coasts. They preferred their unlawful trading to the presence of the Son of God. Put that way it sounds distinctly bad, does it not? But are we never guilty of considering our own interests first, of desiring to get on in this world at all costs, rather than to be ready to sacrifice those things that conscience tells us are “unclean” in the sight of heaven.

It is a great thing to be able to put first things first. “Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth.”

How sad it is after having been converted, and having put our trust in the Lord Jesus, having recognised how much there is in this world in which we can take no part—if after all this we turn back again to those things of which we know He cannot approve. This is likened by the Apostle Peter in his second epistle to the “sow that was washed” returning “to her wallowing in the mire.”

Surely if we have been washed in the precious blood of the Lord Jesus, we should earnestly pray to be preserved from any return in thought, word, or deed to anything that is contrary to His will.

(3) The leopard

That the leopard is a very beautiful beast we should probably all agree, and it is one of the few wild animals that even young children would be able to recognise. How would you know a leopard? By its spots, of course. And it is by those very spots that Scripture would teach us a lesson.

“Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?” is a question asked by the prophet Jeremiah, and surely the answer to both questions is “No.” However much a black man might like to change the colour of his skin he cannot—black he must remain. In the same way the spots cannot be removed from the sleek coat of the leopard. Is it hard to find a moral in all this? I think not, for it is that we have a nature which we cannot alter. As children of Adam we are sinners, and though the great Apostle Paul when speaking of himself as viewed by his fellow men could say that as touching the law he was a Pharisee, and touching the righteousness, which is in the law, blameless (Phil. 3:5-6), when under the full rays of divine light he had to confess “In me [that is, in my flesh] dwelleth no good thing” (Rom. 7:18).

Great apostle though he was, favoured servant of the Lord Jesus, he still had that sinful nature in him which he could not change any more than the leopard his spots.

Divine grace could enable him to conquer the workings of human nature, but not to remove it, and this only made him the more dependent on the Lord Jesus.

The greatest saint of God would be the first to say with sorrow how often he failed, how often his natural self asserted itself; others might not see his failings, but he would be conscious of them; he would, however, be able to point to the One who said, “My grace is sufficient for thee.”

Let us not be led aside by those who would suggest that we can get a new nature, and that we can so improve ourselves as to be fit for the presence of God. We can only be fit for Him by virtue of the death of the Lord Jesus; there must be new birth.

(4) The wolf

This dread beast is found in many parts of the world, and even in Europe numbers are still at large. In former days it was a terror to the English countryside, until finally destroyed as far as this land is concerned in the fourteenth century.

With all its fierceness, it is not only exceedingly crafty, but it is also very cowardly, and does not usually attack singly or where there is any chance of its coming off second best. It is very fearful of anything it does not understand, or that seems to suggest a trap, and this has sometimes helped men to escape from its terrible fangs, fangs that snap together like a pair of pincers.

The combination of fierceness, craftiness, destructiveness and cowardice makes the wolf a fitting picture of the wicked, and in the Bible this animal is alluded to as “ravening,” for it has murder in its heart, and it seeks to destroy life, life that may be good and useful.

You remember when our Lord speaks about Himself as the good Shepherd, the One who is prepared to lay down His life for the sheep, He speaks of the wolf as the scatterer of the sheep. Even as the wolf seeks to scatter the sheep, to destroy the peace of the fold, so the wicked, the agents of Satan, would seek to sow dissension and strife amongst the followers of the Lord Jesus, to destroy their faith, and to substitute discord for peace and joy.

Fortunately the good Shepherd cares for His sheep, and will not allow any one to steal them. It is only when the sheep strays from the fold that it is in danger, and even then so great is the love of the true Shepherd that He will search after that one sheep “until he find it.”

What a comfort it is to feel that there is One who thus cares for us! But may we be preserved from doing anything that would help in the bad work of scattering the sheep.

Another scripture, which we have not read, warns us to “beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves” (Matt. 7:11). Outwardly harmless, actually bent on destruction, and so once again we must not be misled by a fair exterior. The great test is the Bible, and if we hear people preaching or saying what is not in the Bible we must suspect them of being wolves in sheep’s clothing.

Even as the fierce animals of the Bible may remind us of all the powers of evil with which we are surrounded, they may also help to make us realise how powerless we are of ourselves to offer effective resistance, and so they should make us remember that there is One alone whom we can trust fully.

We can then pass on to consider the lessons taught by those animals that are useful, that do their daily work, and this may lead us to ask that very good question: “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?”

Then we might linger for a moment over the smallest of the animals about which we have talked, and remember that it was exceedingly wise, and this in itself gives us a picture of God’s kingdom, where not many mighty are called. The Lord Jesus set a little child in the midst of those who took the place of being wise, and said “Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.”

So I would like each reader of these pages to know something of true wisdom, and to do that they must know something of the One who was declared to be “the power of God, and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor. 1:24), in whom “are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col. 2:3).

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