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January 1870

The History of

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LECTURES:  
EXPOSITORY AND PRACTICAL,  
ON  
THE BOOK OF  
ECCLESIASTES.

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BY RALPH WARDLAW, D. D.

AUTHOR OF DISCOURSES ON THE PRINCIPAL POINTS OF THE SOCINIAN  
CONTROVERSY; UNITARIANISM INCAPABLE OF VINDI-  
CATION; LECTURES ON THE BOOK OF PROVERBS,  
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PHILADELPHIA:  
WM. S. RENTOUL, 421 WALNUT STREET.  
1868.

## PREFACE

OF THE PUBLISHER OF THIS EDITION.

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It is of essential importance to the interest and prosperity of the cause of God in any age, that the precious religious writings of eminent saints which are peculiarly fitted to instruct and edify the people of God, should be made easily accessible. And there are no religious works, perhaps, next to the Holy Scriptures, which are more fitted to be useful in a high degree, than such Expository and Practical treatises on the Books of Scripture as, from their excellence, have established for themselves the character of standard works, in the common estimation of evangelical Christians.

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PUBLISHER'S PREFACE.

ded, which he trusts will be found to materially enhance the value of this edition over any former one.

No name among the many eminent Ministers of Christ who flourished in Britain during the early part of the present century, stood higher during his day, whether as a Divine or as a friend of civil and religious liberty, than that of Dr. Ralph Wardlaw. As a profound thinker; as an able Bible expositor; as a preacher of the glorious Gospel of salvation; and as an ever ready and zealous champion, whether of Divine truth, when assailed from whatever quarter, or of the rights of oppressed humanity—all combined, he occupied, perhaps, the first place in the first rank. It has seemed strange to the Publisher of this new edition of his celebrated Commentary on Ecclesiastes, that a work of such acknowledged excellence should not have been republished either in Britain or America for more than forty years. On it, more than on any other of his Expository works on Books of Scripture, does his solid and enduring reputation as a Bible expositor rest; and “by it,” in an eminent degree, may it be said—“he being dead yet speaketh.”

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PHILADELPHIA, }  
June, 1868. }

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## THE AUTHOR'S PREFACE.

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THE following lectures were, in the substance of them, delivered, in the ordinary course of my weekly ministrations, in the years 1810 and 1811. They have been entirely recomposed for the press. Both their original delivery, and their subsequent preparation for the public in their present form, were suggested by the state of the times, which appeared, in the afflictive visitations of providence upon the mercantile interests of our country, to press so powerfully the great lessons of the Book of Ecclesiastes upon the attention of its inhabitants; and nowhere was the call more imperious, to "lay these lessons to heart," than in this great manufacturing city.

By this statement, the expectation will at once be precluded in the reader's mind, of critical or philological disquisition. Of this, for very obvious reasons, it is the duty of a public teacher of the word of God, to be as sparing as is consistent with fidelity to truth. His first concern, it is true, ought certainly to be, to discover, in every passage, "the mind of the Spirit,"—the sentiment originally intended by the inspired writers to be conveyed; for any other sentiment is not Divine revelation:—and therefore, if, in any particular instance, he is satisfied that the sense has been misapprehended by our English translators, it becomes incumbent upon him, with modesty, to point out the mistake, and to give what appears to be the true meaning. I need not say, however, that in the fulfilment of this duty, (for I will not call it the mere use of a liberty,) self-diffidence and caution are peculiarly requisite. In the following discourses, I have, with very few exceptions, assumed the correctness of the common English Version, in expressing the sense of the original, being satisfied, that in most instances in which different translations have been proposed, its claims to preference are at least not inferior to those of others.

Those who are desirous of examining the Book critically, may have recourse to such authors as Desvœux, Schultens, Dathius, Van der Palm, Hodgson, and others. In their works, the various opinions may be seen which have been entertained by different critics and commentators, respecting its great general object; along with abundance, more and less valuable, of philological remark and dissertation, for the elucidation of particular portions of it. The commentary of Bishop Reynolds, as edited by the Rev. Mr. Washbourne in 1811, I did not see till the last of these lectures was at press.

The general design of the Book is by some conceived to be simple, by others

more complex; and in this department of sacred literature, as in others, there are not wanting occasional indications of the love of hypothesis and originality. There has been also, I am tempted to think, an unnecessary creation of difficulties. It seems sufficiently clear, that the writer's first design is to illustrate and prove, by a variety of examples, taken from his own experience and his observation of others, the position that "ALL IS VANITY;" the insufficiency of all the labors, and pursuits, and earthly pleasures of men, to confer true happiness; an insufficiency arising from the sinfulness of some of them, the illusory nature of others, and the precariousness and short-lived continuance of all. This position he lays down at the outset of his treatise; twenty times he directly repeats it, and oftener still alludes to it, in the course of his details; and when he has finished his proofs and illustrations, he formally re-announces it in his peroration. This ought surely to be enough, to determine the text of a discourse. But there is an object of the writer ulterior to the establishment of this position. It would not have been enough for him to expose the false sources of happiness, without directing to the true;—to break in pieces the cisterns that men have hewed out for themselves, without conducting to the "fountain of living water;"—to point out the folly of the answers which men have given to the question, "Who will show us good?" and to give no satisfying reply to it himself. His *ultimate* object, therefore, is not to make good the position, that "all is vanity," but rather, upon the establishment of this affecting truth, to found the further position, that to "fear God and keep his commandments is the whole" duty, and honor, and happiness "of man." This is "the conclusion of the whole matter:"—and can any conclusion be conceived, to which it could be more worthy of inspiration to conduct the erring creatures of God?

I enjoyed much pleasure in the study and exposition of this interesting portion of the word of God; and the pleasure has been renewed in preparing the discourses for the press. Whether they shall give satisfaction to others, remains now to be ascertained. Every author, of course, indulges a hope, that his work may not be altogether unacceptable. But in publishing, as in preaching, there ought to be a higher aim than to please. The great concern should be, to impress the lessons of Divine wisdom, and the necessity of their immediate reduction to practice. If such impression be not produced,—if no practical result be effected,—it will little avail the reader that he has merely been gratified; nor ought it, surely, to satisfy the writer. "Lo! thou art unto them as a very lovely song, of one who hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument: for they hear thy words, but they will not do them."

I commend the work to the blessing of that God, the sacred lessons of whose word it is intended to illustrate and recommend.

R. W.

GLASGOW, }  
September 28th, 1821. }

## LECTURE I.

### ECCLESIASTES I. 1-11.

'The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king of Jerusalem. 2. Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all (is) vanity. 3. What profit hath a man of all his labor which he taketh under the sun? 4. (One) generation passeth away, and (another) generation cometh: but the earth abideth for ever. 5. The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to his place where he arose. 6. The wind goeth toward the south, and turneth about unto the north; it whirleth about continually; and the wind returneth again according to his circuits. 7. All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea (is) not full: unto the place from whence the rivers come, thither they return again. 8. All things (are) full of labor; man cannot utter (it); the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing. 9. The thing that hath been, it (is) that which shall be; and that which is done (is) that which shall be done: and (there is) no new (thing) under the sun. 10. Is there (any) thing whereof it may be said, See, this (is) new? it hath been already of old time, which was before us. 11. (There is) no remembrance of former (things); neither shall there be (any) remembrance of (things) that are to come with (those) that shall come after.'

THE account given us, in the Old Testament history, of the early character of Solomon, and of the commencement of his reign, is such as cannot fail to impart the purest delight to every pious and benevolent mind. In the following simple narrative, we know not whether to be most charmed with the self-diffidence and piety of the man, or with the disinterested patriotism of the prince:—"In Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night: and God said, Ask what I shall give thee. And Solomon said, Thou hast showed unto thy servant David my father great mercy, according as he walked before thee in truth, and in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart with thee; and thou hast kept for him this great kindness, that thou hast given him a son to sit on his throne, as (it is) this day. And now, O LORD my God, thou hast made thy servant king instead of David my father; and I (am but) a little child: I know not (how) to go out

or come in. And thy servant (is) in the midst of thy people which thou hast chosen, a great people, that cannot be numbered nor counted for multitude. Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad: for who is able to judge this thy so great a people? And the speech pleased the LORD, that Solomon had asked this thing. And God said unto him, Because thou has asked this thing, and has not asked for thyself long life; neither hast asked riches for thyself, nor hast asked the life of thine enemies; but hast asked for thyself understanding to discern judgment; behold, I have done according to thy words: lo, I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart; so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee. And I have also given thee that which thou hast not asked, both riches and honor: so that there shall not be any among the kings like unto thee all thy days. And if thou wilt walk in my ways, to keep my statutes and my commandments, as thy father David did walk, then I will lengthen thy days. And Solomon awoke; and, behold, (it was) a dream: and he came to Jerusalem, and stood before the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and offered up burnt-offerings, and offered peace-offerings, and made a feast to all his servants." 1 Kings iii. 5-15.

The same features of character are beautifully exemplified in the opening scenes of his reign. Behold him, at the dedication of the Temple, assembling all Israel together; bringing up to its place the ark of the covenant of the Lord; pouring out in public to Jehovah the thanksgivings of a grateful heart; blessing the people in His name; standing before the altar of God, spreading forth his hands towards heaven, and, with humble reverence, and holy fervor, and patriotic affection, uttering aloud his prayers and intercessions to the Most High; offering the sacrifices of dedication; renewing his benedictions to the vast assembly; and, after fourteen days of sacred festivity, sending them away,—“blessing the king, and joyful and glad of heart for all the goodness which the Lord had done for David his servant, and for Israel his people.” (See 1 Kings, chap. viii.)

In proportion, my brethren, as we are gratified and delighted by these accounts of the character of Solomon's youth, and of the auspicious beginning of his government, will our feelings of dis-

appointment and grief be intense, when we contemplate his subsequent deviations from the ways of wisdom, and lamentable "departure from the living God." "For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, (that) his wives turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the LORD his God, as (was) the heart of David his father. For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Zidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. And Solomon did evil in the sight of the LORD, and went not fully after the LORD, as (did) David his father. Then did Solomon build an high-place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, in the hill that (is) before Jerusalem, and for Moloch the abomination of the children of Ammon. And likewise did he for all his strange wives, who burnt incense, and sacrificed unto their gods. And the LORD was angry with Solomon, because his heart was turned from the LORD God of Israel, who had appeared unto him twice; and had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods; but he kept not that which the LORD commanded." 1 Kings xi. 4-10.

Alas! how fallen!—And, judging from the history alone, we should have been left to conclude,—fallen finally! Much, however, is to be learned, by the comparison of one part of Scripture with another. If, for example, (to give an instance analogous to the one before us,)—if we had no other record of Manasseh's reign than that contained in the twenty-first chapter of the second book of Kings, we should have known nothing of him but his extraordinary wickedness, the idolatry, oppression, and sanguinary cruelty of his administration;—we should have contemplated him, with the painful feelings of abhorrence and reprobation, dying as he had lived, sinking into the grave under a load of unrepented crime and unobliterated infamy. But when we compare the additional account given of him in the thirty-third chapter of the second Book of Chronicles, we see him brought back, by sanctified affliction, to the God whom he had so awfully forsaken and dishonored, a subject of that "broken and contrite spirit which He does not despise," and an interesting and encouraging example of the freedom and riches of Divine grace. The Book of Ecclesiastes presents us with a similar comfortable and cheering view of the latter days of the life of Solomon. We behold him here, after

a temporary apostasy from the Lord God of Israel, "confessing, and forsaking, and finding mercy." We behold him, returning from the broken and empty cisterns of the world to the Fountain of living water; recording, for the admonition of future ages, his own folly and shame, the bitterness of his disappointment, and the salutary lessons he had learned from the infatuated and impious experiment of seeking happiness in the vanities of the world without God.

That the Book was the composition of Solomon, the title bears; universal tradition affirms; and internal evidence concurs to prove: there being many things in it which will apply to no one else. With the doubts which have at times been expressed, and the answers which have been given to them, I shall not at present trouble you. Some of them have arisen from certain passages in the Book itself, having appeared inconsistent with the dictates of the Spirit of God in other parts of the Sacred volume, and expressive of sentiments dangerous, or at least ambiguous. The true interpretation of these passages will come to be considered in their respective places; when their perfect harmony with the rest of the Bible, will, we trust, be satisfactorily shown, and their title sufficiently established to the character belonging to all that is "given by inspiration of God,"—the character of being "profitable for instruction, for conviction, for reformation, and for education in righteousness." (See 2 Tim. iii. 16; *Greek Text.*)

And, while external and internal evidences establish the genuineness of the treatise, as the production of the prince whose name it bears; the same descriptions of proof assign its composition to a period of his life subsequent to his temporary apostasy from the service and the ways of God. This is the testimony of Jewish tradition; and, whilst every right feeling should induce us to *wish* the testimony true, there is enough in the book itself to vindicate our judgment from the imputation of credulity in *believing* it. For, if it was written by Solomon at all, at what other time of his life *could* it be written? Not *before* his apostasy: for then he had not been guilty of the madness and impiety described. Not *during its continuance*: for the language of the record is that of past time, and the spirit which it breathes is that of penitence for past misconduct. An apostate, persisting in his apostasy, could not possibly have been its author. It must have been written,



therefore, after his return from his wanderings; and the delight which the conviction of this inspires, rests on grounds that are not illusory.

Verse 1st. *The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king of Jerusalem.*

ECCLESIASTES, is the Greek Title of the Book; the title which it bears in the Septuagint. It signifies THE PREACHER. The Hebrew word for which it is used, means, one who assembles, or gathers the people together; and the translation of it by the term *Ecclesiastes*, shows that the Greek Translators understood the object of the assembling to be, the communication of public instruction. That Solomon, in the early part of his reign, should have employed in this way, for the benefit of his people, the wisdom with which he had been so singularly endowed, is highly probable. It is worthy of his piety and his patriotism, and by no means inconsistent, unless on false ideas of honor, with his regal dignity. When he himself went astray, his example could not fail to have a most extensively pernicious influence in "causing Israel to sin." And it is a highly pleasing reflection, that when he "came to himself," he should, with a similar publicity, have acknowledged the folly and the evil of his ways, and have done what lay in his power, by an open avowal of his "repentance towards God," to counteract the fatal tendency of the course he had been pursuing, and to stem the tide of impiety and profligacy, the floodgates of which he had so unhappily opened. He had been guilty of the two great evils, of "forsaking God the fountain of living waters," and of "hewing out unto himself cisterns, broken cisterns that could hold no water;" and now he declares before all men, that he had found this to be "an evil thing and a bitter," and with a decision and earnestness, the product of woful experience, warns all against the miserable infatuation. Nor does he only publish his penitence at the time; he imparts permanence to it by recording it in writing for the admonition of succeeding generations.

His character as a preacher is drawn in the twelfth chapter, the ninth and tenth verses:—"Moreover, because the Preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge; yea, he gave good heed, and sought out, (and) set in order many proverbs. The Preacher sought to find out acceptable words: and (that which was) written (was) upright, (even) words of truth." Let us, then,

attend with seriousness, and with earnest desire of Divine influence, to the words of this preacher, as "words of uprightness and truth."

He was the "son of David." To him had been addressed, by his pious and affectionate parent, the solemn charge, equally melting and alarming: "And thou, Solomon my son; know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart, and with a willing mind; for the LORD searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts: if thou seek him, he will be found of thee; but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever." (1 Chron. xxviii. 9.) It was in opposition to this paternal counsel that he had gone astray; and possibly, the tender recollection of it, brought home to the heart by the events of providence, might be part of the means of "restoring his soul, and making him to walk again in the paths of righteousness." "I was my father's son,"—says he elsewhere, (Prov. iv. 3, 4,) bearing testimony to the affectionate fidelity with which that father had fulfilled the paternal trust,—“I was my father's son, tender and only beloved in the sight of my mother. He taught me also, and said unto me, Let thy heart retain my words; keep my commandments, and live.” Frequently has it happened, (and the consideration of it should encourage godly parents in the discharge of their duty,) that the remembrance of early instructions has, after a course of departure from God, been the means of awakening the conscience, alarming the fears, and touching the sensibilities, of the unhappy wanderer, and turning his feet anew to "the way of God's testimonies."

"The preacher" was also "king of Jerusalem." It was the God of Israel who had chosen and exalted him to this dignity: but he had been guilty of forgetting and ill-requiting the Author of his greatness. Possessed of many and invaluable spiritual advantages above the kings of the surrounding nations, he had yet "learned of their ways," honored and served their gods, and admitted the abominations of their idolatry into alliance and incorporation with the worship of "the Holy One of Israel:" thus violating the most sacred obligations to preserve that worship, by example and authority, free from intermingling corruptions; and leading that people astray into error and sin, whom it was his official duty to encourage and to conduct in the ways of truth and

righteousness. As "king of Jerusalem," he was also placed in a situation, which brought within his reach "whatsoever his soul lusted after," and thus enabled him, in the most favorable circumstances, and on the most extensive scale, (for "what can the man do, that cometh after the king?") to try his infatuated experiments on human happiness; experiments, of which the great general result is expressed, with comprehensive brevity, and deep-felt emphasis, in the second verse:—

Verse 2d. "VANITY OF VANITIES, SAITH THE PREACHER, VANITY OF VANITIES; ALL IS VANITY."

This is the Text of the Preacher's sermon; the leading proposition, which it is his object to illustrate and to establish, in the whole of the subsequent part of this book; of which he never loses sight; which meets us, in the way of direct allusion, at every step and turn of the progress of his argument; and to which, when he has finished his details, he reverts in the very same terms, in his peroration. (Chap. xii. 8.)

To enter into any detached and general illustration of this verse would, therefore, be to anticipate the contents of the Book. The following remarks may be worthy of attention:—

*In the first place:* It is to be considered as the affecting result of Solomon's own experience. He had entered into the spirit of the universal inquiry, "who will show us any good?" (Psal. iv. 6.) and had made trial of the various sources of worldly happiness. He had repaired in person to the different springs, determined to take nothing upon the reported experience of others, but to taste the waters for himself. He had drunk freely of them all; and in this treatise, he describes their respective properties and virtues. The Book might, therefore, with sufficient appropriateness, be entitled "THE EXPERIENCE OF SOLOMON."

*Secondly.* We are not to understand it as the language of a mind soured and fretted by disappointment; the verdict of a morose and discontented cynic, the incessant frustration of whose hopes and desires had made him renounce the world in disgust, while his heart was yet unchanged, and continued secretly to hanker after the same enjoyments; or of a wasted sensualist, who, having run his career of pleasure, felt himself incapable of any longer actually enjoying what still, however, engrossed his peevish and unavailing wishes:—but we are to regard it as the conclusion come to by

one who had felt the bitterness of a course of sin, and the emptiness of this world's joys, and, having been reclaimed from "the error of his way,"—having renounced and wept over his follies,—was more than ever satisfied that "the fear of the Lord is wisdom," and that "the ways of wisdom are the only ways of pleasantness, and her paths alone the paths of peace."

*Thirdly.* Neither must we conceive him to affirm, in these words, that there is *no good whatever*, no kind of enjoyment, no degree of happiness, to be derived from the things of the world, when they are kept in their own place, estimated on right principles, and used in a proper manner. Sentiments widely different from any thing so ascetic and enthusiastic as this, will repeatedly come in our way in the course of the Book. The words before us are to be interpreted of every thing in this world when pursued as *the portion* of him who seeks it,—when considered as constituting *the happiness* of a rational, immortal, and accountable being. His verdict is, that to such a creature they can yield, by themselves, no genuine and worthy satisfaction; and that, whilst they are, in their own nature, unsatisfying, even in this world, they are worse, infinitely worse, than profitless for the world to come. On this ground it is, that he pronounces them *vanity*:—he had weighed them all in the balances, and had found them wanting.

*Fourthly.* The peculiar emphasis may be remarked with which this verdict is expressed. He does not merely say, all things are *vain*:—but "all is *vanity*;"—vanity itself, and *vanity of vanities*; that is, the greatest vanity,—sheer, perfect vanity. And he doubles the emphatic asseveration, "Vanity of vanities; vanity of vanities; all is vanity." This shows, first, the strength of the impression on his own mind. It is not the language of a judgment hesitating between two opinions, or of a heart lingering between opposite desires: but of a mind thoroughly made up; of a heart loathing itself for having ever for a moment yielded to a different sentiment; of decided conviction; of powerful experimental feeling. It shows, secondly, the earnestness of his desire to produce a similar impression on the minds of others. It was a lesson which he himself had learned by the bitterest experience; and he is anxious to prevent others from learning it in the same way. He wishes them to take his word for it; not to venture after him in a repetition of the sad experiments on which his conclusion was

founded, but to enter directly on another course; to seek immediately and earnestly a better portion, even the "peace" of them that "love God's law,"—the "life" that lies in the "Divine favor,"—the joys and the hopes of true religion.

That is justly denominated "vanity," which yields no substantial profit. It is in this connection that he adds;—

Verse 3. *What profit hath a man of all his labor which he taketh under the sun?*

By "labor" he means, not only the labor of the hands, but also the labor of the brain; for of both we shall find him frequently speaking in the sequel. "What *profit* hath a man of all his labor?" Much, it may be answered: much profit; great and manifold benefits, in the estimation of the world, may be the result of human labor. Learning, riches, power, honor, and all the means of sensual and intellectual gratification, may be acquired by labor. But these things, when viewed *apart from God as the chief good*, (the light in which, we observe, it is Solomon's intention to place them,) are all comprehended in the verdict already pronounced,—"Vanity of vanities; all is vanity." The gratification which these things impart is mingled with many disappointments, disquietudes, and mortifications. The pleasures which they yield have a large alloy of pains. They cannot, by themselves, even when enjoyed lawfully, constitute the happiness of such a creature as man. They are neither commensurate in their duration with his immortal existence, nor are they thoroughly satisfying even while they last. The chief point and emphasis of the question will be felt, if we consider a man as having *completed* his labor under the sun; having arrived at the close of his toils. Suppose him, whatever may have been the description and the sphere of his diligence, to have succeeded to his heart's desire; to have surmounted every difficulty, and attained every object of his pursuit:—the question is, *what profit remains to him when he has done?* What has he *then*, as the *proceeds* of his industry? And alas! the question, in this view, admits of but one answer:—"When he dieth, he shall carry nothing away." (Psal. xlix. 17.) This must be the reply as to the man of ambition, the man of wealth, the man of pleasure. Intellectual acquisitions form the only seeming exception: and the exception is no more than apparent. Even the man of learning, the philosopher, the wise man of this world, who has devoted his

life to study, and has gone round, with a master's step, the circle of the sciences; when he, as well as the others, is viewed as having terminated his labors, as an immortal and accountable creature, closing his earthly career, and appearing before God, unprepared for judgment and eternity, unpardoned, unsanctified, and unfurnished for heaven;—O what can we say, even of his acquirements, with all their admitted superiority to the pleasures of sense, and to the pursuits of power and of opulence, but “Vanity of vanities; vanity of vanities; all is vanity?” The simple fact stated in the following verse confirms the general sentence of “vanity” pronounced on all that pertains to time: “One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh.” “What is our life? It is a vapour, which appeareth for a little, and then vanisheth away.” “Our days on earth (are) as a shadow, and (there is) no abiding.” Turn your thoughts to the generation that is already gone; whose connection with the world and with time has already closed; whose bodies fill the narrow house, and whose “spirits have returned to God who gave them:” what profit have they *now*, of all their labor which they took under the sun? Oh! with what a bitter emphasis of utterance would those who lived and died strangers to the blessings of religion and the love of God; trying to do without him; seeking their happiness in the creature; “hewing out their broken cisterns;” “fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind;”—with what a bitter emphasis of utterance, could their voice be heard from beyond the impassable gulf, would they certify to us the truth of the verdict,—“all is vanity!”

It is always of essential consequence, in interpreting any writer, to ascertain his *general design* in the passage under review; the point which it is his object to establish or to illustrate. And in the book on which we are now entering, we shall find much occasion for the application of this remark.

In the remainder of the verses which I have read, that is, from the fourth to the eleventh inclusive, there seems to be one general idea placed in various points of light. It is, in substance, the sentiment expressed in the end of verse 9th, that “(there is) no new (thing) under the sun.” It is the idea of *perpetual change*, yet *constant sameness*; of stable and unaltering uniformity, in the midst of incessant variety and fluctuation.

This appears to be the point, or hidden sense, of the different figures contained in the fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh verses.

Verse 4th. (*One*) generation passeth away, and (*another*) generation cometh; but the earth abideth for ever:—more tersely in the original, *Generation goeth, and generation cometh; but the earth abideth for ever.*

This can hardly, indeed, be called a figure. It is, rather, a simple statement of fact. It affords, however, a striking illustration of the general sentiment. The coming and going of successive generations, presents a scene of endless variety; yet it is itself fixed and unvarying; the unalterable destiny of man. There is nothing that impresses more affectingly on the mind the “vanity” of human life, than the perpetual change of tenants that is taking place in this world of ours; a change which goes on without interruption; the scene presenting the same general aspects, whilst the actors in it are ever shifting; the house remaining the same, but the lodgers continually varying. “The Earth remaineth *for ever.*” that is, throughout these successive generations of men; presenting to the eye the same appearances; performing the same daily and yearly revolutions; exhibiting the same alternations of “seed-time and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night,” (Gen. viii. 22); going on, from generation to generation, in its old original courses, whilst every thirty years it receives a race of new inhabitants; and that, not by a periodical sweeping away, and a periodical creation, but on the principle of an average, calculated from numbers at every period of life, at every individual moment, perhaps, of “the three-score years and ten;” by which arrangement, the variety, whilst it is the more incessant, is yet the less perceptible; and the uniformity, though in reality not so constant, presents still more of the appearance of unchanging sameness. The perpetual stability of the earth is nothing, alas! to man. Each individual can only occupy it his short appointed time, and must then give place to a successor: and in the breasts of “men of the world, who have their portion in this life,” the truth expressed in this verse can engender no feelings but those of indignant fretfulness and mortification. The permanence of the earth is but a tantalizing assurance to the man who has it not in his power, however eagerly he may desire it, to continue on it as a permanent resident. Happy they, who “confess them-

selves strangers and pilgrims on earth, and desire a better country, even a heavenly;" who are heirs of "an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away."

Verse 5th. *The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to his place where he arose.*

The Sun ascends in the morning from the East; runs his diurnal course across the heavens; sets, and disappears; comes round again to the point of rising; renews the day, and repeats the same career: light and darkness ever alternating; each successive day resembling that which preceded it: perpetual sameness, yet incessant change.

The same general idea is still presented, under other figures, in the sixth and seventh verses:—

Verses 6, 7. *The wind goeth toward the south, and turneth about unto the north; it whirleth about continually; and the wind returneth again according to its circuits. All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea (is) not full: unto the place from whence the rivers come, thither they return again.*

What so mutable as the wind? It is the very proverb of fickleness and instability; "whirling about continually." Yet, though constantly varying, it presents no new appearances. There is no point of the compass from which we can say it now blows for the first time. Ten thousand times has it blown, and in every conceivable degree of strength, from North, South, East, and West, and all the intermediate points. Thus, whilst it is ever varying, it is always the same. There is nothing new in its incessant and capricious shiftings: "it returneth again according to its circuits."

"All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea (is) not full:" it does not overflow, swelling above its everlasting boundaries, notwithstanding this constant and copious influx of waters. The sea gives back its waters to the earth. By one of Nature's beautiful provisions, it is continually, by means of the solar influence, sending up insensibly into the atmosphere supplies of vapoury moisture, which descend again in silent dews, or, condensing into clouds, come down in rains and snows, watering the ground, that would otherwise become arid and unproductive, and feeding the springs, and streams, and rivers, which return again to the sea, from which they were derived. Thus there is here, too, perpetual change, yet perpetual uniformity; the same regular rotation of mutual sup-



ply; the rivers maintained from the sea, and the sea kept full by the rivers. In this figure, too, it might perhaps be Solomon's intention to insinuate an additional thought; namely, the unsatisfactory nature of the sources of worldly happiness: "the sea (is) not full." At any rate, this is the thought of the following verse, where it is strongly and beautifully brought out:—

Verse 8th. *All things (are) full of labor; man cannot utter (it): the eye is not satisfied with seeing, neither is the ear filled with hearing.*

Wherever you turn your eyes, in the society especially of civilized men, "all is full of labor." The departments and the modes of human exertion, all for the attainment of some real or fancied good, are endless in number, and inconceivably diversified. Yet, amidst them all, and amidst all their productions and results, "the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing." "The sea is not full." Still there is something or other awaiting; and this is made apparent by "all things *continuing* full of labor;" without cessation, without conclusion: men toiling after the attainment of something that is to make them happy, and, when they have succeeded, toiling still. They seek; they find: yet still they want, and still they labor: still

"With thirst insatiate crave for more."

The eye and the ear, as being the chief senses, are here put for all the desires of man, and all the organs by which they are respectively gratified. The general truth expressed is, that men, with all their endless labors after happiness, are still unsatisfied: a truth, alas! not peculiar to the country or the age of Solomon, but confirmed by the experience of every place, and of every generation.

The uniformity of appearances and events, amidst the constant succession of mankind, is expressed in very bold and vivid terms in the following verses:—

Verses 9-11. *The thing which hath been, it (is that) which shall be; and that which is done, (is) that which shall be done: and (there is) no new (thing) under the sun. Is there (any) thing whereof it may be said, See, this (is) new? it hath been already of old time that was before us. (There is) no remembrance of former (things): neither shall there be (any) remembrance of things that are to come with (those) that shall come after.*

It is very obvious, that this language must be interpreted gene-

rally. It cannot be understood as affirming, without qualification or exception, that amongst all the endlessly diversified modifications of things, and of events; all the discoveries and inventions of science and of art; and all the changes in the history of human life; there is absolutely nothing new; nothing that hath not been already of old time. But there is a vast deal of what passes for new, that is really old. Every man must be sensible, that even his own extending information has very often, in this respect, corrected his earlier views; and that many things which, in his ignorance, he had fancied to be new, his growing acquaintance with the knowledge of former times has shown him to possess claims even to high antiquity. Now, that which takes place in the experience of individuals, may also hold true with regard to the successive generations of mankind. Our ignorance of former times is, accordingly, appealed to, in

Verse 11th. *There is no remembrance of former things; neither shall there be any remembrance of things that are to come with those that shall be after.* How extremely limited and uncertain is our acquaintance with the ages of the world preceding our own! The constitution and phenomena of nature have been all along the same; the powers and passions of men, and the genera, and species, and varieties of character, arising from their diversified combinations, have been much the same; their wants and desires, together with the means existing in air, earth, and sea, for their supply and gratification, have been the same: and it seems natural to expect, that similar circumstances should give birth to similar results. There are, accordingly, many remarkable vestiges, not of the existence, merely, but of the high cultivation, of various arts and sciences, which at first view might appear modern, in nations and periods of remote antiquity; so that, in such cases, the men of recent days have only the credit of reviving what had been forgotten. And so strong, indeed, on some minds, is the impression produced by ancient remains, in favor of ancient times, that they have looked upon the present race as mere children and pigmies in knowledge, and in the power of applying it to practical use, compared with their brethren of an earlier age. There is *nothing*, of which, in these circumstances, we can, *with certainty*, affirm, "This is new." It is probable, that Solomon's acquaintance with science might appear to many of his contemporaries to include in

it much that was novel and original; whilst his own superior knowledge of the acquirements of different nations and of preceding times might enable him to ascertain the contrary.

There are, in particular, (for this is the main subject of the book,) no new sources of worldly happiness. "Who will show us any good?" has been the eager enquiry of the men of this world from the beginning: and, through successive ages, the answers to the inquiry, although modified by circumstances in ten thousand different ways, have, in the leading principles of them, been the same. The multitude of mankind have all along been "forsaking the fountain of living waters;" and the "cisterns," which they have "hewed out for themselves," have been very much of the same description; diversified, it may be, in their exterior forms and decorations, bearing the distinctive shapes and symbols of their respective ages and countries; but all, without exception, alike the modern and the antique, "broken cisterns, that can hold no water."

1. These verses present before us, in the first place, a most impressive and satisfactory testimony in favor of true religion, as the only source of real and permanent happiness. They are the best qualified to pronounce on the vanity and emptiness of the world, who have themselves tried it in all its forms and modes of enjoyment. Solomon made the experiment, and he "found it wanting." When, through Divine mercy, he "came to himself," he renounced the world, as "vanity and a thing of nought." With penitential shame and sorrow, he returned to God, from whom he had so miserably revolted,—even to "the fountain of living waters,"—and found in Him an all-satisfying portion, peace and rest, and "fulness of joy," and, in "the keeping of his commandments, a great reward." And such has been the experience—the feelingly recorded experience—of many a one besides the royal preacher. The insufficiency and vanity, indeed, of earthly things, as the portion of an intellectual, moral, and immortal being, ought to be held as a self-evident truth, unsusceptible of controversy, and requiring no proof. Yet, alas! what cause have we to remark;—

2. In the second place, What an affecting evidence it is, of the infatuation and depravity of mankind, that neither the plainness of the truth, nor the uniformity of the experience of successive generations, produces any alteration whatever on their general

conduct! Men who have made trial of the world, and have afterwards turned from it unto God, have attested, from their personal experience, its universal vanity, and at the same time, the substantial and satisfactory excellence of the blessings they have chosen in its stead; and many a time, from others, have the fearful solemnities of a death-bed, and a near view of eternity, drawn forth the reluctant confession of the same truth; a truth unheeded in the midst of life, and business, and prosperity, but brought home to the mind with dreadful certainty, when death has placed the sinner on the verge of the world to come. Yet, in despite of all this, men continue to pursue the same course. They persist in following the world with all avidity, under one or other of its various forms of falsely-promised enjoyment: just as if no testimony of its vanity existed in the experience of others; in the concurring verdict of their own consciences; in the word, or in the providence, of God! "They that trust in their wealth, and boast themselves of the multitude of their riches, none (of them) can by any means redeem his brother, or pay to God a ransom for him; (for the redemption of their soul (is) precious, and it ceaseth for ever:) that he should still live for ever, (and) not see corruption. For he seeth (that) wise men die, likewise the fool and the brutish person perish, and leave their wealth to others. Their inward thought (is, that) their houses (shall continue) for ever, (and) their dwelling-places to all generations: they call (their) lands after their own names. Nevertheless, man, (being) in honor, abideth not; he is like the beasts (that) perish. THIS THEIR WAY (IS) THEIR FOLLY: YET THEIR POSTERITY APPROVE THEIR SAYINGS." (Psal. xlix. 6-13.) "O that men were wise; (that) they understood these things; that they would consider their latter end!" Remember, ye infatuated votaries of the world! the solemn hour is fast approaching, when you must have done with time, and all its passing concerns. That hour will infallibly awaken you, if you are not happily awakened earlier, to an appalling conviction of the truth which has now, and so often, been urged upon your timely consideration. The special hand of Death will then write, in dark but too legible characters, on every thing from which you have been seeking your happiness,—"Vanity of vanities; vanity of vanities; ALL IS VANITY." O then, be wise in time. You are in quest of what never has been, and never can be found, from the

sources to which you are repairing for it. The search for happiness amongst "the things of this world," has been, shall be, must be, a fruitless labor. It is the toil

"Of dropping buckets into empty wells,  
And growing old in drawing nothing up."

To you is the divine invitation addressed, and to all who are feeling the thirst of nature for satisfactory enjoyment:—"Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters; and he that hath no money: come ye, buy and eat; yea come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for (that which) is not bread? and your labor for (that which) satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye (that which) is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live." Isaiah lv. 1-3. This expostulation, addressed to you by the God of heaven, in infinite condescension and kindness, is recommended to your attention and obedience by the impressive appeal of the Saviour of sinful men:—"For, what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father, with his angels; and then shall he reward every man according to his work." Matt. xvi. 26, 27. "What profit" shall a man then have, "of all his labor which he hath taken under the sun?" The favor of God; the love of Christ; the blessing of Heaven, mingling with all the good and evil of life, enhancing the one, and sweetening and sanctifying the other; the "exceeding great and precious promises" "of the life that now is, and of that which is to come,"—the faith of which inspires "the peace which passeth all understanding;"—the spiritual joy of "fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ," and with the children of God, the excellent of the earth; and the blessed hope of eternal life,—of glory and honor, and immortality;—these are sources of felicity, worthy of your rational and immortal natures,—pure and dignified, substantial and everlasting. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ; come to God in his name; accept the mercy offered, through his mediation, in the gospel; and all these blessings, in time and eternity, shall be yours. "O taste and see that the Lord is good!" "Doth not Wisdom cry? and Understanding put forth her voice? She standeth in the top of high

places, by the way, in the places of the paths; she crieth at the gates, at the entry of the city, at the coming in at the doors: unto you, O men, I call, and my voice is to the sons of men. O ye simple, understand wisdom; and ye fools, be ye of an understanding heart. Hear; for I will speak of excellent things, and the opening of my lips (shall be) right things. Receive my instructions, and not silver, and knowledge rather than choice gold. I love them that love me; and they that seek me early shall find me. Riches and honor (are) with me; (yea) durable riches and righteousness. My fruit (is) better than gold, yea, than fine gold; and my revenue than choice silver. I lead in the way of righteousness, in the midst of the paths of judgment: that I may cause them that love me to inherit substance; and I will fill their treasures." Prov. vii. 1-6, 10, 17-21.

## LECTURE II.

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### ECCLESIASTES I. 12-18.

"I the Preacher was king over Israel in Jerusalem. 13. And I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all (things) that are done under heaven: this sore travail hath God given to the sons of man, to be exercised therewith. 14. I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and behold, all (is) vanity and vexation of spirit. 15. (That which is) crooked cannot be made straight; and that which is wanting cannot be numbered. 16. I communed with mine own heart, saying, Lo, I am come to great estate, and have gotten more wisdom than all (they) that have been before me in Jerusalem; yea, my heart had great experience of wisdom, and knowledge. 17. And I gave my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly: I perceived that this also is vexation of spirit. 18. For in much wisdom (is) much grief; and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow."

IN pursuing his inquiries and experiments, for ascertaining the chief good, the-writer of this Book possessed, as was formerly noticed, peculiar advantages; the situation which he occupied affording him the fullest opportunities of investigating and bringing to the test all the various sources of worldly enjoyment.

When we are about to follow him in the detail of his experience, we should keep the recollection steadily before us, that he is speaking of that period of his life which he denominates "the days of his vanity;" when he had forsaken God, and instead of saying, with his godly father,—“Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us!”—joined in the common cry of the world, “Who will show us any good?”

From the 12th to the 15th Verse, inclusive, appears to be of a *general* nature, expressing, in terms of unrestricted import, the object of his inquiry, the extensive field of his observation, and the impression left upon his mind as the result of his survey; in which he had availed himself to the full of all the facilities and means of

discovery, which were furnished by his royal authority and resources, as *king over Israel in Jerusalem*.

*I gave my heart*,—that is, I applied myself with zeal and diligence,—*to seek and search out by wisdom*,—in the close and prudent and vigorous exercise of his mental powers,—*concerning all (things) that are done under heaven*. This is generally understood of his scientific researches into the works of nature and of art. I should rather interpret it of his inquiry into all the endless variety of human occupations and pursuits; because such seems to be the meaning appropriated in this Book to the phrase, “all things that are done under the heaven,” or “under the sun.” He applied himself to the examination of the sciences and arts, the professions and labors, which occupy the time, the industry, and the investigations of mankind.

The words in the end of Verse 13th,—*This sore travail hath God given to the sons of men, to be exercised therewith*,—are usually considered as expressive of the irksomeness, and difficulty, attending the acquisition of that knowledge of which Solomon is conceived to speak;—God having so ordered it, that unusually extensive acquirements must be the result of severe application to study, accompanied, in its course of discovery, with many obstacles and perplexities, much disappointment and mortification, and a great variety of painful and harrassing feelings. I am disposed, however, to understand the words, as simply explanatory, or exegetical, of what immediately precedes: “I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom, concerning all things that are done under heaven; (even) that sore travail (which) God hath given to the sons of men, to be exercised therewith.” That which is “given to the sons of men, to be exercised therewith,” must surely be something more general than the investigation to which Solomon had applied his heart; for which there were then, and still are, very few who have either the ability or the leisure. There is probably, in the words, a reference to what he had said a little before, “All things (are) full of labor:” and the true origin of this, as the appointed condition of humanity, is to be found in the remote but divinely authenticated records of the entrance of sin into the world:—“Unto Adam He said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it;—cursed (is) the



ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat (of) it all the days of thy life: thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field: in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou (art,) and unto dust shalt thou return." Gen. iii. 17-19.

This view of the meaning of the words is confirmed by the parallel expression in chapter iii. 10, where the connection leaves no ambiguity; "I have seen the travail which God hath given to the sons of men, to be exercised therewith;"—and it agrees well with what immediately follows here, in

Verse 14. *I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and behold, all (is) vanity, and vexation of spirit.*

Solomon had seen all the labors of men in quest of happiness; and he had already, in the opening of his treatise, pronounced all to be "vanity," yea, "vanity of vanities." To this he here adds, "vexation of spirit."

Some, indeed, from a different etymology of the original word for vexation, translate this phrase, "feeding on wind;" and the sense thus given is good, and appropriate. But when we say, "all is vanity, and feeding on wind," we have only one idea presented to the mind, namely, that of *unsatisfactory emptiness*. "Feeding on wind," being a strong figure, makes an addition to the force or emphasis of the preceding expression, but no addition, or very little at least, to its meaning. Our translation, on the contrary, whilst it is founded on a preferable etymology, affords at the same time, an additional idea; and is, besides, evidently more consistent with the different connections in which the phrase occurs in this Book. Thus, for instance, in the 17th and 18th verses of this chapter: "I gave my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly; I perceived that this also is vexation of spirit: for in much wisdom (is) much grief; and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow;" and in chap. ii. 17: "therefore I hated life; because the work that is wrought under the sun (is) grievous to me; for all (is) vanity, and vexation of spirit;" and verse 22: "For what hath man of all his labors, and of the vexation of his heart," (a word in the original of the same derivation,) "wherein he hath labored under the sun?"

The labors of which Solomon here speaks must be viewed *apart*

*from religion.* Religion opens such sources of peace and joy, as serve to compose, and soothe, and satisfy the spirit, amidst all the cares, and crosses, and disappointments of life. But, apart from its supporting and cheering influence, the toils of men in pursuit of happiness, their eager efforts towards a practical answer to the question, "Who will show us any good?" are assuredly vexation, as well as vanity; harrassing the mind with corroding anxieties; fretting and souring it by repeated disappointments; elevating it at times to precarious joy,—precarious, and therefore unsatisfactory; and more frequently overclouding it with dejection and gloom.

One great cause why all is pronounced vexation as well as vanity, is stated in

Verse 15. (*That which is*) crooked cannot be made straight, and that which is wanting cannot be numbered.

I shall not trouble you with the different interpretations which have been given of these words, but simply lay before you what seems to myself, from its agreement with the connection, and with the scope of the passage, to be their true meaning.

"(That which is) crooked cannot be made straight." We have a key to the import of this expression, in chap. vii. 13: "Consider the work of God; for who can make (that) straight which he hath made crooked?" This cannot refer to the natural perverseness of mankind, to the *crookedness* of their dispositions, their want of original rectitude; because it cannot with truth be said, that God hath made our nature crooked or perverse. On the contrary, in the close of the same chapter it is affirmed, "God made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions." So neither, in the words before us, is there any reference to the nature of man; but to the dispensations and arrangements of Divine Providence. It is as if the wise man had said: "There is generally, in the lot of every man, something crooked;—something or other not to his mind; which he wishes, and tries, and labors, to make straight,—to bend to his liking. But providence orders it otherwise. His attempts are all counteracted and frustrated. It is beyond his power, with all the pains he can bestow, to correct the evil. And by this one circumstance, the spirit of the man who seeks his happiness in the things of time, and is destitute of the satisfying portion of God's children, is galled and irritated. So

that, although every thing else is as he would have it,—all straight and to his mind,—yet, whilst this one thing is crooked, he is dissatisfied and unhappy. Indeed, the more entirely every thing else is right, the more bitterly is his pride mortified, and his spirit provoked, that *this* should continue wrong, and baffle his endeavors to change and to rectify it. He kicks against the appointment of heaven, and “disquiets himself in vain.”

Haman went out from the royal presence, “joyful and with a glad heart,” elated by the honors bestowed upon him. But the special favor of majesty,—“the glory of his riches, the multitude of his children, and his advancement above the princes and servants of the king,”—the enjoyment of the present, and the anticipation of the future;—all “availed him nothing, so long as he saw Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king’s gate.” Esther v. 9-13. Nor are such cases by any means of rare occurrence. Numberless are the instances of this kind of unreasonable dissatisfaction; arising from something crooked which cannot be made straight; from some “dead fly” that mars the fragrance of the ointment: so that the name of Mordecai has become a kind of proverbial designation for all those little circumstances, which, existing singly in the lot of individuals, and preying on their disappointed spirits, serve to take the relish out of abounding sweets; and it has become the familiar saying of common life, that *every man has his Mordecai*.

“And that which is wanting cannot be numbered.” This is generally understood, I believe, as meaning, that the wants which men experience in their pursuit of happiness,—the felt deficiencies, discovered in every step of their progress,—are so many, and so diversified, that they cannot be reckoned up. I rather think that the words contain a repetition, in different terms, of the same idea that is expressed in the former part of the verse. A man of the world is here set before us, casting up his accounts; taking an inventory of the various *items* that make up the aggregate of his enjoyments. The sum of them, it may be, is very large. But there is some particular article, on which he has set his heart, and which he would fain have it in his power to put into his list. But his wishes are vain. It is not in his possession; it is not within his reach. It is “wanting,” and therefore “cannot be numbered.” Yet, without it, the account is deficient; and the deficiency gives him more uneasiness and dissatisfaction, than the entire sum of

his blessings gives him enjoyment. It mixes all with discontent, and thus poisons the whole; so that all his labor becomes not only "vanity," but "vexation of spirit." Thus, amidst all the possessions and all the splendors of royalty, the spirit of Ahab was dejected and unhappy; and "he turned away his face, and would eat no bread," because he could not have "the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite," that he might add to his pleasure-grounds "a garden of herbs." 1 Kings xxi. 1-6.

Alas! for human nature, that it should be so! But so we see it, and feel it to be; that we are much more prone to be displeased on account of particular evils, than to be satisfied with abundant and diversified good;—to indulge in discontent because of some one solitary defect, than to cherish gratitude for unnumbered and substantial blessings. This is a *crook* in the nature of our fallen race, which nothing can effectually make straight but the renewing energy of the grace of God.

The first trial which Solomon represents himself as having made, in his course of experiments on human happiness, is that of WISDOM:—

Verses 16-18. *I communed with mine own heart, saying, Lo I am come to great estate, and have gotten more wisdom than all (they) that have been before me in Jerusalem; yea, my heart had great experience of wisdom and knowledge. And I gave my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly: I perceived that this also is vexation of spirit. For in much wisdom (is) much grief; and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow.*

By the *wisdom* here spoken of we may understand, all that knowledge, in the various departments of which, men are accustomed to seek gratification and enjoyment:—the knowledge of mankind, from present observation, and the records of history; of the arts and sciences; of the productions and phenomena of the natural world, in its different kingdoms; and, if you will, of the philosophy of mind and of morals, considered as a branch of speculative and abstract investigation.

God had imparted to Solomon a penetrating and capacious mind, in the exercises of whose powers he acquired that distinguished superiority in wisdom and knowledge, which made him the admiration, not of his own people only, but of surrounding countries, in the age in which he lived. "God gave Solomon," says the

Scripture record, "wisdom and understanding exceeding much, and largeness of heart, even as the sand that (is) on the sea-shore. And Solomon's wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the children of the east country, and all the wisdom of Egypt. For he was wiser than all men; than Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman, and Chalcol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol: and his fame was in all nations round about. And he spake three thousand proverbs; and his songs were a thousand and five. And he spake of trees, from the cedar-tree that (is) in Lebanon even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall: he spake also of beasts, and of fowls, and of creeping things, and of fishes. And there came of all people to hear the wisdom of Solomon, from all kings of the earth, who had heard of his wisdom." 1 Kings iv. 29-34.

Had Solomon continued, as he did at first, to use his mighty intellect in subserviency to the glory of the Author of his being and of all his powers, and in humble dependence for true happiness on Him, without whom all the treasures of wisdom are poverty, and all its light darkness;—it had been well. But far otherwise did he act, in "the days of his vanity." He foolishly expected to find the desired felicity in knowledge itself, without being conducted by that knowledge to God, "the Father of lights, from whom cometh down every good and perfect gift." He drank greedily of the streams of science, without tracing them to their fountain. He expatiated among the works of God, and forgot God himself.

When he says, "My heart had great experience of wisdom and knowledge," we may understand by the *heart* either, according to a frequent use of the word in Scripture, the *mind* in general, trying and comparing the different descriptions of knowledge; or, more restrictedly, the *seat of enjoyment*,—proving, by experiment, the tendencies of each in reference to human happiness. His "experience" in this way was "great;"—greater than that of any other man; for he was "wiser than all men."

He "gave his heart to know wisdom and to know madness and folly:"—that is, either, in the first place, to obtain a thorough discernment of the amount of difference between truth and error, and between virtue and vice, propriety and absurdity, in human conduct;—to know both sides, as subjects of philosophical inquiry and speculation; as things are in general most completely under-

k. 16a

l: 16 b

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stood, and most powerfully impressed on the mind, by means of contrast:—or, secondly, to compare the claims to preference, arising from their influence respectively on present enjoyment, of a studious and contemplative life on the one hand, and a life of madness and folly on the other; of a life devoted to learning, in the various branches of earthly sciences and worldly wisdom, and a life of thoughtless, inconsiderate merriment, careless indulgence, and extravagant riot and dissipation. For, as in our own days this latter course of life has its advocates as well as the former, so had it, we may presume, in the days of Solomon; men who admitted it readily enough to be madness and folly, but who gloried in the very folly and madness of it, laughed at the bookish recluse as, at any rate, a greater fool than themselves, moping away life in solitary research and rueful meditation; and were determined to throw their cares to the winds, to drink down melancholy, to give the reins to their appetites, and take their full swing of frolic, and carousal, and profligacy.

To compare these and other pretended sources of happiness, and to estimate their respective claims, was a part of his study. But mark now, especially, what he says of his pursuit of wisdom: “I perceived that this also is vexation of spirit: for in much wisdom is much grief; and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow.”

This seems a very strange assertion. There cannot be a doubt, that, among all the sources from which men seek their happiness, the *pursuit of knowledge*, (understanding the phrase in all its extent of meaning, with the one exception only of the knowledge that “maketh wise unto salvation,” which it is evident must not be taken at all into the account,) is decidedly the most rational, and the most fitted, from its nature, to yield enjoyment worthy of such a creature as man. Yet even of the pursuit of knowledge Solomon here affirms, that “in much wisdom (is) much grief;” and that “he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow.” Let us, first of all, then, contemplate human wisdom apart from the knowledge of God and Divine things, and take an attentive view of the circumstances from which the grief and sorrow of which he speaks may be considered as arising.

*In the first place:* This wisdom and knowledge, if a man is determined to go far beyond his fellows in the acquisition of it,

must be discovered, and examined, and appropriated by "*much study*;" and this, as Solomon observes towards the close of his treatise, is "*a weariness of the flesh*." It is not easy for the uninformed and inexperienced to imagine the fatigue of mind, and the consequent fatigue of body, to which the men who devote their days to learning must lay their account to subject themselves. Solomon speaks of "*much wisdom*," and of the *increase*, or growing abundance of knowledge. Now, such extraordinary attainments must be purchased at the expense of intense and constant application; which is inconceivably more wasting and exhausting to the constitution, than the hardest toil of the industrious laborer; and to which many, earlier or later in life, some with a mournful and lamented prematurity, have fallen victims. The incessant stretch of the mind's faculties, frequent harassing and anxious perplexity, studious days and sleepless nights, must be his portion who sets his heart on the attainment of unusual eminence in science in general, or in any of its various departments.

*Secondly*: in this pursuit, as in others, there are many disappointments to be expected, to fret, and mortify, and irritate the spirit:—such as, experiments failing, some of them perhaps long-continued, promising, and costly;—facts turning out contradictory, and unsettling or overturning favorite theories;—the means of prosecuting a train of discovery falling short, at the very moment, it may be, when they are most desirable; trifling and worthless results arising, after much labor, long-tried patience, and sanguine expectation;—the anticipated honor and pleasure of introducing a new and important invention or discovery, the product of the experiments and investigations of years, lost on the very eve of arrival, by the priority of an unknown competitor. These, and numberless other occasions of mortification and disquietude, more and less considerable, revealed or kept secret in the bosom, may be expected in the lot of the man who devotes himself to science.

*Thirdly*: There are some parts of knowledge which are, in their very nature, painful and distressing. In a world where sin reigns, and which, on account of sin, lies under the curse of God, many must be the scenes of misery, many the afflicting occurrences and facts, which present themselves to the observant and investigating mind, that is in quest of general and extensive information. They

abound both in the past and present history of mankind. They are fitted to fill the heart with "grief" and "sorrow;" and the more a man's knowledge extends,—the more he reads, and hears, and observes,—the more copious will this source of bitterness become. Not but that there is much of an opposite and pleasing description, as a set-off against those evils; but it is enough, that there *are* actually causes of positive distress, and causes that necessarily multiply with the growing extent of a man's knowledge.

*Fourthly:* There is to be taken into account the mortification of pride that must be experienced, in consequence of the limited nature of the human faculties. There are, in every direction in which the mind may choose to push its inquiries, boundaries, beyond which it attempts in vain to penetrate. And when the man who makes scientific research his supreme good, and the main object of his life, finds, that in every department of investigation he arrives at some point beyond which his powers, strained to their utmost effort, cannot carry him,—at some subject that baffles all his endeavors to comprehend it,—some questions which he cannot answer,—some difficulty which he cannot solve;—that the most luminous path of discovery terminates at length in impenetrable obscurity:—there is apt to spring up, in the natural mind, an indignant dissatisfaction, the offspring of the unsubdued pride and self-sufficiency of intellect, which cannot fail to produce, and sometimes in a very high degree, disquietude and "vexation of spirit."

*Fifthly:* There is a similar feeling of mortification, arising from the very circumstance that, with all the knowledge and wisdom that are acquired, there is still a blank, still a consciousness of want and deficiency, in regard to true happiness. I do not mean the want of any additional knowledge,—the want of something of the same kind that has not been attained, and the attainment of which seems difficult or hopeless;—but a want which even such additional attainments could not supply. The man himself, while sensible, irksomely sensible of it, may not be well aware what it is, or whence it arises; he may feel it, without knowing how it is to be removed. He may sigh for the unknown something, and wonder that he should not be happy. And few things can be conceived more galling to the spirit, more vexatiously mortifying, more fitted to fill a man with desperation, and with a fretful and sullen "hatred of all his labor which he hath taken under the sun,"



than this bitter consciousness, that with all his study, all his research, all his learning, all his varied acquirements, there should still exist such a sense of want, as to full satisfaction and happiness.

*Sixthly:* The man of "much wisdom" and "increased knowledge," generally, if not universally, becomes the marked object of the scorn of some, and the envy of others. Some depreciate his studies and all their results, laugh at them, and hold them up to contempt and ridicule. Others are stung with secret jealousy; which is the odious parent of all the hidden arts of detraction and calumny, and of injurious and unworthy attempts to deprive him of his well-earned honors, and "to cast him down from his excellency." And it is not merely the apprehended or the suffered consequences of such mean and wicked arts that is distressing; to a mind of generous and honorable feeling, it must be grief and "vexation of spirit," even to be the object of passions so vile and devilish.

*Lastly:* There is yet another consideration, which to some of you may seem far-fetched, but which I cannot forbear noticing. The man who occupies his powers in the pursuit and acquisition of human wisdom alone, careless of God, and uninfluenced by regard to his authority and to his glory, is leaving eternity a wretched blank; has no solid and satisfactory support in the anticipation of it, when the thought intrudes itself upon his mind; and is treasuring up grief and sorrow for the close of his career. God having been neglected, his powers must be considered, in the Divine estimate, and in the estimate of an awakened conscience, as having been wasted and abused; science will not yield him peace and hope in the "valley of the shadow of death;" and a neglected God will call him to account for the use made of those faculties which he himself had bestowed, and of whose exercise He ought himself to have been the first and highest object. However lawful, nay, however apparently excellent and honorable his pursuits themselves may have been, the reckoning will be fearful, when God is found to have been awanting:—fearful!—and justly fearful! In proportion to the greatness and variety of the powers conferred, and the capabilities thence arising, will the shame and remorse be deep, and the guilt and punishment aggravated.

Whilst such considerations as these may serve to vindicate and illustrate the affirmation that "in much wisdom (is) much grief,

and that he who increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow;" it is necessary to observe, that Solomon does not by any means say, that in "much wisdom and increase of knowledge" there is *no enjoyment*. That were a very different proposition. There may and must be enjoyment,—various in kind and in degree. But, like the enjoyment springing from every worldly and temporal source, it is mixed with much of an opposite character. And therefore it is, that such wisdom and knowledge, considered by themselves, apart from something still higher and still better, considered as constituting *the happiness* of the man who seeks and possesses them, must ever be found vain;—can never be a sufficient portion to the immortal soul, especially in its anticipations of eternal existence; can never impart to the mind full, and steady, and permanent satisfaction.

The passage, thus explained, suggests two concluding reflections:—

1. In the first place:—"Godliness with contentment is great gain." 1 Tim. vi. 6. If it is impossible for a man, with all his labor and all his skill, to control the administration of providence, to command events, and to order all the circumstances of his lot exactly to his mind; if universal experience confirms the truth, that "that which is crooked cannot be made straight, and that which is wanting cannot be numbered;" then, the secret of true happiness must consist, in having the mind reconciled to that which is crooked, and to that which is deficient;—in being submissive to all the arrangements of the Supreme will. Such submission can only arise from the confidence of faith in the wisdom, faithfulness, and love, of our heavenly Father, and the assurance of his universal and unceasing care of all the interests of his children. "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? yet one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered." Matt. x. 29, 30. This is our encouragement to "cast all our cares upon him: He careth for us." It is when we avail ourselves of the precious privilege,— "in every thing by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, to make our requests known unto God,"—that "the peace of God which passeth all understanding keeps our heart and mind through Christ Jesus." Phil. iv. 6, 7. "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the

called according to (his) purpose." Rom: viii. 28. "That which is crooked" and "that which is wanting" may thus be numbered amongst our very benefits, as contributing, according to the design of Him who gives and withholds at his pleasure, to advance our best and highest interests; to spiritualize our affections; to disengage our hearts from the world; to save us from the danger of making it our portion; to draw us away from all its sinful pleasures, and to moderate and sanctify our attachment even to its lawful enjoyments; to bring us, in the state of our minds and the tenor of our conduct, into more full conformity to the spirit of the apostolic admonition:—"But this I say, brethren, the time (is) short. It remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none; and they that weep as though they wept not; and they that rejoice as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy as though they possessed not; and they that use this world as not abusing (it); because the fashion of this world passeth away." 1 Cor. vii. 29-31. In such a world, my brethren, as that which we inhabit, where there are so many wants that cannot be supplied, and evils that cannot be avoided, he is the truly happy man, who has been taught of God the rare and precious lessons of contentment in all conditions;—"Not that I speak in respect of want; for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, (therewith) to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: everywhere, and in all things I am instructed, both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound, and to suffer need:" Phil. iv. 11-12; he is the truly happy man who in prosperity and adversity sees the love of a father,—in the former, "crowning him with loving-kindness and tender mercies," in the latter, "correcting him for his profit;"—and who is prepared to say, under all the trials and bereavements of life, when he feels his inability to rectify that which is crooked, or to number that which is wanting,—"The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord!"—"Shall we receive good at the hand of the Lord, and shall we not receive evil also?" Job i. 21. ii. 10.

2. In the second place: There is *one* description of wisdom and knowledge, that is infinitely excellent and desirable;—not the source of grief and sorrow, but the fountain of pure and everlasting joy. "This is *life eternal*, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." John xvii. 3.

Here is knowledge worth having and worth seeking: infinitely exalted in its subject, and unutterably precious in its results. Were a man to possess all knowledge besides this; to concentrate in his own mind the collected science of all countries and of all generations; the want of this would turn all to "vanity and vexation of spirit." And, on the contrary, the most ignorant and illiterate of mankind, as to other branches of knowledge, if possessed of this, is truly wise; for he is "wise toward God," "wise unto salvation," wise for eternity. Even now, this wisdom imparts the purest and most elevated delight, amidst all the trying vicissitudes of this valley of tears. The pleasures that arise from other kinds of knowledge are themselves mingled with "grief and sorrow," and are incapable of imparting to the soul any solid and effectual consolation and support under the other troubles of life: and when we look forward, and anticipate the close of this earthly scene, we behold this wisdom ending in the enjoyment and fulfilment of good hope,—in the possession of everlasting and unmingled felicity;—and every other, however valued, and pursued, and applauded by men, terminating in despair, and darkness, and eternal shame.

The gospel of Christ,—the doctrine of the cross, though esteemed foolishness by men,—is "the power of God, and the wisdom of God." It is the study of angels. They desire to look into it. They explore its sublime mysteries with intense and unwearied delight. "If any man among you, then, seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool that he may be wise." You can never be truly and profitably wise, but by sitting down at the feet of Jesus, and "learning of him." *Here*, my friends,—in this blessed Book, "given by inspiration of God,"—here, are the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. An acquaintance with its precious contents may not procure you a reputation for wisdom in the world; may not enrol your names amongst its honored and applauded sages; but it will procure for you what is infinitely more valuable, "the honor that cometh from God only." Let Christians seek, above all things, that they may grow in this knowledge;—the knowledge of the Divine word, in all its inexhaustible riches and variety of contents;—never losing sight of him who is "the sum and substance of the word"—the reality of legal shadows, the spirit of prophecy, and the glorious theme of apostolic

testimony. "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly." In much of *this* wisdom, there is much gladness, and he that increaseth this knowledge increaseth joy. "My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee; so that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom (and) apply thine heart to understanding; yea, if thou criest after knowledge, (and) liftest up thy voice for understanding; if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as (for) hid treasures; then shalt thou understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God. For the LORD giveth wisdom: out of his mouth (cometh) knowledge and understanding. He layeth up sound wisdom for the righteous: (he is) a buckler\* to them that walk uprightly. He keepeth the paths of judgment, and preserveth the way of his saints. Then shalt thou understand righteousness, and judgment, and equity; (yea,) every good path." Proverbs ii. 1-9.

## LECTURE III.

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### ECCLESIASTES II. 1-11.

“I said in mine heart, Go to now, I will prove thee with mirth; therefore enjoy pleasure: and, behold, this also (is) vanity. 2. I said of laughter, (It is) mad: and of mirth, What doeth it? 3. I sought in mine heart to give myself unto wine, yet acquainting mine heart with wisdom; and to lay hold on folly, till I might see what (was) that good for the sons of men, which they should do under the heaven all the days of their life. 4. I made me great works; I builded me houses; I planted me vineyards: 5. I made me gardens and orchards, and I planted trees in them of all (kind of) fruits: 6. I made me pools of water, to water therewith the wood that bringeth forth trees: 7. I got (me) servants and maidens, and had servants born in my house; also I had great possessions of great and small cattle above all that were in Jerusalem before me: 8. I gathered me also silver and gold, and the peculiar treasure of kings and of the provinces: I gat me men-singers and women-singers, and the delights of the sons of men, (as) musical instruments, and that of all sorts. 9. So I was great, and increased more than all that were before me in Jerusalem: also my wisdom remained with me. 10. And whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them; I withheld not my heart from any joy; for my heart rejoiced in all my labor: and this was my portion of all my labor. 11. Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labor that I had labored to do; and, behold, all (was) vanity and vexation of spirit, and (there was) no profit under the sun.”

IN the 16th verse of the first chapter, Solomon speaks of his having “communed with his own heart.” It appears to be this kind of communing that he carries on in the beginning of the second. As the rich man in the parable is represented as addressing his soul, —“I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years, take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry,”—so does Solomon here address himself to his heart:

Verse 1. *Come, says he, I will prove thee with mirth.* Wisdom, thou hast found, will not suffice to give thee the satisfaction thou seekest; let me try thee, then, with something else. In much

wisdom, thou hast discovered, there is much grief; try, then, what mirth can do to make thee happy. *In this enjoy pleasure.* See if pleasure, or happiness, lies here.

The word *pleasure* is not, I apprehend, to be here understood in the restricted sense in which we frequently use it, as nearly synonymous with the *mirth* to which Solomon determined to have recourse; but in the more enlarged and general sense of *happiness*,—that which was the great object of inquiry and pursuit; that on which the course of experiments was making: “Come, I will prove thee with mirth: *in it enjoy happiness;*”—more literally, *In, it see good:*—try this new source of enjoyment; whether it will any better suit thy taste, and fill up thine unsatisfied wishes.

Here, then, we behold the king of Israel descending from the pleasures of learning to the pleasures of sense. He now appears before us, surrounded with the gay, the witty, the mirthful, the voluptuous, the profligate: those *choice spirits*, as they counted and called themselves and one another, who fancied the secret of happiness to lie, in banishing all reflection, in laughing at preciseness and melancholy, and drowning care in merriment and revelry.

He did not, however, relinquish entirely his former pursuits. In the third verse, he informs us, that whilst he sought to give himself unto wine, and to lay hold on folly, he still acquainted his heart with wisdom; and, in the ninth verse, that “his wisdom also remained with him.” In the pursuits of wisdom he had found pleasure; but it was a pleasure mingled with much grief and sorrow. It seems, therefore, to have been his next plan, not to relinquish these pursuits in disgust, but, whilst he continued to enjoy the satisfaction they were fitted to impart, to overcome and banish the griefs which they had occasioned;—to retain the pleasure, and to drown the care. He still, therefore, occupies a portion of his time in the studies before described; and a great part of the remainder he devoted to the banqueting room,—to the social pleasures of jovial festivity.

But instead of “mirth” answering the purpose either of making him happy by itself, or of supplying the deficiencies of wisdom, he pronounces upon it the same verdict:—“and behold, this also is vanity.” His inquiry was, Where shall happiness be found? and where is the place of true enjoyment?—and intemperate

mirth, like human science and earthly wisdom, said, but with still more impressive emphasis, It is not in me.

Verse 2. *I said of laughter (It is) mad: and of mirth, What doeth it?*

This seems to have been his language to himself, when his seasons of merriment were over, and he began, in his moments of cool sobriety, to "commune with his heart," and to reflect seriously on what he had been about. It is the record of dear-bought experience; designed by him for the warning of others, after his own soul had been mercifully recovered from the perilous mazes of error and sin in which he had gone astray:—"I said of laughter, (It is) mad." The intemperate mirth in which he had indulged was like a temporary phrenzy; during which, reason and religion were alike dethroned from the empire of the mind, and all was wild and tumultuous disorder. It was, surely, much liker the fancy of a deranged than of a sound and collected mind, that true happiness could consist in mere thoughtless and unbridled merriment; and it was the act of such a mind to bring this fancy to practical experiment. We pity from the heart the hapless subjects of mental derangement, who are insensible of their melancholy lot, and who seem, in the midst of real wretchedness, to enjoy an imaginary felicity:

—Moody madness, laughing wild,  
Amid severest wo

is, of all the sufferings of this valley of tears, the most deeply touching. And what shall we think of the soundness of that man's intellect, and with what description of feelings are we to contemplate him, who, surrounded with scenes so many and so various, both in private and in public life, of a nature fitted to awaken to serious thoughtfulness, and acknowledging himself, too, an accountable and immortal being, yet makes the banishment of thought the problem of his life; seeks his happiness in the absence of all reflection; devotes himself to unrestrained mirth amidst a world of wo; and to unreflecting laughter and jollity with the grave and the judgment-seat before his eyes? Is this any thing short of the insensibility of madness? Does the Christian poet use too bold a comparison,—or does he not rather "speak the words of truth and soberness,"—when he compares such men to "maniacs dancing in their chains?" It was the language of heart-



stricken feeling,—the language of deep experimental conviction,—that Solomon used when he said of such laughter, “It is mad,” and of mirth like this, “What doeth it?” What doeth it toward the production of true happiness? What is enjoyed that deserves the name, even during its boisterous reign? and what remains from it when that reign is over? “Even in laughter,” (such is the record elsewhere of his own experience,)—“Even in laughter, the heart is sorrowful; and the end of that mirth (is) heaviness;” Prov. xiv. 13: “for, as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so (is) the laughter of the fool.” Eccl. vii. 6. Thoughtless mirth, in a creature that has so much as man has to make him serious, is in itself irrational; and although, by those who give themselves up to it, it is called “a cure for the heart-ache,” it is far, very far, alas! from deserving the designation. It is, after all, but a poor and flimsy covering, either for the cares of an anxious mind, or the secret stings of an accusing conscience, or the restlessness of a spirit that is ill at ease, and dissatisfied with itself. And “the end of that mirth (is) heaviness.” It yields no subsequent satisfaction. The “yesterday” of intemperate folly “looks not backward with a smile.” In proportion to the previous elevation of the spirits is the depth of the subsequent depression. The lees of the debauch are bitter. When the effervescence of the animal spirits is over, and the mind subsides into itself, it feels but “an aching void.” The blaze of crackling thorns is violent and noisy, and, withal, while it lasts, wonderfully cheerful and enlivening; but quickly it dies away, and leaves nothing behind but darkness and unsightly ashes.

The “mirth” to which Solomon thus addicted himself we have considered as the mirth of festive conviviality:—and I need not say that to such mirth the free circulation of the bottle and the glass is, in the estimation of the *bons vivans*, an indispensable requisite. How can a company be merry without wine? This, accordingly, is not wanting in Solomon’s experiment:

Verse 3. *I sought, says he, to give myself unto wine;—that is, not to the grovelling practice of solitary drinking, as a mere gratification of animal appetite, or means of intoxication; but to the pleasures of the social board:—he resolved, to “eat, and to drink, and to be merry.”*

He determined, at the same time, still to *acquaint his heart*

*with wisdom.* Some, it is true, understand this, of his wisely regulating his indulgences, applying prudence and discretion to his pleasures, *enjoying* without *exceeding*. It seems more natural to interpret it as already hinted, of his not renouncing his literary and philosophical pursuits, but connecting them with the pleasures of wine that "maketh glad the heart of man;" associating the two descriptions of gratification, the sensual and the intellectual, the grosser and the more refined. And, indeed, it is hardly to be supposed, that when the heart was "given to wine" as a source of pleasure, and given to it amidst the "mirth" of the convivial banquet, it was used by the rule and the measure of prudential restraint, and exemplary self-government; that, in this species of indulgence, the royal philosopher "let his moderation be known unto all men."

Whilst he thus continued to "acquaint his heart with wisdom," he, at the same time, "sought to lay hold on folly;" by which he seems to mean the folly he had just mentioned. He endeavored to combine the two. He tried each, and he tried both together. And this he did that he might, as he here expresses it, *see what was that good for the sons of men, which they should do under the heaven, all the days of their life*;—that is, in consistency with the object and scope of the whole Book, that he might discover, by his own experience, *what was the best and happiest way of spending this mortal life*:—and having thus briefly noticed his trial of the "lust of the flesh and of the mind," he adds, in the following verses, a fuller and a very spirited description of the experiment to which he brought "the lust of the eye, and the pride of life."

Verses 4–11. *I made me great works; I builded me houses; I planted me vineyards; I made me gardens and orchards, and I planted trees in them of all (kind of) fruits; I made me pools of water, to water therewith the wood that bringeth forth trees; I got (me) servants and maidens, and had servants born in my house; also I had great possessions of great and small cattle above all that were in Jerusalem before me; I gathered me also silver and gold, and the peculiar treasure of kings and of the provinces; I gat me men-singers and women-singers, and the delights of the sons of men, (as) musical instruments, and that of all sorts. So I was great, and increased more than all that were before me in Jerusalem: also my wisdom remained with me. And whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them; I withheld*

*not my heart from any joy: for my heart rejoiced in all my labor; and this was my portion of all my labor. Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labor that I had labored to do; and, behold, all (was) vanity and vexation of spirit, and (there was) no profit under the sun.*

It is unnecessary to dwell long on the various particulars in this enumeration.

He "made him great works;"—both private and public; such as might gratify ambition and the love of fame, by exciting the wonder and admiration of his own subjects and of strangers; might afford objects of contemplation for the eye of his vanity, and give scope for such feelings of self-complacency and high-mindedness as were uttered by the king of Babylon, when, standing on the roof of his palace, in the midst of his splendid city, and surveying its stupendous and magnificent structures, he said, "Is not this great Babylon that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honor of my majesty?" Dan. iv. 30.

I think Solomon may be understood here as referring, not only to the works which were actually constructed during that period of his life which he emphatically denominates "the days of his vanity," but to those also which he had previously reared; which he then, it may be supposed, enlarged and adorned, and began to contemplate with the new and corrupt emotions of vanity and pride.

He "builded him houses." Solomon's palace in Jerusalem was thirteen years in building. He built, besides, the spacious and elegant "house of the forest of Lebanon;" and another house, of similar costliness and splendor, for the daughter of Pharaoh. 1 Kings vii. 1-12. To these, the history adds, "Millo, and the wall of Jerusalem, and Hazor, and Megiddo, and Gezer; Bethhoron the nether, Baalath, and Tadmor in the wilderness; cities of store, cities for his chariots, and cities for his horsemen;" and a variety of other buildings, "in Jerusalem, in Lebanon, and in all the land of his dominion." Ibid. ix. 15-19.

He "planted vineyards; made gardens and orchards, and planted in them trees of all kinds of fruits; and made pools of water, to water therewith the wood that bringeth forth trees." By this last expression are probably meant those extensive nurseries of seedlings, from which his woods and orchards were supplied. These

he watered artificially, at great expense, and with much labor and skill; intersecting them with canals, and feeding these canals from ponds and reservoirs, to secure a constant and regular irrigation.

The number and variety, the order and apparel of Solomon's servants, and the whole style of his domestic establishment, were amongst the circumstances by which the queen of Sheba, on her visit to Jerusalem, was so much astonished; and withal, from feelings, it may be presumed, of hopeless envy, so much dispirited. When she saw "the meat of his table, and the sitting of his servants, and the attendance of his ministers, and their apparel, and his cup-bearers,"—"there was no more spirit in her."

The abundance of his wealth, in "great and small cattle," and in "silver and gold," was a fulfilment of the express promise of God to him at the commencement of his reign, to add unprecedented riches to unexampled wisdom. "The weight of gold that came to Solomon in one year, was six hundred three-score and six talents of gold; besides (that he had) of the merchantmen, and of the traffic of the spice-merchants, and of all the kings of Arabia, and of the governors of the country." "And all king Solomon's drinking vessels (were) of gold, and all the vessels of the house of the forest of Lebanon (were) of pure gold; none (were) of silver: it was nothing accounted of in the days of Solomon." "The king made silver (to be) in Jerusalem as stones, for abundance." 1 Kings x. 14, 15, 21, 27. Both national and personal wealth flowed in from the surrounding countries:—for "Solomon reigned over all kingdoms, from the river unto the land of the Philistines, and unto the border of Egypt: they brought presents, and served Solomon all the days of his life." 1 Kings iv. 21. "All the earth sought to Solomon, to hear his wisdom, which God had put in his heart: and they brought every man his present, vessels of silver and vessels of gold, and garments, and armor, and spices, and horses and mules, a rate year by year." Ibid. x. 24, 25. It is, probably, the riches derived from tributary states, and from the multiplied and precious gifts of gratulation and homage, that he describes under the designation, "the peculiar treasure of kings and of the provinces."

The wealth which the king acquired, was an object about which, in the best days of his reign, when he first mounted the throne of Israel, his heart had been very indifferent. He had sought the

higher gifts of "wisdom and understanding," to fit him for the happy discharge of his royal functions. But the riches which at first, in the exercise of an enlightened and upright mind, he employed for advancing the glory of God, and the best interests of his people, qualified him afterwards, during the period of his backsliding, when "his heart departed from the Lord," for prosecuting to the utmost advantage his experiments on happiness. They were not lodged in his coffers with the avarice of a miser; but were profusely expended on all that they could procure of sensual gratification. He "got him men-singers, and women-singers, and the delights of the sons of men, as musical instruments, and that of all sorts: whatsoever his eyes desired, he kept not from them: he withheld not his heart from any joy." All the senses were consulted and pampered. Whatever could contribute to charm the eye or the ear, the taste, the touch, or the smell, was procured by him, in all its variety, and all its excellence. He conducted his experiments on a large scale; sparing upon them no pains and no expense; and not restrained, by any of the over-delicate and inconvenient scruples of a tender conscience, from satiating his heart in all its most extravagant and capricious desires.

In the midst of all his grandeur, in which (verse 9) he "increased above all that were before him in Jerusalem," and in the midst of all his sumptuous and costly pleasures, "his wisdom remained with him:"—not, indeed, that true wisdom in which he commenced his reign, consisting in a mind regulated, in all its ample powers, by the "fear of the Lord;" but a penetrating and capacious intellect, with all its vast and varied acquirements in human science, and in the speculative knowledge of the theology of Israel. His reputation for wisdom continued to equal his fame for riches and power.

Solomon, as I have just observed, made his experiments on happiness on an extensive scale; procuring for himself, by whatever trouble, and at whatever cost, every possible gratification; every thing a roving fancy could suggest; every thing a heart bent upon indulgence could wish:—

Verse 10. *And whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them; I withheld not my heart from any joy; for my heart rejoiced in all my labor: and this was my portion of all my labor.*

The "delights" which he had enumerated in the preceding ver-

ses were, in their own nature, lawful. He went to the utmost bounds of such enjoyments; and in prosecuting his diversified works of ambition, and elegance, and luxurious refinement, he experienced a kind of satisfaction and temporary exhilaration of spirit. His mind was kept occupied; his attention busy; his eye and ear felt the charm of varying novelty; and the admiration excited by his labors, terminating upon himself as their author and owner, gratified his vanity. Thus "his heart rejoiced in his labor." He was not interrupted by wars; he was not incapacitated by sickness; he was not cramped or embarrassed by an exhausted or deficient treasury; but was favored, by the very God whom he was forgetting and forsaking, with full and undistracted opportunity of indulgence, in the prosecution of all the modes of gratification which his heart could devise. He tasted their sweetness "without adversary or evil occurrent;" nor was his enjoyment marred by any grudging or covetous regret of his immense expenditure, which to some minds would have embittered the whole scene. This temporary enjoyment was "his portion of all his labors." It was what they were intended to produce to him. Present gratification was the object of them all: so he made the most of them: treating all his wishes liberally; disdaining every feeling of niggardliness; glorying in his riches, and using them for the accomplishment of his ends, with open-handed and unrepining profusion.

But, after all, where was the charm in all this? It was *novelty* merely. His heart rejoiced *in* his labors, but not *after* them. They were by and by completed; the novelty of them passed away; and, with the novelty, the pleasure which they had yielded. There was a lively buoyancy of spirit in the busy acquisition; but it left no permanent satisfaction in the subsequent possession;—a case far from uncommon, when the mind has been allowed to run wild in quest of happiness, and has been trying to find it, away from God:—

Verse 11. *Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labor that I had labored to do: and beheld, all (was) vanity and vexation of spirit; and (there was) no profit under the sun.*

Strange! Was there not every thing in his lot that his heart could wish? Yes: he had "withheld his heart from no joy."

But alas! every earthly pleasure, when unconnected with better blessings, *must* leave a void. It palls upon the appetite for happiness, and leaves it as eager and unsatisfied as before. The question is still fretfully repeated, "Who will show us any good?" After all Solomon's labor, "his eye was not satisfied with seeing, nor his ear filled with hearing." And when he thus felt the result of all to be "vanity," as to the production of true and lasting happiness; this very feeling was, of itself, quite sufficient to render all "vexation of spirit." Nothing could well be more mortifying. He resembled a man, who has set about constructing a machine for some particular purpose, complicated and intricate; the result, in the idea, of long and close application of inventive genius; and requiring, in the execution, a great expenditure of skill, and time, and patient labor. While the work is in progress, his mind is full of it. He has no doubt he will be able to make it answer; and the confidence of succeeding animates him to vigorous perseverance, and keeps him in fine spirits. At length, it is completed; and he finds, to his unspeakable mortification, that it will not do. In theory it was ingenious, and seemingly perfect in its adaptation to the end. But when tried in practice, there is some unanticipated defect; and, possibly, he cannot discover where it lies. "All is now vanity and vexation of spirit; and there is no profit to him of all his labor." Such was the nature, and such the success, of Solomon's experiment for the procuring of happiness. When his labor was ended, he had only to sigh over its results. He very soon tired of looking at what was finished, and of hearing what he had heard before. And, besides the feeling of immediate unsatisfactoriness, the galling reflection, as he informs us in a subsequent part of this chapter, forced itself upon his mind, and fretted, and mortified, and disgusted him; that in a very short time all must be left behind him; and left too, he could not tell to whom, whether to a wise man or a fool.

1. From this passage we may observe, in the first place: It is a radical, but very prevalent mistake as to happiness, when men conceive of it as arising from *situation*. Under the influence of this mistake, how often do men, finding something wanting in a particular condition or employment, immediately betake themselves to another, and thence to another, and another, the same feeling of dissatisfaction attending them successively in each; from

their not considering, that it is not in the nature of earthly things, however varied and modified, to be a portion to the human mind; and from their not being aware, that they are all the while carrying about the root and cause of dissatisfaction in their own bosoms. *Here* lies the unsuspected evil:—here the secret spring of bitterness. Men engaged in the pursuit of worldly happiness, changing incessantly from one pursuit to another, trying every likely resource, resemble a person in a fever, who in every posture to which he can turn himself, feels uneasy, and is ever fancying that another change will make him comfortable, insensible that the uneasiness of which he complains has its origin in his distemper itself, and cannot be relieved by mere position. The radical principle of happiness must be carried about *within us*, else we shall infallibly fail of satisfaction in every trial we can make of earthly good.

2. In the second place: Let it not be supposed that there is no such thing to be found as true satisfaction,—real and substantial happiness.

This would be a very hasty, and a very false conclusion. There *is* such a thing,—blessed be the gracious Author of our being!—there *is* such a thing to be found, as solid and heart-satisfying enjoyment. It is not indeed to be derived from the sources to which Solomon betook himself in “the days of his vanity.” He sought it in “mirth and laughter.” But it has often been truly observed, that the objects at which we laugh loudest are not the objects which yield us the greatest delight. The purest kinds, and the highest degrees, of this feeling, are more frequently expressed by *tears* than by laughter. How often has the truth of the saying formerly adverted to been experienced by others as well as Solomon,—that “even in laughter the heart is sad, and that the end of that mirth is heaviness!” “True joy is a serious thing.”\* As little is the object of universal search to be found in the varieties of sensual indulgence, or the pomp, and pride, and luxury of life, or the splendors of ambitious and busy royalty. In these, too, Solomon sought it in vain. Many things may be accessories to happiness; but “one thing is needful.” The true secret of it is, *living to God*;—enjoying God in all things, and all things in Him. This is at once the pure and the sublime source of enjoyment.

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\*The sentiment, I think, is Addison’s: but I am not sure in my recollection, where in his writings it occurs.



Ever vain and fruitless must the pursuit of happiness be, apart from the favor and the service of God. *He* must enter into all that merits the name of true felicity to a rational creature. He is the fountain of all joy: and the streams are truly sweet, only as they taste of the fountain. "O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee, in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is; to see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary. Because thy loving-kindness is better than life, my lips shall praise thee. Thus will I bless thee while I live; I will lift up my hands in thy name. My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness; and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips; when I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the night watches." This is the "good old wine" which once made Solomon's heart, as well as David's, glad. He "tasted new;" but he was brought at length, by dear-bought but happy experience, to say, "The old is better."

"Live while ye live! the sensualist may say,  
 And catch the pleasures of the passing day.  
 Live while ye live! the holy man replies,  
 And give to God each moment as it flies.  
 Lord, in my life let both united be!  
 I live in pleasure, when I live to thee!"

3. In the third place: Let this passage repress in every bosom, the feelings of *envy*.

The poor, when they read such a description as these verses contain,—of houses, and vineyards, and gardens, and orchards, and lakes, and woods; and servants, and cattle, and silver and gold, and royal jewels, and music, and all the "delights of the sons of men,"—are ready to feel the rising emotions of jealousy, and to heave the sigh of envious discontent over their own condition. They mistake this glare of magnificence, this outward semblance of enjoyment, for true happiness. But the antidote to all such feelings, my friends, is before you. Read on. Pass from the detail of abundance and splendor, to the estimate subsequently formed of it all by the owner himself:—"Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labor that I had labored to do: and, behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit; and there was no profit under the sun!" Banish, then,

your envy. Deceive not yourselves with the fancy, that Solomon's disappointment might not be yours. Be assured, you would fare no better than he. The same experiment would yield the same result to you as it did to him, and as it has done to many more who have foolishly ventured to repeat it. Be not "envious," then, "at the foolish, when you see the prosperity of the wicked." "Be not thou afraid, when one is made rich, when the glory of his house is increased: for when he dieth he shall carry nothing away; his glory shall not descend after him: though while he lived he blessed his soul, (and men will praise thee, when thou doest well to thyself,) he shall go to the generation of his fathers; they shall never see light. Man that is in honor, and understandeth not, is like the beasts that perish." Let your minds, then, be settled, my brethren, in the truth of the apostolic aphorism,—“godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world; and it is certain we can carry nothing out. Having, therefore, food and raiment, let us be therewith content.” If you are “rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which God hath provided for them that love him,” envy may well be a stranger to your bosoms. “Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted, but the rich in that he is made low: because, as the flower of the grass, he shall pass away. For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, than it withereth the grass, and the flower thereof falleth, and the grace of the fashion of it perisheth: so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways.” James i. 9–11.

Lastly: Let my hearers “suffer the word of exhortation,” from the lips of the Saviour himself:—“Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: for, where your treasure is, there will your hearts be also.” Matt. vi. 19–21. Seek not your happiness in riches, nor in any thing which riches can procure. It were puerile affectation, or unscriptural cant, to undervalue and vilify them; or to refuse to admit the desirableness of many of the blessings which they put in their possessor's power. But still, neither they themselves, nor all they can enable you to obtain, must be *your happiness*,—your *portion*. You must seek “a better and more enduring substance.” “The grounds of a cer-

tain rich man brought forth plentifully: and he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul; Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him; Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee; then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God." Luke xii. 16-21.

One might have looked on all Solomon's "great works," and splendid buildings, and varied and accumulated magnificence, and have said, The possessor of all these may die to day: this night his soul may be required of him; and then, "Whose shall these things be?" No longer *his*:—"When he dieth, he shall carry nothing away:" and if this is his all,—if he possesses nothing more permanent; no "durable riches and righteousness," no "house not made with hands eternal in the heavens;" no "inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that fadeth not away;"—wo is me for the foolish man!—he has "laid up treasure for himself," but he is not "rich toward God." The language of the Saviour to his poor people, "I know thy poverty, but thou art rich," may well be reversed to this victim of a pitiable and ruinous delusion; "I know thy riches,—but thou art poor!"

Compare the description of Solomon's splendor with that of the "city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God!"—the city which he hath "prepared" for all his people, who embrace his promises, and "confess themselves strangers and pilgrims on the earth:"—"the holy city, the new Jerusalem;" of which the foundations and walls are of precious stones, the gates of pearl, and the streets "of pure gold, as it were transparent glass;" which is guarded by angels; of which "the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple;" which "has no need of the sun, neither of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God doth lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof;" where there shall be no more night, and no more curse, but eternal unclouded day, and everlasting and unmingled blessing! See Rev. xxi. 10-27. xxii. 1-5. Remember, my brethren, that the meanest saint on earth is a citizen of this heavenly city, and has a part in all this glory. The "great

buildings" on which the king of Israel expended so much wealth, and skill, and labor, have long since fallen to ruin, and crumbled to dust; and so, in succession, do all the monuments of earthly grandeur:—

"We build with what we deem eternal rock:—  
A distant age asks where the fabric stood;  
And in the dust, sifted and search'd in vain,  
The undiscoverable secret sleeps."

But the structures of the Divine Architect shall never experience decay; their glory shall never tarnish; their riches shall never be plundered; their blessed inhabitants shall never be wasted by death, or scattered by hostile invasion.

The gardens and groves and pleasure-grounds of Solomon might be called by men an earthly paradise; but it was a paradise of sweets that soon enjoyed, and failed to yield to their possessor the anticipated delight; and, like every thing earthly, it has passed away. His was the "time to plant;" and there came a time after him, "to pluck up that which was planted." But the paradise above, where flows the "pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb," is a scene of delights as unfading as they are pure and exquisite,—delights, that always satisfy and never satiate,—delights that shall be new through eternity,—continued enjoyment only stimulating the appetite, and enhancing the relish. Envy not, then, the possessor of the richest and loveliest inheritance on earth. You have a better inheritance above. "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the Tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God."

It is only through Jesus Christ that this final glory and blessedness can be obtained. It is by him that the way to the Tree of life has been opened, and "paradise regained." The heavenly city has been reared in all its purity and splendor for the habitation of his subjects: the "everlasting inheritance" is prepared in his name, and bestowed for his sake; bestowed on all who are justified by his blood, and renewed and sanctified by his Holy Spirit. It is "the inheritance of the saints in light;" and sinful creatures are not "made meet for it" till they are pardoned and purified. The city, "whose builder and maker is God," is a "holy city;" "and into it nothing shall enter that defileth, or that worketh

abomination, or maketh a lie; but they only who are written in the Lamb's book of life." Rev. xxi. 27. Seek, then, my fellow-sinners, an interest in him. Believe his testimony; follow his footsteps; "live by the faith of the Son of God;" "no longer to yourselves, but to him who died for sinners and rose again." Let his grace be the ground of your hope; his example your pattern; his glory your end; his love your motive; his promises your encouragement. Thus let it be your desire, that "whether you live you may live to the Lord, or whether you die you may die to the Lord; that living and dying you may be the Lord's." And then, whatever may be your condition here, whether rich and honored as Solomon, or poor and despised as Lazarus, you shall be "heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ." "Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city." Rev. xxii. 14.

## LECTURE IV.

### ECCLESIASTES II. 12-26.

“And I turned myself to behold wisdom, and madness, and folly: for what (can) the man (do) that cometh after the king? (even) that which hath been already done. 13. Then I saw that wisdom excelleth folly, as far as light excelleth darkness. 14. The wise man’s eyes (are) in his head; but the fool walketh in darkness: and I myself perceived also that one event happeneth to them all. 15. Then said I in my heart, As it happeneth to the fool, so it happeneth even to me; and why was I then more wise? Then I said in my heart, that this also (is) vanity. 16. For (there is) no remembrance of the wise more than of the fool for ever; seeing that which now (is,) in the days to come shall all be forgotten: and how dieth the wise (man)? as the fool. 17. Therefore I hated life; because the work that is wrought under the sun (is) grievous unto me: for all (is) vanity and vexation of spirit. 18. Yea, I hated all my labor which I had taken under the sun; because I should leave it unto the man that shall be after me. 19. And who knoweth whether he shall be a wise (man) or a fool? yet shall he have rule over all my labor wherein I have labored, and wherein I have showed myself wise under the sun. This (is) also vanity. 20. Therefore I went about to cause my heart to despair of all the labor which I took under the sun. 21. For there is a man whose labor (is) in wisdom, and in knowledge, and in equity; yet to a man that hath not labored therein shall he leave it (for) his portion. This also (is) vanity, and a great evil. 22. For what hath man of all his labor, and of the vexation of his heart, wherein he hath labored under the sun? 23. For all his days (are) sorrows, and his travail grief; yea, his heart taketh not rest in the night. This is also vanity. 24. (There is) nothing better for a man, (than) that he should eat and drink, and (that) he should make his soul enjoy good in his labor. This also I saw, that it (was) from the hand of God. 25. For who can eat, or who else can hasten (hereunto,) more than I? 26. For (God) giveth to a man that (is) good in his sight wisdom, and knowledge, and joy: but to the sinner he giveth travail, to gather, and to heap up, that he may give to (him that is) good before God. This also (is) vanity and vexation of spirit.”

SOLOMON had now made trial of human wisdom and science, as an independent source of enjoyment; of madness and folly,—thoughtless dissipation and mirth; and of the luxuries and elegances, and

other pleasures, of riches and royalty. He had tried them separately; and he had tried them together: and on all of them he had pronounced the verdict which he has here recorded, of “vanity and vexation of spirit.”

This trial, besides, had been made very completely, and with every possible advantage for its yielding the desired result:—“for what can the man do that cometh after the king? even that which hath been already done.” Possessing “a wise and understanding heart,” no man could surpass him in extent and variety of knowledge, or could prove the failure of his experiment upon it to have been the consequence of limited and superficial information, and his unfavorable verdict, therefore, mistaken and false:—and, exceeding in wealth and magnificence all the monarchs that had preceded him in the throne of Israel, and all the contemporaneous princes of the surrounding nations,—having thus fully in his power the means of obtaining every gratification of sense which his heart could desire, and unrestrained in his indulgences by the example or by the fear of superiors,—by no man could the trial be more effectually made than it was by him, of “the lust of the eye, and the pride of life.” He might be imitated, but he could hardly be excelled.

But from what he said it might appear to some, as if he considered all the things of which he had been speaking, as on the same footing of inefficiency and worthlessness; all *equally vain*, and *equally vexatious*. This, however, would be a great mistake. Earthly wisdom he had indeed affirmed to be “vanity and vexation of spirit,” considered as constituting *the happiness* of man,—the portion of an immortal creature; and madness and folly he had included in the same verdict. But it by no means follows, that in his estimate they were *equally* so. In the twelfth verse, he “returns” to contemplate the two, and to compare them;—to view them, not each distinctly, but relatively to each other; not their respective claims to be acknowledged as the chief good, but simply their comparative titles to human estimation and pursuit:—

Verses 12, 13. *And I turned myself, to behold wisdom, and madness, and folly; for what can the man do that cometh after the king? even that which hath been already done. Then I saw that wisdom excelleth folly, as far as light excelleth darkness.*

For the reason assigned, and on which we have briefly touched,

namely, that his own experiment, on both sides of the question, was the completest that could be made; after having pushed it in each direction to its utmost limits, he “turns himself” to look back on what he had passed through; he stops to reflect; he puts the two things in the balance against each other; and in verse 13th he gives his deliberate decision:—“then I saw that wisdom excelleth folly, as far as light excelleth darkness.”

It is evidently of the same kind of wisdom that he here continues to speak. It is not a declaration of the satisfying and unrivalled excellence of spiritual, heavenly, Divine wisdom; but of the vast superiority even of human science, of the wisdom of earth, above ignorant and thoughtless folly. Although in itself far from sufficient to be the portion, the happiness, of such a creature as man; because it is not only accompanied, in the acquisition and possession of it, with a variety of peculiar griefs and sorrows, but it embraces not the favor of God, and leaves unprovided for, the interests of the immortal soul; yet it excels ignorance and folly “as far as light excelleth darkness.” With light we invariably,—I might almost say instinctively,—associate the ideas of security, and order, and cheerfulness; and with darkness the opposite ideas, of danger, and confusion, and melancholy. Wisdom excels folly in its own nature; the furnishing of the mind with knowledge being evidently much more accordant with the character and dignity of a rational creature, than leaving it empty, unimproved, and waste; dissipating its powers, and degrading its exalted capacities, in inconsiderate mirth and revelry, or in mere sensual and animal gratifications. The pursuits of human science, although we pity the man who is destitute of the purer and sublimer joys of true religion, are yet productive of pleasures, high in order, and exquisite in degree. And the superior excellence of such wisdom is further apparent, from the counsel and direction which it affords to its possessor in all the affairs of daily life,—the good which it enables him to acquire, and the evil which it teaches him to avoid. Hence it is added,

Verse 14. *The wise man's eyes are in his head, but the fool walketh in darkness: and I myself perceived also, that one event happeneth to them all.*

Wisdom possesses the same advantage over folly, that sight does over blindness. The wise man is like a person who has his eyes



in a sound state, and has light at the same time to use them. The fool, on the contrary, resembles the man who is either destitute of the organs of vision, or to whom surrounding darkness renders them unavailing. The man of wisdom, having all his wits about him, in the full possession and the appropriate exercise of all his faculties, "guides his affairs with discretion," looks before him, thinks maturely of what he is doing, and, by his knowledge of men and things, is directed to the adoption of plans which promise to be profitable, and to the prudent and successful prosecution of them. He "foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself." He aims at worthy ends, and employs suitable means for their accomplishment. But the fool,—the ignorant and inconsiderate and improvident man,—is continually in danger of stumbling, or of going astray, like a person overtaken by darkness, who "knoweth not whither he goeth." He is ever prone to run blindly and heedlessly into absurd and injurious projects, or to destroy such as are in themselves good, by blundering in the execution of them. The fool's eyes, it is elsewhere said, are "in the ends of the earth," roaming vainly and idly abroad, without serving his present and needful purposes;—gazing, as the organs of a vacant mind, on far off objects, and allowing him to stumble over what is immediately in his way. Without foresight to anticipate probable evils, without even sagacity to avoid such as are present, the fool is in perpetual hazard of injuring and ruining both himself, and all who are so unfortunate as to stand connected with him, or to be exposed to his influence.

Yet, whilst Solomon was not insensible to the peculiar and eminent advantages of wisdom over folly, there were, at the same time, some particulars in which the wise man and the fool stood entirely on a level: and the recollection and contemplation of these galled and mortified his spirit, and prevented his deriving from his trial of wisdom even that measure of enjoyment, which it was fitted in its nature to bestow. It is in this temper of mind that he adds, in the remainder of this, and in the two following verses:—

Verses 14-16. *And (or, yet) I myself perceived, that one event happeneth to them all. Then said I in my heart, As it happeneth to the fool, so it happeneth even to me; and why was I then more wise? Then I said in my heart, that this also is vanity. For there is no remembrance of the wise more than of the fool for ever; seeing that*

*which now is, in the days to come shall all be forgotten. And how dieth the wise man? as the fool.*

The expression, "one event happeneth to them all," refers, not merely to the life of all coming to the same termination, but to the indiscriminate administration of Divine providence, in regard to temporal things, and the similarity of its general aspect towards good and bad, towards wise and foolish. It is the same sentiment which is afterwards more fully stated in the beginning of the ninth chapter: "For all this, I considered in my heart, even to declare all this, that the righteous and the wise, and their works, are in the hand of God: no man knoweth either love or hatred by all that is before them. All things come alike to all: there is one event to the righteous and to the wicked; to the good, and to the clean, and to the unclean; to him that sacrificeth, and to him that sacrificeth not: as is the good, so is the sinner; and he that swear-eth, as he that feareth an oath. This is an evil among all things that are done under the sun, that there is one event unto all: yea, also the heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live, and after that they go to the dead."

When we come to this passage, we shall have a more proper opportunity for considering particularly this view of the Divine providence; a view, which at one time, you know, so agitated and unhinged the mind of the Psalmist Asaph, as almost to unsettle his confidence in the government, and the very existence, of the Divine Being. "His feet were almost gone, his steps had well nigh slipped: he was envious at the foolish, when" amidst all their rebellious forgetfulness of God and presumptuous impiety, their singular prosperity met his view, and was contrasted with the remarkable distresses of himself and others of God's people. Ps. 73.

I have said, the two passages express the same sentiment. Perhaps this is scarcely correct. There is one essential difference between them. In the verses before us, it is not the case of the good and bad, the righteous and wicked, that is spoken of, but rather of the *wise and foolish*; wisdom and folly being understood in reference to the knowledge of earthly science, and to the concerns of time and of the present world. The wise, with all their information, and all their sagacity, cannot, any more than the fool, control the course of providence. They are subject, in common with the weak, and ignorant, and short-sighted, to all the diversified

diseases, calamities, disappointments, and anxieties of life. This Solomon had seen in the experience of others, and had also felt in his own; and it filled him with impatience and fretfulness:—“then said I in my heart, As it happeneth to the fool, so it happeneth even to me; and why was I, then, more wise?”

“Why was I more wise?”—Why? How apparently unreasonable and capricious the question! Had he not just affirmed, that “wisdom excelleth folly as far as light excelleth darkness?” Was there, then, no advantage in the possession of wisdom? Ah! my friends, this language affectingly shows the unsatisfactoriness of all earthly sources of enjoyment; and the tendency of the human heart, when confined in its desires and relishes to such sources alone, to discontent and murmuring. True, there were some points in which the wise man excelled the fool; but then, there were others in which he was nowise his superior: in which both were perfectly on a level; and these were of such a nature that the mortification arising from the equality more than neutralized, in Solomon’s estimation, the advantage arising from the superiority. This bitter spoiled the sweet of all its relish; so that he “said in his heart,” with fretful disappointment, “This also is vanity.”

One of the points of equality, by which his mind was peculiarly affected, was seen in the latter end of the wise man and the fool, and the forgetfulness and indifference of posterity as to both:—“for there is no remembrance of the wise, more than of the fool for ever; seeing that which now is, in the days to come shall all be forgotten:—and how dieth the wise man?—as the fool.”

These words contain Solomon’s estimate of *posthumous fame*. He must be considered as stating a general truth. Men, in anticipating futurity, vainly assign to themselves, and to one another, the lofty attribute of immortality. But how is the presumptuous expectation disappointed! “There is no remembrance for ever,”—no everlasting remembrance, however often, and however fondly men talk of it,—“of the wise man more than of the fool.” The stream of time, in a few generations, carries down to the gulf of oblivion the names of both. It is singularly mortifying to reflect, how little, in a very short period, any man, however eminent may have been his reputation for wisdom, is missed in the world. For a while, a blank is felt. He is the theme of public praise; and the tear of regret is shed, and the voice of lamentation

is raised, over his tomb. But he is no sooner out of sight, than he begins to be out of mind. He is less and less spoken of. The world appears to go on without him, much as it did before. New objects of attention and admiration arise, and the old ones are gradually forgotten. Of the thousands, eminent in their day, who must have lived in ancient times, how few comparatively are there, whose very names have come down to us!—and even as to those that have been saved from the general wreck of time, how very circumscribed is the circle of their fame! By the great mass of human society, by the immensely large proportion of the population of the world, they have never been heard of:—their names, their works, and their sayings, are alike unknown. The wisdom of Joseph saved the land of Egypt from impending ruin. Yet soon “another king arose, who knew not Joseph.” Whilst the salutary effects of his counsel continued to be permanently felt, the counsel itself and the man who had given it were forgotten, and were miserably requited; and, but for the inspired record in the holy Scriptures, we should scarcely, I presume, have heard of his name, even amongst the fables and uncertainties, and confused and mutilated facts, of remote tradition. And of Solomon himself, the wisest of the wise, how little could we with certainty have known, had not his history been in a similar manner recorded, and his inspired writings preserved!

“And how dieth the wise man?—as the fool.” To both, the event itself is equally *certain*: the wise cannot ward it off more than the fool. The time, and the manner, and the circumstances of it are to both equally *uncertain*: to the wise, as to the fool, it may be sudden or lingering, preceded and accompanied by the same varieties of pain and suffering, both being alike subject to all those diseases by which fallen humanity is afflicted, and which to all in succession fulfil the original sentence, “Dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return.” It is followed too, as to both, with the same humiliating effects. “They lie down alike in the dust, and the worms cover them.” To both, the grave is equally narrow, equally cold, equally silent, and dark, and dreary. They rot alike into indiscriminate dust. And, as it is of secular wisdom Solomon is speaking, not of spiritual and saving knowledge,—in the departure of both there is ground for the anxious and trembling forebodings of futurity, both being destitute of good hope. Thus

Solomon "saw that wise men died, and that the fool and the brutish person perished;" and his spirit was vexed and mortified. He hated life; and all his labor in the acquisition of his wisdom and of his general superiority to other men seemed grievous, as having yielded him no solid or permanent satisfaction:—

Verse 17. *Therefore I hated life; because the work that is wrought under the sun is grievous to me: for all is vanity and vexation of spirit.*

Alas! alas! what is life, my friends, without a contented mind? and where is a truly contented mind to be found, except in the pious and believing reference of every thing to God, and making Him the chosen portion of the soul?

Another reason for dissatisfaction with the results of all his varied labors in the pursuit of happiness, is assigned in the following verses:—

Verses 18-23. *Yea, I hated all my labor which I had taken under the sun; because I should leave it unto the man that shall be after me. And who knoweth whether he shall be a wise man or a fool? yet shall he have rule over all my labor wherein I have labored, and wherein I have showed myself wise under the sun. This is also vanity. Therefore I went about to cause my heart to despair of all the labor which I took under the sun. For there is a man whose labor is in wisdom, and in knowledge, and in equity: yet to a man that hath not labored therein shall he leave it for his portion. This also is vanity, and a great evil. For what hath man of all his labor, and of the vexation of his heart, wherein he hath labored under the sun? For all his days are sorrows, and his travail grief; yea, his heart taketh not rest in the night. This is also vanity.*

"I hated all my labor which I had taken under the sun, because I should leave it to the man that shall be after me." But why should this have so grieved thee, Solomon? If thy heart had been right with God; if He had been, as He ought to have been, thy chief joy, the treasure of thy soul; if thy affections had been in heaven, and thy hopes full of immortality;—the thought of parting with earthly possessions, with worldly grandeur, with human admiration, could not have been thus vexing to thy spirit. It would not have distressed the feelings of piety, to anticipate the exchange of these for purer joys and sublimer honors; nor the feelings of generous benevolence, to think of leaving to another

what thou couldest no longer enjoy thyself. But, alas! to the worlding, who seeks his portion in the present life, as Solomon was now doing, even the simple thought that *all must be left*, cannot but be, in the extreme, galling and disheartening.

But there is something more here. They must not only be left, and left to another:—the character of the successor, and the use he is to make of them, are matters of vexatious uncertainty:—“And who knoweth, whether he shall be a wise man or a fool? yet shall he have rule over all my labor wherein I have labored, and wherein I have showed myself wise under the sun. This is also vanity.” If a man has a son to succeed to his wealth and honors, he may be a foolish son, without principle, and destitute of discretion and common sense; or, if there be about him promising symptoms of wisdom, the very succession to riches and splendor may work, as experience shows it to have many a time done, a fatal change; may frustrate a father’s partial anticipations; may intoxicate the youthful heart, and effectually make a fool of the hopeful heir. If a man have no son, and fixes the succession to his estate on one whom he esteems wise and prudent, capable of keeping them together and of using them to advantage, he may have been deceived by specious appearances, assumed for the purpose of obtaining his good graces; or, the same change of character may be produced by actual change of condition, which we have supposed in the case of the son;—and whosoever be the heir, sudden death may prevent his entering on his new inheritance, or may very soon transmit it again to other hands,—and these may be the hands of a fool. It is probable, that Solomon himself had no very flattering anticipations of the future character of his son and heir, Rehoboam; who very early made it manifest that, along with the throne, and the riches, and the royal magnificence of his father, he was very far from inheriting his wisdom; the kingdom, at the very commencement of his reign, being divided by his haughty and headstrong folly, and a large portion of it alienated from the house of David.

It was sadly mortifying to Solomon, then, to reflect, that the produce of all his labor and of all his care; the wealth he had accumulated, the honors he had acquired, the splendors with which he had surrounded himself; might come immediately into the possession of one who might break the sceptre he had swayed amidst

so much prosperity; might abuse and squander his public treasures and his private fortunes; might forfeit his honors and cover himself with contempt:—that such a one might “have rule over all his labor wherein he had labored, and wherein he had showed himself wise under the sun.”

So many circumstances thus concurring to impress on his mind the vanity of earthly things, and the falsehood of the promises of happiness held out by them, he began to bethink himself a little more gravely, and to renounce the pursuit of enjoyment from worldly good, as desperate and hopeless:—“Therefore I went about to cause my heart to despair of all the labor which I took under the sun.” The mode of expression seems to imply, that this was no easy matter. His heart clung firmly to the world:—he could not bring himself to relinquish it:—yet, when he considered and re-considered his experiment, as far as it had hitherto gone, he found it would not do. And, amongst the views of the world which were ever forcibly recurring to his mind, the last mentioned appears to have had a predominant influence. He repeats it:—“There is a man,”—(that is, the case is one which not unfrequently occurs, and Solomon himself was, in some respects, an instance of it,)—“There is a man who hath labored in” (or according to) “wisdom, and knowledge, and equity; yet to a man who hath not labored therein,” (that is, not merely who hath entered on the possession of what cost him no labor of his own, but who, instead of laboring in wisdom, and knowledge, and equity, has labored in folly, and ignorance, and unrighteousness, and who continues to display the same character,) “shall he leave it for his portion.” The entire produce of his prudent, and intelligent, and equitable diligence, becomes the portion of a foolish and a vicious man. “This,” says he, “is vanity, and a great evil;” an evil which, in Solomon’s experience, served to embitter all the satisfaction which a man can derive from his labors:—“For what hath a man of all his labor, and of the vexation of his heart wherein he hath labored under the sun?” When his course is thus brought to a close, and he leaves the results of all his toils to another,—“to the man that shall come after him,”—“what hath he?”—what reward,—what profit,—what compensation, for all his labor, all his anxiety, and care, and vexation of spirit?—when his soul comes to be “required of him,” and the emphatical question is asked, “who shall those things be which thou hast provided?”

The 23d verse,—“For all his days are sorrows, and his travail grief; yea, his heart taketh not rest in the night: this is also vanity,”—does not seem to be intended as a direct answer to the question which had just been asked,—“What hath man of all his labor, and of the vexation of his heart wherein he hath labored under the sun?”—as if the wise man had said, He has only vexation, “*for all his days are sorrows, and his travail grief.*” It is rather designed, I think, to aggravate the evil, that all should have so unprofitable a termination:—“What hath he?”—*although* “all his days were sorrows, and his travail grief.” When he has thus spent his life; given his whole soul to the labors of this world; passed through days of sorrow and disquietude; toiled in carefulness and grief of spirit; and added to such days nights of sleepless anxiety, or slumbers seared and disturbed with uneasy dreams and startling apprehensions;—when, by such means, he has realized all that his heart was set upon, and filled others with wonder and envy at his success;—“What hath he?” When he comes to die, and to leave it all behind him, the poorest is as rich, and the meanest as mighty as he. Such is the termination, and such the fruit, of all his toils, and sorrows, and sollicitudes. Surely, then, “this is also vanity.” It is but very mixed and unsatisfying enjoyment while it lasts; sweet, with a large infusion of bitter;—and the end of all is unprofitable and vexatious.

Solomon had “gone about to make his heart to despair of all his labor under the sun” in pursuit of solid satisfaction from earthly things. In the verses which follow, he sets before us *the proper use of the possessions of the present world*:—

Verses 24–26. *There is nothing better for a man, than that he should eat and drink, and that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labor. This also I saw, that it was from the hand of God. For who can eat, or who else can hasten hereunto, more than I? For God giveth to a man that is good in his sight, wisdom, and knowledge, and joy: but to the sinner he giveth travail, to gather and to heap up, that he may give to him that is good before God. This also is vanity and vexation of spirit.*

“There is nothing better.” Is this, then, the *supreme good*? Does the writer here speak absolutely? For an answer to such questions, we have only to look forward a little to the great general lesson, or *moral*, of the whole book; chapter xii. 13. “Let us



hear the conclusion of the whole matter: fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty" (or, rather, the whole happiness) "of man:"—a lesson which is in harmony with the doctrine, on the same subject, of all the other Scriptures. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; but fools despise wisdom and instruction." "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all they that do his commandments." "Where shall wisdom be found? and where is the place of understanding? God understandeth the way thereof, and he knoweth the place thereof. And unto man he said, Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding." Prov. i. 7. Psal. cxi. 10. Job xxviii. 12, 23, 28.

In the verses before us, Solomon must be understood as speaking of the way to derive from earthly things that kind and degree of enjoyment which they are capable of affording. And this is, not to pursue them as our chief good; not to seek our happiness from them; but, with a thankful, contented, and cheerful spirit, to receive and enjoy such a measure of them as God in his providence may be pleased to bestow.

"There is nothing better for a man," as to the things of time, "than that he should eat and drink," that is, that he should use the comforts and blessing which God confers, "and that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labor;" maintaining an easy and satisfied mind, without grudging and repining at what has been, or fretting with unhappy solicitude about what may be; free from the irksome care about possessions already acquired, and from the toiling and anxious eagerness of those who "haste to be rich," whose desires are incessant for more, and more; their ideas changing and their ambition swelling as they advance, and who are never, in any stage of their progress, "content with such things as they have." This is far from being the way to the true enjoyment even of this world. He enjoys it best, who receives its blessings as from the hand of God, with a cheerful and thankful, but dependent and resigned spirit; who makes God himself,—not the temporary gift, but the Eternal giver,—his portion; and who has learned to be satisfied with whatever He is pleased to provide.

This temper of mind is not in nature; the lesson, as I have just hinted, must be *learned*:—"This also I saw," says Solomon, "that it was from the hand of God." The meaning of this is, not merely

that the bounties of providence are from the Divine hand; but that from Him proceeds a suitable temper of mind for the true enjoyment of them;—a grateful and contented spirit. This is from God. It is produced and maintained by Divine influence; and it imparts to the things of time a relish which can never be experienced by those who make them their portion. Solomon's doctrine of the necessity of this lesson being taught us by God, agrees with the experience of the apostle Paul, as given in his Epistle to the Philippians:—"Not that I speak in respect of want: for *I have learned*, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: everywhere, and in all things, *I am instructed* but to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me." Phil. iv. 11-13. He "*learned*,"—he was "*instructed*;"—not merely informed of this state of mind being his duty, but effectually taught, by the grace of the Lord Jesus, to maintain it. The sentiment of the entire dependence of the creature on Divine Providence; of the peaceful serenity of mind arising from the habitual impression of it; and of God's being the Author of this contented and happy frame of spirit; is finely expressed by the Psalmist in the beginning of the 127th Psalm:—"Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it: except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh in vain. It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows:—so he giveth his beloved sleep." He enables his children, the objects of his paternal love and care, to enjoy tranquil and sound repose; neither abridged by the wakefulness, nor disturbed by the searing dreams of anxiety: by giving them to exercise a believing, filial reliance upon himself, and impressing on their minds the vanity and utter fruitlessness of the most solicitous and drudging labor without his blessing, and the abiding conviction that his sovereignty cannot be controlled, that his wise administration cannot be improved, that his gracious and faithful promises cannot be falsified.

Solomon's own experience served to satisfy him, that the happiness to be derived from the things of this world depends entirely on the state of mind in which they are received and enjoyed, and that this state of mind is "from the hand of God:" for, if the varieties of earthly good had in themselves been capable of im-

parting true satisfaction, who could have found that satisfaction, if *he* failed of it?—"for who can eat, or who else can hasten hereunto, more than I?" Who is there that can enjoy the delicacies and the luxuries of life more than I?—what appetite can be more richly feasted; what taste, in all its capricious likings, more intirely indulged; than mine? Or, "who can hasten" more than I, to the enjoyment of the pleasures of sense, in all their variety?—who can seek them with more unremitting ardor?—who can grasp them with a fonder avidity?—who can possess them with a heart more set upon them, and more determined to make the most of them, than I? And who can obtain them with greater facility?—who can refine them to a higher excellence?—who can multiply them to a richer abundance? Yet all would not do. They yielded me nothing that deserved the name of happiness. God must not only bestow them, but bestow along with them a right spirit in the reception and estimation, the enjoyment and use of them, else they will be curses instead of blessings; fountains of bitterness, rather than springs of pleasure.

The true enjoyment, then, even of the things of the present world, is one of the peculiar advantages of God's people; and the experience of Solomon confirms the saying of the apostle:—"Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." 1 Tim. iv. 8.

Verse 26. *For God giveth to a man that is good in his sight, wisdom, and knowledge, and joy: but the sinner he giveth travail, to gather and to heap up, that he may give to him that is good before God. This also is vanity and vexation of spirit.*

"The man that is good in his sight," is the man that is *truly* good; good in the unerring estimate of the Divine mind; whose "heart is right with God," and who is "steadfast in his covenant;" who believes his word, trusts in his grace, and obeys his will,— "doing justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with his God," "denying all ungodliness and worldly desires, and living soberly, and righteously, and godly, in this present world;" choosing God as his portion; "glorifying him in his body and spirit which are his;" grateful for his kindness; submissive to his corrections; satisfied with the arrangements of his gracious providence, and with the provisions and proposals of his redeeming love. To such a man, "God giveth wisdom and knowledge," by which he is

enabled rightly to appreciate the comparative value of temporal and eternal things; to give the former their proper measure of regard; to "use them as not abusing them," reserving his heart for the latter and for God. In this way he giveth him also "joy" the state of mind arising from this exercise of wisdom and knowledge being eminently favorable to the happy enjoyment of all the blessings of life; preserving equanimity; moderating and regulating the desires; and, by suppressing extravagant elation in prosperity, lightening the pressure of adversity, and tempering the otherwise overwhelming vexation of losses and disappointments, of frustrated schemes, and baffled exertions.

"But to the sinner,"—that is, to the man who is *not* "good before God;" whose spirit is not right with him; who "goes on frowardly in the way of his own heart," and "according to the course of this world;" who "says to the Almighty, Depart from me, for I desire not the knowledge of thy ways;" who, regardless of the obligations, and insensible to the pleasures, of religion, seeks his happiness in the creature and not in the Creator,—“to the sinner he giveth travail, to gather and to heap up, that he may give to him that is good before God. This also is vanity and vexation of spirit.” The meaning is, that all that Solomon had described is the experience not of the good man, but of *the sinner*,—of the man who forgets and forsakes the Lord. This is the man all whose labor is "travail." It is he that rises early, and sits up late, and eats the bread of sorrows. It is he that is sickened with cares, and harrassed by disappointments. His object is, and he toils hardly and restlessly for its attainment, "to gather and to heap up:" and then, when he has gained his end, though never to his heart's content, he must leave all behind him; and, possibly, in the appointment of an all-wise providence, over-ruling every thing for the Divine glory, his accumulated treasures must become the portion of one whom, of all others, he most heartily dislikes,—of a godly man, the object of his avowed and bitter scorn, but of God's approbation and regard; who will devote his possessions to purposes of which his predecessor never dreamed, or which, if they ever crossed his thoughts, were instantly dismissed with banter and imprecation; who will "honor the Lord with his substance, and with the first fruits of all his increase." Solomon had remarked, in surveying the incidents and changes of human

life, that the Supreme Disposer frequently thus transferred the bounties of his providence, stored up by wicked means for wicked ends, from the sinner to the saint; from hands that unworthily abused them, to hands that would apply them to their legitimate uses. It is God's doing. The sinner does not, of his own free will, relinquish his treasures, and give them over into the hands of the godly. No: what he acquired by travail he abandons with reluctance. They are not presented with his open hand, but wrenched from his tenacious grasp. He holds them while he can, and only parts with them from an indignant feeling of necessity. With respect to the travail and anxiety of laboring for earthly good, Solomon's experience, whilst he was departing from God, had, of course, been that of "the sinner;" and it was all "vanity and vexation of spirit."

The great *moral* of the whole of this chapter is contained in these concluding verses. These form the practical improvement of the discoveries made by the writer, in his experiments on earthly wisdom, on madness and folly, on sensual gratification, luxurious elegance, and voluptuous refinement, considered as independent sources of happiness to man. In this view of them, they are all pronounced vanity; incapable of yielding true and substantial felicity: and he here teaches the important secret, of extracting from earthly things the full proportion of sweetness which they are capable of affording.

Let us learn, my brethren, to make a proper discrimination even amongst secular pursuits. Wisdom, or science, even when considered as exclusive of godliness, is, in its nature and uses, decidedly superior to sensual pleasure; and that, too, although in the pursuit and enjoyment of the latter there may be no particularly sinful excess. But still, neither of them will do, to be the substance of happiness, the "one thing needful," the portion of the soul; nor will earthly things, of any description, yield their sweets to their possessor, till they have ceased to be looked upon at all in this light. Forget not, my Christian brethren, the higher and nobler objects of desire and pursuit, which your Divine Master sets before you, and charges you to mind:—"If ye, then, be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid

with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory." Col. iii. 1-4. O! keep these objects of blessed hope continually before your view. In proportion to the force and the constancy of their influence on your affections, will be your equanimity amidst the changes of this fluctuating world, from good to evil, and from evil to good, and the correspondence of your tempers and deportment to the spirit of the apostolic admonition:—"But this, I say, brethren, the time is short: it remaineth, that, both they that have wives be as though they had none; and they that weep as though they wept not; and they that rejoice as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy as though they possessed not; and they that use this world as not abusing it; for the fashion of this world passeth away." 1 Cor. vii. 29-31. The more habitually our desires are elevated to the things that are unseen and eternal, the less will the vicissitudes of those that are seen and temporal be found capable of affecting our real happiness. Assigning to them their proper place, and expecting from them no more than they are fitted to produce, we shall be free from the disappointments of those who look to them for what they never can yield. Laying our account with, one day, leaving them, we shall not be confounded, as by an event on which we had not at all calculated, if, in the providence of God, they should leave us, "making to themselves wings and flying away, as an eagle towards heaven." The knowledge that we "have in heaven a better and an enduring substance," will make our worldly bereavements comparatively light. "Confessing ourselves strangers and pilgrims on the earth," we shall still look for the "better country, even the heavenly." And, "all things working together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose," our temporal loss will be our spiritual gain:—"our light affliction, which is but for a moment, will work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."

And O! let "the sinner" seriously contemplate his future prospects. Let him "consider his latter end." All that you are laboring for, you must very soon relinquish,—leaving every shred behind you. And, quickly as that inevitable and final separation must come, you have no security for your retaining your acquisitions even till then. God is at this moment, in these times of

general calamity and privation, reading to you, and to all, a most impressive lesson of their precariousness. You are "setting your eyes on that which is not;"—that which is so uncertain, so fleeting and transient, as hardly to be allowed the attribute of existence. You are eagerly coveting, and fondly attaching yourselves to a nonentity,—an empty unsubstantial shadow, which, ere your eye has glanced upon it, flits from before you. You are treasuring up "trifles light as air," and as unstable as they are light, which every shifting wind of *fortune*, (to borrow your own heathen phraseology,) may blow for ever away. And O, for your sakes, that this were all!—that the mere loss of these trifles were the amount of the evil that shall arise from a life devoted to the pursuit of them! But, whilst you are living "without God in the world;" estranging your hearts from him and giving them to the creature; preferring to his service the service of mammon; seeking the gift, and forgetting and rebelling against the giver; abusing the bounties of his providence, (for all is abused that is not consecrated in the use of it, by religious principle, to the honor of the Divine Benefactor;) and slighting and refusing the offered blessings of his grace:—whilst you are living thus, you are engaged in a much more unlawful employment than the laying up of trifles for future loss;—you are "treasuring up unto yourselves wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God." Rom. ii. 5. O, deceive not yourselves with the fancy, that because you "labor in *equity*," as well as "in wisdom and knowledge," defrauding no man, but giving every one his due; and because you "run not to the excess of riot," but are decent and sober-living men,—that therefore there is no danger. There *is* danger, imminent and awful danger, if, in the midst of all your equity and sobriety, the world has your hearts, and not God; if you are living to yourselves; if your conduct is not influenced and guided by religious principle; by the faith, and the fear, and the love of God. "Ye cannot serve God and Mammon," is the unequivocal and unqualified declaration of the Lord of Christians; and, of the two services, it is only the service of God that can end well. Loss, and shame, and misery, will be the issue of the one; gain, and glory, and blessedness, the eternal reward of the other. Be persuaded, then, to embrace this holy and happy service. Be persuaded to seek something better and more lasting than this world

can afford you;—to seek an ever-during portion in the love of God, and all the blessings which it confers on its favored objects, through Jesus Christ our Lord. An interest in this love, and in these blessings, is the only way to the true and satisfying enjoyment even of the present world. Listen, then, to the voice of Divine Wisdom:—"Receive my instruction, and not silver; and knowledge rather than choice gold. For wisdom is better than rubies; and all the things that may be desired are not to be compared to it." "Riches and honor are with me, yea, durable riches and righteousness. My fruit is better than gold, yea, than fine gold, and my revenue than choice silver. I lead in the way of righteousness, in the midst of the paths of judgment: that I may cause those that love me to inherit substance; and I will fill their treasures." Prov. viii. 10, 11, 18-21.



## LECTURE V.

### ECCLESIASTES III. 1-15.

“To every (thing there is) a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: 2. A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck (that which is) planted: 3. A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up: 4. A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance: 5. A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing: 6. A time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away: 7. A time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak: 8. A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace. 9. What profit hath he that worketh in that wherein he laboreth? 10. I have seen the travail, which God hath given to the sons of men to be exercised in it. 11. He hath made every (thing) beautiful in his time: also he hath set the world in their heart; so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end. 12. I know that (there is) no good in them, but for (a man) to rejoice, and to do good in his life. 13. And also that every man should eat and drink, and enjoy the good of all his labor, it (is) the gift of God. 14. I know that whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever: nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it: and God doeth (it), that (men) should fear before him. 15. That which hath been is now; and that which is to be hath already been; and God requireth that which is past.”

To the right understanding and interpretation of an author's language, nothing is of more essential consequence than a due consideration of his leading design,—the general scope and object of his performance. The great lesson which this book is intended to elucidate and impress is, the vanity of the attempt to find true happiness from any of the sources of mere worldly enjoyment. To this purpose the verses with which this chapter commences are, in one view of their meaning, remarkably appropriate: and this, of itself, is a very conclusive evidence of that view being right. They teach the two following important truths:—in the first place,

that the concerns of the present world are, beyond expression, unstable and fluctuating; and, secondly, that all its incessant vicissitudes are so regulated and determined by the uncontrollable purposes of the Supreme will, that no human sagacity can foresee and prevent them; "the times and seasons being kept in his own power," by Him who says, "My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure." Such considerations impressively teach us, on the one hand, the folly of saying, in such a world, we shall never be moved; and the wisdom, on the other, of anticipating such changes as may be appointed and inevitable; of accommodating readily to the shifting scenes of life the state of our feelings and desires; of conducting ourselves with propriety in all the varying circumstances of our condition; and of never resting on such uncertainties as the basis of our felicity.

Keeping these general observations in mind, let us briefly glance at the different particulars enumerated in the first eight verses.

Verse 1. *To every thing there is a season, and a time for every purpose under the sun.*

The preceding remarks will have led you to anticipate that I consider these words, containing the general sentiment of which the seven subsequent verses set forth varied exemplifications, as referring to the all-directing providence of God; whose procedure is not the random, and capricious, and unsteady course (if a course it should be called) of short-sighted ignorance and fickle imbecility; but the wise, and regular, and well-ordered administration of One, who "knows the end from the beginning;" to whom there is no unanticipated contingency; and whose omniscient eye, in the midst of what to us appears inextricable confusion, has a thorough and intuitive perception of the endlessly diversified relations and tendencies of all events and all their circumstances, discerning throughout the whole the perfection of harmony. In the all-wise providence of God, then,—“to every thing there is a season, and a time for every purpose under the sun.”

He begins his enumeration of particulars with the commencing and the terminating boundaries of life, between which all must be done, and enjoyed, and suffered, that is done, enjoyed, and suffered, under the sun:—

Verse 2. *There is a time to be born, and a time to die.*

The moment is predetermined, of every man's entering into the

world; and the moment is also fixed, by the same sovereign purpose, at which he is to leave it. When a child is born, no one can affirm how long it is to continue here. It may be an hour, or it may be "threescore years and ten." The first birth is no security for the next. The time and the circumstances of its future departure are known to God alone, the Author and the Supporter of its being. All that *we* can with certainty say, is, "there is a time to die." To all, the event is equally sure; and to all, the period of its arrival is equally a secret. And, when that period does arrive, the wish and the attempt to evade it are to all equally vain. "No man hath power over the spirit to retain the spirit;"—no, not for a moment. How foolish, then, must it be for us, to sit down at our ease to enjoy the world, as if we had the time of our continuance in it in our own power! when, in truth, we are so completely *tenants at will*, and may be called to quit on a moment's notice. "Is there not an appointed time to man on the earth? are not his days also as the days of a hireling?" Yes; but with this difference, that the hireling knows the period of his service; whereas, of the duration of *his*, man is left in utter uncertainty. "His days are determined," indeed; but "the number of his months is with God: God hath appointed his bounds, that he cannot pass;" and he may come upon the invisible limit, the unseen line which separates time from eternity, ere he is at all aware of his being near it.

*There is a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted.*

By some, these words are understood metaphorically, of the dispensations of providence towards families and nations; agreeably to a use made of the same and similar figures in some other parts of Scripture. Thus, God says to his ancient people, by the prophet Jeremiah, chap. xviii. 6-10; "O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? saith the Lord. Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in my hand, O house of Israel! At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it; if that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them. And at what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build, and to plant it; if it do evil in my

sight, that it obey not my voice, then I will repent of the good wherewith I said I would benefit them."

But although the words, thus understood, express an important truth, a truth of a higher order than their literal meaning suggests, yet I am disposed to think that the literal meaning is the true one, and that there is a direct reference in them to a part of Solomon's various labors, as described by him in the preceding chapter: "I made me great works: I builded me houses; I planted me vineyards; I made me gardens and orchards, and I planted trees in them of all kinds of fruits; I made me pools of water, to water therewith the wood that bringeth forth trees." Thus Solomon planted: and thus many, possessing the means, along with the taste and inclination, planted before him, and have planted after him. But the "time to plant" is followed by the "time to pluck up." The planter himself, from change of circumstances, from alteration of taste, from caprice, or from necessity, may undo his own work:—a period of growth, too, arrives, at which wood of all varieties is cut down for profit, or rooted out for fruitlessness:—and no man, when he plants, can be sure how soon the blasting influences of an unpropitious season may oblige him to pluck up his young favorites; or whether his successor may not disapprove his plans, and, immediately on obtaining the inheritance, overturn all his labors. And should they be spared for a time, some one, at a later period, from taste or from avarice, may convert the sylvan into arable; or, (what is still more deplorable, but not unfrequent,) may lay waste his plantations to discharge the debts of profligacy.

Verse 3. *A time to kill, and a time to heal*: that is, say some, a time when God kills, and a time when he keeps alive; a time when he brings to the grave, and a time when he heals and brings back from the very verge of it. I have no objection to this explanation; only, I think it should be understood with reference to the ministry or agency of man; and that, too, not to his killing *by violence*, but to killing, as opposed to *healing*,—both sides of the alternative relating to the same case. There is a time, when all the means that men can devise and employ will prove ineffectual for the preservation of life; nay, when they may even have a prejudicial and deadly influence: and there is a time, according to the unknown purpose of God, when the same means will operate like

charms; will check and turn the ebbing tide of life; and bring back the exhausted and despaired-of patient from the last extremity. All depends on the purpose and appointment of God. Let none foolishly abuse this important truth; a truth which ought never to be absent from the mind of a dependent creature. Let none interpret it as fatalism, and hastily infer the uselessness and impiety of employing means at all. For, although there is "a time to kill," there is also "a time to heal." Previously to the use of means, the result is known only to God; and to us it belongs, to employ, with gratitude and prayer, such means as skill and experience have pronounced to be suitable, and look up to God, in the spirit of faith and submission, for the blessing that is necessary to their healing efficacy. It was not the sin of Ahaz that in his distress he "looked to the physicians," but that he "did *not* look to the Lord."

*A time to break down, and a time to build up.* Even of those cities which Solomon himself "built up," there were some which in Divine providence had previously been "broken down," by hostile violence. See 1 Kings ix. 15-17. He built up also the wall of Jerusalem: which was again broken down at the captivity; and, after the appointed years of desolation, built up anew at the return from Babylon; and at last thoroughly overthrown, in the days of final vengeance on the rebellious city. One hour of Divine judgment, or of human violence, may break down what it has cost the labor of many years to build. "Forty and six years," said the taunting Jews to Jesus, "was this temple in building;" but when God's day of threatened vengeance arrived, in how much shorter time were its massy and stupendous structures levelled with the dust, and the prediction verified, that one stone should not be left upon another! Solomon had "made him great works, and builded him houses." But he knew not, when he had finished them, how long each was destined to stand. Violence might soon lay them in ruins; change of circumstances might induce, or might oblige, himself or his successors in the throne, to pull them down; and, at any rate, a time was to come when they should yield to the dilapidating influence of age; should totter to their fall, and be removed, from a sense of danger.

Verse 4. *A time to weep, and a time laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance.*

These two clauses of verse 4th are evidently of synonymous import. There is a time when, by private or by public calamities, the Sovereign ruler calls to weeping and mourning; sometimes "suddenly as in a moment," without previous admonition, and contrary to all human expectation. In such a time, mirth and dancing are forgotten; or, if not, they are fearfully unseasonable incongruous, and profane:—"In that day did the Lord God of hosts call to weeping, and to mourning, and to baldness, and to girding with sackcloth; and, behold, joy and gladness, slaying oxen and killing sheep, eating flesh and drinking wine: let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we shall die! And it was revealed in mine ears by the Lord of hosts, surely this iniquity shall not be purged from you till ye die, saith the Lord God of hosts." Isa. xxii. 12-14. There is, on the other hand, a time when the scene changes; when the light of prosperity rises over the darkness of affliction; when God "turns men's mourning into dancing;" "takes off their sackcloth, and girds them with gladness." And then, anon, when, forgetting, as they are ever prone to do, the inconstancy of prosperity, and letting slip the salutary lessons of their previous tribulation, they begin, in the thoughtlessness of gaiety, to say, "we shall never be moved," He again "hides his face, and they are troubled." Job was a happy father, and a rich and healthy and honorable man, "the greatest of all the men of the East:"—Job became, by the sudden visitations of God, childless and penniless, tormented with disease, an alien to his friends, wronged, insulted, and desolate; "his harp was turned to mourning, and his organ to the voice of them that weep:"—and, again, the season came round, when the Lord "turned the captivity of Job," and "blessed his latter end more than his beginning."

Verse 5. *A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together:*—not, surely, for the purpose of ordinary building; for that had been already mentioned. The reference seems to be, to the rearing of memorials of covenants between parties, and of remarkable circumstances or events. Such were the pillar erected by Jacob, and the heap of stones piled up by him and Laban, and consecrated by the solemnities of oath and sacrifice, to be the boundary of pledged and covenanted peace between them. Gen. xxxi. 44-55. Such were the twelve stones taken from the midst of Jordan, when "its waters were cut off before the ark of the

covenant," and set up by Joshua, as a memorial to future generations, of the power, and goodness, and faithfulness of Jehovah. Josh. iv. 1-9. And such were the *tumuli* of stones raised over Achan, and over Absalom. Josh. vii. 26. 2 Sam. xviii. 17. Other instances will occur to the recollection of the readers of the Bible; nor has the practice, even in the rude form in which it most frequently appears in Scripture history, been at all peculiar to any one nation. There is a time, then, when covenants are made, and a time when they may come to be disregarded and violated, or to be mutually relinquished by the parties, and the memorials of them thus rendered useless. There is a time when trophies of victory and triumph are erected, and a time when the stones of them are thrown down and scattered; when the victors in their turn become the vanquished, and defeat and shame take the place of conquest and honor; when those who dislike the events destroy their memorials.

*A time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing.* There is a time, when the fondness of faithful and fervent friendship bestows its caresses, and receives them in return with reciprocal sincerity and delight: and a time when the ardor cools; when professions fail; when the friend of our bosom's love proves false and hollow-hearted, and the sight of him produces only the sigh and the tear of bitter recollection: we refrain from embracing, because our embrace is not returned. There is a time, when the man whom God has blessed rejoices with the wife of his youth; when "the candle of the Lord shines upon his head;" when all is prosperity and cheerfulness; and when the hallowed endearments of connubial affection are enjoyed with mutual transport:—and a time, when "the light is dark in his tabernacle;" when the visitations of God have burdened his spirit with care and grief; when even such pleasures lose their wanted relish; when to enjoy them as before would be insensibility to the feelings alike of nature and of piety. There is a time, when the heart of a father exults over "a wise son;" when he presses him to his bosom in the embrace of cordial approbation; and, smiling upon him through tears of sweet affection, experiences all a father's joy, and indulges, in visions of anticipation, all a father's hopes:—and a time, when the smile and the embrace must be reluctantly withheld; when approbation must give place to reproof; when the "foolish son be-

comes the heaviness of his mother;" when the heart is wrung with agony; and the blessed visions of hope are succeeded by the dark forebodings of despondency and dread.

Verse 6. *A time to get, and a time to lose.* Does this require any comment at present, my friends, when proofs of it so numerous are before your daily view? There is a time when industry is successful; when business prospers; when the tide of prosperity flows without interruption, and wealth seems to come spontaneously;—"a time to get." But, by and by, a turn takes place in the tide, and there comes "a time to lose." All is unpropitious. Nothing does well. Sudden and unlooked-for reverses take away at once the produce of many years of industrious application;—or, a continued run of ill fortune, as the world calls it, but in which the man of piety will mark and acknowledge the orderings of providence, drains it off by slow but sure degrees. Riches, which have been accumulated during a long period of persevering labor, "make to themselves wings and fly away as an eagle towards heaven;"—gotten in years,—lost in a day:—or, a fortune obtained at once is no sooner in possession, than it begins to diminish: the "time to lose" commences, and ceases not till all is gone,—and gone, it can hardly be told how.

*A time to keep, and a time to cast away:*—a time, when particular earthly possessions give us pleasure, and we keep them; and a time when, from satiety, or change of taste and character, they cease to please, and we cast them away:—a time when the bounties of heaven are retained with gratitude, as valuable and useful; and a time when duty may require us to relinquish all that we have, that we may not violate the dictates of conscience, or incur the forfeiture of more precious and more lasting blessings;—or, when life comes to be in danger, and, for its preservation, property of every kind will be readily thrown away from us, as, in the comparison, unworthy of a moment's thought. Thus, many have made a cheerful sacrifice of things seen and temporal for the sake of things unseen and eternal; and many more have shown the truth of the proverb, "all that a man hath will he give for his life." Paul "counted all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord;" nay, "suffered for him the loss of all things, and counted them but dung that he might win Christ, and be found in him." The believing Hebrews "took



joyfully the spoiling of their goods, knowing in themselves that they had in heaven a better and an enduring substance." On the voyage of the apostle to Rome, the wheat was cast out into the sea, and the tackling of the ship followed it, to lighten the vessel during the raging storm; and whatever property had been on board would have shared the same fate when life was in jeopardy. What changes do varying circumstances produce in the value we attach to our possessions! All such value is relative. We *keep* the smaller blessing, when it does not come into competition with the greater; but when the former cannot be kept but at the hazard, and far more at the certainty, of losing the latter, it is "a time to cast away."

Verse 7. *A time to rend, and a time to sew.* This does not seem to mean merely that garments, carefully and skillfully sewed, will in time wear, and become fit for nothing but being rent in pieces for other purposes. There appears to be a reference to the practice, so often exemplified in Bible history and alluded to in the other parts of Scripture, of rending the garments, as an expression of strong emotion, especially of grief and vexation of spirit. Thus, Reuben rent his clothes, when he found not Joseph in the pit; and his agonized father, when he saw the bloody vestment of his favorite son. Gen. xxxvii. 29, 34. David rent his clothes, when he mourned for Saul and Jonathan; when he followed the bier of the murdered Abner; and when he received the false intelligence of the slaughter of all his sons by the rebel Absalom, 2 Sam. i. 11. iii. 31. xiii. 31. Eliphaz, and Bildad, and Zophar, at the distant sight of their sadly altered friend, "lifted up their voice, and wept, and rent every one his mantle, and sprinkled dust upon their heads towards heaven." Job ii. 12. The high priest Caiaphas, in real or feigned emotion of indignant grief, rent his clothes, when Jesus owned himself the Son of God, and announced his coming in the clouds of heaven, and sitting on the right hand of power. Matt. xxvi. 65. The instances of the practice, indeed, are frequent;—and, with allusion to it, God, by the prophet Joel, thus calls Israel to repentance, and warns them against the hypocrisy of the outward token, without the inward feeling: "Turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God: for He is gracious and

merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil." Joel ii. 12, 13. There were times, then, of ordinary health and enjoyment, when clothes were made, and worn; and there were times of calamity and grief, when they were rent asunder. Even the garments of festivity, and the robes of royalty, were not exempted from such deforming violence; prosperity, and honor, and power, affording no security from change and suffering.

*A time to keep silence, and a time to speak.* There is a time to keep silence, from disinclination to speak; and a time when speaking would be dangerous or hurtful, and silence is imposed by prudence and necessity. There is a time when affliction strikes us dumb; when the spirit is oppressed, and the opening of the mouth to speak is an unwilling and painful effort: and there is a time of deliverance, when the heart is lightened, and the lips are opened to utter the praises of the Lord, to tell of his kindness, and to join in the cheerful conversation of life. All are sensible that silence is one of the natural expressions of heavy affliction of heart, and that clamorous sorrow is seldom deep. "Assemble yourselves, and let us enter into the defenced cities, and let us be silent there; for the Lord our God hath put us to silence, and given us water of gall to drink, because we have sinned against the Lord." Jer. viii. 14. "It is good for a man that he bare the yoke in his youth. He sitteth alone, and keepeth silence, because he hath borne it upon him." Lam. iii. 27, 28. "I was dumb with silence: I held my peace, even from good; and my sorrow was stirred." Psal. xxxix. 2. Again, there are times of cordial friendship, and unanimity, and safety, when there is room for open confidence, and unreserved communication; and there are times of alienation, division, and danger, when the lips must be sealed, and silence is the only security; when life, and all that a man holds dear, may be jeopardied by a whisper. "Therefore the prudent shall keep silence in that time; for it is an evil time." Amos v. 13. "Trust ye not in a friend, put ye not confidence in a guide; keep the doors of thy mouth from her that lieth in thy bosom. For the son dishonoreth the father, the daughter riseth up against her mother, the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; a man's enemies are the men of his own house." Micah vii. 5, 6.

Verse 8. *A time to love, and a time to hate.*

It ought to have been remarked earlier, as one of the necessary

principles of interpretation of these verses, that Solomon is not to be considered as speaking of what God allowed, or approved, in the conduct of men; of times when all these things might lawfully be done. He speaks merely of times when there is occasion or necessity for them; or of powerful temptation, if the things are wrong in themselves, to the doing of them. There is a time to love; a time, that is, when we experience treatment of which the tendency is to excite gratitude and affection; treatment, of which love is the suitable return: and there is a time to hate;—not when hatred becomes a right and justifiable feeling; for the law of God expressly prohibits our “hating our brother in our heart, or bearing any inward grudge against him,” and commands us to “love,” not our neighbor only, but “our enemy: to bless them that curse us, to do good to them that hate us, and to pray for them that despitefully use us, and persecute us,” Lev. xix. 17, 18. Matt. v. 44;—but a time, when the conduct of others towards us is such as tends to engender hatred; to embitter and alienate our spirits; when even the objects of our love may become the objects of our dislike and aversion. The words, indeed, are general, and may include the feelings of others toward us, as well as ours toward them. “There is a time to love;” when we may be the objects of the favorable regard of others;—“and a time to hate;” when we may be the victims of their unmerited enmity.

*A time of war, and a time of peace:*—a time when, through the “lusts that war in men’s members,” overruled by the providence of God, “wars and fightings” arise; when a nation must defend itself, or perish; when the church of God is persecuted and wasted by an ungodly world; when individuals, however desirous to “live peaceably with all men,” find it impossible;—“they are for peace; but, when they speak, others are for war,” Psal. cxx. 7; and a time, when Jehovah “breaketh the bow, cutteth the spear in sunder, burneth the chariot in the fire, and maketh wars to cease to the ends of the earth;” when smiling peace returns to bless a harassed and exhausted land; when the churches “have rest, and are edified, and, walking in the fear of God, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, are multiplied;” when the desires of the man of quietness are gratified; when God “makes even his enemies to be at peace with him,” and gives him the hearts of those that hated him.

Considering, then, this instability and incessant fluctuation of earthly affairs, which, beginning with the "time to be born," continue to present a scene of perpetual insecurity and change till the "time to die;" and, considering that all is in the hand of God, all under his sovereign control, who has said, "My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure;" Solomon repeats the question, which he had asked repeatedly before, (See chap. ii. 22. i. 3):—

Verse 9. *What profit hath he that worketh, in that wherein he laboureth?*—and confirms the sentence of "vanity," which this question involves, by a renewed appeal to his own extensive experience and observation:—

Verse 10. *I have seen the travail which God hath given to the sons of men, to be exercised in it.*

He had himself seen all that he had just enumerated. He had seen many born, and many, at every period of life, die:—he had seen trees planted by one man, and rooted up by another, or even by the planter himself;—at one time, he had seen life preserved with little difficulty, and, at another, all human means expended in vain;—he had himself broken down what others had built up, and built up what others had broken down;—he had seen festivity and gladness turned suddenly to sackcloth and ashes, and he had seen "weeping endure for a night, and joy come in the morning;"—he had seen covenants ratified and memorials of them erected, and covenants annulled or broken, and their memorials overthrown; trophies of triumph reared, and anon the victors vanquished, and their trophies laid in the dust, and swept into oblivion;—he had seen the delights of friendship and love enjoyed in their full perfection, with a free and bounding spirit, and he had seen even these delights for a time deprived of their relish;—he had seen fortunes made, and fortunes lost; possessions retained for a while with solicitous vigilance, and then relinquished for a good conscience, or cast away for self-preservation;—he had seen times of talkative prosperity, succeeded by seasons of speechless distress; and times of safety, and openness, and confidence, by periods of peril, and secrecy, and apprehension;—he had seen times of kindness and gratitude, and times of unkindness and alienation;—he had seen the bloody wars of his father David, followed by the promised tranquillity of his own reign.

In the midst of this perpetual vicissitude, the minds of men

may often be perplexed and at a stand. It may seem to their eyes a scene of inextricable confusion. But it is not so to the eye of Him who superintends and directs the whole:—

Verse 11. *He hath made every thing beautiful in his time: also he hath set the world in their heart; so that no man can find out the work that God maketh, from the beginning to the end.*

“He hath made every thing beautiful in his” (or its) “season.” This phraseology is evidently to be connected with the first verse of the chapter, and it confirms the interpretation given of it, as having reference to the arrangements of Divine providence. “To every thing there is a season;” and He by whom the “times and seasons” are fixed, orders them all according to his infinite wisdom. All is beautiful harmony;

“All chance, direction which we cannot see.”

Set down a man ignorant of mechanics in the midst of a system of extensive and complicated machinery; and he will gaze about him in vacant wonder, all appearing, to his dizzy and stupified sight, involved and intricate perplexity. But introduce an experienced machinist; and, by the hasty glances of a few moments, he discerns the proportions, and relations, and mutual dependencies of all the parts,—the connexion of the whole with the great moving power, and its perfect adaptation to a proposed end; and his mind is delighted with the admirable display of contrivance and skill. Creatures like us, in contemplating the Divine procedure, are in the situation of the former. The scheme of providence may appear to us a maze of endless confusion, and even, at times, of jarring inconsistency,—one part frequently crossing and counteracting another. But the sole cause of this is our ignorance; the very limited and partial views which we are able to take of it. It is because, as Solomon here expresses it, “we cannot find out the work that God doeth from the beginning to the end.” Had we powers that enabled us to take a full and comprehensive and connected view of the whole,—from the originally proposed design, through all the successive steps of its progressive development, to its final and entire completion,—we should see “every thing beautiful in its season,”—a perfect and delightful harmony, complicated indeed, but, in proportion as it is complicated, the more astonishing, in all the affairs of worlds, and kingdoms, and

families, and individuals; we should be at once satisfied that there is nothing wanting, and nothing useless,—nothing that could have been otherwise than it is, without irregularity and detriment. But to such a view no powers are adequate but those of Deity; and we must, in general, content ourselves with the assurance of faith that “the Lord reigneth,” and that “what we know not now we shall know hereafter.”

A particular consideration, however, is here suggested, as affecting our views of the Divine government, and preventing our observation of it from being even so correct and extensive as it otherwise might be. This is, probably, the idea expressed by the obscure words,—“also he hath set the world in their heart, so that men cannot find out the work that God doeth from the beginning to the end.” I wish to be guided, in the explanation of difficult expressions; by a regard to the connexion in which they stand, and to adopt the view which appears in itself the simplest, and the most consonant to the object of the writer. Following this principle, I would remark,

*In the first place.* From our necessary connection with the world, our hearts, indisposed as they are to look above and beyond it, get so much entangled in its various concerns, so much occupied about the objects themselves which it presents to our desire, and pursuit, and enjoyment, that we are ever prone to overlook the operations of God’s hand,—not to take time to contemplate and examine them with sufficient attention,—to satisfy ourselves with hasty and superficial glances, instead of a close and careful investigation. But this can never do. Of a system so involved and so extended, it is, in the nature of things, impossible to obtain any thing approaching to a comprehensive and accurate understanding, without a large measure of attentive consideration, humbly and devoutly bestowed.

*In the second place.* From our diversified attachments to the persons and things of the world, we are rendered partial in our judgments of the Divine procedure; our minds are biassed and warped; our reason becomes the dupe of our feeling;—so that, what to a neutral spectator would appear the appointment of perfect wisdom, we are hindered from perceiving, or hesitate to acknowledge, to be so, from our happening, in so great a variety of ways, to be interested, and from our intellectual vision being thus shortened and distorted.

It by no means follows that, if such causes of partiality and short-sightedness were removed, we should have a complete comprehension of this subject. No. Our faculties are still limited. They are the faculties of creatures, and incapable, (as those must be, even of Intelligences much more exalted than we are,) of embracing the plans of the omniscient God. But, without doubt, the removal of such causes would render our views inconceivably more just and more extensive than they are.

But it may naturally be asked, How can the blessed God be, with propriety, represented as thus "setting the world in men's hearts?" I reply, by observing; that the world, in a vast variety of its objects of desire and pursuit, not only lawfully may, but necessarily must, interest our hearts, and engage much of our attention. Its legitimate and needful occupations are numerous, and there are not a few, which it is even our indispensable duty to mind. And further, although God has set the world before men, and filled it with desirable objects and sources of gratification, and has so constituted and so situated its inhabitants, as that they must be engaged about it, he is not justly chargeable with the partialities and excesses of men's attachment to it, or with their blinding and perverting influence;—an influence which arises from the absence or the imperfection of a right disposition of heart.

In the two following verses, the secret is repeated, of deriving from temporal things the measure and kind of happiness which, from their nature, they are capable of bestowing:—

Verses 12, 13. *I know that there is no good in them, but for a man to rejoice and to do good in his life: and also, that every man should eat and drink, and enjoy the good of all his labor, it is the gift of God.*"

Solomon, in these words, sums up the uses of the things of the world. He declares *all the good that is in them*. It consists in two particulars; one of which he had mentioned before, and the other is here added to it. The former is, the unsolicitous and cheerful enjoyment of whatever the providence of God is pleased to bestow. This is what he means by a man's "eating and drinking, and enjoying the good of all his labor," without forgetting that "it is the gift of God." It is the same sentiment as in the close of the preceding chapter: "There is nothing better for a man, than that he should eat and drink, and that he should make his soul enjoy

good in his labor. This also I saw, that it was from the hand of God." Of this sentiment I shall not resume the explanation given in last lecture. But in the verses now before us, an addition is made to it; or rather, something more is directly expressed, which ought formerly to have been considered as implied in a man's "making his soul enjoy good in his labor:" for how can he do so without the exercise of *benevolence*? The contracted spirit of selfishness can never be a happy spirit. If a man would truly "rejoice" in the reception and use of the bounties of heaven, he must not shut his heart and hand from God and his fellow-creatures, and expend all upon self: he must "do good in his life."

Cheerfulness of heart in enjoying the fruits of the Divine goodness, is a duty which we owe to the Giver; accompanied, as it ought to be, with the spirit of humble dependence and grateful acknowledgment. When the Israelites were to bring their basket of first-fruits before the Lord, confessing their faith, recognizing and avowing their obligations to the power, and faithfulness, and kindness of the God of their fathers, and performing their act of public homage to his Name, such holy cheerfulness was expressly enjoined upon them:—"Thou shalt rejoice," says Moses, "in every good thing which the Lord thy God hath given unto thee, and unto thy house, thou, and the Levite, and the stranger that is among you." But this rejoicing was to be connected with their devoting a liberal allowance of the Divine bounty for the benefit of others:—"When thou hast made an end of tithing all the tithes of thine increase the third year, which is the year of tithing, and hast given it unto the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, that they may eat within thy gates and be filled; then thou shalt say before the Lord thy God, I have brought away the hallowed things out of my house, and also have given them to the Levite, to the stranger, to the fatherless, and to the widow, according to all thy commandments which thou hast commanded me. I have not transgressed thy commandments, neither have I forgotten them." Deut. xxvi. 11-13. This is one of the proper uses of God's bounty. He gives, to enable us to give; he blesses, that we may be a blessing. And a compliance, from right principles, with the design of the Giver, renders his bounty, to him who possesses it, a source of the purest and most exquisite enjoyment. "It is more blessed," said the Lord Jesus, "to give, than to receive:"—and the saying,



infinitely worthy of Him who set us so wonderful an example of disinterested beneficence, has been found true in the sweet experience of every man who has laid himself out, in the use of his substance, as far as God has prospered him, for the welfare of all within the reach of his influence. This is incomparably more satisfying, both in the act and in the reflection, than any gratification of selfishness, than any indulgence of "the lust of the flesh, or the lust of the eyes, or the pride of life." "Charge them that are rich in this world," therefore, "that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life." 1 Tim. vi. 17-19.

To the present enjoyment and the present use of the gifts of God, we should be excited by the truth illustrated in the preceding part of the chapter,—the absolute and uncontrollable nature of God's purposes and dispensations. They cannot be altered or turned aside by any effort of human power, or of human wisdom. It may be His sovereign intention, soon to order a change in our situation; soon to deprive us of our present sources of enjoyment, and means of usefulness. And what a sad thing will it be, if it shall be found that, during our time of permitted possession, we have not properly improved his goodness, either for ourselves, for others, or for Him! It is this consideration, of the immutability of the Divine purposes, that is urged upon our attention in

Verse 14. *I know that whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever: nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it: and God doeth it, that men should fear before him.*

"It shall be for ever." It must stand. It is beyond the reach of all created power, to prevent or to alter it. "The counsel of the Lord standeth for ever; the thoughts of his heart to all generations." "He doeth according to his will, in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?" "Remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me; declaring the end from the be-

ginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure." Psal. xxxiii. 11. Dan. iv. 35. Isa. xlvi. 9, 10.

"Nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it." These words might be interpreted of the *perfection* of God's purposes; they being, in every respect, so excellent, that to add to them, or to take from them, would be to deteriorate and destroy them. But in the connection in which they stand here, they seem rather intended to express the *impossibility of altering* these purposes; the folly of attempting, or even of imagining, such a thing for a moment. The Supreme Ruler forms his determinations, and arranges his plans, without the counsel of any created being; for "who hath directed the Spirit of the Lord, or, being his counselor, hath taught Him? With whom took he counsel, or who instructed him, and taught him in the path of judgment, and taught him knowledge, and showed to him the way of understanding?" No wisdom, and no power, of any creature, or of all creatures combined, can alter them; no, not a single hair's breadth. Nothing can be added, nothing taken away. "There are many devices in a man's heart; nevertheless, the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand." "There is no wisdom, nor understanding, nor counsel, against the Lord." "Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee; the remainder of wrath wilt thou restrain." "Shall the axe boast itself against him that heweth therewith? or shall the saw magnify itself against him that shaketh it? as if the rod should shake itself against them that lift it up, or as if the staff should lift up itself as if it were no wood!" The last passage is part of the spirited reply to the boasted arrogance of the king of Assyria, who indulged his own proud and insatiable ambition, gloried in past success, and exulted in confident anticipation, having it "in his heart to destroy and cut off nations not a few;" but whose unprincipled passions were, all the while, though "he meant not so, neither did his heart think so," subserving the secret purposes of Jehovah. See Isa. x. 5-15. Prov. xix. 21. xxi. 30. Psal. lxxvi. 10.

The proper influence of the contemplation of God's uncontrollable sovereignty, and of the utter impotence of human power and wisdom to effect any change in His purposes is, to fill the heart with "reverence and godly fear:"—"God doeth it that men may fear before him." All the displays of his absolute supremacy over

his creatures, should have this effect: and the more we accustom ourselves to the contemplation of them, and of the numberless indications of our entire and unceasing dependence, the more will our minds become imbued with the sentiments of religious awe; the more will we “sanctify the Lord God in our hearts, and make Him our fear and our dread;” and adopt, with the deeper humility, the language of sublime adoration: “Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints. Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? for thou only art holy!” Rev. xv; 3, 4.

The 15th verse is very nearly a repetition of the sentiment expressed in the ninth and tenth verses of the first chapter. There he had said, “The thing which hath been, is that which shall be; and that which is done, is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun. Is there any thing whereof it may be said, See, this is new? It hath been already of old time, which was before us.” Here he says, more briefly,

Verse 15. *That which hath been, is now; and that which is to be hath already been; and God requireth that which is past.*

God’s *requiring*, or *recalling*, that which is past, seems simply to mean, his repeating the same scenes, in the administration of his providence, through successive generations. The general plan of his procedure is, in its leading features, and in many even of its minuter details, the same from age to age, so as to present the appearance, described by various similitudes in the opening of the book, of constant sameness in the midst of ceaseless change. As, in surveying the endless variety of the works of nature, we can discern, pervading the whole, the clearest indications of the same great principles of operation, leading us to the adoring acknowledgment of one almighty and all-wise Intelligence; so may we, in the course of the Divine government of our world, discover, amidst all the changes of its eventful history, abundant evidence that the same God continues to reign. Few indeed are the events that occur in any age, which may not find their parallels, or at least, their resemblances, in the annals of preceding times.

The passage suggests the following practical reflections:—

1. In the first place. In the midst of the vicissitudes of this incessantly changing world, let us look forward with hope and joy to that blessed state, where changes, shall for ever cease; where

there shall be the fixed security of perfect, unmingled, and unending felicity. Here, there may be many changes to the better; there, every change would be to the worse,—every alteration a deduction of joy. There, there will be no plucking up and breaking down; no losing and scattering; no weeping and mourning; no hatred and war; no remains of the curse, because no remains of sin. There, shall not only be life, but immortality. There, shall never again come “a time to die.” How delightful, whilst contemplating and experiencing the instability and fickleness of earthly things, to anticipate that everlasting rest;—that paradise, of which the trees are trees of life, that shall never be rooted out by violence, and never yield to decay;—that “city which hath foundations,” and whose walls shall never be shaken;—that land of victory and triumph, and covenanted peace, whose trophies and memorials shall never be overthrown and scattered;—that abode of joy, where there shall never come to its happy residents “a time to weep,” for “God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; where the white robes of purity and gladness shall never be rent asunder by the intrusions of grief, for “sorrow and sighing shall flee away;”—where the silence of distrust and jealousy shall never close the lips, but all shall be “of one heart and of one soul,”—

“Each finds in each a glowing friend,  
And all the God of all adore.”

And when, my Christian brethren, we look forward to this glorious and happy state, can we possibly envy “the men of the world who have their portion in this life?” Do you not rather most sincerely pity them?—pity them, when you behold them seeking their happiness amongst such transient uncertainties?—pity them, when you hear them repeating the universal inquiry, “Who will show us any good?” and, obtaining no satisfactory answer, “still dreaming on, that they shall still succeed, and still” miserably “disappointed?”—the unsubstantial bubbles of earthly joy glittering, it may be, for the moment, in rainbow light, but all successively bursting and vanishing. O that men would be persuaded, to give up the foolish expectation of permanent satisfaction from those things that “perish in the using;”—from this vain and unsettled world,

—“Whose scenes of bliss and wo  
Are shifting every fleeting hour!”

and to seek true happiness, where alone it is to be found, in the favor of an unchanging God, and the hope of an unchanging heaven,—of that “life and incorruption, which are brought to light by the gospel!”

2. In the second place. Whilst we are tenants of this world, it will be well for us to *expect vicissitude*,—to *lay our account with changes*. This will serve to prevent our being unhinged and overwhelmed when such changes come, as those are apt to be by whom they have never been anticipated. Whilst, in the season of adversity, we comfort ourselves with the hope that better days may yet await us; that light may arise to us out of darkness; that though “weeping may endure for a night, joy shall come in the morning;” let us also, in the time of our prosperity, beware of saying, with inconsiderate confidence, “we shall never be moved,”—of trusting to the continuance of the serene calm, or the propitious gale. Let us be always on the look-out for the rising cloud, and keep our vessel in trim for the storm. In prosperity, let us be ready for adversity; in health, for sickness; in laughter, for mourning; in life, for death. If Providence favors us with “a time to get,” let us calculate on the world’s instability, and not be astonished and disconcerted if there should come “a time to lose.” When we are in circumstances to plant and build, let us not forget that we may soon be disinherited of our estate, and obliged to quit our habitation.

3. In the third place. Whatever changes do take place, let us be *satisfied with the providence of God*. I do not mean by this, that we should merely submit from necessity—from a feeling forced upon us, that our case cannot be helped, and cannot be altered, and that, therefore, repining is useless. There is a mighty difference between this state of mind, and that resignation which springs from the pious assurance that all God’s ways are wisdom, and faithfulness, and love: that whilst, in his administration, “to every thing there is a season, and a time for every purpose under the sun,” the times and the seasons are all determined with unerring propriety,—all as they ought to be. This is the satisfaction with God’s providence which I now recommend. It is, “having faith in God;”—even although his procedure should at times be to us inscrutable, yet “against hope believing in hope,” that “all things work together for good to them that love Him, to them

who are the called according to his purpose;”—and, in this confidence, being ever ready to say,

“Thy ways, great God, are little known  
To my weak, erring sight;  
Yet shall my soul, believing, own  
That all thy ways are right.”

And the principles of this confidence we may and ought to apply to the whole of the Divine procedure, whether towards individuals, or families, or nations, or Christian societies, or his church and kingdom in the world. Let our song of faith ever be, “Hallelujah! for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth!”

Thoughtless sinners, allow me to remind you, that there is one of the Divine counsels, respecting which it may, with peculiar emphasis, be affirmed, “It shall be for ever; nothing can be added to it, nor any thing taken from it.” It was his purpose from eternity to save sinners of mankind by the mediation of his Son. And when, in the history of our fallen world, “the fulness of the time was come,” he fulfilled his purpose; when “He who was in the form of God, and thought it not robbery to be equal with God, made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men; and, being found in fashion as a man, humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.” “He was wounded for our trasgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities.” “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.” He finished the work which was given him to do. In that finished work Jehovah is well pleased. His satisfaction in his Son, and in the work of his Son, is infinite and everlasting. Eternity can never diminish it. And his declared determination is immutable as his nature, to receive sinners only in his name, and, for his sake alone, to “be merciful to their unrighteousnesses.” On no other ground than the righteousness and atonement of the Divine Mediator will he admit of their approach into his presence; on no other ground will he listen to their pleadings for mercy; on no other ground will he bless and save them. The foundation which God has laid in Zion for the hopes of sinners, he himself has declared to be “a sure foundation;” and it partakes not of the instability of earthly things. It can never be swept away; and what is built upon it

can never be overthrown. But it is the only foundation. "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid; which is Jesus Christ." You can add nothing to the work which he finished, in the room of sinners, on the cross; and you must take nothing from it. You must rest upon it with humble simplicity of heart, as it is revealed in the gospel. The purpose of God is firm; it cannot be altered. "He that believeth on the Son is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son, shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him." John iii. 18, 36.

## LECTURE VI.

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ECCLESIASTES III. 16-22. IV. 1-3.

“And, moreover, I saw under the sun the place of judgment, (that) wickedness (was) there; and the place of righteousness, (that) iniquity (was) there. 17. I said in mine heart, God shall judge the righteous and the wicked: for (there is) a time there for every purpose, and for every work. 18. I said in mine heart concerning the estate of the sons of men, that God might manifest them, and that they might see that they themselves are beasts. 19. For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath; so that a man hath no pre-eminence above a beast: for all (is) vanity. 20. All go unto one place: all are of the dust, and all return to dust again. 21. Who knoweth the spirit of man that goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast that goeth downward to the earth? 22. Wherefore I perceive that (there is) nothing better, than that a man should rejoice in his own works; for that (is) his portion: for who shall bring him to see what shall be after him?”

“So I returned, and considered all the oppressions that are done under the sun: and behold the tears of (such as were) oppressed, and they had no comforter; and on the side of their oppressors (there was) power; but they had no comforter. 2. Wherefore I praised the dead who are already dead, more than the living who are yet alive. 3. Yea, better (is he) than both they, which hath not yet been, who hath not yet seen the evil work that is done under the sun.”

AMONGST the sources of unhappiness and vexation of spirit, discovered by Solomon in his survey of human life, he mentions, in the beginning of the passage now read, the frequent exaltation of unprincipled men to places of power and authority, their violations of the very laws which they had been appointed to administer and to guard from infringement, and their administration of them with injustice, partiality, and corruption.

Verse 16. *And moreover, I saw under the sun the place of judgment, that wickedness was there, and the place of righteousness, that iniquity was there.*



Different views have been suggested of the connection of this particular passage with the leading object of the book.

*In the first place.* It has been considered as an intended check to the vanity of ambition. The possession of power brings invariably along with it a temptation to its perversion and abuse: a temptation so strong, that many who, previously to their advancement, have appeared to "walk uprightly," "doing justly and loving mercy," have no sooner been raised to a perilous eminence than they have fallen before it, and, to the surprise and disappointment of all, have assumed the character of unrighteous and ruthless oppressors. As the seat of power, then, is not always the seat of true honor, and as it is surrounded with temptations to such conduct as may cover its possessor with infamy and execration, let aspiring ambition be repressed; let the man who is seeking happiness in the attainment of power, pause and bethink himself, and not indulge too sanguine expectations and assurances of finding what he seeks. Let him not deride the warning, and, in self-confident presumption, pronounce it impossible that *he* should ever act a part, which so many, who had quite as good ground for vaunting, have acted before him. No man knows what is in his heart, till his heart has been tried by the eliciting powers of temptation. Besides, even the upright and conscientious ruler may suffer by his official connection with others, and by that generalizing principle of association, which attaches the character of the individual magistrate to the office which he holds, and, from the delinquency of a few, condemns or suspects all, and loads them with indiscriminate obloquy. We know well how unfairly this principle frequently operates; and how difficult it is for a man, even of the purest integrity and the most consummate prudence, to avoid incurring his share, however undeserved, of this official odium, and to preserve his reputation unsullied.

*Secondly.* The abuse of power by unrighteous and wicked judges and governors, is a source of very extensive unhappiness to the people who are placed under its influence. Where there is "respect of persons, and taking of bribes," the poor are oppressed, their substance is spoiled, their dues are kept back by fraud, their wrongs are unredressed, and the evils of poverty are ten-fold accumulated. The unequal administration of law and justice produces between the poor and the rich, and amongst the rich themselves, envies, and

jealousies, and quarrels, and mutual inquietudes and apprehensions. As the impartial distribution of justice is one of the highest blessings that Providence can confer upon a country, its opposite is one of the deepest curses, a source of the most multifarious and aggravated misery. No wonder, then, that in his survey of the condition of mankind, and in forming his estimate of human happiness, the Royal observer should have marked amongst his *memoranda* this fountain of bitter waters, which, rising in "the high places" of the earth, pours its wormwood streams to so melancholy an extent over the peopled valleys beneath.

*Thirdly.* The existence and contemplation of such scenes of iniquity and oppression, were an occasion of much inquietude and vexation to Solomon's own mind; disgusting him with the world; fretting and irritating his spirit; marring his enjoyment; and frustrating his hopes. Even in his own kingdom, where he wished impartial justice to be administered to all his subjects, he had found it, we may presume, impossible, with all his care, to prevent intirely the intrusion of improper characters into places of trust and power. He was disappointed and provoked by complaints from various parts of his dominions, respecting the conduct of those whom he had appointed to be "a terror to evil-doers, and a praise of them that do well;" and, possibly, he sometimes found least satisfaction where he had, and with apparent reason, expected most. This was one of the many cares and crosses of royalty, that rendered its honors and pleasures irksome and distasteful; one of the thorns in his crown by day, and in his pillow of down by night. He knew, besides, that such evils were not confined to his own kingdom, but were exhibited on a much more extensive scale, and in a much more distressing degree, in other countries, with whose past and present history he was acquainted.

—————"His ear was pain'd,  
His heart was sick, with every day's report  
Of wrong and outrage, with which earth was fill'd."

If we compare this verse with the beginning of the next chapter, where the same subject is resumed, we shall be satisfied, that it is this third idea that Solomon had principally in his mind:—"So I returned, and considered all the oppressions that were done under the sun: and behold, the tears of such as were oppressed, and they had no comforter; and on the side of their oppressors

there was power, but they had no comforter. Wherefore I praised the dead who are already dead, more than the living who are yet alive. Yea, better is he than both they, who hath not yet been, who hath not seen the evil work that is done under the sun." These verses contain an amplification of the same sentiment we have just been considering. The language is very strong; yet not stronger than the scene described is sufficient to justify; for nothing can well be conceived more fitted to rouse up all the latent indignation of a generous and compassionate spirit. Solomon's mind was so deeply affected by the miseries consequent on the abuse of authority, especially under arbitrary and despotic governments,—where power takes the place of right; where the oppressed can neither escape nor obtain redress; and where none have the courage to stand forth as the protectors and vindicators of injured innocence, or even to act the part of its private comforters,—that he "praised the dead," because their hearts could no longer be harassed and torn by the view of such scenes, and the bitter feeling of incompetence to mend them; and, to *their* situation, he even preferred that of the unborn child,—of "him who had not yet been;" who had never at all witnessed such wickedness, and such misery resulting from it, nor had his sensibilities crucified by the contemplation of them. Life appeared hateful to him,—death and non-existence preferable. He could not endure a world where such profligacy and such wretchedness prevailed.

The reflection in the seventeenth verse is, in this view of its connection, a very solemn and affecting one:—

Verse 17. *I said in my heart, God shall judge the righteous and the wicked; for there is a time there for every purpose, and for every work.*

Some may be disposed to view it as a *consolation* to the mind of Solomon, to be assured, that "the righteous God, who loveth righteousness" would not be a spectator of such scenes of evil, and *always* keep silence; that he would call to a fearful reckoning the unrighteous and unmerciful oppressor, and avenge the victims of wrong and cruelty. "There is a time *there*," that is, "there is a time" with God in heaven, "for every purpose, and for every work." There is with him "a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;" See Psalm 50:3, a time to mark and register human crimes, and a time to "bring them into judgment." Of such wicked men, "the judgment lingereth not, the damnation slumbereth not."

But, although it is true, that by the final judgments of a holy and just God, every wrong and evil shall be thoroughly accounted for and rectified,—the righteous acquitted, and the wicked condemned; and although this is, in one view, a most gratifying and consolatory truth:—yet I cannot help thinking, that the reflection in verse 17th, was made with a sigh,—a deep and heavy sigh; not, indeed, implying any secret regret that such works were to be brought into judgment, or any wish that they should not; but, in the midst of the satisfactory assurance that they should, an awful and shuddering anticipation of the horrors of the coming retribution. The distress, arising from the contemplation of human wickedness, is a thousand-fold aggravated to the mind of him who connects it with the “judgment to come.” Whilst it becomes us to acquiesce, and that with satisfaction, in the propriety of such wickedness being brought to merited punishment by the wronged and insulted Majesty of Heaven, we cannot but be deeply pained when we think of such cause being given for the infliction of his vengeance, when we see ungodly men “treasuring up unto themselves wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.” The feelings of piety are not incompatible with the feelings of humanity. A holy assent to the execution of the awards of justice in the merited punishment of impenitent transgressors, and a solemn delight in the manifestation of the Divine glory in their destruction, do not at all require that we should feel pleasure in the sufferings themselves of our fellow-creatures, however justly inflicted. On the contrary, the anticipation of them sends home to the heart a pang of indescribable agony. The blessed God himself, whom we should seek in every imitable part of his character to resemble, hath said, “As I live, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but rather that he would turn from his wicked way and live.” Ezek. xxxiii. 11. The general meaning, therefore, of this part of the passage appears to be, that the enjoyment of life was marred and imbittered to Solomon, by the sight and the hearing of the oppression and injustice prevalent in the world; and that, whilst the assurance of a righteous judgment to come imparted to his mind relief and comfort in one view, it added inconceivably, in another, to the weight of distress by which his heart was burdened.

From this verse, and from various other parts of the book, it

is manifest, that Solomon understood and believed for himself, and also, that he taught to others, the doctrines of a future judgment, and a future state of happiness and misery; and that the fancy of some is destitute of foundation, by whom this Book has been interpreted, as if it proceeded throughout upon ignorance of these important truths, as not having been at that time clearly revealed:—a hypothesis, which it seems passing strange that any person who has read the Old Testament Scriptures should ever have seriously espoused; yet which has been made the basis of the most ingenious and learned speculations, relative to the nature of the Mosaic Economy, and the evidence of its Divine authority. The subject may come in our way again. At present, any discussion of it would lead us too much away from the scope and design of the passage under review.

Verses 18-20. *I said in my heart, concerning the estate of the sons of men, that God might manifest them, and that they might see that they themselves are beasts. For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath; so that a man hath no pre-eminence above a beast; for all is vanity. All go to one place: all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again.*

I am disposed to consider these verses as still the language of Solomon himself: for the opinion of some, that they should be interpreted as if spoken by a materialist, or atheistical objector, is incapable, I think, of being maintained in any consistency with the plain construction of the passage. Considering them as the language of Solomon, there appears to be one thing only necessary to be admitted, in order to render their meaning intelligible and clear; namely, that by "the sons of men" we are to understand the general mass of mankind, who live for this world, and have their portion in it. And this is not, surely, an unreasonable postulate. On the principle that the vast majority of mankind live for themselves and for time, and that those who live for God and eternity are the exceptions to the general character, the same designation is, in other places, used in this restricted sense. "O ye *sons of men*, how long will ye turn my glory into shame? how long will ye love vanity, and follow after leasing?" "Unto you, O men, I call, and my voice is to *the sons of men*: O ye simple, understand wisdom; and ye fools, be ye of an understanding heart." And

even in this book: "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, the heart of the *sons of men* is fully set in them to do evil." "Also the heart of the *sons of men* is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live; and after that they go to the dead." Psalm iv. 2. Prov. viii. 4, 5. Ecces. viii. 11. ix. 3. Besides, it will appear still more clearly by and by, that in this passage itself, Solomon affirms the certainty of the immortality of the soul and a future judgment, and that, when he reasons of the *vanity of life*, he has in his view this life considered *by itself*, as alas! it so generally is by thoughtless and ungodly men.

The eighteenth verse, then, may be considered as expressing the wish or desire of Solomon's heart, after he had learned, by much bitter experience, the proper estimate of all the sources of worldly enjoyment, that God would reveal to the sons of men what was their real state and character, as long as they were devoting themselves, in affection and pursuit, to these alone,—as long as they continued "men of the world who have their portion in this life;"—"I said in my heart, concerning the estate of the sons of men, O that God might manifest them," (that is, to themselves, according to what follows,) "and that they might see that they themselves are beasts;"—that whilst they grovel amongst worldly pleasures alone; whilst "earth confines their low desires;" they degrade their immortal nature; they sink themselves to a level with the beasts that perish. For, in as far as mere animal life, and animal gratifications, and the termination of earthly existence, are concerned, where lies the mighty difference? "That which befalleth the sons of men, befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath; so that a man hath no pre-eminence above a beast: for all is vanity. All go unto one place: all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again." Many of the inferior animals have senses capable of imparting much more exquisite sensations of pleasure than men: men are subject to a much greater variety of diseases, and accidents, and modes of suffering, than the generality of brutes: men and beasts breathe together the same air, and are sustained by the same general process of nourishment; and, when they die, they discover the same latent principle of corruption; both alike putrifying and mouldering into dust; the same in *origin*, and the same in *end*. In such views as these, "a man hath no pre-eminence above

a beast," and the life of man, considered simply in relation to this world, is most emphatically vanity,—all vanity. "Lord, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, that I may know how frail I am. Behold, thou hast made my days as a hand-breadth, and mine age is as nothing before thee: verily every man, at his best estate, is altogether vanity. Selah. Surely every man walketh in a vain show; surely they are disquieted in vain: he heapeth up riches and knoweth not who shall gather them." Psalm xxxix. 4-6. "For he seeth that wise men die; likewise the fool and the brutish person perish, and leave their wealth to others. Their inward thought is, that their houses shall continue for ever, and their dwelling-places to all generations: they call their lands after their own names. Nevertheless, man being in honor abideth not; he is like the beasts that perish. This their way is their folly; yet their posterity approve their sayings. Selah. Like sheep they are laid in the grave; death shall feed on them; and the upright shall have dominion over them in the morning; and their beauty shall consume in the grave from their dwelling. Man that is in honor, and understandeth not, is like the beasts that perish." Psalm xlix. 10-14, 20. In these passages from the Psalms, the same general sentiment is expressed as in the verses before us; and in the latter of the two, expressed in very similar terms.

Between the latter end, however, of the man and the brute, there is one essential and most important difference; and it is this difference which manifests, above every other consideration, the extreme and pitiable folly of "the sons of men," when, like the beasts, they live as if the present were their only existence. This difference is expressed in the twenty-first verse:—

Verse 21. *Who knoweth the spirit of man that goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast that goeth downward to the earth?*

For the illustration of this verse, let it be remarked, that the expression "Who knoweth?" does not convey the idea of ignorance or uncertainty with regard to the future destination of the spirit of man in distinction from that of the brute; for, in this same verse, a difference is expressly asserted to subsist between them. Of the one it is affirmed that it "goeth upward," and of the other, that it "goeth downward to the earth." The *death* of man and beast having been mentioned in the preceding verse,—“all are of the

dust, and all turn to dust again,"—makes it sufficiently clear, that it is of this period that Solomon continues to speak; that the phraseology he employs is not intended merely to express the *aspiring nature* of the spirit of man on the one hand, and the *grovelling nature* of the spirit of brutes on the other; but the destiny of each at the close of their present life; the spirit of man *surviving* his mortal frame; whilst that of the brutes, instead of out-living their bodies, is destined to perish with them. The separate existence of the human spirit is still more directly affirmed in a subsequent part of this book:—"Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was; and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it." Chap. xii 7. It would be out of place to enter here into abstruse metaphysical speculations. My own opinion is, (and it seems, amongst other grounds, to have some support from the passage before us, in which the same term is used for the spirit of the beast and for the spirit of man,)—that the immaterial thinking substance in man and brute, is, in its essential properties, the same; that all created existence, spiritual and corporeal, being alike dependent for its continuance on the power which imparted it, it arises intirely from the will of the Creator, and not from any difference between spirit and matter, as if the former were in its own nature indestructible, that the soul, or thinking principle, of man is destined to immortality, whilst that of the brute terminates its distinct and conscious existence when the spark of animal life has been extinguished. To draw with precision the boundaries between the operation of instinct and the exercise of reason, has many a time been attempted, but never with any success; and often, on this subject, (a subject in many respects highly curious and interesting,) have men deluded themselves by words and names; ascribing to instinct in brutes, actions which evidently possess all the distinctive attributes of rationality, and which, without hesitation, they impute to reason in men. Now, as all created existence, of every possible description, must be dependent,—intirely and unceasingly dependent,—on the life-giving God; I can perceive no heresy in the belief, that the same kind of spiritual essence should in brutes be destined to the cessation, and in man to the continuance of existence; any more than in the belief, (which we know to have the direct countenance of revelation, and which is immediately connected with the other,) that the corporeal



part of the man and of the brute, though alike doomed to the dust, is in the former destined to restoration, and in the latter to permanent corruption.

If, in the expression "the spirit of man that goeth upward," the separate existence of the human soul after death be, as I conceive it is, directly affirmed, then the question,—"*Who knoweth* the spirit of man that goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast that goeth downward to the earth?" must not, as I have already noticed, be understood to imply ignorance or uncertainty on this all-important point:—and to suppose no more to be meant, than that the difference between the one and the other in death is not *discernible*, would be egregious trifling; the soul of man being, of course, from its immaterial nature, incapable of being so discerned. Whatever may be the case with other orders of being, and especially with spiritual essences that exist in separation from material bodies;—whatever may be, amongst them, the means of perception and intercourse; we ourselves belong to a species possessing no senses for the discernment of spirits. That we cannot *see* the human spirit quitting the body and going upward to God, is a proposition too trifling for the solemnity of the question; and nothing would be more unphilosophical than to found upon this consideration any sceptical doubt as to its distinct existence, or the existence of spirit in general. It has been justly remarked, that a creature endowed with four only of the senses which we possess, might, with equal reason, question the existence of all that we discover by the fifth.

The question, then, appears to be expressive of a very lamentable fact;—namely, that few, very few, properly think of and consider this essential and important difference between the human and the brute creation; that the great majority of mankind live and act as if they knew nothing of it, or attached to it no degree of credit. A similar style of question is, in other places, used, to express the same idea of rarity, associated with the sentiments of wonder and regret:—"Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies:" Prov. xxxi. 10. "Who has believed our report? and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?" Isa. liii. 1,—and the word which is translated "knoweth" is one which not unfrequently signifies, to *take notice of*, or to *regard*. Solomon affirms, then, the difference between man and brute;

affirms that the spirit of the former at death "ascendeth on high," and that the spirit of the latter, like the body, "goes down to the earth," and perishes with it; and he laments the fact, that by the great majority of the children of men the difference is not attended to, and is intirely without influence. And this deep and melancholy regret accords with the desire which he had just before expressed, that God would show the sons of men how foolish they were, and how they degraded their immortal nature, by living as if the present life were their only existence, and thus equalizing themselves with the beasts of the field. It was, indeed, matter of just lamentation, that such creatures should not lay to heart their lofty destination, and rise superior to the perishing vanities and grovelling pursuits, of a mere earthly and sensual existence.

Verse 22,—*Wherefore I perceive, that there is nothing better, than that a man should rejoice in his own works; for that is his portion: for who shall bring him to see what shall be after him?*—may be understood in two ways.

First. It may be considered as a repetition of the same sentiment which he had more than once expressed before, respecting the grateful reception and cheerful enjoyment of the bounties of Providence. Chap. ii. 24. iii. 12, 13. In this case, the verse must be connected with the vanity of human life, considered by itself, independently of the life to come, as having, in so many respects, no pre-eminence above that of the beasts. In these circumstances, the best thing for a man to do with the possessions of this world is, cheerfully to enjoy them, while his vain and fleeting life endures, as the portion given him by the kindness of heaven; remembering, that when he returns to the dust, his connection with earthly things shall for ever terminate, and that "what shall be after him" will be to him no matter of concern, when he has finally retired from the scene. "Thou prevailest for ever against him, and he passeth; thou changest his countenance and sendest him away. His sons come to honor, and he knoweth it not; and they are brought low, but he perceiveth it not of them." Job xiv. 20, 21.

But, Secondly, the words are capable of a more elevated sense. Solomon had been speaking of the vexation arising to the mind from the wickedness of others, and had been looking forward to a coming judgment, when just and unjust shall give their account.

to God; and to death, as the time when the "spirit of man goeth upward" "to God who gave it." May we not, then, consider him as expressing what ought to be the serious and constant aim of mankind,—what every man should set his heart upon, as his highest attainment;—namely, that, in life and in death, he may have reason to "rejoice in his own works," however much he may be grieved and distressed by those of others; that he may have this as a portion of happiness, which none shall be able to alienate from him,—of inward enjoyment, of which he shall never be robbed. Let him see to it, that, with solemn anticipation of what is before him; with the most conscientious integrity of desire to know and to do God's will; and with the most wakeful and solicitous circumspection in all his ways; he retain the possession of this portion:—and, as to the concern which he feels about the wickedness and oppression of others, the guilt of the oppressor and the misery of the oppressed,—"who shall bring him to see what shall be after him?" The scene shall soon be removed from before his eyes; or rather, he shall be removed from it;—and when he takes his departure out of the world, he shall witness it no more. In this view of the words, they will beautifully correspond with the sentiments and admonitions of the New Testament writers:—"Our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world:"—"Let every man prove his own work; and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. For every man shall bear his own burden." 2 Cor. i. 12. Gal. vi. 4, 5. And the duty implied, and which is thus connected with a man's true interest, will be that which the apostle of the Gentiles so finely expresses, in his vindication of himself before Felix: "Herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men." Acts xxiv. 16. Let a man thus "study to approve himself unto God," as one of his true and faithful servants;—let him not "practise wicked deeds with them that do iniquity," or "have any fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness;"—let him walk with God, in faith and holy obedience;—let him be found amongst the righteous,—the fearers of the Lord:—and let him rest assured that He will, in the end, make a marked and permanent distinction between his subjects and his enemies. "A

Book of Remembrance is written before him, for them who fear him and think upon his name: and they shall be mine, saith the Lord, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him. Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked; between him that serveth God, and him that serveth him not." Mal. iii. 16-18. "The ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous: for the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous; but the way of the ungodly shall perish." Psalm i. 5, 6.

In addition to this solemn practical consideration, let us observe,

1. In the first place, the ground which this passage suggests to us for rejoicing that "the Lord reigneth." We cannot, unless we be dead to all the virtuous sensibilities of the heart, survey the oppression and profligacy of men without deep and painful emotion. Injustice and tyranny are sometimes, in the righteous severity of God, permitted to afflict men on a very extensive scale; many nations being troubled by the arbitrary and ruthless despotism of one man; the example spreading downwards from the sovereign, through all the gradations, to the meanest of petty place-men; and, instead of the "officers being peace and the exactors righteousness," the officers ruling with the haughty rigor of "a little brief authority," and the exactors extorting unrighteous requisitions, and "grinding the faces of the poor:" the hands of the administrators of justice being polluted with bribes; and "when we look for judgment, behold oppression, and for righteousness, behold a cry." But, in the midst of all these perplexing irregularities, let us not fancy that the Sovereign of the universe has forsaken our world, and regards not the doings and the sufferings of the sons of men. "Verily there is a God that judgeth in the earth." All the passions of the human heart, in all their corruption and violence, in all the wildness of their most tumultuary movements, are intirely under his control. He makes "the wrath of man to praise him, and the remainder of wrath he restrains." The unprincipled and blood-thirsty tyrant is made "the rod of his indignation,"—the instrument in his hand of correcting the nations; and, when the ends of his moral administration have been answered, the oppressor himself becomes, in his turn, the subject

of his retributive inflictions. "When the Lord hath performed his whole work upon mount Zion, and on Jerusalem, he punishes the fruit of the stout heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of his high looks." Isa. x. 12. When "the wine-cup of God's fury" has been handed round among all the nations, "the king of Sheshach" must "drink after them." Jer. xxv. 15-26. And if the lawless oppressor should go on in triumph, even to the close of his mad career, still "he shall not go unpunished:"—still there is a judgment to come:—still "in the hand of the Lord there is a cup, and the wine is red; it is full of mixture; and the dregs thereof, all the wicked of the earth shall wring them out and drink them." It is our great comfort to be assured, that "men are in his hand." If any of his own people are left to "suffer for righteousness' sake," "let them not be afraid, but let them glorify God on this behalf." O how often, in the history of the church, have the disciples of Jesus been "oppressed, and drawn before the judgment-seats;" and when they have "beheld the place of judgment, wickedness has been there; and the place of righteousness, iniquity has been there." Should any of you ever be called, for the name's sake of Jesus, to "suffer wrongfully" either by public or private malice, your Master has set before you both your consolation and your duty. "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad; for great is your reward in heaven:"—"But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you, and persecute you: that ye may be the children of your Father who is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." Matt. v. 11, 12, 44, 45. And let all be assured, that, as for all those who by the unrighteous decisions, and acts, and combinations, of arbitrary power and proud malignity, oppose the cause and kingdom of "the just One," their doom is written. "The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against his Anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision. Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his hot

displeasure." "Be wise now, therefore, O ye kings; be instructed, ye judges of the earth: serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Embrace the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him." Psalm ii. 2-5, 10-12.

2. In the second place. Let this passage repress all emotions of envy towards the prosperous in oppression and wickedness. From part of a former chapter, we had occasion to notice how little ground the poor have to envy the large possessions and multiplied pleasures of worldly men,—because of the instability of the enjoyment derived from them, its mingled nature, and its constant tendency to pall upon the appetite, and to produce satiety and disgust. At present, our remark is rather founded on the *character* of the men brought before us in the verses we have been considering. When we anticipate the "great and dreadful day of the Lord," the day of final reckoning and eternal decision, when "God shall judge the righteous and the wicked," little cause truly have we for envying or for wishing to follow such men. Abhorrence of their ways, heartfelt pity for their persons, and an earnest desire to "save their souls from death, and to cover the multitude of their sins," are the feelings with which the sight and the thought of them should penetrate our bosoms. "Envy thou not the oppressor, and choose none of his ways: for the froward is abomination to the Lord; but his secret is with the righteous." "Fret not thyself because of evil-doers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity: for they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb. Trust in the LORD, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed. Delight thyself also in the LORD; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart. Commit thy way unto the LORD; trust also in him, and he shall bring it to pass; and he shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noon-day. Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for him: fret not thyself because of him who prospereth in his way, because of the man who bringeth wicked devices to pass. Cease from anger, and forsake wrath: fret not thyself in any wise to do evil. For evil-doers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the LORD, they shall inherit the earth. For yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be: yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place, and it

shall not be. But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace." Psal. xxxvii. 1-11. The Psalmist Asaph admitted envy of the wicked into his heart, and was tempted by the sight of their prosperity to "deny the God that is above." He was brought to the very verge of atheism. After his recovery, he describes their character, the inward workings of the temptation, and the manner in which the spell was broken and his soul set at liberty, and enabled to resume its confidence and joy in the Lord. "When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me, until I went into the sanctuary of God: then understood I their end. Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castedst them down into destruction. How are they brought into desolation as in a moment! they are utterly consumed with terrors. As a dream when one awaketh; so, O LORD, when thou awakest, thou shalt despise their image. Thus my heart was grieved, and I was pricked in my reins. So foolish was I, and ignorant: I was as a beast before thee. Nevertheless I am continually with thee; Thou hast holden me by my right hand. Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee. My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever." Psalm lxxiii. 16-26.

Lastly. Let "the man of the earth" consider the folly with which he is chargeable, in forgetting his immortality, and living as if he had no connection with any world but this, and no prospect of any existence beyond his residence in it. O remember, that "your days on earth are as a shadow, and that there is no abiding;" that when you die, you are not to sink into annihilation; your spirit is not, like that of the brutes, to "go downward to the earth," but must "go upward,"—upward to God,—"to God, who gave it." Live no longer, then, like the beasts that perish. Rise to a sense of your dignity as immortal beings. Take into your estimate of happiness the whole extent of your existence. The chief good of a rational and immortal creature must be something worthy of his rational nature, and in duration commensurate with eternity. Let your inquiry be, how an eternity of existence may be to you an eternity of enjoyment? To answer this inquiry is the grand design of revelation. "The way of salvation" is there

set before you;—the way to eternal life;—the path to “glory, and honor, and immortality.” Jesus is revealed as the Son of God, the Divine Redeemer, the Hope of sinners. Believe in HIM; live to HIM. Thus shall you possess true honor, and true felicity. When your mortal frame shall descend to the dust, your spirit, commended into the hands of God your Saviour, shall rise to the perfection of purity and bliss. “Absent from the body, you shall be present with the Lord;” and “your flesh also,” though doomed to temporary corruption, “shall rest in hope.” Man and beast go to one place; returning to the common womb of Earth. But the former are not lost. The common parent shall travail again. “The Earth shall cast forth her dead.” They that “dwell in the dust,” who have lived and died to the Lord, “shall awake and sing:”—“Lo this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the Lord; we have waited for him; we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation.” “This corruptible shall then put on incorruption, and this mortal immortality; and the saying that is written shall be brought to pass, Death is swallowed up in victory!” Again, then, I say, live no longer like the beasts that perish. Anticipate what is before you, and thankfully avail yourselves of the mercy of the gospel. “Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.” “This is life eternal, to know the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent.”



## LECTURE VII.

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### ECCLESIASTES IV. 4-16.

“Again, I considered all travail, and every right work, that for this a man is envied of his neighbor. This (is) also vanity and vexation of spirit. 5. The fool foldeth his hands together, and eateth his own flesh. 6. Better (is) a handful (with) quietness, than both the hands full (with) travail and vexation of spirit. 7. Then I returned, and I saw vanity under the sun. 8. There is one (alone,) and (there is) not a second; yea, he hath neither child nor brother: yet (is there) no end of all his labor; neither is his eye satisfied with riches; neither (saith he) For whom do I labor, and bereave my soul of good? This (is) also vanity, yea, it (is) a sore travail. 9. Two (are) better than one; because they have a good reward for their labor. 10. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him (that is) alone when he falleth; for (he hath) not another to help him up. 11. Again, if two lie together, then they have heat: but how can one be warm (alone)? 12. And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a three-fold cord is not quickly broken. 13. Better (is) a poor and a wise child than an old and foolish king, who will no more be admonished. 14. For out of prison he cometh to reign; whereas also (he that is) born in his kingdom becometh poor. 15. I considered all the living which walk under the sun, with the second child that shall stand up in his stead. 16. (There is) no end of all the people, (even) of all that have been before them: they also that come after shall not rejoice in him. Surely this also (is) vanity and vexation of spirit.”

HAVING recorded what, in his survey of the world, he had witnessed, of the odious character of the *oppressors* of mankind, the miseries endured by the poor and unbefriended victims of their prostituted power, and the distress of every generous spirit in being a spectator of such scenes; Solomon next proceeds to notice those sources of disquietude which are peculiar to *benefactors*. For even they, in the midst of their disinterested labors for the good of others, and of the general esteem of society thence arising, are not without their springs of bitterness.

Verse 4. *Again, I considered all travail, and every right work; that for this a man is envied of his neighbor. This is also vanity, and vexation of spirit.*

It is true, that a good man, who lays himself out for the benefit of others, expending his labor, and sacrificing his personal interest, to advance the happiness of mankind, will meet with general affection and regard; so that for such a character, on his own account and on society's, from personal esteem and public spirit, some might be found willing even to risk and to forfeit life itself:—"Scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die." Rom. v. 7. But let a man in eminent station act ever so constantly from the purest principles of generosity or of patriotism; he must not expect to escape the envy of malignant, or the jealousy of rival, spirits; the latter seeking to supplant him and to rise upon his ruins,—the former, like Milton's Satan,

"Eying him askance with jealous leer malign,"

repining at his very excellencies, sickening at the sound of his praises, and gnawing their lips at his rising fame. Many, many a time, has Envy, by its open hostility, and still more successfully by its secret arts of detraction and calumny, by whispered insinuations and hypocritical regrets, by misrepresentation of motives and exaggeration of failures, blasted the reputation, and ruined the prosperity, of the most excellent and justly eminent characters. It is a principle of action in our fallen nature, proverbially subtle, and proverbially indefatigable in its devices and efforts to accomplish the degradation of its unfortunate victim; and it is also, alas! proverbially successful. "Wrath is cruel, and anger is outrageous; but who is able to stand before envy?" Wrath and anger, although unmerciful and violent, yet are usually open and transient. But Envy "mines unseen;" pursues, with unwearied activity, its underground machinations, and unites so much artfulness with so much perseverance, that—"who is able to stand before it?" The dreadful effects of this malignant passion are variously exemplified in the records of sacred history. It was envy that murdered "righteous Abel," and stained the ground with the first effusion of human blood. It was envy that extinguished the feelings of natural affection in the breasts of Joseph's brethren, when they

cast their brother into the pit, and "sat down to eat bread;" when they sold him for twenty silverlings, and, silencing the inward remonstrances of filial duty, with perfidious and relentless barbarity, "pierced with many sorrows" the heart of their aged and venerable parent, by presenting to his distracted sight the bloody vestment of his favorite boy. It was envy that instigated and animated the persecution of Saul against the unoffending son of Jesse, whose stone and sling had saved "the armies of the living God," and whom the virgins of Israel had placed above the monarch in their songs of triumph over the vanquished host of the Philistines. It was envy, in the bosoms of the priests and rulers of the Jews, that "denied the prince of life," and clamored for the crucifixion of Him who was "holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners." Independently of the success of the devices of envy, whether its end is gained or not to the extent of its malignant wishes, it is in a high degree painful to the spirit of a good man to be the object of so detestable a passion, or the means of its excitement in the bosoms of others. If he suspects its existence and operation, he must be subject to incessant apprehension; and if not, his fall may come upon him by surprise,—ere he is aware that the mine has been formed, and the train laid, it may explode at once, to his inevitable and irretrievable ruin. Thus, while envy is "the rottenness of the bones" to the man who indulges it in his own breast, it is the most dangerous enemy to which the object of it can be exposed. It has been finely said of charity, that it is "doubly blessed;—it blesses him that gives, and him that takes." Envy is doubly cursed;—the subject and the object of it it curses alike. Like the star called Wormwood, that imbittered all the rivers and fountains of water on which it fell, it poisons and bereaves of their sweetness all the sources and streams of human enjoyment.

Amongst the objects of envy are to be included, not only such benevolent and patriotic characters as have been mentioned, but all who are favored with any unusual measure of temporal prosperity; who labor with diligence, and are crowned with success; even although nothing can with truth be laid to their charge inconsistent with the most unsullied integrity. Envy is little mindful of truth. Its malignant breath can sully the fairest fame. It hates its rival's success, and it grudges the very reputation for

purity of principle with which that success is accompanied. "I considered *all travail*, and *every right work*, that for this a man is envied of his neighbor."

Perceiving this to be the case; observing the jealousy which attends all descriptions of eminence; the envy consequent on successful exertions, and on rising prosperity and honor; the spirit of detraction that is drawn forth even by the toils and sacrifices of disinterested benevolence; and the unworthy recompense of a life devoted to the public good; some are tempted, on these and similar grounds, to excuse and to indulge their natural propensity to indolence and inactivity. But this is foolish. All indolence, on whatever principles men may apologize for it, is folly:—

Verse 5. *The fool foldeth his hands together and catcheth his own flesh.*

This may be understood, as I have hinted in introducing the verse, as the picture of a sluggard, reducing himself to starvation and pining wretchedness, eating the very flesh off his bones rather than put his hand to labour. "Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little *foldings of the hands* to sleep! So shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth, and thy want as an armed man." Prov. vi. 10, 11. "The soul of the sluggard desireth, and hath nothing." "The sluggard will not plow by reason of the cold; therefore shall he beg in harvest and have nothing." Let no one, then, from the observation that "for all travail and every right work a man is envied of his neighbor," draw the hasty and unwise inference, that it is better to do nothing: for, he who "folds his hands together," and by his idleness reduces himself to "eating his own flesh," acts the part of a fool;—shows himself incapable of all right discrimination.

If the sixth verse be connected with this,—

Verse 6. *Better is a handful with quietness, than both the hands full with travail and vexation of spirit,*—

it may be interpreted as the language of the sluggard, affecting wisdom, and vindicating his conduct by a maxim of prudential consideration:—for of the sluggard it is elsewhere said, he is "wiser in his own conceit, than seven men that can render a reason." He may here be understood to say:—Let others, like fools, vainly toil, and harass, and vex themselves, if they will:—my maxim is, and wiser men than I have held it, "Better is a

handful with quietness, than both the hands full with travail and vexation of spirit." The sentiment, properly understood and applied, is just. It occurs more than once in the Book of Proverbs:—"Better is a little with the fear of the Lord, than great treasure and trouble therewith. Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith." "Better is a dry morsel and quietness therewith, than a house full of sacrifices with strife." Prov. xv. 16, 17. xvii. 1. But it is a sentiment far from being applicable to the indolent and useless fool, who "folds his hands together, and eats his own flesh;" although such a fool may gravely cloak his folly under the misinterpreted sayings of wisdom. It relates to the man of moderate and chastened desires; the man of "godliness with contentment:" who, instead of "hasting to be rich," recollects, amidst his diligence in business, that "a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth;" who prefers peace and quietness, and domestic comfort, even with comparatively slender means, to superfluous exuberance, with bustle and strife.

If, on the other hand, this sixth verse be connected with what follows, it will stand as the sentiment of Solomon himself, the sentiment of practical wisdom, opposed to the absurd conduct and self-inflicted misery of the friendless and solitary miser, who, with "both the hands full," has nothing but "travail and vexation of spirit."

But there is still another interpretation which may be given to the fifth verse, which I mention rather for consideration than with confidence. May it not be designed to express the wretchedness of the man who *indulges envy*? Observe the connection in which it stands. In the fourth verse, we have the evil to which even the man of benevolence and rectitude may be exposed from his becoming the *object* of envy. May not the fifth verse, then, be understood of the misery arising from this malignant passion to him who is the *subject* of it? "The fool,"—the envious fool—"foldeth his hands together, and eateth his own flesh." The malignant temper preys upon him, and engrosses his thoughts:—sleeping and waking, it haunts him:—he is disinclined from labor:—he "folds his hands together" in the attitude of fretful and malignant musing; racking his invention for means to accomplish the odious purposes of his heart. But he is inwardly wretched:—

he “eats his own flesh” with vexation of spirit:—he pines and wastes away in sullen jealousy. He may succeed in effecting the downfall and ruin of his rival; but he is himself a miserable fool.

Verses 7, 8. *Then I returned, and I saw vanity under the sun. There is one alone and there is not a second; yea, he hath neither child nor brother; yet is there no end of all his labor; neither is his eye satisfied with riches; neither saith he, For whom do I labor and bereave my soul of good? This is also vanity; yea, it is a sore travail.*

This is a strikingly graphical, though brief description, of the avaricious keenness and carefulness of a toiling, griping, hoarding, insulated miser. “There is one alone, and there is not a second”—no *heir apparent*, no connection, either by blood or by particular friendship, to succeed him; “neither child nor brother,” (that is, no near relative,) to inherit his accumulated treasures;—“yet is there no end of all his labor;” he toils with unintermitting solicitude, “rising early and sitting late,” nor ever can bear the thought of retiring from active business, as long as he can add a single penny by it to his store:—“neither is his eye satisfied with riches;” constantly either contemplating his acquisitions, or on the eager look-out for more; never saying, It is enough; a greedy receiver, but a reluctant and parsimonious giver. He takes no enjoyment of his wealth; but starves in the midst of abundance; not only “laboring,” but “bereaving his soul of good;” living with the most pitiful penuriousness; grudging himself every morsel of meat, every rag of clothing, every common comfort of life. And the habit grows upon him; he becomes increasingly avaricious as he advances in wealth and in years; no unselfish consideration can move him, nor any claim of charity touch his soul; his hollow eye contracts the timid glance of lurking suspicion; his whole countenance the marked and settled expression of anxiety and unfeeling narrowness; and his wasted frame, his antique and thread-bare clothing, and every part of his appearance, betrays the confirmed and unimpressible MISER. Those who first assigned this designation to the character were happy in their selection. *Miser* signifies *wretched*; and surely there is not on earth a more pitiable object than the man here described; the unhappy victim of one of the strangest aberrations of understanding; one of the most unaccountable contradictions to all right feeling, and to every

ordinary principle of human nature, that is to be found amongst the intellectual and moral varieties of the species.

Solomon's description shows us that these varieties have, in every age, been much the same. Many a time has it since been realized, with wonderful accuracy. The character may be traced to various origins. In some instances, it has arisen from a fatal error in education,—from early and ill-judged lessons of excessive parsimony impressed upon the youthful mind, gradually forming in the heart an undue "love of money;" a habitual desire of getting, and dread of losing, or of being necessitated to give away:—in other cases, from the apprehension and presentiment of a diseased mind,—a hypochondriacal foreboding of approaching poverty—of dying in want; an evil, to which every penny that is lost or parted with is, of course, conceived by the disordered imagination to contribute:—and in others still, from the weak-minded vanity of being noticed and spoken of, during life, and after death, as the possessor of so much wealth, or as the man that had left it behind him. From whatever source it may have arisen, and whatever may have promoted its growth, it is well denominated "vanity and a *sore travail*." The poor rich fool lives in misery, and dies unlamented. Those, whosoever they may be, to whom he bequeaths his wealth, give him little thanks for it. He has only given it when he could hold it no longer. He has not parted with it; he has been obliged to leave it; and not one farthing of it, they know well, should they ever have touched, could he by any possibility have retained possession. They are glad the *useless old fellow* is out of the way; they lay him in the dust without a sigh; and with secret self-gratulation, take possession of his hoards.

The character and dreary friendlessness of the wretched miser probably suggested to Solomon's mind the subject of the following verses,—the benefits of society and friendship:—

Verses 9-12. *Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow; but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up. Again, if two lie together then they have heat: but how can one be warm alone? And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a three-fold cord is not quickly broken.*

The figures which are employed in these verses are in themselves so plain as to require no explanation. They are all intended to illustrate the same general sentiment,—the advantages of union and co-operation; and the sentiment may be applied to every description of faithful and well-principled alliance,—to marriage, to friendship, to Christian communion. Many and valuable are the benefits of such association amidst the changes of this uncertain world; some common to all the varieties of union, and some peculiar to each. It affords to the parties mutual counsel and direction, especially in seasons of perplexity and embarrassment; mutual sympathy, consolation, and care, in the hour of calamity and distress; mutual encouragement in anxiety and depression; mutual aid, by the joint application of bodily or mental energy to difficult and laborious tasks; mutual relief amidst the fluctuations of worldly circumstances, the abundance of the one reciprocally supplying the deficiencies of the other; mutual defence and vindication, when the character of either is injuriously attacked and defamed; and (what may be considered as particularly appropriate to the phraseology of the tenth verse) mutual reproof and affectionate expostulation when either has, through the power of temptation, fallen into sin:—"Woe to him that is alone when he" so "falleth, and hath not another to help him up!" no one to care for his soul, and to restore him to the paths of righteousness.

In all cases, union,—affectionate, principled, faithful union,—the connection and intercourse of kindred souls,—must be eminently productive of reciprocal satisfaction and delight. As "when two lie together they have heat;" so two hearts, in friendly contact, warm each other with the glow of mutual love, at once imparting and receiving sensations of the purest pleasure. Nor is the enjoyment, exquisite though it be, arising from the interchange of congenial affections, the whole of the benefit. Such union gives stability and strength:—"if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a three-fold cord is not quickly broken." The fable of the bundle of rods, by which the dying father taught his sons the benefit of union, has been familiar to all of you from your childhood. The rods, when bound together, resisted all their efforts to break them; but when untied, and taken one by one, they were successively snapped with ease. The "three-fold cord" conveys the same lesson. Twined together, the fila-



ments are strong; untwined and separate, they are slender and feeble. Thus it is, that a union of interests, counsels, and efforts, gives vigor and animation, both in spiritual connections, and in the relations of nature and of business.

It was on the principle here stated, "two are better than one," that the marriage relation was, in part at least, originally founded. "The Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a help meet for him." It is on the same principle that men collect together in society, and that all their various combinations and partnerships are formed, for the successful prosecution of particular ends. Righteous and wicked alike recognize and act upon this principle; the former for the accomplishment of good, the latter for the perpetration of evil. It is on the same principle too, beloved brethren in the Lord, that all the institutions of social religion have their vindication and their use. He who "knoweth what is in man" was well aware that it was not good for his people's spiritual interests, that they should be alone; each individual pursuing his course by himself. He commanded their association in churches, in the bond of spiritual love; and appointed ordinances of public worship, and laws of social intercourse: that, in the due observance of these, they might strengthen one another's hands, and encourage one another's hearts, and mutually "provoke to love and to good works."

The concluding verses of the chapter contain some of the mortifications of royalty, of which Solomon might well speak with freedom, being himself the wearer of a crown.

Royalty, alas! is not always associated with wisdom: and where wisdom is wanting, advancing age, very generally, adds to imbecility and folly, self-will, obstinacy, and headstrong contempt of counsel:—

Verse 13. *Better is a poor and a wise child, than an old and foolish king, who will no more be admonished.*

"Better"—that is, happier, and more really useful. The influence of the "wise child" is limited indeed; but as far as it reaches, in the humble sphere of life in which his lot is cast, it is essentially good: but the "foolish king" has extensive power; and when power is in league with folly, the boundaries of its extent are only the limits of its mischief. Nothing, indeed, can be conceived more

deplorable, than imbecility united with obstinacy, and both in combination with authority and force.

Further: the "wise child," although poor, is, by the possession of wisdom, in the way to reputation, preferment, and honor; whereas the "foolish king," in the midst of riches and external glory, is, by his folly, in the way to poverty, degradation, and disgrace. The wisdom of the one may advance him to a sceptre; the folly of the other, as recorded experience testifies, may wrest the sceptre from his hand.

This is probably the meaning of the fourteenth verse, in which Solomon assigns the reason of his preference:—

Verse 14. *For out of prison he cometh to reign; whereas also he that is born in his kingdom becometh poor.*"

The "poor and wise child" rises from the state of meanness and of oppression to a throne; whilst the "old and foolish king," though "born in his kingdom, becometh poor." The wisdom of the one, when known and appreciated, rescues him from oppression; draws him forth from obscurity; and promotes him to influence, and honor, and command. The folly of the other, felt in its mischievous and galling effects, shakes the stability of his hereditary throne. Though he has obtained the kingdom by inheritance, and, through the sufferance of a burdened, and dishonored, and harassed people, has long continued to wear the crown in this right, from regard, it may be, to former princes of the same dynasty; yet by his mal-administration he exhausts his treasures, destroys the national credit, brings his government to bankruptcy, and himself either to a necessary though constrained abdication, or to a forcible deposition from his dignity, by his own subjects, or by the interference of a foreign power. There is, possibly, an allusion in the passage, (and if there be, it can be no more than an allusion, for in some respects there is no parallelism,) to the oppression and advancement of *Joseph*: on which supposition, the verse will contain a general sentiment under a reference to a particular case.

Another view of this verse has suggested itself to my mind, which it may be worth while just to mention, although the explanation already given seems the preferable one. "Out of prison he cometh to reign" may be interpreted, not of the child, but of the king. A monarch of the character described is a prisoner in

his palace. He knows, and cannot but feel, his unpopularity: and when he comes forth amongst his subjects in the administration of his government, he comes forth, like a prisoner from confinement, to which he is immediately to be remanded again: feeling none of the confidence of freedom; none of the fearless security and unreserved openness of him who reigns in the hearts of a grateful and happy people; but full of apprehensions, and jealousies, and alarms; suspicious of all about him, and even of the very guards that have sworn fidelity to his royal person:—a state of mind by which the latter days of some “old and foolish kings” have been most fearfully distracted.

“Whereas also, he that is born in his kingdom becometh poor,” will then refer to the tendency of his impolitic and infatuated measures, to ruin trade and commerce, and reduce his hapless subjects to poverty and wretchedness.

The former view, however, presents a natural *contrast* between the two descriptions of character mentioned in the thirteenth verse, in regard to their respective tendencies; of the one to elevation and honor, of the other to depression and disgrace: and it is therefore, in all probability, the true meaning.

In the two last verses of the chapter there is a good deal of obscurity:—

Verses 15, 16. *I considered all the living who walk under the sun, with the second child that shall rise up in his stead. There is no end of all the people, even of all that have been before them: they also that come after shall not rejoice in him. Surely this also is vanity, and vexation of spirit.*

The general idea intended to be conveyed by these verses seems to be, the *inconstancy and fickleness of popular attachment to favorite rulers*, and the mortification thence arising to the possessors of royal honor. “I considered all the living that walk under the sun, with the *second child* that shall rise up in his stead;”—that is, with the child *his second*, or successor. Such is the meaning of the same word in the eighth verse, where the solitary miser is represented as having *no second*,—no successor to his wealth. So here, the child that is second to the reigning prince is the child that is to succeed him in the government,—the *heir apparent to the throne*. Solomon “considered,” not only how rapidly, how immediately, upon the demise of the present occupant of the

throne, the attachment shown to him was transferred to his successor; how quickly servility to the latter jostled out the memory of the former; but he further observed, that even in the old king's lifetime, when symptoms discovered themselves of his end drawing near, the heir was sedulously courted, though with greater and less degrees of delicacy; interest was made with him, and insinuating adulation addressed to him; he became the object of attention and solicitation; whilst the aged sire, whose favor, having lost its prospective influence, had declined in value, was neglected, and sunk into contempt. He marked the prevailing propensity of men, whether from motives of self-interest, or from the mere love of change, to disregard the setting, and to worship the rising sun.

This fickleness, having its source in the principles of man's fallen nature, had existed in preceding ages, existed in Solomon's own days, and was more than likely to continue in after times:—

Verse 16. "There is no end of all the people, even of all that have been before them; they also that come after shall not rejoice in him. Surely this also is vanity and vexation of spirit."

"*No end*" seems here to mean, *no fixed point* in which the people can rest with any settled satisfaction; they have no stability; they never reach an object in which their gratification is permanent,—a goal of their capricious and fluctuating desires. They are ever fickle, ever fond of novelty and change. "There is no end to all the people." They have all, in this respect, the same generic character; in having no terminating point and settled resting place to their views and wishes. So it was with "all the people" forming the generation of Solomon's contemporaries; so it had been with "all who were before them;" and "they also who were to come after" would discover the same tendency.

Should it be doubted, whether the word translated *end* be susceptible of the signification thus assigned to it, then the meaning must be:—"There is no end to all the people;" new generations have been continually following each other, and the same course of succession is now going on, and shall continue in after ages; and each generation in its turn brings with it its own peculiarities, its own likings and dislikings,—new men, influenced by new circumstances, seeking after new things, and attaching themselves to new favorites, and new systems of administration.

Such *had been* the case. The inconstancy complained of, Solo-

mon knew, from ancient history, to have characterized former generations. He had even seen it affectingly exemplified within the same generation, in the life-time of his own father. It had been strikingly displayed, in that "cloudy and dark day" of David's reign, when "the hearts of the men of Israel were after Absalom," alienated from the father, who had commenced his reign under such decided indications of popular attachment, by the insinuating flatteries and promises of his unnatural son. And still more recently, in the extreme age of "the man after God's own heart," at a time when the reverence of filial affection ought to have restrained the stirrings and aspirations of an ambitious spirit, Adonijah had "exalted himself, and said, I will be king;" had "prepared him chariots and horsemen, and fifty men to run before him;" and had formed a faction in support of his claims; thus ungratefully requiting the partial fondness of a father, by disturbing and imbittering his old age, and drawing away from him the affections of his people ere his time of departure was come. How afflicting this to the *father!* And how mortifying to the *monarch*, to witness the readiness of his people to attach themselves to another, even while he himself, who had "gone in and out before them" during the best of his days, was yet alive! And even in the case of Solomon himself, the necessity for whose immediate proclamation arose from the rebellion of Adonijah, such feelings of secret mortification could not fail to mingle with the sentiments of parental and regal satisfaction. Although Solomon was the dear and promising son of a beloved mother, and his successor in the throne by previous Divine intimation and his own delighted approval, yet the public rejoicings at his coronation, when "the people came up after him, piping with pipes, and exulting with great joy, and shouting, 'God save king Solomon!' so that the city rang again, and the earth rent with the sound of them," 1 Kings i. 39, 40, 45, however gratifying to the ear both of the loving father and the patriot king, could not but draw the sigh from his heart, and the inward exclamation, "Vanity of vanities!"—when in the plaudits of a rejoicing people he heard the name of another so easily substituted for his own. And the scene must have been affecting to the son, as well as to the father; royal anticipations mingling with tender filial regrets. It read him a salutary lesson of humility in the very outset of his reign, when

surrounded with so much that was fitted to intoxicate and bewilder a youthful mind.

It was now a mortifying reflection to Solomon, that the same fickleness was still an attribute of the popular character; and that what had been seen by him, in the case of his father, would soon be repeated in his own and in his successor's. The heir apparent would be courted, as the future source of coveted honors: and he, too, on his rising to the throne, would have his day, and in his turn be neglected, and give place to another:—"They also that come after him shall not rejoice in him." This is surely a galling and humbling consideration to royalty. Let not the young prince exult in the court that is paid to him. Let him consider how much of it is the product of selfishness; and be assured that his own day of mortification is coming, and may not be distant. Let the rising sun, in the morning of his glory, and amidst his crowd of worshippers, remember that he must set; and that even ere he hath gone down, another luminary, emerging from the opposite horizon, will throw his evening splendors into shade, and draw away from him the admiring eyes and selfish acclamations of those flatterers, who hailed his own ascent, and waited with their adulations on his course! This thought is enough, of itself, to repress the swellings of vain-glory, and to heave with a sigh the bosom that is invested with the purple:—"Surely, this also is vanity, and vexation of spirit!"

From this passage let us,

1. In the first place, learn, to *let nothing discourage us in well-doing.*

Let not the consideration in the fourth verse, that "for every right work a man is envied of his neighbor," restrain us from the active and fearless pursuit of what is glorifying to God, or profitable to men. On the contrary, "whatsoever our hand findeth to do," for either of these ends, or for the comfort and reputation and usefulness of ourselves and families, let us "do it with our might." If we should be the objects of envy, it is better that we be envied for eminence in good deeds, than for success and prosperity in evil. This is true, indeed, of all descriptions of suffering, as well as of what arises from envy. "It is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well-doing, than for evil-doing." 1 Pet. iii. 17. It is a man's honor to be envied on such grounds.

And if this malignant spirit should gratify itself in the invention and propagation of reproach and calumny, we shall have the inward satisfaction of knowing its falsehood; "having a good conscience,"—a treasure on such occasions, of inestimable value, which "cannot be gotten for gold, neither shall silver be weighed for the price of it;" the possession of which will support the victim of envy, and be "his rejoicing," even if that unholy passion should be successful in its unworthy machinations to "cast him down from his excellency." We cannot and ought not to be indifferent about the opinion of our fellow-men, and the reputation we hold amongst them. Religious principle concurs with the feelings of nature, in inculcating the propriety of preventing and disarming envy, and counteracting, by all honorable means, its mischievous devices. Yet let us, my dear brethren, be under the habitual influence of a higher principle than regard to the judgment of men. Let the fear of God rule in our hearts;—a sacred awe of his supremacy; a conscience "quick as the apple of an eye" to the dictates of his will; a constant reference of all things to his glory as our end; and, in dependence on his faithfulness, a believing anticipation of the fulfilment of his "exceeding great and precious promises." "Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him, and he will bring it to pass: and he shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noon-day." "Let us not be weary in well-doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not." Having rightly improved our talents in our Master's employ, under the influence of faith and love, he will say to us at last—"Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." Psalm xxxvii. 5, 6. Gal. vi. 9. Matt. xxv. 21.

2. Secondly; "Take heed, and beware of covetousness." There are few passions more progressive in their nature than avarice, when a man has once fairly yielded to it so far as to give it a place in his bosom as a principle of conduct. Beware of it, then, in its earliest and most specious commencements. Give no ear to its penurious and niggardly suggestions. It is mean, sordid, and despicable in itself, and being directly opposed, in principle and practice, to the ends for which wealth, according to the maxims of the Bible, ought to be sought, it is contrary to the express will

of God, the giver of all that is enjoyed by men. The duty of a Christian is, to "labor, working with his hands the thing that is good, *that he may have to give to him that needeth:*" to "*honor the Lord* with his substance, and with the first-fruits of all his increase." O beware, (for the heart is deceitful above all things,)—beware of cloaking the odious principle against which I have now, in the words of the Saviour himself, been admonishing you, under the sage and plausible maxims of discretion, and economy, and providence. The maxims may be just; but the use made of them is an infamous perversion. Nothing, however, is more common, than to cloak what is evil under the specious semblance of what is good. How often do we see men, and men, too, professing the benevolent religion of Him who, "though he was rich, for our sakes became poor," anxiously scraping together with one hand, and holding fast with the other, as if in jealous dread of a single atom escaping; and palliating and excusing their conduct by common-place observations, delivered with the air of deep and oracular wisdom, as to the necessity and duty of carefulness, and the sin and danger of extravagance. In condemning one extreme, they fancy they have justified its opposite. Some men are foolishly profuse; therefore they must be hard and niggardly:—some men give away what is not their own; therefore they must take care how they part with what *is*:—they cannot do every thing; and this is their regular apology for doing nothing. Have not you met with such characters?—and have not you despised them? Beware, then, of ever becoming their imitators. "Look not, every man, on his own things, but every man also on the things of others: let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." I repeat His words: "Take heed, and beware of covetousness." Ye parents, beware, in the education of your children, of impressing on their minds the wretched maxims of penurious hoarding, and grudging parsimony. Prudence and economy, indeed, they ought to be taught, both by precept and example: but oh! let it be a generous prudence, and not a selfish economy. Of extravagance there are two descriptions; the extravagance of selfishness, and the extravagance of charity. The one grudges no expenditure of which the end is self-gratification; the other is the indiscreet overflowing of a generous heart, under the impulse of feeling rather than of judgment. The former requires to be steadily restrained.



The latter must be managed with much caution and gentleness, lest, in our attempts to repress the practice, we crush the principle; lest in reprimanding and punishing profusion, we destroy charity. Do not frown on an act of generosity because, in the glow of youthful emotion, the limits of prudence have been overstepped. Give your approving smile to the motive, whilst you gently show the injudiciousness of the deed. If the case be such that to criticise the *act* might expose the *principle* to hazard, spare your criticism; and let time and experience, and growing knowledge, be the correctors of the conduct. These will gradually modify and regulate the inward impulses and the outward acts of charity. But beware of the encroachments of avarice. Nothing can be more incongruous than a youthful spirit under the rule of this odious passion, and nothing more gloomily unpromising. To teach your children avarice, is to teach them what will "grow with their growth, and strengthen with their strength;" and, in its progress and maturity, will make them despicable in society, miserable in themselves, and useless to others.

3. Thirdly; Let us, my dear Christian brethren, *rejoice in our union*, and steadily maintain it, in the exercise of principled and faithful love; that we may secure to ourselves and to one another its inestimable advantages. To no kind of association is the saying, "two are better than one," more decidedly applicable, than to that of the fellowship of the church of Christ. Disunion is, in every view, disheartening and debilitating; cordial union animating and strengthening. Universal experience says so;—*our own* experience says so. A church divided against itself cannot stand, any more than a kingdom or a family. In division, Satan obtains an advantage over us, through the want of the mutual counsels, admonitions, and encouragements, of Christian love; and he obtains an advantage, too, over the cause of the Redeemer, by slackening the vigor of cordial co-operation for its advancement. "Suffer ye," then, "the word of exhortation." Let me affectionately beseech you, in the language of inspired authority, "that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called; with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace:"—"that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind, striving together for the faith of the gospel:"—"that ye hold fast

the profession of your faith without wavering, for he is faithful who hath promised; and consider one another, to provoke unto love and to good works; not forsaking the assembling of yourselves together, as the manner of some is, but exhorting one another; and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching." Agreeably to the description in the verses that have been under review, of the mutual benefits of union, "warn them that are unruly, comfort the feeble-minded, support the weak, be patient toward all men." "Finally, brethren, be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you." Thus shall you know, by increasing experience, "how good and how pleasant it is, for brethren to dwell together in unity;" and "the Lord will command the blessing, even life for evermore." Eph. iv. 1-3. Phil. i. 27. Heb. x. 23-25. 2 Cor. xiii. 11. Psalm cxxxiii. 1, 3.

4. Fourthly. Beware of seeking your happiness in the favor and applause of men. Alas! it is fickle and mutable as the very wind.

—————"Say, what is fame?  
It is a fancied life in others' breath;  
A thing beyond us, even before our death."

The courtier, whose wishes and expectations are dependent on the smiles and the sunshine of royal favor, and the prince, who looks for constant enjoyment in the possession of popularity and public applause, both trust to what is proverbially capricious and insecure. "Trust not in man, whose breath is in his nostrils; for wherein is he to be accounted of?" Let not the venerable monarch of these realms, our good old king, be the victim of such popular caprice. Let him enjoy, to the close of his days, the satisfaction imparted by the attachment of a loyal people. Let not his grey hairs be despised; let not our sympathy be refused to his infirmities and sufferings; let not the respect be forgotten that is due to the declining sun.\* And, whilst we set an example of steadfast loyalty to our earthly monarch, let us, above all, adhere, with undecaying attachment, to the cause, and service, and glory of the "King of kings," who fills the throne and sways the sceptre of

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\*The reader requires to be reminded of the time when these Lectures were delivered. References of this kind to our late revered Monarch I could not find in my heart to erase.—Author's note.

an eternal dominion; who can never give place to a successor; and who is supremely entitled to the growing admiration and the everlasting attachment of all his subjects. In *his* immutable favor, too, let us seek our enjoyment. It is the only enduring happiness; springing from the only source that is unsusceptible of change. In *his* smile there lurks no deceit; in *his* assurances of regard there is no duplicity or simulation; "*his* gifts and calling are without repentance;" and in *his* royal clemency and paternal love there is the fullness of eternal joy. "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth whom I desire in preference to thee. My flesh and my heart faileth; but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever." "There be many that say, Who will show us any good? Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us. Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased." Psalm lxxiii. 25, 26. Ibid. iv. 6, 7.

## LECTURE VIII.

### ECCLESIASTES v. 1-7.

“Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil. 2. Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter (any) thing before God: for God (is) in heaven, and thou upon earth; therefore let thy words be few. 3. For a dream cometh through the multitude of business; and a fool’s voice (is known) by multitude of words. 4. When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it: for (he hath) no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed. 5. Better (is it) that thou shouldst not vow, than that thou shouldst vow and not pay. 6. Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin; neither say thou before the angel, that it (was) an error: wherefore should God be angry at thy voice, and destroy the work of thine hands? 7. For in the multitude of dreams and many words (there are) also (divers) vanities: but fear thou God.”

AMIDST the lessons which God teaches us, both by his word and by his providence, of the vanity of human life, and its diversified pursuits and enjoyments, and amidst the melancholy experience, prevailing around us and reaching ourselves, of the insufficiency of learning, riches, pleasure, power, and honor, to confer unmingled and permanent happiness, TRUE RELIGION is the only effectual supporter of the mind. It alone is exempt from the general verdict, “All is vanity;” a verdict comprehending whatever pertains to this world and to time. But religion is not of this world, nor does time limit the enjoyment of its blessings. It is of celestial origin, and possesses a kindred immortality with the Being who is the object of its regards. It affords to man genuine and substantial happiness, both in possession and in hope. It alone imparts the true relish of the blessings of life, and it alone can lighten its burdens, and mitigate its woes. Intercourse with God strengthens

against the temptations, and supports under the trials, that arise from intercourse with men. The very thought of His favor, which is "better than life," makes every thing else, by comparison, appear in its proper light, and thus prevents us from being either unduly elevated, or excessively depressed, by the vicissitudes of time; teaching us to be, "when we rejoice, as though we rejoiced not; and when we weep as though we wept not; and when we buy as though we possessed not; and when we use this world as not abusing it; because the fashion of this world passeth away." 1 Cor. vii. 29-31.

The ordinances of the House of God; the sacred exercises of social worship; have ever been the delight of the true Israel: attendance on them infusing vigor and animation into their souls; and the privation of them depressing their minds, enfeebling all their spiritual efforts, extracting their sweetness from all earthly enjoyments, and exciting the most vehement and longing desires for their restoration. "How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts! My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God. Blessed are they that dwell in thy house; they will be still praising thee:"—"O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee; my flesh longeth for thee, in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is; to see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary:"—"As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God; when shall I come and appear before God? For I had gone with the multitude; I went with them to the house of God with the voice of joy and praise, with the multitude that kept holy day:"—"I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord." Psalm lxxxiv. 1, 2, 4. lxiii. 1, 2. xlii. 1, 2, 4. cxxii. 1.

Such, however, is the insinuating influence of the vanities of life, and of the things of time and sense in general, that we are in constant danger of allowing our thoughts about them to intrude on our religious exercises, and to mingle with the most sacred feelings of devotion; nay sometimes, (such is their power over our hearts,) of performing our acts of worship in a light, inconsiderate, and merely external manner, "drawing nigh to God with our lips, and honoring him with our mouths, whilst our hearts are far from

him." In this way, in proportion as our minds are thus roving and divided and pre-occupied, we turn our religion itself to vanity. It becomes absolutely worthless; an insult to God, and profitless to ourselves. It loses at once its nature and its influence. Such being the powerful tendency of the vanities of the world, Solomon addresses a special warning against it:—

Verse 1. *Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools; for they consider not that they do evil.*

The "House of God" was the Temple, which Solomon himself had built for the residence and worship of the God of Israel. But the admonition applies, in the full spirit of it, to Christian as well as to Jewish worship,—to the service of God under every dispensation of religion.

"Keep thy foot:"—that is, Go not with rash and hasty steps, indicating light and inconsiderate thoughtlessness. Think of the nature of the place; and think of the purpose for which you go thither. The place is "the house of God;" the chosen residence of Jehovah; where He whom "the heaven of heavens cannot contain," "in very deed dwells with men upon earth;" where he hath "put his Name," and manifested his glory:—and you go thither, to engage in the worship of this God, the living God, "the high and lofty One who inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy." Go thither, therefore, with serious reflection. Remember how the God whom you are about to worship said, on different occasions, when he appeared to his most favored servants, "Put off thy shoe from thy foot, for the place where thou standest is holy ground:" and let your spirits, in all your approaches to him, be under the influence of "reverence and godly fear."

"And be more ready to hear, than to offer the sacrifice of fools." The "sacrifice of fools" means, I think, the sacrifice that is offered without the heart; in presenting which, the external service is performed, and performed, it may be, with a scrupulous adherence to the prescribed ritual, but without the devotion of "the inner man," without spiritual homage, without a sentiment to piety. This is a fool's offering; because there cannot be greater folly than to imagine the searcher of hearts to be pleased with it. How strong are the testimonies to the contrary, addressed by his prophets to his ancient people, who "made their boast of the law,

whilst, through breaking it, they dishonored God." "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord: I am full of the burnt-offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts, and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he-goats. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts? Bring no more vain oblations: incense is an abomination unto me; the new-moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with: it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new-moons and your appointed feasts, my soul hateth; they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them. And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you; yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood." Isa. i. 11-15. Such services were not only worthless and unacceptable; they were hateful to God. He represents himself as holding them in abhorrence, as much as he did the blood of an unclean victim, or even of a human sacrifice. Such seems to be the spirit of the following verses:—"He that killeth an ox, is as if he slew a man; he that sacrificeth a lamb, as if he cut off a dog's neck; he that offereth an oblation, as if he offered swine's blood; he that burneth incense, as if he blessed an idol: yea, they have chosen their own ways, and their soul delighteth in their abominations. I also will choose their delusions, and will bring their fears upon them; because when I called none did answer; when I spoke they did not hear; but they did evil before mine eyes, and chose that in which I delighted not." Isa. lxvi. 3, 4. These are expanded statements of the sentiment more briefly expressed in the Book of Proverbs, "The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord:" to which, on one occasion, it is added, "How much more when he bringeth it with a wicked mind!" Prov. xv. 8; xxi. 27,—that is, when not only his *general character* is ungodly, but there is some *special evil purpose* cloaked under the particular act of hypocritical devotion.

"Be more ready to hear" than to offer a heartless and detested sacrifice:—to hear, with a sincere and earnest desire to know and to obey the will of God. Men may hear, and even profess a willingness to hear, when there is no disposition to obey. The character of the Jews in Ezekiel's time is one, alas! of no very rare occurrence: "Also, thou son of man, the children of thy people still

are talking concerning thee, by the walls, and in the doors of the houses, and speak one to another, every man to his brother, saying, Come, I pray you, and hear what is the word that cometh forth from the Lord. And they come unto thee as the people cometh; and they sit before thee as my people; and they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they show much love, but their heart goeth after its covetousness: and lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument; for they hear thy words, but they do them not." Ezek. xxxiii. 30-32. But in the passage before us, and in many others, *hearing* is equivalent to *obeying*. Thus, when Samuel says to Saul, in the full spirit of the sentiment we are considering; "Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt-offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams," 1 Sam. xv. 22; *hearkening* means the same thing as *obeying*: and the quotations formerly introduced, to show the meaning of the "sacrifice of fools," might here be cited anew.

"For they consider not that they do evil." There cannot be more obvious evil, than to come before God in acts of solemn worship, with no affection of the heart in exercise, or with a heart still estranged and at enmity. And yet, as "the heart is deceitful above all things," men may even so far impose upon themselves, as to fancy they are doing what He will be pleased with and accept, when they offer this *soul-less* homage; this unhallowed and odious service. Thus it was with multitudes of the ancient Israelites. Regardless alike of the spiritual meaning and the spiritual performance of their acts and offerings, they vainly imagined that all was well, if blood were duly shed; if ablutions were regularly made; if tithes were sacredly paid; and incense fumed on the censer at the appointed seasons. It is on the foolishness of such an imagination that Jehovah thus indignantly expostulates with them: "Hear, O my people, and I will speak: O Israel, and I will testify against thee; I am God, even thy God. I will not reprove thee for thy sacrifices, or thy burnt-offerings, to have been continually before me. I will take no bullock out of thy house, nor he-goats out of thy folds; for every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. I know all the fowls of the mountains; and the wild beasts of the field are mine. If I were hun-



gry, I would not tell thee: for the world is mine, and the fullness thereof. Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats? Offer unto God thanksgiving; and pay thy vows unto the Most High: and call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me. But unto the wicked God saith, What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldst take my covenant in thy mouth? Seeing thou hatest instruction, and castest my words behind thee." Psalm l. 7-17.

Let us not forget, my brethren, that the same general sentiments are perfectly applicable to the services of New Testament worship. We too have acts of outward devotion to perform, and we too are in danger of satisfying ourselves with the outward performance of them. But the mere utterance of the words of praise and prayer; the mere ceremony of sprinkling with or immersing in water; the mere participation of the symbols of bread and wine; are just as worthless, without the accompanying homage of the heart, as any observance of the Mosaic Ceremonial. The "calves of the lips" are, in themselves, no better than the "calves of the stall." They are both alike the "sacrifice of fools."

If we consider with becoming seriousness what we are doing when we go to the house of God, we shall thereby be led to fulfill the admonition in the second verse:

Verse 2. *Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thy heart be hasty to utter any thing before God; for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few.*

Of all that we utter in our addresses to God we should maturely weigh the meaning. All should be the deliberate dictate of a reflecting mind, and of an impressed and feeling heart. We must take heed, that we do not

———"Mock him with a solemn sound  
Upon a thoughtless tongue."

We must beware of this in every part of our addresses to him:—in the appellations of adoring reverence with which we approach his presence; for these should be dictated by deep, humble, godly fear:—in our confessions of sin, and guilt, and unworthiness; for these must not "come out of feigned lips," but must express a real heart-felt sense of what we are, and of what we deserve:—in our supplications and cries for mercy; for these must spring from an abasing conviction of our need of mercy in all its freedom and

in all its richness, and of the impossibility of our being justified in God's sight, if he should enter with us into judgment:—in our expressions of gratitude for the gifts of Divine goodness; for in these “our souls and all that is within us must bless his holy Name:”—in our petitions for spiritual blessings; for in presenting these, our hearts should be enlarged with fervent desires after them, from an experimental feeling of their incomparable preciousness:—and in our professed resolutions to “cleave to the Lord;” for these must be uttered “with purpose of heart,” else they are hypocritical mockery. There appears to be, in the admonition, a special reference to the making and uttering of rash and inconsiderate *vows*; a subject enlarged upon in the following verses. But it applies, with perfect propriety, and in all its energy, to every description of religious service. The consideration by which the admonition is enforced, is, in the same way, one of universal application:

“For God is in heaven, and thou upon earth; therefore let thy words be few.”

This clause of the verse expresses the distance between God and his creatures, and the consequent veneration and sacred awe which they ought to feel and to manifest in all their intercourse with him; not addressing him with a profusion of unpondered and heartless words, but with the lowly and unobtrusive devotion of the whole soul. “God is in heaven.” The expression may be understood as including his uncontrolled supremacy, his omniscient observation, and his moral purity. His *supremacy*;—“The Lord hath erected his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all.” “Our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased.” His *omniscience*;—“The Lord is in his holy temple; the Lord's throne is in heaven: his eyes behold, his eye-lids try, the children of men:” “The Lord looketh from heaven; he beholdeth all the sons of men: from the place of his habitation he looketh upon all the inhabitants of the earth.” His *purity*;—“Thus saith the high and lofty One who inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy, I dwell in the high and holy place.” Psalm ciii. 19. cxv. 3. xi. 4. xxxiii. 13, 14. Isa. lvii. 15. Under the impression, then, of sacred dread of his majesty and holiness, and of his universal and unceasing observation of all things, “let thy words be few.” This corresponds with the expressions in the beginning

of the verse, as their evident counterpart. The *fewness* of words is meant to imply their being well weighed and well ordered, in opposition to their being poured out with hasty thoughtlessness. And this is the natural effect of reverence, which always restrains rash and inconsiderate utterance in the presence of its object. Not that all copiousness, and all repetition, in prayer are by this admonition condemned. As to copiousness, much depends on the number and extent of the topics of supplication, and on the state of the supplicant's mind:—and as to repetition, it may be so far from an impropriety, as to be an expression at once of strength of faith, and fervor of desire. Of copiousness, we have examples in the prayers of Solomon, of Nehemiah, and of Daniel; and of repetition, in those of Paul, and of the blessed Jesus himself, who, when “in the days of his flesh he offered up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears, to him who was able to save him from death,” thrice repeated, in the anguish of his spirit, the same petition, in the same words. He encouraged importunity, too, in his disciples, (and importunity necessarily implies repetition,) by recommending the example of the woman of Canaan, as an evidence of strong faith; and by delivering the parable of the poor widow and the unjust judge, for the very purpose of inculcating the lesson, that “they ought always to pray, and not to faint.” See 1 Kings viii. Neh. ix. 3. Dan. ix. 2 Cor. xii. 8. Matt. xxvi. 44. xv. 21-28. Luke xviii. 1-7. What is forbidden is, the unmeaning profusion of words, the product of a light and unimpressed mind; and what Jesus himself denominates “vain repetitions,” such as “the heathen use, when they think they are to be heard for their much speaking;” of which we have a fine exemplification in Scripture history, in the frantic orgies of the worshippers of Baal, when they “called on the name of their god from morning until noon, saying, O Baal hear us;” and, being stimulated by the keen irony of the venerable Elijah, continued their unavailing cries “till the time of the evening sacrifice.” 1 Kings xviii. 26-29. Thus, there appears a perfect and instructive harmony between the directions of the Old Testament and those of the New, as to the spirit and manner of the worship of God. What a beautiful illustration of his own precept, as well as of the cautions and injunctions of Solomon in the passage before us, is the prayer which Christ taught his disciples:—“After this man-

ner, therefore, pray ye: Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen." Matt. vi. 9-13.

Verse 3. *For a dream cometh through the multitude of business; and a fool's voice is known by multitude of words.*

There is a comparison, I apprehend, intended in this verse:—"For as a dream cometh through the multitude of business; so a fool's voice is known by the multitude of words." When a man has been occupied with a great variety of cares and businesses during the day, the consequence very often is, confused and incoherent dreams by night, in which there is neither distinct beginning, nor order, nor end. As the nature of a man's dreams, then, indicates the nature and variety of his daily employments and solitudes; so the voice of a worshipper may be known to be a fool's voice, and his mind consequently a fool's mind, by "multitude of words." He talks volubly, incoherently, loud, and long; his mind evidently not deeply if at all engaged, but light, and frivolous, and confused;—tongue without understanding; language without feeling; the unconnected utterance of unconnected thoughts; the "swelling words of vanity;" the inane expression of inward vacancy and heedless presumption. Such wordy and frothy addresses to God manifest the mind of a fool, and from the mind of a fool we should expect them, as we expect the dream of the night to correspond with the multitudinous businesses of the day.

Although this and the preceding verses may with propriety be applied, in the general spirit of them, to all descriptions of worship; those which follow, as they are evidently a continuation of the same subject, show the principal reference, throughout the passage, to be to *rash vows*:—

Verses 4, 5. *When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed. Better is it that thou shouldst not vow, than that thou shouldst vow and not pay.*

A vow was a solemn promise or engagement, voluntarily come

under to God, (usually accompanied with an oath or imprecation, either formally expressed, or tacitly understood,) of some sacrifice to be offered, some portion of worldly substance to be devoted, or some other service to be performed. Such vows it was the duty of him who made them, conscientiously, promptly, and cheerfully to fulfill:—"Pay that which thou hast vowed," and "defer not to pay it." "If a man vow a vow unto the Lord, or swear an oath to bind his soul with a bond; he shall not break his word, he shall do according to all that proceedeth out of his mouth." "When thou shalt vow a vow unto the Lord thy God, thou shalt not slack to pay it; for the Lord thy God will surely require it of thee, and it would be sin in thee. But if thou shalt forbear to vow, it shall be no sin in thee. That which is gone out of thy lips thou shalt keep and perform; even a free-will offering, according as thou hast vowed unto the Lord thy God, which thou hast promised with thy mouth." "Vow, and pay, unto the Lord your God." Numb. xxx. 2. Deut. xxiii. 21-23. Psalm lxxvi. 11.

The expression, "Defer not to pay it," signifies not merely, be sure to pay it; but pay it with promptitude and cheerfulness, indicated by punctuality.—"For he hath no pleasure in fools." A fool's *vow* is much the same as a fool's *prayer*; a vow formed in the mind and uttered by the lips, rashly, without consideration, without the heart, without a serious resolution, or an honest and deliberate purpose, to fulfil it. The God to whom the vow is made cannot be deceived; and he condemns the levity and detests the deceitfulness of heart, by which the vow of a fool is dictated. He will not be mocked; nor will he deign to accept the person or the worship of the man who thus plays the hypocrite; who thus takes back his word, uttered to the God of truth, and insults and provokes the Majesty of heaven. The mode of expression may be illustrated from the striking language of Jehovah to Israel, by the prophet Malachi:—"A son honoreth his father, and a servant his master: if I then be a father, where is my honor? and if I be a master, where is my fear? saith the Lord of hosts, unto you, O priests, that despise my name. And ye say, Wherein have we despised thy name? Ye offer polluted bread upon mine altar: and ye say, Wherein have we polluted thee? In that ye say, the table of the Lord is contemptible. And if ye offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? and if ye offer the lame and sick,

is it not evil? Offer it now to thy governor: will he be pleased with thee, or accept thine offering? And ye brought that which was torn, and the lame, and the sick: thus ye brought an offering: should I accept this of your hand? saith the Lord. But cursed be the deceiver, that hath in his flock a male, and voweth, and sacrificeth unto the Lord a corrupt thing: for I am a great King, saith the Lord of hosts, and my name is dreadful among the heathen." Mal. i. 6-8, 13, 14. As God is displeased with the deceiver who thus, repenting of his vow, and grudging the payment of it, puts off the God of heaven with a corrupt and worthless offering; so is he displeased with the man who draws back altogether, who pays not what he has vowed at all.

"Pay," then, "that which thou hast vowed;" for;—"Better is it that thou shouldst not vow, than that thou shouldst vow, and not pay." Vows were voluntary: and, as is plainly intimated in one of the passages quoted from the Old Testament, sin was not contracted by refraining to vow, but only by the non-performance of vows when they had been made. It is taken for granted, that vows which are binding, and which it is a man's duty to fulfill, must, in their subject, or in that to which he obliges himself, be consistent with the moral obligations of the Divine law. No vow could render that a duty, which was in its nature morally wrong, or which involved, in the performance of it, a violation of any express precept or ordinance of God. To vow to the Lord what was contrary to his will, could never bring a man under obligation to fulfillment; else his vow would have obliged him to sin. When any thing vowed was subsequently discovered to be contrary to the will of God, it must have ceased to bind the soul: and the vow itself required to be repented of, as one that had been made in inconsideration and without knowledge; and might, perhaps, be classed with those sins of ignorance, for which appropriate atonements were appointed. "It is a snare, to the man," says Solomon elsewhere, Prov. xx. 25, "who devoureth that which is holy, and after vows to make inquiry." "That which is holy," probably means that which by his vow has become holy, having been consecrated or devoted to God, and to holy uses. He who "devoureth" this part of his substance, and "after vows makes inquiry," with the view, as is evidently meant, of eluding performance, and, on some plausible pretext, retaining his devoted

property; the bullock of his herd, or the lamb of his fold, or the fruits of his ground, or whatever else it might be; for his own use;—that man is ensnared by temptation,—the temptation of selfish and covetous impiety,—and sins against God. The “inquiry” and deliberation, both as to the propriety of the vow itself, and the disposition and ability to fulfill it, ought to have *preceded* and not to *follow* the making of it. But if the matter of the vow was morally wrong, it could not by the vow be rendered right. It could never be right to do what it was morally wrong to vow to do.

By making vows rashly, men entered into temptation to this sin of “making inquiry.” They were in danger of regretting their precipitation, and seeking after excuses for not fulfilling their engagements. It is, therefore, added in the sixth verse:—

Verse 6. *Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin; neither say thou before the angel that it was an error: wherefore should God be angry at thy voice, and destroy the work of thy hands?*

By uttering rash vows, the mouth caused the flesh to sin. “Thy flesh” is a very unusual expression, if we understand it to mean no more than *thyself*. *All flesh*, indeed, is a common phrase for all men, or mankind; but *thy flesh* for *thyself* is quite unexampled. The probability, therefore, is, that the phrase here, as in some other parts of Scripture, signifies *corrupt nature*; by the evil principles of which it is, that men are tempted to elude the performance of their vows. When a person made such engagements rashly, he laid a stumbling-block in the way of his corruptions, and became his own tempter to the commission of sin.

“Neither say thou before the angel, that it was an error.” I am satisfied, that by “the angel” we are here to understand *the priest*. “The priest’s lips,” says God by Malachi, “should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger (angel) of the Lord of hosts.” Mal. ii. 7. The case which is supposed makes this sufficiently clear. The priest, in his official capacity, stood and acted to the people in God’s stead, receiving in his behalf their vows and free-will offerings, and discharging from the obligation of them, when there was sufficient legal ground for such discharge. There were appropriate offerings prescribed for sins of ignorance; and amongst the rest, for vows to do evil, or to do good, in certain circumstances:—“If a soul

swear, pronouncing with his lips to do evil or to do good, whatsoever it be that a man shall pronounce with an oath, and it be hid from him; when he knoweth of it, then he shall be guilty in one of these. And it shall be, when he shall be guilty in one of these things, that he shall confess that he hath sinned in that thing; and he shall bring his trespass offering unto the Lord for his sin which he had sinned." Lev. v. 4-6. The offering was to be, according to the person's circumstances, a lamb, or a kid of the goats, two turtle-doves, or two young pigeons, or the tenth part of an ephah of fine flour. Now, the case supposed and cautioned against in the passage before us, is the case of a man, who, in order to elude the performance of a vow he has made, comes to the priest, pretending that it was "an error," or a mistake; a thing done rashly, and without consideration of its nature and consequences; a vow which it would, as he has since discovered, be improper for him to fulfill; a sin of ignorance; and who, making this confession, presents, or proposes to present, the appointed offering. This view of the case imparts peculiar force to the words which follow: "Wherefore should God be angry at thy voice, and destroy the work of thy hands?" Such hypocritical mockery of God would expose him to his merited displeasure. Thus insulted, he would be provoked to frown upon him:—and, whilst the foolish deceiver might be "blessing himself in his heart" that he had succeeded so well in keeping possession of the substance which he had alienated by his vow, the curse of offended Heaven might not only blast what he had feloniously kept, but come down upon all that he had; preventing his prosperity; imbittering his sweets; blighting his prospects; and "destroying the work of his hands." This is just the opposite of the promise annexed to the duty of faithful liberality in the service of God:—"Honor the Lord with thy substance, and with the first-fruits of all thine increase; so shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine." Prov. iii. 9, 10. And the displeasure, with its effects, which Solomon here supposes, God actually threatened of old by his prophets, against such as dealt unfaithfully in his service. "If ye will not hear, and if ye will not lay it to heart, to give glory unto my name, saith the Lord of hosts, I will even send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings: yea, I have cursed them already, because ye do not lay it to heart." Mal. ii. 2. "Thus saith



the Lord of hosts, Consider your ways. Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the Lord. Ye looked for much, and, lo, it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it. Why? saith the Lord of hosts. Because of mine house that is waste, and ye run every man unto his own house. Therefore the heaven over you is stayed from dew, and the earth is stayed from her fruit. And I called for a drought upon the land, and upon the mountains, and upon the corn, and upon the new wine, and upon the oil, and upon that which the ground bringeth forth, and upon men, and upon cattle, and upon all the labor of the hands." Hag. i. 7-11. "And now, I pray you, consider from this day and upward, from before a stone was laid upon a stone in the temple of the Lord; since those days were, when one came to a heap of twenty measures, there were but ten: when one came to the press-fat to draw out fifty vessels out of the press, there were but twenty. I smote you with blasting, and with mildew, and with hail, in all the labors of your hands; yet ye turned not to me, saith the Lord. Consider now from this day and upward, from the four and twentieth day of the ninth month, even from the day that the foundation of the Lord's temple was laid, consider it. Is the seed yet in the barn? yea, as yet the vine, and the fig-tree, and the pomegranate, and the olive-tree, hath not brought forth: from this day will I bless you." Ibid. ii. 15-19.

Verse 7. *For in the multitude of dreams, and many words, there are also divers vanities: but fear thou God.*

Here also, I think, there is still comparison. As there are vanities in the multitude of dreams, so are there in the multitude of words. When a man talks much without deliberation, uttering his thoughts as they arise, under the impulse of present and hasty feeling, crude and indigested, and never-ending, it is impossible but that a great deal of sin and folly must intermingle with his words. It is rare indeed, that "a man full of talk" can at all times be "justified." He can hardly fail to utter "divers vanities;" and it will be well, if his words are not frequently worse than idle.

The remedy for all the evils against which the wise man directs his admonitions, is contained in the last clause of this verse:—"But fear thou God." The reverential fear of the Most High,

habitually influencing the mind and heart, will prevent a man from being "rash with his mouth;" from being "hasty to utter any thing before him;" and especially from making inconsiderate vows, and afterwards, with profane duplicity of spirit, seeking excuses for not fulfilling them. "Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts; and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread." Let others act the part of "fools who make a mock at sin;" but "be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long." Ever "fear that glorious and fearful name, THE LORD THY GOD!"

Of such vows as were permitted and common under the Old Dispensation, we have no recorded and approved examples under the New; nor are any directions given us, for the making or the performance of them. Resolutions, in the strength of Divine grace, to serve the Lord, to cleave to him, and to his word, and to his ways, we may, with propriety, form and express. Of this nature, indeed, is the language of God's people, in their addresses to himself, every day; and always has been, and always must be. "I will go, in the strength of the Lord God." But for the "binding of the soul" by special obligations, such as imprecatory oaths, whether verbal or written; for bringing ourselves under a bond superadded to the sanction of the Divine command, I am not sure that we have any warrant, either from the conduct or the writings of the apostles of Christ. Paul's vows, recorded in the eighteenth and twenty-first chapters of the Acts of the Apostles, and others of a like nature, belonged to the Old Dispensation; which had then only "waxed old, and was ready to vanish away;" and, although virtually abolished by the death of Christ, was not yet, in practice, finally set aside.

Vows have been a snare to the consciences of many; especially of the weak, who have often been more afraid of transgressing because *God's vows*, they say, *are upon them*, than on account of the simple and immediate obligation of Divine authority. They are very apt, too, as every thing must be that is of our own devising, when they do not produce a spirit of bondage and fear, to engender the opposite one of self-righteous confidence and presumption. Vows of celibacy and pilgrimage; vows of devoting money, houses, and lands, to pious uses; vows at baptism and the Lord's supper, at admission to church-fellowship, and at ministerial ordination; and the oaths of personal and national covenanting, although some

of them are more objectionable than others, appear alike destitute of New Testament warrant. When the word *vow* is used, as it frequently is, synonymously, or nearly so, with the word *resolution*, it were idle to quarrel with a mere term. It is our duty, however, to beware of ensnaring our souls by self-invented and self-imposed obligations, and of every such addition to his will as might draw upon us the reproof, "Who hath required this at your hands?"\*

But although the New Testament is silent on the subject of vowing, yet the passage we have been reviewing is far from being barren of practical instruction to us in these latter days.

1. In the first place; Let all our religious services, and particularly (for this is the subject before us) the services of the house of God, be performed by us, *sincerely, considerately, and reverentially. Sincerely*;—for the first and most indispensable requisite to all acceptable worship is, that the "heart be right with God." "My son, give me thy heart." All is worthless without this. *Considerately*:—all should be the dictate of an enlightened understanding and a maturely reflecting mind. We should think well what we are doing, when we engage in the different exercises of Divine

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\* We feel constrained, though reluctantly, to differ from these sentiments of the esteemed author, respecting the lawfulness and the duty of *vowing*, under the New Testament dispensation. We cannot see that there was any thing peculiar to the Old Testament dispensation in the nature of *vowing*. The author would not deny it to be a Christian duty to take an oath on adequate occasion; and if so, why not a vow? The Westminster Divines differed from our author in regard to the divine warrant for vowing under the Gospel. They say, (Confession of Faith, Ch. 22, Sections 5, 6),—"A vow is of the like nature with a promissory oath, and ought to be made with the like religious care, and to be performed with the like faithfulness. It \* \* is to be made to God alone; and \* \* out of *faith and conscience of duty*, in the way of thankfulness for mercy received, or for the obtaining of what we want; *whereby we more strictly bind ourselves to necessary duties.*"

Besides, many of the commands in the Old Testament Scriptures to "vow," and of the Prophecies, also, respecting the performance of that exercise, have an evident reference to Gospel times; *e. g.* Psalm 76: 11; 50: 14; Isa. 19: 21. "Covenants," or solemn engagements to God and to each other, by the servants of God, are sustained, we think, not only as lawful, but as, under certain providential circumstances, an incumbent duty, on the part of Christians, by the word of God. This practice has been frequently followed in trying times by the churches of Christ, especially since the Reformation, not only with a clear divine warrant, as we conceive, but with the manifest spiritual blessing of God coming down on the souls of his servants, and on those churches which have engaged in and have been faithful to their covenants. Who can estimate how much we are indebted to the Scottish Covenanters and their covenants, for the civil and religious principles and liberties now enjoyed by us—the blessed fruits of the "Covenanted Reformation?"—

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worship. We should consider, with deliberate seriousness, the character of the Being to whom we approach; "believing that he is, and that he is a rewarder of all them that diligently seek him:"—we should have an enlightened conception of the nature of our duties, in praise and prayer, in speaking and hearing the word of God, in showing forth the Lord's death, in administering to the wants of our poor brethren, and in occasionally attending to the ordinance of baptism. All these services should be done with the understanding, as well as with the heart. The latter without the former is enthusiasm. All the affections, as well as zeal, must be "according to knowledge." "Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the Scriptures?" This union of the understanding and the heart will insure our worshipping *reverentially*. There is no peculiar sacredness in any place now, as there was in the temple of old: but the exercises of the worship of God are themselves sacred, and ought to be solemn, in whatever place performed. "Wherefore we, receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us hold fast the grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably, *with reverence and godly fear*." In fulfillment of this duty, let there be punctuality in the time of your coming to the house of God, and devotion of spirit, and gravity of demeanor, while you are in it. He, surely, obeys not the injunction "keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God," who is careless about being there in due time; who is detained by every trifle, and sometimes by nothing but mere thoughtlessness, and can thus miss, with apparently no regret, some part of the worship, the first hymn of praise, the reading of Scriptures, or the opening prayer. The conduct of those who are in the habit of coming in late is severely reprehensible, as a disturbance of the worship, and a distraction of the attention of others. The decency and solemnity becoming the sanctuary of God require, that all the worshippers should be in their places, and all settled and still, at the commencement of the service, that they may begin and end together. The subject also holds out a reproof to the listless, whose attention, even in the most solemn parts of worship, is distracted by the merest trifles, and who stare about them, with absent minds, in idle vacancy; to those who, instead of striving against the encroachments of drowsiness, nod without restraint in their pews, or lay down their heads with perfect com-

posure to a comfortable nap; and to those, who by loud and un-suppressed coughing, and sneezing, and by other noises, which they are at no pains to avoid, disturb, without any plea of necessity, the stillness and solemnity of the worship. Alas! my brethren, we have enough *within* us, every one in his own bosom, to tempt to the evil of "drawing nigh to God with our lips, and honoring him with our mouths whilst our hearts are far from him;" we need no extraneous enticements, no temptations from one another.

2. Secondly; Let us be always prompt in fulfilling our solemn engagements to God. Although not under self-invented and self-imposed vows, we yet have "given ourselves to the Lord." We are under the deepest and most sacred obligations, and have avowed that we feel them; the obligations arising from Divine authority, and from Divine goodness and grace. "I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies (your whole persons) a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." "Ye are not your own; for ye are bought with a price: therefore, glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's." Rom. xii. 1. 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20. If we feel these obligations aright, all our obedience will be characterized by *promptitude*: "I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies: I made haste, and delayed not, to keep thy commandments." Psalm exix. 59, 60. Every part of our service to God should be thus prompt and cheerful; yielded "with a ready mind," "not grudgingly or of necessity." In particular, we are under obligation, though not by special vow, to "honor the Lord with our substance, and with the first-fruits of all our increase." It will be a comfortable reflection, should God, in his providence, be pleased to deprive us of the means of thus honoring him, that we did not, while in possession of them, shut our heart and hand against his paramount claims, and withhold from Him his due; that it is not on this account, but in the exercise of that love that chastens for the profit of his children, that he "destroys the work of our hands."

3. Thirdly; Let all the professed people of God examine themselves, lest they should have "a name to live while they are dead;" a "form of godliness while they deny its power." Remember what was already stated, and what I repeat and urge upon your

attention, because of its essential importance, that if your hearts are not given to God, but still set on the world, no external services, though attended to with the most punctilious exactness, can ever be pleasing in his sight. They are the "sacrifices of fools," and shall profit you nothing; and if "*for a pretence* you make long prayers, you shall only receive the greater damnation." "Let the sinners in Zion be afraid; let fearfulness surprise the hypocrites."

Lastly. Let all consider, *on what ground* they draw near to God, in the exercises either of private or public worship. This is a most essential point for deliberation. There is but one way of access; one plea; one ground of acceptable homage. "THROUGH HIM" (Christ Jesus) "we both" (Jews and Gentiles) "have access, by one Spirit, unto the Father." "Having, therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the Holiest BY THE BLOOD OF JESUS; by a new and living way which he hath consecrated for us through the vail, that is to say, his flesh; and having a High Priest over the House of God: let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water." Eph. ii. 18. Heb. x. 19-22. All our services, then, must be in the name of Jesus. They must be "spiritual sacrifices," and they are "acceptable to God BY JESUS CHRIST." This implies faith in Jesus, on the part of the worshipper; and without this faith it is, therefore, impossible for you to please him. This *always was* the way of acceptance of the persons and services of sinners; although it was not of old so fully and clearly revealed. It is the way still; and every approach to God, except through the mediation of the blessed and only Redeemer, is an act of unhallowed presumption. And, on the same ground on which we are accepted in our worship here, must we stand before the Divine tribunal in the great day. In the "House of God" above, solemn worship is for ever addressed by the holy and happy inhabitants, "to Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb." There, there is no "sacrifice of fools." Every mind and every heart are engaged, in the perfection of knowledge, and purity, and love, and joy. "God is in heaven," says Solomon, "and thou upon earth; therefore let thy words be few." But though all shall then be advanced to heaven, even in the intimacy of the upper sanctuary the distance between the creature and the Creator shall be felt as it never was felt before; and

holy reverence shall characterize the worship of heaven infinitely more than it now does that of earth;—holy reverence, in delightful association with the perfection of that love which “casteth out fear.” “After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and peoples, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; and cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God who sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb! And all the angels stood round about the throne, and about the elders and the four living creatures, and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God, saying, Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honor, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen. And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these who are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they who came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb: therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and He that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat: for the Lamb, which is in the midst of the throne, shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.” Rev. vii. 9-17.

## LECTURE IX.

ECCLESIASTES V. 8-20.

“If thou seest the oppression of the poor, and violent perverting of judgment and justice in a province, marvel not at the matter: for (he that is) higher than the highest regardeth; and (there be) higher than they. 9. Moreover the profit of the earth is for all: the king (himself) is served by the field. 10. He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase. This (is) also vanity. 11. When goods increase, they are increased that eat them: and what good (is there) to the owners thereof, saving the beholding (of them) with their eyes? 12. The sleep of a laboring man (is) sweet, whether he eat little or much: but the abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep. 13. There is a sore evil (which) I have seen under the sun, (namely,) riches kept for the owners thereof to their hurt. 14. But those riches perish by evil travail; and he begetteth a son, and (there is) nothing in his hand. 15. As he came forth of his mother's womb, naked shall he return to go as he came, and shall take nothing of his labor, which he may carry away in his hand. 16. And this also (is) a sore evil, (that) in all points as he came, so shall he go: and what profit hath he that hath labored for the wind? 17. All his days also he eateth in darkness, and (he hath) much sorrow and wrath with his sickness. 18. Behold (that) which I have seen: (it is) good and comely (for one) to eat and to drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labor that he taketh under the sun all the days of his life, which God giveth him; for it (is) his portion. 19. Every man also to whom God hath given riches and wealth, and hath given him power to eat thereof, and to take his portion, and to rejoice in his labor; this (is) the gift of God. 20. For he shall not much remember the days of his life; because God answereth (him) in the joy of his heart.”

IN such a book as this, it would be unreasonable to expect a close and immediately perceptible connection between its different parts. The writer should be considered as taking a survey of human life, in its various departments and appearances, as these presented themselves to his mind. His book, therefore, does not bear, throughout, the form of a regular dissertation. He appears



at times to start suddenly from one subject to another; and sometimes to resume a former subject, which has again suggested itself under some new aspect or relation. In these cases, there might frequently be an association in the mind of the writer, that not only escapes a superficial reader, but is even undiscernible by the most attentive and judicious;—for every man who pays any attention to the operations of his own mind, must be sensible how slight and remote, how airy and evanescent, the associations of his ideas often are; so that, many a time, he is himself unable at all to recollect what it was that brought the two thoughts together.

The eighth verse of this chapter does not seem to have any connection with what immediately precedes, unless it be with the last words of the seventh verse,—“but *fear thou God.*” This mention of the fear of God might naturally enough suggest to the mind of the writer the conduct of some of the great men of the earth, who, regardless of their Divine superior, abused their power, and kept their subjects in perpetual dread. The fear of God was the best corrective, both of the tyranny of the oppressor, and of the fear of the oppressed. Whether this was the link of connection or not, he resumes, here, a subject on which he had more than once touched already; Chap. iii. 16, 17. iv. 1-3; and the light in which it is taken up, seems rather to favor the view given of the association of ideas in his mind:—

Verse 8. *If thou seest the oppression of the poor, and violent perverting of judgment and justice in a province, marvel not at the matter: for he that is higher than the highest regardeth; and there be higher than they.*

“Marvel not at the matter.” This might, indeed, be understood to mean that, in a world of fallen creatures, and considering the depth of human corruption, there is little reason to wonder at such perversions of power and justice:—or, supposing a particular reference to the persecution of the righteous by the power of the wicked, that *this* need not be matter of great astonishment, when the same considerations are taken into account, together with the fact, that, so far from being a novel and strange occurrence, it has existed from the beginning; even since the days of Cain, who slew Abel “because his own works were evil, and his brother’s righteous.” The apostle John quotes this example of early malignity, for the same purpose of suppressing wonder; subjoining immedi-

ately, "*Marvel not*, my brethren, if the world hate you." 1 JOHN iii. 12, 13.

I am disposed to think, however, that neither of these is the true meaning; but that Solomon alludes to that description of "marvelling," which involves in it some rising hesitancy, some secret, undefined, but painful and distracting doubts, about the superintending providence of God:—that wonder, which tempts a person, on witnessing such scenes of iniquity and cruelty, and perceiving no symptoms of vengeance coming down on the oppressor, to say in his heart, "How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the Most High?" "*Marvel not* at the matter," says the wise man; "for he that is higher than the highest regardeth." You may be tempted to question the knowledge, or even to doubt the existence, of a superintending providence; but be assured you are mistaken: "He that is higher than the highest regardeth." "Verily there is a God that judgeth in the earth." "The Lord's throne is in the heavens: his eyes behold, his eye-lids try, the children of men." He is "higher than the highest." He "whose name alone is Jehovah, is the most high over all the earth;" infinitely elevated, in majesty and power; above the greatest, and mightiest, and proudest of the potentates of this world. And HE "*regardeth*." Yes: "the high and lofty One who inhabiteth eternity, whose name is holy, who dwelleth in the high and holy place," "*regardeth*:" not as an unconcerned spectator, but as a righteous governor and judge; his "eye-lids *trying*," as well as his "eyes *beholding*." And often, when this sentiment is expressed, and this assurance given, it is in connection with the Divine regard to the poor, and his abhorrence of these oppressors. "He (the wicked) hath said in his heart, God hath forgotten; he hideth his face; he will never see it. Arise, O Lord; O God, lift up thy hand; forget not the humble. Wherefore doth the wicked contemn God? He hath said in his heart, Thou wilt not require it. Thou hast seen it; for thou beholdest mischief and spite, to requite it with thy hand: the poor committeth himself unto thee; thou art the helper of the fatherless." "For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, now will I arise, saith the Lord; I will set him in safety from him that puffeth at him." "Say ye to the righteous, that it shall be well with him; for they shall eat the fruit of their doings. Woe unto the wicked; for it shall

be ill with him; for the reward of his hands shall be given him. The Lord will enter into judgment with the ancients of his people, and with the princes thereof: for ye have eaten up the vineyard; the spoil of the poor is in your houses. What mean ye, that ye beat my people in pieces, and grind the faces of the poor? saith the Lord God of hosts." "I will come near to you to judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against false swearers, and against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right, and fear not me, saith the Lord of hosts." "Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you. Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver are cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days. Behold, the hire of the laborers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them who have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth. Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton; ye have nourished your hearts, as in a day of slaughter. Ye have condemned and killed the just; and he doth not resist you. Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain." Psal. x. 11-14. xii. 5. Isa. iii. 10, 11, 14, 15. Mal. iii. 5. Jam. v. 1-7. Thus "he that is higher than the highest regardeth." His penal judgments may not, in any remarkable way, fall upon the objects of his displeasure in this world:—but still he "regardeth:" he marks, and he records, every thought and word, and deed of iniquity and violence, and will bring it into judgment. "He is not a God that delighteth in wickedness: neither shall evil dwell with him: the foolish shall not stand in his sight; he hateth all the workers of iniquity." Psalm v. 4, 5. "Surely thou didst set them in slippery places; thou castedst them down into destruction: how are they brought into desolation as in a moment! they are utterly consumed with terrors. As a dream when one awaketh, so, O Lord, when thou awakest, thou shalt despise their image!" Psal. lxxiii. 18-20.

The last clause of this verse, "and there be higher than they,"

seems to be most naturally interpreted of the angelic ministers of "Him who is higher than the highest;" the celestial messengers and agents, by whom he executes many of the plans of his providence; who are "greater in power and might" than the very greatest of earthly oppressors; who, with the swiftness and the energy of "flames of fire," fulfill the commissions of the Divine throne; whose agency is conspicuous in the Scripture history; and who, though in a manner unseen and unknown by us, are doubtless employed still, both in messages of mercy in behalf of God's people, and in the infliction of judicial vengeance on his enemies. The superiority of these vicegerents of heaven to the mightiest tyrants of this world, the "oppressors of the poor," the "perverters of judgment and justice," was strikingly displayed, when one of them, in a single night, smote and destroyed the myriads of the host of Sennacherib; when "the Lord sent his angel and delivered Peter out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews; and when the messenger of Divine jealousy "smote" the tyrant, "because," in his high estate, "he gave not God the glory," and saved the Church from his persecuting violence. 2 Kings xix. 35. Acts xii. 11, 23.

In the verses which follow, a good deal of the sentiment is similar to what has been formerly illustrated. They are introduced here, apparently for two purposes;—in the first place, to comfort and encourage "the poor," even although by "oppression" their right should be taken away, and they should be kept down, and prevented from rising in the world; and in the next place, to settle the doubts of the man who witnesses the "oppression of the poor," the wresting of their judgment, and the distress which they are thus made to endure,—by showing, that true happiness is by no means on the side of the most successful and the wealthiest oppressor;—or, in other words, that "a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth."

Let us take up the sentiments expressed in the successive verses, and observe their bearing upon this general position:—

1. Natural wants are easily satisfied:—

Verse 9. *Moreover, the profit of the earth is for all: the king himself is served of the field.*

"The profit of the earth" is its produce; and especially corn, or bread, which is the staff of life,—the immediate and indispensable

means of its support. It is "for all:" it is appointed for all; it is sufficient for all; and, although in various measures, all partake of it. And of all to whom "their bread is given" it may with truth be said, that they have all that the earth can yield of real necessities even to the king himself. Royalty, indeed, may possess more than poverty, of the luxuries of life; but these contribute little to true enjoyment; often they are the sources of suffering. Without the tillage of the ground, the king himself could not have bread,—and could not live:—so that, in one view, and that a very important one, the king is more dependent on the ploughman, than the ploughman is on the king. Of all the arts of civilized man, agriculture is transcendently the most essential and valuable. Other arts may contribute to the comfort, the convenience, and the embellishment of life; but the cultivation of the soil stands in immediate connection with our very existence. The life itself, to whose comfort and convenience and embellishment other arts contribute, is by *this* to be sustained; so that others without it can avail nothing. In their dependence on "the field" all are equal: the prince and the peasant are alike "served" of it. And thus, all classes are mutually dependent on one another; by which the rich should be taught humility, and the poor contentment. The latter, if they have their share of "the profit of the earth," have by far the most valuable of its productions. The king may have the garniture of life; but they possess, in common with him, its substance. The king has indeed what they want; but they have what the king cannot want. They can do without what the king has; but the king cannot do without what they have.

2. The poor are widely mistaken, if they imagine that the gratification of a man's desires in the acquisition of wealth always produces the expected satisfaction:—

Verse 10. *He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase. This is also vanity.*

"He that loveth silver" is the man that sets his heart upon riches, and places his happiness in the attainment of them; and "he that loveth abundance" is only another form of the same designation. He "shall not be satisfied with silver:" that is, when he has gotten it, he will find himself disappointed in his expectations from the acquisition; he will find himself the possessor, indeed, of abundance, but not on that account the possessor of happi-

ness. A man's ideas and desires enlarge as he advances. His notions of poverty and riches, which are to so great a degree relative terms, undergo change with his changing circumstances. What seemed to him riches at the outset of his career, soon comes to be accounted poverty. That which, from a lower point in the scale, was the height of his ambition, becomes, when he has reached it, only a point from which to look higher. He never says "It is enough;" but what he gets is still but the means of getting more. The thirst of gain, instead of being quenched, becomes more and more ardent and insatiable. And if a man has not a satisfied and contented mind, he is in want of the very essence of happiness. He carries about within him a source of disquietude and "vexation of spirit," which will make him unhappy amidst the most superfluous abundance. A contented spirit is the very first requisite of true enjoyment: and the poor man who has but "food and raiment," and both, it may be, scantily, is more really and substantially happy if he possesses it, than the richest on earth can ever be without it. Even when a man has so far appeared to be satisfied with what he has got, as to retire from the pursuit of more, he will still feel a void,—“an aching void;”—to a greater degree sometimes, than when the bustle of business kept his mind engaged. It is not in the power of mere wealth to confer solid satisfaction. The desires of the soul cannot be filled by it; nor can it either prevent or remove the various "ills that flesh is heir to." It cannot insure against a single disease; it cannot alleviate pain; it cannot ward off from its possessor himself the stroke of death; nor can it purchase the continuance of life to wife or children, kinsman or friend, or redeem it when it has gone down to the grave. "The small and the great are there."

3. Those who live by the wealth of the rich man—the man whose heart is set upon his riches—have as much, if not more, enjoyment of it than he has himself:—

Verse 11. *When goods increase, they are increased that eat them: and what good is there to the owners thereof, saving the beholding of them with their eyes?*

The rich man, as he rises in the world, must keep up a corresponding establishment. As his riches increase, the number of his servants and retainers, of various descriptions, increases. To the covetous, who has given his heart, and time, and toil, to the

acquisition of abundance, this is a source of incessant fretfulness and vexation. There is within him a contention of opposite feelings. He must keep up a certain appearance in the world. Yet the waste of his dear self, squandered by menials and overseers, or even necessarily expended on "the pride of life," costs him many a pang. It keeps him ever grudging and ever complaining. The number of consumers multiplying with his increasing means, he is not in fact richer, nay, he may even be poorer, than when he had less wealth and fewer mouths to feed. And all the while, what has he of the enjoyment of his riches, beyond those who live upon him, "saving the beholding of them with his eyes?"—the mere gratification of looking on his treasures, and saying, "These are mine!" And is this difference worth much? Is there any rational and substantial gratification in it? Is it a sufficient compensation for the toil with which wealth has been gained, and the anxious care with which it is kept?

Riches increased in Solomon's own reign; and the number of his servants and retainers, the extent and splendor of his establishment, increased in proportion. "His provision for one day," the history informs us, "was thirty measures of fine flour, and three-score measures of meal, ten fat oxen, and twenty oxen out of the pastures, and a hundred sheep, beside harts and roe-bucks, and fallow-deer, and fatted fowl." Thus, "as riches increased they were increased that ate them:" and, had Solomon been one who "loved silver," the only difference between him and his servants, (who, in all essential respects—in all that regarded the wants of nature, and even the real comforts of life—were as well off as their master,) would have been, the "beholding of his treasures with his eyes," and calling them his own; with this difference, indeed, against him in the balance, that *his* breast would have been the residence of all the care.

4. This care is next mentioned, as a source of irksome and sleepless inquietude to the man of wealth:—

Verse 12. *The sleep of a laboring man is sweet, whether he eat little or much; but the abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep.*

It appears to be of the anxiety produced by wealth, in the bosom of the covetous, the man who "loveth silver," that Solomon here speaks, as adding nights of sleeplessness to days of solicitude

and "vexation of spirit." Innumerable are the apprehensions and disquieting jealousies and alarms, some well-founded, and others groundless, that haunt the bosom of the rich man whose wealth is his idol and his all;—apprehensions, and jealousies, and alarms, from which the man of moderate possessions is comparatively free. The full meals of the rich and luxurious may be envied by the poor and hard-toiled laborer; yet they frequently have no other effect than to add to the restlessness of anxiety, harassing even the little sleep they can obtain,—

"—short, as usual, and disturb'd repose,"—

with scaring dreams and phantasms of terror. On the contrary, "the sleep of a laboring man is sweet, whether he eat little or much." If he has but a scanty meal, his fatigue has prepared him for sound repose; and when he can have a larger allowance of his plain and wholesome fare, his healthy and vigorous constitution procures him a regular and ready digestion: and he is, at the same time, happily free of those sudden starts and anxious fears by which the rich worldling is so often agitated, and "his eyes held waking." The laboring peasant has, in general, little cause to envy either the days or the nights of his wealthy lord or neighbor, if he be a man whose riches are his portion and his heart's desire. It is of such that Solomon speaks.

5. Riches sometimes prove the occasion to their possessors of the most serious injury:—

Verses 13, 14. *There is a sore evil which I have seen under the sun, namely, riches kept for the owners of them to their hurt: but these riches perish by evil travail; and he begetteth a son, and there is nothing in his hand.*

The inward anxiety and fear to which riches give rise are sometimes but too well founded. Riches stir up envy: envy leads to calumny and slander, and, not unfrequently, on any or on no ground, to malicious and harassing prosecutions. Riches are a lure to thieves, to robbers, to murderers; and have many a time cost the proprietor his life. And, worst of all,—what is, more than any external calamity, even than death itself, "to the hurt" of him whom providence allows to retain them, they hold out a powerful, and, alas! in many instances a too successful temptation to their owners, to forget God, and to neglect their spiritual and



everlasting interests. They thus endanger the soul; they put eternity itself in jeopardy; and a rise in the world has too often, alas! been the means of spiritual declension, apostasy, and ruin. "They that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil; which, while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows." "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!—How hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God." 1 Tim. vi. 9, 10. Mark x. 23-25.

There are different ways in which riches may be "kept, for the hurt" of the proprietors. But perhaps the case which Solomon had chiefly in his eye, is that of *a son and heir*, for whom, as their destined owner, the riches are reserved; who is born and brought up to a fortune; to whom great prospects are held out; who is bred as an independent gentleman, undemeaned by either handicraft or mercantile labor. But "these riches," in the mysterious providence of God, "perish by evil travail;" by some indiscreet mismanagement, or by some extravagant and over-greedy speculation: and this hopeful son, "hath nothing in his hand:" he is still a son, but no longer an heir. The fortune to which he trusted is gone; and all the prospective visions of his inflated fancy are vanished with it. Nothing could well be, to such a youth, a more serious injury. From his education, "he cannot dig," and "to beg he is ashamed." Thus, riches have been "kept for him to his hurt:" and the poor inconsiderate father partakes of the misery, being fretted by unavailing reflections, galled by the disappointment of his family hopes, and stung to the quick by mortified pride.

6. The possession of riches is, at the very longest, bounded by the present life:—

Verses 15, 16. *As he came forth of his mother's womb, naked shall he return to go as he came, and shall take nothing of his labor, which he may carry away in his hand. And this also is a sore evil, that in all points as he came, so shall he go: and what profit hath he that hath labored for the wind?*

These verses, indeed, may be taken in immediate connection with the case described in the two preceding. They are true, however, of every possessor of riches without exception: and it is not the first time that this particular view of their vanity has been brought forward in this book. The man above described, whose "riches perish by evil travail," came helpless into the world, and he leaves it destitute. And of all it is sadly true, that they can "take nothing of their labor which they may carry away in their hand." This is one of those evident truths which do not require to be proved, but to be impressed. It is one of which the importance is equal to the plainness and simplicity; for it is not truths that are abstruse and recondite that are, in general, of the greatest consequence, or that draw after them the weightiest results. That "we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out" is a position so trite and plain, that to question it would indicate a disturbed intellect. Yet if this simple and obvious aphorism were universally felt and acted upon as it ought to be, it would have an influence that cannot be estimated on the temporal and eternal interests of mankind.

When Job said, "Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord!"—he felt and expressed the same affecting truth. But the feelings of the Patriarch were widely different indeed, from those of Solomon's disappointed and mortified worldling. His is not, like Job's, the "godly sorrow" which is accompanied and tempered with resignation to the will of heaven, bearing the bereavement as a stroke of Divine correction. But to him it is "a sore evil" to part with that wealth on which his heart has been set; to see it "make to itself wings and fly away from him as an eagle toward heaven;" or to leave it behind him when the summons of death arrives. O how affecting is the thought of such a man! how pitiable seems his case to the spiritual mind!—clinging to the world to the very last,—reluctant to quit his hold:—and, even when cold in death, his hand remaining clinched in the last convulsive grasp with which he sought to retain his darling treasures!

Still, however, it is especially of the man whose riches have "perished by evil travail" that Solomon speaks; and respecting *him*, observe what follows:—

7. His remaining days on earth are miserable, and his departure from the world fearful:—

Verse 17. *All his days also he eateth in darkness; and he hath much sorrow and wrath with his sickness.*

*Darkness* here seems to signify especially two things:—in the first place, the *dreary cheerlessness* of the man's mind who has thus lost his all, and whose prospects have been so unexpectedly blasted; light being, in all languages, a figure for joy, and darkness for misery:—and secondly, the sad *neglect* into which the poor man falls. The friendship of the world was friendship to his riches rather than to himself. Whilst these remained with him, he enjoyed it; but when they are gone, the bond is broken: he loses his influence, he sinks into neglect; and the man who before gathered crowds to his levee, finds, to his bitter mortification, that to be penniless is to be friendless. He is deserted, solitary, forlorn; and all his remaining days he “eateth in darkness”—the darkness of poverty and seclusion. “The light is dark in his tabernacle.” The losses which he has sustained, and these galling effects of them, he feels grievously. They lie with oppressive weight upon his spirit. In the “sickness” that brings him to the grave, he has “much sorrow and wrath:”—“*sorrow*,” springing from irremediable bereavement, mortified pride, disappointed hopes, and the ungrateful requital of pretended friends:—and “pierced through as he is with many sorrows,” the trials which have occasioned them are unsanctified; his heart is still worldly; he is irritated, instead of being subdued and submissive; he is agitated by “*wrath*” against men for their base and selfish treatment of him, and by inward murmurings, rising at times even to the bitterness of rage and blasphemy, against the providence of God! How affecting, how fearful the thought of such a close of life,—of such an entrance into eternity! It makes one's heart thrill with horror. O how earnestly should we pray, that God in his providence may keep us from exposure to temptations, and that, by his grace, he may preserve our hearts from such inordinate attachment to a present world; that if he permits us to prosper, he may enable us to “rejoice as though we rejoiced not;” and if he visits us with reverses, to “weep as though we wept not;” and ever to be, “when we buy, as though we possessed not, and when we use this world as not abusing it; because the fashion of it passeth away.”

The chapter concludes with a description of the manner in which the temporal bounties of Divine providence should be received and enjoyed:—

Verses 18–20. *Behold that which I have seen: it is good and comely for one to eat and to drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labor that he taketh under the sun all the days of his life, which God giveth him; for it is his portion. Every man also to whom God hath given riches and wealth, and hath given him power to eat thereof, and to take his portion, and to rejoice in his labor; this is the gift of God. For he shall not much remember the days of his life; because God answereth him in the joy of his heart.*

The sentiment of these verses is very similar to what he had repeatedly expressed before: chap. ii. 24–26. iii. 12, 13, 22. I shall refrain, therefore, from enlarging in the illustration of them. The expression in the eighteenth verse, “This is *his portion*,” is not, by any means, to be understood in the same sense as when it is said of the “men of the world,” that they “have *their portion* in this life;” Psalm xvii. 14. The meaning is, that “the good of all his labor” is “the gift of God,” as well as the life itself in which the acquisitions of property are made: and whatever, through the Divine blessing upon his labors, he acquires, is to be looked upon as given him *to be enjoyed*; the God who bestows it, allotting to every individual his particular *portion* of earthly good,—“dividing to every man severally as he will.” And the manner in which Solomon introduces God as the giver both of life and of its enjoyments, shows us how they ought to be received, and how to be used;—surely, in a way consistent with his will, and conducive to his glory. It can neither be “good” nor “comely” to enjoy the benefit, and to forget the Author of it; to spend the “portion” which God allots, in occupations and for purposes which God abhors. And the man who, in his moments of dissolute revelry, quotes Solomon in excuse or palliation of libertinism, as if he gave his sanction to the “lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life,” either has not thought of his words at all, or has thought of them with most pitiable and malignant perversity.

In contemplating our worldly acquisitions, we are ever in danger of “burning incense to our own net, and offering sacrifice to our own drag;” of taking the credit, that is, and giving the praise, to ourselves. Against this danger Moses warned the Israelites;

and we need the warning not less than they:—"Beware—lest, when thou hast eaten and art full, and hast built goodly houses, and dwelt therein; and when thy herds and thy flocks multiply, and thy silver and thy gold are multiplied, and all that thou hast is multiplied; then thy heart be lifted up, and thou forget the Lord thy God,—and say in thy heart, My power, and the might of my hand, hath gotten me this wealth. But thou shalt remember the Lord thy God; for he it is that giveth thee power to get wealth." Deut. viii. 11-14, 17, 18. But God is not only the bestower of whatever a man is enabled to acquire of "riches and wealth;" but he is further represented here as giving "power to eat thereof, and to take his portion, and to rejoice in his labor." The ability, power, or capacity of enjoyment, here spoken of, may be considered as including health of body, peace and tranquillity of mind, and such a providential ordering of circumstances, as to afford full opportunity in other respects; no untoward hinderance coming between the possessor and the free and unembarrassed use of his property. *This*, too, as well as wealth itself, Solomon pronounces to be "the gift of God;" and he immediately contrasts it, as we shall see in the beginning of the next chapter, with its opposite; with the case of a man to whom God gives the "riches, and wealth, and honor" themselves, but withholds the "power to eat thereof,"—the capacity and the opportunity of enjoyment. We decline farther remarks till we come to this contrast.

The general meaning of the twentieth verse,—“For he shall not much remember the days of his life, because God answereth him in the joy of his heart,”—probably is, that whereas, to the discontented and the unhappy, time passes slowly and heavily,—every minute is numbered,—the hours are tedious and irksome,—their days and their nights are alike wearisome;—to the man above described, on the contrary, the man of contentment, and cheerfulness, and piety, who enjoys a healthy body, and a thankful, dependent, resigned, and happy spirit; who enjoys God in all things, and all things in God,—to *him* the time passes lightly and pleasantly; the hours fly over him “on angel wings:” he smiles on the rising, and smiles on the setting sun; he is not harassed with the remembrance of past ills, over which the memory of the discontented man is for ever brooding in peevish fretfulness; nor is he disquieted with careful solicitude about the future, but, in the exer-

cise of faith in God, enjoys to-day, and leaves to-morrow "to take care for the things of itself." The man whose desires God thus answereth,—giving him "joy of heart" in his labors and in the "portion" arising from their success,—goes through the world with as large a measure of happiness as can well be furnished in it. "The days of his life he does not much remember," because they are not marked for future recollection by those calamities and sufferings, of which the memory (alas! for the selfishness and ingratitude of men!) is in general so much more tenacious than it is of past enjoyments. His life is a "river of pleasures," to which his recollections and his anticipations, as well as his present blessings, are all so many tributary streams. Abundant cause has such a man for heart-felt ascriptions of praise, both to the God of providence, and to the "God of all grace."

To expatiate in practically improving this passage would lead to unavoidable repetition. I shall only observe:—

1. *In the first place*, the propriety and the duty of keeping continually in mind that "He that is higher than the highest regardeth" every step of our procedure through life;—that his eye is unceasingly upon us; that he marks every thought, every look, every word, every action; that he "compasses our sitting down and our rising up, and is acquainted with all our ways." Forget not this, ye children of God:—"There is no creature that is not manifest in his sight; but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do:"—and let the remembrance of it be a powerful and prevalent restraint upon all evil. "Stand in awe, and sin not." In a particular manner, let whatever power, authority, and influence you possess, be uniformly exercised in justice and in mercy. "Just and true are all the ways of the King of saints." He is "the righteous God, and he loveth righteousness." And often does he express a peculiar regard to the rights of the poor, and a watchful and indignant jealousy of their infringement. The Lord Jesus, the King of Zion, has "chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of his kingdom." They constitute a large proportion of his subjects. "He shall judge the poor of the people, he shall save the children of the needy, and shall break in pieces the oppressor. He shall deliver the needy when he crieth, the poor also, and him that hath no helper. He shall spare the poor and needy, and shall save the

souls of the needy. He shall redeem their souls from deceit and violence; and precious shall their blood be in his sight." Let us, then, my Christian brethren, beware of "despising the poor." And especially, when in the church we are called to the exercise of judgment between brother and brother, let us be on our guard against all "respect of persons,"—all partiality, all favoritism on the one hand, and oppression on the other. It is not of the mere practice of courtesy in places of worship, but of the exercise of judgment in the meetings of the church, regarding matters of controversy between the rich and the poor, that the apostle James speaks, when he gives us, as he gave others of old, the following important directions:—"My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons. For, if there come into your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment; and ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool: are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts? Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him? but ye have despised the poor. Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment-seats? Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called? If ye fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself, ye do well: but if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors. For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now, if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law. So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty. For he shall have judgment without mercy that hath showed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment." James ii. 1-13.

2. *In the second place.* Let the minds of all, and especially of "the brethren of low degree," be impressed, from the consideration of this passage, with such declarations as these:—"A little that a righteous man hath, is better than the riches of many wicked:"—

“Better is little with the fear of the Lord, than great treasure and trouble therewith:”—“Godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world; and it is certain, we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment, let us be therewith content.” True happiness depends not, as we have seen, on situation. In as far, indeed, as the real and substantial comfort of different situations is concerned, happiness is much more equally diffused than, on a hasty and superficial survey of mankind, we might be ready to conclude. Every situation has its peculiar cares, disappointments, deficiencies, and trials. No earthly condition brings with it unalloyed satisfaction: and frequently the alloy is most abundant where we should hardly expect it to be found. The great and steady source of peace and joy is true religion;—that state of mind in which a man “sets the Lord continually before him;” traces all events to his providence; acknowledges him in all his ways; makes him the supreme portion of his soul; follows his will; submits to his appointments; seeks his glory; and delights in his love. This makes every condition happy; every station honorable. He is truly rich who is “rich toward God.” Every one else, though crowned with gold and diamonds, “clothed in purple and fine linen, and faring sumptuously every day,” is “poor, and miserable, and wretched, and blind, and naked.” True religion, a life of faith and love, and active devotedness to God, is accompanied with a sweet and cheering sense of his paternal favor, amidst all the vicissitudes of life. And this alone can impart peace and hope to the soul when it is lingering on the verge of time, and just about to quit the world, and enter on eternity. It is only leaving the paltry, and perishing possessions of earth, for the full enjoyment of the “better and more enduring substance,” so long anticipated as the object of hope and desire;—the “inheritance that is incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away.” “I have fought a good fight; I have finished my course; I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give to me at that day; and not to me only, but to all them also that love his appearing.”

3. *In the last place.* Let this passage recommend to all, the authoritative and kind and salutary admonition of the merciful Redeemer:—“Labor not for the meat that perishes, but for th t



meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man will give you; for him hath God the Father sealed." He is himself the bread of life;—bread, of which whosoever eateth shall live for ever. And every man that would have the life must eat of the bread. It is the only food of the soul. It is for high and low, rich and poor together. "The king himself" must be "served of the" gospel "field." And all are invited to partake of this heavenly provision. "Spend no longer your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which satisfieth not. Harken to the voice of God, and eat ye that which is good. Come ye, buy and eat, yea come, buy wine and milk without money and without price." "The Spirit and the Bride say, Come; and let him that heareth say, Come; and whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely." Obey the gracious invitations: and then indeed you "shall not much remember the days of your life." The load of self-accusing reflection and of anxious anticipation will be lifted from your spirit. You will commence a career of new and unknown felicity. God will "answer you in the joy of your heart." "While many say, Who will show us any good? he will lift upon you the light of his countenance;" and this will "put a gladness into your heart," such as you never experienced, even "when your corn and your wine increased." You will "go on your way rejoicing;" "counting all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ;" assured that "nothing shall separate you from the love of God;" "forgetting the things that are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, and pressing toward the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." And when you shall have reached your eternal home, "the land of sacred liberty and endless rest," "the former things shall no more be remembered nor come into mind," except to give zest to the pleasures, ever new and ever growing, of that holy and happy place, where "God shall wipe away all tears from your eyes."

## LECTURE X.

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### ECCLESIASTES VI. 1-12.

“There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, and it (is) common among men: 2. A man to whom God hath given riches, wealth, and honor, so that he wanteth nothing for his soul of all that he desireth, yet God giveth him not power to eat thereof, but a stranger eateth it: this (is) vanity, and it (is) an evil disease. 3. If a man beget a hundred (children,) and live many years, so that the days of his years be many, and his soul be not filled with good, and also (that) he have no burial; I say, (that) an untimely birth (is) better than he: 4. For he cometh in with vanity, and departeth in darkness, and his name shall be covered with darkness. 5. Moreover, he hath not seen the sun, nor known (any thing:) this hath more rest than the other. 6. Yea, though he live a thousand years twice (told,) yet hath he seen no good: do not all go to one place? 7. All the labor of man (is) for his mouth, and yet the appetite is not filled. 8. For what hath the wise more than the fool? what hath the poor, that knoweth to walk before the living? 9. Better (is) the sight of the eyes than the wandering of the desire: this (is) also vanity and vexation of spirit. 10. That which hath been is named already, and it is known that it (is) man: neither may he contend with him that is mightier than he. 11. Seeing there be many things that increase vanity, what (is) man the better? 12. For who knoweth what (is) good for man in (this) life, all the days of his vain life which he spendeth as a shadow? for who can tell a man what shall be after him under the sun?”

THE case described in the beginning of this chapter forms an intended contrast, as I formerly noticed, to the one mentioned in the close of the fifth. In that case, the possession of wealth and its attendant blessings was happily associated with the capacity of enjoyment, or what the wise man denominates “power to eat thereof.” In the case which he now states, the wealth is supposed to be bestowed, but the capacity of enjoyment withheld:—

Verses 1, 2. *There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, and it is common among men: A man to whom God hath given riches,*

*wealth, and honor, so that he wanteth nothing for his soul of all that he desireth; yet God giveth him not power to eat thereof, but a stranger eateth it: this is vanity, and it is an evil disease.*

This evil was common, it should seem, in the days of Solomon; and we are far from being without instances of it in our own. Human nature being in every age the same, we may expect it, with the exception of the changes which the varying state of society and of manners necessarily produces, to exhibit in general the same appearances. "There is a man to whom God hath given riches,"—abundant pecuniary treasures;—"and wealth,"—an estate, it may be, in land, with numerous flocks and herds,—sheep and oxen,—camels and asses;—"and honor,"—the external splendor of riches attracting public admiration, and the weight and influence which, in every country, are associated with wealth.

But, alas! with all this bounty, "God giveth him not power to eat thereof." Although all his schemes of emolument have prospered,—his riches have flowed in upon him, so that "he wanteth nothing for his soul of all that he desireth,"—all his wishes, in regard to the object on which his heart was set, having been fully realized: yet some untoward occurrence, some insuperable obstacle, comes between him and the enjoyment of his possessions, depriving him of the opportunity, or of the capacity, of availing himself at all of his overflowing resources of earthly greatness and felicity. His body, for example, may be afflicted by painful or exhausting sickness, by which every thing the world can furnish is bereft of its relish, so that "he never eateth with pleasure;" and all his riches and wealth cannot arrest the progress of his malady; cannot impart a moment's ease, or give efficacy to a single medicine: or, a series of heavy domestic afflictions may so prey upon his spirit, as to render all his honors and all his pleasures vapid and irksome; so that, to remind him of them is only to deepen his gloom by making him feel anew their tastelessness; it is singing songs to a heavy heart;" it is but embittering the reflection,

"How ill the scenes that offer rest,  
And heart that cannot rest, agree."

Instances of such a nature are, alas! far from being rare: and they are not less humbling to our self-dependent pride, than they are affecting to our feelings of sympathy.

"A stranger eateth it." A self-interested, artful man, taking

advantage of circumstances, insinuates himself into the good graces of the proprietor; lives upon the fat of his estate; secretly wastes his substance in the advancement of his own projects; and perhaps draws the whole into his hand at the owner's death:—or, in one or other of a variety of imaginable ways, it falls, in the providence of God, into the possession of a stranger. This is severely mortifying. It is a picture of the vanity of the world. And it is “an evil disease;” the very idea of having the means of enjoyment in the most profuse abundance, and yet being excluded from the capacity of using them, being in itself enough to prey upon the spirits, to sink them to the dust, to produce mental malady, and to increase and hasten forward that of the bodily frame.

I am aware, that by some the character here described is understood to be that of *the miser*; and the want of “power to eat thereof” to mean the want of disposition, or the absolute unwillingness, which forms the strange distinction of this anomalous and pitiable being, to make any use of his possessions; to take any enjoyment of them. And, no doubt, this is well named “an evil disease.” It is a wasting distemper of the soul, partaking alike of aberration of intellect and perversity of heart. But the character of the miser was very particularly delineated before,—in the seventh and eighth verses of the fourth chapter; and it appears, therefore, not unreasonable to understand the passage before us, rather, as setting forth a new case.

On this case he enlarges in the following verses; introducing into it additional particulars, for the sake of giving the greater force and vividness to the impression of it upon the mind:—

Verses 3–6. *If a man beget a hundred children, and live many years, so that the days of his years be many, and his soul be not filled with good, and also that he have no burial; I say, that an untimely birth is better than he. For he cometh in with vanity, and departeth with darkness, and his name shall be covered with darkness. Moreover, he hath not seen the sun, nor known any thing: this hath more rest than the other. Yea, though he live a thousand years twice told, yet hath he seen no good. Do not all go to one place?*

The case here is still that of a man of wealth, and riches, and honor. But to these are superadded:—

*In the first place, A numerous family of children and grandchildren;—a matter of fond desire, and of high honor, amongst the*

Hebrews; as you may be satisfied by simply recollecting how frequently the number of a man's immediate descendants is particularized in the account given of him in the Scripture history. Suppose him, then, to have ever so many,—“a hundred children:”

*Secondly, Long life:*—an object of desire, not to the Hebrews merely, but to mankind in general; of one of the strong instinctive wishes of our nature. Every man desires, and every man hopes, to live long upon the earth: and Satan spoke no more than truth when he said, “All that a man hath will he give for his life.” All goes overboard when *it* is in jeopardy. Well: suppose him to “live many years, so that the days of his years be many.” Let him complete, nay, let him far exceed, the ordinary limit of the life of man.

The supposition then is, that even with these additions to his wealth and honor, “his soul is not filled with good;” all the while, that is, he has had no capacity of enjoying his riches, and family, and life; for the expression seems to be evidently equivalent to that in the second verse, not having “power to eat” of the substance God hath given him:—all the days of his protracted time he has “eaten in darkness” and in bitterness of spirit. And when he comes to die, and to number the last of his “many days,” he “has no burial;” no respect and honor in his death; no interment corresponding to his wealth, and consequence, and station. Many are the ways in which we may imagine this to happen. The “stranger” who has deluded him by his ingratiating arts, outwitted his heirs, and got possession of his property, having had no object but this in view, having been influenced by considerations entirely selfish, now that his end is gained, may care little about the honorable obsequies of the man, of whom he has got all that he wanted. He who courted and flattered the living, may thus neglect and spurn the dead. Or, even his children themselves may have felt and acted toward him in a similar manner; loving the money more than the man; wearying for the *old fellow's* departure; glad to have him out of the way, and with bare decency to thrust him into his grave,—that they may part amongst them his treasures. Such things may take place, without supposing the character described an utterly sordid miser.

Causes of a very different kind may also prevent a man from “having burial.” He may die amongst strangers, in a foreign

clime; he may be cast away at sea; or he may perish on land, in circumstances that preclude even his countrymen and friends from doing him honor at his death, by the regular rites of sepulture. But the strong language used by Solomon, shows that he meant something more than the mere accidental absence of the funeral solemnity. It is his not receiving what he might and ought to receive. The man is represented as *living without enjoyment*, and *dying without honor*:—his life resembling the fabled punishment of Tantalus in the heathen mythology, from whose lips, ever burning with unquenchable thirst, the cooling stream receded ere they could touch it; and over whose head hung the most delicious fruits, which mocked every effort to reach them that he might satisfy his longing appetite;—and his death, notwithstanding all his wealth, being obscure and ignoble, unfelt and unlamented.

Such is the case supposed: the verdict pronounced upon it is, "I say, that an untimely birth is better than he:" and the reasons of the verdict follow, in

Verses 4–6. "For he cometh in with vanity, and departeth in darkness, and his name shall be covered with darkness. Moreover, he hath not seen the sun, nor known any thing: this hath more rest than the other. Yea, though he live a thousand years twice told, yet hath he seen no good: Do not all go to one place?"

Most commentators understand the fourth verse as referring to the abortion; and, consistently with this view of its subject, translate it—"although it cometh in with vanity and departeth in darkness, and its name shall be covered with darkness." But this seems to me very unnatural. "An untimely birth" can hardly with any propriety be spoken of as *coming in* and *departing* at all, inasmuch as it is never numbered amongst the living, nor has any place in the society or the habitations of men. And what is the *name* of an abortion? or, what sense is there in speaking of its name as "covered with darkness," when the thing itself has never seen the light, and its very existence has been unknown? I understand the verse, therefore, of the man described in the preceding context, and as assigning Solomon's reason for giving the preference to "an untimely birth." The man "cometh in" to the world "with vanity." He not only enters on a life which at the best is vain, uncertain, unsatisfying, and transitory; but even, as to this life, having "seen no good" in his passage through it, he seems,

as far as he himself is concerned, to have been born *to no purpose*,—*for no end or use*,—*in vain*. He goes through the period of his earthly existence, a mere passive exemplification of the utter vanity of expecting sure and solid happiness from the present world; and then he “departs in darkness,” without the light either of comfort or of honor;—his name is “covered with darkness;” he is immediately forgotten; no sooner out of sight, than out of mind.

The fifth verse, however, is evidently spoken of the abortion:—“Moreover, he hath not seen the sun, nor known any thing: this hath more rest than the other.” It is true, that an untimely birth has had no enjoyment; but neither has it had suffering; or, supposing it to have had life when born, its suffering has been but momentary; and it is with the condition of the man who has been troubled and tantalized through life, and unhonored and unlamented in death, that its destiny is compared. The comparison regards the absence of suffering, rather than the proportions of positive enjoyment:—“This hath more rest than the other;” or, “this hath rest rather than the other;” which, in the present case, is much the same in real amount with—“this hath rest, and not the other.” The rest of the grave is meant; where the untimely birth is immediately laid. It has not “seen the sun,” indeed, or enjoyed the cheering light of heaven. But what is the cheering light of heaven to the man whose eye it gives “to see no good?”—to whom it only discloses, day after day, the same dreary scenes of woe? The abortion has the advantage, in “not having known any thing;” for it is better to know nothing at all, than to know nothing but trouble. It is laid in the grave, without having tasted the miseries of human life; in the grave, where, amid the silence and solitude of death, the cares and disappointments, the disquietudes, and mortifications, and distresses, of this world are neither felt nor dreamed of. It would have been better, in Solomon’s judgment, for the unhappy being he had depicted, to have been “carried from the womb to the grave.” Such was the wish of Job when, overwhelmed with accumulated sufferings, he “opened his mouth, and cursed his day:”—“Why died I not from the womb? why did I not give up the ghost when I came out of the belly? why did the knees prevent me? or why the breasts that I should suck? For now should I have lain still, and been quiet; I should have slept; then had I been at rest, with kings, and counsellors,

and princes: or, as a hidden untimely birth, I had not been; as infants which never saw light. There the wicked cease from troubling; and there the weary be at rest. There the prisoners rest together; they hear not the voice of the oppressor. The small and great are there, and the servant is free from his master. Wherefore is light given to him that is in misery, and life unto the bitter in soul; who long for death, but it cometh not; and dig for it more than for hid treasures; who rejoice exceedingly, and are glad when they can find the grave?" Job iii. 11-22.

These words of bitter complaining from the lips of the afflicted Patriarch serve further to illustrate the following verse: "Yea, though he live a thousand years twice told, yet hath he seen no good: do not all go to one place?" Suppose the life of this hapless being, who is surrounded with means of enjoyment which he cannot use, were prolonged to more than double the length of the longest life ever spent upon earth,—yet, if he "sees no good" from its commencement to its close, and then "goes to one place" with the abortion—even to the grave, the place of perfect equality, the common receptacle of corruption, the "end of all flesh;" is not the verdict pronounced in the third verse founded in truth—"I say that an untimely birth is better than he?" Nothing can be more preposterous, than to attach value to existence, apart from enjoyment; as if it were better *to be*, even although in misery, than *not to be* at all. The measure of the value of existence is simply the quantum of good that is enjoyed in it. When we speak of the cessation of being, we find it difficult to divest ourselves of the impression of a kind of dreary consciousness of non-existence as accompanying it. We fancy ourselves continuing to be, and yet sensible that we are not. I need not say that such feelings are intirely illusory. The cessation of existence being the cessation of all consciousness, he who ceases to be, is as if he never had been. And he who has not entered on life at all, or who has entered on it one moment, only to quit it the next, has a preferable lot to that of him who has lived long, but lived only to suffer.

In the seventh and eight verses, we have a further illustration of the little advantage, as to the things of time, possessed by one man above another:—

Verses 7, 8. *All the labor of man is for his mouth; and yet the*



*appetite is not filled: for what hath the wise more than the fool? what hath the poor, that knoweth to walk before the living?*

“All the labor of man is for his mouth;” that is, the direct and leading end of all human toil, of every occupation of men, in all the departments of society, is *the support of life*. This is first; and every thing else is subordinate to it. It is obviously the most important result of human effort in all the businesses of life; one to which every other will be readily sacrificed; one without which no other could be enjoyed. This was the object assigned to the labor of man, when the ground had been cursed on account of his sin:—“Cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.”—“He that laboreth,” says Solomon elsewhere, “laboreth for himself; for his mouth requireth it of him.” Gen. iii. 17-19. Prov. xvi. 26. The effect of human labor, therefore, is chiefly valuable as it answers this end: “Take no thought for your life,” said he who had the correctest estimate of the comparative value of the objects of desire,—“take no (anxious) thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?” He, then, who has life sustained by his labor, has the first end answered of all human exertion.

“Yet the appetite is not filled.” This is true of all. It is never durably filled; but requires to have its cravings, which are ever returning, satisfied anew from day to day. And the cravings of appetite return to the rich as well as to the poor. The former as well as the latter can only take, of all his profuse abundance, as much at a time as his appetite will receive. In this respect, too, “what hath the wise more than the fool?” The most learned and sagacious of men has, in this matter, no pre-eminence over the mere idiot, who, by some means or other, obtains a sufficiency of food, and whose appetite relishes it as well as the other’s. The wise man can neither prevent the returnings of hunger; nor, when they do return, can he allay them more effectually than the fool. In this essential point of human comfort, they are substantially

alike. The skilful anatomist, who possesses an intimate acquaintance with the whole of the complicated and wonderful mechanism of the human frame, and the man who knows little more than the difference, in properties that meet the senses, between the flesh and the bones, divide and masticate their food by the same instruments, and receive it into the same organ of digestion; it is mixed with the same juices, undergoes the same changes, affords the same variety of secretions, and carries the same nourishment, through the same channels, to the same bodily members, which all occupy the same relative positions, and respectively fulfill the same functions.

“What hath the poor,” it is added, “who knoweth to walk before the living?” The answer is not directly given: but it seems to me to be indirectly implied in the ninth verse:—

Verse 9. *Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of the desire.*

The poor that knows how to conduct himself with propriety and prudence, maintaining a behavior corresponding with the station assigned him among the living;—who is ingenious, industrious, obliging, and respected accordingly, enjoys the necessaries and the true comforts of life as well as the richest. He has “the sight of the eyes,” that is, he has substantial *present enjoyment* in what he obtains; and in this, being satisfied with it, possessing the tranquillity of a contented spirit, he has what is “better,” more conducive to true happiness, than the unsatisfied “wandering of the desire” after new objects of pursuit; which, even when successfully attained, leave the mind still craving, never disposed to say, It is enough. This incessant restlessness of desire after different pleasures, is truly “vanity and vexation of spirit;” and it is a vanity and vexation to which they are especially subject, who set their hearts on the wealth and gratifications of this world as their portion.

The tenth verse, as it stands in our English translation, is exceedingly obscure:—

Verse 10. *That which hath been is named already, and it is known that it is man: neither may he contend with him that is mightier than he.*

The intention of the writer seems to be, to express the common frailty and vanity of the nature of man, as having been the same

in all that have ever existed; and the verse might be thus rendered:—“For he who (or, whosoever) hath been,—his name is long since named;\* and it is known what he is,—(even) MAN;” (or, “and it is known that he is MAN:) neither may he contend with him that is mightier than he.” Take any person that has existed, or that now exists; any individual of the present or of former generations;—whatever may have been his station, whatever his character; “his name has been long since named,” God having of old given one name to the entire race. “Male and female created he them, and blessed them; and called their name ADAM in the day when they were created.” The name signified originally their formation *from the dust*; but it came afterwards to be associated with their return *to the dust*: “Dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return.” This, then, is the state and doom, the origin and the end, of every one without exception, whose name is *man*. In his best estate, he is altogether vanity,—sinful dust and ashes. And as God formed him from the earth, named him MAN, and, when he sinned, destined him to earth again; it is in vain for him to “contend with him that is mightier than he:” his “vanity,” as a frail and mortal creature, being the result of Divine appointment, and the execution of a Divine sentence, is utterly irretrievable. All must submit successively to the same doom; and every attempt to avert it is at once foolish and impious.

Man, then, considered in himself, is vanity. But may not this “vanity,” if it cannot be intirely done away, be at least lessened, and the “vexation” arising from it mitigated, by the nature of the pursuits to which man devotes himself during his vain life? The answer must be, YES; provided we include amongst these pursuits *true religion*, which constitutes the dignity and the happiness of every rational nature. But if we confine our regard to those pursuits and occupations merely, which relate to the present world, and which are limited in their continuance and results by the few days of man’s abode upon earth, then the answer is to be found in the following verse:—

Verse 11. *Seeing there be many things that increase vanity, what is man the better?*

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\* “His name is *long since* named.” I have thought myself justified in rendering the word כִּנְר *long since*. It occurs only in this Book, chap. i. 10. iii. 15. vi. 10. ix. 6. “As a particle, it denotes, a *considerable length of time, a good while, as we say, past, or to come.*”—Parkhurst.

Having alluded, in the tenth verse, to the vanity of the *nature* of man, as a creature of the dust, and doomed to dust again; he here represents this original and inherent vanity of his fallen nature as “increased,” instead of being mitigated, by a large proportion of the employments of mankind, and by their attempts at the attainment of happiness from earthly sources alone. In this view, the whole of the preceding part of the book is a comment on this verse. “What is man the better” of all these attempts? His temporal comforts, indeed, both personal and social, may, as the result of some of them, experience improvement. But even this cannot be effected without a heavy accompaniment of evil, producing a scene so checkered, as to have given rise to many debates, whether, in the average lot of man, the enjoyment or the suffering preponderates:—and, when he is contemplated in the light in which every wise and good being must regard him, as rational, immortal, and accountable, with what an emphasis of deep concern, may the question be asked, “what is man the better?” How frequently is he the worse! How often do his various engagements draw away his mind from the only true source of happiness! How few, comparatively, repair to *it!*—how many, alas! to the “springs of false delight!” And, even, as to temporal enjoyment, how often are the anticipations of men,—their fears in one quarter and their hopes in another,—agreeably or bitterly disappointed; the dreaded evil turning out for good, and the wished-for good, proving the occasion of evil!

Hence it is added, in the twelfth verse:—

Verse 12. *For who knoweth what is good for man in this life, all the days of his vain life, which he spendeth as a shadow? for who can tell a man what shall be after him under the sun?*

No man can previously affirm, with confidence, what situation will be best for him in this life; for the reason just hinted, that the very objects which a man most eagerly covets and pursues, in the expectation of finding happiness from them, so often, when they have been obtained, bring him, instead of happiness, disappointment, and misery, and ruin; and he discovers too late his error and miscalculation. When the inquiry, “Who will show us any good?” is confined to the things of this life, it can receive no satisfactory answer; no answer that will hold permanently true. It must be continually reiterated, from reiterated disap-

pointment; each source successively failing, or quickly satiating, and palling upon the taste; no man being able in this wilderness to discover for himself, or to point out to others, any fountain of pure and perennial joy; any fountain that can with certainty be depended upon, even during the fleeting years of a single life. Riches, honors, power, and pleasure, and even knowledge itself, all are precarious,—incapable of being insured even for the short period of his “vain life, which he spendeth as a shadow;”—equally unsubstantial, equally transient, and equally trackless. “Man that is born of a woman—cometh forth as a flower, and is cut down; he fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not.”—“Our days on earth are as a shadow, and there is no abiding.” And yet, not only is it impossible to secure, for the brief duration of this vain and shadowy existence, the sources of enjoyment recommended by other guides and other teachers than Him who is himself the Supreme good; but even while they last they are unsatisfactory. With a precariousness belonging to them every successive moment, they unite a constant feeling of present deficiency. And in addition to this; a man’s happiness, in as far as it depends on the possession and hope of earthly things, is not a little affected by his prospects of the future, as well as by what is at the moment passing over him;—by the use that may be made of his substance when he has left it behind him; by the reputation in which his name may be held by posterity; by what he imagines, with or without reason, may befall his family; and by other anticipations of a similar kind:—yet of such things he is utterly ignorant, and all around him are as ignorant as himself. No one can open to him the secrets of futurity: “for who can tell a man what shall be after him?” His “vain life” must speedily come to a close; and this must terminate, completely and for ever, all his connections with this world; so that he can no more have “a portion in any thing that is done under the sun.” How inexpressibly light and worthless, then, are all those pursuits that end at the grave, and that leave, even to the most successful of their votaries, the moment he has closed his eyes on time, no profit, no result, nothing whatever,—but that which he has vainly estimated as the prize of life; leaving him, alas! a blank for eternity!

Must the question, then, as to “what is best for a man all the days of his vain life,” be left without an answer? Is there no

one that knows it, and can furnish a satisfactory reply? Yes, my friends, it is answered; answered by unerring knowledge and supreme authority:—it is answered in this blessed book of God; of which the leading and all-gracious design is, to show us the way to true happiness both here and hereafter. Here multitudes have found it; and many of them, after having run the whole round of earthly pleasures in the vain pursuit. They have at length renounced these empty or polluted cisterns, and have learned to “draw water with joy out of the wells of salvation.” They have found in the Creator, to whom the lessons of the Bible directed them, what they sought with no success from the creature. They have “wept a silent flood” over their former follies; and “the Father of mercies” has wiped the tears of penitential sorrow from their eyes, and filled their souls with his own peculiar joys. Having “tasted that the Lord is gracious,” they have learned to say, with delight unfelt before, “The Lord is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him:”—“It is good for me, that I draw near unto God:”—“Men of the world have their portion in this life: as for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness:”—“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ:”—“Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift!”

The favor of God, the service of God, and the “good hope through grace” possessed by the children of God,—these are “good for a man,”—these are good for every man, “all the days of his” otherwise “vain life.” “He has showed thee, O man, what is good: and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?”—“Blessed is the man that feareth the Lord, that delighteth greatly in his commandments:”—“Blessed is the people, whose God is the Lord!”

Human life, considered in itself, apart from its connection with eternity, is vanity; a fleeting shadow; a fading flower; a vapor that endureth for a moment, and then vanisheth away. Man, contemplated merely as the possessor of such a life, is vanity; a creature formed of the dust, and soon to return to the dust again:—all his pursuits, be they what they may, that are confined to this transitory and precarious existence, are vanity; and all will be found in the end, as they have many a time been found in present

experience, to be "vexation of spirit." If this lesson is not learned, with salutary effect, in this world, it will be learned in all the everlasting anguish and unavailing desperation in the next. Oh! if the soul, when trembling on the verge of eternity, when the last fibre of the thread of life is parting, can only look backward with tormenting regret, and forward with more tormenting doubt and despair!—what a state for an immortal and accountable creature!—to feel the torturing conviction, that he has been trifling, or worse than trifling, all his days; that he has thrown his life away on "vanity," and has nothing left as the result but "vexation of spirit;" that it is too late to make provision for the world to come, and which is just opening to him in all its darkness, and all its unknown terrors; that he has finished and sealed the "senseless bargain" (Oh how bitterly does he feel it to be so?) of "Eternity for bubbles;" that he has bartered and damned his soul for the "pleasures of sin" and the worthless nothings of a world that has passed away from him! It is not necessary that a man should have "seen no good," or should have had "no power to enjoy" his "riches, and wealth, and honors," and family, in order to his feeling their emptiness in his latter end, when his soul is absorbed in one grand concern, and longs for a peace and a hope which they are incapable of imparting. Even though he had derived from them through life the whole amount of pleasure which, without the influence of true religion, it is in their power to bestow; still, it is pleasure that is gone with each passing moment, and leaves the soul at last drearily desolate, and unprovided for the boundless prospect that lies before it. He has "received in his life-time his good things," and all must be left behind him. He has lived without God, and without God he must die. His life has been faithless, and his death must be hopeless. He has laid up for himself treasures on earth, and there is no treasure reserved for him in heaven. He has said to his soul, "Thou hast goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry;" and when "his soul is required of him," he feels himself "a fool." He "came in with vanity," and he "departeth in darkness." It is the everlasting existence by which it is followed that stamps importance on the life of man. Should a man double the age of Methuselah, his life (though to us, with our narrow span of threescore years and ten, it might seem like a little eternity,) would still be vanity, if it

were spent without reference to the endless duration that is beyond it. Another year, my friends, has just gone over us, and is now as irrecoverable as "the years before the flood." But, Oh remember, it will not have as little influence on our future destinies. Ask yourselves how it has been spent. Ask yourselves how all the years of your past life have been spent. How many have you lived? and what have you been doing? Have you anticipated eternity? Have you made any provision for your immortal existence? Have you, in the way of his own appointment, secured the blessing of God, and a title to the inheritance above? Are there not many of my hearers whose consciences say *No* to such inquiries?—who have lived twenty, thirty, forty, sixty, nay, perhaps fourscore years, "without God in the world,"—"without Christ and without hope?" Oh! trifle no longer with interests of such tremendous magnitude. "Live not the rest of your time in the flesh, to the lusts of men, but to the will of God." "Choose the good part that shall never be taken away from you." "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found; call upon him while he is near." "The Spirit and the Bride say, Come; and let him that heareth say, Come; and whosoever will, let him come, and take of the water of life freely."



## LECTURE XI.

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### ECCLESIASTES VII. 1-6.

“A good name (is) better than precious ointment: and the day of death than the day of one's birth. 2. (It is) better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting: for that (is) the end of all men; and the living will lay (it) to his heart. 3. Sorrow (is) better than laughter: for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better. 4. The heart of the wise (is) in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools (is) in the house of mirth. 5. (It is) better to hear the rebuke of the wise than for a man to hear the song of fools. 6. For as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so (is) the laughter of the fool. This also (is) vanity.”

HAVING represented, in a great variety of views, the vanity of human life, and of its numerous and diversified pursuits, Solomon now proceeds to set before us the counsels of wisdom, for the regulation of our desires and the guidance of our conduct in this vain and transitory world. Some of these, like many of the sayings of our Divine Lord, stand in direct opposition to the ordinary sentiments and practices of mankind. But they are not, on this account, the less worthy of our most serious attention: for it need not, surely, be matter of surprise, that the thoughts and the feelings of a fallen and depraved creature, whose heart is corrupt, and whose understanding is the dupe of its corruption, should not coincide with the mind of the infinitely wise and the infinitely holy;—that to such a creature the directions and admonitions of Heaven should, in many instances, appear paradoxical and extravagant.

Verse 1. *A good name is better than precious ointment; and the day of death than the day of one's birth.*

Perhaps this might, without impropriety, be considered as a reply to the question in the close of the preceding chapter: “Who

knoweth what is good for man all the days of his vain life which he spendeth as a shadow? for who can tell a man what shall be after him under the sun?" There is one thing, answers Solomon, which is eminently good for a man; good while he lives, and the possession of which will render the day of his death even better than the day of his birth; it is "A GOOD NAME." This will bless his life, and embalm his memory. But, respecting "a good name," several things are carefully to be observed. In the first place, it means more than merely *being well spoken of*. A man may be well spoken of, nay, may even acquire high renown, who, judging on Scripture principles, ought rather to be condemned; the world very frequently, in their estimate of character, not only allowing a little apparent good to compensate for much real evil, but even "calling good evil, and evil good; putting darkness for light, and light for darkness; bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter." Many, alas! are the instances, in which "that which is highly esteemed amongst men is abomination in the sight of God." A good name, in the Scriptural use of the phrase, is a reputation for what is *truly good*; for piety, wisdom, integrity, benevolence, and other genuine excellences of character. It is further to be noticed, that the *reputation* must be considered as including the *reality*,—the actual possession of the virtues that are the ground of praise. A reputation, indeed, for qualities which we are conscious to ourselves we do not possess, so far from imparting any true satisfaction to the mind, must, on the contrary, occasion the most painful emotions of vexation, and shame, and self-reproach. Whilst there remains a spark of generous and honest feeling in the bosom, nothing can be more distressing than unmerited commendation.

Rightly understood, then,—as signifying a reputation founded in the real possession of what is truly good, good in the sight of God,—"a good name is better than precious ointment." Two qualities are expressed by the comparison. It is *pleasant*, and it is *valuable*; as the ointment is *odoriferous*, and *costly*. "Ointment and perfume rejoice the heart: so doth the sweetness of a man's friend by hearty counsel:"—"Because of the savor of thy good ointments, thy name is as ointment poured forth; therefore do the virgins love thee:"—"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is, for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's

beard; that went down to the skirts of his garments:"—"Mary took a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair: and the house was filled with the odor of the ointment." Prov. xxvii. 9. Cant. i. 3. Psalm cxxxiii. 1, 2. John xii. 3. These passages show the ground for both the ideas which we conceive the comparison to express. But the sign falls far below the thing signified, both in its pleasantness and its preciousness.

A good name is to its possessor a source of pure and exquisite enjoyment; gratifying in a high degree to his feelings, when it is not pronounced, by a secret consciousness, to be intirely unfounded. It is pleasant as the fragrance of rich perfume; sweet and refreshing, soothing and exhilarating to the soul. The sweetness of it should be estimated by the bitterness of its opposite.

But it is not merely, nor chiefly, as a source of pleasure to a man's own mind, that a good name is to be prized:—it is of more substantial value, as an important qualification for usefulness. The power of any man to do good depends, in an eminent degree, on the reputation he enjoys. His character multiplies his opportunities, inspires confidence, gives weight to his counsels, and freedom, and energy, and effect, to all his doings. To the man of inconsistency it will be said with scorn, "Physician, heal thyself;" but he whose reputation is established for uniform integrity, possesses a winning and commanding influence, which he may turn to most profitable account, in the cause of truth, benevolence, and piety. It is our duty, therefore, to desire "a good name;" not merely on its own account, or for the satisfaction it affords to ourselves, but for the sake of its utility, in enabling us the more effectually to promote the glory of God, and the good of men. It gives us, to use the language of mechanics, a *rest*, and a *purchase*, in advancing every good work, which nothing else whatever can furnish. For this reason, they are decidedly and very far in the wrong, who despise, or rather, perhaps, who affect to despise, "a good name," and to pour contempt on the opinion of the world, and disregard, as unworthy of their notice, whatever men may say of them. It is true that our first and highest concern should be, to "commend ourselves unto God;" and, compared with this, it should be "a light thing" with us "to be judged of man's judgment." It is also true, that we should employ no means of ob-

taining a character amongst men but the direct and honorable means of a steady and consistent deportment; the cultivation and the display (not the ostentatious, but the unobtrusive and unavoidable display) of real goodness,—goodness that follows its everyday course of well-doing,—

“Holds the noiseless tenor of its way,”—

neither courting observation nor shrinking from it; not varnishing itself with a false lustre, but appearing in all its native simplicity and loveliness; not shadow, but substance; not tinsel, but bullion. Whilst all this is readily conceded; still we maintain, that to be totally unconcerned whether we be slandered or approved, whether “our good be well or evil spoken of,” is as immoral as it is unnatural. The same apostle who counted it “a light thing to be judged of man’s judgment,” and kept in mind that “he that judged him was the Lord,” was, at the same time, earnestly solicitous, and took measures of prudent precaution accordingly, to “provide for honest things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men;” he denied himself, and declined the benefit of his just rights, that he “might cut off occasion from them that desired occasion” to reproach and calumniate him; and this, for the very reason we have been assigning, a regard to his official usefulness,—“lest he should hinder the gospel of Christ.” The same principle is involved, also, in the precept, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.”

“And the day of death (is better) than the day of one’s birth.” This seem a strange saying. The birth of a child is a season of gladness, gratulation, and festivity. The death of the same child, when it has advanced to manhood or to age, is the occasion of sorrow and bitter lamentation. It comes into the world amidst rejoicings, and leaves it amidst tears. Yet it is here affirmed that “the day of death is better than the day of one’s birth.” The affirmation may be understood in different ways:—

It may be interpreted *generally*, in connection with the view given of the vanity and vexation of the life of man. It may be the sentiment of chapter iv. 1–3, *generalized*; applied to human life *on the whole*, instead of being confined to one particular department of observation: as if he had said, Seeing “all is vanity

and vexation of spirit,"—seeing there are so many springs of bitter water in this valley of tears, of which all who pass through it must drink, the man whose journey has terminated is more enviable than he who has it yet to begin; to the former all its evils having ended in the grave,—the land of deep forgetfulness, where "the weary are at rest." The truth of the sentiment, in this general view of it, is proportioned to the measure of suffering endured by the person's self, or, to the increase of his own unhappiness in consequence of the sufferings witnessed by him in others.

But if we adopt this principle of explanation, it is evident, we must stop short at the grave. We must contemplate man simply as passing through this world, and the grave as the close of his journey,—the boundary of his course. Now, we can hardly for a moment suppose that Solomon meant we should look no further; that we should consider man merely as the creature of a day,—his life limited by the little span of "threescore years and ten," cut off from all connection with a life to come. Yet if we *do* look beyond the grave, we must necessarily introduce into the sentiment before us certain limitations and distinctions. It certainly is not true respecting all who die, that the day of their death is better than the day of their birth. To many it is fearfully the reverse. And perhaps, as I before noticed, the distinction is hinted by the connection of the saying with that which precedes; the superiority of death to birth being affirmed only of the man who possesses "a good name," in the sense we have affixed to the phrase.

We rejoice when a man is born into the world. The joy is natural; nor is there any impropriety in it. But let me suppose for a moment, that we were let into the secret of the little stranger's future history; and suppose he were exhibited by the Oracle, tormented by incessant disease, crossed and fretted by perpetual disappointments and vexations; every blossom and promise of personal and social joy invariably and intirely blasted; a man of sorrows, and familiar with griefs:—how completely then would our feelings of gladness be changed to those of heaviness and anguish! This would be the case, even viewing things with reference to the present life alone: and too often is the birth of a child, with inconsiderate and vacant listlessness, thought of in no other light. But what is the event in reality? It is the entrance of an im-

mortal creature on an interminable existence. Yes;—that little feeble babe, that hangs in dependent helplessness upon the breast, is a child of immortality. When you have numbered the sands of the ocean, you will not have numbered the years of its existence. There resides in that tender little frame a spiritual substance, a soul, which death cannot touch, possessing powers capable of indefinite, and eternal expansion, and susceptibilities of everlasting enjoyment or of unending woe;—a spirit, that “smiles at the drawn dagger, and defies its point;” that shall “triumph in immortal youth;” that is destined to live, as long as God himself. Suppose, then, we could get still farther into the future history of the babe that has just made its entrance into our world, and is passing through it to another:—suppose we could find access to the book of Heaven’s decrees, and could ascertain its eternal destiny; and were infallibly assured, that after a life of unintermitted suffering here, it was to sink into an eternity of woe:—Oh! should we not then weep over him tears of blood? should we not wring our hands, in speechless agony, over his little cradle, and be ready to “open our mouth and to curse his day?” Surely it could not *then* be true, that the day of death would be better than the day of birth. No; for there can be no suffering here, comparable to the misery of hell. The sentiment we should then utter, would be,—“Good were it for that child, if it had never been born!”

The saying before us, then, must be confined to the wise and the good; to the children of God; those who have believed his word, and walked in his ways, and have had “a good name” in “the Lamb’s book of life.” Of them it is emphatically true; true in all its extent of meaning; true, not only when this life has been a life of unusual suffering—when they go to heaven “out of great tribulation;” but true, even taking life in its “best estate,” freest of evil and fullest of good. This is the language alike of the Old and of the New Testament records. To such, death is a salvation; a salvation from sin, and from all the evil of which sin is the cause. The day of birth is the day of entrance on a sinful, and therefore on a suffering world: the day of death is the day of entrance on a sinless, and therefore a perfectly happy world. “To die is” thus “gain.” “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord.”—“They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat: for the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne

shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." The passage through Jordan into the land flowing with milk and honey, was better to the Israelites than the passage through the Red Sea into the difficulties, and dangers, and distresses of "the waste howling wilderness."

Our journey through this world is toward that which is eternal. How long it is to be, or how short, we are all equally ignorant. But the prime concern is, with regard to each of us, that, however short or however long, it may *end well*. Consequences unutterably important—interests of eternal moment—depend on its termination. Yet, alas! such is the natural earthliness of our minds,—such the fascinating and seductive influence of "the things that are seen,"—that although we know and acknowledge them to be but temporal, they are ever excluding from our thoughts and desires the "things that are unseen," though *they* are eternal. Alas! for the wisdom of human nature;—alas! for the boasted prudence of rational and calculating man, that it should be so! But that it *is* so, we cannot cast even a hasty glance upon the world,—we cannot turn our eye inward for a moment to the secrets of our own hearts,—without the sad conviction forcing itself upon our minds. The man must have renounced all pretensions to soundness of intellect and rectitude of feeling, who will not admit the importance of immortal creatures considering with seriousness the prospects that are before them; laying to heart the things that belong to their everlasting peace, and not sacrificing eternity to time, excellent and ever-during joys for the paltry vanities of the world and "the pleasures of sin which are but for a season." But if this be granted,—if such consideration be the wisdom of such creatures;—then, whatever has any tendency to correct the deceptions of time, and to keep men in mind of eternity, to counteract the power of sensible objects, and to give predominant influence to those that are spiritual, must be infinitely "better,"—more conducive to the true interests of mankind,—than what has a contrary tendency;—a tendency to aid the natural depravity and worldliness of the heart, in blinding, alluring, and bewitching men, to their endless ruin.

It is on this principle, that the maxims contained in the following verses are founded:—

Verses 2-4. *It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart. Sorrow is better than laughter: for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning: but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.*

“It is better to go to the house of mourning,”—the house where Death has paid his gloomy visit, and has spread his pall over the light of domestic joy,—“than to go to the house of feasting,” where all is gaiety and merriment, and animal indulgence. The reason of the preference is assigned:—“for that,” namely death, and the mourning attending it, “is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart.” The *general tendencies* of the two contrasted scenes are thus expressed. It is not to be inferred that in every case it is wrong to go to a “house of feasting.” Our blessed Master, though “holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners,” graced a marriage-feast with his presence, and supplied, by miracle, the means, not of inebriation, (infinitely far from our minds be such a thought!) but of innocent convivial cheerfulness:—and the apostle Paul, when he makes the supposition of Christians being “bidden to a feast” by “any of them that believe not,” lays them under no prohibition of compliance, should they be “disposed to go,” but only cautions them as to some parts of their conduct while there. John ii. 1, etc. 1 Cor. x. 27, etc. There are joyous seasons, and occurrences in life, when we may, without impropriety, unbend ourselves in social festive enjoyment: always taking heed, that we keep within the limits of Christian temperance; and never forgetting the Divine Author of all our blessings, and our obligations to use them to his glory. But still, the house of feasting has peculiar temptations. Its *general tendency*, proved, alas! by much mournful experience, is to produce forgetfulness of God and of spiritual things; to fill the mind with worldly vanities; to dissipate serious impressions; and thus, instead of counteracting, to aid the deceptions of time and sense. “The harp and the viol, the tabret and pipe, and wine, are in their feasts: but they regard not the work of the Lord, neither consider the operation of his hands.”—“They lie upon beds of ivory, and stretch themselves upon their couches, and eat the lambs out of the flock, and the calves out of the midst of the stall. They



chant to the sound of the viol, and invent to themselves instruments of music like David: they drink wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with the chief ointments: but they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph.”—“Job’s sons went and feasted in their houses, every one his day; and sent and called for their three sisters, to eat and to drink with them. And it was so, when the days of their feasting were gone about, that Job sent and sanctified them, and rose up early in the morning, and offered burnt-offerings according to the number of them all, for Job said, It may be that my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts. Thus did Job continually.” Isa. v. 12. Amos vi. 4-6. Job. i. 4, 5.

In the house of mourning, on the contrary, lessons the most salutary, in regard to the best interests of men, are presented, with awakening energy, to the mind; lessons which, alas! we are all of us too prone to forget, and of which the very frequency of repetition is ever apt to diminish the vividness of the impression. We are there reminded of “the end of all men;” and reminded, consequently, of our own. The tendency of such scenes is, to lead “the living to lay this to heart;” to induce to serious reflection on the past, and anticipation of the future; to bring home to the secret meditations of each man’s bosom the prospect that awaits himself; and to press upon his consideration the all-important question, how *he* may meet the closing scene in peace and hope.

And is it not a desirable thing, that the living should consider their latter end?—that they should think, with seriousness, of the events that are before them;—of death, and judgment, and eternity?—No, says the man of this world. Such thoughts and anticipations are inconsistent with present enjoyment, which is every man’s present concern: they produce dejection and gloom; they drive men mad. Why torment ourselves before the time? Why torture the present moment by anticipating moments that are far away?—“begone, dull care!” Let us catch the pleasures of the passing hour! Let us pluck the rose before it withers! Let us not, like fools, conjure up the phantoms of to-morrow, to scare away the joys of to-day! Let us not throw over our present sunshine the shadows of a future darkness!—Ah! vain man! and will this thoughtlessness prevent the approaches of Death, or keep thy latter end at a distance? Will it arrest the flight of that “numbered hour” that shall lay thee with the dead, and summon

thy parting spirit to the judgment-seat of God? Will Death spare you, because you laugh him to scorn; or the evil hour linger, because you do not prepare for its coming? O remember, that which is far off in your imagination may be very near at hand in reality. Whilst the rich man, in the parable, was saying to his soul, "Thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease; eat, drink, and be merry; God said to him, Thou fool! this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?"

The language of Solomon, in this passage, implies his knowledge and firm conviction of a future state of happiness and misery. For, if death were "the end of all men," as to their *existence*, it would be difficult to establish the wisdom of his maxims. "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die," might then be pleaded for as the most rational principle of human conduct; and the libertine might maintain a successful argument with the moralist and the divine. But, taking the case as it really stands, nothing can be conceived of greater consequence than to persuade men to "lay to heart" their state and their prospects, and to provide for the happiness of a never-ending existence. If this object is gained by affliction, affliction is the greatest blessing of a man's life; the kindest appointment of a beneficent providence. If the "heaviness" that springs from trouble issues in "the joy of God's salvation;" if the darkness of sorrow introduces into the soul the light of spiritual and everlasting gladness; what cause has the patient to say,—"It was good for me that I was afflicted!"

"Sorrow is better than laughter." Is this the sentiment of a morose and cynical misanthrope?—or of an infatuated and gloomy-minded devotee? Certainly, adversity is not in itself preferable to prosperity. Solomon does not say it is. But adversity has many a time produced effects more truly and permanently beneficial than prosperity. There is a mighty difference between the Divine and the human estimate of things. If a man's spiritual advantage is promoted by suffering, he is, in God's account, a great gainer; and if his prosperity either prevents him from thinking of higher blessings, or entices away those affections that had been fixed upon them, he is an unspeakable loser. The words of Solomon express the result of experience, and are dictated, not by cynical moroseness, but by genuine enlightened benevolence; benevolence that

is chiefly concerned about the highest interests of men. The reason of the preference given of sorrow to laughter is, that "by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better." And the reason is just and weighty. The improvement of the character in its inward principles—the establishment and promotion of true religion in the soul—of the highest and purest affections of which the heart is susceptible—is an end incomparably more excellent than the acquisition of any temporal benefit, and cheaply purchased by the loss of it. And such is the spiritual tendency of sorrow, springing from affliction; opposed to that of thoughtless inconsiderate mirth. The troubles of life are here supposed to produce sadness. They are not in themselves "joyous, but grievous." "Ye are in heaviness through manifold trials." But the sadness conduces to spiritual profit; and this is the ground of the preference. When the Nile overflowed the adjacent lands in Egypt, all around would wear the aspect of desolation and dreariness: but when the flood subsided, it left fertility and wealth behind it, and supplied food and life to millions. So is it when the floods of tribulation rest for a time on the heart; they serve to meliorate the soil, to soften and enrich it, and prepare for a more abundant produce of the fruits of righteousness. This is the gracious design of God, their heavenly Father, in all the afflictions allotted by him to his children. "We have had fathers of our flesh who corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection to the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us, after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we may be partakers of his holiness. Now, no affliction for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward, it yielded the peaceable fruit of righteousness, unto them who are exercised thereby." Heb. xii. 9-11. The humbling and otherwise salutary effect of such correction is finely expressed by the prophet Jeremiah: "I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus; Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke; turn thou me, and I shall be turned, for thou art the Lord my God. Surely after that I was turned, I repented; and after that I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh: I was ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth. Is Ephraim my dear son? Is he a pleasant child? For since I spake against him I

do earnestly remember him still; therefore my bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord." Jer. xxxi. 18-20.—"Before I was afflicted," says David, "I went astray; but now have I kept thy word."—"It was good for me that I was afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes." Psalm cxix. 67, 71. And whilst such has been the experience of God's children, as to the influence of sanctified afflictions in cherishing in their souls the principles of vital godliness; those that were far from God and far from righteousness have been not seldom indebted to them, as the means of their first excitement to religious concern, and of their turning from the error of their way. Even the hardened Manasseh, branded with impiety and oppression, and stained with innocent blood, with whom warning and expostulation had been vain,—“when he was in affliction besought the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, and prayed unto him; and He was entreated of him, and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem, into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the Lord he was God.” 2 Chron. xxxiii. 12, 13.

The “laughter” of which Solomon speaks, is the laughter of the fool; that thoughtless mirth, which excludes reflection; dissipates the mind; unfits it for every thing serious; and leaves the heart worse instead of better. On these accounts:—

Verse 4, “the heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.”

“The wise” may be understood either of the man who is under the predominant influence of that “fear of the Lord, which is wisdom;” or of the man who consults his own best interests, pursuing the best ends by the best means. These, indeed, are properly descriptions of but one character. The best and highest ends are, without all question and beyond all comparison, those which relate to our connections with God, and to our eternal existence. He is truly “wise for himself,” who “looks not at things seen, which are temporal, but at things unseen, which are eternal.” And this right estimate of the things of time and of eternity will ever be found in union with the fear of God. The everlasting welfare of the whole man, for which God has graciously made provision by the gospel, is the highest good on which the heart can fix its desires. We need not be surprised that “the heart of the

fool should be in the house of mirth." The fool's object is present pleasures; and of pleasure he has formed a miserably false conception. His grand inquiry is, how he may most effectually banish all care from his mind; how he may drive away every thing gloomy, by which he means especially every thing serious, and pass his time most lightly and pleasantly; that is, with the least possible intrusion of reflection, or of anticipation. For these ends, he makes choice of the "house of mirth" and "feasting." He would be always in it, drinking down care, and laughing at melancholy. The longer he pursues his career of thoughtlessness, thoughtlessness becomes the more necessary to his peace. Incessant mirth becomes the more indispensable, as its intervals become the more irksome. His *heart* is in the house of mirth. The house of mourning he never frequents from choice; never sets his foot on its threshold but from unavoidable necessity. The "wise man," on the contrary, is considerate. He "looks before and after." He reflects on the past; he contemplates the present; he anticipates the future. He is a man of thought. Feeling himself sinful, and knowing himself accountable and immortal, his state before God, and his prospects for eternity, are the chief subjects of his concern. Profiting by the experience of others, and by his own; convinced from both, that "it is better to go to the house of mourning than to go the house of feasting; that sorrow is better than laughter, for that by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better;" "his heart is in the house of mourning." He goes thither "not by constraint, but willingly." It is his choice: not so much, indeed, that he may learn any thing new, as that he may have truths more deeply impressed upon his mind, which it is of the last importance for him to remember and habitually to feel, but which, he is deeply sensible, he is continually prone to let slip. The wise man and the fool may thus be distinguished by their respective likings. The former would prefer going to the "house of mourning" to read anew a lesson of serious and salutary wisdom, to spending hours of thoughtless levity and laughter in the house of mirth. There cannot be a more decisive evidence of folly, than when nothing gives any pleasure but merriment and frivolity. He who cannot converse with eternity—he who cannot look forward to death and judgment—without feeling an interruption of his pleasure; without a cold misgiving of heart and a fretful im-

patience to get rid of the unwelcome and intrusive thoughts; is in a state of mind far from such as any truly wise man can desire for himself; or any truly benevolent man can, without emotions of the deepest concern, contemplate in others.

Verse 5. *It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise, than for a man to hear the song of fools.*

The "song of fools" is one of the modes of expressing that "mirth" which had just been mentioned in the fourth verse, as characterizing the "house" which fools love to frequent. It is the jovial utterance of either the profligate sensuality, or the unreflecting and empty levity, of the fool's mind. To "hear the song of fools" is to court their company, and participate in their irrational pleasures; of which the tendency is to assimilate the character to theirs; to banish thought; and to inspire a relish for dissipation and insensate merriment and riot. With this is contrasted the advantage of "hearing the rebuke of the wise." Rebuke is of all things the most unpalatable in itself. But many things are salutary that are bitter, and many things sweet that are destructive. Let the youth who feels the inclination to frequent the "house of mirth," and to "hear the song of fools," listen to the "rebuke of the wise," who, in pity to his soul, dissuades, expostulates, and reproveth. The indulgence of his propensity may be more agreeable at the time; but the end will be poignant and unavailing regret that the "rebuke" was disregarded. Be assured, it is infinitely better to choose and to frequent the company of those who will deal faithfully with your faults, and rebuke and correct your errors even with a salutary severity, than to associate with such as will regale you with the poisoned sweets of flattery; applaud you in your follies; extol your spirit; encourage you in your schemes of frolic or of mischief; laugh at your jests; clap your toasts; and join the chorus of your jovial songs. "He that regardeth reproof shall be honored."—"He that refuseth instruction despiseth his own soul: but he that heareth reproof getteth understanding."—"He that walketh with wise men shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed."—"Let the righteous smite me; it shall be a kindness: and let him reprove me; it shall be an excellent oil, that shall not break my head: for yet my prayer also shall be in their calamities." Prov. xiii. 18. xv. 32. xiii. 20. Psalm cxli. 5.

Whilst, from the company and counsels of the wise, and the lessons of the house of mourning, there accrues the most valuable and lasting benefit,—happiness, sterling in its nature and eternal in its duration;—on the contrary,

Verse 6. *As the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fool. This also is vanity.*

Could any similitude be more strikingly descriptive? The blaze of dry thorns is sudden, noisy, and cheerful. But, enlivening as it is while it lasts, it is as transient as it is sprightly. It subsides as quickly as it rises. The bickering flame is soon extinguished, having only served to make the gloom the deeper; and nothing is left behind but unsightly and unprofitable ashes. Kindled “under a pot,” it wants that steady intensity of heat that is necessary to any powerful or permanent effect upon its contents; so that even while it lasts it does little service. “So is the laughter of the fool.” It is mirthful and boisterous, and, for the time, looks like happiness. But, like the blaze of dried thorns, it is soon over; and it leaves no profit. It has answered, and even that in appearance only, the care-killing end of the moment: but the subsequent dulness and *ennui* are only the deeper. “The end of that mirth is heaviness.” And when the days of such laughter shall be exhausted, then will come the sad fulfillment of the Saviour’s words,—“Woe unto you that laugh now! for ye shall mourn and weep.” Well then may we adopt, respecting such laughter, the verdict formerly pronounced upon it,—“I said of laughter, It is mad; and of mirth, What doeth it?”

1. From this passage, observe, *in the first place*; that the benefit derived from visits to “the house of mourning” should not be merely *our own*. We ought to frequent it, not only that we ourselves may learn the spiritual lessons which are taught us by its scenes of woe; but that we may impart consolation, and support, and profit, to its sorrowing inmates; that we may wipe the tear from the eye of grief; pour the oil of soothing sympathy into the wounded spirit; bind up the broken heart; draw the souls of the mourners to God; impressing on their minds the Divine intention in every trial; spiritualizing their meditations and desires; and rendering the feelings of nature subservient to the purposes of grace. Our own distresses, and our own consolations, are intended by the God that afflicts and comforts us, to fit us for

such visits of mercy;—to qualify us for the house of mourning;—to make us experienced comforters. “Blessed be God,”—says the suffering apostle of the Gentiles,—“Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them who are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God!” Thus, by the religion of the blessed Jesus, *selfishness* is excluded from every thing. Our very trials are not sent, nor our consolations under them administered, for ourselves alone. To ourselves, indeed, they are precious and life-giving; but on ourselves, whether we be ministers or private Christians, the design of them does not terminate. The example of our Divine Master is an example of benevolence and love:—“Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others: let THIS mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.” Phil. ii. 4, 5. And even HE is represented as having learned sympathy, and skill in the administration of comfort, by his experience of suffering:—“We have not a high priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but who was in all points tried like as we are, yet without sin:”—“for in that he himself hath suffered, being tried, he is able to succour them that are tried:”—“though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience”—the difficulties and trials attending it,—“by the things which he suffered.” Heb. iv. 15. ii. 18. v. 8. Thus his sufferings were, in every way, turned to account, for the benefit of his people.

2. *In the second place;* Remember, the time is fast approaching, when the dwelling-place of every one of us shall, in reference to *ourselves*, become the “house of mourning.” This is “appointed unto all.” Neither riches, nor power, nor learning, nor love, nor friendship, can possibly avert it. Death’s impartial visits are paid alike at the palace and the cottage. Remember, then, the solemn time is coming, when, either suddenly, or by the gradual ravages of disease, we, like others, must “go the way whence we shall not return.” The time is coming, when we shall be laid on our sick-bed; when the messages of anxious friends shall be brought in whispers to our door; when the parting sigh shall pass our lips; when we shall be stretched in our shroud, cold and insensible; when agonized relatives shall steal in silence to our apartment,



with gentle step and timid hand, as if afraid of disturbing our slumbers; lift the covering from our face, to gaze, in pensive anguish, on our altered features, and to drop the last warm tear on our feelingless cheek; when the company of mourners shall assemble, to convey our mortal remains to their long home; and when, "the earth having returned to the dust as it was, and the spirit of God who gave it," "the place that now knows us, shall know us no more:"—when all those affecting lessons, which we have so often learned from the death of others, shall be learned by others from ours. O the blessedness of having a good hope, in that infinitely momentous crisis, when we must part from all below, and part for ever!—that survivors, whilst they mourn our departure, may say over our grave, with well-founded assurance,—“Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord!”

3. *Lastly*; From such passages as this, the author of this book has sometimes been condemned and scouted, as a gloomy and morose moralist; a cynical philosopher; contemplating human life through the distorted medium of a disappointed and embittered spirit; disposed to aggravate all its evils; to depreciate all its enjoyments; to frown on its harmless pleasures; and determined to be pleased with nothing. Let us consider this view of his character.

(1.) Those who bring the charge should know that a difficulty has at times been felt by some, to vindicate him from the *very opposite* imputation. His language, in some parts of the book, is such, that they have been surprised and startled by it, and have felt it less easy of reconciliation than any other parts of the Bible, with the lessons of Christian soberness and spirituality of mind; and they have been at a loss what answer to make, when it has been quoted by the laughing sceptic as a sanction for enlarged indulgence in the gratifications of a present world. Now, should not this lead *both* to suspect that they are alike misapprehending his meaning, and that, as he cannot be justly chargeable with both extremes, he is, in fact, chargeable with neither?

(2.) A great part of what dissatisfied and harassed the mind of Solomon was, not the evils suffered by himself, but those which he saw or knew to be endured by others. We have had a specimen of this in the beginning of the fourth chapter:—"So I returned, and considered all the oppressions that are done under the sun: and behold the tears of such as were oppressed, and they had

no comforter; and on the side of their oppressors there was power; but they had no comforter. Wherefore I praised the dead that are already dead, more than the living that are yet alive. Yea, better is he, than both they, who hath not yet been, who hath not seen the evil work that is done under the sun." Are not these praise-worthy feelings? Is there no credit due for the benevolence, which was thus made unhappy by the woes of others? Shall we condemn, as a gloomy and cynical misanthrope, the Christian poet, the delicate and tender-hearted Cowper, when, over-whelmed by the contemplation of human guilt and human suffering, his benevolent spirit bursts forth in the utterance of indignant grief:—

“O for a lodge in some vast wilderness,  
Some boundless continuity of shade,  
Where rumor of oppression and deceit,  
Of unsuccessful or successful war,  
Might never reach me more! My ear is pain'd,  
My heart is sick, with every day's report  
Of wrong and outrage, with which earth is fill'd.”

(3.) When he *does* express dissatisfaction with life, *as to his own personal enjoyment of it*, it is not on account of *the evils that had befallen him*. The feelings which he expresses are not those of a man fretted and alienated from the world by the injuries done to him, and longing to be away from the society and sight of beings whom he hates and contemns. Neither are they the feelings of impiety, irritated by the unpropitious dealings of Providence; charging God foolishly, and thinking he “does well to be angry even unto death;” opening his mouth in blasphemy against the Author of his existence, and the ordainer of his lot. The complaints he utters are not complaints of evil suffered, but of the unsatisfactory nature of good enjoyed. Of this he possessed a rich and enviable abundance and variety; as much as could well fall to the lot of man.—Be it so—you are ready to say,—and does this mend the matter? Why, it is worse than the other. We can find some grounds of apology for *his* repinings who has been the victim of incessant disappointment, vexation, and calamity. But here was nothing of the kind. What ailed the man? to be dissatisfied and full of complaints, when there was nothing in his condition but good! What thankless ingratitude! what unreasonable, capricious, intolerable discontent!—No, my friends. His

feelings were not thus destitute of reason and piety. The cause of the dissatisfaction expressed, it is no difficult matter to assign. The good in question was all pursued, obtained, possessed, and enjoyed, *apart from God*. It was *then*,—in “the days of his vanity;” it failed to yield any solid enjoyment: and when he came to himself, he felt the cause of the failure, and recorded the salutary lesson. And O that the lesson, the dictate of *his* dear-bought experience, were written in every heart!—“graven as with an iron pen and lead in the rock for ever!”—that ALL HAS BEEN, IS, AND MUST BE, UNPRODUCTIVE OF HAPPINESS, WITHOUT GOD;—“VANITY OF VANITIES, ALL IS VANITY.”

But Solomon did not do the world justice. It was not a fair experiment. A chemist, when he wishes to ascertain the virtues of any substance, takes care to separate from it, as thoroughly as he can, all extraneous ingredients, that he may have it unmixed, and thus obtain a correct result. When, in like manner, our object is to ascertain the capacity of any thing to impart pleasure, ought we not, on the same principle, to divest ourselves to whatever has any tendency to interfere with, or to mar, the enjoyment it seems fitted to afford?—Solomon perhaps tried to do this. But he could not. He had too much remaining of the religious impressions of his earlier days, for making the experiment with fairness. He knew God too well—the God of his father; from whom he had received the solemn paternal charge, which he never could obliterate from his remembrance,—“And thou, Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind; for the Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts: if thou seek Him, he will be found of thee; but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever!” In obedience to the charge of this pious father, he had begun his career in the fear of the Lord. He had, therefore, too many recollections, and too many anticipations, to allow of his being happy in the pursuit of the vanities of the world, and the pleasures of sin. These, in spite of him, must have intruded at times even on his maddest social hours; and must have armed every moment of solitude and reflection with a tormenting sting. No yesterday, during that period, would look back upon him with a smile. And Solomon’s case is, in this respect, far from being a solitary one. Persons who have been

“brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord,” but have cast off the fear of God and the profession of religion, can seldom get entirely rid of these early convictions and impressions. They are continually haunting them. Such persons are often distinguished by the lengths to which they go in vicious indulgence. The reason is, that they are making an effort to get above their prejudices and silly fears. They are solicitous to conceal them, and determined to show their companions in sin their superiority to them. But such persons, I repeat, do not do justice to the world. Oh! it is a fearful experiment, to be fairly made. That the world may yield its pleasures pure and unadulterated,—I mean such pleasures as it affords to its votaries, who follow it as their chief good, to the exclusion of spiritual joys,—the mind must be stripped of all the vestiges of early religious instruction, of all sense of God, of all anticipation of judgment and eternity; the voice of inward remonstrance must be entirely stifled, and the “conscience seared as with a hot iron.” If a man can thoroughly accomplish this, he will then have the pleasures of sin in their perfection. But, oh! can a state be imagined more unutterably fearful? Could a heavier curse be conceived to light upon a man, than the curse of success in the attempt to divest himself of every principle that would interfere with the unmingled enjoyment of forbidden pleasures?

Besides; the very persons who cavil at Solomon for his calumnious representation, as they account it, of human life, themselves contributed not a little to the imbittering of his feelings, after he came to look back on his unhallowed experiment, and to record its results. The laughter of the fool,—the giddy joy of the vain, the thoughtless, the dissipated, and voluptuous,—is one of the most affecting and distressing sights to a serious and spiritual mind: and such was that of the reclaimed and penitent King of Israel. Inconsiderate sinners may laugh at the pain they give to the godly. But the pain is the product of benevolence, as well as of piety. The self-delusion, the present privation, and the anticipated wretchedness of sinners, are its source; and their welfare in time and in eternity is the sincere and fervent desire of all by whom it is felt. “I beheld the transgressors, and was grieved.”—“Rivers of waters run down mine eyes, because they keep not thy law.” O “be ye not mockers, lest your bands be made strong.”—“Love

not the world, neither the things that are in the world."—"The lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eye, and the pride of life," will all deceive you at last. They will leave you worse than destitute. If you give them the preference, and persist in living without God, the day of your death, however you may flatter yourselves, will not to you be better, but infinitely worse, than the day of your birth. Many a poor worldling will envy through eternity the child that was carried from the womb to the grave;—will wish, with unavailing regret, that the day of his birth had also been the day of his death;—and will load with bitter imprecations the hour that commenced an existence to which he cannot put a termination, and which his own sin and folly have rendered irremediably miserable. Dost thou believe, then, on the Son of God? It is only to those who, when they quit this world, go to be with Christ, that "to die is gain,"—that "the day of death is better than the day of birth:" and none can be admitted where He is, but those who have believed, and loved; confessed, and honored; and served him here. If you renounce the world, and seek God in Christ as your portion, He will "come unto you, and make his abode with you." He will be the light of your habitation when it becomes a "house of mourning," and, when he takes you hence, it will be to his own house above, where "the days of your mourning shall be ended!"

## LECTURE XII.

ECCLESIASTES VII. 7-14.

“Surely oppression maketh a wise man mad; and a gift destroyeth the heart. 8. Better (is) the end of a thing than the beginning thereof; (and) the patient in spirit (is) better than the proud in spirit. 9. Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry; for anger resteth in the bosom of fools. 10. Say not thou, What is (the cause) that the former days were better than these? for thou dost not inquire wisely concerning this. 11. Wisdom (is) good with an inheritance; and (by it there is) profit to them that see the sun. 12. For wisdom (is) a defence, (and) money (is) a defence: but the excellency of knowledge (is, that) wisdom giveth life to them that have it. 13. Consider the work of God: for who can make (that) straight which he hath made crooked? 14. In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider: God also hath set the one over against the other, to the end that man should find nothing after him.”

It is evident, that what is said, in the first of these verses, of the tendency of oppression to “*make a wise man mad*,” may be understood either of the *suffering* or of the *exercise* of oppression. The former, it is needless to prove, serves to fret, and harass, and exasperate the spirit; so that there are not wanting instances, in which men, even eminent in reputation for wisdom, have, by its long continuance,—by their being the constant victims of injustice, privation, insult, and violence,—been worked up to a pitch of absolute frenzy; have given way, after long and difficult restraint, to the burst of ungovernable indignation, and have acted the part of madness, rather than of considerate sobriety. Moses, describing the unrighteous oppression which, amongst other curses, should befall the Israelites under the Divine visitation for their sins, concludes in these words:—“Thy sons and thy daughters shall be given unto another people, and thine eyes shall look, and fail

with longing for them all the day long; and there shall be no might in thy hand. The fruit of thy land, and all thy labors, shall a nation which thou knowest not eat up; and thou shalt be only oppressed and crushed alway; so that *thou shalt be mad* for the sight of thine eyes which thou shalt see." Deut. xxviii. 32-34.

I am disposed, however, to understand the expression in the passage before us, as relating to the *oppressor*, rather than to the *oppressed*. The possession of power carries in it a strong temptation to its abuse; a temptation before which even men who had borne a previous character for wisdom, have not seldom fallen. And when a man, even a wise man, exalted to power, once gives way before the tempting inducements to its corrupt employment, the very exercise of oppression tends to infatuate and bewilder him. It blinds his judgment; it perverts his principles; it hardens his heart; it changes his character. A contention arises in his bosom between the love of power, with the profit of its abuse, on the one hand, and the remonstrances and upbraiding of conscience, on the other. The reluctance too, so mighty in human nature, to own an error, produces a passionate impatience of reproof and counsel, which is proportionally the more vehement, as he is inwardly sensible he is wrong. This state of mind drives him forward to measures of new violence; the very opposition of conscience, reacting as an irritating stimulus in the contrary direction; the anger at its torturing remonstrances producing a desperate effort to silence and banish them; as when a man, to show his indignant scorn of rebuke, repeats his fault more offensively than before. One step leads on to another; till his conduct, losing all the characteristics of wisdom, becomes like that of a man bereft of reason, and swayed by the derangement of passion.

One of the reasons for preferring this interpretation of the former part of the verse, is its affording *so clear* a connection with the latter:—"and a gift destroyeth the heart."—"A gift" is a bribe to oppression. The taking of gifts was prohibited by the law of Moses, on account of the same corrupting tendency that is here ascribed to them. The man, indeed, who consents to receive a gift, known to be bestowed with such an intention, is already corrupted. "Judges and officers shalt thou make thee in all thy gates, which the Lord thy God giveth thee, throughout thy tribes: and they shall judge the people with just judgment. Thou shalt

not wrest judgment: thou shalt not respect persons, neither take a gift: for a gift doth blind the eyes of the wise, and pervert the words of the righteous. That which is altogether just shalt thou follow, that thou mayest live, and inherit the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee." Deut. xvi. 18-20. "A gift destroyeth the heart." It operates as a temptation. It undermines the principles of impartial equity, and deadens the feelings of humanity and mercy. It perverts the moral sentiments, and leads to the woe denounced on the man who "calls evil good, and good evil; who puts darkness for light, and light for darkness."

This view of the verse accords well with Solomon's leading design. It contains, on this interpretation, an additional reason why we should not "envy the oppressor," or covet very earnestly the possession of power, seeing it carries in it a temptation so dangerous; an influence so perverting.

Verse 8. *Better is the end of a thing than the beginning of it; and the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit.*

This verse appears to be intended for the *oppressed*; although it expresses, at the same time, a general truth. The design of it is to recommend *patience*, as a remedy against the evils of oppression, and against the calamities of life in general.

Things are better judged of by their end than by their beginning. The morning often lowers, when the succeeding day is clear. And thus, in the arrangements of providence, events frequently appear very dark and unpromising, of which the final issue is, beyond expectation, good. On this account, we should beware of being "hasty" in judgment, in feeling, or in action. Jacob said, "All these things are against me!" But, though appearances seemed to justify his despondency, all things were "working together for his good." "Ye have heard," too, "of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord, that the Lord is very pitiful and of tender mercy." He "turned the captivity of Job," and "blessed his latter end more than his beginning." And (to quote a case more immediately connected with the subject of the preceding verse,) when the children of Israel were oppressed with increasing rigor by Pharaoh and his task-masters; when their work was required, by the lawless caprice of a despot, without materials being furnished for it, and they were beaten for not producing it; when their plight was so de-



plorable and heart-sinking, that when Moses, in the name of Jehovah, spoke to them the words of Divine encouragement and promise, "they hearkened not unto him, for anguish of spirit, and for cruel bondage;" all seemed dark and desperate. But "better was the end than the beginning." Jehovah, at length, brought them out "with a high hand and an outstretched arm." He "loosed the bands of wickedness, he undid the heavy burdens, he broke every yoke, and let the oppressed go free." The oppressor may, in "the beginning," appear to have the best of it; but, in "the end," he will have reason to envy the victims of his tyranny. Not unfrequently, even in this world, the righteous God, in his overruling providence, makes the infatuated ambition, the blind obstinacy, and the relentless cruelty, of the oppressor, the means of his own ruin, and of the deliverance of the oppressed:—and, at any rate, if retributive justice should not visit him now, the most powerful abuser of authority, the most independent and ruthless trampler on the rights of his fellows, must give his own account at last to the "Judge of all."

Let such considerations produce patience under wrongs:—"The patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit." Patience is here, for a very obvious reason, opposed to pride. Pride is one of the chief sources of impatience; of that hastiness of temper which can brook no wrong, which kindles in an instant at every real or fancied injury, and clamors for immediate revenge. Humility, on the contrary, is the parent, not of insensibility, but of gentleness and meekness; the opposite of quick, and passionate, and resentful irritability; of a patience that *suffers* in submission, and *waits* in hope; bearing even the evils that are inflicted by men, in the remembrance that men are but "God's hand," Psalm xvii. 14; and resting in the tranquil expectation that "the end will be better than the beginning;" that the providence of God will make "darkness light" before his injured children, and "crooked things straight."

Patience is "better" than passionate and hasty "pride," both as being more conducive to happiness, and as being more in harmony with the Divine will. The "patient in spirit" has more comfort, tranquillity, and true enjoyment, in his own bosom, than the "proud in spirit:"—his self-control enables him to be more useful, in supporting and counselling others around him, for which

he would be incapacitated by the agitations of passion:—and he is, at the same time, prevented by it from acting with that precipitate impetuosity which, springing from pride, serves, in general, only to aggravate calamity, and to hasten ruin. Besides, patience is the temper of mind which God approves, and pride that which he condemns: so that he who cherishes and displays the former is intrinsically, in the estimate of the great Lawgiver, “better” than he who indulges the latter. The same sentiment is often expressed by Solomon, as one of much general importance, and of extensive application. “Only by pride cometh contention:”—“He that is slow to wrath is of great understanding; but he that is hasty of spirit exalteth folly:”—“A wrathful man stirreth up strife; but he that is slow to anger appeaseth strife:”—“He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city.” Prov. xiii. 10. xiv. 29. xv. 18. xvi. 32.

In immediate connection with the sentiment thus expressed, is the admonition in the ninth verse:—

Verse 9. *Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry; for anger resteth in the bosom of fools.*

I shall not, at present, enter into any disquisition respecting the lawfulness of anger, or make any attempt to ascertain the precise limit at which it becomes criminal. Those, I am satisfied, have gone to an extreme, who have contended that the passion is, in its own nature, sinful. Cases are not only supposable, but of no infrequent occurrence, in which its emotions may be fairly justified. Yet it is one of those passions for which a person feels afraid to plead; because it requires, instead of encouragement and fostering, constant and careful restraint; and the propensity in every bosom to its indulgence is ever ready to avail itself of an argument for its abstract lawfulness to justify what all but the subject of it will condemn as its causeless exercise, or its criminal excess. In both these respects there is hazard;—of its springing up on improper occasions, and of its going beyond reasonable bounds.

There are two views, suggested by this verse, in which every prudent man will be desirous to guard against anger; its *ready admission*, and its *long retention*. “Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry; for anger resteth in the bosom of fools.” If we regard the glory of God, who is himself “long-suffering, and slow to an-

ger," or our own personal and social happiness, which has so often been fearfully disturbed by the violence and inveteracy of the passions, we will give diligent heed to this admonition. Great has been the dishonor done to God, and incalculable the mischiefs produced to men, by hasty and by long-cherished anger. It is in the bosom of "fools" that anger "resteth." To retain and foster it is a mark of a weak mind, as well as of an unsanctified heart: and this is here assigned as a reason why we should not be hasty to admit it. We should be cautious of receiving into our bosoms what we are forbidden to harbor in them. If it be foolish to retain it, it must be foolish to give it ready entrance. David was "hasty in his spirit to be angry" against Nabal; and none will deny that his provocation was strong: yet he saw reason afterwards to bless God for preventing the indulgence of his hasty passion, which, in the moment of sudden irritation, had threatened what could never have been justified. See 1 Sam. xxv. "Be ye angry," says the apostle, "and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath. Neither give place to the devil." Eph. iv. 26, 27. The connection of these words seems, without straining, to intimate, what experience abundantly confirms, that the Tempter of mankind often avails himself, in a special manner, of this passion, to drive its subjects to the commission of sin. "Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: for the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God." James i. 19, 20.

One great source of unhappiness in the world—a copious and perennial spring of bitter waters—is discontent,—dissatisfaction with the situation, as to time, place, and circumstances, in which Divine providence has placed us. It is, I think, against such a temper of mind that the warning is pointed in verse tenth:—

Verse 10. *Say not thou, What is the cause that the former days were better than these? for thou dost not inquire wisely concerning this.*

It is obvious, that the complaint here supposed may be understood in two senses. It may relate to *character*, or to *condition*; to comparative degrees of *impiety and wickedness*, or to comparative degrees of *calamity and suffering*. It is in the latter sense that I understand it here: yet you will excuse a remark or two on the former.

The complaint, in what may be termed the *moral* view of it, has

been common, I suppose, in every age, since the beginning of the world. Had it all along been true, it is impossible to conceive, bad as the world is, how much worse it must have been. But the *degeneracy of the times*, as it is never out of the mouths of some amongst ourselves, so was it always in the lips of the very generation they praise, who extolled in their time the one which preceded it; and that again its still more worthy predecessor. The truth is, we are, on many accounts, exceedingly incompetent judges. There is much difficulty in taking a comparative view that shall be sufficiently comprehensive and impartial, of our own and other times. We are extremely apt to confine our estimate to particular descriptions of character or departments of conduct, which happen, whether from accidental circumstances, or from our peculiar mental temperament, to have more particularly attracted our attention and impressed our minds: and to overlook the endless variety of modifications and aspects under which the corruption of our nature displays itself; to forget that, in human society, there is a fashion in morality, as there is in every thing else, of which it is the very essence to fluctuate, and to show, in successive periods, capricious and changeful predilections; that religion and virtue, though declining in the quarter of the country which forms the immediate sphere of our observation, may be reviving and making progress in another; that when the prevalence of any particular vice has been the occasion of injury and suffering to ourselves, we naturally feel and speak strongly, under the irritations of self-love, magnifying in our imaginations both the intrinsic enormity of the evil, and the extent to which it is practised. So much do these and other causes affect the judgment, that two persons, differing in circumstances, and in mental constitution and moral sentiment, shall produce, from the very same scene of life and manners, descriptions so unlike each other, as that we shall be at a loss to believe the identity of the subject: just as two painters, following each his own taste and fancy, may, from the same assortment of objects, by variety of grouping and arrangement—by the different degrees of retirement or of prominence given to each—and by their opposite styles of shading and coloring—present us with two pictures so totally dissimilar, as that we may look long and narrowly, ere we discover the points of coincidence.

I might illustrate these remarks by an application of them to

our own times, in our own country. That in some classes of the community there has been a declension in purity of morals, sobriety and moderation, and personal and family religion, will hardly admit of a doubt. It was naturally to be expected, from the progressive increase of riches and luxury, which never fail to bring along with them a set of new vices, and to relax the tone of public virtue. Infidelity, too, and irreligion have been of late more unblushingly avowed, and have drawn from some of their unhappy votaries more daring, more artful, and more extended efforts for the diffusion of their unhallowed and mischievous principles, than for many years have been witnessed amongst us. Yet many and interesting are the favorable characters of the present age; and some of its evils have originated in the existing good. The zeal of Christians for the diffusion of the word of God, and of the knowledge and the influence of "pure and undefiled religion" at home and abroad, has been enlarged, and its exertions multiplied and ardent, beyond all former example. And this not only indicates an abounding of the good principles of piety and benevolence, as the sources from which it must proceed; but, accompanied as it is with so much united prayer for the Divine blessing, it cannot fail to be productive of salutary effects, in the amelioration of individuals and communities. It is at once an index of good existing, and an efficient means of its advancement. It shows a fountain whence it emanates; and it carries with it, in all its ten thousand streams, a purifying and healing virtue. The evil has become more visible by its contrast with the good. The efforts of infidelity have arisen from the efforts of the friends of the Bible, and the wonder is, not that they should have been made now, but that they should have been so long suspended. It is a trial of strength between truth and error, between Heaven and Hell. Hell has its partial successes and triumphs; and the great majority, alas! remain on the side of the prince of darkness. But Heaven, we trust, is at present prevailing; and of ultimate and universal victory, to the full extent of the Divine purposes and predictions, it were impious to doubt. My own firm persuasion is, that true religion is not on the decline, but on the increase, both in our own country, and in the world at large.

Let us, however, beware. We are not to fancy, from the language of Solomon, that there is no difference, in a moral view,

between different periods; or that such difference is not a fair and legitimate subject, and an interesting one too, of candid observation, inquiry, and comparison. And, whilst we cannot acquiesce in the incessant complainings of men who are for ever sighing after old times, and “saying that the former days were better than these,” we ought to be on our guard against light impressions of the abounding evils of our age and country; for evils still prevail to a most deplorable extent, and their guilt is awfully enhanced by the super-abundance of spiritual privileges, and by the very means employed for their exposure and prevention.

But although I have ventured these general remarks on this view of the passage, the other, as I have already noticed, appears to be the meaning of the writer. It refers to the comparative measure of *suffering* rather than of *sin*; of *natural* rather than of *moral* evil. He is finding fault with a *dissatisfied spirit*—a disposition to be continually complaining of *the times*, as if in them were to be found all the elements of misery—laying on them the blame of that unhappiness of which the complainer carries about the cause in his own bosom:—“Say not of the former days, they were better than these; for *thou dost not inquire wisely concerning this.*”

*In the first place.* Thou art inquiring for *the cause* of what thou shouldst first ascertain with certainty to be a *fact*; of what possibly has no existence but in thine own distempered imagination, or partially informed judgment. All the idle speculations about a golden age, and the purity and happiness of the simple and primitive state of society, uncontaminated by the corrupting refinements of civilized and luxurious life, come under this reproof. There has been no golden age in this world, but the short period of paradisiacal innocence and bliss, enjoyed by the first progenitors of our sin-accursed race.

*Secondly.* Consider with thyself farther, that thou knowest the evils of former times only *by report*; whereas of present ills thou thyself *feelest* the pressure. By this feeling thy judgment is liable to be perverted. Or, thou *seest* the distress that is endured by others; and distress that is seen affects the heart more deeply than distress that is reported. The sight of the eye is more impressive in such cases, than the hearing of the ear. Thou canst balance, with an unbiassed mind, the good and the evil of “olden tim

to which thou art not a party ; but a sufferer is more ready, through the selfishness of his nature, to brood over his one calamity, than to contemplate with gratitude his multiplied blessings—to nauseate the drop of bitter, more than to relish the cup of sweets.

*Thirdly.* In uttering thy complaints with a dissatisfied and repining spirit, thou art unwise: for thou arraignest, in so doing, the all-wise providence of the Most High, who assigns to every successive age its portion of evil and of good. He has “fixed the times before appointed, and the bounds of our habitation;” and it is our true wisdom to be pleased and satisfied with whatever has seemed good to the wisdom that is infinite. What he does is ever best. The complaints of a fretted spirit are ungodly; and the “inquiries” of such a spirit are equally unwise in their principle, and delusive in their results.

Verse 11. *Wisdom is good with an inheritance; and by it there is profit to them that see the sun.*

The former part of this verse is sometimes understood to mean, that *worldly possessions are little worth without wisdom*; because the possessor of an inheritance, who is devoid of discretion, will either squander it away through thoughtless improvidence, or will not use it at all, or will employ it for ends that are worse than unprofitable; that are criminal and pernicious. I imagine, however, the marginal reading, which accords with a common mode of Hebrew comparison, to be the true one,—“Wisdom is better than an inheritance.” The eleventh and twelfth verses are obviously connected together, the latter being explanatory of the former; “Wisdom is better than an inheritance, and a profit (or profitable) to them that see the sun”—that is, to mankind:—

Verse 12. *For wisdom is a defense, and money is a defense, but the excellency of knowledge is, that wisdom giveth life to them that have it.*

“Wisdom is a defense, and money is a defense;” both affording, in different ways, the means of security from the ills of life. Wisdom enables a man to consult his own safety, to “foresee evil and hide himself,” and to make many friends by his circumspect and prudent behavior. Riches, too, surround their possessor with friends; they are a powerful protection against his enemies; and the effectual means of averting many evils, and securing many benefits:—“a rich man’s wealth is his strong city.”—“But the ex-

cellence of knowledge"—its peculiar advantage—"is, that wisdom giveth life to them that have it." In this especially consists its superiority to an inheritance.

"WISDOM" must here, I think, be understood in its best sense; as signifying not mere prudence and discretion, but including along with these the knowledge that "maketh wise unto salvation." Without this no man is truly wise. "The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom." True wisdom leads its possessor to act according to just views of the comparative value of different objects of desire and pursuit; and, therefore, to give a decided and cordial preference to the things that are unseen and eternal, above those that are seen and temporal; the latter, when laid in the balance against the former, being "altogether lighter than vanity." It is obvious, I think, that the expression, "wisdom *giveth life* to them that have it," cannot mean merely that it enables a man the more effectually to provide for the continuance and the comfort of the present life. In this respect "money" might be considered approaching to a par with it; and at any rate such a consideration would never have been mentioned by Solomon with so much emphasis. The security and comfort of this life, indeed, had already been included in the comparison, "Wisdom is a defense, and money is a defense;" which represents them both as, thus far, answering the same purpose. But wisdom, the "wisdom that is from above," imparts not only the true enjoyment of the present life, but "life eternal" to them that have it. This is its peculiar excellence. "Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding: for the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies; and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her. Length of days is in her right hand, and in her left hand riches and honor. Her ways are ways of pleasantness and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of LIFE to them that lay hold upon her; and happy is every one that retaineth her." Prov. iii. 13-18.—"Take fast hold of instruction; let her not go: keep her, for she is *THY LIFE*." Ibid. iv. 13.—"This is *LIFE ETERNAL*, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." John xvii. 3.—"Now, therefore, hearken unto me, O ye children; for blessed are they that keep my ways. Hear instruction, and be wise, and refuse it



not. Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors. For whoso findeth me findeth LIFE, and shall obtain favor of the Lord. But he that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul: all they that hate me love death." Prov. viii. 32-36. This indeed is true "profit to them that see the sun."—"Riches profit not in the day of wrath." The LIFE that is obtained by wisdom, "cannot be gotten for gold, neither shall silver be weighed for the price of it." "What is a man profited, if he should gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give, in exchange for his soul?" Matt. xvi. 26.

The possession of this heavenly wisdom, then, is the great secret of human happiness. Under its influence, its possessor will be led rightly to improve the varying circumstances and conditions of life, satisfied with the wise and immutable purposes of heaven.

Verses 13, 14. *Consider the work of God: for who can make that straight which he hath made crooked? In the day of prosperity, be joyful; but in the day of adversity, consider. God also hath set the one over against the other, to the end that man should find nothing after him.*

To "consider the work of God,"—to observe with close attention, and acknowledge with pious reverence, his providential hand, is an important part of true wisdom; as well as to bear habitually in mind the complete and unceasing dependence of all creatures on his sovereign will:—"Who can make that straight, which he hath made crooked?" This has no reference to the previous, undiscovered purposes of God, as to the future arrangement of his providence. These are no rule to us. We are not to allow ourselves to be influenced, either by such conjectural anticipations, or by any idea of invincible fatality. Our business is, to use with diligence the means that are placed in our power of obtaining comfort and happiness, and, in the spirit of humble faith, to leave the event to God. But when the event comes, whatever it may be, we are called to acquiesce in it; not murmuring and complaining, and "fighting against God." That were as vain, as it would be impious: for "who can make that straight, which he hath made crooked?" There is no contending, with success, with innocence, or with safety, against the appointments of providence. Our wisdom is to make a proper improvement of them. "Behold, he taketh away; who can hinder him? who will say unto him, What doest thou?"—"Behold, he breaketh down, and it cannot be built

again; he shutteth up a man, and there can be no opening."—"When he giveth quietness, who then can make trouble? and when he hideth his face, who then can behold him?"—"He doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?" Job ix. 12. xii. 14. xxxiv. 29. Dan. iv. 35.

"In the day of prosperity be joyful; but in the day of adversity, consider."

God has given us of the bounties of his providence; and it is his intention, in bestowing them, that they should be enjoyed by us with grateful and cheerful hearts. Joy is the proper feeling for the season of prosperity and blessing. Not to be joyful, would imply the want of a becoming spirit of thankfulness to the giver. When the children of Israel were commanded to appear before the Lord, with the offering of the first-fruits of their land, the charge was given in these words:—"Thou shalt set it before the Lord thy God, and shall worship before the Lord thy God. And THOU SHALT REJOICE in every good thing which the Lord thy God hath given unto thee, and unto thy house, thou, and the Levite, and the stranger that is among you." And, in denouncing against them the curses of heaven, Moses uses the following remarkable language:—"Because thou servedst not the Lord thy God WITH JOYFULNESS, AND WITH GLADNESS OF HEART, for the abundance of all things; therefore shalt thou serve thine enemies, which the Lord shall send against thee, in hunger, and in thirst, and in nakedness, and in want of all things: and he shall put a yoke of iron upon thy neck, until he have destroyed thee." Deut. xxvi. 10, 11. xxviii. 47, 48.

Whilst prosperity is the season of joy, adversity is a Divine call to serious consideration. Not that in prosperity consideration is to be banished, or that joy is to be excluded in adversity. No. There are joys which are often most sweetly and most intensely experienced in times of trouble. The Christian "glories in tribulation." He is "sorrowful, yet always rejoicing." And when all goes well with us,—when the kindness of heaven "fills our mouth with laughter and our tongue with singing,"—we must never dismiss serious thoughts. We should be "when we rejoice, as though we rejoiced not;" remembering the precariousness of earthly delights, and "joining trembling with our mirth." But it is the de-

sign and the tendency of adversity to rouse to consideration. This is its proper effect. "Is any among you afflicted? let him pray." Adversity contains an immediate, and frequently a startling and impressive, call to such reflections as, alas! prosperity is ever in danger of driving away. It sobers the intoxicated spirit. It summons back the mind from its heedless and perilous wanderings.

"In the day of adversity," then "consider" the AUTHOR of your trials. Whatever be their nature, and whatever the instrument of their infliction, they are the appointment of providence; they come from the hand of a wise and merciful God, who, in all his ways, is entitled to your thoughtful regard.—"Consider" the CAUSE of all suffering. It is all to be traced to sin. Sin is the bitter fountain of every bitter stream that flows in this wilderness.—"Consider" the great general DESIGN of adversity; to excite to self-examination, repentance of sin, and renewed vigilance; to promote the increase of faith, and love, and hope, and spirituality of mind, and general holiness of heart and life. These various topics of consideration are fitted, when duly laid to heart, to produce the sentiments and feelings that are suited to times of trouble. The first, to inspire silent and reverential submission to the will of God, who is the *author* of our trials; the second, humiliation of spirit under a sense of sin, as their *cause*; and the third, an earnest desire for the spiritual profit, which constitutes the gracious *design* of the Divine chastiser. "Thou shalt also consider in thy heart, that as a man chasteneth his son, so the Lord thy God chasteneth thee: therefore thou shalt keep the commandments of the Lord thy God, to walk in his ways, and to fear him:"—"The Lord's voice crieth unto the city, and the man of wisdom shall see thy name; hear ye the rod, and who hath appointed it:"—"Who is he that saith, and it cometh to pass, when the Lord commandeth it not? Out of the mouth of the Most High proceedeth not evil and good. Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins? Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the Lord: let us lift up our heart with our hands unto God in the heavens:"—"Now therefore, thus saith the Lord of hosts, Consider your ways. Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages, earneth wages to put it into a bag with

holes. Thus saith the Lord of hosts, Consider your ways:—"No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous but grievous; nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them who are exercised thereby. Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; and make straight paths for your feet." Deut. viii. 5, 6. Mic. vi. 9. Lam. iii. 37-41. Hag. i. 5-7. Heb. xii. 11-13. Such are some of the many Scriptural addresses to persons in adversity; in all of which may be recognized, with equal clearness, its Author, its cause, and its design.

Prosperity and adversity are, in the present life, and more or less in the history of every individual, intermingled together. They come and go with a frequent and uncertain alternation; so that in the highest prosperity, we should never lose sight of adversity, or allow ourselves to forget how near a change may be. If we do forget it, it is not for want of incessant mementos. In the appearances which the world is every day and every hour presenting to our view, the Supreme Disposer of events is continually "setting the one over against the other." One man is prospering while another is suffering; the prosperity of one is commencing, whilst that of another is terminating: the same man who prospered yesterday, suffers to-day: prosperous and afflictive occurrences befall the same individual at the same moment. And what is the purpose of God in this constant alternation and intermingling of good and evil?

It is,—“to the end that man may find nothing after him.”

This expression is obscure. I shall content myself with mentioning several different interpretations of it, leaving it to yourselves to decide between them:—1. That no man might come after God, to review his providential administration, and discover defect or fault; imagining that things might have been managed to better advantage:—this alternation of prosperity and adversity in the lot of individuals, and in the general aspect of the world, being the wisest arrangement, both for the glory of God and for the good of men—who need adversity to prevent the intoxicating influence of prosperity, and prosperity to lighten the overwhelming pressure of adversity; who require, amidst the temptations of the world, to be constantly reminded of its precariousness; and whose characters are, by varying circumstances, elicited and displayed,

so as to make the justice of God apparent in the final judgment.—  
 2. That men might be sensible of their intire dependence, the lesson being brought home to their minds by their felt inability to alter, in the smallest degree, what he has *done before, and fixed*. No creature can “find any thing after HIM,” who “openeth, and no man shutteth, and shutteth, and no man openeth:” and this ought to produce humble submission to his sovereign appointments; seeing the attempt is thus vain to “find” what he has not willed.—3. That men, impressed with the uncertainty of earthly good, might find their only satisfying portion in God himself; that nothing besides him can confer true and permanent felicity; and that in him there is enough to impart and to secure it, without any thing being sought for after him: that they might be led, from choice and experience, to say, “The Lord is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him:”—“Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire in comparison of thee. My flesh and my heart fail; but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever.”

1. Let us, from these verses, learn, *in the first place*, to beware of *ambition*,—of eagerly coveting the acquisition of power. Let the dangers arising from it to its possessor be considered, and we shall rather be disposed to say, with humble self-distrust, “Lead me not into temptation!” We shall be jealous of ourselves with godly jealousy; and, instead of being eager to acquire, we shall be backward to accept, what contains in it such a temptation to its abuse, and the abuse of which serves equally to infatuate the oppressor, and to madden the oppressed. Not that a Christian is enjoined, or even warranted, uniformly to decline every situation of power and influence, where he might bring his principles into exercise for the benefit of society. No: it may be his duty to accept a trust, to which the voice of his fellow-citizens, and the voice of providence, concur to invite him. There are, besides, various descriptions and degrees of power, which arise from the relations established by nature between man and man. With whichever of these we are intrusted, let it be our prayer, that the grace of God may enable us to “use” our authority “as not abusing it;” for in every case we may be under temptation, constant or occasional, to excess and oppression. You have authority as parents, or as teachers, or as masters, whether of domestic servants, of field laborers, or

of workmen in the various departments of business:—see that you never exert your *power* beyond the limits of *right*; for the gratification of any selfish principle, or the attainment of any selfish end; for any purpose, other than the good of those over whom you possess it. And if you now hold, or should ever be called to hold, a magistracy, or any situation of public trust and influence, let the strictest equity, the most incorruptible integrity and honor, in combination with the tenderest clemency and the most kindly benevolence, characterize your whole conduct; “that the name of God and his doctrine be not blasphemed.”

2. *Secondly*; Let us cherish in our hearts, and exemplify in our lives, the virtues of meekness, and patience, and long-suffering. These are truly Christian virtues; despised by a proud world, but inculcated in the Scriptures with a frequency and earnestness that mark their value in the sight of God; and recommended to our approbation and practice by the perfect example of our blessed Master,—“who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, threatened not; but committed himself to Him who judgeth righteously;” who “was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth.”—Cultivate those lowly and lovely tempers, both towards one another, and towards all men. “Walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called; with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavoring to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace:”—“Warn them that are unruly, comfort the feeble-minded, support the weak, be patient toward all men. See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men:”—“Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them who despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father who is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.”—Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father who is in heaven is perfect.” Eph. iv. 1–3. 1 Thess. v. 14, 15. Matt. v. 44, 45, 48; with Luke vi. 36.

3. *Thirdly*; Let me recommend to all “the wisdom that cometh from above:”—the knowledge and the faith of Divine truth, and the practice of the Divine will. This wisdom is infinitely better

than any earthly inheritance; than any amount of earthly treasures, in possession or in hope. "It giveth LIFE to them that have it." It "maketh wise *unto salvation*"—the most important end, above all comparison, that can engage the contemplation, the desire, or the pursuit, of immortal beings. With this wisdom is associated the favor of God, in which is life; and the "sure and certain hope" of an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away;" an inheritance incomparably more excellent, and infinitely more enduring, than the finest and the largest on earth; an inheritance, of which "the land that flowed with milk and honey" was but a poor and temporary figure; "the better, the heavenly country." He is emphatically a fool, who disregards this "eternal inheritance," and "lays up for himself treasures on earth, where moth and rust corrupt, and thieves break through and steal." Jesus Christ is "the wisdom of God." The knowledge of Him in his true character and mediatorial work, is eternal life. Prize more and more, my Christian brethren, this saving knowledge, and hold it fast unto the end; when its true value, partially appreciated now, will be fully apparent, and delightfully experienced. "Will ye also go away?" said Jesus to his twelve apostles, with the look and the tone of tender interest, when some had "gone back, and walked no more with him." "Lord," said Peter in reply,—and, oh! adopt ye the answer, and let it come from a devoted spirit,—"Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of ETERNAL LIFE!"—"Beware, lest, being led away by the error of the wicked, ye fall from your own steadfastness; but grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ." John vi. 68. 2 Pet. iii. 17, 18. "And may God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, shine into the hearts" of all who hear me, "to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ!"

4. *Fourthly*; Let the mixture of prosperity and adversity, which in this world is seen and felt by all, produce in all the blessed effects that have been described. Instead of carping at the divine arrangements, and vainly seeking permanent enjoyment amidst the uncertainties and fluctuations of the world, be satisfied with what you cannot improve; bow to what you cannot alter; and turn for constant and lasting happiness to that "Father of lights" who is the author of "every good and perfect gift;" who has

stamped mutability and fickleness on every thing created, and is himself alone "without variableness or shadow of turning." Let those who know God,—who have "tasted that the Lord is gracious,"—cultivate and display tempers of mind corresponding to the states in which his providence alternately places them. Let the one and the other lead them to himself. "I have learned," says the apostle of the Gentiles,—may we all learn, from the same heavenly teacher, the same blessed lesson!—"I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where, and in all things, I am instructed, both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me." Phil. iv. 11-13.

5. *Lastly*; And oh! let the man of this world, whether at the present moment in prosperity or adversity, be persuaded to "consider." A portion, in a scene so changeful and so fleeting, will not do. If you are prospering, recollect that, short as your earthly life must be, your prosperity may be shorter. If you are suffering, you have already learned the precariousness of prosperity. "Set not, then, your eyes any more on that which is not;" but seek for yourselves, "in heaven, a better and more enduring substance;"—in heaven, where prosperity and adversity are no longer set "the one over against the other," but all is "fulness of joy, and pleasures for evermore." Fret not at the vanity of the world. Murmur not that your prosperity has not been more steady. Its departure, if you rightly improve it, may do you infinitely more good than you could have derived from its longest continuance, or its highest possible augmentation. Vent not a sinful spleen in unprofitable complaints of the times, and repinings that your lot had not been cast in an earlier and a better age. The times, no doubt, are bad; yet bad times might be the best times for mankind, if they would but make a right use of them, and learn from them the salutary lessons of spiritual wisdom. And with you, my friends, the very best times are bad,—miserably bad,—whilst you continue to live "without God in the world." The best times are the worst, if they take away your hearts from him, and impose upon you the unsubstantial and passing shadows of happiness for its solid and eternal realities. "O taste, and see that the Lord is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him."



## LECTURE XIII.

### ECCLESIASTES VII. 15-22.

“All (things) have I seen in the days of my vanity: there is a just (man) that perisheth in his righteousness, and there is a wicked (man) that prolongeth (his life) in his wickedness. 16. Be not righteous over much; neither make thyself over wise: why shouldst thou destroy thyself? 17. Be not over much wicked, neither be thou foolish: why shouldst thou die before thy time? 18. (It is) good that thou shouldst take hold of this; yea, also from this withdraw not thine hand: for he that feareth God shall come forth of them all. 19. Wisdom strengtheneth the wise more than ten mighty (men) who are in the city. 20. For (there is) not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not. 21. Also take no heed unto all words that are spoken; lest thou hear thy servant curse thee: 22. For oftentimes also thine own heart knoweth that thou thyself likewise hast cursed others.”

Verse 15. *All things have I seen in the days of my vanity: there is a just man that perisheth in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man that prolongeth his life in his wickedness.*

“Behold,” says the Psalmist, “thou hast made my days as a hand-breadth, and mine age is as nothing before thee: verily every man, at his best estate, is altogether vanity.” All a man’s days on earth might therefore be with propriety denominated “the days of his vanity.” The designation, however, appears to be applied by Solomon to that period of his life, during which he forsook God, and tried to find his happiness from worldly sources. The days of this period were, indeed, emphatically what he here denominates them. In the course of these days, he had taken a very extensive survey of human life, and had marked with attention, in the spirit of a philosophical observer, the various circumstances which, in different situations, affected the happiness of mankind:—“All things,” says he, in verse fifteenth, “have I seen in the days of my vanity.”

He specifies one of his observations, and founds upon it the counsel of wisdom:—"There is a just man that perisheth in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man that longeth his life in his wickedness." The subject here, I apprehend, is not the conduct of Divine providence respecting the fortunes and lives of the righteous and the wicked; but rather the treatment which these two opposite characters frequently experience from the world: though this, no doubt, takes place under the superintendance, and by the permission, of Heaven. Solomon had noted various instances, in which the consistently righteous man,—the man who by his conduct "testifies against the world that its deeds are evil;" and especially one who, along with this character, holds a station of power and eminence in which he feels his obligation to act conscientiously, without regard to fear or to favor, to flattery or to threatening,—exposed himself to the malignant operation of hatred and envy, by which his days had been at once embittered and cut short, through open violence or by secret treachery: whilst the wicked man had "prolonged his life in his wickedness," acting on principles more congenial to the likings of the world in which he lived, and employing arts for his preservation such as the just man could not in conscience have recourse to: so that sometimes he had even succeeded in lengthening out his days *by* his wickedness, whilst the good man had prematurely perished *for* his righteousness. From the days of "righteous Abel," downward through the history of all nations, facts are not wanting in corroboration of Solomon's statement. The whole army of martyrs, as well as many an ill-requited patriot, might be brought as witnesses to its truth.

With this general observation what follows is to be considered as in immediate connection:—

Verses 16–18. *Be not righteous over much; neither make thyself over wise; why shouldst thou destroy thyself? Be not over much wicked, neither be thou foolish; why shouldst thou die before thy time? It is good that thou shouldst take hold of this; yea, also from this withdraw not thy hand: for he that feareth God shall come forth of them all.*

Persons who relish not, nor study, the word of God as a whole, have often particular parts of it which they like; favorite texts, such as, when severed from their connection, and regarded in their

sound rather than their sense, appear to suit their pre-conceived opinions and prevalent desires. These little insulated scraps of Scripture, misunderstood and perverted, and applied to purposes the very opposite of the Divine intention, obtain a free currency amongst multitudes of people, many of whom, perhaps, never read them in their Bibles, but have got them at second-hand as maxims of high authority; and they are quote on all occasions, and referred to with the easy confidence of a geometrician quoting his axioms. In this, and in many other ways, the word of God meets with treatment which would be resented as an insult by any human author; being made to express sentiments in perfect contrariety to its general spirit, and even to its most explicit declarations.

Few texts (perhaps I might say none) have been in such general favor; have been caught at, and circulated, and appealed to with approbation by so great a variety of characters; as the first clause of the sixteenth verse,—“Be not righteous over much.” Its grand recommendation lies in its being so *undefined*; susceptible of so many shades of meaning; prescribing no precise boundaries, but leaving matters conveniently at large; and thus affording latitude for every man to fix his own standard, (and even that may be very fluctuating,) and then to appeal to Scripture against all who go beyond him, as exceeding reasonable bounds, and being “righteous over much.” For it is surprising how men who hate and disregard the Bible in its great truths and requirements, will yet quote its words, nay, even plead for its authority, when it can be made, by any perversion, to accord with their own inclinations.

The saying is a favorite one with the profligate, who, in cursing the enthusiasm and hypocrisy of others, vainly fancies that he is vindicating his own vice and folly; and who reckons it quite a sufficient reason for rejecting with scorn a serious and salutary advice, that it comes from one whom all must allow to be—“righteous over much!”

Often, on the other hand, is it appealed to by the man of morality, who, with stern severity, condemns the profligate, but who piques himself on his own sobriety, honesty, industry, kindness, and general decency of character; and making this external virtue his religion, though without a single sentiment or emotion of

inward godliness, considers every thing beyond it as being—"righteous over much!"

Many, who are equally destitute of the true spirit of religion; who feel its services an irksome drudgery; whose secret language in them all is,—“What a weariness is it!” and who, therefore, satisfy their consciences with very flimsy apologies for the neglect of them, are ever ready to pronounce those “righteous over much,” who cannot see their excuses in the same satisfactory light with themselves.

This admonition, too, is a weapon in constant use with the thousands, whose religion consists in the strict observance of its outward forms, in their appropriate times and places. They would not for the world be missed out of their pew on the Sabbath, and with even greater reluctance on certain days of human institution. But they are clear for keeping religion in its proper place. This is a topic on which they continually insist; a species of *propriety* which, in company with a smile of self-complacency, is for ever on their lips. It is all well, if a man minds religion on its own appropriate day, and attends to his business the rest of the week. These things must not be made to clash. “Six days shalt thou labor, and one thou shalt rest,” are God’s own prescriptions:—and the Bible itself enjoins us not to be—“righteous over much!”

But there are none to whom this favorite caution is of more essential service, than those professors of religion, of whom, alas! the number is not small, who, disliking “the offence of the cross,” are desirous to keep on good terms with both Christ and the world; and who cover from others, and try to cover from themselves, the real principle of their conduct, by prudential maxims of imposing plausibility, and some of them in the terms of Scripture. The wisdom of the serpent, they say, is recommended to us, as well as the harmlessness of the dove. They cannot see the use of exposing themselves and their religion to needless derision. They are ever mightily afraid, lest, by the over-strictness and uncomplying spirit of its professors, men should be led to form gloomy notions of the gospel, as a system of morose and puritanical austerity. “We must needs go out of the world,” they allege, “if we are to take no part in its pleasures.” Under the pretext of recommending religion, such persons meet the world half-way; they join in its follies and vain amusements; they rather court

than shun its intercourse; and they sanction their unseemly compliances by an appeal to the admonition before us; regarding the reproach cast upon others who think a more decided and marked separation from the world their duty, as brought upon themselves by their own imprudence,—by *carrying matters too far*,—by being “righteous over much!”

A passage of Scripture that has been so much abused, and of which the abuse is so extensively prejudicial, it is of great importance rightly to understand: and, before noticing any of the different views that have been taken of it, I shall state what to me appears to be its true meaning.

The whole passage seems to be an instance of serious and impressive IRONY: of which the subject is, the line of conduct most prudent to be pursued, supposing the end in view to be the securing of favor, honor, and prosperity in the world. Thus:—“There is a just man that perisheth in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man that longeth his life in his wickedness.” If, therefore, you wish to avoid the enmity of the world, with its mischievous and sometimes deadly consequences, and to insure favor, success, honor, and long life,—“be not righteous over much:”—remember that religion is a matter, in which men, in general, are particularly fond of moderation; and beware of assuming an appearance of sanctity greater than the world is disposed to approve of, or to bear with.—“Neither make thyself over wise; why shouldst thou destroy thyself?” Recollect, that the same feelings of envy and malignant jealousy may be excited, as they very often have been, by high degrees of superior intelligence and wisdom. Be not obtrusive, therefore, with your eminent endowments. Deal prudently. Be cautious of exasperating the jealous pride of others. Besides the risks that arise from envy, such qualities may bring you often into the critical situation of an arbitrator; in which you must unavoidably expose yourself to the resentment of one or other of the parties, and possibly even of both. And from various other sources danger may arise to you. But, at the same time, beware. Similar effects may be produced by opposite causes. Although men do not like over much religion, you must be on your guard, on the other hand, against the extreme of wickedness:—“Be not over much wicked.” You will expose yourself to suspicion and hatred, as a dangerous member of society: men will become your

enemies from fear, and will think they confer a benefit on the community, by making riddance of you: nay, in the excess of riotous and unbridled profligacy you may be betrayed into deeds which may awaken the vengeance of human laws, and bring you to an untimely end. Let prudent consideration, then, set bounds to your licentiousness.—“Neither be thou foolish; why shouldst thou die before thy time?” As there are hazards attending high pretensions to wisdom, so are there risks peculiar to folly. The absolute fool becomes the object of contempt. His life is hardly thought worth an effort, far less a sacrifice, for its preservation. The fool is easily made the tool and the dupe of a party; exposing himself to be the prey of virulent enemies, or of selfish pretended friends. Folly leads a man into innumerable scrapes. It may induce him heedlessly to mix with wicked associates, and may thus, as indeed has many a time happened, occasion his suffering for crimes in the perpetration of which he had no active hand, and which, fool as he is, he would shrink from committing. And in numberless ways he may come, by his folly, to “die before his time.” If, therefore, I repeat, your object be to shun the world’s enmity, with its possible and probable effects, and to secure the world’s favor, with its desirable accompaniments and consequences, take care of these extremes;—as “there is a just man that perisheth in his righteousness, be not righteous over much, neither make thyself over wise; why shouldst thou destroy thyself?”—and though “a wicked man” may, and sometimes does, “prolong his life in his wickedness,” yet “be not over much wicked, neither be thou foolish; why shouldst thou die before thy time?”

All Scripture irony is serious, and intended to impress on the mind important lessons. The passage is, in this respect, similar to that striking one towards the close of the book:—“Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thy heart, and in the sight of thine eyes:—**BUT KNOW THOU** that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment.” So here, the admonition closes with an impressive recommendation of the fear of the Lord, as the best and only means of inspiring true peace and tranquil security of mind; as a sovereign antidote against the fear of man; and a powerful incentive to the faithful and firm discharge of duty in every situation:—

Verse 18. "It is good that thou shouldst take hold of this, yea, also from this withdraw not thy hand: for HE THAT FEARETH GOD SHALL COME FORTH OF THEM ALL."

"It is good"—supremely good and advantageous—"that thou shouldst lay hold on this,"—that is, on what I am now about to mention; "yea, also from this withdraw not thy hand,"—that is, let this antidote against the perils of an evil world, and against the fear of man, which so often brings a snare, be the subject of thy constant and attentive remembrance; the object of thy supreme and unceasing desire, and of thine unabated endeavors after its thorough attainment and its permanent influence;—"for he that feareth God shall come forth of them all." Instead of adopting any of the maxims, or following any of the schemes, of a carnal policy and worldly wisdom, "be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long:"—"Sanctify the Lord God in your heart; let him be your fear, and let him be your dread: and He shall be for a sanctuary." He shall be thy fortress and strong tower; so that thou shalt not need to be afraid of what man can do unto thee. "Thou shalt dwell on high; and thy place of defense shall be the munition of rocks."—"He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High, shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress; my God; in him will I trust. He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth shall be thy shield and buckler." Psalm xci. 1, 2, 4.—"Fear not them who kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him, who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall to the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not, therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows." Matt. x. 28-31.

The nineteenth verse may be connected with this, as containing an amplification of the idea expressed in the latter part of it:—

Verse 19. *Wisdom strengtheneth the wise more than ten mighty men who are in the city.*

"Wisdom,"—that is, *this* wisdom, the fear of God, declared in other places to be wisdom, and the beginning of wisdom,—this wisdom "strengtheneth the wise:" it fortifies and invigorates the soul; it elevates it above every other fear; it inspires the heart

with a firm feeling of security, and with resolute, undaunted courage in the path of duty, however beset with enemies and obstructed by difficulties. "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusteth in thee."—"Wisdom strengtheneth the wise more"—imparts to them more of inward confidence, and of real safety—"than ten mighty men;" ten experienced and skilful, powerful and intrepid leaders; or, understanding the number *ten* as a definite for an indefinite, more than any number of valiant warriors "who are in the city" can give to its inhabitants when invested by a besieging foe. Such a city may be deemed secure, when so defended: but the fear of God is a still stronger and surer defense to those who put their trust in his power and mercy.—Or, supposing the "ten mighty men who are in the city" to be the foes of "him who fears God," wisdom makes him stronger than his enemies; gives him fortitude of mind against them, however numerous and however mighty. He that is with him is more than all that can be against him; so that he may say, with the Psalmist,—“Though a host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident:”—“I laid me down and slept; I awaked, for the Lord sustained me: I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people, that have set themselves against me round about.” The felt security of those who are under the special protecting care of the Almighty, is finely represented by the case of the prophet Elisha, when surrounded in Dothan by the host of the king of Syria. When his servant, on rising in the morning, saw the city invested on all sides with horses and chariots, he said, with a fearful heart, “Alas! my master, how shall we do?” Elisha answered,—“Fear not; for they that be with us are more than they that be with them.” And he prayed, and said,—“Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes that he may see. And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw: and behold the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha.” This host of the Lord was unseen but by the eye of faith. To the mind of the prophet it imparted the most fearless composure, under circumstances in which, to the eye of sense, his destruction must have seemed inevitable. 2 Kings vi. 15–17.

In vindication of the general principle which I have adopted for the explanation of this passage, let it now be observed, *in the*



*first place:* The *motives* which Solomon employs to recommend and enforce his advice evidently show that, in the fifteenth verse, when he speaks of “a righteous man perishing in his righteousness, and a wicked man prolonging his life in his wickedness,” he refers not directly to the conduct of providence, but to the consequences arising to the righteous and the wicked, from the feelings of mankind towards them: for, in the ordinary administration of God, the duration of human life does not appear to be at all regulated by the characters of men.

*Secondly.* If the counsel,—“Be not righteous over much” means, that it is our duty to be righteous, but that we should beware of excess in righteousness; then the opposite counsel,—“Be not over much wicked,” if taken seriously, (that is, as having nothing in it of the nature of irony,) must, on the same principle of interpretation, be understood to signify, that we may be wicked, provided we take due care not to exceed, or to go beyond bounds in our wickedness. But this, surely, can never be the counsel of the word of God. Every reader of the Bible will be instantly sensible how much it is out of unison with the universal tenor of its sentiment and phraseology.

*Thirdly.* *Righteousness*, when opposed, as it is here, to *wickedness*, usually means, in Scripture language, true religion in general, in all its various branches, of principle and of practice; the intire profession and course of conduct of a good man. In this enlarged sense I understand it here; and this makes me dissatisfied with other interpretations of the passage.

Some consider *righteousness* as referring particularly to the exercise of *justice*, and the admonition not to be righteous over much, as a caution against the over-rigid application of the principles of equity; pressing every thing to an extreme; never tempering justice with clemency, but exacting satisfaction and punishment, without mercy, on all occasions, even for the most trivial faults. But if righteousness mean simply justice, then wickedness must mean simply injustice; and if “be not righteous over much” be a warning against the extreme of justice, “be not over much wicked” must be a warning against the extreme of injustice; a warning which we certainly should not expect to find in that book which admits of no compromise between right and wrong, and whose sentence is,—“He that is faithful in that which is least is

faithful also in much; and he that unjust in the least is unjust also in much." Luke xvi. 10. Those who have adopted the interpretation I am speaking of have not, I think, sufficiently attended to the *antithesis* in the passage; nor duly considered, that the true principle of interpretation, whatever it may be, ought to apply, with equal fairness and ease, to both sides of it. There is reason, indeed, to think, that the counsel—"be not righteous over much," is quoted by multitudes without the most distant recollection, and by not a few without even the knowledge, of its being followed immediately by the admonition not to be "over much wicked."

Others, understanding the terms "righteous" and "wicked," as I think they ought to be understood, in their more general acceptation; and at the same time conceiving "Be not righteous over much" to be Solomon's serious counsel; cannot, however, deny, that of true righteousness, of real religion, of genuine, unsophisticated goodness, there cannot be excess. They are, therefore, under the necessity of qualifying and restricting after all. Some of them explain the words as a caution against *intemperate zeal*, exerting itself indiscreetly, contentiously, and to the injury of religion:—some, as a warning against *a blind and bigoted superstition*, displaying itself in an excessive attachment to rites and ceremonies of human invention; or even, it may be, to external institutions of Divine appointment; whilst the spirit of vital godliness is intirely or in a great measure overlooked:—others, as an admonition against a *needless scrupulosity* about trifles; a want of proper discrimination between smaller and greater matters; between what have been termed essentials, and non-essentials; from which have arisen the hottest contentions, and numberless unnecessary schisms.

Of all these, and other interpretations of a similar kind that might be noticed, it may be observed in general:—First, that these things are not properly righteousness; but the mere adjuncts, and unjustifiable accompaniments or counterfeits of righteousness: and secondly, that if such things are meant in the exhortation, "Be not righteous over much," it will follow, that what is said in the verse preceeding, of "the righteous man perishing in his righteousness," must be considered as expressing, not the consequence of his real godliness itself, but of his imprudent profession and practice, or his needlessly ostentatious display, of it. But this certainly is not

what Solomon means, when he contrasts the "righteous perishing in his righteousness," and the "wicked prolonging his life in his wickedness."

Considering *righteousness*, then, in its proper sense; in the sense in which it is generally used in the Bible; I must repeat what has before been hinted, that no man who is conversant in the contents of that blessed volume, can for a moment admit the idea of its containing a caution against the excess of it;—the excess of true religion and moral obedience. Were such excess possible, surely it is not the side on which we are in danger of erring, and require to be seriously admonished. Shall we warn him against too much spirituality of mind, who feels himself by nature "carnal, sold under sin," and in whose bosom the "law of sin" is incessantly striving against the "law of his mind?" Shall we put him on his guard against allowing the love of God,—the comprehensive principle of all righteousness,—to occupy too much of his heart, whose nature is enmity against him? Shall we caution against looking too constantly at the things which are unseen and eternal, a creature whose propensities are so powerful to seek his portion in the things that are seen and temporal; who feels his affections drawn downward, and bound to the earth? How preposterous the thought, of warning a sinful creature against the excess of holiness!—a selfish creature against the excess of benevolence and integrity!—an earthly-minded creature against too intimate fellowship with heaven!—a creature surrounded with temptations to equivocate between God and the world, and who carries about within him principles of the old man, to which, alas! these temptations are too congenial, against a profession and conduct too decided on the part of God and of godliness!—a creature who is so much in danger of seeking glory from men, against estimating too highly or coveting too eagerly, the honor that cometh from God only!—a creature, in a word, that has so many sadly prevailing tendencies to the intire dereliction of righteousness, against being "righteous over much!"

*Lastly.* The whole of the language of the Divine word, in describing the character at which God's people ought continually to aim, is fitted to impress on every mind the *impossibility* of the dreaded excess,—of being "righteous over much." Let a few passages suffice as a specimen of many. "If any man be in Christ: he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold all things

are become new.”—“Every man that hath this hope in him,” (in Christ; namely, the hope of seeing him as he is and being like him,) “purifieth himself even as He is pure.”—“Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended; but this one thing I do: forgetting the things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”—“Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.”—“I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service: and be not conformed to this world; but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is the good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God.”—“They that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh, with the affections and lusts.”—“Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world: if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.”—“Ye cannot serve God and mammon.”—“The friendship of the world is enmity with God: whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world, is the enemy of God.”—“Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all pollution of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”—“Giving all diligence, add to your faith, fortitude; and to fortitude, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly-kindness; and to brotherly-kindness, charity.”—“For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself: for whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live, therefore, or die, we are the Lord’s.” 2 Cor. v. 17. 1 John iii. 3. Phil. iii. 13, 14. Col. iii. 2. Rom. xii. 1, 2. Gal. v. 24. 1 John ii 15. Matt. vi. 24. James iv. 4. 2 Cor. vii. 1. 2 Peter 5-7. Rom. xiv. 7, 8. These passages, which are only an exemplification of the current phraseology of the Bible on the subject of Christian holiness, express a spirituality, a decision and self-denial, a universality, perseverance, and progress, of practical obedience, utterly inconsistent with any cautions against the danger of excess, and admonitions to moderation. Of such sedatives, alas! we stand not in need. All the exciting stimulants that can be applied to our minds are few enough, and weak enough, to keep us on the alert against the

temptations of the world, and alive to the great ends of our being. The sinless perfection of our moral nature, is the object of commanded pursuit, and of promised attainment. We can never, even in a future world, go beyond this; and in the present world, bearing about with us to the end the corruption of the old man, we can never reach it. We can never exceed the requirements of the precepts I have been repeating. To be "righteous over much," is an impossibility.

The statement in the twentieth verse,—

Verse 20. *For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not,*—

Is made without exception or qualification; and ought for ever to lay in the dust the lofty pretensions of some professing Christians, as if they had attained to a state of perfect freedom from inward and outward sin; a pretension pregnant with the most astonishing self-ignorance, or the most presumptuous spiritual pride. There are "*just* men upon the earth:" they "do good," and manifest by its fruits the nature and qualities of the tree. But there are no *perfect* men upon earth; none who can say, without the most pitiable self-deception, "I have no sin." There is many a one that "doeth good;" but no one that "doeth good and sinneth not;"—no, not one. Not only are we guilty of many sins along with our good deeds; but in our good deeds themselves there is sin. "There is not a just man upon earth that doeth good, and," even in the good that he doeth, "sinneth not." We have all of us abundant reason to say, not only that "in many things we offend," but that in every thing we "fail and come short;" and still to come to God with the prayer of the publican,—"God be merciful to me a sinner."

But the connection of the verse with what precedes is not, at first view, very obvious: and accordingly different translations have been proposed of the connective particle, rendered by our translators "*For*;" some joining it with what goes before, and others with what follows. There seems no need for any alteration. The verse connects in a natural and edifying manner with the sentiment of the eighteenth and nineteenth verses:—"It is good that thou shouldst lay hold of this; yea, also from this withdraw not thy hand: for he that feareth God shall come forth of them all. Wisdom,"—this wisdom, the fear of God,—"strengtheneth

the wise more than ten mighty men who are in the city." The admonition to cultivate the fear of God is then enforced by the appropriate consideration, "For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not." You are a sinful and imperfect creature; having the seeds of all evil within you; ever liable to feel the power of temptation, and to fall before it. Cherish, therefore, the fear of God, as the great preventive of evil; the strengthening and sustaining principle amidst abounding intimidations and allurements; that which alone can counteract the propensities of corruption. One temptation to sin, a frequent and a strong one, is the fear of man. But the predominant fear of God raises the mind above it; gives vigor of heart, boldness of countenance, and energy of resistance; and, maintained in exercise by the Spirit of God, secures the final victory.

Verses twenty-first and twenty-second contain some further necessary advice, for the preservation of our peace and happiness in life:—

Verses 21, 22. *Also, take no heed unto all words that are spoken; lest thou hear thy servant curse thee: For oftentimes also thine own heart knoweth, that thou thyself likewise hast cursed others.*

This precept requires *practice* more than it needs *illustration*. Its general nature is sufficiently plain. It is addressed to those who are apt to be jealous of what is thought and what is said about them by others; who are continually on the tiptoe of listening suspicion. It has been said, and is almost proverbial, that listeners seldom hear good of themselves. It is quite natural to expect that it should be so. The very practice shows the man's conscience to be inwardly whispering to himself, that it is not good he is entitled to hear. The anxious curiosity indicates the existence of such a secret suspicion; and he who indulges it well deserves the mortification he receives. If we regard our own happiness, we shall pay attention to this admonition. The *feeling* must be one of exquisite distress, when a man, expecting commendation and blessing, hears from the lips that should have uttered it, reviling and malediction. In such a case, surely, "ignorance is bliss." It may often happen, that a person, under the irritation of temporary passion, may utter hastily the severe reflection, and the imprecation of evil, to which he would by no means stand in his cooler moments. What he has hastily uttered he quickly forgets. But

he who is the subject of it cannot so readily banish it from his mind; he cannot, from his self-partiality, make adequate allowance for the momentary passion that has produced it; he broods over it; it leaves a deep and rankling wound; and he thus makes himself lastingly unhappy, by hearing what he who said it has not lodged in his bosom for a single hour. We should, besides, be influenced to receive this admonition by the consideration suggested in the twenty-second verse:—"For oftentimes also thine own heart knoweth that thou thyself likewise hast cursed others." You not only are aware, my fellow-christians, how you were wont to feel and to speak, when you were destitute of the grace of God; but you are conscious to yourselves how you are apt to be affected still: how ready you are, in the moment of irritation, to kindle with resentful emotion, and to utter the wish of evil; nay, how much you are in danger of even retaining and cherishing the spirit of malediction. Sensible of this, you will "beware of giving heed unto all words that are spoken." Your own consciousness will prevent you from thinking it impossible that you should hear any evil of yourselves; and it will, at the same time, teach you, to make allowance for the passions and the hasty speeches of other men.

1. From this passage, I may, *in the first place*, address to my fellow-christians, the words of the apostle John:—"Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you." No strange thing happens to you. It has been so, as the apostle, in the connection of the words quoted, reminds his brethren, from the very beginning; from the time when God said to the serpent,—“I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed.” “Cain was of that wicked one, and slew his brother: and wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother’s righteous.” The same principle of enmity against God and his spiritual children continued to operate in the days of Solomon; who saw “the just man perishing in his righteousness, and the wicked man prolonging his life in his wickedness.” And never was the hostility of human nature to God and goodness more affectingly displayed, than at the fullness of time, during the personal ministry of the Son of God; when the Eternal Word, made flesh, dwelt amongst men, “full of grace and truth.” He was hated by the world, because, by the perfection of his example,

and the faithfulness of his ministry, he "testified of it that its deeds were evil." And most emphatically might it be said of him, that he "perished in his righteousness." His apostles after him experienced the same effects from the same cause, agreeably to his own faithful premonition:—"If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but, because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you,—The servant is not greater than his Lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also." And the case is still unaltered. The enmity between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman still subsists. Various circumstances in providence, indeed, prevent it (and for this we have cause to be thankful,) from operating in the way of public persecution of the Christian name. But still it exists, and still it shows itself in an endless variety of more private ways, wherever the decidedly serious and spiritual religion of the gospel is exhibited. Unregenerated human nature likes not God and holiness one whit better now than it has ever done. The pure and lowly Saviour is still, and often even in the midst of professed and nominal attachment to him, "despised and rejected of men:" and the tendency of the cordial acceptance, and the humble and spiritual profession of his doctrine, still is, to separate a man from his brethren; to divide households, two against three, and three against two; and, by its collision with the corrupt passions of the heart in those who continue strangers to its saving power, to strike out the sparks, and kindle the fire, of persecution and strife. Wheresoever, and to what extent soever, the spirit of hostility displays itself, let the sufferers remember, both for their encouragement and their admonition, the words of their Master:—"Blessed are they who are persecuted for righteousness' sake; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven." O remember, my brethren, it must be "for righteousness' sake" that you suffer,—it must be "falsely" that you are evil spoken of, else the blessing cannot be yours. "But if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their



terror, neither be troubled; but sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every one that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear." Matt. v. 10-12. 1. Peter iii. 14, 15.

2. *Secondly*; Let men beware of wresting and abusing the Scriptures, to their own delusion and ruin. It is a very sure evidence of a man's not being decidedly righteous at all, when he is particularly fond of the caution (misinterpreted as in that case we are certain it must be,) "not to be righteous over much:"—a caution which is often repeated, with a sneer of malicious satisfaction, by men in whose eyes all real, heartfelt, spiritual religion; all scriptural godliness; is held as enthusiasm and madness;—that religion, I mean, which mourns for sin in deep self-abasement; which loves the Saviour supremely; which is addicted to reading the Bible, to prayer, and communion with God; which counts the Sabbath a delight; which shrinks, with a delicate tenderness of conscience, from even the appearance of evil; which ceases to have pleasure in the empty vanities, the time-and-soul-killing follies, of a passing world, and weeps in pity for those who have; which seeks to enjoy God in all things, and all things in God.

My friends, the subject is serious—deeply serious; worthy of being in earnest about. Either you must belong to the people of God, or to the world: and the time is coming when this distinction shall be announced with awful solemnity, and shall be fixed, with its consequences on either side, in eternal permanence.

With easy lightness of heart, and scornful rejection of serious counsel from those who feel the weight of religious truth and the sacredness of religious duty, you talk of "not being righteous over much;" and you thus cloak under a Bible phrase your deplorable regardlessness of the Bible's most important discoveries and most imperative obligations. You spurn its pure and elevated sanctities away from you, and, with infatuated thoughtlessness, allege its own authority for doing so. But you do not read your Bible, else you never would talk thus. O my friends, do bethink yourselves. A sinful creature "righteous over much!"—a sinner too good! Can you, in your consciences, believe, that the word of God seriously warns you against the danger of this? If not, O beware of perverting a Divine counsel;—beware of doing with the word of

the Eternal God what you would resent as an insult were it done with your own.

“There is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good and sinneth not.” There is not, therefore, a just man upon earth, that can stand accepted before God on the ground of his own righteousness. Such is the character of that Being with whom we have to do, and such the requirements of his perfect law, that nothing but a sinless righteousness can procure acceptance at his bar. Such a righteousness is not to be found in fallen man. And the very first, and a most distinctive feature, in the character of the renewed, is the intire renunciation of all dependence on their own doings, and a simple-hearted reliance on the perfect righteousness,—the obedience, atonement, and intercession,—of the Son of God. All of them are ready to say, with deep prostration of soul before God, “If thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?”—“Enter not into judgment with thy servant; for in thy sight shall no man living be justified:”—“God be merciful to me a sinner!”

Forget not, at the same time, that personal righteousness, “walking in newness of life,” is the only unequivocal evidence of interest, by faith, in the righteousness of the Redeemer. Therefore,—

3. *Thirdly*; Let Christians implore, with earnestness and constancy, the influences of the Spirit of God, at once to deepen their sense of sinfulness, and at the same time to maintain in full vigor in their souls the “fear of God:” that by this wisdom they may be brought through all temptations; may “come forth” victorious from all opposition, and untainted from all the corrupting influence of an evil world:—that they may manifest in increasing holiness the increasing power of this sacred principle:—that they may not be “led away by the error of the wicked, and so fall from their own steadfastness, but may grow in grace, and in the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.” Let it be their constant desire and aim, to be *righteous more and more*; never thinking that they have already attained, or that they are already perfect. Let them “follow holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.” “Of *this*” let them “take hold;”—“from *this* let them not withdraw their hand.”—“Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God that worketh in you, both to will and to do of his good pleasure.”—“Gird up the loins of

your minds, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that shall be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance; but, as he who hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation: because it is written, Be ye holy, for I am holy. And if ye call on the Father, who, without respect of persons, judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear: forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you; who by him do believe in God, who raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory, that your faith and hope might be in God." 1 Peter i. 13-21.

4. *Lastly*; Let a sense of our own liableness and proneness to err, in heart, in word, and in conduct, render us charitable, candid, and gentle, in our judgments of others. The *principle* of the admonition, "Take no heed unto all words that are spoken, lest thou hear thy servant curse thee; for oftentimes also thine own heart knoweth, that thou thyself likewise hast cursed others," may be thus, with propriety, generalized:—We ought not to expect too much from others, when we are conscious to ourselves of our own weakness and sinfulness: and we should especially beware harshness, and of severely condemning others for things of which of we ourselves are guilty. "Thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things." Rom. ii. 1. "Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged; and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, and considerest not the beam that is thine own eye? Oor how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and behold, a beam is in thine own eye. Thou hypocrite, cast out first the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye." Matt. vii. 1-5.

## LECTURE XIV.

ECCLESIASTES VII. 23-29.

“All this have I proved by wisdom: I said, I will be wise; but it (was) far from me. 24. That which is far off, and exceeding deep, who can find it out? 25. I applied mine heart to know, and to search, and to seek out wisdom, and the reason (of things,) and to know the wickedness of folly, even of foolishness (and) madness: 26. And I find more bitter than death the woman, whose heart (is) snares and nets, (and) her hands (as) bands: whoso pleaseth God shall escape from her; but the sinner shall be taken by her. 27. Behold, this have I found, saith the Preacher, (counting) one by one, to find out the account: 28. Which yet my soul seeketh, but I find not; one man among a thousand have I found; but a woman among all those have I not found. 29. Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions.

Verses 23, 24. *All this have I proved by wisdom: I said, I will be wise; but it was far from me. That which is far off, and exceeding deep, who can find it out?*

THE wisdom which God imparted to Solomon did not consist in the supernatural infusion of knowledge on all subjects into his mind; but rather in an understanding rendered by “the Father of the spirits of all flesh” unusually acute and comprehensive, capable of quick discernment, clear and accurate conception, enlarged views, and thus of extensive and multifarious acquisitions. And it was in the diligent exercise of his mental faculties, thus strengthened, elevated, and amplified, that he gained that extent and variety of knowledge and wisdom, for which he was so highly and justly celebrated.

The serious and important lessons contained in this book, are the result of the wisdom given him, when rightly exercised, under the influence of the fear of the Lord, and the superintending direction of the Holy Spirit, by whom he was prompted to record his experience.

“All this,” says, he, in the first of the verses I have now read,—“All this have I proved by wisdom:”—I have tried all these diversified sources of happiness, and have proved the result to be such as I have stated:—I have proved the lessons I now deliver to be founded in truth; to be “good and profitable unto men.” Not that it was a wise course by which he collected his experience: but he had now, through Divine mercy, been led to apply to that experience the wisdom given him; and to teach to others the lessons he had taught to himself.

Even to the course, indeed, which procured him his experience, he had been incited by the misdirected desire of wisdom, or knowledge. This was his ruling passion; a principle, good in itself, but in its application susceptible of the most grievous perversion:—“I said, I will be wise.” On this object he set his heart, and he pursued it with unabating ardor in every direction,—in all descriptions of experiment and research.—“But,” he adds, it was far from me.”

1. The measure of wisdom which he was desirous to attain, in his different pursuits, was far from him. He still found, after all his investigation, that he “knew but in part;” and the more he came to know, the more did he perceive the vast extent of what yet remained undiscovered; of subjects hid in darkness, or dimly seen in the twilight of conjecture. In the rich mine of science, he was for ever striking on some new vein; and, in the very ardor and enthusiasm of discovery, arriving at points, beyond which no mortal skill or power was able to penetrate. Thus even Solomon, with all his marvellous faculties, experienced the truth of what the poet says of knowledge,—

“’Tis but to know—how little can be known.”

There are limits to the powers of the mightiest minds. There are many things in the nature of the Divine Being, many things in his works, and many things in his ways, that are “past finding out;” things, of which the loftiest and most capacious understandings must be content to say, “Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain unto it:”—or, as Solomon adds, in the following verse, “That which is far off, and exceeding deep, who can find it out?”

2. If we consider him as speaking of the exercise of his under-

standing during "the days of his vanity," which is probably the case, how affecting is the representation of his pursuits!—"I said I will be wise:"—and, to fulfill his resolution, he set himself to the study of all the branches of human knowledge. But all the while, wisdom, *true* wisdom, "was far from him." Having departed from the "fear of God," true wisdom was nowhere else to be found: a search through the universe could not have discovered it. All would still have been unsatisfying, all folly, without this; wisdom and true happiness alike far from him. "Where shall wisdom be found? and where is the place of understanding? Man knoweth not the price thereof; neither is it found in the land of the living. The deep saith, It is not in me, and the sea saith, It is not with me; It cannot be gotten for gold, neither shall silver be weighed for the price thereof. It cannot be valued with the gold of Ophir, with the precious onyx or the sapphire. The gold and the crystal cannot equal it; and the exchange of it shall not be for jewels of fine gold. No mention shall be made of coral or of pearls; for the price of wisdom is above rubies. The topaz of Ethiopia shall not equal it, neither shall it be valued with pure gold. Whence, then, cometh wisdom? and where is the place of understanding? Destruction and Death say, We have heard the fame thereof with our ears. GOD understandeth the way thereof; and HE knoweth the place thereof. For he looketh to the ends of the earth, and seeth under the whole heaven; to make the weight for the winds; and he weigheth the waters by measure. When he made a decree for the rain, and a way for the lightning of the thunder; then did he see it and declare it; he prepared it, yea, and searched it out. And unto man he said, BEHOLD, THE FEAR OF THE LORD, THAT IS WISDOM; AND TO DEPART FROM EVIL IS UNDERSTANDING." Job. xxviii. 12–28.—Having forgotten the concluding declaration of this beautiful and sublime passage, Solomon necessarily missed, in every other quarter in which he sought it, the precious object of his desire.

Verse 25. *I applied mine heart to know, and to search, and to seek out wisdom, and the reason of things, and to know the wickedness of folly, even of foolishness and madness.*

The words in the beginning of the twenty-fifth verse express the indefatigable ardor with which his end was pursued:—"I applied my heart, to know, and to search, and to seek out wisdom,

and the reason of things." The various terms employed, between which it is quite unnecessary to attempt fixing the precise shades of difference, are evidently accumulated, to convey strongly to the mind the impression of eager, intense, and unwearied assiduity of application; persevering in spite of all difficulties and discouragements.

He sought to know "wisdom, and the reason of things." He was not satisfied with the knowledge of mere facts. He investigated principles. He tried to discover causes; both in nature and in providence; and in the moral and physical departments of each. And, in his study of mankind, he examined the reasons of their state, their conduct, and their prospects: and explored the various sources of their happiness and their misery.

One of the subjects of his attention and inquiry was, "the wickedness of folly, even of foolishness and madness;" that is, the foolishness and madness of men, who live "without God in the world;" who "walk in the sight of their eyes, and in the imagination of their heart." In one view, this was a very proper and a highly profitable subject of investigation. We can hardly be better employed than in considering, and seriously weighing, the "exceeding sinfulness" of sin; and the more closely we examine it, in the various lights in which it ought to be contemplated,—as committed against the Sovereign of the universe, infinitely holy and infinitely good, and as tending to bring dishonor upon his blessed name, to unsettle the foundations of his eternal throne, and to spread confusion, misery, and ruin through all his dominions; we shall find it to be unsearchable,—"exceeding deep, so that none can find it out." This is the case, as to the intrinsic evil and demerit of sin. Its malignity cannot be estimated by a fallen creature, whose judgment is perverted by its sadly prevailing power. Although not, in the strict acceptation of terms, an infinite evil, (for, since in infinitude there are no degrees, this would equalize the guilt of all transgression,) yet, as committed against an infinite Being, not even a holy creature (because necessarily finite, though free from the bias of corruption,) can form any adequate conception of the measure of its guilt. God alone thoroughly knows it. He beholds it in its true undisguised nature; in all the extent of its inherent deformity. He views it in the light of his own spotless purity and incomprehensible majesty; and in all

its bearings and tendencies, were it allowed its unrestrained operation, both in reference to his own glory and to the happiness of creation. The estimate which he has formed of it we learn from the declarations of his word; and especially from the sacrifice required for its expiation,—from the deeply mysterious and awful scenes of Gethsemane and Calvary. And as the intrinsic evil of sin is beyond our comprehension, so is the depth of human depravity; the “fulness of evil” that is in the heart of man. “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it? I the Lord search the heart; I try the reins; even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings.” Jer. xvii. 9, 10. Thus God

“——hides from every being but himself  
That hideous sight,—a naked human heart.”

Good had it been for the king of Israel, had he contemplated “the wickedness of folly, even of foolishness and madness,” to deepen his humility; to aggravate his horror of sin; to soften his pity for the wretched subjects of this moral mania; and to render him more closely vigilant and jealous of himself, from a consciousness of the enormous sum of hidden evil in his own heart! There are some things, which it is much better for us not to know at all, than to learn by experience. But Solomon, instead of satisfying himself with examining “the wickedness of folly” by his observation of others; by their recorded warnings and dying regrets; by inward reflection; by the contemplation of God; by meditation on the testimony of his word; must needs subject it to personal experiment: he must try “foolishness and madness” as a source of enjoyment: he must join the company of fools; partake of their follies; and know for himself. Infatuated prince! He reaped the fruit of his doings. Good things abused are proverbially the worst. The wisdom bestowed on Solomon, rightly employed, was his own happiness and honor, and the blessing of his people and of mankind. But, perverted and prostituted, it led him fearfully astray. It brought him within the eddies of a perilous whirlpool, and exposed him to the hazard of eternal destruction. His soul, indeed, was, through sovereign mercy, restored. But, oh! the bitterness and “vexation of spirit” which his sinful presumption cost him!



The bitterest, yet the most dangerous and intoxicating ingredient in the cup of folly—bitter in the end, though sweet in the enjoyment—Solomon mentions in the twenty-sixth verse, in terms that indicate how his heart recoiled from the recollection:—

Verse 26. *And I find more bitter than death, the woman whose heart is snares and nets, and her hands as bands: whoso pleaseth God shall escape from her; but the sinner shall be taken by her:”*

In the preceding verse, he speaks of his having “applied his heart, to know the wickedness of folly.” The particular sin to which he refers in the twenty-sixth verse, is frequently in the Scriptures termed *folly*, and those who committed it, especially under certain circumstances, were said to have “wrought folly in Israel.”—“I find more bitter than death,”—that is, in the issue; in the worse than deadly tendency of her tempting blandishments,—worse than deadly, because endangering not the body merely, but the immortal soul; not the interests of time merely, but of eternity; leaving nothing behind them but the bitterness of remorse, and the “fearful looking for of judgment:”—“I find more bitter than death, the woman whose heart is snares and nets, and her hands as bands.” This is the “strange woman,” whom he so often mentions in the book of Proverbs; depicting her character; describing her ways; and warning against the perils of her company. How strong the expression,—“whose heart is snares and nets!”—signifying the multitude of her devices of temptation; and the consummate skill, the secrecy, the address, the guile, with which she uses them, for the accomplishment of her purposes. Her very “heart is snares and nets,” in whose intricate and entangling meshes the fascinated and deluded soul is taken captive to its destruction.—“And her hands as bands.” Her powers of detention are equal to her powers of allurements. Her heart is a net, to ensnare the unwary; her hands are as bands, to hold him fast when her wiles have proved successful. So irresistible is the power, operating like the spell of enchantment, by which she retains under her influence the hapless victim of her charms. Delicate as the subject is, faithfulness demands that we speak plainly; especially for the warning of thoughtless youth. There is no sin more sadly prevalent; none that has enticed more to their ruin; than this. “Whoredom, and wine, and new wine, take away the heart.” It was this sin, that robbed Reuben of his birthright,

and wrung his father's heart with shame and anguish:—it is a foul blot in the life Judah:—it unsheathed the sword of perfidy and vengeance against the guiltless Shechemites:—it spoiled Samson of his eyes, his strength, his liberty, his life; and endangered the freedom of his country:—it cost David many a pang of penitential agony; many a secret groan; many a bitter tear:—and it had well nigh proved the ruin of his son and successor in the throne; whose “soul escaped, as a bird out of the snare of the fowler;” narrowly escaped, and with serious damage. A hard and narrow escape, indeed, in every case it is. It is a sin that has slain, and, alas! continues to slay, its thousands and tens of thousands.

“Whoso pleaseth God shall escape from her; but the sinner shall be taken by her.”—“Whoso *pleaseth God*,” is, in the original language, the same phrase as “the man that is *good before God*,” in the twenty-sixth verse of the second chapter. The expressions used here strongly intimate, that, from the greatness, the imminent greatness of the danger, final escape is to be considered as a remarkable interposition of heaven; a signal instance of peculiar Divine regard. The man that is “good before God,” may, alas! as mournful experience has too often shown, fall before this temptation. And if, after falling, and yielding himself for a time to guilty indulgence, he is recovered to repentance and purity, he may be looked upon as rescued from extreme peril,—as “a brand plucked out of the fire;” obtaining a deliverance which nothing but the grace of God could effect for him. “But the sinner,”—the obstinate sinner, whose character is thoroughly vicious; who has no “good thing in him towards the Lord God of Israel;” who has run on in his course of sin and profligacy till he has been “given over to a reprobate mind,” and is the guilty victim of Divine displeasure and vengeance,—*he* “shall be taken by her;”—yes,—and he shall be held by her:—and he shall be ruined by her. “Led captive by her at her will,” he shall find at last that “her steps take hold on hell;” that her syren smiles have cursed him with the frown of an angry God; that her soft and silken cords have only drawn him down

“To adamantine chains and penal fire.”

“Hearken unto me now, therefore, O ye children, and attend to the words of my mouth. Let not thy heart decline to her ways; go not astray in her paths. For she hath cast down many wounded; yea, many strong men have been slain by her. Her house is the

way to hell, going down to the chambers of death." Prov. vii. 24-27. See the whole chapter, and also Prov. v. 3-14. xxii. 14.

Solomon's own deliverance was wonderful; for no one could go further astray, or give himself up more completely to the gratification of irregular desires, than he. "King Solomon," says the inspired historian of his reign, "loved many strange women, (together with the daughter of Pharaoh,) women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Zidonians, and Hittites; of the nations concerning which the Lord said unto the children of Israel, Ye shall not go in unto them, neither shall they come in unto you: for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods. Solomon clave unto these in love. And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines: and his wives turned away his heart." 1 Kings xi. 1-3. And then follows a particular account of the lengths to which he went in complying with the "abominable idolatries" of these unworthy objects of his wandering and wanton affections. "And the Lord was angry with Solomon, because his heart was turned away from the Lord God of Israel, who had appeared unto him twice; and had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods: but he kept not that which the Lord commanded." Ibid. 9, 10.

To these melancholy circumstances in the life of this prince there is an obvious allusion in the following verses:—

Verses 27, 28. *Behold, this have I found, saith the Preacher, counting one by one to find out the account; which yet my soul seeketh, but I find not: one man among a thousand have I found; but a woman among all those have I not found.*

"Counting one by one to find out the account," is by some rendered, "weighing one thing after another to find out the reason." Our own translation, however, seems preferable. For as to the *reason* of what he states, we can hardly imagine that the wisdom of the wisest of men, after it was set free from fascination and allowed to judge without bias, could for a moment be at a loss to discover, or hesitate to pronounce upon it. What he means to tell us, then, is, that he was careful and minute in the observations from which he drew his account. He considered amongst his courtiers, and amongst his wives and concubines, to find out the number of the faithful; the truly good; the virtuous; the godly. And the judgment which he formed from this inspection

had undergone no change, from recollection, at the time he was writing: for this is probably the meaning of the words, "which yet my soul seeketh, but I find not."

"One man among a thousand have I found; but a woman among all those have I not found."—"One man among a thousand!" a very small proportion, alas! and presenting a sad picture of the degenerate state of Solomon's court at the period referred to. He was not then imitating the determination of his pious father:—"I will walk within my house with a perfect heart. I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes: I hate the work of them that turn aside; it shall not cleave to me. A froward heart shall depart from me; I will not know a wicked person. Whoso privily slandereth his neighbor, him will I cut off; him that hath a high look and a proud heart will I not suffer. Mine eyes shall be upon the faithful of the land, that they may dwell with me: he that walketh in a perfect way, he shall serve me. He that worketh deceit shall not dwell within my house: he that telleth lies shall not tarry in my sight." Psalm ci. 2-7.

But small as this proportion is, it is greater than was to be found amongst the *women* of the royal household:—"a woman among all those have I not found." Are we to consider this as expressive of Solomon's general opinion, that the number of good women is inferior to the number of good men? Were we so to interpret his words, they would convey a judgment contrary, as I am satisfied, to truth; and, at the same time, unwarranted by the particular case on which it is founded. The reason of Solomon's want of success in his search for a virtuous woman, it is not, surely, difficult to discover. He sought for good where, from the nature of the thing, nothing but evil was reasonably to be expected. Who, that is in quest of virtue, and purity, and general excellence of female character, would seek it in the crowded seraglio of an eastern prince?

In multiplying to himself wives and concubines, Solomon had gone far astray from the original law of marriage, announced "in the beginning," when God made "a male and a female, and said, For this cause shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh." He had, also, doubly violated the express command of God, who had not only charged the Israelites in general, that they should

not make marriages with the surrounding nations, because they would thus be turned away from following Jehovah, to serve other gods; Deut. vii. 3, 4: but had also, in anticipating their future desire of a king over them, in describing their character, and specifying his duties, most explicitly enjoined,—“Neither shall he multiply wives to himself, that his heart turn not away.” Deut. xvii. 17. In the transgression of these prohibitory precepts, Solomon had greatly exceeded any of his predecessors in the throne of Israel.

In such a situation, when, instead of concentrating his affections on one wife, as the partner of his joys and sorrows, and seeking domestic happiness in her faithful and undivided love, he gathered around him, for magnificence and for lawless indulgence, so large a multitude, with all their varieties of corporeal and mental qualities, and necessarily placed himself in the very midst of heartless blandishments, of envies and jealousies, of contending interests and selfish quarrels, how could he ever hope for *happiness*?—and, in such a situation, when he had surrounded himself with idolatrous heathens, or with such Hebrew women as chose to be their voluntary associates in ministering to his voluptuousness, how could he ever look for *virtue*? A virtuous woman would not connect herself with such a group; or if, by the prospect of magnificence and plenty, any one whose principles were in the main good, had been tempted to join herself to his court, her character was not likely, in such company, to remain long free from the general corruption. Of all possible ways, he certainly adopted the least promising, for finding a virtuous woman. He had himself, and no other, to blame. If, indeed, he had satirized the sex, because amongst *such* a thousand he had not discovered one woman of sound principle, he satirized it on most unjust, unwise, and unmanly grounds.

But I am far from thinking that he here speaks the language of a disappointed and waspish satirist. He rather utters the feelings of an abased and self-dissatisfied penitent; of one who had felt it to be “an evil thing and a bitter,” to depart, as he had done, from God; who “remembered the wormwood and the gall;” who perceived and lamented the folly and the wickedness of all those “inventions,” by which himself and others had sought to find happiness apart from the favor and the ways of God. He justifies God, and condemns himself:—

Verse 29. *Lo! this only have I found, that God made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions.*

Here is "the conclusion of the whole matter:"—"Of the things which he had spoken this is the sum."—"God made man upright." When the progenitors of our race came from the forming hand of their Creator, they were the subjects of perfect intellectual and moral rectitude. There was no distortion in the understanding; no obliquity in the will; no corruption in the affections. There was perfect truth in the mind; perfect purity in the heart; and perfect practical holiness in the life. They were made "in the image, and after the likeness" of God himself; which, according to the apostle, consisted especially in "righteousness and true holiness," connected with, and arising out of, "knowledge." Otherwise than thus man could not be made, by a pure, and holy, and benevolent Being. To suppose the contrary, is to make God, in the strictest sense,—in a sense of which it is impious to admit the imagination,—the Author of sin. The subject, indeed, is enveloped in difficulties, of which that man has not properly thought who does not feel their magnitude. Into the discussion of these, it were unreasonable to enter. I can only remark in general, that the matter of fact, of the actual existence of moral evil, is too notorious to admit of a moment's question:—that the Bible account of its origin did not cause it; it existed independently of the revelation which informs us how it began; and the rejection of that revelation neither removes nor mitigates it, nor disencumbers it, in the slightest degree, of its embarrassing difficulties;—that, on the contrary, revelation alone, whilst it assumes and proceeds upon the mournful fact, provides a remedy; all other systems, finding human nature in ruins, leave it as they find it. Revelation rears out of the ruins a magnificent and holy Temple to the God of purity and love. That evil exists, then, is an indisputable fact:—that God could not be its Author, is a proposition, which, to all who entertain right notions of his character, will be equally indisputable:—"God made man upright." Of all that followed, although happening "according to His determinate counsel and foreknowledge," the guilt and responsibility must necessarily lie with man himself. This is the statement here; and it is a statement to the truth of which we *must* assent, in despite of any puzzling questions to which the subject has given rise:—"God made

man upright: but they"—that is, men—"have sought out many inventions."

The uprightness in which man was created was the great source of his original happiness. He was perfectly happy, because he was perfectly free from that which is the cause of all misery,—of all external and internal suffering. Resembling his Creator in holiness, he resembled him in felicity. But, alas! through the influence of temptation man became dissatisfied with the situation in which his all-bountiful Lord had placed him, and with the measure of knowledge and enjoyment (abundant as it was) with which he had graciously blessed him:—and the origin and the pattern of all the subsequent "inventions," by which men have endeavored to find happiness was, an attempt to obtain an augmentation of it from what Jehovah had interdicted. "The serpent said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: for God doth know, that, in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil. And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her, and he did eat." Gen. iii. 1-6. Such were the first of human "inventions" for the attainment of a fancied happiness. We know too well the result. It "brought death into the world, and all our woe." The flattering promise of the tempter, who "is a liar, and the father of lies," proved a cursed and cursing delusion; aggravating his own condemnation, and gratifying his malignity in damning others. Many have been the "inventions" since. But they have all partaken of the falsehood and deceitfulness, the folly and impiety, of the first. They have been "of the earth, earthy,"—"from beneath, and not from above." They have left GOD out of the account; and how could they prove otherwise than illusory?—wretched proofs of the senselessness and depravity of the inventors?—"wells without water," from which all who travel to them "return with their vessels empty; ashamed and confounded, and covering their heads?"

Solomon includes himself; and himself chiefly, in the sentence of condemnation. HE had tried many of these inventions. He had followed the crooked ways of human folly and corruption, in his search after the supreme good, during "the days of his vanity:" and having felt in himself, and having witnessed in others, the depth of innate depravity, he "justifies the ways of God to men," and traces all the unhappiness of this apostate world to its true source. He had "fallen by his iniquity;" and when he "returned unto the Lord his God," it would no doubt be in the spirit of that language which was afterwards dictated by the prophet to the backsliding and revolting Israelites:—"Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously; so will we render the calves of our lips:" and the Lord "healed his backsliding, and loved him freely, and turned away his anger from him." We may suppose him adopting the expressions of his father's penitence, and, in these appropriate terms, breathing out the feelings of a broken and contrite heart:—"Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving-kindness; according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions; and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight; that thou mightst be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest. Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me. Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts; and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice. Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy Holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free Spirit. Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee." Psalm li. 1-13.

Solomon fulfilled the resolution expressed in the last of these verses, when, after his recovery, he committed his experience to writing, penning this book, under the direction of the Spirit of God, for the warning and instruction of mankind.

From this passage, observe;—



1. *In the first place*; We ought not to be greatly surprised, or to be easily shaken in mind, although we discover many things in the works and ways of God that are above our comprehension.

Is it at all marvellous that it should be so? The works and ways of God are the works and ways of an infinite Being. Would it not be astonishing, then, were it otherwise? There is hardly any thing in nature that is fully understood by us. We know a good deal of *effects*; but of *causes*, wonderfully little. We frequently, indeed, impose upon ourselves, by using language that appears to indicate our acquaintance with causes; whereas, when the meaning is fairly analyzed, it is found to be no more than another way of expressing the effects. We say, for example, that a stone falls to the earth *by gravitation*; and that, by the same *cause*, the earth and other planets are attracted towards the sun, and kept in their respective orbits. But when we ask the question, *What is gravitation?* we are at a loss for a reply. A series of questions might follow, which would only bring us back to where we set out. The principle, or power, itself to which we have given a name, remains, as much as before, unknown to us. From the effect we infer that the power exists; but what the power is, we cannot tell; and it is only the effect that we can properly be said to know: respecting its secret nature we are profoundly in the dark.—So are we with regard to the nature of *substance*; our knowledge of bodies being confined to their sensible *qualities*. The beautiful process of vegetation;—the principle of animal and vegetable life;—the connection of matter and spirit in our own frame, and the manner in which, by nervous influence, mind imparts activity to matter, and matter conveys sensations and perceptions to mind;—and ten thousand other things, with which we are so familiar as hardly to think of them;—are, when examined, inexplicable mysteries. Are we, then, entitled to expect that every thing should be simple and easy of explanation in the nature, and in the moral dispensations, of Deity? The expectation would surely be unreasonable in the extreme. Well may we say, “That which is far off, and exceeding deep, who can find it out?”—“Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? It is high as heaven; what canst thou do? deeper than hell; what canst thou know? The measure thereof is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea.” Job xi. 7-9.

O be humble! Forget not that God alone is omniscient. Solomon found many things unfathomable. In all likelihood, the highest archangel in heaven finds many things unfathomable. Beware, then, of the pride of reason. Beware of that sceptical and unsound philosophy ("science, falsely so called,") which, in the plenitude of its inconsistent arrogance, is dissatisfied with every thing which it cannot fully comprehend;—which pretends to reject the Bible for its mysteries, whilst it cannot lift an eye amidst the works of creation, without beholding itself surrounded by mysteries innumerable;—which, renouncing the guidance of Divine revelation, itself only

“———leads to bewilder, and dazzles to blind.”

Let us rejoice, my brethren, that true wisdom, that which “makes wise unto salvation,” is revealed in the Divine word, in letters of light. Respecting *it*, no man needs to say, “I will be wise,” and still find wisdom “far from him.”—“This commandment which I command thee this day,” said Moses to the Israelites, “it is not hidden from thee, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that thou shouldst say, Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it? Neither is it beyond the sea, that thou shouldst say, Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it? But the word is very nigh unto thee, even in thy mouth and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it.” Deut. xxx. 11–14. And what Moses said of the law, Paul affirms of the gospel: “The righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise, Say not in thy heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above:—or, Who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead.) But what saith it? The word is very nigh thee, even in thy mouth and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith which we preach; that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shall believe in thy heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto justification; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the Scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed. For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek; for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him: for whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” Rom. x. 6–13.

2. *Secondly*; Let all be admonished, and especially the young, to beware of "the pleasures of sin" which are but "for a season."

You would smile at me in scorn, should I set about attempting to convince you that there are *no pleasures* in sin. Alas! the whole corruption of our nature teaches us, with an eloquence too powerfully persuasive, an opposite lesson. If there were no pleasures in sin, there would be no temptations in sin, nor any need for the warnings and threatenings by which we are so strongly and so frequently deterred from it in the word of God. There *are* pleasures in sin. But, oh! remember, there are many poisons that are sweet; sweet to the palate, but quickly convulsing the frame with the agonies of death. Think of the *nature*, and think of the *end*, of all sinful pleasures. Think of their nature. Will you venture to seek your happiness in opposition to your Maker,—in that which he has condemned, and which his soul hateth? If you do, then think of the certain *end* of such pleasures. They are, at best, but a palatable poison. There is death in them,—eternal death. At the last, they "bite like a serpent, and sting like an adder." Your own inward corruption; Satan the prince of this world; wicked men, and wicked women too; may tempt you to sin. But O forget not, that every temptation to sin is a temptation to ruin; to the perdition of soul and body in hell. Let the experience of Solomon warn you,—let the experience of thousands besides warn you,—not to tamper with temptation. Once give way,—and you cannot, nor can any man, tell how far you may go. The first step is a step of tremendous peril. Tremble to take it. It is a step to hell. "Flee from the wrath to come."—"Touch not the unclean thing."—"Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men: avoid it; pass not by it; turn from it and pass away."

Ye whom God has graciously rescued from the broad way that leadeth to destruction, and turned into the narrow way of life and salvation, be thankful for the grace that has "made you to differ." And, whilst with gratitude you say, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give praise," say also, in the spirit of humble dependence, "Hold up my goings in thy paths, that my footsteps slip not."—"Lead me not into temptation."—"Lead me in thy truth, and teach me; for thou art the God of my salvation: on thee do I wait all the day."

3. *Thirdly*; The proneness of all mankind to seek happiness in other things than in the favor, and service, and image of God, clearly shows them to be a fallen race.

Many have been the disputes of men about the chief good. There was no such dispute in Paradise: there is no such dispute in heaven. Man's original happiness was in God:—the happiness of angels is in God:—there is no happiness in the universe, but in God:—in the favor, in the likeness, in the service, and in the enjoyment of God. All the “inventions” of men for the attainment of happiness—and “many” they have been—long experience have proved to be folly. The gospel of Christ proposes the only means of effectually gaining it: because its end is to bring men back to the source from which it originally sprung;—to restore them to the Divine favor, and to the Divine image. Whatever accomplishes this, will make men happy; and nothing short of this possibly can. O what reason for humility, in contemplating the vain endeavors of men to effect an absolute impossibility;—to find happiness without God! And what reason for thanksgiving and praise for an open way, in which we may return with acceptance to our offended Sovereign, and enjoy the light of his countenance! “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh to the Father but by me.” Keep in this way, my Christian brethren. It is the way of peace, of holiness, of life.—And hear, ye careless ones, the warning voice of the Son of God, “the faithful witness.” It is the voice of love and mercy:—“Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able,—when once the Master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door; and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us:” then will I profess unto you, “I tell you, I know you not whence you are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity.” Luke xiii. 24–27. “He that is wise shall be wise for himself; but if thou scornest, thou alone shalt bear it.”

## LECTURE XV.

### ECCLESIASTES VIII. 1-8.

“Who (is) as the wise (man)? and who knoweth the interpretation of a thing? a man’s wisdom maketh his face to shine, and the boldness of his face shall be changed. 2. I (counsel thee) to keep the kings’s commandment, and (that) in regard of the oath of God. 3. Be not hasty to go out of his sight: stand not in an evil thing; for he doeth whatsoever pleaseth him. 4. Where the word of a king (is, there is) power: and who may say unto him, What doest thou? 5. Whoso keepeth the commandment shall feel no evil thing: and a wise man’s heart discerneth both time and judgment. 6. Because to every purpose there is time and judgment, therefore the misery of man (is) great upon him. 7. For he knoweth not that which shall be: for who can tell him when it shall be? 8. (There is) no man that hath power over the spirit to retain the spirit; neither (hath he) power in the day of death: and (there is) no discharge in (that) war; neither shall wickedness deliver those that are given to it.”

Verse 1. *Who is as the wise man? and who knoweth the interpretation of a thing? a man’s wisdom maketh his face to shine, and the boldness of his face shall be changed.*

Solomon commences this chapter with a repetition of the praises of wisdom, which he had before affirmed to excel folly as far as light excelleth darkness:—“Who is as the wise man?” A sound understanding, a cultivated mind, and discriminating prudence, all under the governing influence of “the fear of the Lord;”—these constitute true wisdom. And, when viewed in this light, surely none will hesitate to admit, that “wisdom is the principal thing.” Riches, nobility, power, confer no eminence comparable to that which arises from superior intelligence, in union with superior piety. “Who is as the wise man?”—who can be compared to him, in real intrinsic excellence, or in the benefits which accrue to him from his wisdom?

“And who knoweth the interpretation of a thing?”—that is, who, *as* the wise man,—or who *but* the wise man, knoweth it?

“The interpretation of a thing,” I should understand as comprehending in general the *solution of difficulties*, whether in nature, in providence, or in the affairs of men. This is the province of the wise man. He has observed the appearances, and investigated the secrets, of nature:—he has carefully marked the procedure of providence, ascertaining its principles and noting its mysteries:—he has studied human nature in all its varieties of character; human life in all its diversities of condition; and society in all its multiplicity of interests and connections. He understands these things himself, and he is consulted respecting them by others.

“A man’s wisdom maketh his face to shine.” The beauty of the “human face divine” lies in its expression. The light of wisdom within, beams in the countenance, imparting to it the attractive aspect of intelligence and sensibility. It is a mild and lovely light. It does not dazzle and overpower by the studied brilliance of self-display, but with soft and gentle radiance inspires delight, and wins affection; for of genuine wisdom, self-diffident humility is the invariable associate. “If any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know.” Such wisdom gives to the countenance the expression both of dignity and of grace. It commands reverence, and it insures love. It conducts at once to honor and to friendship, to respectful deference, and familiar intimacy.

The humility and gentleness which accompany and characterize true wisdom are, by many, understood to be meant in the last clause of the verse;—“and the boldness of his face shall be changed.” It shall be “changed,” say they, to meekness and self-diffidence, the opposite of that forward and brazen impudence which so frequently distinguishes ignorance and folly.

Others interpret “boldness” in a good sense, as signifying firmness and decision, fortitude and resolution, of character; which render a man undaunted and effective in supporting the cause of truth and rectitude, and resisting the encroachments of vice and folly; in facing opposition, and disregarding obloquy. Amongst such a people, for example, as those whom Ezekiel had to encounter, wisdom would set the face as a flint, and enable its possessor to confront them with a self-possession and commanding confidence, fitted to intimidate, and repress their hardened effrontery. “The house of Israel will not hearken unto thee; for

they will not hearken unto me: for all the house of Israel are impudent and hard-hearted. Behold, I have made thy face strong against their faces,<sup>2</sup> and thy forehead strong against their foreheads. As an adamant, harder than flint, have I made thy forehead: fear them not, neither be dismayed at their looks, though they be a rebellious house." Ezek. iii. 7-9.

It will at once occur to you, that if this sense of the word "boldness" be adopted, some corresponding alteration becomes necessary on the word "changed." By the interpreters in question, the clause is accordingly rendered, "and the boldness of his countenance *shall be doubled.*" But this is a far-fetched and unusual sense of the original word; if indeed it will bear it at all.

The direct and proper meaning of the Hebrew word is to *hate*; and the Septuagint translation is probably the just one,—“but he who is impudent of face shall be hated.”\* Instead of procuring, as wisdom does, respect and affection, the forward impudence and shamelessness of the fool will expose him to dislike and aversion. Men look with pleasure on the countenance that is lighted up with mild intelligence, but turn away with disgust from the unblushing stare of petulance and self-sufficiency.

To the advice addressed to us in the following verses, it will be our interest, as it is our duty, carefully to attend. It is a part of that “meekness of wisdom,” which “makes the face to shine,” and is opposed to the effrontery that is the object of such universal dislike, and often<sup>2</sup> the occasion to a man of so much injury:—

Verses 2, 3. *I counsel thee to keep the king's commandment, and that in regard of the oath of God. Be not hasty to go out of his sight: stand not in an<sup>2</sup> evil thing; for he doeth whatsoever pleaseth him.*

The former of these two verses is by some rendered—“Keep the commandment of the king; but according to the word of the oath of God:”—which makes the last clause restrictive of the first; limiting and qualifying the injunction to loyal obedience:—as if Solomon had said, “Obey the king; but only in so far as this obedience can be yielded in consistency with your engagements to God, the King of kings, the Supreme Ruler, the Lord of the con-

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\* “He who is strong, *i. e.* impudent with his face shall be hated.”—*Parkhurst*.—“Wisdom enliveneth a man's countenance, but austerity in the looks is hateful.”—*Hodgson*.

science, whose authority is first and highest." That such a limitation of the precept is necessary to be understood, admits of no question. To the mightiest of earthly monarchs, when his commands are not in harmony with those of heaven, but call for a violation of "conscience towards God," we must say, with all respectful mildness, yet with immoveable determination, "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye."—"We must obey God rather than men." Acts iv. 19. v. 29.

In this view of the words, the expression "the oath of God" might possibly mean the oath so frequently taken by Jehovah himself to maintain his word inviolate, confirming, "by two immutable things in which it is impossible for God to be," both his promises to obedience and his threatenings against transgression. "As I live, saith the Lord God," gives the promise all its power of encouragement, and the threatening all its energy of dissuasion.

The more simple and probable meaning, however, is, the oath of fidelity and allegiance to the king which they had taken in the name of God,—in his presence, and under appeal to Him and his awful sanction. You have sworn obedience and fealty: see that ye do not forswear yourselves, by disobedience and rebellion.

"Be not hasty to go out of his sight:"—that is, either to leave his presence, or to throw up your office and quit his service with inconsiderate rashness, under the hurrying influence of caprice or passion; whether the king be displeased with you, or you with him. Be not imprudently hasty and precipitate. "If the spirit of the ruler rise up against thee, leave not thy place; for yielding pacieth great offences." Quickness and irritability of temper are culpable towards any man; they are particularly reprehensible towards one to whom we owe the highest official respect.

"Stand not," (that is, persist not,) "in an evil thing:"—If you are conscious of having done wrong, be prompt to confess it, and to submit thyself to the royal clemency. Do not persist in high-spirited self-vindication, whilst you are secretly sensible of your error. There are some tempers so peculiar, so proudly peculiar, that they will much rather make confession to an equal, and still more readily to an inferior, than to one who is above them. But readiness to own an error or a fault is our duty to all. It is a part of true wisdom. It amounts to saying,—what a man must



be very self-sufficient indeed who is unwilling to say,—“I am sensible that I *may* err; and in seeing my error to-day, I am wiser and better minded than I was yesterday.”

A special reason is assigned for the admonition, as it regards our conduct to rulers:—“for he doeth whatsoever pleaseth him.” Whilst your first and most sacred regard should be to the “oath of God,” yet your own interest is also involved. You are in the king’s power. He may degrade you from your station, deprive you of your emoluments, and inflict upon you such punishment as shall not be alleviated by the consciousness of its being undeserved. The headstrong passion that persists in evil, because it cannot brook submission, is itself inexcusable; and it may cost you dear: for,—

Verse 4. *Where the word of a king is, there is power; and who may say unto him, What doest thou?*

The royal authority is accompanied with power; so that what it wills and ordains it has ability to carry into execution. Perverse resistance and obstinate self-vindication are, therefore, vain and hazardous. It is your interest, as well as your duty, to confess and to submit.

“For who may say unto him, What doest thou?” There are cases,—there were then, and there are still,—in which to say so would not only be proper, but an incumbent duty. The man who has been called, in providence, to the high and important station of a counsellor to royalty, is under the most sacred obligations, both to his master and to his country, to fulfill his trust with incorruptible integrity; obligations which he ought to feel, even apart from “the oath of God;” though he should not forget that it, also, lies upon him. If the king discovers an inclination to adopt and follow unjust, oppressive, or otherwise pernicious measures, such a man, as he must answer to God, should feel himself bound, with all becoming respect indeed, yet with unshaken firmness, and at whatever risk, to “say to him, What doest thou?” and to endeavor, by all possible means of persuasion, to “stay his hand.” A counsellor that has principle to do this, is the greatest blessing, (alas! that the blessing should in all ages have been so rare!) that a monarch can possess. If his master feels not the value of his faithful counsel, and, in the pride and folly of his heart, will take his own way, such a counsellor will be venerated

in his abdication or his downfall; and having, like Micaiah, the son of Imlah—"among the faithless, faithful only he!"—exonerated his conscience by wholesome, though unpalatable, advice, he will enjoy, also, the blessing of inward peace, even if the consequences of his fidelity should to himself be irons and a dungeon, with "bread of affliction, and water of affliction."

But it is not at all of such firmness of integrity that Solomon here speaks. It is of the man who "persists in an evil thing." It is from *this* that he dissuades, as implying at once sin and folly: the sin of adding the vindication of evil to the doing of it; and the folly of provoking, by such fool-hardiness, a power so far superior to his own.

The best way, accordingly, of shunning the king's displeasure, and the vengeance of the law, is prescribed in the fifth verse:—

Verse 5. *Whoso keepeth the commandment shall feel no evil thing; and a wise man's heart discerneth both time and judgment.*

"The commandment" here, may mean either "the king's commandment," according to the phrase in the second verse,—or rather, perhaps, the commandment of God; by which may be understood the will or law of God in general. By the precepts of that law, indeed, which He had given to Israel, it was the duty both of the king and people, respectively, to regulate their conduct: that law the people were to obey; that law the king was to enforce. "The king's commandment," therefore, might be considered as the law of the land, given by the Divine Legislator himself: and the sentiment expressed is, that the best and surest way to the enjoyment of a "quiet and peaceable life," under the secure protection of the governing powers, was, "to live in all godliness and honesty." He who thus "kept the commandment" should "feel no evil thing."—"Who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?" The sentiment, directions, and language of Solomon in this passage, bear so close a resemblance to those of Paul, when he writes on the same subject to the Christians at Rome, that we may quote the latter as a New Testament commentary on the former;—"Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers; for there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever, therefore, resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God; and they that resist shall receive to themselves condemnation. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to

the evil. Wilt thou, then, not be afraid of the power? Do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: for he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain; for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. Wherefore, ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience' sake. For, for this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing. Render, therefore, to all their dues; tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor." Rom. xiii. 1-7.—It is evident that these apostolic precepts are just those of Solomon in a more expanded form. The same "counsel" is given; it is enforced by the same considerations, of "wrath" and of "conscience;" and the same means are prescribed for shunning the severity of the ruling power;—called by Solomon, "keeping the commandment," by Paul, "doing that which is good."

There are many good people that are very imprudent people. Their behavior is, in the main, excellent; but, on many occasions, it is exceedingly inappropriate. There is an intire want about them of that discretion, so needful in the intercourse of life, which enables its possessor to suit his conduct to time and circumstances. Herein consists another eminent advantage of the man of wisdom:

"A wise man's heart discerneth both time and judgment." The word translated "judgment" is one of very extensive and general signification; being applicable to all ordering, regulation, disposition, arrangement, of events, actions, or things. It might here, perhaps, be correctly enough rendered *propriety*; according to which every thing has its right place and due adjustment with others, in the conduct of life. There are *three* inquiries, which the man of true wisdom is ever proposing to himself:—*What* should I do? *When* should I do it? *How* should it be done? He pays regard not only to the *matter* or *quality* of his actions, but to the *time* and the *manner* of them. He attends to circumstances, in every department of his conduct; whether in executing his own good purposes, or in repressing and frustrating the evil designs of others; in imparting counsel; in administering reproof; in seeking, either for himself or for others, the redress of grievances; in promoting needful improvement and reform, whether in private

or in public affairs; and in all the every-day transactions and intercourse of life;—never forgetting, what daily experience more and more confirms, that success very often depends as much on the choice of a right season, and the adoption of a proper way of performing an action, as upon the action itself. There are many persons, on the contrary, who satisfy themselves with the first only of the inquiries I have mentioned. They mind the *What*, but utterly disregard the *When* and the *How*; and, their actions being in themselves irreprehensible, they marvel that any fault should be found with them. What have they done that's wrong? And when they are told they have not been wrong in what they have done, but have chosen a wrong time and a wrong manner of doing it; they feel very lightly under the charge, and congratulate themselves on the admitted rectitude of the deed itself. That is enough for them.

This is very unwise: and indiscretion of this kind has ever been an abundant source of unhappiness to men:—

Verse 6. *Because to every purpose there is time and judgment, therefore the misery of man is great upon him.*

The degree of mischief, and disappointment, and wretchedness, arising amongst mankind from the want of wise consideration of seasons and circumstances, is beyond calculation. Were men in general more carefully attentive to these, a large proportion of the miseries of which they complain might readily be avoided. But some by their weakness, others by their heedlessness,—some by their headstrong obstinacy, others by their excess of pliancy,—some by impatient precipitation, others by procrastinating dilatoriness,—and thousands in an endless variety of other ways,—are led to overlook “time and judgment,” and to bring distress and ruin upon themselves, or others, or both.

Although, however, “the misery of man is,” by these means, “greater upon him,”—much greater, than it would otherwise be; yet many, at the same time, are the circumstances, which human foresight cannot anticipate; which elude the penetration of the most sagacious; and over which the most vigilant can exercise no control. The memory of the past is not associated in man, unless by immediate prophetic inspiration, with the prescience of the future. The events of coming time being beyond the sphere of our acutest vision, we must, in very many cases, if we act at all,

act upon a calculation of probabilities. So that the wisest of men, and, far more, those who are deficient in ordinary foresight, are liable to risk, from unanticipated contingencies, in almost all that they do. From this source, also, there arise much disquieting solicitude, frustration of hopes, and consequent unhappiness. This is the sentiment expressed in the seventh verse:—

Verse 7. *For he knoweth not that which shall be: for who can tell him when it shall be?"*

He knows not, himself, what events are to come in future time; and all his fellows being alike ignorant, he can obtain from no one of them any information, either of the events themselves, or of the seasons of their occurrence: an humbling truth of which we are often reminded in Scripture, to impress us with a sense of our intire dependence. "Boast not thyself of to-morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth." Prov. xxvii. 1. "Go to, now, ye that say, To-day or to-morrow, we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away? For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this or that." James iv. 13-15.

There is one event,—an event appointed to all, respecting the time and circumstances of which this uncertainty is proverbially great; an event on which, in the prosecution of our various schemes, we are too little disposed to calculate; yet an event which has, times innumerable, interrupted and thrown into confusion and ruin, the plans and pursuits of men; entailing mischief on their associates in speculation, and on their families or expectant heirs. You have anticipated the event to which I allude. Of *death* it may always with emphasis be said, "who can tell him when it shall be?" It is by God, the giver of life, that "our days are determined; the number of our months is with him: he has appointed us our bounds, that we cannot pass." No; "*we cannot pass;*"—for whensoever the time fixed in his sovereign purpose for our removal arrives, then, in the language of

Verse 8. *There is no man that hath power over the spirit, to retain the spirit, neither hath he power in the day of death: and there is no discharge in that war; neither shall wickedness deliver those that are given to it.*

“There is no man that hath power over the spirit, to retain the spirit,”—that is, to keep the soul in its earthly tabernacle one instant longer than God’s appointed time. This is true of every man, and true both in regard to himself and to others. The power that sways millions with a nod, fails here. The wealth that procures for its owner all that his heart can wish, fails here. The might of the warrior which has slain its thousands, and which no human arm could withstand, fails here. The most earnest desire of life; and the tears, and the wailings, and the fond caresses of disconsolate affection;—all fail here. No man, from the prince to the beggar, has power over his own spirit, or over the spirit of the dearest friend on earth, to retain it—no, not for one moment; any more than he can arrest time in its course, or stay the speed of the impetuous tempest. This is a power that resides in God alone. He gave life; he sustains it; he sets the time of its continuance. HE could add to Hezekiah’s life fifteen years, as he could prolong the day, by bringing back the shadow on the dial of Ahaz. Nay, he could, by his incommunicable power, restore the parted soul to its earthly residence, after it had fled away to the world of spirits. But such power is not in man, nor in any creature: and on the Divine exercise of it, which is sovereign and uncontrollable, we are incessantly dependent. “If HE set his heart upon man, if he gather unto himself his spirit and his breath; all flesh shall perish together, and man shall turn again unto dust.” Job. xxxiv. 14, 15.

“Neither hath he power in the day of death.” In that day, all power becomes alike impotent. All bodily vigor gives way; and all mental resources and devices are equally unavailing against the last enemy. Whatever may be the wishes of a man’s heart, he has no ability to effect them. Opposition is vain. For the power of death is, in truth, the power of God. When we speak of Death as a person, and call him “the King of Terrors,” I need not say we use a mere figure of poetry or rhetoric. When a physician succeeds in arresting the progress of a distemper, and bringing up from the gates of death the life that was hanging in suspense, let us beware of fancying that he counteracts any Divine intention; he fulfills one. His success only indicates what the purpose of Providence had been; that the sickness should not be unto death. The design to add fifteen years to Hezekiah’s life preceded the

intimation of it, and the application of the simple means prescribed for its accomplishment. And although we have no intimation of the intentions of heaven, yet are we equally sure that the efficacy of means of recovery, in answer to prayer for the Divine blessing, only shows us what these intentions, though previously kept secret, had been;—does not frustrate, but accomplish them.

“And there is no discharge in that war.” Every individual must grapple with the last enemy. There is no possibility, whatever may be our dread of the conflict, of procuring a discharge, and shunning its horrors. No flight and no concealment can save us; nor are there any weapons of effectual resistance. “He counts darts as stubble, and laughs at the shaking of the spear.” And it is not here, as on the plains of Thessaly, or the mountains of Gilboa, or the fields of Waterloo, or (to the personal feelings of the speaker, more sadly interesting than them all) the heights of Salamanca,\* where, though hundreds and thousands fell, hundreds and thousands escaped and survived. This is a field in which every man must advance; and every man must advance alone, to single combat; and every man in succession must fall. The enemy to be encountered is himself invulnerable; and whether the struggle be short or long, and however successful for a time our efforts may be to parry, or to cover ourselves from, his deadly thrust, he will, sooner or later, find his way, with certain aim and irresistible force, to every heart. If we reckon the population of our world at a thousand millions, and the average of a generation at thirty years, it will follow, that ninety thousand die every day; upwards of sixty every minute; one every second of time. How solemn the thought! How rapidly is the world of spirits peopling! And, alas! that there should be so much reason to fear that, in past generations at least, whatever may be the case in those to come, hell has been peopled so much faster than heaven!

Whilst men of all stations are the indiscriminate victims of death, so are men of all characters. To the children of God, “to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” They may meet the last enemy without dismay; as a friend, rather than an enemy,—a friend, that comes to introduce them to God. To the wicked he is em-

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\* In the battle of Salamanca, the author's brother fell. The reader will excuse this little anachronism; for such it will seem from the statement in the Preface, of the time when these Lectures were first delivered.

phatically the "King of Terrors." Fondly would they stay his approach; fondly would they shun the combat; dreading (as well they may) the fearful consequences. But in vain:—

"Neither shall wickedness deliver them that are given to it." The profligate, the ungodly, the worldly, may, in the midst of their vicious, or of their busy and unthinking career, laugh at the fears of death, and set the God of heaven at scornful defiance. But "God is not mocked." Death will have his prey. All the power and all the arts of the wicked cannot withhold it. They must die, and "be driven away in their wickedness." They may say, in the pride and folly of their minds, "We have made a covenant with death, and with hell are we at agreement: when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, it shall not reach unto us:"—but these are only "swelling words of vanity." God says to them, "Your covenant with death shall be disannulled, and your agreement with hell shall not stand: when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, ye shall be trodden down by it." Isa. xxviii. 15, 18.

This passage suggests the following practical reflections.

1. *In the first place;* This additional eulogy of wisdom, should operate as an additional excitement to seek it from heaven, and to cultivate it by all the means of its increase; as at once the richest excellence, the loveliest ornament, the strongest recommendation, and the most efficient instrument of good, in any character. Let what Solomon says here impress his exhortations elsewhere:—"Get wisdom; get understanding: forget it not; neither decline from the words of my mouth. Forsake her not, and she shall preserve thee; love her, and she shall keep thee. Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding. Exalt her, and she shall promote thee; she shall bring thee to honor when thou dost embrace her. She shall give to thy head an ornament of gold: a crown of glory shall she deliver to thee. Take fast hold of instruction; let her not go: keep her; for she is thy life." Prov. iv. 5-9, 13.

2. *Secondly;* Let us manifest the influence of religious principle, in a becoming subjection to the government of our country; from considerations both of duty and of discretion. We should feel it incumbent upon us, "to shun all exasperating language; to repress all railing and indecent accusations against those who have



the management of public affairs; to engage in no virulent opposition, or hasty measures; to continue in our place and station; not to enter upon, much less to persist in, any turbulent attempts; nor needlessly to expose ourselves to the jealousy and resentment of Government."—Scott's Commentary. Not that we must approve, in our judgment, of every public measure; or that we are never to join in temperate and constitutional means of procuring the correction of abuses, and the rescinding of injurious decisions; the alteration of what is wrong; or the improvement of what is right. But in all, we should be prudent and temperate; influenced by sober principle and genuine patriotic regard to our country; not by presumptuous self-conceit, or revolutionary frenzy. And surely I may be permitted to say, that never was there a period in the history of Europe, when the duty was more imperious, of being cautious, and diffident, and tender, in our censures of public men, and public measures, than it is in the present day. Events have been so strange,—they have, in innumerable instances, so completely contradicted all the ordinary calculations of probability,—that, without a super-human gift of foresight, no man could have at all anticipated, or provided against them. Never was there a season to which the language of the seventh verse was more applicable,—“he knoweth not that which shall be; and who can tell him when it shall be?—never a period at which a wise man could find it more difficult, in devising public measures, to “discern time and judgment;” or when it was more unsafe and unfair, to judge of such measures by their success or their failure. The constant, wakeful vigilance of a free people over the plans and proceedings of their rulers, is of inestimable benefit. But at such a time as this, few things can be more offensive to every Christian feeling, than to hear men persist in talking, with indiscriminate severity of censure, of the folly and impolicy of all the measures of the administration. It displays so intolerable a share of arrogant self-confidence; coupled with a deficiency so lamentable, of charity and candor!\*

3. *Thirdly*; Let us all recollect, and keep it in constant remem-

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\* These observations were originally delivered in February, 1811. They are retained without alteration, because, in the spirit of them, they are applicable to all times, and especially to all seasons of public difficulty and embarrassment, arising from the perplexing darkness of providential arrangements.

brance, that there is ONE KING, in whose hands, and in whose hands alone, unlimited power is safe; whose word is law; and in obeying whose authority we can never err. His commands are all right; and they are all beyond dispute. To *his* authority let us yield a willing and unreserved subjection: for "his law is perfect; his statutes are right; his commandment is pure; his judgments are true and righteous altogether." If such be the imprudence, such the hazard, of obstinate disobedience to an earthly monarch; how imminent, think you, must be the peril; how extreme the folly; of the man, who scorns the rebukes of his Maker, and hardens himself against God? Who hath ever done so, and hath prospered? The words of admonition,—“Stand not in an evil thing; for he doeth whatsoever pleaseth him: where the word of a king is, there is power; and who may say unto him, What doest thou?”—may here be applied with unlimited emphasis. Yes: where the word of THIS KING is, there is power; almighty, irresistible power; power, which no created arm can defy with impunity. Whilst you carefully endeavor to order your temporal affairs with that discretion which may insure success and prosperity; O with what miserable imprudence do you conduct yourselves, whilst you live in forgetfulness of God, and in thoughtless disregard of death, and judgment, and eternity! No imprudence can be equal to this. “A wise man’s heart discerneth both time and judgment.” Is it, then, consistent with the character of a wise man;—does it accord with the dictates of that prudence, which you wish to apply to the regulation of all your concerns;—that, although you know “the time to be short” and proverbially uncertain, and eternal consequences to be depending on every moment that passes over you, you should live unprepared for eternity? Is it prudent in you, conscious as you must be of guilt, to run the risk of encountering the displeasure of an offended God, and to pay no attention to the nature and the vouchers of what comes to you in the form and with the claims of a proposal from Him? Be persuaded to think, and to think NOW. Be wise to-day: to-morrow is not yours.

4. *Fourthly*; Let these admonitions be enforced, by the absolute and infallible certainty of your coming to death. Had you “power over the spirit to retain the spirit,” or could you procure a “discharge” from the conflict with the last enemy; could you prolong

your life at pleasure, and secure to yourselves immortality on earth; then might you, with some pretensions to reason, disregard our serious warnings, and take your own way. But well you know, it is far otherwise. The hour of your departure is to you, as it is to all, a secret: "Who can tell you when it shall be?" But it is fixed;—fixed in the purpose of Him "without whom a sparrow falleth not to the ground." It is fixed;—and, for aught you can tell, it may be very near. You may not be destined to see the shining of to-morrow's sun; and, if you should, to-morrow will still be as uncertain as to-day. Many of those who are dying to-day had as little thought of it yesterday, as those who are living to-day have of dying to-morrow. The "King of terrors" you *must* meet,—you *must* encounter: and it is a conflict in which "the help of man is vain;" in which fellow-creatures can do you no service. And, will you, then, engage this enemy alone? Will you enter the lists with him single-handed? Will you meet him without the armor of God?—without the shield of faith, and the helmet of hope?—without the breastplate of righteousness, and the sword of the Spirit? Will you venture into the dark valley, without the Lord with you,—without his rod and his staff to comfort you? Will you be your own light,—your own strength,—your own salvation? O blind self-sufficiency! O thoughtless and infatuated presumption! You give this a wrong name when you call it courage. It is insensibility;—the insensibility of ignorance. Look unto Jesus! He has "abolished death, and brought life and incorruption to light, by the gospel." "Through death, he has destroyed him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and delivered them who, through fear of death, were all their lifetime subject to bondage." Believing in him, building your hopes on him, living to him, you will be safe; and no otherwise. You may then anticipate death with a measure of his feelings who said, "To me to live is Christ; and to die is gain. I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better." And at the solemn hour when you must bid a final adieu to the world; when, to you, "time shall be no longer;" you may say, in humble, yet triumphant confidence, "O death! where is thy sting? O grave! where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law: but thanks be unto God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!"

## LECTURE XVI.

### ECCLESIASTES VIII. 9-17.

“All this have I seen, and applied my heart unto every work that is done under the sun: (there is) a time wherein one man ruleth over another to his own hurt. 10. And so I saw the wicked buried, who had come and gone from the place of the holy, and they were forgotten in the city where they had so done. This (is) also vanity. 11. Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil. 12. Though a sinner do evil a hundred times, and his (days) be prolonged, yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before him: 13. But it shall not be well with the wicked, neither shall he prolong (his) days, (which are) as a shadow; because he feareth not before God. 14. There is a vanity which is done upon the earth; that there be just (men,) unto whom it happeneth according to the work of the wicked; again, there be wicked (men,) to whom it happeneth according to the work of the righteous. I said that this also (is) vanity. 15. Then I commended mirth, because a man hath no better thing under the sun, than to eat, and to drink, and to be merry: for that shall abide with him of his labor the days of his life, which God giveth him under the sun. 16. When I applied mine heart to know wisdom, and to see the business that is done upon the earth: for also (there is that) neither day nor night seeth sleep with his eyes: 17. Then I beheld all the work of God, that a man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun: because though a man labor to seek (it) out, yet he shall not find (it); yea further; though a wise (man) think to know (it), yet shall he not be able to find (it).

Verse 9. *All this have I seen, and applied my heart unto every work that is done under the sun: there is a time wherein one man ruleth over another to his own hurt.*

Apart from Divine testimony, observation and experience are the surest grounds of accurate knowledge. In the book of Ecclesiastes, we have not the thoughts and opinions of a man who, with little or no attention to facts, sits down in his closet to commit to writing the speculations, conjectures, and theories of an inventive and ingenious mind. We have the results of a personal survey:

of a close and acute inspection of men and things; confirmed, in many instances, by actual trial, and recorded under the superintendence of the Spirit of truth. The book, therefore, possesses a peculiar interest, as combining, in the lessons which it teaches, the evidence of human experiment with the sanction of Divine authority.

“All this have I *seen*,” says Solomon, in the first of these verses, “and applied my heart unto every work that is done under the sun:”—that is, to the attentive observation, and diligent scrutiny, both of the procedure of Providence towards this world, and of the conduct of mankind in the various conditions of life. And in the course of his survey, there was one thing which he had not unfrequently remarked, that superiority to others—the possession and exercise of authority—was coveted by many, without due consideration of its tendencies; that unless the power be well and wisely used, it had better, even for the sake of its possessor, be wanted:—

“There is a time wherein one man ruleth over another to his own hurt.”

Had not Solomon himself experienced the truth of this? His royal honor was at once his temptation to sin, and his opportunity; and in sinning, himself, he led his subjects astray along with him. This turned out “to his own hurt,” as well as to the hurt of his people; for it was in consequence of this perversion of his authority by which he “made Israel to sin,” that the Lord stirred up against him various adversaries, to harass him, and to disturb the peace of his reign; and forewarned him of the rending away of ten of the tribes of Israel from the dominions of his son.—Besides, as Solomon when forsaking Jehovah, following the world, and “going after strange gods,” could not be satisfied with himself; and as a conscience that is ill at ease, a self-upbraiding spirit, usually produces a very unhappy effect upon the temper, rendering a man, in his conduct towards others, hasty, passionate, sullen, and capricious; it is not improbable that some ground had been given by him, during the time, especially, of his defection from the service of God, for the complaints afterwards made by his subjects to his son and successor respecting the grievousness of his yoke, when they presented their unsuccessful petition for its mitigation, and for a gentler system of rule.

The influence of a disquieted conscience in producing angry and capricious rigor, is exemplified in the case of Asa: who, when reproved by Hanani the seer, for his folly and distrust of Jehovah; and threatened, as his punishment, with wars for the remainder of his reign, "was wroth with the seer, and put him in the prison house: and Asa," it is added in the history, "oppressed some of the people the same time." He wreaked his unreasonable anger against this prophet, and his secret rankling dissatisfaction with himself, in acts of passionate severity towards his subjects.

Some of Solomon's successors in the throne of Judah, and many, alas! of the kings of Israel, might be produced as exemplifications of the truth here stated; and not a few might be added from the general history of both ancient and modern nations. Often have unprincipled and oppressive tyrants brought upon themselves the vengeance of their subjects, and come to an untimely end. They have "ruled over others to their own hurt;" their power having prospered for a time, but ultimately involved them in insurrection and ruin. And even if they should escape the indignant fury of the oppressed, still the abuse of power is to their hurt; for "he that is higher than the highest regardeth," and they "treasure up to themselves wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God."

It is, primarily at least, to such characters, that the tenth verse refers:—

Verse 10. *And so I saw the wicked buried, who had come and gone from the place of the holy; and they were forgotten in the city where they had so done. This is also vanity.*

By "the place of the holy" some understand the seat of judgment, which, in chapter iii. 16, had been denominated "the place of righteousness." It is the place which ought to be occupied by the holy, and not by the wicked, and over which the Most Holy may be considered as presiding, with peculiar jealousy of its purity, and displeasure at its corruption. And by the wicked being *buried* who had occupied this honorable seat, they conceive to be meant, his being buried with all the splendor of funeral pomp; with all the ceremonial of lamentation and woe:—whilst their being "forgotten in the city" is thought to refer to the change produced in the public mind by death:—to that kind of good-natured disposition which leads men to say no ill of the dead,—to deal

gently with their faults,—to palliate and even to banish from their remembrance the very enormities for which they cursed them during their lives; and to honor in death those who disgraced themselves in life.

But this view is neither natural in itself, nor suitable to the connection. Solomon had said, in the eighth verse, that “wickedness could not deliver those that were given to it,” from the stroke of death:—nay, at times, as he adds in the ninth verse, a man’s wickedness, especially in the abuse of power, might prove the means of hurt and ruin to himself. It is the same sentiment that he continues to illustrate in verse 10:—“I saw the wicked, who had come and gone from the place of the holy,”—who had attended the sanctuary, joined in the worship of God, and cloaked their unrighteousness and oppression under the garb of external piety,—who had “come and gone,” continuing their hypocritical career in safety, no marks of Divine vengeance visiting them for their awful profanation and odious dissembling;—“I saw the wicked, who had lately flourished in their wickedness; who, in the possession of great power, had “prospered in bringing evil devices to pass;”—I saw them *buried*,—the victims of mortality equally with others; unable any more than the meanest and the weakest of their oppressed subjects “to retain the spirit,” and having no power more than they in the day of death:—I saw them *buried*,—carried, in affecting humiliation and impotence, to “the house appointed for all living.” And this was not only the “land of forgetfulness,” as to any knowledge on their part of what was passing amongst men; but the “land of forgetfulness,” as to the remembrance of them by their survivors on earth:—“They were forgotten in the city where they had so done.” They had sought after, and expected, perpetual fame: but men had no pleasure in remembering them; when out of sight, they were out of mind; their name and memory rotted with their carcases in the dust. The sentiment is similar to that expressed by the Psalmist:—“I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree: yet he passed away, and lo! he was not; yea I sought him, but he could not be found.” Psalm xxxvii. 35, 36.

I have considered the expression, “who had *come and gone* from the place of the holy,” as implying the continuance of the course described, without interruption by any interposition of heaven,

or indication of Divine displeasure. The forbearance of God, and the abuse of it by men for their encouragement in sin, are accordingly introduced with more particular emphasis in the eleventh verse:—

Verse 11. *Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.*

A matter of fact is stated in these words, with its sad and fatal influence on the minds and characters of ungodly and inconsiderate men. "Sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily." Particular sins are not, in the Divine administration, visited with instant punishment. Nay, even the man who lives in sin; in the daily and hourly defiance of every restraint; and in the fearless violation of every precept of heaven; is allowed to pursue his course without the immediate arrest of judicial vengeance. The lips of the blasphemer are not sealed in death the moment he has uttered his blasphemy: he lives to repeat it a thousand and a thousand times. Week after week is the sabbath-breaker spared, to profane in succession the Days of God. The arm of justice is not instantly put forth upon the murderer while the life-blood is warm on his guilty hands, to hurry him away to the judgment-seat of God. The secrets of impurity are not immediately brought out to light, detected, exposed, and punished, by Him, from whose eye "no darkness or shadow of death can hide the workers of iniquity." The haughty tyrant, the persecuting oppressor, is not always, in the flush of his impious arrogance, smitten by the angel of the Lord, because he gives not God the glory. See Acts xii. 20-23. The "unprofitable servant,"—the useless cumberer of the ground,—is not cut down in his first barren season, but spared through many a year of fruitlessness and vain expectation. Sinners of every name, and of every degree, continue to live, and continue to prosper.

Such being the order of the divine administration; such the forbearance and long-suffering of God; the corrupt and infatuated children of men, bent on the indulgence of their sinful lusts and passions, "encourage themselves in an evil way;" they strengthen themselves in wickedness; hand joins in hand in the combinations of iniquity; "their heart is fully set in them to do evil."

Future and unseen things make a much less lively impression



on the mind than things that are present and seen. This world meets the senses in ten thousand forms of temptation; whilst the world to come is far off and invisible. The pleasures of sin are immediate, affording present gratification: its future consequences are distant and unfelt. That, too, which men, from whatever principle, wish to be true, they are naturally prone to believe; the judgment being the dupe of the heart, and the heart "deceitful above all things." They are fond of thinking that sin will not expose them to such irremediable vengeance as the Bible threatens. They are willing to be persuaded of this; and they flatter themselves into the persuasion by the wiles of a thousand sophistries. At first, it may be, they commit sin with a timid heart and a trembling hand. They hesitate long. But at length, though with irresolute tremor, it is done. No harm comes to them. No indications of the anger of Heaven follow the deed. They feel themselves safe. And, having tasted of the sin, it is sweet; and they desire it again. It is done again; still with scruple and shrinking, but with less than before. The third time, their apprehensions are still weaker; and they learn, with less and less remorse, to "walk in the counsel of the ungodly, to stand in the way of sinners, and to sit in the seat of the scornful." Finding, that they are not struck dead on the spot,—that "sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily,"—they begin to suspect whether God be actually privy to their words and deeds; to say in their hearts to themselves, and with flattering lips to one another, "God hath forgotten; he hideth his face, he will never see it." They doubt of providence; or they flatter themselves that surely the Supreme Ruler, if he exists at all, and takes any notice of the affairs of men, cannot be such an enemy to sin as he has been represented; that he will be very merciful and lenient to the frailties of his erring creatures; for how, say they, are we to know what he means to do in future, if not by what he does now? He will not be strict to mark iniquity: he is good; and goodness shall at last carry the day. Thus they gradually cast off restraint, contemn God, and say, "He will not require it." This is a fearful process; but there is reason to apprehend, it is not a very uncommon one. Wicked men are, in reference to a judgment to come, like Pharaoh of old, who persisted in hardening his heart against God, always "when he saw that there was respite."

Such is the way in which the suspension of the sentence of God against sin,—the delay of punishment,—affects the corrupt hearts of “the sons of men.” Instead of “the goodness of God leading them to repentance,” they take advantage of it; they “despise the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering, and after their hardness and impenitent heart, treasure up unto themselves wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.” But is it an awful delusion:—

Verses 12, 13. *Though a sinner do evil a hundred times, and his days be prolonged, yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, who fear before him: but it shall not be well with the wicked, neither shall he prolong his days, which are as a shadow; because he feareth not before God.*

“Though a sinner do evil a hundred times,” that is, ever so many times, “and his days be prolonged,”—no deadly vengeance lighting on his trespasses;—though, from present impunity, he becomes unceasingly bold in sin; going on from bad to worse, till, at the hundredth time, his conscience becomes “seared as with a hot iron:”—yet still there is a distinction between the righteous and the wicked; between him that serveth God, and him that serveth him not. “Surely I know,”—it was a matter of firm and indubitable certainty with Solomon, and so it should be with us; one of those fundamental truths, one of those moral axioms, of which nothing should be allowed to shake our confident assurance:—“it shall be well with them that fear God.” The fear of God is here, as it is very generally in the Scriptures, put for the whole of true religion, both in its inward principles and its outward practice,—both in the heart, and in the life. “It shall be well with them” *during life*; the favor and the blessing of God attending them amidst all its changes, soothing their sorrows, and heightening the relish of their joys, and making “all things to work together for their good.” “It shall be well with them” *in death*;—“Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright; for the latter end of that man is peace:”—“The righteous hath hope in his death:” “good hope,” resting on a sure foundation, securing his mind against the agitations of foreboding fear, and enabling him to say, “O Death, where is thy sting? O Grave, where is thy victory?” “It shall be well with them” *in the judgment*: for they shall stand with acceptance before the throne of God; they

shall hear his voice address them in blessing, and shall instantly feel the sentence fulfilled in the commencement of unmingled and never-ending felicity.—“But it shall not be well with the wicked,”—either while he lives, or when he dies, or when he stands before the tribunal of God. Not while he lives; for even when he prospers, it is ill with him: the curse of Heaven is upon his tabernacle, and it secretly mingles itself with all his enjoyments. He is “cursed in the city, and cursed in the field; cursed in his basket and store; cursed in the fruit of his body, and the fruit of his land; in the increase of his kine, and the flocks of his sheep; cursed when he cometh in, and cursed when he goeth out.” Not when he dies:—for he has then nothing before him but “a fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries:”—He shall be “driven away in his wickedness;” quitting in horror a world that has cheated and damned his soul: or if he should “have no bands in his death,” the more overwhelming will be the wretchedness of his disappointment, when he plunges into unanticipated woe. Not when he appears before the judgment seat,—for “the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous; because the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous, but the way of the ungodly shall perish.”

“Neither shall he prolong his days, which are as a shadow.” The meaning is not, that he shall not live long. Many an ungodly man reaches and passes the limit of “threescore years and ten.” But his time of departure *must* come. It may be earlier or later. He may “do evil a hundred times and his days be prolonged.” But it cannot be always so. His days are still “as a shadow;” they pass successively away, and the last of them must quickly arrive. And when it does arrive, every wish for prolonged life will be vain. He will not be able to command the addition of a single day, any more than to arrest “the shadow’s fleeting form.” Even when he is most anxious to live, the time may come for him to die:—when he anticipates most joyously a lengthened journey, he may reach the “bound which he cannot pass:”—when his heart is beating highest with worldly expectation, its last pulse may be near at hand. And then “wickedness shall not deliver him that is given to it.” He “shall not prolong

his days." The shadow must pass. "His breath goeth forth; he returneth to his dust: in that very day, his thoughts perish."

Although, however, there is a distinction, of which the Lord and Judge of all never loses sight, between the righteous and the wicked; yet, in the administration of Divine providence, *character* is not the measure for the distribution of temporal good. This is the sentiment expressed in the fourteenth verse:—

Verse 14. *There is a vanity which is done upon the earth; that there be just men unto whom it happeneth according to the work of the wicked; again, there be wicked men to whom it happeneth according to the work of the righteous. I said, this also is vanity.*

The investigation of this mystery in the providence of God, (for it is of providence that Solomon evidently speaks,) we shall defer till our next lecture; the sentiment which is expressed in the verse now before us being enlarged upon in the beginning of the following chapter. The matter of fact, I only observe at present, is now, as it was then, manifest to every observer. And well might it be denominated, in relation to the great design of this treatise, "a vanity." Nothing could more strikingly show the vanity of the world, and the folly of excessive attachment to its pleasures, or confidence in its possessions. For, can any thing be more irrational, than to fix the heart on what it is impossible for us to secure by any means, or by any course of conduct?—what is uncertain to the good as well as to the bad; and is neither exclusively connected, in the purpose and procedure of God, with righteousness nor with wickedness; what is neither retained by the one, nor forfeited by the other; what is neither a mark of Divine satisfaction, nor of Divine displeasure; what may be given with a frown and taken away with a smile; what the possession of may be a curse, and the loss of may be a blessing. The very arrangement itself, besides, when viewed without relation to a future world, bears the aspect of vanity. It seems strange, unreasonable, unaccountable; like the result of a vain and unsettled caprice, rather than of a wise and well-directed principle.

Verse 15. *Then I commended mirth, because a man hath no better thing under the sun, than to eat, and to drink, and to be merry; for that shall abide with him of his labor the days of his life, which God giveth him under the sun.*

This may be understood in two ways, according to the *time* at

which we suppose the commendation of mirth to have been uttered. First, we might consider it as the libertine conclusion, drawn by Solomon, from the state of things here described, in the "days of his vanity:"—as if he had said,—“Seeing these things are so, let us indulge ourselves. What better can we do, than to enjoy the world while it is our in power? Let us eat, and drink, and be merry; for the pleasure which a man has actually enjoyed is that alone which he can say with certainty is his own; that alone which he is sure shall abide with him of his labor; that alone of which he cannot be bereaved or disappointed.”—Or, secondly, we might interpret it as his serious inference, in the days of his returning wisdom, respecting the use which a man should make of worldly good, while God is pleased to bless him with the possession of it. In this case, “mirth” must be understood, not of licentious jollity, but of the cheerful enjoyment of the bounties of Heaven; and “eating and drinking,” of the happy and unsolicitous use of that portion of the world’s good which Divine kindness has bestowed. The measure of a man’s earthly prosperity, and of the success of his labor, is a matter of complete uncertainty: but a cheerful and contented spirit, disposed to *enjoy* whatever portion is sent, is a sure and constant blessing. The secret of happiness, so far as it depends on the things of time, is to enjoy prosperity cheerfully, and without the irksome and depressing apprehensions of an anxious mind, as long as it continues; and if it is lessened or withdrawn, still to receive our diminished and stinted supplies with the same cheerful and buoyant gratitude;—thus making the best of that which, both in its degree and its continuance, is so proverbially uncertain. Amidst all changes, this happy frame of spirit may be preserved. It is a “joy” with which “a stranger cannot intermeddle.”—“A merry heart doeth good like a medicine.”—“He that is of a merry heart, hath a continual feast.”

In this view of the verse, it contains much the same sentiment as on different occasions has been already before us. Chap. ii. 24. iii. 12, 13. v. 18. He does not mean, that the unrestrained enjoyment of temporal pleasures is the chief good. The whole tenor of his treatise belies such a supposition. Neither does he mean, that even in the enjoyment of the things of this world, we are to be selfish, and to consult exclusively our own immediate gratification. This is not less inconsistent with the general spirit, and

the express declarations of the book. His language is neither that of libertinism, nor of selfishness. It is the language of experienced discretion; of piety and practical wisdom;—recommending contented cheerfulness,—the thankful reception, and the free, un-anxious, and lively enjoyment, of whatever portion of earthly things the providence of God may be pleased to bestow; as the only way of extracting from them such happiness as they are fitted to yield: the only way of at all redeeming them from the charge of utter “vanity and vexation of spirit.”

Verses 16, 17. *When I applied my heart to know wisdom, and to see the business that is done upon the earth; (for also there is that neither day nor night seeth sleep with his eyes:) then I beheld all the work of God, that a man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun: because though a man labor to seek it out, yet shall he not find it; yea, further, though a wise man seek to know it, yet shall he not be able to find it.*

These verses express the difficulties which Solomon experienced; the inextricable perplexities in which he found himself involved; in one department, especially, of his researches after knowledge: in observing the labors of men, in connection with the providence of God. In the sixteenth verse, “the business done under the sun” refers to the toil and travail of mankind, in all its endless varieties. In contemplating these, he observed the mystery of providence. He saw that success was far from being uniformly proportioned to the measure of human diligence, solicitude, and skill. He saw many, “rising early, and sitting late, and eating the bread of carefulness;” “neither day nor night seeing sleep with their eyes,” through plodding eagerness for the acquisition of property, or anxious fears about its safety. And yet their days of toil and nights of sleeplessness were vain; success and security depending upon God: for “except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it; except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh in vain.”—And then, the procedure of God, in reference to the works and ways of men, was “a great deep;” full of mystery; to the eye of the human observer, appearing to be regulated by no fixed principles; no labor, no discretion, no character, affording any assurance of prosperity; but circumstances over which the sagacity of man could have no control, in innumerable instances, and at times in a manner the most marvellous and con-

founding, crossing the path, arresting the progress, and frustrating the purposes and hopes, of those who bade fairest for success; and giving that success to others to whom no one supposed it possible, and who hardly, even in self-flattery, expected it themselves. All was wonder and perplexity,—beyond the penetration of the most profound observer, though applying to the subject the closest and most unwearied attention:—

“Though a man labor to seek it out, yet he shall not find it; yea, further, though a wise man think to know it, yet shall he not be able to find it.” To every view he can take of “the work of God,”—to every hypothesis he can frame with regard to the principle of his providential government, difficulties present themselves, and exceptions and anomalies, which he cannot explain. The hypothesis that accounts satisfactorily for one event, seems to be contradicted by another; circumstances which to him appear to be similar, and to warrant similar expectations, terminating, not unfrequently, in opposite results; and on the contrary, trains of events, and courses of conduct the most unlike each other, sometimes conducting to the same issues; to riches, or to poverty,—to honor, or to shame. That it is to the mystery of providence, in its superintendence over the affairs of men; over “all the business that is done under the sun;” that Solomon refers, will be very evident when we come to show, in next lecture, the connection between the end of this chapter and the beginning of the ninth; and the manner in which he there exemplifies and illustrates the sentiment he had here expressed.

1. In the mean time, observe, *in the first place*, from the verses that have now been expounded:—There are instances, in which the possession of power, authority, and dominion, dazzling as it may be to the imagination, is yet more to be *pitied* than *envied*. It is so, surely, when a man “rules over others to his own hurt:” and every man thus rules, who perverts and abuses his power to the purposes of oppression and selfishness. The splendor of such power can be admired by fools alone. It is the splendor of a consuming fire, at which children may laugh and clap their hands with delight, reckless of the mischief it is spreading around, but which more thoughtful spectators will contemplate with grief and horror. The fire will at length devour him who has kindled it, and who exulted in its devastations. Perverted power will come

back, with fearful recoil, upon its unprincipled perverter. Whatever may be its present effects to the cruel oppressor, or the vain-glorious ruler, it must, in the end, be "to his own hurt," when "the King of kings and Lord of lords," the Sovereign Judge of all, shall call him to his reckoning. This shall be found especially true of the persecuting powers of this world, who have directed their violence against the church of God, and by sanguinary edicts, by bonds and imprisonments, by swords, and racks, and flames, have sought its extermination. The persecuted have been the compassionated party. They still are, when their sufferings are read in history. Yet the persecutors are infinitely more to be pitied than they. From the beginning until now, the voice of the blood which they have shed has "cried against them from the ground," and has "entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth." The retributive justice of God has many a time, even in this world, given them blood to drink; in the cup which they have filled, filling to them double: and "true and righteous have been his judgments." And, oh! should they escape his vengeance here, what an account have they to give to Him who hath said of his people, the objects of his love, "He that toucheth you, toucheth the apple of his eye!" Zech. ii. 8. The victims of their fury they have "chased up to heaven;" whilst for themselves, it will be found, they have been preparing a place in hell. Envy not, then, such power. Prefer being its victim to being its possessor. Be burned at the stake, rather than kindle it. "The memory of the just is blessed, but the name of the wicked shall rot." And how unenviable is the man, who on earth is execrated while remembered, and as soon as possible is forgotten; and whose crimes are registered in heaven, and kept from oblivion there, to cover him in the end with "shame and everlasting contempt!"

2. *Secondly*; We have been considering the delay of punishment; the patience and forbearance of God: and we have illustrated a little the effect of this on human depravity,—the use that men actually make of it, as an encouragement to boldness in sin. Let me press a little upon your attention its proper and legitimate effect,—the use that men *ought* to make of it.

Instead of lulling in security, it ought to alarm;—instead of emboldening to sin, it should melt to penitential sorrow.

In the first place:—instead of lulling in security, it ought to



alarm. To make good this observation, I shall endeavor to show you, that the Divine forbearance and long-suffering, so far from being a proof that God thinks lightly of sin, affords convincing and impressive evidence of the contrary.

(1.) First of all, we should recollect that by the patience of God there is no alteration produced in the *nature* of sin. There is in sin itself an intrinsic malignity that remains immutably the same. There is in it a contrariety to the holiness, an opposition to the authority, an ingratitude for the unparelled kindness, and an affront to the sacred majesty, of the infinite God,—as well as a universal wrong done by it to creation, whose happiness it tends to destroy,—that *must* render it, in all its kinds and in all its degrees, in all places and at all times, hateful in his sight. It is in the nature of things impossible that He should ever look upon it with indifference. This should be a settled conviction in all our minds, and every thing that may *seem* opposed to it, we should rest perfectly assured, has nothing of inconsistency but the appearance.

(2.) It does not at all follow that the provocation of Deity is small, because he does not instantly express it in action. His anger is not like that of his creatures. Men, when provoked by any injury done to them, are ready to kindle immediately into a transport of passion, and to indulge their resentment in word and in deed. But God is infinitely above being affected in this manner. He punishes sin, not from passion at the harm he sustains:—for “if thou sinnest, what doest thou against him? or if thy transgressions be multiplied, what doest thou unto him?”—but because it is right and necessary that sin should be punished. With a composure undisturbed by the swellings and out-breakings of human pride and impiety; unmoved by the scornful taunts, and bitter blasphemies, and daring outrages of the ungodly; he fixes his own time for “bringing it into judgment.” That time may be distant. But O beware of fancying, because the execution of his anger is not immediate, the anger itself cannot be severe: for—

(3.) It is an evidence that it *is* severe, and that the expression of it at last will be more aggravated. What, think you, is the *real* reason why God suspends the execution of his sentence, and “bears long” with the condemned offender? Hear Himself, in answer to the question:—“Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but

rather that the wicked turn unto me, and live: turn ye, turn ye; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?" Now, why this solemnity of asseveration?—why this tenderness of persuasion?—why this energy of expostulation and entreaty?—why does he lift up his hand to heaven, and add his oath to his word? Surely the death that the sinner must die can be no light or trivial evil, when the God of mercy and truth is thus in earnest in warning him against it. Why does He spare his offending creatures from day to day? Is it that he has pleasure in sin, or complacency in sinners? No. The reason is, that he knows the full measure of the sinfulness of sin, and knows the fearful nature of its eternal consequences. He waits to be gracious. He warns, he threatens, he entreats, by his word, and by his providence; and his warnings, and threatenings, and entreaties, are all of them the utterance of mercy. Like a parent, when he has denounced a severe but deserved punishment; a punishment that must be executed if there is not repentance, humiliation, and confession:—in proportion to its severity, he lingers to inflict it; he tries every method he can think of, to gain his end without proceeding to extremities,—for "his bowels yearn over his son." If we saw a parent thus delaying the stroke; exhausting all the arts of authority and love; his heart wrung with anguish, and still failing him when the moment of infliction approaches;—we should conclude, that the punishment thus suspended must be a heavy one. The same is the inference which men should draw from the long-suffering of God.

(4.) Delay amongst men may lessen certainty, leaving room for escape, and for the loss of opportunity and ability to effect their threatenings. But it cannot be so with God. We have seen how strongly this is affirmed in the verses we have been expounding. "Though the sinner do evil a hundred times, and his days be prolonged,—yet surely it shall not be well with him."—"His judgment lingereth not; his damnation slumbereth not."—"One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." And when sinners flatter themselves with their own delusions, and "say in their hearts, God will not require it," their destruction, from being thus unanticipated, will only come upon them with the more overwhelming violence;—"When they shall say, peace and safety, then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child, and they shall not escape."

(5.) In the very perversion and abuse itself of Divine forbearance, there is a fearful aggravation of criminality, which will be added to the guilt of every sin to which it has afforded encouragement; and will form a heavy addition to the general grounds of condemnation. Mark how the inspired apostle speaks of it. The disregard of God's goodness and long-suffering is, according to him, nothing less than a "treasuring up of wrath, against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God." Rom. ii. 5.

Let the patience of God, then, alarm you, "ye careless ones," instead of flattering and deceiving you. "Set not your hearts in you to do evil;" but rather "cease to do evil, and learn to do well."

I noticed, as a *second* legitimate effect of the suspension of vengeance, that it ought to *melt you to penitential sorrow*. An act or unexpected clemency has sometimes, in human experience, had the effect of softening a heart, which all the terrors of judicial severity had been unable to move. Let sinners, then, consider the following things:—

(1.) God has *no personal interest to serve*, in sparing you. A judge amongst men, after he has pronounced the sentence, may be afraid to inflict the punishment. The prisoner may be in circumstances that render it hazardous: or the judge may expect some advantage to himself from his lenity. But with God there can be neither the fear of evil, nor the hope of good, from his offending creatures. In proportion as a criminal perceives that the clemency of his judge is either extorted by dread of consequences, or even by considerations of interest, it will fail to have upon him any subduing or melting influence: it will only inspire contempt. But, as the Supreme Judge is infinitely independent of his creatures; as his acts of clemency and of sparing mercy are entirely disinterested,—in no respect for his own, but all for the poor offender's sake; ought not his patient forbearance to melt the sinner to contrition, instead of hardening him in rebellion? Say not, your continued transgression *can do HIM no harm*. It is most true. The infinite God sustain damage from a creature! or be ultimately bereft of the smallest portion of his glory by a creature! It were blasphemy to suppose it. That is a gratification which neither the malignity of earth or hell can ever obtain. "L

thou sinnest, what doest thou against him? or if thy transgressions be multiplied; what doest thou unto him? If thou be righteous, what givest thou him? or what receiveth he of thy hand? Thy wickedness may hurt a man as thou art; and thy righteousness may profit the son of man." But ought not this very independence of Deity to convince you, that it is for your own sakes alone that he exercises towards you his forbearing clemency? And should not this give an overcoming power to his warnings, as the dictates of compassionate kindness?

(2.) God is under *no obligation* to spare you;—no, not for a moment. He might in justice *now* cut you off; and he might have done it long since, and have consigned you to merited perdition. And what he in *justice* might have done, he has never wanted *power* to do. You are not spared because he cannot destroy you. He could, in one moment of time, sweep off into irremediable destruction every individual of his sinning creatures; and give existence to a new and better race, who should love, and fear, and serve, and honor him. But instead of this, he is pleased to call sinners to repentance; to invite them back to himself; to hold out to them, through the mediation of his Son, the sceptre of mercy; and to give them time to hear his voice, and to turn from their ways and live. O think, then,—

(3.) *What base ingratitude* there is, in abusing this wonderful, this unmerited, this free and disinterested kindness of God. Nay, *ingratitude* is too gentle a term. There is not a word in language sufficiently strong to express the hellish malignity of such conduct, or to convey any adequate idea of its inexpressible odiousness. What would you think of the man, who should derive encouragement from the very kindness of a benefactor, to neglect him and to do him injury? What do you think of the unnatural child, whom the very tenderness of his father encourages to disobey and insult him? Yet this is what sinners do, when, from the merciful suspension of punishment, their "hearts are set in them to do evil:" only, the obligations which they violate are infinitely higher. God is good and kind to them amidst all their rebellion: he sustains every moment the life which they are employing against himself. Yet, instead of the thought of his goodness breaking and changing their hearts, the very experience they have had of it, and the hope of its continuance, are the considerations which cheer

them on in their career of ungodliness. What think you of this?—of trying the patience of God further, *because* we have found it to be great!—of sinning against him with a high hand, *because* we know him to be “slow to anger!”—of blaspheming and insulting him, *because* he does not instantly revenge the insult and the blasphemy!—of hardening our spirits in impious opposition, *on account of* that very mercy which ought to soften, and conciliate, and subdue them!—of persisting to trample on his authority and laws, *because* he himself has assured us, that he is ready to forgive! O, my friends, how unnatural, how monstrous is this! Surely the very thought, that you should have been guilty of any thing even approaching to it, should wring your hearts with the bitterness of shame and grief; should bring you to his feet in tears of penitential sorrow; and constrain you to give yourselves up henceforth to him from whom you have revolted, and with body, soul, and spirit, to serve him,—“redeeming the time.”

3. *Thirdly*; Let me conclude with a single word of admonition to Christians:—and it shall be conveyed in the language of their Lord himself. It is, to beware of the temptation which even to them the seeming delay of judgment presents;—a temptation to forgetfulness, to unbelief, to negligence, and to apostasy:—“Watch, therefore; for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh. Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? Blessed is that servant whom his lord, when he cometh, shall find so doing. Verily I say unto you, That he shall make him ruler over all his goods. But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; and shall begin to smite his fellow-servants, and to eat and drink with the drunken; the lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of, and shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypoerites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” Matt. xxiv. 42-51.

## LECTURE XVII.

### ECCLESIASTES IX. 1-10.

“For all this I considered in my heart, even to declare all this, that the righteous, and the wise, and their works, (are) in the hand of God: no man knoweth either love or hatred (by) (all that is) before them. 2. All (things come) alike to all: (there is) one event to the righteous, and to the wicked; to the good, and to the clean, and to the unclean; to him that sacrificeth, and to him that sacrificeth not: as (is) the good, so (is) the sinner; (and) he that swear-eth, as (he) that feareth an oath. 3. This (is) an evil among all (things) that are done under the sun, that (there is) one event unto all: yea, also the heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness (is) in their heart while they live, and after that (they go) to the dead. 4. For to him that is joined to all the living there is hope: for a living dog is better than a dead lion. 5. For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten. 6. Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished; neither have they any more a portion for ever in any (thing) that is done under the sun. 7. Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works. 8. Let thy garments be always white; and let thy head lack no ointment. 9. Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of the life of thy vanity, which he hath given thee under the sun, all the days of thy vanity: for that (is) thy portion in (this) life, and in thy labor which thou takest under the sun. 10. whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do (it) with thy might; for (there is) no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest.”

Verse 1. *For all this I considered in my heart, even to declare all this, that the righteous, and the wise, and their works, are in the hand of God: no man knoweth either love or hatred by all that is before them.*

In the close of the former chapter, we found Solomon declaring the unsearchableness of “the work of God,” or the conduct of his providence toward the children of men, even by the penetration of the acutest and most experienced minds. This he confirms by a reference to his own want of success in all his endeavors to fathom

the mystery; although he was one to whom God had given "wisdom and understanding, and largeness of heart, even as the sand on the sea-shore." He was earnestly desirous to have understood and explained it; but after "considering in his heart" for this purpose, all that he could with certainty declare was, the existence of the fact, and the necessity of leaving all, with believing submission, in the hand of God:—"For all this I considered in my heart, even to declare all this,—that the righteous and the wise, and their works, are in the hand of God;"—in the hand of Him who is infinitely just, infinitely wise, and infinitely good. Though his providence does present a mystery to our limited faculties, yet he is not forgetful of those who fear him. They and their works are neither unknown nor unregarded: and he will one day make it fully manifest, that his whole procedure has perfectly accorded with his character, as "the righteous Lord who loveth righteousness, and whose countenance beholdeth the upright." They themselves are under his special and unremitting care:—his eye is ever upon them; his ear is open to their cry: and "their works" are remembered by him for good. "They that feared the Lord spake often one to another; and the Lord hearkened and heard; and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him. Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked; between him that serveth God, and him that serveth him not." Mal. iii. 16-18.

But, however confident we may be of this distinction being ever present to the Divine mind, yet, in the general administration of Providence in the distribution of temporal good and evil, it often seems as if it were forgotten; so that, as it is here expressed, "no man knoweth either love or hatred by all that is before them." As there is no description or degree of temporal prosperity with which wicked men are not favored, and hardly any kind or measure of adversity to which good men are not at times subjected, no man can discover, from his external condition merely, the state of the Divine affection towards him, whether he be an object of the love of God, or of the contrary; the good and the evil of life coming alternately in the lot of all,—the gourd of

earthly comfort flourishing one day and blasted the next, in the experience of men of every description of character. This sentiment is more fully brought out, in

Verse 2. *All things come alike to all; there is one event to the righteous, and to the wicked; to the good, and to the clean, and to the unclean; to him that sacrificeth, and to him that sacrificeth not: as is the good, so is the sinner; and he that sweareth, as he that feareth an oath.*

“The *clean*,” are evidently those who were not merely attentive to keep themselves free from ceremonial pollution, but who were “pure in heart,”—renewed and sanctified in the spirit of their minds; and “the *unclean*,” those who were destitute of this inward purity, and who might, at the same time, show their disregard of God, by carelessness about the contraction or the removal of legal defilement. By “him who sacrificeth, and him who sacrificeth not,” we understand, the man, on the one hand, who is conscientious and regular in the discharge of religious duties, and, on the other, the man who entirely neglects them, and lives “without God in the world;”—the pious worshipper, and the atheistical despiser of all devotion. “There is one event,” says Solomon, to these opposite characters:—one event, *in life*;—“all things,” with regard to the measure of prosperity and adversity, of the cares and joys, the hopes and fears, the gratifications and disappointments of life, “coming alike to all:”—one event *in death*;—not indeed as to its solemn and eternal consequences, nor even as to the state of mind with which its approach is anticipated, and its arrival met; but as to all the external circumstances and corporeal effects of it; no distemper coming upon the wicked (with the exception, indeed, of those which are the immediate product of particular vices) to which the righteous are not also liable; no degree of pain or of any attendant evils afflicting the one, which may not likewise distress the other; and no loathsome taint of corruption invading the body of the one, that does not equally prey upon and consume that of the other. In these respects, “as is the good, so is the sinner; and he that sweareth, as he that feareth an oath.” “Swearing,” being here opposed to “fearing an oath,” must, of course, mean swearing *lightly* and *falsely*; and “fearing an oath” is taking it with solemnity, and keeping it with fidelity, under a deep impression of the evil of profaning the great and dreadful



name to which the appeal is made. In such a connection, the fear of an oath is the fear of God: "Thou shalt *fear the LORD thy God*; him shalt thou serve, and to him shalt thou cleave, and *swear by his Name.*" Deut. x. 20.

Such being the state of the fact, as to the providential allotments of temporal good and evil, the observation of it has at times proved a strong and distressing temptation to the children of God, to doubt and question the reality of His superintendence over the affairs of men. Such a state of temptation Asaph affectingly describes in the seventy-third Psalm. His "feet were almost gone," his "steps had well nigh slipped;" for he was "envious at the foolish, when he saw the prosperity of the wicked." He had not merely observed an indiscriminate mixture in the lot of good and evil men, but in some instances which had come particularly under his notice, there was a great preponderance of prosperity on the side of the latter. Theirs was a cup of rich and almost unmingled sweetness, whilst a full cup of bitterness was "wrung out" for the other. And over these unaccountable anomalies, as they seemed to him to be, he brooded in agonizing perplexity of spirit, till his mind was giving way to scepticism, and drawing to the very borders of apostasy and atheism. He said, "How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the most High?" The prophet Jeremiah, if not tempted as Asaph was, yet expresses a similar feeling of difficulty and wonder:—"Righteous art thou, O LORD, when I plead with thee; yet let me talk with thee of thy judgments: Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper? wherefore are all they happy that deal very treacherously? Thou hast planted them; yea, they have taken root; they grow; yea, they bring forth fruit: thou art near in their mouth, and far from their reins." Jer. xii. 1, 2.

Whilst the Divine procedure has thus perplexed and tempted the minds of God's people, it has, on the contrary, been abused by his enemies as an encouragement to perseverance in sin. "They say unto God," in the midst of their prosperity, "Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways. What is the Almighty, that we should serve him? and what profit should we have if we pray unto him?" Job xxi. 14, 15, with the preceding context.

This appears to be the sentiment expressed in the latter part of the following verse:—

Verse 3. *This is an evil, among all things that are done under the sun, that there is one event unto all: yea, also the heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live; and after that they go to the dead.*

The heart of the sons of men is *by nature* full of evil. It is “enmity against God.” Its “imagination is only evil continually.” It is “deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.” Out of it “proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness.” That must be a fearfully polluted fountain from which there flow so many foul and tainted streams. Natural conscience, though partaking of the corruption of the fall, and very deficient and partial, very treacherous and false, in the discharge of its function, has yet an effect far from inconsiderable, along with the apprehension of punishment which it inspires, in restraining from the commission of iniquity even men who have no true fear of God before their eyes. But prosperity in sin tends to dissolve even this restraint; it hardens the heart, stifles the voice of conscience, it silences the suggestions of fear, and drives a man on to a frantic wildness in the gratification of his passions and desires:—“madness is in their heart while they live.”

Every act of sin, being an act of rebellion against the infinite God, is an act of madness; of infatuated, and impotent, and self-destroying frenzy:—for “who hath hardened himself against Him, and” finally “prospered?” All worldliness of spirit, being a preference, in affection and pursuit, of temporal to eternal things, is madness; far beyond the derangement of the maniac who throws away gold for stones, and prefers straws to pearls and jewels. But the expression, “madness is in their heart,” appears from the connection rather to mean that wild and unthinking boldness; that forwardness, and hardihood, and licentious extravagance in sin; which arise from a course of prosperity in it, and from the seeming distance of the evil day. “The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts. His ways are always grievous; thy judgments are far above out of his sight: as for all his enemies, he puffeth at them. He hath said in his heart, I shall not be moved; for I shall never

be in adversity." Psalm x. 4-6. "How much she hath glorified herself and lived deliciously, so much torment and sorrow give her: for she saith in her heart, I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow." Rev. xviii. 7.

How awful is the thought!—"madness is in their heart *while they live*." Intoxicated by success in sin, they persist in it to the last; casting off the fear of God, and "mad upon their idols:"—and then—"after that they go to the dead!" "The dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit to God who gave it:"—or rather, while their bodies are laid in the grave, to be food for the worm of corruption, their souls depart to the "place of torment," to join the "spirits in prison," even all the wicked dead who had left the world before them! Such is their melancholy end; and then all is over with them;—settled for ever;—their time of mercy gone:—they are beyond the reach of hope:—

Verse 4. *For to him that is joined to all the living there is hope: for a living dog is better than a dead lion.*

"For to him that is joined to all the living there is hope:" either, hope in adverse times of better days to come; or rather, as the connection intimates, hope with respect to his future state,—his state after death;—"For a living dog is better than a dead lion;" that is, the meanest living is better than the noblest dead. The dog was not only an unclean animal by the Mosaic law, but, being greatly despised amongst the Jews, was often used as the emblem of what was despicable and worthless. Of all appellations that of a *dead dog* was the most contemptuous; and a living dog was not much better.\* The lion, again, is the noblest of the beasts of the forest; mighty, majestic, royal; he "turns not away for any." The meanest living man possesses a superiority over the mightiest dead, in having life itself, and power, and consciousness, and feeling, and enjoy-

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\*See 1 Sam. xxiv. 14. 2 Sam. ix. 8. 2 Kings viii. 13. In this last passage, Hazeal's exclamation of surprise should probably be rendered, "But what is thy servant—a mere dog—that he should do this great thing?" It is not the *silence*, but the *greatness* of the thing he speaks of: and it does not seem to be *indignation* that he expresses, at being supposed to possess *dispositions* for so *base* and *odious* a work; but *astonishment* that one *so mean* and of *so little account* as he affects to call himself, should be deemed *competent* to achieve *so mighty* a work. It is not with horror he startles, according to the common view of his words, like one unconscious at the time, of the propensities of his character, and not believing himself capable of such enormities:—it is rather the start of an agreeable surprise; though he covers, by an affected humility, the secret pleasure of an aspiring ambition.

ment; which with regard to the dead, viewed in their relation to this world, are all at an end, whatever their power and eminence while they lived. The carcase of the "king of beasts" may be carrion to the vilest and most worthless dog that breathes. The lowest and most despised subject the king of Assyria had, was in these respects superior to his fallen master, when "his pomp was brought down to the grave, and the noise of his viols; when the worm was spread under him, and the worms covered him." The most abject wretch might then stand on his tomb, and say, "How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, that didst weaken the nations!" He might stamp over his ashes, and insult his name:—no ear startles at the sound; no eye kindles; no hand stirs to grasp the avenging blade:—all is still and motionless:—"there is no voice, nor any to answer, nor any that regardeth."

The description, in the third verse, of the "sons of men" shows, that under that designation Solomon does not include those whose hearts have been changed by Divine grace; who have been "delivered from this present evil world;" but the mass of mankind in general; that part of the race which has ever, alas! been the great majority, who "walk after their own lusts," following the tendencies of their fallen nature.—"To him that is joined to all the living, there is hope." I might have conceived this to express the encouragement, which wicked men derive from hope, to perseverance in their evil courses, and even in their maddest indulgences; and "a living dog is better than a dead lion," to mean the unthinking exultation of such men in the continued possession of life; their impious vaunting that death has not yet made *them* his prey; and their high-spirited determination to avail themselves of life while they have it. But the connection of the following verses inclines me to a different sense:—

Verses 5, 6. *For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten. Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished; neither have they any more a portion for ever in any thing that is done under the sun.*

Whatever encouragement to sin the wicked might derive from their hopes of prolonging life, and even from their illusory promises to themselves of impunity beyond the grave, it is evident they

could driven one from "knowing that they must die;"—unless, indeed, the limitation of their time might be an excitement to them,—an unhallowed excitement,—to make the most of it; to drink as largely as they may of the cup of pleasure, ere the hand of Death dash it from their lips:—and this is, accordingly, one of the favorite themes "in the song of fools," in their hours of jovial revelry.—I am disposed to think, however, that Solomon uses the words more seriously. "To him that is joined to all the living there is hope:—for the living know that they must die." To them, death is yet to come. The solemn prospect is still before them; a prospect which *must* be realized, and they know not when. Till the event has taken place, we cannot pronounce on their future doom. While there is life, there is hope. They may consider their ways. They may turn to the Lord. They may be prepared for their latter end, and for meeting their God. But when once the dissolution of soul and body has taken place,—all is over; life is gone, and hope with it.

A variety of humbling and affecting views are then set before us, of the termination of the earthly career of wicked and worldly men.

*First.* Of all that engaged and interested their attention while they lived, their knowledge is at an end. Their acquaintance with every thing on earth has closed:—"the dead know not any thing." We can impart to them no intelligence of what is doing and of what is passing here. And what is of infinitely weightier moment, we can no more communicate to their ear the tidings of mercy; the knowledge that "maketh wise unto salvation:"—"wisdom at" every "entrance" is now "quite shut out."

*Secondly.* "They have had their reward." Thus Jesus speaks of those who valued and courted the praise of men, rather than the praise of God. And thus Solomon here speaks of such as have labored after this world; have "laid up for themselves treasures upon earth;" have pursued pleasure, or wealth, or power, or glory, as their chief good; have continued to live in carelessness and sin:—"neither," says he, "have they *any more* a reward:" that is, they have already had it. And when they have plunged themselves into irremediable despair, it will be said to each of them, contrasting their state with that of the poorest and most despised and afflicted of God's children, "Son, remember, that thou in thy

lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now, he is comforted, and thou art tormented." Luke xvi. 25.

*Thirdly.* They have not even posthumous fame. Whilst their reward on earth is at an end, and their sufferings in the other world are commenced, never to terminate; "the memory of them is forgotten."—"As the cloud is consumed and vanisheth away, so he that goeth down to the grave shall come up no more. He shall return no more to his house, neither shall his place know him any more." We had the same circumstance particularized in the preceding chapter:—"I saw the wicked buried, who had come and gone from the place of the holy; and they were forgotten in the city where they had so done."

*Fourthly.* They are utterly impotent: they have no power whatever remaining, either to profit or to hurt, and are neither courted for the one, nor feared for the other. This seems to be the idea chiefly intended by their "love and their hatred and their envy having now perished." Their power to benefit and to injure is alike gone. The objects of their love can derive from it no advantage, nor can the victims of their hatred and envy sustain from them any damage. While they lived, their favor might be courted, and its effects desired; their displeasure deprecated; their hatred and envy dreaded; the consequences of them anxiously shunned. But their mere names have no charm either of blessing or of curse. The ashes of the grave can do neither evil nor good. "There the wicked cease from troubling."—"Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help. His breath goeth forth; he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish." Job iii. 17. Psalm cxlvi. 3, 4.

*Lastly.* Their portion of enjoyment, such as it was, is gone for ever. They "had their portion in this life;" Psalm xvii. 14, and when this life comes to a close, it is necessarily lost:—"neither have they any more a portion for ever in any thing that is done under the sun." While they lived, they had a portion in their own labors, under the sun; but now, others are entered into their labors, reaping the fruits of them, and striving to add to them. These occupants shall be followed by others. But they themselves shall never return to their place. Death is not a temporary

absence, but an eternal adieu. And if this world be a man's portion, when he dies it is for ever gone.

Thus the conclusion to which Solomon comes, and his solution of the difficulty arising from the prosperity of the wicked, are very similar to those of Asaph:—"When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me; until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end. Surely thou didst set them in slippery places, thou castedst them down into destruction. How are they brought into desolation as in a moment! they are utterly consumed with terrors. As a dream when one awaketh, so, O Lord, when thou awakest, thou shalt despise their image. Thus my heart was grieved, and I was pricked in my reins. So foolish was I and ignorant; I was as a beast before thee. Nevertheless I am continually with thee: thou hast holden me by my right hand." Psalm lxxiii. 16-23. And as the Psalmist, returning to a right mind, restored to confidence in God, delights himself anew in his love and mercy, saying, in the spirit of self-devotion, "Thou shalt guide me by thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth whom I desire in comparison of thee: my flesh and my heart fail, but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever;" Psalm lxxiii. 24-26.—so Solomon here, addressing himself to the children of God, exhorts them to the exercise of trust and joy:—

Verse 7. *Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works.*

Let thy mind be fully assured, notwithstanding all the appearances of the contrary that have disquieted thy spirit, that "the Lord loveth the righteous." Go thy way; be cheerful and happy.

The description of the conduct of the first Christians, in the Acts of the Apostles, affords a fine exemplification of what Solomon means in this verse:—"Continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favor with all the people." Acts ii. 46, 47. The same kind of joy is described in these words with that recommended in the passage before us. It is the gladness of heart that springs from a sense of the Divine favor; from the lifting up of the light of God's countenance.

"God *now* accepteth thy works:"—yes—even now, in the midst

of all these difficulties and perplexing appearances:—let not these shake and unsettle your mind:—even now, he “loveth righteousness, and his countenance beholdeth the upright:”—he regards their works, the fruits of faith and love, with approving complacency; and he will at last, before assembled worlds, manifest at once his delight in his people, and his hatred of the workers of iniquity. Therefore,

Verse 8. *Let thy garments be always white, and let thy head lack no ointment.*

White garments were worn on occasions of festive joy. Isaiah speaks of the “garment of praise” being given to “them that mourn in Zion,” instead of “the spirit of heaviness;” Isa. lxi. 3; and perhaps the joy of the saints in heaven is intended, as well as their justification and purity, by their being “clothed in white raiment.” This idea is especially countenanced by one passage, where, besides being “clothed with white robes,” they are represented as having “palms in their hands,”—the palms of victory and triumph,—and as “crying with a loud voice,”—the voice surely of exulting gladness,—“Salvation to our God who sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb!” Rev. iii. 4, 5. vii. 9, 10.

Anointing with oil, and with fragrant ointments, was also a customary practice, to which there are various allusions in other parts of Scripture. It was not only performed as a rite of official consecration; it was one of the daily ceremonies of the dressing chamber, and of preparation for appearing abroad; and it was particularly attended to on occasions of personal, domestic, or public rejoicing. Hence we read of the mourners in Zion receiving “the *oil of joy* for mourning;” Isa. lxi. 3; and of the blessed Messiah being “anointed with the *oil of gladness*, above his fellows.”—“Thou hast anointed my head with oil,” says the Psalmist David, “my cup runneth over.” Psalm xxiii. 5.—“My horn shalt thou exalt like the horn of a unicorn; I shall be anointed with fresh oil.” Psalm xcii. 10. When Joab sent the woman of Tekoah to king David, he said to her, “Feign thyself to be a mourner, and put on mourning apparel, and *anoint not thyself with oil*, but be as a woman that had a long time mourned for the dead.” 2 Sam. xiv. 2. Daniel’s real mourning was expressed in the same way. He “ate no pleasant bread, neither did flesh nor wine come into his mouth, neither did he *anoint himself* at all:” Dan. x. 3, and in



warning against ostentatious hypocrisy, Christ says, "But thou, when thou fastest, *anoint thy head*, and wash thy face, that thou appear not unto men to fast, but to thy Father who is in secret." Matt. vi. 17, 18. The miraculous healing of the sick was in many instances accompanied with "anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord;" and the sacred influences of the Spirit of grace are denominated "an unction from the Holy One." The notion of *pleasure* thus seems invariably associated with the practice; and it was aptly indicated by the richness and freshness, and, in many cases, by the aromatic fragrance, of the balsamic unguents. "Let thy head lack no ointment" is equivalent to—Rejoice in the bounty and loving-kindness of the Lord: "let not thy heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." And the expression "let thy garments be *always white*" is of the same amount with the apostolic exhortation, "Rejoice evermore!" Take the enjoyment of whatever the hand of a kind providence bestows, with a grateful and cheerful spirit;—not with selfishness or extravagance, or thoughtless mirth; but with benevolence and sobriety, and with that true joy which is independent of the possessions of time; which, coming from above, infuses into the things of earth a relish of heaven, and would continue to be the inmate of the pious soul, though they were all removed.

Verse 9. *Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest, all the days of the life of thy vanity, which he hath given thee under the sun, all the days of thy vanity; for that is thy portion in this life, and in thy labor which thou takest under the sun.*

How sadly does Solomon, in these words, condemn his own practice! He commends marriage, in the form in which it existed from the beginning, as a source of genuine happiness, the sweetest that earth can furnish; but he warns against such departures from its original institution as he had himself known, by bitter experience, to frustrate the kind intentions of Heaven in its appointment. "Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest,"—the one object of thy undivided affections, with whom thou hast plighted mutual faith, and who has given thee her heart in return for thine. It is only in this way that conjugal and domestic felicity, the purest and richest of temporal delights, and the dearest earthly solace of this valley of tears, can be effectually enjoyed. It is the will of God, intimated in nature by the numerical proportion

of the sexes, and explicitly declared in his Word, that "every man should have his own wife, and every woman her own husband." This was the first and permanent law, when God, in the beginning "made a male and a female, and said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and cleave unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh." It were out of place to enlarge on the advantages, both to the parties themselves and to their offspring, of adherence to this arrangement. All recorded experience is in favor of it; and how could it be otherwise? Not only did such flagrant transgressors as Solomon make themselves miserable by the violation of it. Look even to patriarchal times. The quarrels of Sarah and Hagar were a grief to Abraham; his grandson Jacob was vexed by those of Rachel and Leah; while Isaac, although not without sources of trial, (for who is, or who can be, in this world of sin?) yet appears, in this particular, to have lived a life of harmonious and tranquil happiness with his heaven-sent and loved Rebekah.

But our joy in the dearest relations, as well as in all the possessions of life, is to be maintained in the remembrance that our days are vanity:—"Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest, all the days of the life of thy vanity, which he hath given thee under the sun, all the days of thy vanity." The most intimate and endearing connections, the springs of our most exquisite enjoyment, are necessarily but temporary. Every marriage should be formed in the recollection, that sooner or later it must leave a widow or a widower. And blessed are they, whom the remembrance of the vanity of life does not deprive of the relish of its joys!—"For that is thy portion in this life;" these sources of happiness, both personal and social, are given thee to be enjoyed, as thine allotted measure of this world's good, while this frail and mortal life continues:—"and in thy labor which thou takest under the sun;"—they are at once the fruit of thy labor, through the smile and blessing of heaven upon the work of thy hands; and they are the cheering solace of thy labor, amidst all its fatigues and its occasional disappointments and difficulties. The mode of expression in this verse remarkably accords with the apostle's admonition, to remember the shortness of time both in its joys and its woes:—"but this I say, brethren, the time is short: it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none; and

they that weep as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not; and they that use this world, as not abusing it: for the fashion of this world passeth away." 1 Cor. vii. 29-31.

There is a connection between the exhortation in this verse to *joy*, and that in the tenth to *active diligence*, founded on the principle so finely expressed by Nehemiah to the Israelites:—"Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions to those for whom nothing is prepared: for this day is holy unto our Lord: neither be ye sorry, for *the joy of the Lord is your strength.*" Neh. viii. 10:—

Verse 10. *Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might: for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest.*

Dejection and melancholy unbrace all the sinews of exertion. They make the hands to hang down, and the knees to become feeble. When the mind is under their influence, nothing, either of a temporal or spiritual nature, can be done with energy and effect. All is spiritless and inefficient. Whereas, when the heart is light; when the spirits are buoyant and cheerful; the whole man, in all his powers, is prompt and vigorous for duty:—"whatever the hand finds to do is done with might."

I need not say, that whatever we are admonished thus to do, must be in its nature "lawful and right." The hand may find to do what God has forbidden. But this, instead of being done with might, must not be done at all. The exhortation may be extended to *all duty*, whether in reference to ourselves, to others, or to God. In compliance with it, the child of God will not be "slothful in business," but set an example of active industry, working with his hands the thing which is good; that he may "walk honestly toward them that are without;" that he may "have lack of nothing;" and that he may "have to give to him that needeth." In compliance with it, he will "work out his own salvation with fear and trembling," in the spiritual and unremitting use of the means of establishment and growth in grace; "giving diligence to make his calling and election sure," by "adding to his faith, fortitude; and to fortitude, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly-kindness; and to

brotherly-kindness, charity." In compliance with it, he will give himself, with constant and persevering energy, to those works which have for their objects the glory of God, and the good of men, both in their temporal and eternal interests,—the works of *piety* and *benevolence*. It is probably to these that the exhortation chiefly points. Whatever opportunities God gives thee in his providence, for promoting his own glory, and for advancing the present and the everlasting well-being of thy fellow-creatures, embrace them with eagerness; apply to them all thy bodily and mental energies; persevere in them with unrelaxing ardor. Do all "heartily, as to the Lord and not to men:"—"do it *with thy might*," exerting thyself, like a person who has much to do, and who knows not how little time he may have to do it.

Such is the reason given for the admonition:—"for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest." Thou art travelling to the tomb. Every moment brings thee nearer to it; and every moment may terminate thy journey. And when thou hast arrived at "the house appointed for all living,"—"there is no *work*" there; active power is gone: there is no "*device*;" no scheme can be either planned or executed there: there is no "*knowledge*" of what passes on the earth amongst surviving men: and there is no "*wisdom*;" that which was unemployed in life, can there no longer be applied to use. In fulfilling the admonition of this verse, we imitate the example of Him whose disciples and followers we call ourselves: for his language, expressing the principle on which he acted every day, every hour, every moment of his life, is in the full spirit of it:—"I must work the works of Him that sent me while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work." John ix. 4.

These verses suggest the following reflections.

1. *In the first place*; There are some truths, in the faith of which we ought at all times to be firmly established, and of which we should not allow our conviction to be readily shaken by apparent difficulties. Of this description, especially, are those which respect the existence and perfections of Deity. Every thing derogatory to his essential excellence; every thing of the nature of imputation against any of his necessary moral attributes; we should unhesitatingly and with abhorrence reject. Difficulties in the Divine administration we might well expect to find. But let nothing of

this kind ever shake our conviction that He is righteous, and that he "loveth righteousness and hateth iniquity." It is surely much more reasonable; more accordant both with soundness of judgment and with lowliness of heart; to conclude, that whatever appears opposite to this is opposite in appearance only, and that the difficulty arises entirely from our short-sightedness and limited knowledge. "Verily there is a reward for the righteous; verily he is a God that judgeth in the earth."

2. *Secondly*; In the full confidence of this, let the people of God "rejoice in tribulation." The design of their heavenly Father, in all their trials, is in perfect harmony with the assurances of his paternal love. His discipline is one of the expressions of that love. He would be neither faithful nor kind, were he to withhold it when, in his infinite wisdom, he perceives it to be necessary for their spiritual benefit. "My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, neither be weary of his correction; for whom the Lord loveth he correcteth, even as a father the son in whom he delighteth."—"We have had fathers of our flesh who corrected us, and we gave them reverence; shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they, verily, for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure, but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness." Prov. iii. 11, 12. Heb. xii. 9, 10. Be assured of this all-merciful intention under the severest strokes of his hand: and even although you should appear to be selected for suffering, whilst the ungodly around you are enjoying prosperity, be not startled nor stumbled at this; but look, in the exercise of faith, for present and ultimate good from all that you are called to endure. Imitate Moses, in "choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season." Repress the risings of a foolish and criminal envy. Rejoice in hope. "The trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold, that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, shall be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ." Cleave to the Lord with purpose of heart. Bow to his sovereignty; yield to his wisdom; rely on his faithfulness; rejoice in his love; be strong in his strength. His grace is sufficient for you, and will "keep you through faith unto salvation."—"What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? He who spared

not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not, with him, also freely give us all things? Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall, tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? (As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.) Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors, through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Rom. viii. 31, 32, 35-39.

3. *Thirdly*; Let the ungodly and worldly man beware of interpreting his earthly prosperity, however great and however constant, into a token of Divine favor and approbation, or an evidence that God never will call him to "give an account of his stewardship." This is a miserable delusion; a fearful abuse of the providence of God. O flatter not yourselves, as if the God who permits you to prosper; the kind and indulgent Author of all your undeserved and ill-requited blessings; approves or thinks lightly of your sins. He hates them; and he *will* punish them. "He is not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness, neither shall evil dwell with him." Let not that be your encouragement to continued disregard of God, which ought to melt you to penitence, and to win your heart to gratitude and love. Let not your prosperity thus be your ruin. It is "the prosperity of *fools* that destroys them." If, lulled by such a delusion, you persist in forgetting God, and are only waked by the summons to judgment,—woe is me for you! As the righteous may be assured of the favor of God, you may, with equal certainty, be assured of his holy displeasure; and well may you tremble for its consequences. "Say unto the wicked, It shall be ill with him."—"When the wicked spring as the grass, and all the workers of iniquity do flourish, it is that they shall be destroyed for ever."—"The wrath of God," which is "revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men," rests upon them amidst all their prosperity, and shall abide upon them for ever;—the wrath of a holy, just, almighty, and immutable God. They "spring" and "flourish:" but they are not "trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, in which he is glorified;" and

“every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit, shall be hewn down, and cast into the fire.”

4. *Fourthly*; In forming our estimate of the comparative happiness of different descriptions of men, we should take into our account the whole extent of their existence, and not merely this transitory life. It is passing strange, that any who profess to believe in the immortality of man should ever overlook this self-evident principle. It is peculiarly wonderful that it should, on any occasion, escape the recollection of those who have themselves been taught of God, to “look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen.” Yet it was forgetfulness of this that constituted the main error of Asaph, when he was envious at the prosperity of the wicked; and it was by being reminded of it, that his spirit was set at liberty from the bondage of temptation. It was the saying of an ancient philosopher, that no man should be pronounced happy till after his death; by which he intended to express the extreme uncertainty of earthly enjoyments, and the impossibility of knowing how soon the sunshine of prosperity might be overcast, and how long and how deep might be the subsequent gloom:—how quickly the cup of sweets might be dashed from the lips, and a bitter cup succeed it, so full and so nauseous, as to make the sweet be all forgotten. But the word of God teaches us to go still further; not only to suspend our sentence of happiness or misery till the earthly course has been finished, but to look beyond its close, into the eternity that follows it. It would be very foolish to pronounce a man happy in this world on account of one day’s enjoyment, succeeded by threescore years of severe, unintermitted, and unmitigated suffering. It were more foolish, in the proportion of everlasting existence to the short period of human life, to call him a happy man, who should enjoy throughout the threescore years all that this world could possibly furnish, and then sink into an eternity of woe. So mighty is the disproportion between the present and the future part of man’s existence, that we cannot be said to have estimated his happiness at all, if we have left the latter out of our calculation. For the lives of all mankind together bear no proportion to eternity. They are not to it what the twinkling of an eye is to the life of Methuselah. We are not required to prefer the temporal situation of Lazarus, to that of the rich man. But who, in the possession of a

sound understanding, would hesitate to prefer the character and intire existence of the one to the character and intire existence of the other? Who would not prefer the poverty, and sores, and squalid wretchedness of the beggar, followed by an endless duration of bliss; to the riches, and health, and finery, and sumptuous fare of his lordly superior, succeeded by everlasting torment in the "fire that never shall be quenched?"

5. *Fifthly*; Let the precariousness of the tenure by which life is held; along with the decisiveness of death, in for ever terminating all connection with the concerns of time, and fixing irreversibly the future state; warn the ungodly, the careless, the worldly, to seek a more durable portion than any they can possess here, and to flee in time for refuge from the coming wrath. What a sad thing will it be, my friends, should it be said at last of any one of you, He has had his reward! "To him that is joined to all the living there is hope." Improve, then, the time of your merciful visitation. "To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts." For when a man has been "joined to the dead," if he has lived and died in his sins, hope is at an end. His sentence is sealed; and the seal can never be broken. From the prison of hell he can never return to this world; and between it and the abodes of the blessed there is fixed a great and impassable gulf; across which no sounds of mercy, no tidings of salvation, no proclamations of pardon, reach his ear. "Hope never comes, that comes to all."

As there is hope for all that are "joined to the living, we are encouraged to announce and recommend to all that live, the mercy offered by the gospel to sinners through the one Mediator. But still remember, words cannot express the uncertainty of life. To some of you, this may be your last warning. To-morrow may disjoin you from the living, and settle your eternal doom. O look now, then, unto Jesus. Defer not reflection to a day that may never be yours,—“Turn ye, turn ye, for why will ye die?”

*Lastly*; Let Christians recommend religion by displaying its cheerful influence. It is an article of your creed, that the discoveries, of the gospel are "good tidings of great joy," and that "wisdom's ways are ways of pleasantness." Let not your deportment belie your professed belief. Are you to show yourselves believers of glad tidings, by "hanging your heads like a bulrush,



and spreading sackcloth and ashes under you?" by a countenance never lighted up with a smile? by nothing but sighs, and tears, and groans? Is it not the precept of God, intimating at once your duty and your privilege, "Rejoice evermore?" Light is the emblem of knowledge, and purity, and joy; and in all its three emblematic senses, Christians are "children of light." "Come then, O house of Jacob, and walk in the light of the Lord." Truly *this* light is sweet. Present to all around you a just and inviting view of your religion. "Lie not against the truth," by leading every one that looks you in the face to fancy it a system of inveterate and incurable melancholy. There is a wide distance between cheerfulness and levity; between the tranquil yet animated gladness of the believing soul, and the frothy and transient mirth of the fool. Religion is at an equal distance from unbecoming frivolity and sullen moroseness. It is the day-light of the soul. Let it appear in its true character. Let it infuse its cheering influence into your enjoyment of all your earthly blessings. "Eat thy meat with gladness, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; and live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest." And not only so; but, animated by the faith of the Divine promises, and by the blessed prospects that are before you, "rejoice in tribulations also; knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope; and hope maketh not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in your hearts, by the Holy Spirit who is given unto you." Rom. v. 3-5.

## LECTURE XVIII.

### ECCLESIASTES IX. 11-18.

“I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race (is) not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favor to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all. 12. For man also knoweth not his time: as the fishes that (are) taken in an evil net, and as the birds that (are) caught in the snare; so (are) the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them. 13. This wisdom have I seen also under the sun, and it (seemed) great unto me: 14. (There was) a little city, and few men within it; and there came a great king against it, and besieged it, and built great bulwarks against it. 15. Now there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city; yet no man remembered that same poor man. 16. Then said I, Wisdom (is) better than strength: nevertheless the poor man’s wisdom (is) despised, and his words are not heard. 17. The words of wise (men are) heard in quiet more than the cry of him that ruleth among fools. 18. Wisdom (is) better than weapons of war: but one sinner destroyeth much good.”

HAVING, in the preceding part of the chapter, stated the fact of the indiscriminate distribution of temporal good and evil in the administration of providence, and having drawn from it the reflections and practical lessons which it suggested; the wise man returns to the further examination of the same subject, or at least of one very closely connected with it in the Divine procedure:—

Verse 11. *I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favor to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all.*

This verse has not only a connection with the general subject of the preceding passage, but a more immediate relation to verse tenth. In it he exhorts to the application of vigorous diligence in “whatever our hand findeth to do.” Here he suggests a caution against a too sanguine confidence of success, after the exer-

tion of all our ability and all our skill. Different characters are prone to oppose extremes. Some are so timid and diffident, that they will hardly undertake or exert themselves in any thing, from the apprehension of failure. Others are so dauntless and ardent, that failure hardly ever enters into their calculations. The former are in danger of losing opportunities both of doing and of obtaining good. They stand in need of excitement. The admonition of the tenth verse requires to be pressed upon their practical regard, that they may not become the victims of inactivity and sloth. The latter are in danger of precipitation and extravagance, and, by their high undoubting assurance of success, of preparing for themselves the bitterness of disappointment. They need the counsels of humility and dependence. The lesson of the eleventh verse must be urged upon their notice; a lesson, of which the truth must be obvious to every attentive observer of human affairs:—“The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favor to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all.”

We very naturally expect, that the lightest of foot should always get first to the goal, and win the prize; that in battle, the most numerous and well appointed and powerful army should uniformly be victorious; that the man of intelligence and prudence in business should never fail to make rich; that he who courts favor and popularity, by skilful and well-devised arts, should invariably succeed in gaining the good graces of his fellow-men. But experience frequently contradicts our expectations. The man who is “swift of foot as a wild roe” may trip and stumble, or by some untoward accident be thrown behind his less fleet competitor. Innumerable are the circumstances that affect what is called the fortune of war,—the chance of battle,—so that at times a hundred may put ten thousand to flight. The most intelligent and prudent do, not unfrequently, with all their application and care, fail of getting forward in the world; riches seeming unaccountably to elude their grasp. And the most insinuating and skilful courtier defeats sometimes his own purposes, or is thwarted by occurrences which he could not control, and becomes the most unpopular of men.

We are not to conclude from this, that there is no adaptation

of means to ends,—no tendency in these qualities to the desired event, more than in their opposites;—that there is no superior probability of success to the swift more than to the slow, to the strong more than to the weak, to the intelligent more than to the ignorant, to the skilful more than to the foolish. Far from it. Were this the case, we might give up altogether the use of means for the attainment of our ends, or be utterly regardless of their nature. The meaning evidently is no more than that, with all a man's superiority, success is not to be *insured*:—no man must count upon it with certainty—"Time and chance happeneth to them all."

"Time."—There are favorable and unfavorable times in which men's lot may be cast; and such times, too, may occur alternately in the experience of the same individual. A man of very inferior talent, should he fall on a favorable time, may succeed with comparative ease; whereas in a time that is not propitious, abilities of the first order cannot preserve their possessor from failure and disappointment. And even the same period may be advantageous to one description of business, and miserably the reverse to another; and it may thus be productive of prosperity to men who prosecute the former, and of loss and ruin to those engaged in the latter; although the superiority in knowledge, capacity, and prudence, may be all, and even to a great degree, on the losing side.

"Chance."—We must not understand Solomon as intending by the use of this word, to convey the idea that there is, or can be, any thing *absolutely fortuitous*. The reign of chance can never be more than imaginary. The very supposition of it is pregnant alike with impiety and absurdity. It is atheism. Chance is a term denoting ignorance, not on God's part, but on ours. It has been happily defined, although by a poet, yet without a poet's fiction,—“direction which we cannot see.” The blind Goddess of Fortune is but the creation of a foolish and ungodly fancy. Without our Heavenly Father, “a sparrow falleth not to the ground;” and no figure could more strongly express the idea of unremitted attention to the minutest interests of his children, than his “numbering the hairs of their heads.”—“The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord.”

The obvious meaning of chance here is, that there is an endless variety of circumstances and events, which cannot be foreseen, and over which, therefore, no man can have any control, which yet

must materially affect the success or the failure of all his schemes and operations. These "secret things" which "belong unto the Lord," *appear to us* as if they came by chance; and men who fear not God, idly talk of Fortune favoring them when they prosper, and of her being blind, capricious, and partial, when they fail. But all is under the superintendence of Him who is infinite in wisdom, power, and goodness. And even with regard to ourselves, it is going too far to represent human life as a perfect *lottery*, in which the wheel goes round, and blanks and prizes are drawn out, without discrimination and with equal frequency, for the indolent and the active, for the prudent and the foolish; as if indolence and activity, prudence and folly, were without distinction in their respective tendencies. There is, however, beyond question, as universal experience evinces, and as the present times impressively testify, a vast deal of uncertainty in calculating the probabilities of a man's success in any pursuit. Unanticipated circumstances may assign the laurel to the slow, and leave the swift uncrowned; may give victory to the weak, and bring defeat and shame to the strong; may confer riches and favor on the ignorant and indiscreet, and withhold them from the wise, the skilful, and intelligent. That "chance" must have this restricted meaning, is obvious: for even if it were understood as exclusive of providence, still, facts could never bear out the affirmation that there are no distinctive tendencies in different principles and modes of conduct, and that it is, unqualifiedly, all one as to the result, whether a man be diligent or slothful, prudent or insensate.

The sentiment of the eleventh verse is expanded in the twelfth:—

Verse 12. *For man also knoweth not his time: as the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare; so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them.*

"Man knoweth not his time," refers to the uncertainty of events, the fickleness of human affairs, already mentioned. A man may select his time for the execution of any purpose, with much apparent sagacity. To others, as well as to himself, it may seem the most promising that could have been chosen. Yet who can, with certainty, tell him what shall be? He knoweth not what a day may bring forth. The wind may suddenly shift. The tide may unexpectedly turn. The times may surprise him by an un-

looked for change. He may cast his seed into an excellent bed, in the best of weather; but numberless are the circumstances that may blast his hopes of a harvest. To-day may be an auspicious time, and his prospects may be brightened by the splendour of hope:—to-morrow may be unfavorable, and may cloud them with the darkness of despair. In this world of mutability, he must always plan and act with a measure of uncertainty; and ought to preface all his undertakings with—“If the Lord will.”

The fishes and the birds, roaming through their respective elements, with all the happy agility of freedom, dart suddenly into the net of the fisherman or the snare of the fowler. They are taken by surprise; taken, beyond escape; and taken, to be destroyed. “So are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them.” An evil time is a time of misfortune and calamity, which often comes unexpectedly, without the possibility either of its being anticipated, or of its mischievous effects being shunned.

There is one most important time, of which men are left in total ignorance; the time that closes their connection with this world, terminating all their schemes, and labors, and enjoyments, and prospects. To the ungodly, this is indeed “an evil time,” the worst of all times: and how often has it “fallen suddenly upon them!” How often, when a man has been in the uninterrupted course of his prosperity, rising rapidly to the summit of his wishes;—when he has realized his fortune, finished his house, laid out his lands,—and is saying to his soul, “Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry,”—is he “snared in an evil time,” and in a moment goes down to the grave!—“O that men were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end.”

His general observations Solomon illustrates by a case, which we may suppose to have been a matter of fact that had come to his knowledge:—

Verses 13–16. *This wisdom have I seen also under the sun, and it seemed great unto me. There was a little city, and few men within it; and there came a great king against it, and besieged it, and built great bulwarks against it. Now there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city; yet no man remembered this same poor man. Then said I, Wisdom is better than strength;*

*nevertheless, the poor man's wisdom is despised, and his words are not heard.*

"This wisdom seemed great" to Solomon. He was delighted with it. It was found where it was not looked for. The governors of the city, the public functionaries, would no doubt set all their wits to work, to devise means of safety. But they could think of none that gave any promise of proving effectual. They were at a stand; and would of, course, have surrendered at discretion, or have perished by the sword of exterminating vengeance. In this emergency, an obscure, unknown, "poor man, by his wisdom saved the city," which was little in itself, ill defended, and quite incapable of withstanding the besieging army of a great king.

"Yet no man remembered this same poor man." The danger was no sooner over, than he was ungratefully forgotten, and his important service was unrewarded. "Wisdom," on this occasion, was "better than strength," and prevailed against it, foiling the might of the assailing enemy. But the honor that is due to wisdom is not always obtained by its possessor. Had this wise man been at the same time a man of station and wealth, his name would probably have been recorded in the annals of the city, a pillar possibly reared at the time to commemorate his service, and a monument of regret erected over his grave. But the man was poor; and having been neglected before, he quickly relapsed into his original obscurity. "His wisdom was despised, and his words were not heard." They *were* indeed heard; but it was only in the moment of danger and alarm. Or, for aught we can say, the poor man's scheme might be devised and executed by himself, done secretly, or with the concurrence and aid of a few more of his own station. And whether this was the case, or whether it was laid before the chief men of the city, and by them adopted, the effect might be envy, and consequent studied neglect. For although a pressing sense of immediate danger might induce them at the time to listen to and follow his counsel, it might still be with the despicable feelings of spiteful jealousy; and when the danger was past, the same feelings might induce them to treat with neglect the poor benefactor of their city; or he might speedily escape their memories, as "the chief butler," when restored to his honors, "remembered not Joseph, but forgot him."

But why is this incident introduced here? What is its connection

with the writer's subject? The connection is far from being distant. It presents an illustration, in two views, of the sentiment in the eleventh verse. It shows, *in the first place*, that "the battle is not to the strong." A mighty monarch came against this small and feeble city, invested it, and constructed his works around it. Its destruction seemed inevitable. But there happened to be within its walls, amongst the obscure part of its population, a poor man, who in his wisdom suggested some expedient, which baffled the exertions and frustrated the hopes of the enemy, rendering all his engines and bulwarks useless and unavailing. This little circumstance, unforeseen and unexpected, disconcerted the whole project, and gave preservation and victory to the weak. It shows, *secondly*, that "favor is not to men of skill." It does not appear, it is true, that the poor man had any such object in view as courting favor. But he displayed wisdom and skill; and he missed their merited recompense. His poverty and obscurity, or the envy of those in power and station, deprived him of his due.

Verse 17. *The words of wise men are heard in quiet more than the cry of him that ruleth among fools.*

There seems, at first view, an inconsistency between the end of the sixteenth verse and the seventeenth. In the former it is said, "The poor man's wisdom is despised, and his words are not heard:—in the latter, "The words of wise men are heard in quiet, more than the cry of him that ruleth among fools."—In the seventeenth verse, there is probably a reference to the quiet way in which this "poor wise man" saved the city. We may suppose him to have communicated his scheme to two or three privately, who had the good sense to hear him, and to enter into his views; and whilst "the cry of him that ruled among fools,"—the loud and blustering bravadoes, it may be, of a senseless and headstrong ruler, were not only unavailing, but calculated to hasten and to aggravate the ruin of the place,—the wisdom of this poor man was "heard in quiet," and was secretly, and without noise and ostentation, working its deliverance. This renders the sixteenth and seventeenth verses quite consistent; the latter referring to the attention shown to his wise suggestions at the time, and their influence in effecting the deliverance of the city; and the former, to the subsequent disregard of the man himself and of his wisdom, when the threatening danger was past,—the indisposition then either to



hear or to profit by it, or to give respect and honor to its possessor.

Verse 18. *Wisdom is better than weapons of war: but one sinner destroyeth much good.*

In the instance which Solomon had just adduced, the truth of the former part of this verse had been illustrated and established. Wisdom had proved its superiority to military weapons and war-like engines, for it had effectually overcome them; and it had thus accomplished what forcible resistance would have attempted in vain. And even on the supposition that "weapons of war" could have delivered the city, still it must have been at the expense of blood, and of varied and accumulated distress,—of the tortures of the wounded, and the groans of the dying, and the tears of widows, and orphans, and friends; all which was prevented by the timely exercise of wisdom.

From his being contrasted with one "sinner," we are naturally led to consider the wise man as not only politically sagacious and prudent, but wise in a higher sense,—truly good, influenced by right principles, by motives of genuine disinterested benevolence, by regard to the will of God and the obligations of duty, satisfied with the attainment of the benefit to others, without stopping to calculate the possible results to himself. This one wise man *effected* much good: but "one sinner *destroyeth* much good." It is far easier to do harm, than to do good. And one wicked man, possessed of a little mischievous subtlety and address, may, and alas! often does, succeed in thwarting and frustrating the best concerted schemes; overturning the most prudent and beneficial regulations; effectually embarrassing the wisdom of the wise; and impeding the efforts of the benevolent; and thus producing the most serious and incalculable injury.

The influence of one truly wise and good man may be very extensive, both upon the temporal and the spiritual condition of others; in preventing evil, and in promoting personal and social happiness. But how much good, on the contrary, may not one sinner destroy! and how much positive evil may he not be the instrument of working! How often has such a man broken the peace and ruined the comfort of families, which might otherwise have remained united and happy! How often has he sown in secret the seeds of jealousy and discord in a circle of friends and

acquaintances! How often fanned the flame of discontent, sedition, and rebellion, in a community enjoying a happy measure of peace, freedom, and prosperity! How often has he blasted characters by defamation and slander, and thus marred and destroyed extensive usefulness! How often, by falsehood and misrepresentation, has he imposed on others, to the loss of their property, the ruin of their affairs, and the consequent distress of themselves and families! How often—But time would fail me to enumerate all the ways in which a sinner may destroy temporal good. Then, when we think of the good he may destroy, and the evil he may occasion, of a spiritual kind, how weightily must the observation be felt by every serious mind! By plausible and sophistical, but palatable and seductive reasonings, he may shake and root out the half-formed principles of the unestablished inquirer, acting as Satan's instrument in "catching away what has been sown in his heart;" by his example, his counsel, his sneers, and his flatteries, by adorning in captivating and alluring colors the pleasures of sin, touching by ridicule the feelings of false pride, representing as unreasonable the restraints of religion and virtue, praising the spirit, and working on the vanity of his victim, he may successfully entice the young and unwary to criminal indulgence, and may thus baffle the efforts, and balk the delighted hopes, of godly parents. He may take a malignant pleasure in plying his arts of temptation upon the more established, and he may exult in the desolating effects of his occasional success,—when a godly man has been entangled in his snares, or has tripped and fallen over any of his stumbling-blocks, and has thus offended the church of God, opened the mouths of the profane to scorn and blasphemy, and hardened the infidel in his unbelief, and the transgressor in his course of sin. He may set himself down as a centre of contagion, and may spread all around him a moral and spiritual pestilence, counter-working all the purifying, salubrious, and life-giving efforts of piety and benevolence, of parental solicitude, ministerial zeal, and private philanthropy. The corruption of one may spread to ten; of ten to a hundred; of a hundred to a thousand. And it goes down through succeeding generations. The corrupted father communicates the taint to his children; and they again to theirs. So that the pernicious influence of "one sinner" that lived in the time of Solomon, may be widely felt,

though it cannot be traced, even at the present day; and the mischief of one destroyer of good amongst ourselves, may continue and increase to the very close of time!

My Christian brethren, let us bear in mind, that this infectious nature of sin is one of the reasons why we are admonished to attend to the purity of fellowship in the church of God. "Know ye not, that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out, therefore, the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ, our passover, is sacrificed for us. Therefore, let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." 1 Cor. v. 6-8. "Looking diligently, lest any man fail of the grace of God: lest any root of bitterness, springing up, trouble you, and thereby many be defiled." Heb. xii. 15. O let us beware of ever fancying there can be safety, where the Lord has declared there is danger. We are not sufficiently impressed with the deceitfulness of our own hearts, when we entertain such a thought. Let us ever cherish humility and self-vigilance; and see to it that we ourselves be promoters and not destroyers of good. Let us, at the same time, in the united exercise of Christian love and Christian faithfulness, guard against the wilful admission of corruption, the voluntary implanting of "roots of bitterness;" and when corruption has been unwittingly received, and has subsequently discovered itself, let us beware of its presumptuous retention, in open-eyed disobedience to the will of Christ; self-sufficient insensibility to our own danger; and disregard of the honor of his name.

Although there are principles in our nature, as fallen creatures, which render the work of the sinner, in doing evil and destroying good, much more easy than that of the wise man in promoting good and repressing evil, yet let us be encouraged in all our benevolent labors, especially those for the spiritual benefit of others, by considering the extent of possible advantage from success in a single instance. The seduction of one is fearful, both in itself, and in the sad train of consequences that may arise from it. But let us not forget how valuable, in itself and in its possible results, is the conversion and salvation of one. "If any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him, let him know, that he who converteth the sinner from the error of his way, shall save a soul

from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins." Even if the good stopped here, it would be inestimably precious; for "what is a man profited, if he should gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" But think of the influence of this individual on others, in the family, in the circle of relatives and friends, and in the neighborhood to which he belongs; and, through them, on successive generations to the end of time. "He established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers that they should make them known unto their children; that the generation to come might know them, even the children who should be born, who should arise and declare them to their children; that they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments." Psalm lxxviii. 5-7. How animating is the thought, (and there is no enthusiastic extravagance in it,) that the good we now do may continue to be felt, and felt in a constantly widening circle, till the last trumpet shall sound!—that one sinner brought back to God may, for aught we can tell, prove, in course of time, the salvation of thousands! The solitary seed that has yielded thirty, sixty, or a hundred fold, stops not there. Each of the grains of its produce may yield the same; and field must be added to field to receive the accumulating increase. Let parents, let ministers, let Sabbath-school teachers, let all in their respective spheres of spiritual influence, be stimulated by such considerations to lively and persevering exertions; and to the seizure of every opportunity, on which prudence lays not an evident interdict, of "seeking the profit of others that they may be saved."

Let us further learn from this passage, to *beware of self-dependence*. If "the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong," then ought the admonition to be obeyed, as the dictate of Divine wisdom as well as the injunction of Divine authority—"Trust in the Lord with all thy heart, and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and he shall direct thy paths." Fully assured that—although to us the future is uncertain, and events that have been unanticipated may to our minds seem accidental—there is no such thing as chance or fatalism, but that all things are under the immediate and unceasing superintendence of an all-wise providence, let us consider it as our part

to use means, to look to God for his blessing, and to leave the issue in his hands. This state of mind is the most consistent at once with duty and with happiness. It keeps the spirit tranquil; disposed to gratitude for success, and at the same time prepared for possible disappointment; "the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keeping the heart and mind through Christ Jesus." As we ought not to "boast of to-morrow, because we know not what a day may bring forth;" so, neither should we be over-anxious about to-morrow, because we may be distressing ourselves about what we are never to see. How beautiful, how affectionate, how persuasive, and how full of argument, the Saviour's exhortations to his disciples against all anxious concern about the future days of life! "Wherefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air; for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are not ye much better than they? Which of you, by taking thought, can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: and yet I say unto you, that even Solomon, in all his glory, was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (for after all these things do the Gentiles seek;) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take, therefore, no thought for the morrow; for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." Matt. vi. 25-34.

And whilst we learn the lesson of dependence on God respecting all our temporal interests, let us be equally on our guard against depending on ourselves in our Christian course, in our spiritual warfare,—in "running the race set before us,"—in "fighting the good fight of faith." Our speed in the one, our courage and strength in the other, and our victory in both, must come from

above. Divesting ourselves of all self-confidence, let our trust be in Him who "giveth power to the faint, and to them that have no might increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; they shall walk, and not faint." Isa. xl. 29-31.

Further: It is the part of true wisdom to be prepared, as far as its precautions can reach, against possible emergencies. Let none of you, then, count upon life,—no, not for an hour;—for "man knoweth not his time." Death is at once the most certain and the most uncertain of all things. It must come; but *when*, or *how*, O who shall tell us? Every one of us has his "time," fixed in the purpose of Him who "appoints us our bounds, that we cannot pass." How awful will it be, if *that* time come upon any of you unawares!—if, "as the fishes are taken in an evil net, and the birds are caught in the snare," so you should be "snared in an evil time," by its "falling suddenly upon you." Ah! then will it be to you an evil time indeed! O ye careless children of men, who are treading every moment on the verge of eternity, trifle no longer with its infinitely weighty concerns; lest it should be with you as it was with the incredulous and infatuated antediluvians, who scorned the warning voice of the "preacher of righteousness." They were "eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark; and knew not until the flood came, and took them all away." Beware, then, lest while *you* "say, Peace and safety, sudden destruction should come upon you!" "What meanest thou, O sleeper? Arise, and call upon thy God" to save thee from the gathering storm; for the elements are conspiring thy ruin. Think not to brave it. Speed thee to the Ark which he has provided for thy security, and where alone thou canst be safe. Come to Jesus! Make him thy refuge! All shall then be well,—all safe,—safe for eternity.

And ye, brethren in the Lord, join to the lesson of dependence on God, the lesson of sleepless vigilance. It was not to men of the world, but even to his own disciples, that Christ addressed the warning,—"Take heed, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness, and the cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares."—"Be ye, there-

fore, sober, and watch unto prayer." Be ever at your respective posts, in the service of your Master: and then, although you know not the time of his coming, it will never be to you "an evil time." Whether he arrive "at even or at midnight, or at cock-crowing, or in the morning," let him find you watching.

In occupying your talents for the glory of God and for the good of men, you may not always meet from the latter with a suitable return. This "poor wise man, who by his wisdom delivered the city," had he been again placed in similar circumstances, might have been tempted to consult his own preservation only, and to leave those who had so ungratefully neglected and scorned him, to shift for themselves. This would have been the conduct dictated by the ordinary principles prevalent in the world. But the Bible teaches a lesson more disinterested and generous. We must not be "weary in well-doing," even to those from whom we may have met with a sorry recompense. Let your eye be directed, not to men, but to him who "is not unrighteous, to forget your work and labor of love, which ye show toward his Name;" and his example is to be the model from which you are to copy:—"Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them who despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father who is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them who love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father who is in heaven is perfect." Matt. v. 44-48.

## LECTURE XIX.

ECCLESIASTES X. 1-10.

“Dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savor: (so doth) a little folly him that is in reputation for wisdom (and) honor. 2. A wise man’s heart (is) at his right hand; but a fool’s heart at his left. 3. Yea also, when he that is a fool walketh by the way, his wisdom faileth (him,) and he saith to every one (that) he (is) a fool. 4. If the spirit of the ruler rise up against thee, leave not thy place; for yielding pacieth great offences. 5. There is an evil (which) I have seen under the sun, as an error (which) proceedeth from the ruler: 6. Folly is set in great dignity, and the rich sit in low place. 7. I have seen servants upon horses, and princes walking as servants upon the earth. 8. He that diggeth a pit shall fall into it; and whoso breaketh a hedge, a serpent shall bite him. 9. Whoso removeth stones shall be hurt therewith; (and) he that cleaveth wood shall be endangered thereby. 10. If the iron be blunt, and he do not whet the edge, then must he put to more strength: but wisdom (is) profitable to direct.”

HAVING spoken of the excellence of wisdom, Solomon here proceeds to lay down certain maxims, relative both to its advantages, and to the mode of its exercise.

The first of these is an observation founded on universal experience, and arising both from the nature of the thing, and from the corruption of the human heart:—

Verse 1. *Dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savor; so doth a little folly him that is in reputation for wisdom and honor.*

When the apothecary has compounded his ointment of the richest and sweetest ingredients, with much skill, and care, and time; if flies fall into it, and die there, and putrify, especially in a hot climate, they will destroy its pleasant fragrance, and produce an offensive stench. So, when a man has acquired a high reputation for wisdom, and an honorable character, the higher he rises in



public estimation, the more cautious and guarded he requires to become in his behavior: for "a little folly" will mar, and may even ruin his good name; and bring him to neglect and disgrace. As dead flies spoil the sweet odor of the ointment, so doth "a little folly," a remaining foible, a comparatively trifling inconsistency, or even an occasional slip, affect the character of the man who "is in reputation for wisdom and honor."

The causes of this do not lie deep:—

In the first place. In proportion to the height of a man's reputation, *he attracts notice*. The eyes of others are upon him. The fool passes unheeded; nobody minding what he says or what he does. But when a person rises to eminence, his behavior is marked. It becomes the subject of scrutiny and of conversation. An importance attaches to whatever he is, or says, or does. And the more eyes are fastened on a man, the less likely is any infirmity or fault to escape detection and animadversion. "A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid."

Secondly. The higher a man's reputation is, *the more is expected of him*. The less allowance, consequently, is made for his failings. That which in an ordinary man would have passed unobserved, is noticed in him with surprise and astonishment. Instead of his defects being lost, like the spots in the sun, amid the blaze of his excellences, the very light of his virtues serves to give them relief and prominence; so that they are in great danger of proving a counterbalance to all his estimable qualities.

Thirdly. This danger is ten-fold increased by the influence of a principle, which, (alas for human nature!) is too welcome a guest, too close an inmate in our bosoms; and of which we had occasion, in a former lecture, to expose the odious nature and mischievous effects,—I mean *spite* and *envy*. It is the malevolent wish of envy, to keep down a rising character to the common level. We are mortified by the superiority of others, especially if, by talent and diligence, they have passed ourselves in the race and left us behind them. It is its aim and business, both to depreciate the merits, and to magnify the faults, of its objects; and eagerly does it avail itself of "a little folly," marking it with hawk-eyed keenness, exposing and exaggerating it, setting it in the most unfavorable lights, associating it slyly and malignantly with each of the person's excellences, not so as to hide it by means of them, but

to disparage them by means of it, and in every way improving it to the discredit and the ruin of his reputation.

Such being the case, the obvious improvement which should be made of it by "the man who is in reputation for wisdom and honor" is, to "ponder the path of his feet,"—to be *very circum-spect* and *very consistent*. This he ought to aim at with unremitting vigilance, not only for his own sake, but for the sake of his usefulness, in the employment of his wisdom and influence for the good of men, and for the glory of God; his power to do good being necessarily proportioned to the esteem in which he is held.

Solomon's next observation regards the advantage of the wise man over the fool, in the management of all descriptions of business:—

Verses 2, 3. *A wise man's heart is at his right hand; but a fool's heart is at his left. Yea, also, when he that is a fool walketh by the way, his wisdom faileth him, and he saith to every one that he is a fool.*

It is evident from the connection, that the *heart* in this place, as in many other instances in the Scriptures, means the *judgment* or *understanding* of man. It is the same word that, in the third verse, is rendered *wisdom*; "His wisdom faileth him," being, in the original, "his *heart* faileth him." The "right hand" is the hand which men usually employ, in works both of labor and of skill; and which they use with the greatest readiness, dexterity, and success. The expression, therefore, in the second verse, "A wise man's heart is at his right hand, but a fool's heart is at his left,"—seems to mean—*First*: That a wise man *minds his own proper business*; whereas the fool neglects what belongs to himself, and is exceedingly officious, intermeddling, and full of sagacious counsel, in every one's concerns but his own. Any wisdom he has is "at his left hand:" it is applied in the wrong place.—*Secondly*: The understanding of the wise man is at all times *ready for his immediate direction*,—"at his right hand." So that, being steadily applied to its proper business, it is prepared to meet times of emergency, and to act as circumstances direct, so as not to ruin or even injure his affairs, either by imprudent precipitation or unnecessary delay. The fool, on the contrary, is ever uncertain; ever at a loss; all hesitation and perplexity. His wisdom is always to seek. It is never to be found at home: but is continually

roaming abroad among a thousand matters with which he has nothing to do: so that, in his own proper concerns he is incessantly taken at unawares, startled, disconcerted, stupified; and the moment of needful action being lost, his affairs are irretrievably disordered.—*Thirdly*: That which the wise man does, his wisdom enables him to do *well*—with *skill* and *dexterity*—(a word derived from the very circumstance of the right hand being the hand of promptitude and skill,)\*—whereas the fool, when he does any thing at all, does it with his left hand; not only applying any little fragments of wisdom he may possess, in a wrong direction, but bungling, blundering, and failing, even in that which he attempts.

The fool has not even so much wisdom as to conceal his folly. “When he walketh by the way,”—that is, in the whole of his ordinary intercourse with men,—in the daily concerns of common life,—“his wisdom faileth him, and he saith to every one that he is a fool.” He cannot meet a neighbor on the road without making an exposure of his folly. By some ridiculous speech or out-of-the-way action, he makes the vacancy or the distortion of his mind as apparent as if he were to say to every one, “I am a fool.” He blabs out imprudently and inconsiderately what he does know, without regard to time, place, or company; or he talks ignorantly and absurdly of what he does not know. By his words, by his actions, or by his manner in both, he tells to all his folly, exposing himself to the pity of some, and to the contempt and derision of others. Nobody respects him; nobody can place any dependence upon him, or commit any business to his care.

The fourth verse contains one of the counsels of wisdom:—

Verse 4. *If the spirit of the ruler rise up against thee, leave not thy place; for yielding pacifieth great offences.*

It is very similar to the advice in chap. viii. 3,—“Be not hasty to go out of his sight; stand not in an evil thing; for he doeth whatsoever pleaseth him.”

The case brought before us is that of a real or supposed fault on the part of a subject, by which the anger of his prince has been excited. In such circumstances, a proud and hasty fool would instantly throw up his place, avow himself a rebel, and endanger his head. Wisdom will act a different part. “Leave not thy place:”—do not rashly and passionately quit the prince’s presence

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\*Latin—Dexter.

and renounce his service. If you have committed the fault, frank and ingenuous confession is more than your interest,—it is your incumbent duty. If you have not, yield a little in the mean time, and take a more favorable opportunity afterwards, when “the spirit of the ruler” is calmer, and more disposed to listen to reason and right, of clearing your character, and establishing your innocence. Do not argue with an angry man; and least of all with an angry prince. Let him have time to cool. “Yielding pacifieth great offences.” It settles them, and brings them to rest. There is a vast deal more to be gained by meekness and gentleness, and by a little calm prudence and management, than by resentful and intemperate violence.

Rulers, it is acknowledged by the Royal Preacher, do not always conduct themselves agreeably to the dictates of true wisdom, or in a manner in all respects calculated to fix the affectionate regards of their subjects. One evil, fitted to give occasion for much envy and jealousy, contempt and wrath, he specifies in

Verses 5–7. *There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, as an error which proceedeth from the ruler. Folly is set in great dignity, and the rich sit in low place. I have seen servants upon horses, and princes walking as servants upon the earth.*

The evil which is animadverted on in these words is the capricious and unreasonable advancement of ignorant and incapable minions from a low to a high station; from inferiority and subjection to eminence and authority; whilst the nobles of the land, who, from their birth, and wealth, and influence, might be supposed destined to high place, and by their education, and the study of the law, and government, and politics of their country, qualified for elevation and rule, are overlooked and degraded, being set beneath the indigent, and empty, and despicable upstart; so that while a servant,—or rather a slave,—rides in all the pomp of pageantry and state, princes and nobles walk—as his inferiors and attendants—on foot. This was far from being a very uncommon case under the despotic governments of the East; slaves of the palace being not unfrequently, from caprice, partiality, or secret selfishness, advanced to the highest ranks, to look down, in haughty superciliousness, on their natural and deserving superiors.

The passage is not to be interpreted as if it precluded men of low degree from mounting by their own merit, gradually and

fairly, by successive steps of advancement, even to the highest and most honorable offices of the state. The evil consists in elevating the low, not merely from a low station, but from such a station accompanied with *incapacity*:—"FOLLY is set in great dignity." Uneducated, inexperienced, narrow-minded, and imprudent men; as low in mental character as base in birth and in station; are suddenly exalted to superiority and power, by senseless or unprincipled favoritism. Such men have disgraced their unseemly dignity, by mean, mercenary, imperious, rash, and ruinous misconduct. For, in most instances, such *upstarts* in the state turn out not merely fools, but insolent and overbearing tyrants.

Many a time has such conduct brought shame and ruin, not on the favorite himself only, but on his imprudent master, accompanied sometimes, also, with serious calamity to the state: and the language of the following verse might be considered as referring to the foolishness of such a ruler; who, in degrading his nobles, and exalting his unworthy minion, *digs a pit for himself*:—Verse 8. "He that diggeth a pit shall fall into it; and whoso breaketh a hedge, a serpent shall bite him."

The eighth, ninth, and tenth verses, however, taken together, may be more naturally interpreted, as a caution against rash, inconsiderate rebellion;—precipitate, ill-advised, ill-concerted, and ill-conducted attempts, to overturn or to alter the established government of a country. Such attempts can never be made without imminent hazard to him who ventures upon them:—

Verses 8-10. *He that diggeth a pit shall fall into it; and he that breaketh a hedge, a serpent shall bite him. Whoso removeth stones shall be hurt therewith; and he that cleaveth wood shall be endangered thereby. If the iron be blunt, and he do not whet the edge, then must he put to more strength:—but wisdom is profitable to direct.*

Even with regard to such a court minion as has above been described, the patriotic desire to bring him down from his elevation, and to deliver the country from the mischiefs his folly inflicts upon it, may be attended with no little danger in the attempt at its accomplishment. The man who violently seeks his downfall may bring injury, and possibly even death, upon himself.

But the verses have a general and strong application to those who give way to the suggestions of pride and resentment for real or fancied injuries, and are driven on, by intemperate discontent,

to schemes of sedition, or open rebellion. When a man digs a pit, there is a risk of his falling into it himself. So when either a ruler becomes a tyrant, or a subject a rebel, the oppressive abuse of power endangers the safety of the one, and the resistance of lawful authority that of the other. The violent dealing both of the tyrant and of the rebel, is ever ready to come down upon their own heads. All history concurs to show us, how both the one and the other have "dugged pits" for themselves,—falling victims to their own lawless passions, or to their inconsideration and rashness; the retributive justice of Divine providence frequently displaying itself, in infatuating wicked men, in leaving them to outwit themselves, and to be "snared in the works of their own hands."

The man who "breaks a hedge,"—an old hedge, where serpents are wont to lurk,—may expect to be bitten: so he who attempts incautiously to break down or to root up the ancient fences and boundaries of law and government, is in imminent jeopardy of receiving deadly stings;—either bringing down premature vengeance upon his head from the existing powers, or involving himself in ruin by the disturbances which he excites.

"Whoso removeth stones"—from a building, for instance, with the view of pulling it down,—*"shall be hurt therewith;"* the stones falling upon him, bruising him, and breaking his bones,—especially if he goes to work in a hasty and unskilful manner, or attempts the removal of what is too heavy for his strength:—so the man who sets himself to pull down or to alter the fabric of the constitution and government of a country, undertakes a work of no light or trifling difficulty, and a work always of hazard to himself, and very often of fearfully doubtful benefit to others. It is a vast deal easier to find fault than to mend; to complain of what is wrong, than to substitute what is right; to pull down an old house, than to build up a new one.

"And he that cleaveth wood shall be endangered therewith." In all cases there is risk of this. But the risk is various in degree; and it is especially great, when a man sets about his work with bad tools:—

Verse 10. "If the iron be blunt, and he do not whet the edge, then must he put to more strength;" and the more strength he is obliged to apply, the hazard of accident becomes the more immi-

ment. So is it with the man who presumes to act the part of a corrector of errors, and reformer of abuses, without natural capacity; without experience and skill; without adequate and well-prepared means: or who attempts to accomplish by force and violence what he cannot effect by prudence and management. The peril to himself is thus tenfold augmented, and along with the peril to himself, the hazard of mischief to others.

But in these, and in all other matters, "wisdom is profitable to direct." It is of use to guide us in the whole of our conduct, according to the circumstances which providence allots us:—to "direct" to the most proper *objects* of desire and pursuit, and to the best *means* of attaining them; to the most eligible *method of employing* these means, and to the most suitable *time* for their application. All these come within the province of wisdom; and to all these due attention is necessary, in order to good being done effectually and safely without failure and shame, and without concomitant or subsequent mischief.

1. Allow me, before closing—in the first place; to apply the observation in the the first verse of the chapter, in a more particular manner, to *Christian character*.—"A good name," it is said in the beginning of the seventh chapter, "is better than precious ointment." In proportion to its value, it should be preserved with care; as the apothecary will be anxious, according to the fineness and costliness of his perfume, to keep it from dead flies, and every other means of deterioration and corruption. It is precious in itself, and ought to be carefully retained for its own sake. It is precious on account of the happy influence imparted by it, in enforcing all a man's instructions, and counsels, and attempts at usefulness; and should be cherished for the sake of its effects. When a man possesses a high character as a CHRISTIAN, he is "in reputation for wisdom and honor" of the most excellent kind. This is "a good name" indeed;—the best it is possible to enjoy. It is like that sacred ointment, compounded by the instructions of God himself, which was to be applied to no common or profane use, and of which no imitation was permitted to be made. O my Christian brethren, of what importance is it, for the honor of God our Saviour, and for the best interests of our fellow-men, that we preserve this reputation untainted! When David, by his fall, "gave occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme," he did

essential injury to both; injury that has never been repaired even to this day:—for his recorded sin is still the sneer of the scoffing infidel, and the encouragement of the determined offender. O seek, earnestly and importunately seek, those supplies of grace that are needful, for enabling you to maintain a steady consistency, —to keep your garments clean, amid the pollutions of a defiled and defiling world,—to keep the sweet perfume of your Christian virtues free from the corruption of offensive incongruities. Remember, the eyes of the men of the world are intently fixed on those whom the blessed Redeemer has “chosen out of the world,” and who profess to have separated themselves from its sins and its vanities. They watch them narrowly. They are acute detectors of inconsistency. They have a malignant satisfaction in the discovery of evil; and, when a discovery is made, there are no bounds to the severity of their censure; they know not what it is to make allowances. It speedily circulates, gathering aggravations in its progress. It is commented on with all the keenness of invective, and all the bitterness of sarcasm; with the sneer, the shrug, the wink, the smile of irony, the sallies of satirical humor, and the loud laugh of jesting and buffoonery. The unhappy transgressor may have “wept a silent flood; his penitent spirit may have been “pierced through with many sorrows;” he may have “confessed his transgression to the Lord,” and found forgiveness at the foot of the cross. But the evil he has done to others may be beyond remedy. And remember, my brethren, it is not by gross sins alone that your Christian reputation and usefulness may be injured. Flaws and defects, and failings, which in others would pass unnoticed, may be marked and magnified in you. The unguarded liberty of a single hour may sink in the scale the character acquired in successive years; and even a foible may mar your influence, and be like the dead fly in the ointment of the apothecary. The higher you stand in situation and repute, the greater is your danger, and the more imperative the call to vigilant self-jealousy.—Be you ever so watchful, it is true, you may be the victims of calumny and false accusation; but let it be your constant aim, with the implored aid of the Spirit of God, to “abstain from all appearance of evil,” and to “cut off occasion from those who desire occasion” against yourselves, and against the Master whom you serve. “Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time. Let



your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man."—"Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts; and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear: having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak against you as of evil-doers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ." Col. iv. 5, 6. 1 Pet. iii. 15, 16.

2. *Secondly*; If a wise man's heart is at his right hand, and a fool's heart at his left, there is one most important particular in which all are by nature fools; and the grace of God alone corrects the folly.—There is one object, about which every man whose understanding is not miserably perverted, must feel a special solicitude; and for which, calculating on the principles of common prudence, every thing else ought to be cheerfully sacrificed. Yet while "all things are full of labor," the diversified toils of men are almost exclusively for "the meat that perisheth." How few comparatively mind the gracious injunction, to "labor for that which endureth to eternal life!" This is a description of labor to which men have no natural inclination; in which, alas! every man's heart is "at his left hand." He either neglects it altogether, or he sets about it on false principles, and in a wrong way. The truly wise man, the man whose heart is "at his right hand," considers immortality as incomparably the most important concern of an immortal creature; and the service of God, in whatever sphere he occupies, as his happiness and his honor. To this service he applies his right hand; employing in it all his power and all his skill.—And whilst he pursues the highest of all aims, he does it according to the directions of a wisdom superior to his own. The fool may attempt to serve God in his own way and in his own strength, and to attain immortal life on the ground of his own fancied merits. But the wise man, impressed with the presumption and vanity of all such attempts on the part of sinful creatures, guilty, condemned, and without strength, accepts, with gratitude, the offers of mercy. Instead of "going about to establish his own righteousness;" trying to make out a condition of life which he has already violated; forming and breaking unprofitable resolutions; he "submits himself to the righteousness of God,"—"the righteousness which is by faith." "Accepted in

the beloved," he gives himself to God in active service, under the impulse of grateful love. His *right hand*, and all the powers of his mind directing its efforts, are devoted to his new Master. He follows implicitly the dictates of his will; throwing aside his own inventions and reasonings, and pursuing Divine ends by Divine means; seeking God's glory in God's own way; and never presuming that he can improve upon the counsels of Heaven. When he acts otherwise than thus, his "heart is at his left hand." "Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool that he may be wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God; for it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness: and again, The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain." If, instead of humbly abiding by the instructions given us, we begin to devise rules and to follow methods of our own, it will turn out in the end only an exhibition of our folly. It will be "saying to every one that we are fools." And instead of whatsoever we do prospering, nothing can be anticipated from our schemes but failure and shame.

3. *Thirdly*; Observe the manner in which all offences and differences should be managed, if our object be to heal, and to restore confidence and peace. The advice and sentiment in the fourth verse may be profitably generalized. You may not be called to "Stand before kings," and to incur the displeasure of rulers. But in all the various intercourse of life,—in the family, in the church, in the world,—bear in mind the maxim, that "yielding pacifieth great offences." Nothing is to be gained by proud defiance and angry violence; by the display of an unbending spirit; a spirit that scorns to confess its own faults, and that seems to stoop and condescend, with haughty superciliousness, in receiving the acknowledgments of others. A gentle, yielding spirit is the spirit of conciliation and harmony. Anger irritates and inflames the wound; meekness mollifies, cleanses, and heals it. Resentful pride adds fury to the storm; a mild demeanor changes it to a calm. By the pouring on of oil we may smooth the wave, which we should lash and rebuke in vain. "Put on, therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering; forbearing one another and

forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any; even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfectness: and let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful." Col. iii. 12-15.

4. *Fourthly*; It is a good general principle, reasonable in its nature, and beneficial in its application, that every man keep within his own sphere in society, discharging its duties with humility, and judging others with candor.—Public men are exposed to many and strong temptations; and on many occasions, amidst the contending interests of the members of their own community, and the relative claims of foreign states, cannot fail to be environed with perplexing difficulties. We certainly expect more than is reasonable, if we imagine they are never to err, or that their errors are always to be trivial. Let us place ourselves in their situation, and, sensible of the deceitfulness of our own hearts, and of our liableness to err and to be imposed upon even in the little concerns of common life, let us not be extravagant in our expectations, or harsh and contemptuous in our judgments.—Not that princes and the administrators of government are never to be told of their errors, and of the dangers and the mischiefs to which the country is exposed by their misrule. Only let us be diffident and candid, and ready to make fair and reasonable allowances.—And let us beware of rash and hasty interference. There are few things in which consideration and caution are more imperiously required, than the redress of grievances and the reformation of abuses. Resentment and pride are dangerous counsellors; and measures of precipitation and violence are seldom either equitable or expedient. Those men are often the most forward with their schemes and their offers of aid, who are least qualified for the work, and least aware either of the difficulties of its execution, or of the problematical uncertainty of its consequences.—The body politic, like the animal body, will ever be most vigorous and thriving, when all the members keep their proper places, and duly fulfill their respective functions. And the same similitude is applied by inspired authority to the church, or the body of Christ. "The body is not one member, but many. If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the

body? And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? and if the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body as it hath pleased him.—And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee; nor again, the head to the feet, I have no need of you.—That there should be no schism in the body; but that all the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honored, all the members rejoice with it.” 1 Cor. xii. 14–18, 21, 25, 26.

Beware, especially, of intermeddling with others from envy, or any such malignant principle, with a view to bring them down. Many a time, in such cases, has the saying been verified, “He that diggeth a pit shall fall into it.” In the secret workings of his providence, the Lord often turns into foolishness the evil devices of men against one another, and particularly against his own people; and entangles their feet in the meshes of their own snares. Haman was hanged on the gallows which he had prepared for Mordecai; and Mordecai, whom he had sought to crush, was advanced to dignity and honor. The author of a calumny digs a pit, into which he not unfrequently falls himself. He prepares a grave for the reputation of another, and he who propagates the slander assists him in deepening and widening it; and in the issue it buries his own. “Judge not, that ye be not judged: for with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged, and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.”—“He shall have judgment without mercy that hath showed no mercy.” Matt. vii. 1, 2. James ii. 13.

*Lastly.* Never forget whence all the “wisdom” that is “profitable to direct,” and especially all spiritual understanding of truth and duty, must be sought and found: “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all liberally, and upbraideth not: and it shall be given him.”—“The wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.”—“For this cause we also \* \* \* do not cease to pray

for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God."—"Show me thy ways, O Lord; teach me thy paths. Lead me in thy truth, and teach me; for thou art the God of my salvation: on thee do I hope all the day." James i. 5. iii. 17. Col. i. 9, 10. Psalm xxv. 4, 5.

## LECTURE XX.

ECCLESIASTES X. 11-20.

“Surely the serpent will bite without enchantment; and a blabber is no better. 12. The words of a wise man’s mouth (are) gracious; but the lips of a fool will swallow up himself. 13. The beginning of the words of his mouth (is) foolishness: and the end of his talk (is) mischievous madness. 14. A fool also is full of words: a man cannot tell what shall be; and what shall be after him, who can tell him? 15. The labor of the foolish wearieth every one of them, because he knoweth not how to go to the city. 16. Woe to thee, O land, when thy king (is) a child, and thy princes eat in the morning! 17. Blessed (art) thou, O land, when thy king (is) the son of nobles, and thy princes eat in due season, for strength, and not for drunkenness! 18. By much slothfulness the building decayeth; and through idleness of the hands the house droppeth through. 19. A feast is made for laughter, and wine maketh merry: but money answereth all (things.) 20. Curse not the king, no not in thy thought; and curse not the rich in thy bed-chamber: for a bird of the air shall carry the voice, and that which hath wings shall tell the matter.”

IN these verses, Solomon pursues the same general train of thought as in those which precede; comparing together the respective qualities and effects of wisdom and folly.

Verse 11. *Surely the serpent will bite without enchantment, and a babbler is no better.*

There is in these words an allusion to a practice said to prevail in the East, of charming adders by the power of sounds, fascinating them by musical incantations, and rendering them for the time harmless to the persons who handled them. There are references to the same custom in other parts of Scripture; and the fact is vouched by considerable authorities. “Their poison” (the poison of wicked men) “is like the poison of a serpent: they are like the deaf adder, that stoppeth her ear; which will not hearken to the voice of charmers, charming never so wisely.”—“Behold,

I will send serpents, cockatrices, among you, which will not be charmed, and they shall bite you, saith the Lord." Psal. lviii. 4, 5. Jer. viii. 17.

The meaning of the verse before us, however, does not at all depend on the reality of the alleged fact: Whether it was authentic, or only the general belief, the sentiment expressed is the same. "Surely the serpent will bite without enchantment,"—that is, he will bite *unless he be charmed*: "and a babbler is no better." This latter clause is by some rendered—"and there is no success to the master of the tongue;" and is interpreted as expressing the vanity of the most exquisite incantations, even by "charmners charming never so wisely," *after the bite has been inflicted*;\* and as intended to warn against delay in softening and subduing a dangerous character, and thus preventing what, when once done, it may be far from easy to remedy. But it was not by the subtle eloquence of the tongue that serpents were charmed; and the connection evidently favors the translation of the Hebrew phrase, signifying "master of the tongue," by such an English designation as "bab-bler," or *talker*;—a man who is *all tongue*. This "bab-bler" is the very person to be charmed. He is compared to a serpent. His tongue is dangerous in the extreme,—doing injury sometimes without design and sometimes with it,—from the want of common sense, or from the want of principle. It is "an unruly evil, full of deadly poison." He who gives to his tongue an unrestrained license, and is guided in the use of it neither by principle nor by prudence, is a man that requires to be managed with peculiar caution. Contradiction and violence may only irritate, and make the venom of his tongue the more virulent and deadly. He must be *charmed*. We must find out his right side,—the way to gain his good graces, to tame him, and keep him gentle. If he be a man of power, the danger of meddling with him becomes the more imminent, and the necessity for cautious management the more imperative.

But a babbler is dangerous not only to others; he is equally so to himself:—

Verse 12. *The words of a wise man's mouth are gracious; but the lips of a fool will swallow up himself.*

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\*Si serpens momorderit, non incantatus, quid præstabit peritissimus incantator?—*Van der Palm*.

“The words of a wise man’s mouth”—of the man who is guided by sound principle and discretion, and a due consideration of circumstances and characters—“are gracious:”—they are kind and insinuating; adapted, in times of difficulty, to gain and to secure the friendship of others,—to avert gathering storms, and to still the tempest when it has begun to rage. Such were the words of Jacob, when, after having committed himself to the God of his fathers, he went to meet his brother Esau, whose proud resentment he had so much cause to fear. Gen. xxxii. And such were the words of Abigail to David, when his wrath had been kindled by the insolent conduct of her churlish and thankless husband, and his purpose of vengeance had been formed, and was on the eve of immediate execution. 1 Sam. xxv.

The contrast of the first clause of this verse with the second, clearly shows what is meant by the *graciousness* of the wise man’s words:—“but the lips of a fool will swallow up himself.” His rash, imprudent, and passionate, or his unprincipled and slanderous talk, is incessantly exposing him to hazards, alienating his friends, exasperating his enemies, and bringing upon him their open or their secret vengeance. He thus digs pits for himself that may swallow him up, and becomes the victim of his own folly. The conduct of the successor of Solomon in the throne of Israel, affords an apt illustration of “a fool’s words swallowing up himself.” Had Rehoboam followed the sound advice of the aged counsellors of his father and “spoken *good words* to the people” when they came to implore a mitigation of their burdens, all had been well. They would have sworn a willing allegiance; would have shouted “God save king Rehoboam!” and would have been, as the old men expressed it, “his servants for ever.” But, like a fool, instead of his words being “gracious,” he “answered the people roughly;” talked, with supercilious severity, of “his little finger being thicker than his father’s loins,” and of “chastising them with scorpions in place of whips:” and his ungracious words “swallowed up himself.” They roused the indignant spirit of the people; divided his kingdom; and alienated for ever from the house of David the whole of Israel except the tribe of Judah.

We cannot wonder that the fool’s words should be represented as thus hazardous to himself as well as to others, when we consider the description of them in the thirteenth verse:—



Verse 13. *The beginning of the words of his mouth is foolishness; and the end of his talk is mischievous madness.*

When he speaks at all he speaks foolishly; and, commencing in folly, he concludes in madness: he either works himself up to a pitch of frenzy, by the very power of eager and continued vociferation, fretting and fuming with ridiculous and extravagant passion at phantoms, possibly, of his own creation, which his wild and incoherent mind has embodied into reality, and, by dwelling upon them and talking of them, has aggravated to a hideous magnitude:—or, if he happens to meet with the smallest check or contradiction—if he is not listened to with the attention to which he deems such an oracle entitled—if his hearer does not appear to feel along with him to the full extent to which he absurdly feels himself;—he is instantly on fire, all blaze, and smoke, and noise; he is thrown more and more off his guard; till his passion becomes “mischievous madness,” perilous to all within his reach, and whom he has power to injure, and not less perilous to himself. Were it not for the harm which such a combustible talker, in his moments of inflammation, may occasion, along with the pain produced by the humiliating spectacle of a fellow-man exposing himself as the wretched dupe of his own imbecility and senseless passion, he might well be laughed at for the ludicrous incongruity between his feelings and their exciting causes; between his endless and over-powering talk, and the subjects of his voluble vehemence.—The character is in this verse shortly but strikingly touched. It is far from being uncommon. And there are few more dangerous, or more difficult to manage.

*Few ideas and many words*, is the next feature in the portraiture of the fool:—

Verse 14. *A fool also is full of words: a man cannot tell what shall be; and what shall be after him, who can tell him?*

Some, I believe, have fancied, that Solomon here *mimics* the fool,—giving an exemplification or specimen of what he means. Rather than cease talking, the fool will repeat the same thing in much the same words:—“A man cannot tell what shall be,—and what shall be after him, who can tell him?” But this, if it be ingenious, is not solid. The two clauses are not of the same meaning. The latter is not a mere vain repetition of the former. “A man cannot tell what shall be,” expresses a person’s own ina-

bility to dive into the future; and "what shall be after him, who can tell him?" expresses the inability of all others to give him the information he may wish for.

By others, the verse is considered as reproving the presumptuous vanity of the fool's talk. His being "full of words," they think, refers particularly to his foolish boastings of what he is to do,—his airy promises,—his extravagant and confident schemes for the future, and vauntings of their certain success;—a very common way in which the fool utters his mind and proclaims his folly; forgetting entirely, that—while he thus talks at random, and roams at large over the fields of futurity, with no doubts, no conditional *ifs*, no humble recollection of dependence, between him and the attainment of all his speculations—"a man cannot tell what shall be; and what shall be after him, who can tell him?"

Others still,—and this is probably the true meaning,—interpret the words as descriptive of the loose incoherency; the unconnected heterogeneous jumble; of the fool's discourse: which is so mingled, so impertinent, so disjointed, that no man at any one part of it, can tell, or can even guess, what is to come next. No man can judge from what he is now saying, what he is about to say; or from what he is now doing, what he is about to do. If the person who is himself at a loss puts the question to others, he finds them as unable to conjecture as himself:—"a man cannot tell what is to be; and what is to come after it, who can tell him?" All is *Babel*: no order, no system, no associated pairs of ideas, no rational and perceptible sequence of one thing from another.

In these different interpretations, the character represented is much the same; only it is brought out from the words in different ways. The fool appears in them all, as a man of words, rather than of ideas; and "full of words." He talks at random about every thing, past, present, or to come; and is always equally confident. It is vain to attempt arguing with him; he cannot be kept to a point; he will stupify you with talk; and he must and will have the last word, even although he should only say at the end the same thing that he said at the beginning.

A total want of common sense in the most ordinary affairs of life and transactions of business completes the picture:—

Verse 15. *The labor of the foolish wearith every one of them; because he knoweth not how to go to the city.*

This last expression was, in all probability, proverbial. "He does not know the way into the city,"—although, it may be, living in the immediate vicinity. He wanders in the openest and best frequented road:—that is, he blunders in the simplest and easiest matters. If there be a wrong way, he is sure to take it.—The whole verse connects immediately with the preceding. "A man cannot tell what is to be; and what shall be after it, who can tell him? The labor of the foolish wearieth *every one of them*;"—that is, all men that have any thing to do with him. They are teased, and harassed, and worn out of patience by his incorrigible stupidity, and the blunders it is perpetually producing; blunders, of which the rectification is sometimes much more troublesome than the entire business about which they are committed. Send the fool back to adjust his error, and it is twenty to one that he makes a second worse than the first.

The whole of this description of the absurdity of the fool's discourse and conduct, and its mischievous consequences, may be understood as opposed to the brief commendation of wisdom in the end of the tenth verse, as "profitable to direct." The wise man "orders his own affairs with discretion," and whatever is intrusted to him by others he manages with prudence, accuracy, and despatch; securing to himself approbation, confidence, and advancement.

In speaking of the opposite effects of wisdom and folly, it was not unnatural for the writer, himself a king, to introduce some remarks on the comparative influence of the one and the other, when predominant in the character of public rulers:—

Verses 16, 17. *Woe to thee, O land, when thy king is a child, and thy princes eat in the morning. Blessed art thou, O land, when thy king is the son of nobles, and thy princes eat in due season, for strength, and not for drunkenness.*

"A child," in the former of these verses, refers not so much to age, as to *capacity*. A woe is pronounced on a country when its sovereign is ignorant, inexperienced, froward, fickle, willful, easily imposed upon, and otherwise unfit, as a child, for his weighty charge. The historian of the reign of Rehoboam the son of Solomon, in the First book of Kings, informs us that that prince "was *forty and one years old* when he began to reign." Yet when Abijah, his son and successor, expostulates with Jeroboam and his followers

for their rebellion against his father, he represents Rehoboam as having been then "*young* and tender-hearted," and incapable of withstanding them.\* *Tender-hearted* is an epithet susceptible of different significations. When it is said of the good king Josiah that his "heart was tender," *that* lowliness and contrition of spirit are meant, which arise from a sense of sin, and a becoming fear of God. He "humbled himself and wept before the Lord." But this was not the character of Rehoboam; and the epithet, when applied to him, must be understood as expressing irresolute timidity, softness, want of courage and nerve for encountering and going through difficulties. But whatever we conceive to be meant by tender-hearted; certainly, when we think of the age above assigned to Rehoboam, the word translated *young* cannot signify his being a child in years; and yet it is the same word as that rendered "*a child*" in the passage before us. It means, evidently, that he was raw and inexperienced; deficient in vigor, and without skill. We necessarily associate with extensive power lodged in the hands of a child, the ideas of general incapacity, inexperience, and liableness to imposition, and the probability at least of frowardness, fickleness, and self-will. Hence it is threatened, through the prophet Isaiah, as a curse upon the people of Israel, "I will give children to be their princes, and babes shall rule over them." Isaiah iii. 4.

In such cases, it cannot be expected that public affairs should prosper; and especially when, to the incapacity of the sovereign, there is added the curse of an indolent and voluptuous nobility; when not only is the king of the land a child, but her "princes eat in the morning;" that is, when they are men "given to appetite," devoted to sensual gratifications, their god their belly, indulging their propensities at unseasonable times, for their own pleasure, and to the neglect of the business of the State. A wise, and temperate, and active nobility, might counteract, by their counsel and their influence, the mischiefs of a weak prince's incapacity. But when both these evils meet, then may it be said, with emphasis as well as truth, "Woe to thee, O land!" Every thing must be deranged and out of course; all the miseries must be felt, of misrule, oppression, and anarchy; and all the moral horrors exhibited, of a licentious and degraded community.

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\* Compare 1 Kings xiv. 21, with 2 Chron. xiii. 7.

On the other hand—Verse 17. “Blessed art thou, O land, when thy king is the son of nobles, and thy princes eat in due season, for strength, and not for drunkenness.”

The king’s being “a son of nobles” must not be understood as implying the sentiment that capacity is the uniform attendant of exalted birth. “A son of nobles,” evidently signifies a noble-minded prince, the descendant of illustrious progenitors, possessing their talents, and emulating their excellences. It stands opposed to the designation, “a child,” in the preceding verse. Our Lord said on one occasion to the Jews, “If ye were Abraham’s children, ye would do the works of Abraham;” and we are accustomed, with a peculiarity of meaning which every one understands, to say of a youth, the resemblance of whose character to that of his parent is particularly marked and striking, He is his father’s son. On the same principle of phraseology, “a son of nobles” is one who does not disgrace his birth, but who resembles the line of eminent ancestors from whom he has derived it.

The sense which we attached to the phrase in the former verse—“eating in the morning,” is confirmed by its being placed in contrast with “eating in due season, for strength, and not for drunkenness.” It is equally plain, from the mention of drunkenness, that “eating,” in the sixteenth verse, means *feasting* in general; the being addicted to banqueting and revelry. And opposed to this is “eating in due season,”—not for the mere indulgence of animal appetite; the sordid gratification of sensual propensities; but for the natural and proper end of eating—the nourishment and invigoration of the bodily frame for the active exertion requisite in the fulfillment of the duties of life. A wise, experienced, able, and accomplished monarch, with a temperate, steady, and patriotic nobility, devoted to public business and not to pleasure,—king and courtiers jointly applying their powers, from right principles, to the service of the commonwealth,—is a blessing of inestimable value to a country. The administration of affairs will then, under the smile of heaven, be proportionably prosperous; and the people, experiencing the benefits of good government, will be loyal and contented; and, influenced by the example of their superiors, sober, industrious, honorable, and happy.

Luxury is usually accompanied by slothfulness,—the love of

ease and repose; and in every department of business, private and public, slothfulness is the parent of loss, decay, and ruin:—

Verse 18. *By much slothfulness the building decayeth; and through idleness of the hands the house droppeth through.*

A house requires, not only to be built, but to be kept up. If due attention be not paid to this,—if a man, from laziness, after having got his habitation reared, will not be at the trouble of necessary repairs, a damage that is at first trifling will imperceptibly increase, and will be followed by others, till the building comes to be in danger. Resolutions to have it mended are daily formed, and daily neglected; the indolent inhabitant always finding some apology for putting off till to-morrow. To-morrow is so near, that matters, he says to himself, cannot be much worse before then; and as it is always equally near, the excuse which it furnishes is always equally valid. Day after day, as the time for purposed or half-purposed exertion comes round, the sluggard yawns out to himself the same convenient assurance, that a few hours can make no difference; till, by daily procrastination, the repair becomes impracticable, and the decayed and shattered tenement “falls through.”—All domestic and all national affairs will necessarily go to wreck in the hands of the slothful. “The sluggard will not plow by reason of the cold; therefore shall he beg in harvest, and have nothing;”—“I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding; and, lo, it was all grown over with thorns, and nettles had covered the face thereof, and the stone wall thereof was broken down. Then I saw, and considered it well; I looked upon it, and received instruction. Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep: so shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth; and thy want as an armed man.”—“The hand of the diligent shall bear rule; but the slothful shall be under tribute.”—“The drunkard and the glutton shall come to poverty; and drowsiness shall clothe a man with rags.” Prov. xx. 4. xxiv. 30–34. xii. 24. xxiii. 21.—In this last passage the same connection is observable, as in the subject of lecture, between *sensuality* and *sloth*.

When the rulers of a land addict themselves to sensual indulgence and profligacy, the public funds are wasted by the demands of their luxury, and lavished on the companions of their intemperance and riot; by which means the treasury is impoverished,

and either the business of government, which cannot go on for a day without money, must be at a stand, or the royal coffers must be replenished by injurious and oppressive taxation. :—

Verse 19. *A feast is made for laughter, and wine maketh merry; but money answereth all things.*

Feasting and wine, laughter and merriment, are transient, unsubstantial, and profitless. What can they do towards the great ends of government? Which of the purposes can they serve, which would be effectually answered by the money that is thrown away upon them? The verse appears to be introduced, to aggravate the folly and criminality of the conduct reprobated in the sixteenth verse, of the princes of a land “eating in the morning,”—giving themselves to unseasonable and intemperate festivity. The feast, indeed, yields them laughter and mirth. But woe to the land, when its princes expend on such frivolous and unworthy objects the money which ought to be devoted to the advancement of their country’s prosperity, and which, in government, equally as in other departments of life and business, “answereth all things”—is indispensable to every step of its procedure.

Such conduct on the part of rulers presents a very strong temptation to their subjects—while they cannot but inwardly disapprove, dislike, and despise them—to give utterance to their feelings in the language of reviling and imprecation: and the chapter concludes with an admonition on this subject, founded on considerations of prudence, which do not, however, imply the exclusion of higher principles:—

Verse 20. *Curse not the king, no, not in thy thought, and curse not the rich in thy bed-chamber: for a bird of the air shall carry the voice, and that which hath wings shall tell the matter.*

This is an important general caution:—a caution, for which there is little occasion when a land is blessed with a king who is the son of nobles, and when its princes eat in due season, for strength, and not for revelry. Against such there is no disposition to vent imprecations:—they are a blessing, and they are blessed in return:—they reign in the hearts of a loyal and happy people. But, even when it is otherwise,—when the king is a child, and the princes eat in the morning,—there is an *official respect* due to the magistracy, independently of the personal character of the magistrate. Honor is enjoined to be paid to governors *as such*. “Sub-

mit yourselves to every ordinance of man, for the Lord's sake: whethèr it be to the king, as supreme; or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evil-doers, and for the praise of them that do well. For so is the will of God, that with well-doing ye may put to silence the iguorance of foolish men: as free, and not using your liberty for a cloak of maliciousness, but as the servants of God. Honor all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king." 1 Pet. ii. 13-17. All those general principles, on the ground of which obedience is inculcated, enforce also respectful behavior, and prohibit cursing and reviling. "Render therefore to all their dues; tribute to whom tribute is due, custom to whom custom, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor." Rom. xiii. 7. "Conscience toward God" must be our first consideration—a sense of duty arising from his authority. But the fear of punishment from men,—what the apostle Paul denominates "wrath,"—is a second; which, although in its nature inferior, is yet perfectly justifiable and legitimate.—We ought not to do "in thought," what it is wrong in the sight of God to do with our tongues: for "the Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts." The most secret and deeply hidden thought of a malicious and cursing heart is perfectly known to Him, though it never should give itself expression in words. And whilst all things are naked and open to Him,—whilst our very "thoughts are heard in heaven,"—let us not forget that kings, and the courtiers and the satellites of kings, have a sense of hearing unusually acute, and exercise a vigilance which few things can escape:—"A bird of the air shall carry the voice, and that which hath wings shall tell the matter." This is a strong proverbial form of speech, expressive of the strange and unaccountable way in which such matters are frequently detected. They come to light—nobody knows how. The course they have followed leaves no traces by which it can be searched out. It is as if "a bird of the air had carried the voice." You are as much at a loss as the Syrian monarch was, when Elisha the prophet "told the king of Israel the words that he spoke in his bed-chamber." You are lost in unavailing conjecture, when that which has been "spoken in the ear in closets," or whispered in a soliloquy in your most private retirement—that which you have little more than thought—finds its way to the throne, and exposes



you to jealousy and to vengeance. "Curse not the king," therefore, "no, not in thy thought, and curse not the rich in thy bed-chamber." Add prudence to principle. The thing is in itself wrong; and it is at the same time hazardous. It involves at once the displeasure of God, and the risk of forfeiting your head to men.

Let us now gather up some of those inferential lessons which are suggested by the verses.

1. *In the first place*; The variety of characters with which we must meet in our passage through the world, if we mix at all in the active scenes of life, is very great; and it is a lesson of no inferior consequence, to "walk in wisdom" toward them all. We must not, indeed, sacrifice integrity and a good conscience. These have no equivalent; no price at which they can be disposed of without irreparable loss. But it is a duty, as well as an advantage, to suit our behavior to the characters of those with whom the intercourse of life brings us into contact. From a disdainful or a thoughtless disregard of this lesson—from treating men of all tempers and characters alike,—from scorning or neglecting to *charm the serpent*,—much contention and wrath, disturbance and mischief, have arisen. Even *folly* itself is a genus that comprehends under it no inconsiderable number of species and varieties: and it is far from being a trifling or contemptible exercise of prudence, so to conduct ourselves towards fools themselves, as to avoid encouraging and puffing them up in their folly, and to save from injurious impression our own reputation and interest. "Answer not a fool according to his folly," says the wise man elsewhere, "lest thou also be like unto him. Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit." The seeming contrariety of these directions is perhaps most simply explained by observing the different senses of the phrase "according to his folly." Answer not a fool *in a foolish manner*, lest thou also be like unto him. Answer a fool *as his folly deserves*, lest he be wise in his own conceit.

2. *Secondly*; Solomon, doubtless, uttered much pernicious folly himself during "the days of his vanity," when he resolved on making the trial of foolishness and madness as a source of enjoyment and pleasure. But after those days, so unworthy of him, were over,—when "his understanding returned to him," and he

deduced the lessons of wisdom from the experience of folly, O how "gracious" were "the words of his mouth!" With the meek humility and tender earnestness of one who deeply and bitterly felt the absurdity and the criminality of his own ways, he addresses his admonitions to others, and seeks to win their hearts to that which is good. This he does in the book before us; and how fine, too, are the exemplifications of it in the introductory portion (the first nine chapters) of the book of Proverbs! How affectionate, how faithful, how fervent, how insinuating, how endearing! That youth's heart must be sadly infatuated, or wretchedly hardened, that can slight and resist counsel so administered.

But we know into whose lips, above all others, "grace was poured." "The Spirit of the Lord rested upon Him,—the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord." Truly gracious were the words which proceeded out of *his* mouth; in themselves profitable and saving; and, in the manner of them, uniting the divine dignity of "one who had authority," with all the mildness and engagingness of winning persuasion:—"Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart." In his experience a mournful evidence is presented, that the most gracious words, the fullest of wisdom and kindness, will not always secure from hatred and opposition, when that which is uttered is unpalatable and offensive truth. There were times when his countrymen hung upon his lips with delighted eagerness; all bearing him witness, and "marvelling at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth;" but no sooner did he touch a string that was not quite in harmony with their national and their provincial pride, than, as if by a touch of magic, all was, in an instant, indignation and wrath, and he is hurried to the brow of a precipice, to be cast down headlong. Yet ought we always, notwithstanding this, as far as is consistent with fidelity to the interests of truth, to choose acceptable and ingratiating words, such as may disarm resentment, give assurance of good-will, and obtain for whatever we may have to say a fair and favorable hearing. "Let your speech be always with grace."

3. *Thirdly*; If "the lips of a fool swallow up himself," by bringing upon him the resentment of men, and laying him open

to varied mischief; there is a higher and more alarming sense in which the expression will be found to hold true. When men speak against God; when they "contradict and blaspheme" his testimony; when they talk of his threatenings with bravado and scorn; and with sneering contempt of the invitations of his mercy: their words are the words of folly, and they are words which in the end will prove their infallible and irremediable ruin. "The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against his Anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall have them in derision. Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure."—"And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convict all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him." Psalm ii. 2-5. Jude 14-15. Ah! *then*, indeed, "the lips of the fool will swallow up himself." He will be found to have employed them against his own life. Having despised and rejected the offered mercy of God in this world; instead of "gracious" words from the lips of the "meek and lowly" Redeemer, he shall hear the fearful sentence of the righteous and offended Judge,— "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels."

4. *Fourthly*; As it is our incumbent duty to seek, by all lawful means, the good of our country, let it be our prayer to Him who "has the hearts of all in his hand," and who "giveth to man understanding," that its kings, and princes, and nobles, may be men at once of ability, of integrity, and of public and private virtue; men, like those of Issachar, "having understanding of the times, to know what ought to be done:"—that its "officers may be peace, and its exactors righteousness,"—"fearing God, and hating covetousness:"—that thus, under the smile and blessing of the Most High, it may be well with our beloved country, both now, and in generations yet to come.

5. *Fifthly*; My Christian brethren,—in the spiritual kingdom of

which we are subjects, the King is "the holy One and the just," infinite in wisdom and knowledge, as well as in holiness and grace. No "woe" can ever be sounded against Zion on account of the character of *her* King. It combines in it every excellence that can engage the loyalty of his subjects, and insure the prosperity of his government. "Righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins:—and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears; but with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked." Nothing can go wrong under an administration like this; in which infinite goodness is directed by infinite wisdom, and the purposes of both are effected by infinite power. "The mountains shall bring peace to the people, and the little hills, by righteousness.—In his days shall the righteous flourish, and abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth." For this just, and good, and wise, and mighty King shall reign for ever. His sceptre is intransferable. "His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed." No curses of his government escape the lips, or are formed in the hearts, of his happy subjects. "Men shall be blessed in him: all nations shall call him blessed."

6. *Sixthly*; Remember further, my brethren, that the saying in the eighteenth verse, respecting the evil tendencies of indolence and sloth, is applicable, in the full emphasis of it, to spiritual as well as to temporal things. Spiritual riches are acquired by diligence and vigilance; and spiritual declension and poverty are the natural and invariable results of negligence in the use of those means which God has appointed for the preservation and advancement of the Divine life in the soul. "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God that worketh in you, both to will and to do of his good pleasure." The Word and ordinances of God are the means. They must be used with constancy and application of mind, with the earnestness which arises from pleasure, with a fervent desire to profit by them, and, in order to this, with believing prayer for Divine influence to attend them all with efficacy.

7. *Seventhly*; Exertion is also necessary, combined and unwearyed exertion, for maintaining and building up the spiritual house or temple of the living God. It is true that, in one sense, this is the work of the great Architect alone:—"Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts."—"Behold the man whose name is THE BRANCH: and he shall grow up out of his place, and he shall build the temple of the Lord: even he shall build the temple of the Lord, and he shall bear the glory." Zech. iv. 6. vi. 12, 13. But the Master Builder employs workmen. He carries on his designs by the instrumentality of human agents,—by the efforts of his people, and especially of his faithful servants in the ministry of the Word. Let not our hearts, then, be reluctant, and let not our hands be slack. Let not this building decay by your slothfulness; let not this house drop through, through the idleness of your hands. Let it not be said, If Zion prospers, it is not by *your* means. The work is excellent and honorable, involving the glory of God and the highest interests of men. Let every one be emulous to place a "living stone" in the spiritual Temple; not merely to contemplate its progress with pleasure, but to help it forward with zeal; till, rising in all its loveliness, and in all its grandeur, it is at length completed, and the top-stone brought forth with shoutings—"Grace, grace, unto it!"

8. *Eighthly*; Let me conclude, by reminding sinners, that if there be hazard in the most secret imaginations and whispers of rebellion against an earthly monarch, the peril must be incomparably more imminent, that arises from every deed, or word, or thought, of insubordination to the "King of kings and Lord of lords." Nothing can escape HIM. The unuttered devices of the heart lie naked to his inspection. He "seeth in secret." "Hell is open before him, and destruction hath no covering." "There is no darkness, nor shadow of death, where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves."

"Who can resist th' almighty arm  
That made the starry sky?  
Or who elude the certain glance  
Of God's all-seeing eye?"

He needs no "bird of the air to carry the voice, or that which hath wings to tell the matter." "His eyes run to and fro through

the whole earth, beholding the evil and the good." His ear is ever open. He slumbers not nor sleeps. And what he sees and hears is recorded in a mind by which nothing is forgotten, and nothing, amidst the infinite multiplicity of its remembrances, is diminished in certainty or in accuracy, by the lapse of time. "Curse not THIS KING, no, not in thy thought." Your curses cannot injure Him: but his curse coming down upon you, will sink you to the lowest hell.

## LECTURE XXI.

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ECCLESIASTES XI. 1-8.

“Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days. 2. Give a portion to seven, and also to eight; for thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth. 3. If the clouds be full of rain, they empty (themselves) upon the earth: and if the tree fall toward the south, or toward the north, in the place where the tree falleth, there it shall be. 4. He that observeth the wind shall not sow; and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap. 5. As thou knowest not what (is) the way of the spirit, (nor) how the bones (do grow) in the womb of her that is with child: even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all. 6. In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand: for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both (shall be) alike good. 7. Truly the light (is) sweet, and a pleasant (thing it is) for the eyes to behold the sun: 8. But if a man live many years, (and) rejoice in them all; yet let him remember the days of darkness; for they shall be many. All that cometh (is) vanity.”

SEVERAL times, in the preceding part of this book, we have found Solomon speaking of the proper way of enjoying the bounties of Divine providence,—with gratitude, cheerfulness, and moderation; occasionally hinting at the use which ought to be made of them for the temporal and spiritual benefit of others. “I know that there is no good in them, but for a man to rejoice and TO DO GOOD in his life.—On this latter topic he enlarges in this chapter; exhibiting, in various and very interesting and beautiful lights, the virtue of benevolence, and the motives to its practical cultivation.

The passage, I am aware, has by some been applied to the virtue of *industry*, rather than of liberality; and this view of it has been supported by plausible reasons, and ingenious criticisms. I am satisfied, however, that the ordinary interpretation is preferable; that in a treatise on the sources of happiness, it is but reasonable

to expect some special notice of the duties and rewards of benevolence; and that to this the figurative illustrations are admirably appropriate.

If a man were seen scattering corn on the surface of water that had inundated and overspread the fields, it might appear the act of a fool; the witless waste and unwarrantable destruction of the "precious seed." But the seed, on the inundation subsiding, might be deposited in a loamy and fertile bed, might spring up in rich luxuriance, and yield in future days a produce of a hundred fold. To some such practice as this, there seems to be a beautiful allusion in the opening of this chapter:—

Verse 1. *Cast thy bread upon the waters, for thou shalt find it after many days.*

The word in this verse translated "bread" is, in Isaiah xxviii. 28, rendered "bread-corn:"—"Bread-(corn) is bruised, because he will not ever be thrashing it, nor break it with the wheel of his cart, nor bruise it with his horsemen." The same is evidently the meaning of it here. Some, indeed, have fancied that the *absolute hopelessness* of "casting bread upon the face of the waters," is designed to represent the duty of beneficence and liberality even where there does not exist the slightest prospect of a return; and they object to the view I am now giving of the allusion, that the man who, in the case supposed, scatters his seed-corn on the waters, does it with an express view to a future crop. But is this really a well-founded objection? It is true that it is our duty to "do good and lend, *hoping for nothing again*,"—that is, for no return from the objects of our kindness. But this does not preclude our "having respect unto the recompense of the reward" from a higher quarter. Nay, the prospect of an increase to ourselves, in temporal or spiritual good, is, in almost all the passages that inculcate liberality, held out as an encouragement to the practice of the duty. "Honor the Lord with thy substance, and with the first-fruits of all thine increase: so shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine."—"He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the Lord; and that which he hath given will He pay him again."—"When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends, nor thy brethren, neither thy kinsmen, nor thy rich neighbors; lest they also bid thee again, and a recompense be made thee. But when thou makest a feast, call the



poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind; and thou shalt be blessed: for they cannot recompense thee; for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just.”—“But this I say, He who soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he who soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully.”—“Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.” Prov. iii. 9, 10. xix. 17. Luke xiv. 12-14. 2 Cor. ix. 6. 1 Tim. vi. 17-19. The obvious meaning of all such passages is, that the liberal distribution of the bountiful, prompted and regulated by Scriptural principles, will, in one form or another, yield him a profitable result: for “God is not unrighteous,” says the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews, “to forget your work and labor of love, which ye have showed toward his Name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister.” Heb. vi. 10. The very same motive is presented in the verse before us:—“Cast thy bread-corn on the waters: FOR thou shalt find it after many days.”\*

It may not always yield to you in this world a return in kind; but it is not forgotten of God; it is not lost. Every work of

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\* Rev. Gulian Lansing, D. D., American Missionary in Egypt, in his most interesting and instructive book—“Egypt’s Princes, or a Narrative of Missionary labor in the Valley of the Nile,” (published by Wm. S. Rentoul, Philadelphia,)—throws a flood of light on the meaning of this verse of our author’s text, derived from his own personal observation in his missionary tours in the land of Egypt. It will be seen that, while confirming our author’s view of the text generally, Dr. Lansing’s well-known eminence as an Arabic scholar, and his familiarity with the colloquial expressions of the Arabs, have enabled him, in addition to the testimony given from his own observation, to furnish us with a most valuable illustrative criticism on this and similar texts. On pages 81-83 of his book, describing what he saw from the deck of his Nile-boat, he writes:—“Nearer the water’s edge, a man was sowing barley on the strip of mud which had been left by the retreating Nile. He sank up to the thighs in mud at every step. This was sowing in a good and deep soil, one in which an abundant harvest might be anticipated almost as a certainty. There were neither thorns nor stony places; still there was danger of the fowls of the air devouring it, for they were flying about in myriads, and the sun and wind had covered the surface with a thin, dry crust, into which the seed would not sink; so that boys were following in the track of the sower, floundering in the mud, and, as they went, harrowing in the seed with their fingers. Such has hitherto been *our* seeding time in the valley of the Nile. We have found a deep, rich soil in the Egyptian mind. In the little patches into which

charity performed, every gift of charity bestowed, by his people, from love to His name and regard to His glory, is remembered by him for good. The charity which he delights in and rewards, is not, indeed, that which plumes itself on its doings as acts of merit, and distributes its alms as purchase-money for heaven. It is that which, disowning all self-confidence and self-glorifying, is influenced by humble and lively gratitude for the riches of Divine mercy; gives freely because it has freely received; testifying its thankfulness for the grace of Him who, "though he was rich, for our sakes became poor, that we through his poverty might be made rich." It "does good to all as it has opportunity, especially to those who are of the household of faith;" and whatever is done to his disciples for his sake, the blessed Redeemer will at last acknowledge as having been done to himself:—"I was hungry, and ye gave me meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me in; naked, and ye clothed me; I was sick, and ye visited me; I was in prison, and ye came unto me." And when the righteous, of whom so very small a proportion enjoyed the opportunity of performing acts of kindness to himself in person, are represented as expressing their surprise at his language,—“Lord, when saw we *thee* hungry, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? when saw we *thee* a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? or when saw we *thee* sick

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we have been able to cast the seed of the Word, there is promise of a golden harvest, and already a few handfuls have been given us as an earnest of that harvest; but it has hitherto been the lot of the sower to go forth with weeping—waist-deep, in a mire of difficulties. ‘But he shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bearing his sheaves with him.’

“*This is that sowing to which Solomon exhorts, in Ecc. xi. 1:—‘Cast thy bread upon the waters, for thou shalt find it after many days!’* Some commentators, understanding too literally the particle ‘upon,’ which in the margin is given ‘upon the face of,’ have gone to the Indian rice marshes for an example of the actual casting of the seed upon the surface of the water. But the phrase may mean, ‘in the presence of—beside’ the waters; and this agrees with the fact, as we daily witness, of the peasants going forth and sowing the seed *beside* the retreating and drying up waters of the river, the pools and canals, and in the broad fields through which it can be distributed by the water-courses; and the prophet Isaiah, xxxii. 20, says, ‘Blessed are ye that sow beside, literally upon, all waters.’ This use of the phrase ‘upon the waters’ is yet common in Arabic. When the people would go out for a pleasure excursion, they gather up their pipes and coffee-cups, and say, ‘Come, let us go and sit upon the waters;’ meaning beside the waters, on the banks of some neighboring stream; and the converse phrase is frequently used in the Koran, in the constantly recurring promise to the believer, of ‘Gardens, beneath which flow rivers of waters.’”—EDITOR.

or in prison and came unto thee?"—he explains his words on the principle that has been mentioned, of identifying himself with his people, whom "he is not ashamed to call his brethren:—"Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye did it to one of the least of these my brethren, ye did it unto ME." Matt. xxv. 35-40.

Our liberality ought to be as widely diffusive, as the measure of our prosperity will admit:—

Verse 2. *Give a portion to seven and also to eight; for thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth.*

"Give a portion:—"The expression is borrowed, either from the custom of masters of feasts sending portions from before them to the different guests at table; as when Joseph *sent messes* to his brethren, distinguishing Benjamin above the rest by the largeness of the supply allotted to him; Gen. xliii. 34:—or from the practice, on festive occasions, of distributing gratuitously to the poor. "Go your way," said Nehemiah to the Israelites, "eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and *send portions* unto them for whom nothing is prepared; for this day is holy unto our Lord: neither be ye sorry, for the joy of the Lord is your strength." Neh. viii. 10. The Jews commemorated their providential deliverance from the exterminating vengeance of Haman, by "days of feasting and joy, and of *sending portions* one to another, and *gifts to the poor.*" Esth. ix. 22.

"Give a portion to seven, and also to eight:—"that is, sow bountifully, and not sparingly. You are in danger of keeping within, rather than of going beyond, the proper boundaries. You should, therefore, be jealous over yourselves, and allow none to go unprovided for, whom it is in your power to supply. *Seven* is one of the numbers significant in Scripture phraseology of abundance and completeness. Go beyond it; rather than keep within it, leaning to the side on which you are naturally, from the selfish tendencies of the heart, most prone to err.

This cheerful and diffusive liberality is further enforced by another and a very powerful consideration:—"for thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth." This uncertainty of human affairs has been frequently noticed, in different connections, in the preceding part of this book. It forms, indeed, one of its principal themes. The present may be a season of prosperity; but it may very soon be succeeded by a time of calamity and dis-

tress; and our ignorance of what is coming should lead us to make a proper use of the bounty of Heaven whilst it remains in our possession: for—

*In the first place*, we may soon, in Divine providence, be deprived of the means, and consequently of the ability, of doing good. No man, therefore, should look forward to a time when he will begin to lay out his substance for benevolent purposes; but each should use what he has *now*. The contrary indicates a want of disposition, which is not very likely to leave him when his own convenient time arrives; and long, too, ere that time comes, his riches may “make to themselves wings and fly away as an eagle towards heaven.”

*Secondly*. When this does happen, it becomes a sad reflection; a melancholy addition to a man’s unhappiness; that he has not, during his period of prosperity, been making a proper use of the means of good put into his hands,—the use of them enjoined by the Giver;—that he has selfishly wrapt up his talent in a napkin, and kept it close from the poor and needy,—till it is gone—unexpectedly gone, and his opportunities irredeemably lost. The opposite reflection is an animating support to the mind under the most impoverishing and depressing bereavements; when, in proportion to the extent of our means, we can say with Job,—“When the ear heard me, then it blessed me; and when the eye saw me, it gave witness unto me: because I delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless, and him that had none to help him: the blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me; and I caused the widow’s heart to sing for joy.—I was eyes to the blind, and feet was I to the lame. I was a father to the poor.” Job xxix. 11–13, 15, 16.

*Thirdly*; It is frequently of consequence to us, to secure friends in the time of our prosperity, against the day of possible calamity and suffering:—It sometimes happens, that entire reverses take place in the circumstances of men; and that he who has assisted and relieved others, requires relief and assistance from the very objects of his kindness. It appears to be to such vicissitudes in human condition that Paul refers, when, exhorting the Christians at Corinth to liberality in their contributions for the poor saints who were at Jerusalem, he says to them: “For I mean not that other men be eased, and you burdened: but by an equality: that

now at this time your abundance may be a supply for their want, that their abundance also may be a supply for your want, that there may be equality; as it is written, He that had gathered much had nothing over, and he that had gathered little had no lack;" 2 Cor. viii. 13-15:—every man who, in the collecting of the manna, to which the last expression alludes, was found, in the general measurement, to have gathered more than the daily allowance of an omer for each member of his house-hold, supplying by his superfluity the deficiency of his neighbors.—By the benevolent appropriation of a part of our substance, friends may be acquired, whose grateful services may, at a future time, and in altered circumstances, be of essential benefit to us. And if, in our time of need, they should disappoint us, and give us to experience the bitterness of ingratitude, still we shall be able to look up with confidence to the Author of our blessings and our trials; whose providence will not forsake or leave destitute those who had endeavored to act as faithful stewards of his bounty, so long as he had been pleased to continue it with them.

In what opposite ways may the same consideration be applied! The very circumstance which Solomon here urges as a reason for present and generous liberality, the covetous worldly-minded man pleads as an apology for *hoarding*. I know not, he says, "what evil may come upon the earth:" I must, therefore, take good care of what I have got. I must reserve it to meet the contingencies of futurity. Who can tell but I may otherwise come to dependence, and die poor myself?—A prudent precaution, to prevent our becoming a burden upon others in the time of age and infirmity, is by no means to be condemned. But it is an awful perversion, when the apprehension of future possibilities is made an excuse for griping avarice. How much more noble the use that is made, by the Spirit of God, of our ignorance of the future! Instead of withholding from others on this ground, says Solomon,—rather give while you have to give,—and give liberally;—lose not the precious opportunity;—"it is more blessed to give than to receive;"—enjoy, then, the pleasure of present beneficence;—"give a portion to seven, and also to eight; for thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth."

He then, by a very beautiful figure, illustrates the duty of the man who enjoys the munificence of heaven:—

Verse 3. *If the clouds be full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth.*

From earth, and seas, and lakes, and rivers, the sun exhales immense quantities of watery vapors. These condense in the atmosphere into clouds; and the clouds do not retain their precious treasure, but, agreeably to the kind intention of the wonder-working Author of nature, discharge their contents upon the earth in refreshing and fertilizing showers. A bountiful man is a "cloud full of rain" to the parched wilderness of poverty. A parsimonious niggard is a "cloud without water," yielding nothing but disappointment and mortification to the anxious expectant of a blessing. In the sultry climate of the East, a cloud charged with rain is sometimes inexpressibly precious. The very look, the very thought of it, is refreshment. And as the clouds are formed, by the provision of nature, for the express purpose of watering the earth; so is the bounty of providence bestowed on men, not merely for themselves, but "that they may have to give to him that needeth." They receive, that they may impart. They are blessed, that they may be a blessing.

The meaning of the remaining clause of the same verse is not so obvious:—

*And if the tree fall toward the south, or toward the north, in the place where the tree falleth, there it shall be.*

These words are very commonly used to express the sentiment, that whatever character belongs to a man when he quits the world, that character he must retain; there can be no subsequent change: as death finds him it finally fixes him; pronouncing the sentence, "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still; and he that is filthy, let him be filthy still; and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still; and he that is holy, let him be holy still."—This yields a good sense; and one by no means remote from the general scope of the passage. The possessor of heaven's bounty, is reminded that he must fall before the stroke of death; that when he does fall, his state is for ever fixed, according to his character and works while he lived: and a motive is thus set before him to benevolent activity and pious effort, drawn from the uncertainty of life, and from the fearful consequences of being taken away amidst a course of selfish prosperity and worldly-mindedness; of large promises, it may be, for the future, and

entire neglect of present duty; and having his state fixed for ever, beyond the possibility of change or remedy.

From the connection, however, the general import of the figure seems rather to be, the security of a return to the man of principled beneficence.—In whatever quarter thy bounty is dispersed, thou shalt find it again. As where the tree falls it lies, so thy charity is not lost. Give in all directions; for thou shalt find it again:—thy recompense is secure. It is the same sentiment, otherwise expressed, with that in the first verse,—“for thou shalt find it after many days.”

This is a subject, respecting which men are ever disposed to find, and ingenious at inventing, excuses. Their circumstances, their families, their necessary expenditure, the uncertainties of business, the ingratitude and the vices of the poor,—and especially their fears about what may happen;—these, with other apologies, they plead to themselves and to one another, for not giving, or at least for not giving *now*,—for satisfying themselves at present with *hoping* what they may be able to do hereafter,—for transacting the business of charity, not by cash payments, but by promissory notes at distant dates, which, when the time of demand arrives, they find fresh excuses for renewing.—It is against the timid withholders of present charity, that the fourth verse is directed:—

Verse 4. *He that observeth the wind shall not sow; and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap.*

The husbandman must take his seed-time and harvest as they are sent to him by the God of the seasons. The weather is not in his choice. If he minds every cold wind that blows, or every cloud that gathers in the sky and threatens a shower, he may lose both his spring and his autumn. Day after day may pass; while he is marking the direction of the wind, and gazing on the face of the sky, in timid hesitation whether he may safely scatter his seed, or put in his sickle; till the proper season is gone, and leaves him nothing but fruitless regrets that he cannot recall it.—The lesson taught by the comparison is, that we should fulfill the duties of benevolence when it is in our power; embracing with alacrity every opportunity of doing good; not startled and prevented by every little circumstance that may occasion inconvenience or apprehension; deferring, and deferring, from excessive scrupu-

losity, and morbid fearfulness of possible mistakes and impositions, till our opportunities of usefulness are irrecoverably gone.

But let not this principle be pushed to an extreme. Let it not be considered as entirely precluding the exercise of prudence and caution. In the whole of the business of life these are serviceable, and in few things more so than in the practice of benevolence. The farmer, although he cannot always get weather in every respect to his mind, will not, however, purposely choose an unfavorable day, either for sowing or for reaping. So ought we to select our objects and our opportunities to the best advantage, lest we should bestow charity that will be unproductive of good, or even fruitful of evil,—being conferred on improper persons, at unseasonable times, or in an unsuitable manner.

We ought, especially, to beware of allowing our fears about the future, to preponderate against the sense of present duty; for this kind of irresolute apprehensiveness would lead us to refrain from doing any thing that promises to be productive of good, because in every case there is a *possibility* of failure,—the future arrangements of providence being entirely beyond our penetration:—

Verse 5. *As thou knowest not what is the way of the spirit, nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child; even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all.*

By “the way of the spirit,” some understand the way of the *wind*. “The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, or whither it goeth.” And this being used by our Lord as an emblem of the mysterious operations of the Spirit of God upon the minds of men,—(“So is every one that is born of the Spirit,”)—to these operations the expression before us has by others been conceived to refer. I am inclined to think, however, that “the spirit” here means, neither the wind nor the Holy Ghost, but the *human soul*. Its connection with what follows in the verse, gives more than probability to this interpretation. “Thou knowest not the way of the spirit, nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child.” The formation and growth of the human fœtus in the womb, is one of those secret wonders of nature, of which there are so many, that elude our penetration. Anatomical skill, indeed, may ascertain many facts respecting the successive stages of its progress from conception to maturity; but questions might



still be asked, to which the most experienced anatomist could give no reply but an acknowledgment of his ignorance. We are "fearfully and wonderfully made." The structure of our frame, so "curiously wrought," so singularly complicated, so exquisitely adapted in all its parts to all its functions, is one of the most marvellous products of the wisdom of Divine contrivance, and the power and skill of Divine operation. The beautiful provision made for the sustenance and growth of the embryo man by the system of fetal circulation,—the entrance of the principle of animal life, indicated by its first faint fluttering movement,—and the gradual increase of living vigor, till, by the pangs of parturition, it is thrown from its prison, utters its first cry, and draws for itself the vital air of heaven;—all is full of mystery and wonder. But there is another secret. When, and whence, cometh "the spirit?"—the immortal soul? At what time does it take possession of its tenement? Does it enter with the principle of animal life, when the infant first stirs in the womb?—or does it unite itself with the body at the moment of its birth into the world?—To such inquiries we can return no certain answer. We neither know "the way of the spirit," nor "how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child." The very union itself of immaterial and invisible spirit with gross corporeal substance, has been, is, and ever will be, incomprehensible by our feeble reason; and the time and the manner of their first coalition is alike a mystery.

"Even so thou knowest not the works of God, who maketh all."—We may apply this particularly to the subject of the preceding verses, or more generally to the various departments of the Divine procedure. There are wonders in providence, as well as in creation. God has singular ways of working in both. You may say,—We cannot tell how we are to obtain any return for our liberality;—we cannot imagine, how giving away should fail to make us poorer,—how, by scattering, our substance should increase. But God's ways are not your ways. He effects his purposes by hidden arrangements, that are promoting their ends even when to you they may seem for the time to counteract them; and that bring about events altogether out of the range of human expectation. In your ignorance of the Divine administration, your best course is to discharge your duty with cheerfulness, and with-

out fruitless anxieties and apprehensions; confiding in his wisdom, faithfulness, and love; "committing your way unto him, and trusting in him, that he will bring it to pass;" using whatever measure of his bounty he bestows upon you, according to his own directions, without reserve and without fear of the issue. A proper feeling of reverence for God, who "doeth great things past finding out, yea, and marvellous things without number," should lead us to this implicit obedience and implicit reliance. "There is no searching of his understanding." "O the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!"

Every good, and especially every benevolent action, dictated by the principles of the word of God, is sowing seed for a future harvest: and true wisdom consists in doing this daily,—constantly,—losing no time, no opportunity:—

Verse 6. *In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thy hand: for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good.*

Many of our attempts at good may fail of the desired end; and some of them may even produce results opposite to our intentions. But such occurrences should not discourage us. Let them dictate prudence, but never inspire despondency. Let them direct our efforts, but by no means slacken them. If the sowing of the morning fails, that of the evening may yield a crop; and we cannot previously tell but that both may be equally productive. We cannot ascertain beforehand which of our endeavors is to be most successful, nor can we be certain as to any one of them, that it will not prosper. We may be tempted to try nothing, by the morbid apprehension of failure. The better course is, to calculate on some of our attempts failing; and on this account, that we may have the greater probability of succeeding in some, to make them the more numerous; whilst, at the same time, we bring to bear upon every one of them the entire amount of prudence and forethought we possess, that, as far as lieth in us, we may insure a favorable issue to them all. We shall then fulfil, in its true spirit, the direction contained in this verse.—"Let us not be weary in well-doing; for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. As we have therefore, opportunity, let us do good unto all, especially unto them who are of the household of faith." Gal. vi. 9, 10.

It ought further to be remembered, that even if all our designs and schemes of usefulness should, by unforeseen circumstances, be frustrated; yet, having been in our hearts, and having been attempted from right motives, even from the principles of benevolence and piety, they are, in the estimate of God, the same as if they had been attended with the most perfect success. Men are exceedingly apt to form their judgment of actions according to the issue of them. But He who "searcheth the heart" "judgeth righteous judgment;" and even of the good intention to which his providence denies accomplishment, he says to its projector, "Thou didst well that it was in thy heart."

It is natural, that men should desire prosperity:—

Verse 7. *Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun.*

Light is a beautiful emblem of happiness or joy. We at once, by a kind of instinctive association, connect with it the idea of cheerfulness and pleasure; and that of melancholy and mourning with darkness. This is so natural, so accordant with universal feeling, that the figure is, I suppose, common to all languages. It occurs frequently in the Scriptures. "Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart."—"If thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul; then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness shall be as the noon-day."—"The light of the wicked shall be put out, and the spark of his fire shall not shine. The light shall be dark in his tabernacle, and his candle shall be put out with him."—"The light of God's countenance" is the cheering influence of his favor; and, to express the uninterrupted joy of the heavenly state; the absence of those alternations of gladness and gloom that characterize the present life; it is beautifully said, "There shall be no night there." It is "the inheritance of the saints in light." The heavenly city, seen by John in the visions of God, "had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it; for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb was the light thereof."

But, desirable as prosperity is, it cannot be secured. This word is, in every man's experience, although in very various proportions, a scene of alternate light and shade, clouds and sunshine:—

Verse 8. *But if a man live many years, and rejoice in them all, yet let him remember the days of darkness, for they shall be many. All that cometh is vanity.*

Long continued prosperity is very dangerous to its possessor. It is apt to make him forget himself; to seduce his affections from better things, and to lead him to say within himself, "This is my rest." But however long and uninterruptedly prosperity may have been enjoyed, its continuance, even for a day longer, can never be counted upon. "Days of darkness" may be near, when a man is least apprehending their approach. The day that has gratified his utmost wishes may be the day that gives beginning to disappointments and troubles. The sun of his prosperity may be eclipsed in its meridian altitude. The moment that has cleared his sky of its only remaining cloud, may be the moment that gives indications of the coming storm.—And as the days of darkness may be near when least anticipated, they may also be "many," in proportion to the number of the previous days of light. Often has lasting prosperity been succeeded by protracted affliction; many days of sunshine and gladness by many of "darkness and gloominess, of clouds of thick darkness."—Let no man, therefore, say, "I shall not be moved; for I shall never be in adversity." Job, in the season of his felicity and glory, when "the candle of the Lord shined upon his head, and by his light he walked through darkness,"—when, according to another of his beautiful figures, "his root was spread out by the waters, and the dew lay all night upon his branch,"—Job then said, "I shall die in my nest, I shall multiply my days as the sand." But while he was saying so, unthought-of troubles were gathering round him. The predatory bands of the Sabeans and Chaldeans were on their march, to drive off his herds, and murder his servants;—the "fire of God" was falling from heaven, and consuming his flocks with their shepherds;—and the "great wind from the wilderness" was smiting the four corners of the "house of feasting," and burying in its ruins his entire family, his "seven sons and his three daughters!" While he was saying so, the intelligence came that laid him among the ashes, an agonized and desolate mourner, with his head shaven, and his mantle torn;—the commencement of "wearisome days," and "months of vanity," during which "his harp was turned to mourning, and his organ to the voice of them that weep."—The man who never anticipates and expects trouble must be but ill prepared to stand it when it comes. And since "all that cometh is vanity:"—since our joys are precarious and transient; since

we cannot say with effect to the sun of our prosperity, "Stand thou still," when a higher authority commands it to decline into the twilight of fear, and the night of darkness and sorrow;—O how unutterably foolish is the man who trusts to this vanity, and calculates on no reverse!

As a part of the *improvement* of these verses, my friends, allow me,—

1. *In the first place*; To extend a little this thought, of the succession of "days of darkness" to days of light and prosperity.—Although such days should not at all overtake the prosperous worldling during his earthly life;—though his entire course here below should be marked by success in all his pursuits, and the fulfilment of all his wishes;—yet, ah! if he dies as he has lived, "a man of the world, who has his portion in this life," days of darkness,—many days of darkness,—an eternity of darkness, awaits him. When the light of his earthly prosperity is extinguished, it must be succeeded by "the blackness of darkness for ever." O then, how much more blessed is the poorest of the children of God, who, though his "days of darkness" on earth be "many," possesses, amidst the deepest of their gloom, "a joy with which a stranger cannot intermeddle,"—a "good portion, that shall not be taken away from him,"—a "treasure in the heavens that faileth not;"—who, in the midst of darkness, has light from the Lord; and who has the prospect of that land of light,—of knowledge, and purity, and bliss,—where "the days of his mourning shall be ended,"—where the "Lord shall be his everlasting light, and his God his glory!" Jesus "lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and said, Blessed are ye poor; for yours is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye that hunger now; for ye shall be filled. Blessed are ye that weep now; for ye shall laugh. But woe unto you that are rich! for ye have received your consolation. Woe unto you that are full! for ye shall hunger. Woe unto you that laugh now! for ye shall mourn and weep."—The "days of darkness" in this world *may* come; but if you live and die without God, the days of darkness of which I now speak *must* come. As to this there is no uncertainty. It is sure as the word and oath of the God of truth. All the impenitent enemies of God and his Son, all the careless neglecters of the great salvation, shall be banished from the blessed light of heaven to the darkness of hell, where no ray of gladness or of hope enlivens the perpetual gloom.

But, blessed be God, these days of everlasting darkness may be avoided. "I am the Light of the world," says the Redeemer of men; "he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." And "truly *this* light is sweet;" sweet at all times; peculiarly sweet, in the season of adversity; shining then in the dwellings of the righteous, and making their hearts glad, when the lights of their earthly joy are dark in their tabernacle. And it is an everlasting light,—“the light of life,”—of life eternal. If you would possess the light of true joy, you must come to the Fountain of light,—even to Him of whom it is said, "In him was life, and the life was the light of men."

2. *In the second place*; We should learn to consider ourselves as debtors to one another, and to our fellow-men in general, in every thing by which God puts it in our power to profit them.—Whatever be the gift we have received, it becomes our duty to "minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God." The exhortation in the beginning of the chapter may be applied, in all its emphasis, to spiritual as well as to temporal things. This, indeed, is the peculiar province of *Christian* charity. In its efforts and sacrifices for the corporeal and other temporal comforts of men, it finds many associates amongst those who are alive to the claims of humanity and compassion, although they are destitute of religious principle:—but having learned to "seek first," for himself, "the kingdom of God and his righteousness,"—having been taught the preciousness of the soul, and the value of eternal blessings, the Christian takes into the range of his benevolent contemplations and schemes of usefulness, the everlasting existence of the objects of his pitying regard. To leave this out of the account, is the prevalent defect of what is extolled as benevolence amongst men; but it is the extreme of inconsistency and folly. It is infinitely more foolish, than if a man were to expend all his counsel and his pains to obtain for another the ease and comfort of an hour, whilst he wilfully disregarded what might secure the happiness of a lifetime;—or, than if a medical practitioner were to bend all his attention, and devote all his skill, to some slight topical ailment, whilst he allowed a deadly disease to prey upon the constitution with unheeded, unmitigated, and fatal fury. The eternal salvation of sinners has been the great object of Divine benevolence; for the accomplish-

ment of which, all the wonders have been wrought of the mediation of the Son of God. It was for this that "he who was in the form of God, and thought it not robbery to be equal with God, made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men; and, being found in fashion as a man, humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." He who neglects the spiritual and eternal interests of men, is not of one mind with God. His benevolence is wretchedly defective and spurious. He wants the spirit of that world of love, where "there is joy over one sinner that repenteth."

3. *Thirdly*; Let Christian ministers, Christian parents, teachers of Sabbath schools, and the disciples of Christ in general, in their various departments of usefulness, be encouraged to cast the seed of spiritual instruction upon the waters. We shall find it after many days. "Be instant, in season, out of season;" not consulting, but cheerfully sacrificing, your own ease and convenience. "In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thy hand; for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that; or whether they both shall be alike good." In some cases, it may be long before any of the seed begins to spring; and in others, whole fields may speedily be "white unto harvest." There is not in the spiritual the same regularity of return as in the natural world. Sometimes, the seed is no sooner sown than the blade appears, and is rapidly succeeded by "the ear and the full corn in the ear." At other times, it may lie in the soil till you think it must be rotten, and sigh over it as lost; and when hope is gone, and you have given up all thoughts of its ever appearing, that may be the very moment when the principle of life from God quickens the germ, and surprises and delights you with the unexpected beauties of spiritual vegetation.

4. *Fourthly*; In the spiritual, as in the natural world, "it is God that giveth the increase." It was so, when Paul planted, and Apollos watered; and it is so still. "Neither is he that planteth any thing, nor he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase." But an increase from the seed of the word is graciously promised:—"As the rain cometh down and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: so shall

my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth; it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I send it." Isa. lv. 10, 11.—When we sow our seed, therefore, let our prayers ascend for the quickening influences of heaven; and when any increase appears, let our acknowledgments be made for those influences to the God of all grace. The prayer of faith shall not be unanswered; the exertions of zeal shall not be unblest; the seed-time of instruction shall be followed by a harvest of the "fruits of righteousness;" the "work and labor of love" shall not be forgotten of Him for whose sake, and to the glory of whose name, it is done.

5. *Fifthly*; And, my Christian brethren, if a portion of your worldly substance be required for the purpose of imparting the bread of life to famishing millions, will you withhold it? Will you keep it back from Him out of whose treasures you have received it; who still says, "The silver is mine, and the gold is mine;" who honors you by putting it in your power to promote his cause; who encourages you to liberality by the promise of his blessing; and who is able to "canker your gold and silver," and cause "the rust of them to witness against you?"—"Honor the Lord with your substance."—"There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth." Be not deaf to the appeals of Heaven. Let the pleading voice of the whole Heathen world be heard. Let the claims of "the seed of Abraham, God's friend," awaken the grateful sensibilities of your hearts, and open your hands to liberality. Seize the present opportunity. Let it not pass unimproved. Seek not after apologies for refusal. Cover not a grudging disposition by plausible objections. Let not Conscience be bribed and cajoled by Avarice. Put not to the credit of prudence and principle what belongs to the account of hardhearted selfishness, and the "love of this present world." Allow no imaginary obstacles, or trifling difficulties, to bar the present exercise of your Christian generosity. "Cast you bread-corn on the face of the waters." "Give a portion to seven and also to eight."—How powerful is the Divine exhortation with Israel by the prophet Haggai! Hear it, with an awakened conscience and a willing mind. "Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your cieled houses, and this house lie waste? Now therefore thus saith the Lord of hosts, Consider your ways. Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not



enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages, earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes. Thus saith the Lord of hosts, Consider your ways. Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the Lord. Ye looked for much, and, lo, it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it. Why? saith the Lord of hosts. Because of mine house that is waste, and ye run every man unto his own house. Therefore the heaven over you is stayed from dew, and the earth is stayed from her fruit. And I called for a drought upon the land, and upon the mountains, and upon the corn, and upon the new wine, and upon the oil, and upon that which the ground bringeth forth, and upon men, and upon cattle, and upon all the labor of the hands." Hag. i. 4-11. Mark also the promise of blessing attending their compliance with the expostulation, and derive from it the encouragement it is fitted to give:—"And now, I pray you, consider from this day and upward, from before a stone was laid upon a stone in the temple of the Lord: since those days were, when one came to a heap of twenty measures, there were but ten: when one came to the press-fat, for to draw out fifty vessels out of the press, there were but twenty. I smote you with blasting, and with mildew, and with hail, in all the labors of your hands; yet ye turned not to me, saith the Lord. Consider now from this day and upward, from the four-and-twentieth day of the ninth month, even from the day that the foundation of the Lord's temple was laid, consider it. Is the seed yet in the barn? yea, as yet the vine, and the fig-tree, and the pomegranate, and the olive-tree, have not brought forth: FROM THIS DAY WILL I BLESS YOU." Hag. ii. 15-19.

## LECTURE XXII.

ECCLESIASTES XI. 9, 10. XII 1-7.

“Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these (things) God will bring thee into judgment. 10. Therefore remove sorrow from thy heart, and put away evil from thy flesh: for childhood and youth (are) vanity.”

“REMEMBER now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them: 2. While the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars, be not darkened, nor the clouds return after the rain: 3. In the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble, and the strong men shall bow themselves, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those that look out of the windows be darkened: 4. And the doors shall be shut in the streets, when the sound of the grinding is low, and he shall rise up at the voice of the bird, and all the daughters of music shall be brought low: 5. Also (when) they shall be afraid of (that which is) high, and fears shall be in the way, and the almond tree shall flourish, and the grasshopper shall be a burden, and desire shall fail: because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets: 6. Or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern. 7. Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.”

OF all the seasons of life, youth is the one in which we are least disposed to anticipate “days of darkness.” The spirits are then light and buoyant, and the heart dances to the notes of pleasure. The blood is warm; the passions are ardent; the inward pleadings for their indulgence are powerful; restraint is felt to be irksome, and is esteemed unreasonable; the counsels of age are apt to be disregarded, as coming from those who have themselves enjoyed their youth, and who, being now incapable of its pleasures, would ungenerously deny them to others. These counsels may be the results even of dear-bought experience, and the dictate of the sincerest affection. But youth is incredulous of evil; never

disposed to take it upon trust from others that "all is vanity," but determined to make the trial for itself. Feeling that there are pleasures in sin, it flatters itself with the persuasion, that the young at least may be allowed a little license. Impelled by inward propensities, and solicited by outward temptations, it pursues its course of indulgence. What the Bible condemns as dangerous and ruinous sins, it learns to call by the palliative names of juvenile levities, irregularities, indiscretions; and laughs away reflection, as the business of maturer age.

Well aware of the character and natural propensities of youth, Solomon, turning himself to the young, as he was naturally led to do by the tenor of the preceding verse, frames his address accordingly:—

Verse 9. *Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thy heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment.*

This, as I hinted in a former lecture, is most naturally interpreted as the language of serious and awakening irony. Some of the terms are such as will not bear to be explained of that innocent cheerfulness, and chastened indulgence, which alone could be directly recommended either to childhood, or youth, or manhood.—"Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth." Take thy pleasure. Pursue whatever course inclination suggests to thee. Trouble not thyself with reflections or with anticipations; but yield to present impulses, and spend a merry life. Give thyself no concern about what may please God. Please thyself. "Withhold not thy heart from any joy." Follow the tide of thy passions. And if

"——thy pulse's madd'ning play  
Will send thee pleasure's devious ways,"

do not check it; mind not moderating and reducing it; let it bound in thy veins; and give thy youthful desires their full measure of gratification.

That Solomon means more than mere merriment, mere cheerful, unsolicitous, light-hearted jollity,—that he means the *pleasures of sin*,—is evident from the phrases which follow:—"and walk in the ways of thy heart, and in the sight of thine eyes." The *ways of a man's heart*, in Scripture language, do not mean the ways of the renewed heart; but the ways to which he is led by the dis-

positions and tendencies of the heart in its natural state, unregenerated by the grace of God:—"For the iniquity of his covetousness," says God concerning rebellious Israel, "I was wroth and smote him: I hid me and was wroth; and he went on frowardly in the way of his heart." To "walk in the sight of the eyes," is to pursue whatever the eyes look upon as desirable. We naturally fix our eyes on that which we value and wish for, and avert them from that which we dislike. The eyes thus become the index of the affections. Ezekiel's wife is denominated "the desire of his eyes." Seeking with eagerness the precarious treasures of the world, is "setting the eyes upon that which is not." The "lust of the eye," is associated with the "lust of the flesh, and the pride of life." And in the second chapter of this book, Solomon expresses the unrestrained gratification which he gave to all his propensities in these words, "whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them; I withheld not mine heart from any joy." It is one of the prayers of his pious father, "Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity." The ways of the heart, and the sight of the eyes, are sometimes united, to signify the practical indulgence of evil tendencies. In delivering the Divine injunction to the Israelites respecting the fringes of their garments, Moses says to them:—"And it shall be unto you for a fringe, that ye may look upon it, and remember all the commandments of the Lord, and do them; and that ye seek not *after your own heart*, and *your own eyes*, after which ye use to go a whoring." Numb. xv. 39. Enjoy thyself, then, says Solomon. Let thy heart follow thine eye, and thine eye thy heart. Rove at pleasure amidst all the scenes of youthful indulgence. While "the days of thy youth" continue, give the reins to thy lusts, and satiate thyself with whatever thy heart fancies.

This is counsel, which the young would like very well to understand as given them in good earnest. But so given, it would be counsel very inconsistent with the whole tenor and design of this book. Solomon takes a higher aim. His object is, to entice the young to purer, and nobler, and more lasting joys; and he immediately checks the indulgences of time, by pointing to eternity. He draws in the rein, which he seemed to throw loose. He damps the fire which he appeared to kindle. He exhibits a youth, giving himself up to all the gaities, and all the licentious pleasures of

the world, and in the midst of the scene of mirth and revelry, he suddenly startles his ear, and thrills his heart with the summons to the tribunal of God:—"Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thy heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: BUT KNOW THOU that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment."

This is very solemn.—Go on, young man. Pursue thy career of pleasure. Give thy heart all its desires. But—count the cost. Anticipate what is before thee. Remember, thou hast an account to give. Think of the awful realities of a coming judgment:—and then,—with these before thine eye,—follow thy present course, *if thou canst*. Thou mayest have many companions in thy career of thoughtlessness and sensuality. But O forget not, "God will bring thee into judgment." Think of thyself. Thine own personal concern in the transactions of that day will be as sure, as if thou wert to be the sole culprit,—the only prisoner at the bar,—as if all creatures were swept from existence but thyself. "*Know thou*" this. Be assured of it. "God has appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness." Let conscience speak freely, and it will ratify the assurances of his Word. Laugh not at the warning. I know that young men are disposed to treat every thought of such a subject as a gloomy intruder on their pleasures;—I know that the problem of happiness is, how such thoughts may be most effectually and constantly excluded from the mind;—and I know that the man who ventures to suggest them, exposes himself to be proscribed as rude, and stigmatized as fanatical. But O beware! Listen to friendly admonition. What you are tempted to laugh at now, you will find a dread reality in the end.

This is not the language of sarcastic contempt, and heartless indifference, feeling no concern whether it is complied with or not. It is not the language of a sated sensualist, grudging you your youthful pleasures, because he can now no longer partake of them himself. It is not the language of a haughty disdainful Pharisee, who says in his heart,—"God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this youthful libertine." It is not the language of a sour, morose religionist, who would deprive you of all enjoyment, and condemn you to perpetual austerity and gloom. No, my young friends. It

is the voice of sincere affection. It is language dictated by the experience of one, who tried the course you are running, or resolving to run. He knows it all. His heart dissolves in tenderness over the youth whom he sees “regarding lying vanities, and forsaking his own mercy.” The tear trembles in his eye while he addresses you. He beholds you spreading all your sails, and about to launch forth, insensible of your danger, on a sea that is full of perils; a sea, by whose enticements to adventure he had himself been tempted out, of which the hidden dangers are most imminent where its beauties are most alluring; whose fairest spots are surrounded with the most numerous wrecks, where his vessel had a thousand times been in jeopardy, and from which he had, as by a miracle of mercy, got back into port, in thankful amazement at his own safety. He would persuade you against running the same fearful risk,—against trying a course from which so few have returned.

To show that his end was far from being to make them miserable before the time,—to deprive them of their enjoyments and substitute nothing in their room,—to agitate their bosoms with unavailing alarms,—he adds in

Verse 10. *Therefore, remove sorrow from thy heart, and put away evil from thy flesh: for childhood and youth are vanity.*

This language is not of the same description with that in the preceding verse, “Rejoice in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth.” There is nothing in it of irony. The sorrow and the evil to be put away, are those to which the course described in the preceding verse naturally conducts the youth who pursues it. They are, he may be assured, its unfailing attendants and consequences. The admonition, therefore, is one of benevolent compassion; to avoid suffering both in body and in soul, both in time and in eternity. The course from which Solomon dissuades was fitted, even in this world, to occasion affliction and mourning to the heart, and disease to the bodily frame. It is in warning against a life of dissolute pleasure, that Solomon elsewhere urges these motives on the attention of youth:—“lest thou give thine honor unto others, and thy years unto the cruel; lest strangers be filled with thy wealth, and thy labors be in the house of a stranger; and thou mourn at the last, when thy flesh and thy body are consumed, and say; How have I hated instruc-

tion, and my heart despised reproof, and have not obeyed the voice of my teachers, nor inclined mine ear to them that instructed me!" Prov. v. 9-13,—and such a course not only leads to bodily suffering and anguish of spirit in this world, but will infallibly "destroy both soul and body in hell."

He then adduces a  *motive*  to compliance with his admonition, and afterwards prescribes the  *means*  of its fulfilment.—The motive is, the constant precariousness of life at every period of it, even in the season of its greatest vigor, and under its fairest and most flattering appearances:—"childhood and youth are vanity." The young are naturally disposed to promise themselves long life,—to count upon many days. Age, they know, must be near the grave; but  *they*  have abundance of time before them,—plenty of leisure to think about the life to come, before the present life shall come to a close. But, alas!  *vanity*  is inscribed on all the stages of our mortal course; and dependence on its prolongation is, at every period of it, foolish and illusory. Childhood and youth are subject to vicissitude and death, as well as manhood and age. The young man who is bent on worldly pleasure is therefore seriously reminded that he "knows not what a day may bring forth:" that in reckoning on continued life, he is building in the air; that death may arrest him in his career, when he least expects interruption; and that in the state in which death finds him he must give in his account, when "God shall bring him into judgment."

The  *means*  of fulfilling the counsel, to "remove sorrow from the heart, and put away evil from the flesh," are then prescribed:—

Chapter xii. verse 1. *Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them.*

It is the tendency of our fallen nature to forget God; and this tendency is peculiarly strong in youth, amidst the gaieties and allurements of a fascinating and seductive world. Forgetfulness of God is sometimes put for the whole of irreligion; and on the same principle, the *remembrance of God* may comprehend all the principles and affections of practical godliness. So the phrase is used here. It is an admonition to early piety.

"Remember thy Creator."—Remember him, as the great Author of your being; and spend not the existence which He has

given and which he every moment sustains, in forgetfulness of him and rebellion against him. Remember your unceasing dependence upon him for "life, and breath, and all things," and cherish the humility that becomes dependent creatures. Remember him, as your all-bountiful Benefactor, both in providence and in redemption; the Father of mercies, the God of salvation. Remember him in all the characters in which he has been pleased to make himself known to his creatures, especially that in which it is the principal design of the Bible to reveal him, as "by Jesus Christ reconciling the world unto himself;" just in justifying the ungodly; displaying, in the redemption of sinners by the work of his Son, his infinite wisdom, his spotless purity, his inviolable righteousness, and his unbounded mercy, in that inseparable harmony in which, by the necessity of his nature, they exist in his perfect character. This view of God has been given to men from the beginning with various degrees of progressive light, *salvation* having, since the entrance of sin, from the first promise downwards, been the leading subject and end of Divine revelation. Remember Him, with the dispositions, the worship, the obedience, the service, that are due to him. It is affectionate, reverential, practical remembrance of him that is here recommended. Think how awful it is, that God should be so generally forgotten by his intelligent offspring: that He should have so few of their thoughts; so little of their regards! Dare ye to be singular, by devoting yourselves to God in a world where he is so grievously dishonored; where there are so few hearts that give him a welcome residence. Choose ye his love as your portion, his service as your employment, his glory as your end.

And "Remember *now* thy Creator, *in the days of thy youth.*"—*In the first place*, because "childhood and youth are vanity;"—because life is from the first uncertain; because "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom;" and if you delay, your life may close before you have begun to be wise. The youngest amongst you, and the healthiest and most vigorous, is not sure of a day. If you do not wish, therefore, to die in forgetfulness of God, your safest way is to remember him now.—*Secondly*, because he is supremely entitled to the choicest and best, nay to the whole, of your days. He has a paramount claim upon all your time. Every day of your life is misspent, that is spent without God. Think not only



of the folly, but of the impiety, of delay. You do not intend, perhaps, to spend all your days without religion. You will begin to think seriously by and by. But is not this to postpone the will of God to your own? to resolve that you will take your own pleasure now, and, when you have sated yourselves, will then give some thought to pleasing God? Is it not to say, you will devote to yourselves and to your lusts the prime and vigor of your days, and then give to that God who made you for his glory, and to whom you owe your all, the dregs and refuse of your time? What think you of this preference of self to God? Is it not deeply impious? O be not, then, guilty of it. "Remember *now* thy Creator, in the days of thy youth."—*Thirdly*. Your own happiness is concerned in your compliance with this counsel. That happiness is unworthy of the name, which is disturbed by the remembrance of God. The contemplation, and enjoyment, and service of the Divine Being, must be the honor and the blessedness of every rational nature. There is a propriety, a beauty, and a glory, in early piety. It shall be "an ornament of grace unto thy head, and chains about thy neck." And, whilst it confers honor, it imparts happiness. The ways of wisdom are "ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her; and happy is every one that retaineth her." The earlier, therefore, you enter on these ways, you will have, according to the time that God may spare you, the longer period of true enjoyment;—of enjoyment, uninterrupted by the whispers of an uneasy conscience, and the scaring apprehensions of a coming judgment; of enjoyment, excellent and worthy in itself, and leaving no stings behind.

And, as early religion is the way to happiness in youth, it is also the effectual means of laying it up for *trouble* and for *age*:—"while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them."

"The evil days" are the same with the "days of darkness" in the eighth verse of the preceding chapter. They are days of trouble; days of gloom and sorrow, arising from one or other, or, it may be, from a combination, of the numberless "ills that flesh is heir to." The arrival of such days, sooner or later, may be expected by all. The Divine allotments, indeed, of temporal enjoyment and suffering are exceedingly diversified, and the prin-

ciple by which these degrees are measured is amongst the secrets of Deity; giving rise, in its sovereign application, to many a wondering question which we in vain attempt to answer. But every man may look for his share of trial. How few are the lives that are spent without days of darkness! And for such days, a course of mirthful and dissolute forgetfulness of God is surely a miserable preparation. Whatever may be the thoughts of men or whatever their thoughtlessness in the time of comfort, and health, and prosperity, the need of religion is universally felt in the season of disease, and bereavement, and woe. And, oh! it is a sad thing, when "the evil days come," and come suddenly, and our sources of consolation are yet to seek:—to seek, when perhaps we are almost, if not utterly, incapacitated for thinking, by the nature of our bodily distemper, or by the stunning, and stupifying, and distracting influence of unanticipated distress. And would it not be righteous in an insulted and offended Deity, to deny his comforts in the season of need to those who had slighted and refused him in the hours of their own preferred enjoyment? who, when all was going well with them, "walked in the ways of their heart, and in the sight of their eyes," and presumptuously thought they could do without Him; and who, instead of being drawn to him by the choice of love, are driven to him by the mere force of calamity? Would there not be justice in his turning away his ear from their cry, and saying, "Because I called, and ye refused; I stretched out my hands, and no man regarded: but ye set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof; I also will laugh at your calamity, I will mock when your fear cometh?"

If you survive the "days of evil,"—if you are not cut off in youth or in manhood,—old age must come upon you; "the years must draw nigh when you shall say, I have no pleasure in them:"—that is, no pleasure from the sources which yielded it before,—no pleasure of the kind to which you gave up your earlier days. Those things which gratified your youth, and kept it in thoughtless merriment, will then lose their relish, and cease to be enjoyed; and if you have not previously "remembered your Creator," and provided other and more enduring pleasures, alas! how cheerless will be the years of your declining life! Before these years draw nigh, then, lay up for them suitable enjoyment. The only satisfying pleasures—the only pleasures which will then remain—will

be those of true religion. When every other spring has run dry, or its streams have become vapid or nauseous, the "wells of salvation" will continue in all their fulness, and freshness, and sweetness. The blessed truths of God will yield to the soul consolation and peace, and tranquil gladness, and animating hope. Instead of bitter and unavailing regrets for pleasures that are past and can never return, you will experience, amidst the felt exhaustion of nature; amidst the "labor and sorrow" of fourscore years; a "joy with which a stranger cannot intermeddle." Leaning on the arm of Divine love and power, you will pass without fear through the "valley of the shadow of death," and be "gathered to the grave, as a shock of corn, fully ripe, is brought in in his season."

The same idea of the cheerless condition of age without provision made for its happiness by timely piety; or rather, the view of those circumstances in age that render the supports and consolations of religion peculiarly necessary; is expanded in

Verse 2. *While the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars, be not darkened; nor the clouds return after the rain.*

The darkening of the sun and the cheering light of day, and of the moon and stars that illuminate and enliven the night, may be explained either literally of the dimness of vision that is incident to old age, or in one or other of two figurative senses: of the cessation of the sprightly enjoyment of the lights of heaven, in those years of which the old man says, "I have no pleasure in them;" or of the gloom of affliction, the darkness of those troubles to which age is liable, which occasion dull days and wearisome nights, sun and moon being alike shrouded in obscuring clouds. The first of these views identifies the expression in meaning with another in the subsequent description of old age,—*"and those that look out of the windows be darkened."* The second and third are so close connected, that they may be considered as one,—the infirmities, and uneasiness, and troubles of age being the principal cause of light itself ceasing to charm, and losing its quickening and spirit-stirring influence. The expression thus stands in contrast with that in the seventh verse of the preceding chapter, *"Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun."*

*"The clouds returning after the rain"* is a beautiful figure

for a succession of troubles. Between those clouds that darken the sky of age there is but little interval. They may rack and disperse for a short while, and the spirits be eased and lightened; but instead of the continuance of the "clear shining after rain," the clouds return, and the sky is overcast anew. Not only do the distresses of advanced life multiply from the enlarging circle of family connections and of "children's children," in all whose trials the old father's heart is interested; but the exhaustion of the bodily energies, and the general sinking of nature, afford little respite from varied, and sometimes indescribable, feelings of uneasiness and distress. The varieties in the condition of old men are, it is true, very considerable; and to some the description before us is much less applicable than to others. We meet at times with cases, in which, even to *four score* years and *ten*, the sky continues unusually serene, the "cloudy and dark days" being rather the exception to those of sunshine and cheerfulness. But Solomon's representation is not that of extraordinary instances, but of what may in general be expected.

The principle by which we should be guided in our interpretations of Scripture ought to be, neither predilection for what is old, nor fondness for what is new, nor the vanity of being original, but a simple regard to truth and probability. On this principle, after considering such explanations as have come in my way of the following verses, with their respective critical defenses, I am satisfied that the one which has been all along the most common is the most natural; and I shall therefore, without entering at all into controversy, which would be out of place, and foreign to my purpose in these lectures, adopt it in the comments I am now to offer you.

Verses 3-5. *In the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble, and the strong men shall bow themselves, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those that look out of the windows be darkened; and the doors shall be shut in the streets, when the sound of the grinding is low; and he shall rise up at the voice of the bird; and all the daughters of music shall be brought low: also when they shall be afraid of that which is high, and fears shall be in the way, and the almond-tree shall flourish, and the grasshopper shall be a burden, and desire shall fail: because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets.*

“The keepers of the house shall tremble.”—The hands and arms, the instruments of averting threatened evil, the guards and defenders of “the earthly house of this tabernacle,” become feeble and palsied, constantly tremulous, or shaking with the slightest attempt at effort, and incapable of yielding it any, even the smallest, protection from assault and injury. Old age is the time of the felt cessation of power. “Cast me not off in the time of old age: forsake me not, when my strength faileth.”

“And the strong men bow themselves.”—The limbs, however robust they were formerly, bend under the weight of the body, tottering with extreme frailty, and unable to give it effectual support. The strong men can no longer carry their burden from place to place: they let it fall in the attempt even to raise it.

“And the grinders cease, because they are few.”—The teeth, which perform the same office to the food as the millstone to the corn, comminuting and grinding it, and preparing it for the organs of digestion, loosen and fall out; and the few that remain become incompetent to the purpose they were wont to serve, so that the same kinds of food cannot now be taken as before, and the mastication of those which *are* taken is effected with much slowness and difficulty.

“And those that look out of the windows be darkened.”—Another striking and affecting symptom of age,—the decay, and sometimes the total loss, of sight; exemplified in Isaac, in Jacob, in Eli, and in a greater or less degree experienced by the old in general. The eyes, which from their bony sockets, as from the windows of the “earthly house,” look out upon surrounding objects, examining the near, surveying the distant, receiving notices from without, imparting intelligence and intimating emotions from within, watching against evil and directing to good, become suffused and dim, and fail in the fulfilment of their important functions. All is obscurity and confusion. The brilliance of the light itself may be darkly seen; but the reflection of it from the objects on which it falls is too faint to be perceptible. Children and friends approach, but the eyes, which wont to glance with pleasure, turn not towards them; they must speak ere they can be distinguished. Dangers are at hand; but the sentinels of the house give no alarm. Other eyes than his own must guide, and inform, and warn the

sightless old man. And he is bereft, too, of one of the richest sources of enjoyment,—

“——from the cheerful ways of men  
Cut off, and, for the book of knowledge fair,  
Presented with a universal blank,  
Of Nature's works, to him expung'd and raz'd,  
And wisdom at one entrance quite shut out.”

“And the doors shall be shut in the streets, when the sound of the grinding is low.”—There is evidently, in this particular, an allusion to the noise of the hand-mill in grinding the corn for the day; to the opening of the doors in the morning for this cheerful work; and to the lively sound of its accompanying songs. But if by the *grinders*, in the former verse, the teeth be meant; then in this verse the *grinding* must signify, under the allusion mentioned, the work which the teeth perform. The lips are, in other parts of Scripture, by a very natural figure, called the doors of the mouth. “Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth: keep *the door of my lips.*” Psalm cxli. 3.—“Trust ye not in a friend; put ye not confidence in a guide; keep *the doors of thy mouth* from her that lieth in thy bosom.” Mic. vii. 5. In the old man, when “the grinders cease,” and the “sound of the grinding is low,” the lips are compressed with a singular firmness,—the doors of the mouth shut, with a closeness that gives the countenance of age one of its most marked peculiarities.

“And he shall rise up at the voice of the bird.”—This probably expresses the general wakefulness of age. Were the interpretation consistent with the dulness of ear incident to this period of life, we might consider it as meaning that the old are easily disturbed—the slightest noise startling them. It seems rather, however, simply to signify their inability to rest. They wake early; even as soon as the cock crows or the birds begin to chirp in the morning: whereas, when young and vigorous, exercise prepared them for repose, and they could sleep sound and long. “Tired Nature's sweet restorer” flies from the eye-lids of age, as well as from those of woe.

“And all the daughters of music shall be brought low.”—By “the daughters of music,” I understand those organs that are employed either in the production, or in the enjoyment of it:—the lungs, which inhale the needful supply of air; that exquisitely

beautiful mechanism by which the air, in its passage from the lungs, is so finely and delicately modulated; and the ear, which, by a structure not less admirable, is adapted for receiving the impressions of sound, and through which the sensations of delight are conveyed to the mind. In old age, the play of the lungs is less easy, and respiration more laborious; the voice becomes tremulous and feeble; and the command of its modulation is impaired, not only by the rigidity of its own organs, but by the obtuseness of those of hearing; by which last defect, too, the pleasure of musical sounds is diminished, or lost. The voice is thus unfitted for making music, and the ear for enjoying it.—“I am this day,” said Barzillai the Gileadite to king David, in declining to accompany him to Jerusalem,—“I am this day fourscore years old: can I discern between good and evil? can thy servant taste what I eat or what I drink? can I hear any more the voice of singing-men and singing-women? wherefore, then, should thy servant be yet a burden unto my lord the king?” 2 Sam. xix. 35.

“They shall be afraid of that which is high.”—Every ascent in the way, up which, in the days of their youth, they would have bounded with agility and ease, is now discouraging to them. They stop, and take breath, and hesitate, and, unable to see themselves, make many inquiries, before they will attempt what, with a desponding shake of the head, they “fear will be too much for them.”

“And fears shall be in the way.”—They are full of apprehensions of real or imaginary dangers,—of accidents that may happen to them,—of obstacles over which they may stumble,—of being jostled and thrown down, or otherwise hurt,—of mischiefs that may come in their way, which they have not eyes to see, nor strength to ward off, nor agility to escape.

“And the almond-tree shall flourish.”—From the particular time of the almond-tree’s flourishing, it has by some been placed early in spring,\* whilst others have assigned it to winter.† In the latter view, it has been considered as significant, in the imagery of Solomon, of the closing scene of life, when

“——pale concluding winter comes at last,  
And shuts the scene.”

But the existing dubiety about the season gives uncertainty and

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\* See Cotton on the verse:—Blayney on Jer. i. 11, 12; &c.

† See Dathius and Van der Palm on the verse.

indistinctness to this explanation; and both on this account, and on the ground of its own superior beauty and appropriateness, the more common view of the figure is entitled to preference. The almond-tree covered with its snow-white blossoms is a beautiful poetic emblem of the hoary head; and the casting of the blossoms might farther represent the shedding of the silver locks from the venerable brows of age.

“And the grasshopper shall be a burden.”—By those who explain the preceding emblem from the season of the year, this also has been interpreted as referring to winter, when the grasshopper, which in summer had been all sprightliness and agility, becomes languid and inactive, and “a burden” to itself. Thus it is, as they allege who adopt this explanation, with the aged man, when he experiences the feebleness of decrepitude, and is bowed down with the load of his infirmities.\*—But may not the expression be intended simply to convey the idea of *extreme feebleness*? signifying, not that the old man is, like the grasshopper at a particular season, a burden to himself, although that is true; but that to the relaxed and palsied imbecility of age, *the lightest thing is a load*. Would it be an inappropriate expression for the feebleness of an unnerved and emaciated frame, to say of a man, he was become so exceedingly weak that he could not bear a fly to light upon him? This I take to be the meaning of the grasshopper being a

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\* “*Locusta, sive cicada, per æstatem valde agilis ac læta, hyeme languet, atque ipsi sibi molesta est:*” [i. e., The locust or *cicada*, which during summer is full of agility and gladness, in winter languishes, and is a burden to itself.—Ed.]—*Van der Palm*.

It may be owing to an undue sense of the ludicrous, but I never have been able to view in any other light than as an ingenious conceit, with too little dignity in it to have been intended by Solomon, the resemblance which some have drawn, and have supposed to have been in his eye, between the shape of the grasshopper and the decrepit body of a very infirm old man:—“*Cum locusta comparatur senex, propter corpus macilentum, pedes graciles, et incessum incurvatum ac si onere premeretur:*” [i. e., The old man is compared with the locust, on account of his meagre body, shrivelled legs, and crooked gait as if oppressed with a burden.—Ed.]—*Dathius*. He translates the words, “*locusta onerabitur,*” in *Eccles. xii. 5*: “the dry, shrunk, shrivelled, crumpling, craggy old man, his back bone sticking out, his knees projecting forwards, his arms backwards, his head downwards, and the apophyses, or bunching parts of the body, in general enlarged, is very aptly described by that insect.”—*Parkhurst* on the word—who refers for fuller proof of the resemblance to Dr. Smith’s *King Solomon’s portraiture of old age*.—The resemblance may be very complete; but the comparison, I confess, conveys a conception to my mind too odd and ludicrous to be willingly admitted on such a subject.



burden. It is not improbable, that the phrase was a proverbial one for the utmost degree of debility.

“And desire shall fail.”—I rest in the ordinary interpretation of these words, as signifying the cessation of the desire of animal pleasures; the appetites and propensities of nature giving way with the departure of the warmth of youth, the cooling of the blood, the sinking of the animal spirits, and the general exhaustion of the energies and capacities of the living frame.

“Because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets.”—The grave is man’s long or perpetual home. As time advances, indeed, the epithet will become less and less appropriate, as the sleep of the tomb will be shorter and shorter, till the sounding of the “trump of God;” when the slumbers of centuries and the repose of a day shall be disturbed together; when righteous Abel, the earliest tenant of the tomb, shall quit the narrow house, and the breath shall at the same time return to the man who is yet warm in his shroud. But the terms were appropriate in Solomon’s days, and are so still in ours; and to all who reach the grave it must ever continue a *perpetual* home, in as far as respects their return to “the place that knew them” in the present world. “When a few years are come, then I shall go the way whence I shall not return.”—“Man lieth down, and riseth not; till the heavens be no more they shall not awake, nor be raised out of their sleep.”—“As the cloud is consumed and vanisheth away, so he that goeth down to the grave shall come up no more. He shall return no more to his house, neither shall his place know him any more.” Perhaps the “long home” may mean, not specifically the grave, but the *future state* in general,—the “undiscovered country, from whose bourne no traveller returns;”—where the condition of every individual is immediately and irreversibly settled.

“The mourners going about the streets” refers to the ancient eastern custom of employing official mourners, who were hired for the purpose of wailing for the dead: raising public lamentations over them; attending at their funeral obsequies; by dress, and voice, and gesture, and all the outward expressions of grief, moving the feelings of kindred and spectators; and praising the excellences of the departed in dirges of plaintive music, which, in extraordinary cases, were even recorded amongst the sacred melo-

dies of the country. Thus "the singing-men and singing-women" celebrated the virtues of good king Josiah. They "spoke of Josiah in their lamentations," says the writer of the Chronicles, "to this day, and made them an ordinance in Israel: and behold they are written in the Lamentations." 2 Chron. xxxv. 25. To the same description of persons the prophet Jeremiah alludes, when, weeping for the slain of the daughter of his people, he says, "Thus saith the Lord, Consider ye, and call for the mourning women that they may come; and send for cunning women that they may come: and let them make haste, and take up a wailing for us, that our eyes may run down with tears, and our eyelids gush out with waters." Jer. ix. 17, 18.

*Our* customs differ from theirs. We should be apt to think this kind of mercenary and fictitious sorrow a burden rather than a gratification to the disconsolate spirit of bereaved and agonized affection; and likely, besides, in most instances, to be proportioned to the wealth more than to the worth of its subjects. But we also have every day before our eyes the sight of "mourners," although not of the same description, "going about the streets;" relatives and friends assuming in succession for each other the garb of sorrow. The man of grey hairs has followed many a bier in the course of his fourscore years,—has dropt his tears of tender sympathy, or of heart-broken anguish, over many a grave:—and now at length the mourners assemble for himself, and follow him to "*his* long home," and commit *his* loved and venerated dust to the house of silence.—Various have been the interpretations of

Verse 6. *Or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern.*

The silver cord being loosed, and the golden bowl broken, have been thought to represent life under the image of a lamp of gold suspended by a cord of silver threads from the ceiling of a festive hall, enlightening and enlivening the company:—but the cord loosens or snaps asunder, the lamp falls and is broken, the light is extinguished, and all is involved in gloom.\*—The remainder of the verse has been interpreted as a figure taken from the furniture of a well. The bucket and the wheel are broken: the water

\* Dathius.

can no longer be drawn: and, instead of the busy and lively scene that was wont to surround the well's mouth, all is solitude and silence, the ground untrodden, the water stagnant.—The imagery of the entire verse has by others been traced to this latter source. "There is a *cord* to the *bowl*, or bucket, with which the water is drawn; a *wheel* by which the more easily to raise it; a *cistern*, into which it may be poured; and a *pitcher*, or vessel to carry it away with:—but now all are broken or loosened, and become useless." Thus, at death, all the functions of life terminate, and the entire mechanism of the human frame is shattered and goes to decay. "The lungs cease to play, the heart ceases to beat, the blood to circulate; every vessel becomes useless; the whole surprising contrivance for forming and communicating the blood, which is the life, from the fountain of the heart to every extremity of the body, is entirely deranged: the silver cord is loosed, the golden bowl is broken, the pitcher and the wheel are alike marred."\*

But I cannot persuade myself to dismiss this interesting description thus hastily.—One of the difficulties which we feel in the explanation of it arises from our not being acquainted with the terms and phrases then employed in the different departments of natural science, as far as the cultivation of them extended; nor even with the names in common use, for many of the parts, especially in the internal structure, of the animal machine. I can hardly suppose the phraseology of Solomon here to have been entirely poetical; I mean, the immediate invention of his own fancy alone; expressing resemblances that had presented themselves to his own mind, but had not at all been previously recognized in the language of ordinary life. It is well known how many of the terms and designations by which anatomists have chosen to distinguish the different organs and functions of the human frame are figurative,—borrowed from obvious or remote analogies, and likenesses to other objects and operations in nature;—and the same terms and phrases, or others framed on similar principles, are to be found in common discourse.

Suppose, then, we adopt the common explanation of the "silver cord," (which I confess myself disposed to do) as signifying the spinal marrow,—that prolongation of the brain which comes down in the central tube of the back bone, and sends off nerves

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\* Scott's Commentary.

in all directions, which branch into innumerable fibers, distributed to the remotest extremities:—is it at all necessary that we consider the name as Solomon's own,—a fine poetical image? At the risk of marring to some minds the beauty of the image, I must say that I think it more likely to have been the common name for the part of our frame in question. We can hardly conceive a designation more strikingly appropriate. The medullary *cord* it is often called by anatomists at this day; and why it should be denominated the *silver cord* no one need be told, that has seen its silvery whiteness, which is particularly remarkable as it appears in the living subject, or when exposed while death is recent and the body fresh.—The loosing of the silver cord is the final cessation of nervous influence and of all sensibility. It is by means of the nerves that the soul transmits and effectuates its volitions. It is by them also that all the bodily senses convey to it the impressions made upon them by their respective objects. Is it, then, refining too much, to regard the nerves as the medium of communication between the body and the mind?—the bond, as it were, of their connection and intercourse?—and the loosing of the silver cord as the dissolution of their intimate and mysterious fellowship?

By the “golden bowl” some understand *the heart*. But to a bowl the heart bears no great resemblance, and still less to one of gold; and it is more probably represented, in next clause of the verse, by the *fountain*.—There are two membranes that envelope the brain; the one, firm and opaque, surrounding the whole mass; yet, though in contact, not properly connected with it, but rather lining the skull;—the other, soft, delicate, and transparent, closely attached to the brain, insinuating itself between all its convolutions, compacting and lubricating the whole. The *golden bowl* might be the common anatomical name for this beautiful integument, both on account of its globular shape, and from its yellowish color, bearing a nearer resemblance to that of gold than any other part of the body. There is no occasion in this, any more than in the former case, for having recourse to poetical imagery. There is, in truth, much more of fancy and metaphor in the designations of the *severe* and the *affectionate mother*,\* given in modern

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\* Dura mater, and pia mater.

anatomy to the two membranes I have mentioned, than in that of the golden bowl, which is founded, surely, in a greatly simpler and more direct resemblance. I have somewhere seen it said, that this membrane is frequently shrivelled and ruptured at death. But whatever be in this, the breaking of the golden bowl may signify the termination of all the functions of that most essential and precious organ of the mind's operations, the brain:—"In that very day, his thoughts perish."

The expressions which follow have been conceived to refer to the circulation of the blood:—"and the pitcher be broken at the fountain, and the wheel be broken at the cistern."—The discovery of this most wonderful and beautiful process being attributed to an anatomist of our own country, at a period comparatively very recent, it may be reckoned extravagant to suppose the knowledge of it to have been possessed by Solomon in so remote an age of antiquity. It is not at all impossible, however, that this knowledge might then have existed, and, like some other branches of science, have been subsequently lost; which does not in the least detract from the praise due to the modern discoverer. It seems exceedingly unlikely that the circulation of the blood should be an entire secret till so late as the beginning of the seventeenth century. Passages have been quoted from different writers which seem to prove that it was not unknown to the ancients, whatever uses they made of their acquaintance with it, and in whatever ways they might account for its curious and astonishing phenomena. But, at any rate, let us recollect what the inspired record affirms of the extent of information, in the various departments of natural science, acquired by Solomon. It is true that we have no remains of his researches in human and comparative anatomy. But the same thing is true of other branches, in which we know him to have excelled. He "spoke of trees, from the cedar-tree that is in Lebanon, even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall:"—yet, where are now the traces of Solomon's botany? "He spoke also of beasts:"—what has become of his zoology?—"and of fowl, and of creeping things, and of fishes:"—are any extant works, or remnants of works, to be found in the departments of natural history that treat of these? Even the intimation, general as it is, that these different provinces of animated nature were extensively explored, and carefully studied by him,

warrants the conclusion that he was not inattentive to their internal and *comparative* structure: and when we connect with this the penetrating sagacity and comprehensive enlargement of his mind, we may feel our incredulity mitigated at least, if not entirely removed, respecting his acquaintance with the *sanguineous system*.

The HEART is the FOUNTAIN, from which the streams of vital nourishment pervade the whole animal frame. To enter into any minute detail of the manner in which it performs its office, and of the entire system of venous and arterial vessels, would be utterly out of place. Some general idea, however, may be given of the process. For the due performance of its functions, the human heart is divided into four distinct cavities or chambers. From one of these, on the left side of the heart, the blood, in its pure state, is forced, by the powerful contraction of this wonderful organ, (a contraction produced by the quantity and the stimulating virtue of the blood itself,) into the open mouth of one large artery, which immediately branches off in smaller divisions, and these again in smaller, till their numberless and unsearchably minute ramifications have diffused the streams of life, and warmth, and nourishment, to the remotest extremities of the body,—so perfectly, you all are aware, that you cannot pierce the skin with the point of a needle, without puncturing a vessel, and drawing blood. From the arteries, the blood is taken up by the mouths of innumerable small veins, which, reversing what took place with the arteries, unite into larger and larger branches, (like rills uniting into streamlets, and these into rivers,) till at length, by two large veins, one bringing it from the superior, and the other from the lower parts of the body, it is poured into the upper cavity, (where these two veins unite,) on the right side of the heart,—the side opposite to that from which it has issued.—But observe—the blood is not now in the same state. It issued of a bright red color, and fit for the purposes of life. It is now of a dark purple hue, and, in its passage through the body, has either contracted or parted with such qualities, as to be no longer capable of supporting life,—of giving warmth and nourishment to the animal frame. It must be again purified. And wonderful is the provision made for this necessary purpose. From the upper cavity on the side of the heart to which the blood was restored by the veins, it passes into

the inferior chamber on the same side: and thence it is propelled, through a large artery, to the lungs. Into the lungs we are continually, by respiration, drawing the air of the atmosphere. The vessels into which the air is drawn lie close along-side of the blood-vessels, throughout the entire substance of the lungs. The air which we inhale is found, when we breathe it out again, to have lost its purity, and to have become unfit for the support of animal life. That which it has lost has been imparted, by a mysterious chemical process, to the blood; which is sent back from the lungs, in its original purity, by several large veins, which unite at the upper cavity, or reservoir, on the left side of the heart. From this it passes into the inferior cavity, from which it had first issued, and commences anew its nutritious course through the system.—Thus, there are properly *two circulations*,—a greater and a lesser; one through the body, the other through the lungs; both equally essential, each being useless without the other; and both incessantly going on together:—two hearts, in truth, beating simultaneously, receiving the blood at the same instant, the one from the body and the other from the lungs, and then at the same instant driving it through the body and through the lungs again, and that at the rate of seventy strokes every minute, during the whole course of a man's life! The various arrangements, and exquisite contrivances, by which both these circulations are effected, so as to go forward continually, independently of our volitions, present a display of wisdom and power utterly overwhelming; such as no man can contemplate in a proper frame of mind, without adoring the Author of his being, and exclaiming, "I am fearfully and wonderfully made:"—"O Lord, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all."

In the verse before us, then, we may suppose the heart to be the "fountain:"—the great artery, which receives the blood immediately from it, to be distributed through all the rest, may be intended by the "pitcher:"—and the "pitcher is broken at the fountain," when, at death, this vessel loses its elastic propelling power, ceases to act, collapses, and lies empty and useless.

The *wheel* was a power by which the water was drawn from the *cistern*, or *pit*. It may be understood to represent the *lungs*, the organ of respiration. And this, indeed, seems to be the great impelling power of the whole living system; on which depend

all the effective movements of the heart itself, and consequently of every other part of the animal frame. The play of the heart is maintained by the play of the lungs, by which its purity and its stimulant powers are imparted to the blood. So that, by analogy, not indeed in all respects correct, but as well grounded as some more modern ones in anatomical science, the lungs may be said to bring its fluid contents from the heart, as the wheel draws the water from the well.—When death approaches, the lungs gradually cease to play; less and less air is inhaled, and inhaled with irregularity and difficulty; the action of the heart becomes proportionally feeble and intermittent; till, at length, the last breath is faintly expired; the lungs collapse; the pulses all cease; and the stillness of death insues.—And—

Verse 7. *Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was; and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.*

The body, formed originally from the dust, shall undergo the full execution of its sentence,—“Dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return:” a sentence pronounced on man in consequence of his sin, and of which the stroke of death, throughout successive generations, has been the righteous fulfilment. For, although man was formed from the dust, he was not on that account necessarily mortal. The power that gave him life was able to sustain it in never-fading vigor. We talk of death as coming in the course of nature. But of the original course of nature, when man came in the beauty of holiness from his Creator’s hand, it was no part. It pertains to the course of *fallen* nature. Man was deathless while he was sinless. He became mortal when he apostatized from God. And the universality of the reign of death is a mournful but conclusive evidence of the universality of the apostacy. Every shrouded corpse, and every opening grave, should lead our minds back to the entrance of sin,—to

“—man’s first disobedience, and the fruit  
Of that forbidden tree, whose mortal taste  
Brought death into the world, and all our woe.”

And while the body is consigned to the grave, to be food for the loathsome worm, and to mingle with the dust of former generations, the immortal spirit, the tenant of this earthly tabernacle, shall—perish with it? No.—Sleep with it in the tomb for ages in a state of insensibility? No.—It shall “return unto God



who gave it.”—Solomon was no materialist. He did not consider the soul as of the same substance with the body, and thought as the mere result of certain modifications and arrangements of matter and motion, and death the final destruction of the whole man;—but the body as only the organ of the indwelling spirit, like a complete set of admirably adapted instruments, by which it acquired its knowledge, and reduced that knowledge to use in the execution of the dictates of its will; and the soul, though acting by means of the body while it continues its occupant, yet capable of existence, of thought, and of activity, in a state of separation from it. Of the manner, it is true, in which a spirit exists, and thinks, and acts, and enjoys, in its disembodied state, we can form no distinct conception; but we are quite as ignorant of the manner in which spirit operates on matter when connected with it; for, though we know the facts, we cannot account for them: and if even the facts that are attested by our senses and experience we are unable to explain, ought not this to prevent incredulity and scepticism as to others that are beyond the sphere of our observation, and which we have no cause for doubting but our incapacity to conceive of them?

Nor was the soul, according to Solomon, to fall, during the sleep of the body in the grave, into a state of insensibility, or unconsciousness.—Had it been to partake in the deep slumbers of the tomb, it could not have been said to “return to God who gave it” any more than the body. The distinction between the two is marked; and the existence of the soul, in life and consciousness, when separate from the body, emphatically declared.

When the spirit thus returns to God, we are not to understand that in every instance it is to remain in His presence, and to enter into his joy. It goes to receive its doom from the supreme Judge; a doom, not at that time formally pronounced, indeed, but which the subsequent decisions of the great day shall only recognize and ratify. That day of formal judicial sentence may be distant: but this is not inconsistent with immediate transition at death to happiness or woe,—with the “spirits of the just” being “made perfect” in heaven, and the souls of the wicked “going to their own place,”—to that everlasting fire that is prepared for the devil and his angels.”—“The beggar died, and was carried by the angels

into Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died, and was buried; and in hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torments."

The feelings, my friends, with which we contemplate the description in this passage, or behold it realized in our aged friends or others around us, must vary according to the characters and the prospects of those in whom we witness the symptoms of decay and of approaching dissolution.—"The hoary head is a crown of glory, when it is found in the way of righteousness." There is not on earth a more venerable and delightful spectacle than of an aged pilgrim "walking with God:" and a more affecting and deeply melancholy sight can hardly, on the contrary, be imagined, than that of a hoary-headed sinner, who has lived his fourscore years "without God in the world!"—all that time, God calling and he refusing:—and the Almighty "angry with him every day:"—his body now bowed down beneath the weight of years,—all his powers, of action and of enjoyment, decaying,—every hour likely to be his last,—time all behind him, and eternity all before him,—and his soul still "dead in trespasses and sins,"—the hour of his departure come, and no readiness for the world to which he is bound!—O with what opposite emotions do we contemplate old age in this character, and in the saint of God who, in approaching the close of his earthly pilgrimage, is drawing near to what has long been the goal of his hopes and desires; who, while outwardly decaying, is inwardly maturing for heaven; in whom every symptom of coming death is but a symptom of approaching life; and who, in the final exhaustion of nature, bids adieu to the world in the words of aged Simeon, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace,—for mine eyes have seen thy salvation!"

True, indeed, it is painful for affection to mark the indications of increasing feebleness in the objects of its tender regard; to see infirmities multiplying, and troubles gaining ground, which it feels its inability to remove, and can only soothe by the gentle offices of kindness; to be thus continually reminded, that the hour is at hand when the dear old father, or friend, to whom it has long clung in fond attachment, must take his final leave. And when that hour arrives,—when the "silver cord is loosed, the golden bowl broken, the pitcher broken at the fountain, and the wheel broken at the cistern,"—even though the event has long been anticipated, who can witness it without deep emotion?—who

can part even from exhausted age without a pang of inexpressible tenderness?

Of all the periods and events of life, the concluding scene is the one of deepest interest to the person himself, and to surviving spectators. Various are the ways in which it comes, and various the aspects it presents; but in all it is solemn. What can be more so, than the approach of that moment which, to the dying man, is the boundary between time and eternity? which concludes the one, and commences the other: which terminates all his interests in this world, and fixes his condition for a never-ending existence in the world unknown?—What can be more so, than those moments of silent and indescribable anxiety, when the last sands of the numbered hour are running; when the beat of the heart has become too languid to be felt at the extremities of the frame; when the cold hand returns not the gentle pressure; when the restless limbs lie still and motionless; when the eye is fixed, and the ear turns no more toward the voice of consoling kindness; when the breath, before oppressive and laborious, becomes feebler and feebler, till it dies slowly away—and to the listening ear there is no sound amidst the breathless silence; nor to the arrested eye, that watches with the unmoving look of thrilling solicitude for the last symptom of remaining life, is motion longer perceptible;—when surrounding friends continue to speak in whispers, and to step through the chamber on the tiptoe of cautious quietness, as if still fearful of disturbing *him*—whom the noise of a thousand thunders could not now startle—who has fallen on that last sleep, from which nothing shall rouse, but “the voice of the archangel, and the trump of God”?

Solemn and affecting as the scene is when man thus “goeth to his long home,”—when age closes in death,—when “the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit to God who gave it;” how sweetly cheering, how inexpressibly consoling is it, when the valley of the shadow of death is lighted from heaven; and when the grave, dark and dreary as it is, is closed over the dead, “in the sure and certain hope” that as “Jesus died and rose again, even so them also who sleep in Jesus will God bring with him!”

Ye aged pilgrims, who have begun to experience and to exemplify the truth of Solomon’s description—fear not. Let your

trust be in him who hath said, "I will never leave thee, I will never forsake thee:"—"Even to your old age I am he; and even to hoar hairs will I carry you." Look backward with gratitude; look upward with confidence; and look onward with hope. Your "heart and your flesh fail; but God is the strength of your heart, and your portion for ever."

And, O ye who have lived from childhood to youth, and from youth to age, regardless of God and of eternity, with no relish for any pleasures but those of time and sense, "walking in the ways of your hearts, and in the sight of your eyes," and to whom the years have "drawn nigh," and have come, when the zest of those earlier pleasures is gone, and there is nothing in their stead,—to whom remembrance yields only regrets, and anticipation doubt and fears:—O end not as you have begun: die not as you have lived: you have thrown away your life; throw not away eternity too. Your guilt has been deep; your folly has been extreme; your danger is imminent; but I dare not say,—the mercy of God in the gospel forbids me to say,—that your condition is hopeless. Even to you, the sceptre of his grace is extended; even to you the voice of invitation is still addressed, "turn ye, turn ye, for why will ye die?" There is but a step between you and death. O let not that last step be taken without God. Bow before the footstool of his throne. Lay your gray hairs there in the dust of penitential abasement. Confess your guilt. Let your spirit bend to the offers of free mercy. "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved:" for he excepts none from the gracious assurance,—“Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out.”

And ye, my young friends; which of the two characters we have been bringing before your view would you wish to be yours, should you live to old age? You can have but one answer to the question. You desire to die in peace with God, and in good hope for eternity. If such be your desire, "remember now your Creator in the days of your youth." Thus prepare for an honorable and happy old age, and for a death of tranquillity and hope.—But your reaching old age, the word of God tells you, and the events of every day tell you, is an extreme uncertainty. You have no covenant with death. The years you anticipate may never come; they may never even "draw nigh."—"Childhood and youth are

vanity." If, therefore, you would live a life of genuine happiness, however long,—“remember your Creator in the days of your youth:” and if you would be secure for a future world, at whatever period you may be summoned from this, again I say, “remember your Creator in the days of your youth.” I could call many amongst my hearers to witness to you, that they were strangers to true enjoyment till they entered on a religious life,—a life of faith upon the Son of God. “O taste, and see that the Lord is good!”

## LECTURE XXIII.

ECCLESIASTES XII. 8-14.

“Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher; all (is) vanity. 9. And moreover, because the Preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge; yea, he gave good heed, and sought out, (and) set in order many proverbs. 10. The Preacher sought to find out acceptable words; and (that which was) written (was) upright, (even) words of truth. 11. The words of the wise (are) as goads, and as nails fastened (by) the masters of assemblies, (which) are given from one shepherd. 12. And further, by these, my son, be admonished: of making many books (there is) no end; and much study (is) a weariness of the flesh. 13. Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this (is) the whole (duty) of man. 14. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether (it be) good, or whether (it be) evil.”

Verse 8. *Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher; all is vanity.*

With this general declaration the book had commenced, as the text of the preacher's discourse. This text he had illustrated in a great variety of lights, never losing sight of it, but frequently repeating it with particular application to the different branches of his subject. He had commented on human life, in many of its diversified conditions and aspects, and had shown the vanity of it in each. He had at length, in the most affecting terms, described the wants, and frailties, and troubles, of its concluding period, and had brought it, after its longest continuance, to its universal termination:—“Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was, and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.”

How appropriate, in this connection, is the repetition of his text! There is no season in which the vanity of life is more strikingly apparent, than when a man looks back upon it from its approaching close. O in what a different light does it appear to the recollections of dying age, and to the sanguine anticipations of

vigorous and healthful youth! The latter looks forward to long life, and his flattering hopes fill the prospect with prosperity and happiness:—he “rejoices in his youth, and his heart cheers him in the days of his youth.” To the former, the longest life appears in the retrospect as short as, in the anticipations of his early days, it had seemed long: and, if he has continued to live for the present world only, his recollections of the past must be not only “vanity,” but unutterable “vexation of spirit.” The pleasures of sin, however fascinating in the enjoyment, will *then* be found to “bite like a serpent and sting like an adder:”—and all the fled joys of worldly prosperity—O how inexpressibly vain the remembrance of them, when “the silver cord” is just giving way,—the dust about to “return to the earth,” and “the spirit to God who gave it!”—when the recollections of time are absorbed in the anticipations of eternity! The hand of death will lift from before the eyes of the dying the veil of delusive fascination that covered the emptiness of earthly joys; and this solemn truth, inscribed upon them all, will appear in its dread reality, and be felt in all its bitterness by the disappointed and foreboding heart—“Vanity of vanities,—all is vanity!”

The royal author of this book, we have had repeated occasion to observe, does not merely draw conclusions from reasonable principles and suppositions, but delivers the dictates of observation and experience. He had seen crowds of mortals flocking to various springs, in different and opposite directions, all in quest of the waters of happiness; and he formed the resolution, (certainly not in wisdom,) of trying them all for himself. He records in this book the results of his trial; to assure mankind, that at no one of those fountains where happiness is usually sought is it really to be found; and to direct them, for the attainment and permanent possession of it, to the “river of God’s pleasures.”

The determination to warn others is, in the mind of a penitent, the natural suggestion of the experience he has had of the vanity and the bitterness of sin. The suggestion is especially strong, when a professed servant of God has gone astray. He has “given occasion to the adversaries of the Lord to blaspheme.” He knows and feels this; and he is anxious to counteract, by subsequent exertion for the spiritual benefit of others, the mischief he may have done by his wicked defection. Solomon had set a dreadful, and

widely pernicious example before his subjects. He here appears in the character of a penitent, himself returning to God, and seeking to bring others along with him; employing all his wisdom for this purpose.

Verse 9. *And, moreover, because the Preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge; yea, he gave good heed, and sought out, and set in order many proverbs.*

“The Preacher was wise.” To the origin of his unrivalled wisdom we have had frequent occasion to advert. Solomon had been thankful for this precious gift of God. But for a time, in the latter period of his life, he had most miserably abused it. The “light that was in him” had been “darkness;” his faculties having been perverted to the purposes of vice and folly. Now, when he is restored to the right way, his wisdom is applied anew to proper and worthy ends.—“When thou art restored,”—said our Lord to Peter, “strengthen thy brethren:”—“feed my sheep—feed my lambs.”

The preacher “still taught the people knowledge;”—both by speech, and by writing. He taught them knowledge of the most useful and important kind,—spiritual, sanctifying, saving knowledge,—genuine, heaven-derived wisdom. The knowledge which Solomon possessed was very various. It embraced a wide circle of science and philosophy. But it was not this that he taught the people. It was the knowledge of true religion: and in this book we have a specimen of his instructions.

I cannot but remark here, how differently the relative value of things is estimated by men and by God. Many a philosopher and naturalist, I doubt not, has wished with all his heart that, instead of those writings of Solomon preserved in the Bible, we had had some of his treatises on the natural history of plants and animals. But Divine wisdom has judged otherwise. It is not the intention of the Scriptures to teach men earthly science, but to teach them religion; not to make them philosophers, but to make them saints. In consistency with this design, those writings of Solomon which have come down to us as a part of the sacred canon, and which we hold to have been “given by inspiration of God,” are such as exhibit the nature of practical godliness, and the encouragements to its cultivation, and prescribe numerous and excellent rules for the conduct of life.



“Yea, he gave good heed:” that is, he applied himself to this object. He investigated truth carefully; not uttering rash and hasty sayings, but the results of meditation, and prayer, and divine illumination.—He tried the various methods of instructing men, and, amongst the rest, that of *sententious maxims*, or *proverbs*. Of these, he “sought out and set in order many.” The inspired historian of his reign says, “He spoke three thousand proverbs.” 1 Kings iv. 32. By a proverb we usually understand a short pithy sentence, comprising in few words some important and notorious truth, and in current and general use. The latter part of this definition does not necessarily belong to the idea of a proverb, in the sense in which the term is used by Solomon. There is no reason whatever for believing that all his proverbs were in previous circulation, and were by him merely *collected*. With some of them this might be, and probably was, the case. But in general, they appear to have been the wise man’s observations on human life, and on the circumstances, characters, and prospects of men,—“sought out” with attentive care, committed to writing as they were made, and then “set in order,” or arranged, in as far as they were capable of arrangement, for public use. Those of them that are contained in the “Book of Proverbs” we consider as having the sanction and authority of the Spirit of God.—And a wonderful book it is. What an inexhaustible treasure of practical wisdom! The more deeply it is searched into, the more we shall always discover in it; and the more diligent and attentive our observation of human life, and of human nature, both in ourselves and others, the more of truth and accuracy will there be found in its various and valuable sayings.

In teaching the people wisdom,

Verse 10. *The Preacher sought to find out acceptable words; and that which was written was upright, even words of truth.*

“Acceptable words:”—literally, *words of delight*.—He threw his instructions into various forms, to attract and to fix the attention. He accommodated himself in this respect, as far as was consistent with preserving inviolate the interests of truth, to the diversified tastes of men. He took care to avoid every thing, in his modes of expression, and in the general manner of his instructions, that could tend unnecessarily to irritate, disgust, and repel those whom it was the desire of his heart to make “wise unto

salvation." He sought to gain their ear, only that he might the more effectually reach their hearts. He used all the sweetness of persuasion, all the solemnity of affectionate warning, and all the faithfulness of kind reproof, to win sinners from the error of their ways, and draw them to God. The first nine chapters of the book of Proverbs, present us with a most interesting specimen of these "acceptable words." There is in them an inimitable union of admonitory fidelity, and enticing and subduing kindness. Like Paul, he "exhorts, and comforts, and charges, as a father doth his children." The whole soul of the writer is breathed out in the earnestness of benevolent desire.

It is plain, that his "seeking to find out acceptable words" refers not to the *matter*, but to the *manner* of his teaching. In the matter, he could not accommodate himself to the likings of corrupt creatures,—creatures that are ever disposed to "say to the seers, See not; and to the prophets, Prophecy not unto us right things; speak unto us smooth things; prophecy deceits: get you out of the way, turn aside out of the path, cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us." Isa. xxx. 10, 11. The very reason why he was desirous to "find out acceptable words" was, that he knew the truth itself to be unpalatable. His object was, to win men to that which was fitted to secure their happiness, but to which they were naturally disinclined. In the doctrines and precepts delivered by him, he adhered most scrupulously to the counsel of God:—"and that which was written was upright, even words of truth." In this he was unbending. What he spoke and what he wrote was "upright," not only as being the genuine declaration of his own mind, but as according with Divine intimations, and with the dictates of that law, which is "holy, and just, and good,"—"righteous altogether:"—and it was "true,"—the unerring and unadulterated truth of God. He could say, in the language of the apostle of the Gentiles, "We are not as many who corrupt the Word of God:"—"We have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but, by manifestation of the truth, commending ourselves to every man's conscience, in the sight of God." 2 Cor. ii. 17. iv. 2.—Although Paul, lest his success among the Greeks should be imputed to his artificial eloquence, and not to the power of the truth and Spirit of God, avoided the studied arts of Grecian

rhetoric,—the “enticing words of man’s wisdom;” yet, doubtless he also, like Solomon, “sought to find out acceptable words,”—all the modes of earnest and faithful, but insinuating and winning, persuasion. He who “warned sinners, night and day, with tears,”—he who “prayed and besought men, in Christ’s stead, to be reconciled unto God,”—would, without question, shun every thing, in speech and in manner, that could be needlessly irritating and repulsive.

The nature and design of the preacher’s instructions are stated in

Verse 11. *The words of the wise are as goads, and as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies, which are given from one shepherd.*

They are “as goads.” The meaning of this is sufficiently obvious. The goad was a staff with a sharp point of iron, used for stimulating oxen, and quickening their pace, when engaged in drawing the plough, or in other labor. Thus “the words of the wise” are intended to be excitements to the service of God: to stir up to increased activity such as are already employed in it; and to rouse others from their thoughtless lethargy, to “prick them in their hearts,” to excite them to inquiry respecting their best interests, and to animate them to press, through all opposition and difficulty, into the ways of God.

The latter part of the verse is not so plain; and various have been the proposed renderings and explanations of it.\* It may be observed, that the word “fastened” does not, in the original language, agree in gender with “nails,” but with “the words of the wise;”† and the whole verse may perhaps be thus rendered:—“The words of the wise, which are as goads, and fastened deeply as nails by the masters of assemblies, are given from one shepherd.”

“The words of the wise” are the words of Solomon himself, and of those other “holy men of God,” who “spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.” We have seen why they are compared to goads. They are further said to be “fastened deeply as nails by the masters of assemblies.” They are explained to the understanding, applied to the conscience, driven home to the heart, and fixed in the memories, of their hearers, by the public teachers of the people.—There may, perhaps, be a special reference to such short comprehensive sayings as the Proverbs, (verse 9,) which are

\* See Dathius, Van der Palm, and Hodgson, on the verse; and Parkhurst’s Lexicon, on the word **שָׁמַר**.

† Lowth.

fitted to make a deep and abiding impresson on the mind, and to be easily kept in remembrance. Like nails they are at once sharp, and take a firm hold.

And these words of the wise "are given from one shepherd." Can there be any hesitation about the meaning of this? The "Shepherd of Israel, who guided Joseph like a flock,—he that dwelt between the cherubim,"—He is the original giver of all the words of inspired wisdom. The subordinate shepherds, the divinely commissioned teachers and guides, were many; but they received all their communications from Him. The designation is most frequently applied in the Scriptures to the Lord Jesus Christ, the Divine Messiah.\* And as He, the second Person of the blessed Trinity, is represented as having from the beginning had the immediate conduct of the whole scheme of redemption, it is likely that we should understand the words before us of HIM. The prophets, who prophesied of the grace that was to come unto the church in the fulness of time, "inquired and investigated diligently,—searching what or what manner of time the SPIRIT OF CHRIST which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. Unto whom," says the apostle Peter, "it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us, they did minister the things which are now reported unto you WITH THE HOLY GHOST sent down from heaven." 1 Peter i. 11, 12. Thus the Spirit that spoke by the prophets and by the apostles is the same. The words of the wise are "the true sayings of God;" to be received by us as such, with humble reverence, lively gratitude, constant remembrance, and prompt and universal obedience.

Verse 12. *And further, by these, my son, be admonished; of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh.*

"My son:"—This is the same style of address with that used by Solomon in the book of Proverbs. He is not, I think, to be understood as directing his discourse expressly and exclusively to *Rehoboam*, but in general to *his reader*, whosoever he might be. It is the address of an old man, and the expression of an affectionate heart. Solomon uses it in the same spirit with the venerable

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\* Compare Psalm xxiii. 1. Isa. xl. 10, 11. Ezek. xxxiv. 23. John x. 1 Heb. xiii. 20. 1 Pet. v. 4.

apostle John, when he writes to the disciples of Christ, in his advanced age, as his little children:—"My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not."

"By these, my son, be admonished." This may mean, either, by "the words of the wise" in general, mentioned in the eleventh verse, or more particularly, by the words of wisdom contained in the book which he was just bringing to a close.

In the latter view of the verse it may be thus paraphrased:—"Receive, my son, the admonitions conveyed in this brief review of the vanity of life. 'Of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness to the flesh.' A vast deal more might be written. I might multiply treatises. The subject, in connection with others that are related to it, is inexhaustible. But 'of making many books there is no end.' I need not set myself to the endless task. By these, my son, be admonished. I have said enough for your conviction and warning. Receive the instruction, and be wise. I might write, till the study of what was written would be a weariness to the flesh. But there is no need. Let what I have written suffice."

In the former view, thus:—"My son, I have written much, and I have studied more. Many a time have I worn out my bodily strength, in my researches into the works of nature and of art,—into all the subjects that occupy human investigation. Of such pursuits and labor I find there is no end: and however agreeable and however profitable they may in some respects be, and however worthy of a share of thy attention,—yet let me, above all things, direct you to 'the words of the wise,'—to the writings of Moses and the prophets, to the 'lively oracles' given through them by the one Shepherd, the God of Israel. By these, my son, be admonished:—make these the men of thy counsel,—thine instructors, thy guides, thy reprovers, thy comforters. From other works you may receive entertainment, and, by hard and wearisome study, extensive, and, it may be, useful information. But these alone can make you truly wise, wise from above, wise unto salvation:—"The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple: the statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes: the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the Lord are true

and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey, and the honeycomb." Psalm xix. 7-10.

He then proceeds to sum up the whole in a single weighty sentence, one of "the words of the wise:"—

Verses 13, 14. *Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.*

"Fear God, and keep his commandments."—These words express a principle, along with the conduct which natively flows from it, and is the evidence of its existence. The *Fear of God* comprehends in it all the gracious affections of the soul towards Him, which are produced by the Holy Spirit, and ought to be cherished under his supplicated influence;—holy awe of his infinite majesty, his spotless purity, and inflexible justice,—fervent gratitude for his goodness and mercy,—confidence in his wisdom, power, and faithfulness,—implicit submission to his sovereign will,—and supreme delight in his entire character.—The fear of God is founded in the knowledge of what he has revealed himself to be; and it is not only inseparable from love, but invariably proportioned to it in degree. There may be *terror* where there is no love; nay, where there is deep-felt and inveterate hatred. But this is as different from the gracious fear of God, as the trembling of a slave who detests his master, but feels himself to be in his power and at his mercy, is different from the filial reverence of an affectionate and ingenuous child, who, in proportion as he loves his father, dreads incurring his displeasure, and is made unhappy by a single word or look of disapprobation. It is the thought of his parent's anger, not the pain of correction, that grieves the spirit of such a child; and the agony of that thought is exactly according to the intensity and tenderness of his affection.

The fear of God, accordingly, is, in Scripture, generally put for the whole of true religion in the heart, and is, not unfrequently, inclusive also of its practical results in the life. Those who "fear God," and those who have "no fear of God before their eyes," are the two great descriptions of mankind. Wherever the fear of God exists in the heart, there will follow the keeping of his commandments in the life; and it is from the latter that we are

to judge of the former. God's name is not feared, when his commandments are not obeyed. Practice is the test of principle,—the only sure criterion of all profession. It is the two together that constitute true religion. The heart must be “right with God,” and the life must prove its rectitude. “The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding:”—“The fear of the Lord, is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all they that do his commandments.” Job. xxviii. 28. Psalm cxi. 10.

“This is the whole duty of man.”—The word *duty* is in this translation supplementary. The expression in the original—“This is the whole of man”—has not, that I am aware of, any parallels by which it might be illustrated. The supplement of the word *duty* destroys its evidently designed comprehensiveness. It is not only the whole duty, but the whole honor, and interest, and happiness of man. And as *happiness* is the chief subject of the treatise, it might, perhaps, be a more appropriate supplement than the other. It is true indeed, inferentially—invariably true—that the *duty* of man is his *happiness*; that the latter is inseparably associated with the former. But may not this be the very sentiment which Solomon intended to convey? The duty is expressed, and the happiness inferred. He sums up duty, in its principle and practice, and declares the fulfilment of this summary to constitute the whole happiness of man. That which men, in ten thousand ways, seek in vain—all their pursuits terminating in “vanity and vexation of spirit”—this is the short and infallible way to find. True religion—the fear and service of God—is the honor and the happiness of man in the present life; and what is infinitely more, it embraces his entire existence as an immortal being, and secures his honor and happiness for the life to come. The honor and the happiness of such a being can never be truly estimated without viewing him in his relation to eternity. A life of true religion is the only life that yields present enjoyment worthy of his spiritual and deathless nature; and it is the only life that can ever END WELL. “Fear God, and keep his commandments; for THIS IS ALL THAT CONCERNETH MAN”—is a sentiment that will be seen and felt in all its truth and importance, in that solemn day, that shall wind up and close the eventful history of our world, and fix,

by an irrevocable sentence, the eternal destiny of every child of Adam:—

“For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.”

The *certainty* of this event is ascertained by all the evidence that establishes the Divine authority of the Bible;—it is confirmed by the secret intimations of conscience; and by all the present irregularities, otherwise so unaccountable, in the Divine administration towards the children of men.—The *solemnity* of the event is unspeakable:—the assembling of all the millions of mankind that shall ever have existed, from the beginning to the close of time, before the tribunal of the universal Sovereign!—when “the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat; the earth also, and the works that are therein, shall be burnt up.” 2 Peter iii. 10.—“I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away, and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God. And the books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.” Rev. xx. 11, 12.

“Every work” and “every secret thing” shall then be “brought into judgment:”—all the doings of men, however private, however anxiously concealed from their fellow-creatures, performed in the dead of night, and far from any human eye;—and all their thoughts, and desires, and purposes, though studiously kept within their bosoms, and never whispered to human ear. Nothing shall escape detection and disclosure. The eye of omniscience having witnessed all, and the Mind that embraces present, past, and future with equal minuteness and equal certainty, having retained all; the sentence pronounced on each individual will be founded in a complete and unerring knowledge of all that he has been, and of all that he has done. This is probably all that is meant by God’s “bringing every work into judgment.” There will be such a development of character, as shall justify the Supreme Judge, and the judgments he pronounces and executes, in the consciences of the condemned; and certify his unimpeachable righteousness to angels and men: but there seems no necessity



for supposing a public discovery of every deed, and word, and thought, of every individual of the myriads before the judgment-seat.

The Scriptures assure us, that the Lord Jesus Christ is to occupy, on that day, the throne of universal judgment:—"the throne of his glory:"\* and the language of the prophet, in prospect of the first coming of the Son of God, may, in all its emphasis, be applied to his second: "But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when He appeareth?" Mal. iii. 2. What answer shall we give to this solemn enquiry? Shall none stand?—Yes: there shall "stand before the throne and before the Lamb a great multitude which no man can number, out of all nations, and kindreds, and peoples, and tongues, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands, and shall sing with a loud voice,—Salvation unto our God who sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb!" Rev. vii. 9, 10. And this multitude shall consist of those who had sustained while on earth a certain character. That character is now before us, in the text; they shall all be such as "feared God and kept his commandments." "The ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous: for the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous, but the way of the ungodly shall perish." Psalm i. 5, 6.

It is necessary, however, to remind you, that the true fear of God, and the obedience thence resulting, must be founded in the faith of that testimony concerning himself which he has given us in his Word. Nothing can be more manifest, than that, if God has revealed himself to sinners, and calls upon them to fear him, he means that he should be feared in the character in which he is revealed. The man who, with that revelation in his hand, professes to fear and to obey God on other terms than those which it prescribes, instead of honoring, insults him,—instead of offering an acceptable service, presents what He must reject with indignation. When God makes himself known to sinners, he makes himself known in a character corresponding to their condition. It is to men *as sinners* that the Bible is addressed. If they do not read it in the remembrance of this, they cannot understand it; for the meaning and appropriateness of any communication must depend

\* See John v. 22-17. Acts xvii. 30, 31. x. 42. Matt. xxv. 31-46. 2 Cor. v. 10, &c.

on the character, and circumstances, and consequent needs, of those to whom it is made. As sinners, men need salvation. In the Bible, accordingly, God appears as "the God of salvation;" and to "show unto men the way of salvation," is its principal,—nay, I might almost say, taking salvation in the most enlarged sense of the term,—its exclusive design. It follows, that no sinner can be considered as truly fearing God, till he has recognized him in this relation, and distinctly and fully acquiesced in that way of salvation, or those proposals of mercy, which he has been graciously pleased to reveal. The first expression of the genuine fear of God on the part of a fallen creature, is the prayer of the publican, uttered in the publican's frame of spirit, "God, be merciful to me a sinner!"—A self-righteous sinner is the strangest, the most anomalous, and self-contradictory of all characters. That sinner shows that he has no right conceptions, no becoming impressions, of the purity and justice of his offended Maker—that there is "no true fear of God before his eyes"—who presumes to think that he can justify himself in His presence. Before man had sinned, it was the law or authoritative appointment of God, that he should hold his life of original blessedness on the condition of his continued innocence. But the moment man fell, and became a sinner, his case was necessarily altered; and it is now equally the law or authoritative appointment of God, that, as a sinner, he must owe his forgiveness and happiness to sovereign grace and mercy, through faith in a Mediator. The reception given to the offers of a free salvation is now the test of loyalty or rebellion. That man retains in his bosom the spirit of a rebel, who persists in attempting what God has declared impossible, and in flattering himself he can want what God has pronounced indispensable; who flies in the face of his most explicit assurances, that "by the works of the law no flesh living shall be justified," and still "goes about to establish his own righteousness; who puts in his claim for right, when he should present his petition for favor; who, openly or secretly, in words or in heart, inserts his own name into that plea, from which the most High has excluded every name in or under heaven, but the name of his Son; who professes to seek the favor of God by "keeping his commandments," and forgets that "this is his commandment"—and, to a sinful creature, necessarily the first of all his commandments—"that he believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ."

No true obedience, besides, can be rendered to the Divine commandments, so long as the heart continues estranged from God, and in its natural state of enmity against him:—and this enmity is slain only by the cross. The fear and the love of God take possession of the sinner's heart together, when, feeling his sinfulness and condemnation, he flees thither for safety; beholds there “mercy and truth meeting together, righteousness and peace embracing each other;” justice and grace revealed with equal honor in the sufferings of the appointed Surety; “good-will to men” in union with “glory to God.” The believing contemplation of these Divine harmonies at once penetrates with awe and melts with love:—and the sinner, relieved from slavish terror, and renewed in the spirit of his mind, “runs in the way of God's commandments.” Fear restrains him from evil, and love incites him to good.

1. Allow me, then, in improving our exposition of these verses, *in the first place*, most earnestly to entreat you all, to give attention to “the words of the wise.”—The holy Scriptures are the records of Divine wisdom. They are very various; and they are all profitable. No knowledge, no wisdom, can be compared with that which they reveal. The treasures of the mind of Deity are laid open here. Things are made known which “eye had not seen, nor ear heard, and which it had not entered into the heart of man to conceive.” Here, and here alone, are “the words of eternal life.” It is not to the philosophers of this world that your attention is now invited. Their researches in the various sciences, the sciences both of matter and of mind, we wish not to undervalue. In their subjects, these sciences are rational and dignified; in their discoveries, speculations, and reasonings, they are often interesting, elegant and instructive; and in many of their results, in their application to the purposes of human life, they are, in no small degree, useful. But, in religion and morals, the only safe instructors are those who received their lessons from God himself. All others are “blind guides,” who “professing themselves to be wise, have become fools.”—“Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world. For after that, in the wisdom of God, the world, by wisdom, knew not God, it pleased God, by the foolishness of preaching, to save them that believe. For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after

wisdom; but we," (says one of those whom God commissioned to "destroy the wisdom of the wise, and to bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent,")—"we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness, but unto them that are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men." 1 Cor. i. 20-25. The gospel of Christ is, with peculiar emphasis, denominated "the wisdom of God," being the most astonishing, and to us the most deeply interesting, of all the exertions and discoveries of Divine intelligence. The mechanical skill, displayed in the works of nature, marvellous as it is, must yield in excellence to what may be termed the moral wisdom of the scheme of grace. The goodness visible in creation is transcendently surpassed by the mercy manifested in redemption. It is the knowledge of *this* discovery of God, that constitutes the most valuable wisdom. An acquaintance with all his other works, throughout the entire range of nature, supposing it attainable, could not countervail the ignorance of this. It would raise its possessor, indeed, to an elevation incomparably higher amongst his fellow-men; it would place his name first in the lists of scientific eminence, and transmit it for the wonder and applause of future generations. But it would not procure him, what the wisest as well as the weakest requires, the pardoning mercy of God, and eternal life. There is only one description of knowledge with which these are associated, and the weakest possessor of that knowledge is wiser than the wisest who is without it. Despised by men, it is highly esteemed with God. Excluded from human philosophy; and the possession of it, so far from being reckoned amongst the requisites of a man of science, exposing him to derision, rather than procuring him honor; it is the philosophy of the Bible; it is the philosophy of heaven:—"These things the angels desire to look into."—O despise not, then, those "words of the wise," which declare the "faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world, to save sinners." Despise not the words of this heavenly teacher himself, who is the Wisdom and the Word of God, on whom the Spirit was poured without measure, and who "spoke as never man spoke." Let his sayings sink deep into your ears. Receive them with meekness, and re-

tain them with faith and love. Keep them, for they are your life.—“As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up; that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.”—“All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him. Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”—“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand. My Father, who gave them me, is greater than all; and none is able to pluck them out of my Father’s hand. I and my Father are one.”—“I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth, and believeth in me, shall never die.” John iii. 14-19. Matt. xi. 27-30. John x. 27-30. xi. 25, 26. O that these words of “a greater than Solomon,” may be esteemed by you, as they truly are, words of wisdom, and not contemned as foolishness! May they be “as goads,” “pricking you in your hearts,” piercing your consciences with a sense of sin and danger, and urging you forward to the only Saviour! May the great “master of assemblies” himself “fasten them as nails,”—giving them a deep, an abiding, a salutary and saving impression, in every heart!

2. *Secondly*; Ye who have “tasted that the Lord is gracious,” who have felt the value of the word of God, and have learned to “count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge”

which it contains,—who have known in your experience that to “fear God and keep his commandments” is the whole happiness of man, and are satisfied that it is his highest honor,—be encouraged to persevere unto the end. Prize more and more highly “the words of the wise.” “Search the Scriptures.” Believe the truths; rejoice in the promises; practise the precepts, of this blessed book. “Be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord.” Keep in your view the solemnities of a coming judgment: and whilst your hopes of acceptance at that day are founded exclusively in “grace reigning through righteousness unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord,” forget not the obligations under which you lie to “glorify God in your bodies and in your spirits, which are his.” Remember, the master whom you serve has said to you, respecting whatever talents he has intrusted to your management, “Occupy till I come.” Use them not, then, for sinful or selfish ends; wrap them not in a napkin; but employ them with diligence for the honor of his name and the interest of his cause; that when he comes to take account of your stewardship, he may own you with his approving sentence, “Well done, good and faithful servant;—enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.”

Let not the vanities of the world seduce you from the possession and the pursuit of better and more enduring joys. Let the lesson that “all is vanity,” be imprinted on your minds, as a truth affirmed by God, and attested by the unvarying experience of men. Let nothing tempt you to repeat Solomon’s unwise experiment; but rest satisfied, and act upon the assurance, that the result would be to you the same as it was to him. “Cleave to the Lord with purpose of heart.” Let HIM be, to the end, “the portion of your inheritance and of your cup.” Still “fear God, and keep his commandments;” and you will increasingly experience while here, and fully know hereafter, that “this is the whole” happiness, and honor, and interest, “of man,” for time, and for eternity.

*Lastly.* It ought to be *our* desire and aim who profess to be servants of God in the ministry of the Word, to make that word the exclusive standard of all our instructions, and to present and recommend these instructions with the same end in view, as to our hearers, with that for which they are given to us of God. It

is our duty to “speak the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth,” with a single eye to the glory of God and the best interests of men:—“To the law, and to the testimony: if we speak not according to this word, there is no light in us;”—and if we declare the truths of this Word for selfish and unworthy purposes, the blessed Author of it may give these truths efficacy for the salvation of others, but our service he will disown:—he may save the hearer, but he will reject the preacher.

I have endeavored to set before you, and to press upon your serious attention, the doctrine taught, and the conduct recommended and enjoined, in this interesting portion of the sacred volume, I hope with a sincere desire to promote the honor of my Master, and the present and future benefit of my hearers. But whatever may have been the motives and aims of the preacher, of one thing be ye confidently assured, that in all that he has revealed—in every doctrine, every precept, every promise, every warning, every threatening—the Divine Author of the Bible has your good invariably in view. By what else, indeed, could He be influenced?—To his *doctrines* does he not graciously subjoin,—Believe, and live? Where amongst his *precepts* is the one that is not fitted to promote the well-being of him that keeps it? His *promises*!—are they not “exceeding great and precious?” What is the sum of all his *warnings*, but—Do thyself no harm? And even his *threatenings*,—the most tremendous declarations of the coming wrath,—are they not the utterance of mercy?—of that mercy that is “not willing that any should perish,” and that “has no pleasure in the death of him that dieth?” What is the language of every one of them, coming from the very heart of that infinite Being who “delighteth in mercy?” Is it not,—“Escape for thy life!”—“Flee from the wrath to come!”—“Turn ye, turn ye, for why will ye die?”

Are not the two great lessons of that book of which we are now closing our review, lessons dictated by the love of a benevolent God? Why does he record in his Word, and urge upon your attention, the assurance that “all is vanity,” but to keep you from deceiving yourselves, where deception would be your ruin?—Why does he exhibit the emptiness of the shadow, but to induce you to lay hold on the substance?—Why does he warn you away from the “streams of false delight,” but to conduct you to the fountain

of unmingled and eternal joy?—Be assured, every one of you, that all the contents of his Word are in harmony with the kindness of his heart:—that he makes nothing your duty which you will not find to be at the same time your interest:—and under this conviction, hear again “the conclusion of the whole matter,” the comprehensive summary of these “words of the wise” to which we have been attending—the aim of the writer from the beginning to the close of his treatise—the end to which he meant all his details to lead—the grand lesson which the whole were intended to teach and to impress:—may it be graven in indelible characters on all your hearts; and may the God by whose authority it comes, give you to enjoy the full experience of its truth!—“FEAR GOD, AND KEEP HIS COMMANDMENTS: FOR THIS IS ALL THAT CONCERNETH MAN!”

END OF THE LECTURES ON ECCLESIASTES.





# THE CHRISTIAN'S HOPE

OF

CHRIST'S SECOND COMING.

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(Extracted from Dr. Wardlaw's Discourses on the Principal Points of the Socinian Controversy.)

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THE Christian is an EXPECTANT of CHRIST; ONE WHO LOOKS FOR HIS SECOND APPEARANCE. He is distinguished by his *hopes*, as well as by his principles, and by his character.

The HOPE of the Christian *divides itself into three parts*: his hope *during life*, his hope *at death*, and his hope *at the second coming of Christ*. To this last period Christian hope is most frequently represented [in the Scriptures] as looking forward,—because the expectation of that event is naturally considered as including all that shall intervene before it. The saints of God, under the ancient dispensation, were distinguished by their hope of the coming of the promised Messiah in the fulness of time. And as the hope of his *first* coming characterized his people *then*, so does the hope of his *second* coming characterize them *now*.

*That he will come*, to raise the dead, and to judge the world; to bless his faithful people with complete salvation, and to execute on his enemies the vengeance due to their impenitent rebellion; *the Scriptures do most plainly and abundantly testify*. “Let not your heart be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so; I would have told you: I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go away and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also:”—“And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold two men stood by them, in white apparel; who also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come, in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven:”—“The Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall first rise;—then we, who are alive and remain, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.” John xiv. 1-3. Acts i. 9-11. 1. Thess. iv. 16, 17.

And while the certainty of the event is thus clearly affirmed, it is no less evident, that *the hope of the event, and the influence of that hope, are distinctive marks of a Christian*;—of one who is such, not in name only, but in heart. “As it is appointed unto men once to die, and after this the judgment; so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and to them that look for him shall he appear the second time, without a sin-offering, unto salvation:”—“Ye turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God; and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, who delivered us from the wrath to come:”—“Looking for that blessed hope, even the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ:”—“I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give to me at that day; and not to me only, but to all them also that love his appearing. Heb. ix. 27, 28. 1 Thess. i. 9, 10. Titus ii. 13. 2. Tim. iv. 6-8.

The *temper of mind which these various expressions describe* is exemplified in a very impressive and edifying manner, in the conclusion of the Bible:—“He who testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. *Even so, come, Lord Jesus!*” Rev. xxii. 20. The spirit breathed in this holy aspiration, is to be found, although in very unequal degrees, in every faithful follower of the Redeemer. There is included in it:—In the first place, *a firm belief that he WILL come*:—that, as certainly as the Word of God was verified by his coming the first time, it shall also be verified by his second appearance. And this confidence—resting on the faithful declaration of the God of truth, and maintained by all the accumulated evidence which proves the Bible to be his word—stands unshaken by the profane taunts of the ungodly scoffer, who says still, as he said in the days of old, “Where is the promise of his coming?” 2 Peter iii. 1-10.—Secondly, *Glad anticipation of the event*: because it shall be a time of unprecedented honor to their Lord and Redeemer; who shall then be “glorified in his saints, and admired in all them that believe;” and, instead of hanging on the cross, in ignominy and pain, “despised and rejected of men,” shall occupy, amidst surrounding millions, the throne of universal judgment:—and because it shall be the time of complete salvation and triumph to his redeemed people; of the personal glory and blessedness of each, and of the social happiness of all.—Thirdly, *Habitual preparation for its approach*. “None of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; or whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live, therefore, or die, we are the Lord’s. For to this end Christ both died, and rose again, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living.” Rom. xiv. 7-9. The Christian lives with an eye to his final account. He tries his conduct, not by the standard of present interest or advantage, of any kind, but by the light in which it shall appear when he shall stand at the tribunal of Christ. He endeavors habitually to act according to the spirit of the apostolic exhortations—“Gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end, for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ:”—

“Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot and blameless.” 1 Peter i. 13. 2 Peter iii. 14.—Fourthly, *Patient expectation of it.* The Christian is subject to many and various distresses, some of them “common to men,” and others peculiar to the children of God. He is “in heaviness through manifold trials.” But, in the hope of the glory that shall be revealed, he “possesses his soul in patience.” As “the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain,” so waits the believer for the salvation of God; “stablishing his heart, because the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.” James v. 7, 8. He “rejoices in hope,” and is therefore “patient in tribulation:” Rom. xii. 12;—not murmuring, and fretting, and weary of the world, on account of its trials, but “resting in the Lord, and waiting patiently for him;” happily assured, that his “light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for him a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.” Psalm xxxvii. 7; 2 Cor. iv. 16–18.

*This hope, from its very nature, possesses a sanctifying influence:*—“Beloved, now are we the sons of God; and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know, that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in Him (that is, in Christ\*) purifieth himself even as he is pure.” 1 John iii. 2, 3. It cannot fail to be so, from the nature of the thing. That which we *hope for*, we *desire*;—and that which we *desire*, we *pursue*. Likeness to Christ, and the felicity thence resulting, cannot be the object of *hope* without being the object of *desire*; nor can it be the object of *desire*, without being the object of *present pursuit*. So that every one who really has *this hope* in Christ—that is, whose hope has not only Christ for its foundation, but complete conformity to Christ in the perfection of holiness for its object—will infallibly, “purify himself even as he is pure.” To the man who does not thus purify himself, holy conformity to Christ cannot be the object of hope; for if it were, he would *like it*, as no man can be said to *hope* for what he does not *like*;—and if he liked it, he would show this by now seeking after its attainment. The object of such a man’s hope, if he has formed in his mind any definite notion of it at all, must be something essentially different.

*The ground of this hope, which has just been alluded to, is no less distinctive of the Christian than the hope itself.* In looking forward to the *second coming* of his Lord, his hope of acceptance and of eternal life rests on that work which he finished at his *first coming*;—on the atonement made by the blood of his cross. Convinced that there is only one spot on the face of this earth from which a guilty creature, whose mind is properly impressed with the holiness of God and the evil of sin, can view the solemnities of an approaching judgment without dismay; the Christian transports himself in imagination to the heights of Calvary;—takes his station there at the foot of the

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\* “*In him.*”—The expression is commonly interpreted as if it referred to the believer’s having this hope *in himself*, that is, residing in his mind and heart. The phrase in the original, however, is,  $\epsilon\pi' \alpha\upsilon\tau\omega$ , which expresses not the exercise of hope in the heart of him who possesses it, but the ground on which his hope rests.

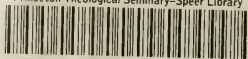
cross;—and, with one arm embracing the sacred wood, and the other uplifted towards heaven, surveys, with steady eye, the overwhelming scene.—The heavens open—not in tranquil serenity, as when, on the banks of the Jordan, the Spirit of peace alighted on the Redeemer to consecrate him to his office—but rending, and rolling away, with a mighty noise:—he beholds the descending Judge, revealed in effulgent glory, and “all his holy angels with him,” “ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands:”—he hears “the voice of the Archangel and the trump of God,” “louder than a thousand thunders:”—he sees the great white throne erected:—the millions of the dead starting to life, and gathering before the dread tribunal—while “from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne the heavens and the earth flee away, and no place is found for them;”—“the judgment set, and the books opened;”—the whole race of mankind assembled, on the right hand, and on the left—all waiting their respective dooms, with joyful hope, or with trembling apprehension! With the eye of prophetic faith, he beholds all this—and with deep solemnity of spirit he anticipates his own appearance at the bar of judgment. Conscious of unworthiness and guilt, and impressed with holy awe in contemplating the purity and the majesty of the Judge, and the inconceivable magnitude of the results of that “great and dreadful day of the Lord,”—he prays, with humble fervour—“God be merciful to me a sinner!”—“If thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquity, who, O Lord, should stand?”—“Enter not into judgment with thy servant; for in thy sight no flesh living can be justified.” But his supplications are not the language of despair. He has hope—“good hope through grace.” Did he look only to the throne, indeed—only to the judgment-seat, with all its attendant solemnities—his heart would fail him;—but, looking alternately to the Throne and to the Cross, the view of the one takes away the terrors of the other. He who occupies the throne of judgment, is the same who “bore the sins of his people in his own body on the tree.” The SAVIOUR is the JUDGE. The remembrance of this reassures his spirit, and animates him with the confidence of hope: “There is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared:”—“Who is a God like unto thee, who pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage: he retaineth not his anger forever, because he delighteth in mercy:”—“Lo this is my God; I have waited for him, and he will save me: this is the LORD; I have waited for him, I will be glad and rejoice in his salvation.” Psalm cxxx. 43; Micah vii. 18. Isa. xxv. 9.

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