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W H B
Scranton March 1, 1878.

My dear Young Friends,

I can hardly believe that another month has already rolled around since I wrote you about Uzziah's sin. I had thought another week would elapse before your meeting. So quickly time is always flying; & we must do with our might what our hands find to do. It will seem but as yesterday soon, when you will be grown out of boyhood & girlhood & schooldays, and find yourselves fast in the hard tasks of life, with no chance to stop or turn aside.

It is a great pleasure to me to be able in this manner to keep up our acquaintances still. We were to take up the story of Lot's wife this month, I believe?

Lot was a good man, but he was very fond of riches; & so he & his family, had a good many troubles, & faults, which had they, been less

worldly might never have befallen them. He was one of that famous colony who emigrated from "Ur of the Chaldees," one of the earliest towns that ever existed, somewhere in Mesopotamia in Asia, so long ago that all the account we have of it is in the eleventh (31-32) & twelfth (1-6) chapters of Genesis. God had told Abram to go to the west to live, & that there He would bless him; and Abram obeyed, & took Lot his nephew, among others, with him. They traveled until they came to the place which was afterward called Sichem, or Shechem, or Sychar, & from that to Bethel, or rather what was afterward Bethel; for there were no towns such as we have until long after that time, & when Abram & Lot came there the land was full of natives more like our American Indians when the Puritans came to this country, than anything else I can compare them to. That is to say (in the words of the Bible, Gen. xii, 6) "the Canaanite was then in the land."

Abram & his nephew managed to get along

with these native Canaanites, & became very rich; just as some thorough-going, hardworking men who came out here to Scranton thirty years ago when it was all a pine wilderness, have become very rich. Only their riches were of a very different sort from these rich men here; it was in flocks & herds, which as you know take a good deal of land to live on. Finally they became so rich that there was not room enough for them on all that beautiful plain where they were; & their herdsmen began to quarrel with one another (Gen. xiii, 5-7.) So Abram said to his nephew, "Let there be no strife between us; is not the whole land before you?" and he proposed to him to choose in which direction he would go, & he himself (Abram) would go the other way, so that they should each have land enough for their cattle.

Lot was not very respectful to his kind uncle but took him right up at his word, & made his own choice, taking the

best (as he thought it) for himself, with seeming, to think that it would have been polite & good to give his uncle the first selection. He saw that the plains down by the town of Sodom were "well-watered everywhere" (Gen. xiii, 10), & so he chose them & "dwelt in the cities of the plain, & pitched his tent toward Sodom" — which means I suppose, that sooner or later he went in to that place to live.

Now Sodom was the wickedest place, perhaps, that ever was in the world. It was a great deal worse than such towns as we see nowadays on the outskirts of our country, where men can behave just as badly as they choose. I remember one town I saw once in Michigan (Regansee) where every single house on the main street for a considerable distance was a miserable run-hole!

I suppose Sodom was a thousand times worse than that. men were murderers, & in other ways did so abominably that finally God just sent down fire from heaven & burned the place up! Lot must have known what a vile place Sodom was, but he evidently thought he could gain more property, or enjoy himself more, there, than away from it; & so he went there to live. By & by God warned him of the coming destruction of it.

Up to this time we have heard nothing of Lot's wife; but I thought it necessary that we should become a little acquainted first with her husband, & her home. I think it quite probable (tho' the Bible does not tell us) that she was a Sodomite woman; or at all events she certainly became as much attached to the town as if she was.

Now we come to the story recorded of her in Genesis xix, 15-26, and referred to by our Savior in Luke xviii, 32.

God sent two angels to Lot to warn him that the town was to be destroyed by fire. Poor Lot! he didn't know how to bear it to go away. He "lingered" (xix, 16); & the angels had fairly to drive him forth; & then he was not willing to go very far away.

How wonderfully patient God was to allow him to stop at Zoar, near by, instead of going as far as ever he could from the wicked, doomed city!

But as they were running away from Sodom, & the two angels hastening them; Lot's wife, thinking of all the pleasant things in Sodom, & all the pleasant days she had spent there, & regretting & grieving to be compelled to leave them all behind her; fairly rebelled against it all, & "looked back from behind her" This, you may observe in the 17th verse she had been expressly commanded not

to do. What do you suppose made her do it? She knew the angels were right; she had yielded to their command to flee; & they had directly said "Look not behind you." Why did she?

I think; first, she was a little sceptical. She could hardly have done so dangerous a thing unless she was. She was not quite willing to run away from Sodom to Zoar until she could see for herself that Sodom was burning. But God requires faith in Him. He had given her a good enough reason to believe Sodom would fall, in the estimable characters of the angels. Then He required that she should just take their word for the event. So He gives us the Bible, a book which it is easy to see is inspired of God; & then He tells us no more than it says, leaving us to receive that or die. Lot's wife wanted more proof - wanted to see, not to trust; & so not a believer.

But again, I think she was moved by

curiosity. What an idle thing it was for her to be looking behind her when she was on the most important errand of her life. How bad it is of a boy or a girl sent on an errand to be stopping to satisfy his curiosity about something he sees on the way. Curiosity is a good thing if it is used at the right time, for a proper purpose; but Lot's wife had a wicked curiosity, as Eve had had before her; & it led her to dreadful misfortune.

But I think the root of the whole matter was her worldliness.

Lot's wife is to my mind the great Bible example of that sinful disposition. John (I Epistle, ii, 15) bids Christians "love not the world, neither the things of the world;" & says positively if they do, the love of the Father is not in them. "For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, & the lu-

of the eyes, & the pride of life is not of the Father, but is of the world; & the world passeth away, & the lust of it; but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever." Lot's wife loved the world; she loved a town so wicked that God had to destroy it; she loved it so much as to have to be hurried out of it; she loved it so much as to want it & turn back & look longingly on it when she was almost saved from it. She was worldly-minded. In the first place, she & her husband loved riches too much; & so as St. Paul said to Timothy (I, vi, 9) they fell into temptation & a snare; & she, into a foolish & hurtful lust which doomed her in destruction & perdition. (I am quoting Paul's words to Timothy.)

Now are you anxious to get rich, to have the pleasure of the world; are you worldly-minded? It is right enough to

wish to have enough to live by, or to support those who may be dependent on you; but not to do as Lot did, be so anxious to make money as to forget to be respectful to your elders, to be neglectful of the wickedness of those with whom you associate, & to become as much mixed up with them as Lot & his wife were with Sodom. Seek first the kingdom of God & His righteousness; & all things you need shall be added to you.

And you can have pleasure in the world, but not become so wedded to it that you cannot give it up if called on. I know a girl who says "she would rather dance than eat"; & the consequence is she lets it run away with her, & sins against her conscience. God will not forget that. You must "use the world as not abusing it." (I Cor. vii, 31).

The great lesson of the story of Lot's wife is; she was worldly-minded, & would not give it up; & God killed her. He turned

her into a pillar of salt, just for a somewhat similar sin. He struck Sapphira dead in her tracks (Acts v, 10). God will not let worldly-minded people go to Heaven. He hates worldliness. It is a very dangerous thing to love money so much as to neglect church, & Bible, & prayer & benevolence, for it. It is a very dangerous thing to distrust God's word. It is a very dangerous thing to do what God's word tells us not to do. It is possible to be lost when one is almost saved. Lot was saved by the very hardest: he didn't look back. Even he, good man that he was, who had obeyed God's word & gone from Ur to Canaan, came very near staying & being destroyed. "If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly & sinner appear". Don't be worldly. "Remember Lot's wife." Do not be slothful in business, but be "fervent in spirit serving the Lord" "Rejoice," not in worldly amusements, but "in the Lord": "Whoso is wise and understandeth these things, even he shall know the

loving kindness of the Lord."

With constant prayers and the warmest
love for you all, my dear boys & girls,
& with the most earnest hope that these
letters on sin may not be without
profit to you, I am always your Friend,

W. H. Belolen

To the Young People's
Union Prayer Meeting
Branchville, N. C.

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