

**A LECTURE TO CHILDREN AND
YOUTH ON THE HISTORY AND
CHARACTER OF HEATHEN
IDOLATRY, . 6-48 (NOT
COMPLETE)**

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A lecture to children and youth on the history and character of heathen idolatry, . 6-48 (not complete) by William Brodie Gurney

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WILLIAM BRODIE GURNEY

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A LECTURE

TO

CHILDREN AND YOUTH

ON THE

History and Character of Heathen Idolatry;

WITH SOME REFERENCES

TO THE

EFFECTS OF CHRISTIAN MISSIONS.

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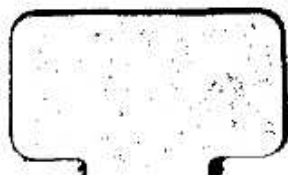
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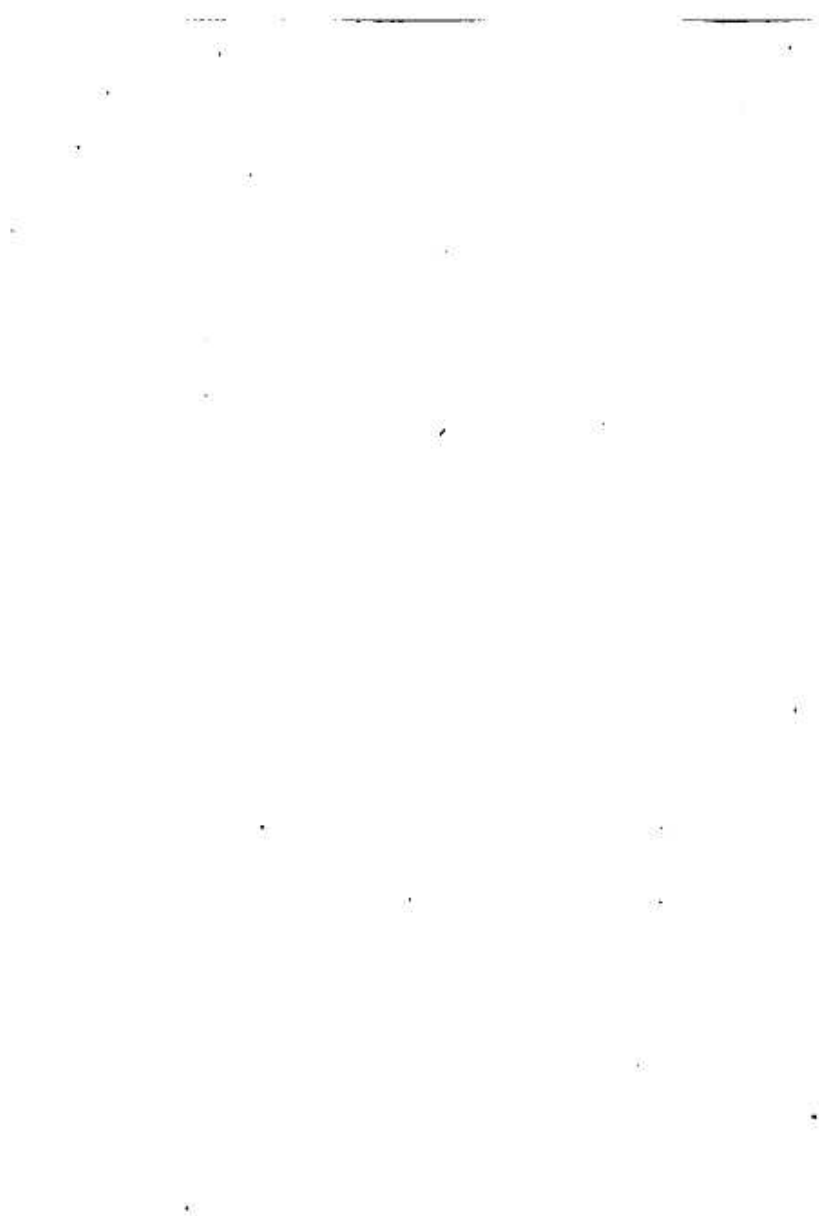
P R E F A C E.

THE following Lecture was delivered to many thousand children and youth, in various parts of the Kingdom. It was considered to have created an interest in Missionary operations, and there was reason to hope that some who heard it were, through Divine grace, brought to feel that while engaged in sending the Gospel to the heathen they were, as they did not love the Lord Jesus Christ, only heathens themselves, and to seek an interest in his love. It has been thought that the publication may be useful, and the Author has complied with the suggestion of those in whose judgment he confides. He has found it impossible to bring all which it was desirable to say, and which it was desirable that young persons should have an opportunity of reading, within such a compass, that it could be read in the time usually devoted to a Lecture to children and youth, and he would suggest that when thus delivered, omissions should be made at the discretion of the speaker, in which he will be guided by the nature of his auditory.

The profits, if any, will be devoted to the Schools connected with the Baptist Missionary Society.

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charged the people, "Take ye, therefore, good heed unto yourselves lest thou lift up thine eyes unto heaven, and when thou seest the sun, and the moon, and the stars, even all the host of heaven, thou shouldst be drawn to worship them." There are many passages of Scripture expressing the displeasure of God; and nearly eight hundred years after the command delivered by Moses, good king Josiah, finding that idolatry was practised, and that there were in the temple of the Lord, horses and chariots consecrated to the sun, removed the horses and burnt the chariots. Some writers are of opinion that the moon was worshipped still more extensively than the sun, particularly by the Jews; and there appears to be no doubt that human sacrifices were offered to both of them in some countries. The Jews used to describe the sun and the moon as the king and queen of heaven, and the stars as their army, thus forsaking the true God, who had so greatly distinguished them by his mercies.



Worship of the Heavenly Bodies.

In the course of time, idolatry was extended to other objects besides the heavenly bodies. Some of their gods probably were great warriors, who had led them on to victory; or kings, who had reigned over them, to whom they continued to pray after their death, vainly supposing that they had still the power of assisting

them, and some were, most probably, the creatures of their own imagination.

There are some very striking representations of the false gods of the heathen in the Old Testament, with which you are, no doubt, acquainted. The children of Israel were told, that the heathen sacrificed to devils not to gods; and there is a reference in a book, with which, probably, you are not acquainted, I mean the Apocrypha, in the Wisdom of Solomon, the 13th chapter, to the heathen worshipping fire, or the wind, or the lights of heaven, and to their taking the refuse of a log of wood, carving it diligently, fashioning it to the image of a man, or of some wild beast, and laying it over with vermillion (and with paint, calling it red.) These red idols, Harmer, in his Observations (vol. 4, p. 160) states, were intended to represent great warriors who had been deified, or considered as gods, on account of their success in war.

They made images and put them up in their houses or their temples, and prayed to those images as if they had been alive and had the power of hearing their prayer and assisting them. Some were in the form of an ox, others of a calf, others of reptiles, cats and dogs, and apes, and others partly man and partly beast, giving the strongest proof of that which is stated by the apostle, that "their foolish heart was darkened."

I have said that idolatry became very general. You have read about Abraham; and, probably, some of you are calling to mind that he is described as the father of the faithful: but Abraham's father was an idolater, and he himself was an idolater; and God called him, as the sacred historian informs us, to leave his father's house, and to go forth into another country, and there to erect an altar to the true God: and Abraham obeyed.

There is a tradition among the Jews, that the father of Abraham made idols for sale, and that Abraham assisted him; but that, one day when his father was absent on a journey, a man called, and in conversation, asked Abraham how old he was; Abraham replied, fifty. "Why," said the man, "how foolish you are, that at the age of fifty, you are worshipping a god whom you made only yesterday." Abraham, it is said, was confounded with this observation; and the more he thought upon it, the more he felt the folly of his conduct, and in consequence of this, took up a weapon, and broke in pieces all the images, except the largest, into the hand of which he put the weapon, and before which he placed an offering which a worshipper had presented. On the return of his father, Terah, it is said he expressed his consternation at the havoc he witnessed; and enquiring how it had happened, his son ironically

told him that the gods had had a quarrel which should eat the offering, and that the great god had broken all the rest, but that even when he had done so, the offering remained unconsumed, for he could not eat it. Very soon after this, as the tradition goes, he left his father's house, and went into another country, pointed out to him by God, and set up His worship, and commanded his children after him to worship only Him.

The Jews, as you are aware, were the descendants of Abraham. While they were in Egypt they saw idolatry of the grossest kind among the Egyptians. The accounts which are given by ancient historians of their idolatry are very painful. Ham, one of the sons of Noah, was the founder of the Egyptian monarchy, and he was worshipped under the name of Jupiter Ammon. But not only this, they idolized every form of creeping things and abominable beast.

When the children of Israel left Egypt, Moses, by command of God, charged them not to practise the abominations of the Egyptians and worship their idols. This word, idols, is, in the margin of our Bibles (Deut. xxix. 17) translated "dungy gods," words which strikingly represent that of which the engraving opposite is a representation,—“the Sacred Beetle of Egypt.” Yes; even the beetle was one of the creeping things which was worshipped by the Egyptians. Along with the bodies embalmed in Egypt there are frequently found various idols and representations of their gods, and this engraving affords a striking illustration of this degrading and impious worship. It is copied from a stone now in the British Museum, the figure of the beetle, called “Thore,” in the centre, with two of the false goddesses of Egypt, “Isis” and “Nithys,” on the sides.

But the worship of the Egyptians was not confined to any one, or even a few descriptions of beasts or creeping things. Diodorus Siculus relates, that a Roman soldier serving in Egypt, having killed a cat, was immediately sacrificed to the indignation of the people, notwithstanding his officers endeavoured to save him; and that when a famine prevailed in that country, to a degree which drove the people to the eating of human flesh, none of them would eat any of the numerous animals which were idolized.

Historians record too, that Cambyses, the Emperor of Persia, when attacking a city, was beaten back by the arrows of those on the walls; in consequence of which, he presented in front of his army a number of dogs and cats and other animals, upon which the people ceased to shoot their arrows lest they should injure their gods. By this stratagem, Cambyses advanced and took the city.

How sad it is to see that the descendants of Abraham, notwithstanding their peculiar obligations to God, and notwithstanding the