

THE
PULPIT COMMENTARY,

EDITED BY THE
VERY REV. H. D. M. SPENCE, D.D.,
DEAN OF GLOUCESTER;

AND BY THE
REV. JOSEPH S. EXELL, M.A.

WITH
INTRODUCTIONS

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NEW EDITION.

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ECCLESIASTES.

Exposition
BY REV. W. J. DEANE, M.A.,
RECTOR OF ASHEN.

Homiletics
BY REV. T. WHITELAW, D.D.

Homilies by Various Authors.
REV. PROF. J. R. THOMSON, M.A. REV. W. CLARKSON, B.A.
REV. J. WILLCOCK, M.A., B.D.

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ECCLESIASTES ; OR, THE PREACHER.

INTRODUCTION.

§ 1. TITLE OF THE BOOK.

THE book is called in the Hebrew *Koheleth*, a title taken from its opening sentence, "The words of Koheleth, the son of David, King in Jerusalem." In the Greek and Latin Versions it is entitled 'Ecclesiastes,' which Jerome elucidates by remarking that in Greek a person is so called who gathers the congregation, or *ecclesia*. Aquila transliterates the word, *Κωλέθ*; what Symmachus gave is uncertain, but probably *Παροιμιαστής*, 'Proverb-monger.' The Venetian Greek has *Ἡ Ἐκκλησιάστρια* and *Ἡ Ἐκκλησιάζουσα*. In modern versions the name is usually 'Ecclesiastes; or, The Preacher.' Luther boldly gives 'The Preacher Solomon.' This is not a satisfactory rendering to modern ears; and, indeed, it is difficult to find a term which will adequately represent the Hebrew word. *Koheleth* is a participle feminine from a root *kahal* (whence the Greek *καλέω*, Latin *calo*, and English "call"), which means, "to call, to assemble," especially for religious or solemn purposes. The word and its derivatives are always applied to people, and not to things. So the term, which gives its name to our book, signifies a female assembler or collector of persons for Divine worship, or in order to address them. It can, therefore, not mean "Gatherer of wisdom," "Collector of maxims," but "Gatherer of God's people" (1 Kings viii. 1); others make it equivalent to "Debater," which term affords a clue to the variation of opinions in the work. It is generally constructed as a masculine and without the article, but once as feminine (ch. vii. 27, if the reading is correct), and once with the article (ch. xii. 8). The feminine form is by some accounted for, not by supposing Koheleth to represent an office, and therefore as used abstractedly, but as being the personification of Wisdom, whose business it is to gather people unto the Lord and make them a holy congregation. In Proverbs sometimes Wisdom herself speaks (e.g. Prov. i. 20), sometimes the author speaks of her (e.g. Prov. viii. 1, etc.). So

Koheleth appears now as the organ of Wisdom, now as Wisdom herself, supporting, as it were, two characters without losing altogether his identity. At the same time, it is to be noted, with Wright, that Solomon, as personified Wisdom, could not speak of himself as having gotten more wisdom than all that were before him in Jerusalem (ch. i. 16), or how his heart had great experience of wisdom, or how he had applied his heart to discover things by means of wisdom (ch. vii. 23, 25). These things could not be said in this character, and unless we suppose that the writer occasionally lost himself, or did not strictly maintain his assumed personation, we must fall back upon the ascertained fact that the feminine form of such words as Koheleth has no special significance (unless, perhaps, it denotes power and activity), and that such forms were used in the later stage of the language to express proper names of men. Thus we find *Sophereth*, "scribe" (Neh. vii. 57), and *Pochereth*, "hunter" (Ezra ii. 57), where certainly males are intended. Parallels are found in the Mishna. If, as is supposed, Solomon is designated Koheleth in allusion to his great prayer at the dedication of the temple (1 Kings viii. 23—53, 56—61), it is strange that no mention is anywhere made of this celebrated work, and the part he took therein. He appears rather as addressing general readers than teaching his own people from an elevated position; and the title assigned to him is meant to designate him, not only as one who by word of mouth instructed others, but one whose life and experience preached an emphatic lesson on the vanity of mundane things.

§ 2. AUTHOR AND DATE.

The universal consent of antiquity attributed the authorship of Ecclesiastes to Solomon. The title assumed by the writer, "Son of David, King in Jerusalem," was considered sufficient warrant for the assertion, and no suspicion of its uncertainty ever crossed the minds of commentators and readers from primitive to mediæval times. Whenever the book is referred to, it is always noted as a work of Solomon. The Greek and Latin Fathers alike agree in this matter. The four Gregories, Athanasius, Ambrose, Jerome, Theodoret, Olympiodorus, Augustine, and others, are here of one consent. The Jews, too, although they had some doubts concerning the orthodoxy of the contents, never disputed the authorship. The first to throw discredit upon the received opinion was Luther, who, in his 'Table Talk,' while ridiculing the traditional view, boldly asserts that the work was composed by Sirach, in the time of the Maccabees. Grotius followed in the same strain. In his 'Commentary on the Old Testament' he unhesitatingly denies it to be a production of Solomon, and in another place assigns to it a post-exilian date. These opinions attracted but little notice at the time; but towards the close of the last century, three German scholars, Döderlein, Jahn, and Schmidt, revived the objections urged by Luther and Grotius, and henceforward a continuous stream of criticism, opposed to the

earlier tenet, has flowed forth both in England, America, and Germany. The array of writers on both sides is enormous. The discussion has evoked the energies of innumerable controversialists, though the opponents of Solomon have in late years far outnumbered his supporters. If the more ancient opinion is upheld by Dr. Pusey, Bishop Wordsworth, Mr. Johnston, Mr. Bullock, Motais, Gietmann, etc., the later view is strongly supported by Keil, Delitzsch, Hengstenberg, Vaihinger, Hitzig, Nowack, Renan, Ginsburg, Ewald, Davidson, Noyes, Stuart, Wright, etc. The question cannot be settled by the authority of writers on either side, but must be calmly examined, and the arguments adduced by both parties must be duly weighed.

Let us see what are the usual arguments for the Solomonic authorship. We will endeavour to set them forth very briefly, but fairly and intelligibly.

1. The first and most potent is the unanimous verdict of all writers who have mentioned the book from primitive times to the days of Luther, whether Christian or Jewish. The common opinion was that the three works, Canticles, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes, were composed by Solomon; the first, as some said, being the production of his earlier days, the second written in his maturity, and the third dictated at the close of life, when he had learned the vanity of all that he had once valued, and had repented of his evil ways and turned once more to the fear of the Lord as the only stable comfort and hope. St. Jerome, in his 'Commentary,' gives the opinion which was prevalent in his day: "*Itaque juxta numerum vocabulorum tria volumina edidit: Proverbia, Ecclesiasten, et Cantica Canticorum. In Proverbiis parvulum docens et quasi de officiis per sententias erudiens; in Ecclesiaste vero maturæ virum ætatis instituens, ne quicquam in mundi rebus putet esse perpetuum, sed caduca et brevia universa quæ cernimus; ad extremum jam consummatum virum et calcato sæculo præparatum, in Cantico Canticorum sponsi jungit amplexibus.*"

2. The book purports to be written by Solomon; the writer speaks continually in the first person; and as the work is confessedly inspired and canonical, any doubt as to the literal accuracy of the inscription throws discredit on the truth and authority of Scripture. In a treatise of this nature it is altogether unlikely that the author should attribute his own sentiments to another.

3. There is nothing in the contents which militates against the Solomonic authorship.

4. There is nothing in the language which is not compatible with the time of Solomon.

5. It is a composition of such consummate skill and excellence that it could have proceeded from no one but this wisest of men.

6. There are such a multitude and variety of coincidences in expression and phraseology with Proverbs and Canticles, which are confessedly more or less the work of Solomon, that Ecclesiastes must proceed from the same author.

Such are the grounds upon which *Ecclesiastes* is attributed to Solomon. The opinion has a certain attraction for all simple believers, who are content to take things on trust, and, provided a theory makes no very violent demands on credulity, to accept it with unquestioning confidence. But in the present case the arguments adduced have not withstood the attacks of modern criticism, as will be seen if we take them *seriatim*, as we proceed to do.

1. The universal consensus of uncritical antiquity concerning authorship is of little value. What was not questioned was not specially examined; the conventional opinion was regarded as certain; what one writer after another, and Council after Council, actually or virtually stated, was accepted generally and without any controversy. So the authorship, being taken for granted, was never criticized or investigated. Of how small importance in such a matter are the opinions of the Fathers, we may learn from their view of the Book of Wisdom. Unhesitatingly many of them attribute this work to Solomon. Clemens Alexandrinus, Cyprian, Origen, Didymus, and others express no doubt whatever on the subject; and yet no one nowadays hesitates to say that they were absurdly wrong in holding such an opinion. Similarly, many Councils decreed the canonicity of Wisdom, from the third of Carthage, A.D. 397, to that of Trent; but we do not give our adhesion to their decision. So we may reject tradition in discussing the question of authorship, and pursue our investigation independently, untrammelled by the utterances of earlier writers. As to the assertion that Solomon penned this treatise in sorrowful repentance for his idolatry and licentiousness and arrogant selfishness, it must be said that there is no trace of any such change of heart in the historical books; as far as we are told, he goes to his grave after he had turned away from the Lord, in that hard, unbelieving temper which his foreign alliances had produced in him. Not a hint of better things is anywhere afforded; and though, from the commendation generally accorded to him, and the typical character which he possessed, one would be inclined to think that he could not have died in his sins, but must have made his peace with God before he departed, yet Scripture supplies no ground for such an opinion, and we must travel beyond the letter to arrive at such a conclusion. He records his experience of evil pleasure, relates how he revelled in vice for a time, took his fill of luxury and sensuality, with the view, as he says, of testing the faculty of such excesses to give happiness; but he never hints at any sorrow for this degradation; not a word of repentance falls from his lips. "I turned, and tried this and that," he says; but we find no confession of sin, no remorse for wasted talents. He learns, indeed, that all is vanity and vexation of spirit; but this is not the cry of a broken and contrite heart; and to ground his repentance upon this declaration is to raise a structure upon a foundation that will not bear its weight.

2. There can be no doubt that the writer intends to assume the name and characteristics of Solomon. He calls himself in the opening verse "son of David" and "King in Jerusalem." Such a description applies

only to Solomon. David, indeed, had many other sons, but none except Solomon could be designated "King in Jerusalem." It is true also that the first person is continually used in narrating experiences which are especially appropriate to this monarch; e.g. "I am come to great estate, and have gotten more wisdom than all that were before me" (ch. i. 16); "I made me great works; I builded me houses" (ch. ii. 4); "All this have I proved by wisdom: I said, I will be wise" (ch. vii. 23). But not thus is Solomon demonstrated to be the actual author; cleverly personated authorship would use the same expressions. And this is what we conceive to be the fact. The writer assumes the rôle of Solomon in order to emphasize and add weight to the lessons which he desired to teach. The idea that such personation is fraudulent and unworthy of a sacred writer springs from ignorance of precedents or a misunderstanding of the object of such substitution. Who thinks of accusing Plato or Cicero of an intention to deceive because they present their sentiments in the form of dialogues between imaginary interlocutors? Who regards the author of the Book of Wisdom as an impostor because he identifies himself with the wise king? So common was this system of personation, so widely spread and practised, that a name was invented for it, and *Pseudepigraphal* was the title given to all such works as assumed to be written by some well-known or celebrated personage, the real author concealing his own identity. Thus we have the 'Book of Enoch,' the 'Ascension of Isaiah,' the 'Assumption of Moses,' the 'Apocalypse of Baruch,' the 'Psalter of Solomon,' and many more, none of them being the production of the person whose name they bear, which was assumed only for literary purposes. A moralist who felt that he had something to impart that might serve his generation, a patriot who desired to encourage his countrymen amid defeat and oppression, a pious thinker whose heart glowed with love for his fellow-men,—any of these, humbly shrinking from obtruding upon notice his own obscure personality, thought himself justified in publishing his reflections under the mantle of some great name which might gain for them credit and acceptance. The *ruse* was so well understood that it deceived nobody; but it gave point and definiteness to the writer's lucubration, and it also had the effect of making readers more ready to accept it, and to look in its contents for something worthy of the personage to whom it was attributed. There is nothing in this derogatory to a sacred writer, and no argument against the personation can be maintained on the ground of its incongruity or inappropriateness. And when we more carefully examine the language of the book itself, we see that it contains virtual, if not actual, acknowledgment that it is not written by Solomon. His name is not once mentioned. Other of his reputed writings are inscribed with his name. The Canticles begin with the words, "The song of songs, which is Solomon's;" the Proverbs are, "The proverbs of Solomon, son of David, King of Israel." Ps. lxxii. is entitled, "A Psalm of Solomon." But our author gives himself an enigmatical appellation, which by its very form might show that it was

ideal and representative, and not that of an existing personality. To suppose that Solomon uses this name (which may be interpreted "Gatherer") for himself, with the abstruse idea that he who had *scattered* the people by his sins now desired to *gather* them together by this exhibition of wisdom, is to task the imagination beyond limit, and to read into Scripture notions which have no existence in fact. There can, indeed, be no adequate reason given why Solomon should have desired thus to conceal his identity; the plea of humility and shame is a mere invention of commentators anxious to account for what is, in their view, really inexplicable. He calls himself "King in Jerusalem"—an expression occurring nowhere else, and never applied to any Hebrew monarch. We read of "King of Israel," "King over all Israel," how that Solomon "reigned in Jerusalem over all Israel;" but the title "King in Jerusalem" is unique, and seems to point to a time when Jerusalem was not the only royal city, after the disruption of the kingdom, that is, subsequent to the epoch of the historical Solomon.

The same conclusion is reached by the occasional wording of the text itself, which speaks of Solomon as belonging to the past age. "*I was king*," the monarch is made to say (ch. i. 12), speaking, not as a reigning monarch himself would speak, but rather as one who, from the other world, or by the mouth of another, was relating his past earthly experiences. Solomon was king to the day of his death, and could never have used the past tense in reference to himself. Delitzsch and Ginsburg have called attention to a Talmudic legend based on this expression. According to this story, Solomon, driven from his throne on account of his idolatries and other sins, roamed through the country lamenting his follies, and reduced to the extremity of want, ever crying, with miserable iteration, "I, Koheleth, was King over Israel in Jerusalem!" The legend is noticeable only as conveying the significance of the preterite tense found in the text. This tense cannot, in view of the immediate context, be translated, "I have been and still am king;" nor is he saying that he was king when he applied his mind to wisdom. He is simply introducing himself in his assumed character, not comparing his present with his past life, but from his standpoint, as once an earthly and powerful king, giving the weight of his experiences. In another passage (ch. i. 16) he talks of having gotten more wisdom than all that were before him in Jerusalem. Now, this city did not fall into the possession of the Hebrews till some years after the accession of David: how could Solomon refer to previous kings in these terms, when really only one had preceded him? And that his reference is to rulers, and not to mere inhabitants, is denoted by the use of the preposition *al*, which ought to be translated "over," not "in" Jerusalem. Commentators have endeavoured to answer this objection by asserting that Solomon hereby indicates the ancient Canaanitish kings, such as Melchizedek, Adonizedek, Arannah; but is it likely that he would thus introduce the thought of these worthies of past generations as though he and his father were their natural successors? Would he condescend to compare himself with

such? and would his readers be impressed by a superiority to these princelets, mostly heathens, all of them beyond the pale of Israel, and, with one exception, in no respect celebrated? It is surely much more probable that the author for the moment forgets, or throws aside, his assumed character, and alludes to the long succession of Jewish monarchs who had reigned in Jerusalem up to his own time. A further intimation that a fictitious use is made of the name of the great king is given in the epilogue, supposing it, as we do, to be an original portion of the work. Here (ch. xii. 9—14) the real author speaks of himself and the composition of his book; he is no longer "*the* Koheleth," the Solomon, who hitherto has been the speaker (as in ver. 8), but *a* koheleth, a wise man, who, founding his style on his great predecessor, sought to please and edify the people of his generation by means of proverbial sayings. This is the way in which he describes his undertaking, and in which it is impossible that the historical Solomon should have written: "Moreover, because Koheleth was wise, he still taught the people knowledge; yea, he pondered, and sought out, and put in order many proverbs," and, as the next verse implies, he adopted a form and style which might make the truth "acceptable" to his hearers.

3. Besides the notice mentioned above, there are many statements in the book wholly irreconcilable with the circumstances of Solomon's reign and epoch. In ch. iii. 16; v. 8, etc., we read of oppression of the poor and high-handed perversion of judgment, and are bidden not to wonder thereat. That such a condition of things obtained in the time of Solomon is not conceivable; if it did exist, one would have expected that this powerful monarch would immediately have set about a reformation, and not contented himself with urging patience and acquiescence. But the writer appears to have no power to redress these crying wrongs, which, if he is king, must have been owing to his neglect or misgovernment. He tells what he has seen, sympathizes with the sufferers, offers advice how to make the best of such trouble, but gives no hint that he considers himself answerable for this miserable state of things, or could in any way alleviate or remove it. If, as alleged, this book is the result of Solomon's repentance, the outcome of the revulsion of feeling caused by the warnings of the Prophet Ahijah and the grace of God working in his softened heart, here, surely, was an opportunity of expressing his changed sentiments, acknowledging the wrongdoing which occasioned the disorders in the administration of government, and avowing a determination of redress. But there is nothing of the kind. He writes as an uninterested observer, one who had no hand in producing, and possesses no influence in checking, oppression. So, too, Solomon could not have written of his own class and country in such terms as we read in ch. x. 16, "Woe to thee, O land, when thy king is a child, and thy princes eat in the morning!" It is doing violence to language, if not to common sense, to argue that Solomon is alluding to his son Rehoboam, who must have been more than forty years old at this time; and it does not speak well for the king's repentance if, knowing that his son would turn out so

badly, he made no effort for his reformation, nor, following the precedent observed in his own case, attempted to nominate a more worthy successor. Here and in other remarks about kings (e.g. ch. x. 20) the writer speaks, not as though he himself were a monarch, but merely as a philosopher or student of human nature. If he introduces the great king as uttering the sentiments, they are his own experiences which he records (ch. x. 4—7): the spirit of the ruler rising against a subject, a fool set in high dignity and the rich debased to low places, servants upon horses, and princes walking as servants upon the earth;—such circumstances one can ill imagine the historical Solomon to have known and recorded, though they might readily enough have been witnessed by one who made him the vehicle of his life-history.

Again, can one suppose that Solomon would call the heir to his throne “the man that should be after” him (ch. ii. 18), and hate his labour because its fruits would fall into such unworthy hands? Or that, being well aware who his successor would be, he should speak as if it were quite uncertain—one of those future contingencies which no one could determine (ch. ii. 19)? To minimize the force of the objection here made, some critics assert that Solomon utters this sentiment after Jeroboam’s attempted rebellion, and with the fear of this restless and unscrupulous leader’s success lying heavy on his mind; but there is no historical ground for this notion. As far as we know, no dread of a revolution troubled his last days. Jeroboam had been driven into exile; and it is quite a gratuitous assumption that the fear of his return and forcible seizure of the throne dictated the words in the text.

There are other incongruities in connection with the relation of monarch and subject. The passage ch. viii. 2—5, 9 contains advice, not from a ruler to his dependents, but from a subject to his fellow-subjects: “I counsel thee to keep the king’s commandment,” etc. It is a prudent exhortation, showing how to behave under a tyrannical government, when “one man ruleth over another to the other’s hurt,” and could never have emanated from great David’s greater son.

Again, is it compatible with the modesty of a refined disposition that Solomon should boast unrestrainedly of his intellectual acquirements (ch. i. 16), his possessions, his greatness (ch. ii. 7—9)? Such exultation might proceed naturally enough from a fictitious person, but would be most unseemly in the mouth of the real character. Is he satirizing himself when he denounces the royal spendthrift, glutton, and debauchee, and describes the misery which he brings on the land (ch. x. 16—19)? Is it not much more likely that Koheleth is drawing from his own experience of licentious rulers, which concerns not Solomon at all? Then, again, the course of philosophical investigation into the *summum bonum* depicted in the book is wholly incompatible with the historical Solomon. There is no evidence whatever that he entered into any such inquiry and pursued it with the view herein intimated. The writer gives a fair account of many of the king’s great undertakings—his palaces, gardens, reservoirs, his feasts, sensu-

ality, and carnal enjoyments; but there is no hint in the history that these things were only parts of a great experiment, steps on the path that might lead to the knowledge of happiness. Rather they are represented in the annals as the outcome of wealth, luxury, pleasure-seeking, selfishness. It is impossible, too, that, in recounting his performances, Solomon should have omitted all mention of that which was the chief glory of his reign—the erection of the temple at Jerusalem. Yet his connection with it is not noticed by the remotest allusion, though there is possibly some mention of the worship there (ch. v. 1, 2): “Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God.”

Further, if, as we have seen, the references to Solomon himself are often inconsistent with what we know of his history, the state of society presented by intimations scattered here and there is certainly not that which obtained in his reign. We read of violent oppression and wrong, when tears of agony were wrung from the persecuted, whose misery was so great that they preferred death to life under such intolerable circumstances (ch. iv. 1—3); whereas, in these palmy days of the kingdom, all was peace and plenty: “Judah and Israel were many, as the sand which is by the sea in multitude, eating and drinking, and making merry” (1 Kings iv. 20). Two more antagonistic scenes could scarcely have been depicted, and we cannot suppose them to refer to the same period. It is true that after Solomon’s death the people complained that his yoke had been grievous (1 Kings xii. 4); it is also true that he dealt sternly with the strangers and the remnant of the idolatrous nations left in the land (2 Chron. ii. 17, 18; viii. 7, 8); but the former allegation was doubtless exaggerated, and referred chiefly to the taxes and imposts laid upon the people in order to supply the means for carrying out magnificent designs; there was no complaint of oppression or injustice; it was relief from excessive taxation, and perhaps from enforced labour, that was demanded. The typical character of Solomon’s reign would not have afforded a theme of prophetic representation of Messiah’s kingdom, had it been the scene of violence, turbulence, and unhappiness which stands before our minds in Koheleth’s page. With regard to the possible sufferings of the aboriginals, from whom was exacted bond-service (1 Kings ix. 21), we have no record that they were treated with undue severity; and it is certain that, in any case, Koheleth would not be thinking of them in recounting the misery which he had witnessed. No Hebrew, indeed, would take them into consideration at all. Hewers of wood and drawers of water they became in the nature of things, and of them nothing more was to be said.

Another aspect of affairs, incongruous with Solomon’s time, is seen in an allusion to the system of espionage practised under despotic governments (ch. x. 20), where the writer warns his readers to beware how they utter a word, or even cherish a thought, in disparagement of the ruling power; walls have ears; a bird shall carry the word; and punishment is sure to follow. Can we believe that Solomon used such a system? And is

it credible that, if he did encourage this odious practice, he would explain and dilate upon it in a popular work? Once more, it must have been at a much later period that the admonition against unsanctified and diffuse study was needed (ch. xii. 12). The national literature in Solomon's time must have been of the scantiest nature; the warning could have been applicable only when the theories and speculations of Greece and Alexandria had found their way into Palestine (Ginsburg).

Further, it must be noticed that, though God is spoken of continually, it is always by the name of Elohim, never by his covenant appellation, Jehovah. Is it conceivable that the historical Solomon, who had experienced such remarkable mercies and special endowments at the hands of Jehovah, should ignore this Divine relation, and speak of God merely as the Maker of the world, the Governor of the universe? In Proverbs the name Jehovah occurs nearly a hundred times, Elohim hardly at all; it is preposterous to account for this difference by asserting that Solomon wrote one work while in a state of grace, and hence used the covenant name, and the other after he had fallen, and felt himself unworthy of God's favour. As we said before, there is no trace of repentance in his life; and the picture of "the aged, penitent king, stung with poignant anguish of mind for his sins, and unable to utter the adorable name," if true to nature (Wordsworth), is not true to history. Rather, one would have expected one who had been betrayed into idolatry to be careful to use the name of the true God in contradistinction to that which was common to the false and the true.

Other discrepancies might be pointed out, such, for instance, as the absence of all allusion to idolatry, which the king, if repentant, could not have refrained from mentioning; but enough has been said to show there are many statements which are unsuitable to the character, epoch, and circumstances of the historical Solomon.

4. The allegation that the language of the book is wholly compatible with the time of Solomon would require too great space to be examined in detail. We should have to enter into technicalities which could be appreciated by none but Hebrew scholars, and only by those few who were fully acquainted, not merely with the writings of the Old Testament, but also with the language of Targums, etc., the rabbinic literature which came into existence by slow degrees after the Babylonish captivity. Suffice it to say generally that the language and style of the book have marked peculiarities, and that many words and many forms of expression either occur nowhere else in the Bible, or are found solely in the very latest books of the sacred canon. Delitzsch and Knobel and Wright have given lists of these *hapax legomena* and words and forms which belong to the later period of Hebrew. The catalogue, which extends to nearly a hundred items, has been closely examined by various scholars, and careful criticism has eliminated a very large number of the incriminated expressions. Many of these are abstract words, formed from roots naturally enough, though not occurring elsewhere; many have derivatives in the earlier books; many

cannot be proved to belong exclusively to the Chaldee, and may have been common to other Semitic dialects. But after making all due allowances, there remain enough instances of late and rabbinical words and phrases to prove that the work belongs to a period posterior to Solomon. Certainly it is quite possible to press the grammatical and etymological argument too far, and to lay too much stress on details often most difficult to dissect, and frequently more questions of taste and delicate judgment than of stern and indubitable fact; but the present case does not rest on isolated examples, some of which may be found faulty and weak, but on a large induction of particulars, the cumulative importance of which cannot be set aside.

How is this argument attempted to be met? The linguistic peculiarities cannot be wholly denied, but it is argued that the Aramaisms and foreign expressions are owing to Solomon's wide intercourse with external nations, and the bent of his mind, which inclined to comprehensiveness, and led him to prefer what was rare and removed from the intercourse of common life. Some suppose that this was done with the view of making the work more acceptable to non-Israelites. Others deem that the subject-matter necessitated the peculiar phraseology employed. Such allegations, however, will not account for grammatical peculiarities and verbal inflections, which are found rarely or never in earlier books, or for the absence of forms which are most common elsewhere. Foreign words might be introduced here and there in a work of any age; but it is different with changes in syntax and inflection; these denote another epoch or stage in language, and cannot be adequately explained by any of the above arguments. The assertion that the writer desired to commend his treatise to external nations is entirely unsupported by evidence, and is negatived by the fact that idolatry, the crying sin of other peoples, is never alluded to. Compare the bold denunciations of the Book of Wisdom, and it will at once be seen how a true believer deals with those who are enemies to his religion and worship. There is another consideration which supports the view for which we contend. The whole style of the work is indicative of a later development. Critics point to the very frequent employment of conjunctions to express the most diverse logical relations, which were not needed in the simpler lucubrations of early times. Then there is the pleonastic use of the personal pronoun after the verbal form; the mode of expressing the present by the participle, often in connection with a personal pronoun; the almost entire absence of the imperfect with *vav* conversive; and many other peculiarities of a similar nature, all of which indicate neo-Hebraism.

5. That no one but Solomon could have written a book of such consummate excellence is, of course, a mere assumption. We know so little of the literary history of those days, and our information concerning writers and educationists is so scanty, that it is impossible to say who could or who could not have composed such a work. Because we can fix the authorship definitely upon no other person, we are not compelled to subscribe to the traditional view. One of equal mental capacities and attainments with the

writer of Job might, under inspiration, have produced Koheleth; and, like the other, have remained unknown. The apocryphal compositions of post-exilic days show a large amount of literary talents, and the age which gave them birth might have been fruitful in other authors.

6. The coincidences between Ecclesiastes, Proverbs, and Canticles may be explained without resorting to the supposition that the three works are the production of one author, and that author Solomon. Not to discuss the genuineness of the Song of Songs, the Book of Proverbs is confessedly derived from many sources, and quotation from its pages would not serve to establish the Solomonic origin of the passage cited. All that can be decided from the parallelism with the other books attributed to Solomon is that the author had evidently read those works, as he certainly had perused Job, and perhaps Jeremiah, and, consciously or unconsciously, borrowed sentiments and expressions from them. And, on the other hand, there are confessedly such marked variations of style between those writings and Ecclesiastes, that it is difficult to allow that they came from the same pen, though wielded, as is said, at different ages of life.

From these premisses it must be concluded that the Solomonic authorship cannot be maintained, and that the book belongs to a much later epoch than that of Solomon. Surrendering the traditional opinion, we are, however, at once cast upon an ocean of surmises, which are wholly derived from internal evidence as this strikes different readers. In assigning the date of the book, critics are hopelessly divided, some giving B.C. 975, others B.C. 40, and between these dates others have, on various grounds, taken their respective stand. But eliminating theories which the work itself contravenes, we find that most reliable authorities are divided between the times of Ezra and Nehemiah, the Persian, and the Greek epochs. The theory of its composition in the time of Herod the Great, enunciated by Grätz, needs no refutation, and is only noticeable as showing, by the legend on which it is based, that at that day Koheleth was generally regarded as an integral portion of Holy Scripture. The first period mentioned would take us to the time of the Prophet Malachi, B.C. 450—400. But that seer writes much purer Hebrew than Koheleth, and the two could hardly have been contemporaneous. At any rate, we cannot be wrong in taking the generation after Malachi as the *terminus a quo* of our inquiry. The *terminus ad quem* seems to be defined by the use made of Ecclesiastes by the author of the Book of Wisdom. That the latter is the later of the two is evident from its Hellenistic form and environment, of which Koheleth shows no trace, and from its exhibiting a development of the doctrines of wisdom and eschatology far beyond what is found in our book. Koheleth complains that increase of wisdom brings increase of trouble (ch. i. 18); the later pseudo-Solomon asserts that to live with Wisdom hath no bitterness, but is stable joy and gladness (Wisd. viii. 16). On the one hand, we read that there is no remembrance of the wise man more than of the fool for ever (ch. ii. 16); on the other hand, it is maintained that wisdom makes the

memory of its possessor ever fresh, and confers upon him immortality (Wisd. viii. 13; vi. 20). If one argues sadly that the good and the evil have the same fate (ch. ix. 2), the other often comforts himself by thinking that their destinies are very different, and that the righteous are at peace, and live for evermore, and their reward is with the Most High (Wisd. iii. 2, etc.; v. 15, etc.). And generally the future judgment which Koheleth intimates vaguely and indefinitely, has, in the later book, become a settled belief, and a recognized motive of action and endurance. Both writings virtually assume the authorship of Solomon; and many passages of the later work, especially ch. ii., seem to be designed to correct erroneous impressions gathered by some minds from Koheleth's unexplained statements. There is good reason to suppose that certain free-thinkers and sensualists in Alexandria had ventured to support their immoral opinions by citing the authority of the wise king, who in his book urged men to enjoy life, according to the maxim, "Let us eat and drink; for to-morrow we die." This misapprehension of inspired teaching the author of Wisdom unhesitatingly condemns and confutes. The passages referred to are noted as they occur in the Exposition. But a comparison of the reasoning of the materialists in Wisdom with the statements in ch. ii. 18—26; iii. 18—22; v. 13, 20, will show whence was derived the perverted view of life which needed correction.

Now, the Book of Wisdom was composed not later than B.C. 150; so the limits between which lies the production of Ecclesiastes are B.C. 400 and B.C. 150. The nearer definition must be determined by other considerations. Mr. Tyler and Dean Plumptre have traced a connection between Ecclesiastes and Ecclesiasticus, and, by a series of contrasted citations, have endeavoured to prove that Ben-Sira was well acquainted with our book, and used it largely in the composition of his own. Plumptre also considers that the name Ecclesiasticus was given to Ben-Sira's work from its connection with Ecclesiastes, following the track there set. But be this idea well founded, it will not help us much, as the date of Ecclesiasticus is still a disputed question, though most modern critics assign it to the reign of Euergetes II., commonly called Physcon, B.C. 170—117. This, if it is accepted, gives the same result as the previous supposition. But a surer criterion is found in the social and political circumstances revealed incidentally in our book.

We read of the arbitrary exercise of power, the corruption, the dissoluteness and luxury of rulers (ch. iv. 1, etc.; vii. 7; x. 16); perversion of justice and extortion in provinces (ch. v. 8); the promotion of base and unworthy persons to high positions (ch. x. 5—7); tyranny, despotism, revelry. These doings are graphically depicted by one who knew from experience that of which he wrote. And this condition of affairs points with much certainty to the time when Palestine lay under Persian rule, and irresponsible satraps oppressed their subjects with iron hands. For the same conclusion makes also the comparison of the inexorable law of death to the cruel obligation of military service which obtained among the Persians, and which allowed of no evasion (ch. viii. 8); so, too, the allusion to spies

and the trade of the secret informer (ch. x. 20) suits the government of the Achæmenidæ. The oppressive rule under which the Palestinians groaned led to a widespread disaffection and discontent, to a readiness to seize any occasion to revolt, and rendered suitable the caution against hasty action and the exhortation to patience (ch. viii. 3, 4). The social and political condition induced two evils—first, a reckless disregard to moral and religious restraint, as though God took no care of men and paid no heed to their welfare; secondly, a scrupulous attention to the externals of religion, as though by this one could constrain Heaven to favour him—the offering of perfunctory sacrifices, the making of vows as a barren duty. This state of things we know to have been existent from the age of Nehemiah and before the Maccabæan period; and many observations of Koheleth are directed against these abuses (ch. v. 1–7). The remark about the multiplication of books (ch. xii. 12) could not have applied to any period previous to the Persian. The absence of any trace of Greek influence (which we shall endeavour to prove further on) removes the writing from Macedonian times; nor could it be reasonably attributed to the Maccabæan epoch. There is no trace of the patriotic feeling which animated the Hebrews under the tyranny of the Syrians. The persecutions then experienced had made future retribution no longer a vague speculation or a dim hope, but an anchor of patience—a practical motive for constancy and courage. This was a great advance upon the misty conception of Koheleth. The conclusion at which we arrive is that Ecclesiastes was written about B.C. 300.

In deciding thus we are not precluded from considering that many of the proverbs and sayings contained herein come from an earlier age, and may have been popularly attributed to Solomon himself. Such time-honoured sentences would be readily inserted in a work of this nature and would favour its reception and currency. The author must be deemed wholly unknown; he has so completely veiled his identity that any attempt to draw him from his purposed obscurity is hopeless. That he wrote in Palestine seems most probable. Some have fancied that the expression (ch. xi. 1), "Cast thy bread upon the waters," etc., refers to the sowing of seed on the inundated banks of the Nile, and that, therefore, we are justified in considering Alexandria as the scene of our author's labours. But this interpretation of the passage is inadmissible; the words have nothing to do with Egyptian cultivation, and give no clue to the writer's domicile. Indeed, there are allusions to rainy seasons and the dependence of the land for fertility, not on the river, but on the clouds of heaven (ch. xi. 3; xii. 2), which pointedly debar any notion of Egypt being intended, and plainly indicate another country subject to very different climatic influences. The peculiarities of the Palestinian weather are characterized in ch. xi. 4, "He that observeth the wind shall not sow; and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap." Such warnings would have no significance in a land where rain rarely ever fell, and no one ever con-

sidered whether or not the wind was in what we call a rainy quarter. Again, no one but a Jew living in his own country would talk familiarly of frequenting the temple-worship (ch. v. 1); of seeing evil men honoured in the holy place, Jerusalem (ch. viii. 10); of a fool not knowing the way to "the city" *par excellence* (ch. x. 15). Such expressions indicate a dweller in or near Jerusalem, and such we consider the author to have been—one who addresses his countrymen in their own language, as it was spoken in his time and locality. Had he lived in Egypt, he would doubtless have used Greek as the vehicle of his instructions, as did the writer of the Book of Wisdom; but dwelling in Palestine, he, like the composer of Ecclesiasticus, published his lucubrations in the native Hebrew. At the same time, his travels had probably extended beyond the limits of his own country, and made him in some sort familiar with foreign courts.

Dean Plumptre has arranged his idea of the author, plan, and purpose of the book in the form of an ideal biography, which indeed seems to solve many of the vexed questions that meet the student, but is evolved entirely from internal considerations, and is invented to support the writer's foregone conclusions. It is very ingenious and captivating, and worthy of study, whether one agrees with the view taken or dissents from it. Conceiving Ecclesiastes to be the production of an unknown author writing about B.C. 200, and, in spite of the personation of King Solomon, really uttering his autobiographical confessions, the dean proceeds to delineate Koheleth's life and character from the hints contained, or thought to be contained, in his pages. According to his biographer, Koheleth, an only son, was born somewhere in Judæa (not Jerusalem), about B.C. 230. Well taught in the usual lore, he early learned to reverence Solomon as the pattern of wisdom and wise experience—in this respect being superior to the mass of his countrymen, who, neglecting their own history and their own sacred books, were inclined rather to follow the modes of thought of the Greeks and Syrians, with whom they were brought in contact, and if they conformed to the national religion, it was rather from conventionality and a regard to routine than from heartfelt conviction and devout feeling. Koheleth saw and marked this vain ceremonialism and lip-worship, and learned to contrast such pretenders with those who really feared the Lord. As he grew up, his father, though wealthy, made him take his share in the labours of the vineyard and corn-field, and taught him the happiness of a life of activity. But he was not long content with this quiet existence; he panted for a wider sphere, larger experience; and, with his parents' consent, and with ample means at his disposal, he set out on foreign travel. Alexandria was the place to which he directed his steps. Here, having good introductions, he was admitted to the highest society, saw the life of courts, joined in the revelry prevailing there, indulged in all the enervating luxury and immorality which made the life of the pleasure-seeking inhabitants of this corrupt city. Satiety produced disgust. While staining his soul with degrading passions, he had preserved the memory of better things, and the struggle

between the opposing elements is faithfully retraced in his book. On the one side, we have the weariness and pessimism of the *blasé* profligate; on the other, the revolt of the higher nature leading to a truer view of life. The course of his experience conducted him to a friend who was pure and sincere, and to a mistress who was beyond measure abandoned and false; and while he could thank God for the gift of the former, who had proved to be a wise and loving counsellor, he was no less thankful for being enabled to tear himself from the snares of the latter, whom he had found "more bitter than death." Deceived and disappointed, and dissatisfied with the scanty literature of his own nation, he turned for solace to the literature and philosophy of Greece; her poets supplied him with language in which to clothe the sentiments which arose from his new experiences; philosophers, Epicureans and Stoics, for a time charmed him with their teaching concerning nature, morality, life, and death. Such doctrines confirmed the notion of the vanity of most of the objects that men eagerly pursue, and encouraged the opinion that it was one's duty and interest to enjoy moderately all the pleasures that are available. Koheleth now discovered that there was something better than sensuality; that charity, benevolence, reputation, afforded joys more comforting and lasting. Admitted a member of the *Museum*, he joined in the philosophical discussions which were there carried on; heard and talked much about the *summum bonum*, happiness, immortality, free-will, destiny; but here was little to satisfy his cravings, though for the time he was interested and cheered by this intellectual activity. And now his excesses and his close study told upon his constitution, sapped his strength, and condemned him to premature old age. Partly paralyzed, weakened in body, but with the brain still active, he sat waiting the inevitable stroke, musing upon the past, and learning from the reflection that the soul could be satisfied by nothing but religion. Childhood's teaching came back with new force and meaning; God's love, justice, and power were living and energizing truths; the Creator was also the Judge. These verities, which he at length was compelled to acknowledge, were such as ought not to be kept unrevealed. Others, like himself, might have passed the same ordeal, and might need the instruction which he could give. How better could his enforced leisure be employed than in presenting to his countrymen his experiences, the course of thought which carried him through the pessimism of the sated sensualist, the wisdom of the Epicurean thinker, to the faith in a personal God? So he writes this record of a soul's conflicts, under the pseudonym of Koheleth, "the Debater," "the Preacher," shielding himself under the ægis of the great ideal of wisdom, Solomon King of Israel, whose life of enjoyment and late repentance, as tradition affirmed, bore a close analogy to his own.

It will be seen that there are many utterances in Ecclesiastes which spring naturally from the mouth of one situated as Koheleth is supposed to be, and which are readily explained by the above theory. It is also easy so to analyze the work, and so to interpret the allusions, as to give strong

ground for its acceptance. And Dean Plumptre deserves great credit for the invention of the story, and its presentation in a most fascinating form. But regarded by sober criticism, does it satisfy the requirements of the case? Is it necessitated by the language of the book? Is there no other theory, less novel and violent, which will equally or better meet the circumstances? The objections to the "ideal biography" may here be very briefly stated, as we shall have occasion to discuss many of them more fully in our account of the plan and object of our book. The whole romance is based on the assumption that the work is replete with Grecisms, traces of Alexandrian thought, echoes of Greek philosophy and literature. Remove this foundation, and the beautiful edifice crumbles into dust. Our study of the book has led to a very opposite conclusion from that entertained in this very ideal biography. The alleged Hellenisms, the Stoicism and Epicureanism, do not stand the test of unprejudiced criticism, and are capable of being explained without going so far afield. The particular examination of these items we defer to another section, but thus much may be here said—the adduced expressions and views are the natural outcome of Hebrew thought, have nothing extraneous in their origin, and are analogous to post-Aristotelian sentiments, not because they are consciously derived from this fount, but because they are the produce of the same human mind, reflecting upon problems which have perplexed thinkers in every age and country. Restless speculation, combined with a certain infidelity, was rife among men; Koheleth reflects this mental activity, this endeavour to grapple with difficult questions, and to offer solutions from varying points of view: what wonder that, in the course of his disquisition, he should present parallels to the opinions of the Stoic or Epicurean, who had gone over the same ground as himself? There is no plagiarism, no borrowing of ideas here; the evolution is, as it were, inspired by the subject.

"We do not make our thoughts; they grow in us
Like grain in wood: the growth is of the skies;
The skies, of nature; nature, of God. The world
Is full of glorious likenesses; and these
'Tis the bard's task, beside his general scope
Of story, fancy framed, to assort, and make
From the common chords man's heart is strung withal,
Music; from dumb earth heavenly harmony."

(Bailey, 'Festus.')

In short, the book is a product of the *chokma* literature, practically religious, and more concerned with the life and circumstances of man generally than with man as a member of the commonwealth of Israel. The Hebrew, in this and similar works, divests himself in some degree of his peculiar nationality, and speaks as man to man, as one of the great human family, and not as an item in a narrow fraternity. Not that revelation is ignored, or the writer forgets his theocratical position; he simply places it in the background, takes it for granted, and, virtually

grounding his lucubrations thereon, does not bring it forward prominently and distinctly. So Koheleth, in all his warnings of the vanity of earthly things, shows that beneath this sad experience and melancholy view lies a firm faith in the justice of God, and belief in the future judgment, which could be derived only from the inspired history of his people.

§ 3. CONTENTS, PLAN, AND OBJECT.

The following is an analysis of our book as it lies before us :—

After announcing his name and position, "Koheleth, son of David and King in Jerusalem," the author puts forth the thesis which forms the subject of his treatise: "Vanity of vanities; all is vanity." Man's labour is profitless; nature and human life repeat themselves in monotonous succession, and all must fall ere long into oblivion. Nothing is new, nothing is lasting (ch. i. 1—11). This is the prologue; the rest of the book is taken up with the writer's various experiences and deductions therefrom.

He had been king, and had tried to find some satisfaction in many pursuits and under various circumstances, but in vain. The striving for wisdom is a feeding on wind; there is always something that eludes the grasp. There are anomalies in nature and in human affairs that men are powerless to comprehend and to rectify; and sorrow grows with increasing knowledge (ch. i. 12—18). He takes a new quest; he tries pleasure; he tests his heart with folly: in vain. He turns to art, to architecture, horticulture, kingly state and magnificence, luxury, and the amassing of wealth; there was no profit in any of them (ch. ii. 1—11). He studied human nature in its manifold phases of wisdom and folly, and he learned thus much, that the former excels the latter as light excels darkness; yet with this came the thought that death levelled all distinctions, placed wise man and fool in the same category. Besides this, be one never so rich, he must leave the results of his labours to another, who may be unworthy to succeed him. All this bitter experience forces the conclusion that temperate enjoyment of the goods of this life is the only proper aim, and that this is entirely the gift of God, who dispenses this pleasure or withholds it according to man's actions and disposition. At the same time, this limitation impresses on man's labour and enjoyment a character of vanity and unreality (ch. ii. 12—26). Now, man's happiness depends upon God's will, and he has arranged all things according to immutable laws, so that even the minutest matters have each their proper time and season. General experience proves this; it is useless to struggle against it, however inexplicable it may seem to be; man's duty and comfort is to recognize this providential government and practically to acquiesce therein (ch. iii. 1—15). There are injustices, disorders, anomalies in the world, which man cannot remedy by any exertion of his own, and which impede his peaceful enjoyment; but, doubtless, there shall be a day of retribution, when all

such iniquities shall be punished and corrected, and God allows them for a time to continue, with the view of proving men, and to teach them humility, that in one sense they are not superior to brutes. (For man and brute succumb to the universal law of death; and that there is a distinction in the destination of their spirits, though it may well be believed, is incapable of proof.) Hence man's happiness and duty consist in making the best of the present life, and improving the opportunities which God offers, without anxious care for the future (ch. iii. 16—22). He gives further illustrations of man's inability to secure his own happiness. See how man is oppressed or wronged by his fellow-man. Who can remedy this? And in face of such things, what pleasure is there in life? Success only leads to envy. Yet labour is necessary, and none but the fool sinks into apathy and indolence. Turn to avarice for consolation, and you are isolated from your fellows, and haunted with a sense of insecurity. High place itself has no assurance of permanence. Foolish kings are supplanted by young and clever aspirants; yet the people do not long remember their benefactors or profit by their meritorious services (ch. iv. 1—16). Turn to popular religion: is there any satisfaction or comfort to be found there? Nay, all is hollow and unreal. The house of God is entered thoughtlessly and irreverently; verbose prayers are uttered with no feeling of the heart; vows are made only to be broken or evaded; dreams take the place of piety, and superstition stands for religion (ch. v. 1—7). In the political life, too, there is much that is disheartening, only to be supported by the thought of an overruling Providence (ch. v. 8, 9). The pursuit and possession of wealth give no more satisfaction than other mundane things. The rich are always wanting more; their expenses increase with their wealth; they are not happy in life, and may lose their property at a stroke, and leave nothing to the children for whom they laboured (ch. v. 10—17). All this leads again to the old conclusion that we should make the best of life such as it is, seeking neither riches nor poverty, but being content to enjoy with sobriety the good that God gives, remembering that the power to use and enjoy is a boon that comes solely from him (ch. v. 18—20). We may see men possessed of all the gifts of fortune, yet unable to enjoy them, and soon obliged to leave them by the inexorable stroke of death (ch. vi. 1—6). If desires were always accomplished, we might have a different tale to tell; but they never are fully satisfied; high and low, wise and foolish, are equally victims of unsatisfied cravings (ch. vi. 7—9). These desires are profitless, because circumstances are not under man's control; and, not being able to forecast the future, he must make the best of the present (ch. vi. 10—12).

Koheleth now proceeds to apply to practice the truths which he has been establishing. As man knows not what is best for him, he must accept what is sent, be it joy or sorrow; and let him learn hence some salutary lessons. Life should be solemn and earnest; the house of mourning teaches better than the house of feasting; and the rebuke of a wise man is more whole-

some than the mirth of fools (ch. vii. 1—7). We must learn patience and resignation ; it is no wisdom to quarrel with things as they are or to praise the past in contrast with the present. We cannot change what God has ordered ; and he sends good and evil that we may feel our entire dependence, and not disquiet ourselves about the future, which must be wholly unknown to us (ch. vii. 8—14). Anomalies occur ; all excesses must be avoided, both on the side of over-righteousness and of laxity ; true wisdom is found in the observance of the mean, and this is the only preservative from errors in the conduct of life (ch. vi. 15—22). Having thus far been aided by Wisdom, he desires, by her assistance, to solve deeper and more mysterious questions, but is wholly baffled. But he learned some further practical truths, viz. that wickedness was folly and madness, that of all created things woman was the most evil, and that man was made originally upright, but had perverted his nature (ch. vii. 23—29). His experience now leads him to consider man as a citizen. Here he shows that it is useless to rebel ; true wisdom counsels obedience even under the worst oppression, and submission to Providence. Subjects may well be patient, for sure retribution awaits the tyrant (ch. viii. 1—9). But he is troubled by seeming anomalies in God's moral government, noting the contradiction to expected retribution in the case of the good and evil. God's abstention and the impunity of sinners make men incredulous of Providence ; but in spite of all this, he knows in his heart that God is just in reward and punishment, as the end will prove. Meantime, unable to solve the mystery of God's ways, man's right course is, as before said, to make the best of existing circumstances (ch. viii. 10—15). This conclusion is confirmed by the fact that one fate awaits all men, and that the dead are cut off from all the feelings and pursuits and interests of life in the upper world (ch. ix. 1—6). Hence the lesson is repeated that man's wisest course is to use his earthly life to the best advantage, without being greatly disturbed by the inscrutability of the moral government of the world (ch. ix. 7—12). Wisdom, indeed, is not always rewarded, and the wise man who has done good service is often forgotten ; but there is a real power in wisdom which can effect more than physical strength (ch. ix. 13—18). On the other hand, a little folly mars the effect of wisdom, and is quite sure to manifest itself in word or conduct (ch. x. 1—3). Koheleth then gives his experience of what he has seen in the case of capricious rulers, who often advanced to high stations the most incompetent men ; and he offers some advice for conduct under such circumstances (ch. x. 4—7). Wisdom teaches caution in all undertakings, whether in private or political life ; a man should count the cost and make due preparation before attempting reformation in government or any other important matter (ch. x. 8—11). See the strong contrast between the gracious words and acts of the wise man, and the objectless prating and useless labours of the fool (ch. x. 12—15). The lesson of caution under the government of dissolute and unprincipled rulers is strongly enforced (ch. x. 16—20). Drawing towards the conclusion of his work, Koheleth gives some direct practical

advice under three heads. We should leave unanswerable questions, and endeavour to do our duty with diligence and activity; especially we ought to be largely beneficent, as we know not how soon we ourselves may meet with adversity and need help (ch. xi. 1—6). This is the first remedy for impatience and discontent; the second is found in a spirit of cheerfulness, which enjoys the present discreetly and moderately, with a due regard to the future account to be rendered (ch. xi. 7—9). The third remedy is piety, which ought to be practised from early years; life should be so guided as not to offend the laws of the Creator and Judge, and virtue should not be postponed till the failure of faculties makes pleasure unattainable and death closes the scene. The last days of old age are described under various images and analogies, which contain some of the most beautiful traits in the book (ch. xi. 10—xii. 7). The conclusion of the whole is the echo of the beginning, "Vanity of vanities; all is vanity" (ch. xii. 8).

The book ends with an epilogue (ch. xii. 2—14), commendatory of the writer, explaining his standpoint and the object of his work. The real Koheleth here speaks, tells of the care with which he has prepared himself for his task, and assumes the gift of inspiration. It is better to know a little well than to weary one's self with reading many things; and the whole course of the discussion in the present case tends to give one lesson, viz. that man's true wisdom lies in fearing God and looking forward to the judgment.

Such are the contents of this work as presented by the writer. But never was there a book whose plan, design, and arrangement were more widely disputed. While some enthusiastic admirers have found herein an elaborate artistical structure, a formal division into sections rhythmically distributed, others have deemed it a mass of loose thoughts heaped together without any attempt at coherence or logical system. Others, again, give the work a colloquial character, hearing in it the language of two voices—that of the wearied and exhausted seeker, and that of the warning and correcting teacher. Tennyson's poem, 'The Two Voices,' has been used in illustration of this view of Koheleth. By others the unity of the book is wholly denied, and it is considered to be derived from many authors, being, in fact, a collection of philosophical and didactic poems, interspersed with gnomes and proverbs, hard questions, and some solutions of the same. Few will now be found to uphold this theory, the identity of thought throughout, and the orderly progress of the one underlying reflection, being conspicuous to any unprejudiced reader, and (if we regard the closing verses as an integral portion of the treatise) leading to a grand and satisfying conclusion.

Among the various theories concerning the design of the author in presenting this work, we may mention a few very briefly. Rosenmüller divides it into two parts—a theoretical (ch. i.—iv.) and a practical (ch. v.—xii. 7); the former showing the vanity of human pursuits and generally of mundane things, and the latter directing men's life to worthy objects, and giving rules for obtaining pleasure and contentment. Tyler

and Plumptre see in it a struggle between revealed religion and the theories of Greek philosophies, in the form of an autobiographical confession without any regular plan. Renan looks upon the author as a sceptic; Heine calls the book 'The Canticle of Scepticism;' these critics consider that the leading thought of the vanity of human affairs, and the call to enjoy life, point to a disbelief in a present Providence and a future retribution. Schopenhauer and his school read pessimism in every utterance concerning the shortness of man's life, the vanity of his pursuits, the disorders which prevail in nature and in society. One critic deems that the treatise points out the vanity of everything of earth; another, that its object is to indicate the *summum bonum*; another, that the point proved is the immortality of the soul; and yet another, that the author labours to show the limits of philosophy, and the excellence of religion in comparison therewith.

One school of interpreters sees in our book a discussion between a pious Israelite and a Sadducee, or a youth vexed by his daily experiences and a senior who tries to allay his misgivings and calm his excitement. Others find a Hebrew, under the guise of Solomon, employing Greek sophisms, and a Jewish believer refuting him by citing maxims and proverbs; or a Solomon objecting to the common theory of Divine providence and placing man's happiness in sensual pleasure, and a prophet arguing for the moral government of the world and assigning its right position to human enjoyment. In this view all apparent contradictions are explained away; all unorthodox sentiments appertain to the caviller, while the correction is that which the Holy Spirit would enforce. We may say at once that it is impossible to support this idea by reference to the text. There is no trace of different interlocutors; objections have no immediate answer, and what are regarded as replies present no connection with preceding statements. The idea of dialogue must be considered as wholly chimerical. Equally without foundation is the theory of the "two voices." What are regarded as the utterances of fatalist, materialist, Epicurean, are not refuted or retracted; the voice that should have taken the opposite side in the controversy is obstinately silent, and the poison—if poison it be—is left to work its dire effect.

Of course, those who maintain the traditional view of the authorship hold a totally distinct opinion concerning its scope and object. With them it is the result of a late repentance, seeking to atone for past follies, and to enforce the warnings of a bitter experience, and thus to *gather together* the people whom Solomon foresaw would be scattered by his sins. Having prescience of the fate that awaited Israel after his death, he thus endeavours to comfort his countrymen in the evil days that were coming. He teaches the vanity of earthly things—things "under the sun"—that the blessedness of eternity may be realized; union with God implies detachment from the world. He surveys nature, he recalls his own varied experience, he looks abroad: there is nothing satisfying in this view. He thinks of his successor, Rehoboam, a youth of weak intellect, but strong passions, and finds no

comfort there; he owns his infatuation, he calls himself "an old and foolish king" (ch. iv. 13), and already he sees the throne occupied by Jeroboam, "the poor and wise child" who should usurp his seat. He remembers his countless wives and concubines, who had led him astray, and exclaims that women are the pest of the world, and that not one in a thousand is good. He anticipates times of confusion and misrule, and counsels obedience and submission. Then, at the close of the book, he pictures himself aged, enfeebled, laid on his death-bed, and in solemn tones he urges early piety, the emptiness of everything apart from God, and utters the moral of his wasted life, and sums up man's duty in the weighty climax of the book. If the treatise were Solomon's, such, indeed, might have been the course of thought.

Before we offer our own opinion concerning the purpose of the book, let us look at the views which others have formed respecting Koheleth's standpoint and sentiments.

First of all, is our author a pessimist, as many suppose? Does he take the worst view of things, find no benevolence in the Creator, see no hope of happiness for man? Certainly, his ever-recurring cry is, "Vanity of vanities; all is vanity;" certainly, he affirms that death is better than life, that the lot of those is most to be envied who never have been born, that men's labours and aims and ambitions end in disappointment, that the pursuit of wisdom, or art, or wealth, or pleasure is alike unsatisfying; but these and such-like mournful utterances must not be considered apart from their context and the place which they occupy in the treatise. They do not represent the object or teaching of the book; they occur as passing observations which met the thinker in the course of his investigation, and which he notes in order to trace the line taken by his inquiry. His pessimism, such as it is, is only a cloud seeming to obscure for a time the heaven of his faith, and dissipated by the clear shining behind it. When he speaks in desponding tones of mundane objects, he desires to call attention to the weak point in all such things, the fault that underlies them all. Men's mistake is to think that they can secure happiness by their own efforts, whereas they are conditioned by a higher power, and can neither achieve success nor enjoy it when won except by the gift of God. If he affirms that the day of death is preferable to the day of birth, he is virtually repeating Solon's celebrated gnome that no man can be accounted happy till he has closed his life happily—that the new-born infant has a time before him full of trial and trouble, the course and end of which no one can foresee, while with the dead all is over, and we can calmly judge of his career. His faith in God's justice and benevolence is the exact contradictory of Schopenhauer's school. His word is, "God hath made everything beautiful in its time" (ch. iii. 11); he believes in the moral government of the universe; he acknowledges the reality of sin; he looks to a life beyond the grave. He would not paralyze exertion, and hold back from work; he recommends diligence in one's own duties, beneficence towards others; he

leads men to expect happiness in the path on which God's providence leads them. There is no real hopelessness, no cynical despair, in his utterances taken as a whole. If he lacks the bright faith of the Christian, he in his measure feels that all works together for good for them that love God, if not in this world, yet assuredly in another. So the charge of pessimism falls to the ground when the treatise is considered in its totality, and not estimated by isolated passages.

A strong plea for the prevalence of traces of Gentile teaching has been put forward by modern critics. Let us, then, examine the grounds on which rests the idea of the potent influence of Greece (for the external influence means Hellenism) in the foundation and expression of Koheleth's sentiments. First, as to language, we have certain phrases cited which are alleged to be derived *Græco fonte*. In ch. iii. 11 *ha-olam*, translated "the world" in our version, is supposed to be the Greek αἰών, whereas it is truly Hebraic in form and signification, and is probably not used in the sense of "world" in the Old Testament. In the next verse the phrase, "to do good," is taken as equivalent to εὖ πράττειν, "to fare well, to prosper;" but this is not its use in the Bible, and it is best taken in the ethical sense of being beneficent, etc. The phrase, καλὸς κάγαθός, is found in the "good and comely" of ch. v. 18, *toḥ asher-yapheh*, where, however, the correct rendering is, "Behold, what I have seen as good, which is also beautiful," and the Hellenistic source is wholly unrecognizable. *Pithgam*, "sentence," is not φθέγμα, but a Persian word Hebraized. "I gave my heart to seek and search out," "I considered in my heart," etc. (ch. i. 13; ix. 1),—such-like expressions do not imply a formal course of philosophizing, but simply the mental process of an acute observer and thinker. "That which is" (ch. vii. 24) is not τὸ τί ἐστίν, the real nature of things, but that which is in existence. Dean Plumptre deems the book to be "throughout absolutely saturated with Greek thought and language." His chief proofs are such as these: the phrase, "under the sun," to express all human things (ch. i. 9, 14; iv. 15, etc.); "seeing the sun," for living (ch. vi. 5). But what more natural term could be found than "under the sun"? And why should it be borrowed? And the periphrasis for life, or its equivalent, is found in Job and the Psalms. "Be not over-righteous or over-wise" (ch. vii. 16) is a maxim, regarded contextually, by no means identical with the gnome μηδὲν ἀγάν, *ne quid nimis*. The proverbial warning respecting the bird of the air reporting a secret (ch. x. 20) surely need not have been derived from the story of Ibycus and the cranes; as stimulating the mind under teaching it was more natural for a Hebrew to speak of "goads" than a Greek (ch. xii. 11). We need not go to Euripides or the social life of Hellas to account for Koheleth's disparagement of women; his own country and age, cursed with the evils of polygamy and the degraded condition of the female sex, gave him reason enough for his remarks. Some other instances are adduced by critics who see what they desire to see; but they are all capable of easy explanation without recourse to a foreign origin being necessary. So we

may safely conclude that the language of our book exhibits no trace of Greek parentage.

An apparently strong case has been produced by those who see evidences of Greek philosophy in Ecclesiastes. Echoes of Stoical teaching are heard in the language that speaks of the endless recurrence of the same phenomena in the life of man (ch. i. 5—7, 11, etc.), which is paralleled by the theory of the cycles of events presented by history, as M. Aurelius says (xi. 1), "There will be nothing new for posterity to gaze at, and our ancestors stood upon the same level of observation. All ages are uniform and of a colour, insomuch that in forty years' time a tolerable genius for sense and inquiry may acquaint himself with all that is past and all that is to come." There is similarity, doubtless, in the ideas of these authors, but no greater than might be expected in two thinkers writing of a consideration of facts which struck them in reviewing the past. The thought of the vanity of man's life and labour, his aims and pleasures, is deemed to be derived from the apathy of the Stoic and his contempt for the world; whereas it springs from the teaching of bitter experience which needed no foreign stimulus to animate its expression. The fatalism characteristic of Stoic doctrine, which to a superficial reader seems to obtrude itself constantly, is really not found in our book. The writer is too religious to fall into any such error. The sad refrain, "Vanity of vanities; all is vanity. What profit hath a man of all his labour?" seems to some to savour of that philosophic fatalism which regards man as the prey of blind destiny. Now, the things of which Koheleth predicates vanity are wisdom, wealth, pleasure, power, speculation; and why? Not because they are the working of irresponsible and uncontrollable destiny, but because they fail in themselves to bestow that for the sake of which they are pursued, or accrue only to those persons whom Providence thus blesses. He recounts his own experience and his attempts to find satisfaction in various pursuits, and he concludes that all such strivings are vain, in so far as all are conditioned by the dispensation of God, who permits enjoyment and possession according to his good pleasure. The things themselves cannot secure and are not the cause of any happiness which accompanies them; this is solely the gift of God. Man, too, does not know what is best for him, and often seeks eagerly for what is pernicious; Providence overrules his efforts and controls the final result. Providence governs the most minute as well as the most important events of man's life (ch. iii. 1—8); everything is thus regulated according to mysterious rules which are beyond our ken. But this profound conviction does not lead Koheleth to regard man as a mere machine, possessed of no free-will, whose liberty of action is entirely controlled by higher power, who is as completely under the rule of necessity as the external physical world. He does allow that, as there are laws that direct the forces of material nature, so there are laws that control man's intellectual and moral nature; and it is from his obedience or disobedience that happiness or pain ensues. The infringement of these laws does not always bring punishment

in this world, nor their observance reward, but retribution is certain in the life beyond the grave (ch. xi. 9); and the Preacher counsels men to fear God and to practise piety and virtue, not as though they were the victims of cruel destiny, but as responsible beings who in many respects had their life in their own hands. The second division of the book (ch. vii.—ix.) contains a collection of practical suggestions how to make the best of the present in remembrance of the omnipotent control of Providence. If the fatalist pronounces that all is left to chance, and that God hides his face and cares nought for human concerns, Koheleth warns against the error of supposing that, because retribution is delayed or falls in some unexpected way, Heaven takes no interest in mundane matters. Moral government does certainly exist, and seeming exceptions only show that we cannot understand its course, while we must submit to its decrees. If, again, unbelief asserts that human efforts are vain and sterile, the Preacher, on the contrary, urges men to do their part with energy, to use with profit the time granted to them, to make the best of their position; not that they can always command success, but generally wisdom is more powerful than physical force, and at any rate diligence and action are man's duty, and results may be left in higher hands. The vexed question of free-will and omniscience is not handled; man's liberty and God's decree are both maintained, but their compatibility is not explained. They are set side by side, and both are taken into account, but there is no formal attempt at reconciliation; it is enough to hold, on the one hand, that Providence rules supreme, and, on the other, that piety and wisdom are better worth than folly or greatest natural power. The bitter and reiterated cry of "Vanity" does not argue disbelief in man's free-will or in God's providential care; it issues from a soul that has learned its own weakness and its dependence upon God; that has learned that happiness is his gift and is dispensed according to his good pleasure.

Another loan from Stoic teaching is supposed to be found in the frequent combination of "madness and folly" (ch. i. 17; ii. 12, etc.), which is compared with the view that regarded all weaknesses and delinquencies as forms of insanity. But Koheleth is offering no definition of human frailty; his intention is to show how he pursued his investigation. As *contrariis contraria intelliguntur*, he learned wisdom by watching the results of unwisdom, confusion of thought and purpose ("madness"); that he thus designates moral error is natural to one taking a philosophical view of human nature. Why he should have borrowed the expression from the Stoics is hard, indeed, to see.

The alleged Epicureanism is equally unfounded. That parallels are met with can surely be explained without supposing that the Preacher "drank from a common source" with Lucretius and Horace. With regard to physical science, had Koheleth to go to Epicurus that he might learn the mystery of the daily rising and setting of the sun, or that rivers flow into the sea, or that the waters somehow find their way back again? These

are matters of observation which must strike any thinker. Is the doctrine concerning the dissolution of man's compound being at death derived from Lucretius? Ecclesiastes says that men and beasts have one destiny; they have a living principle, and, when this is withdrawn, their bodies crumble into dust. He learned this great fact from his own sacred books; if Greek philosophers taught it, they evolved the idea from their own minds and observation, or it was a traditionary knowledge handed down from antiquity. But Koheleth sees a difference between the spirit of man and that of the lower animals, in that the former goeth, as he holds, upward (ch. iii. 21), returns to God (ch. xii. 7), the latter goeth downward to the earth. He is here not thinking of the absorption of man's spirit in the *anima mundi*; he has been taught that God breathed into Adam the breath of life, and that at death that "breath," the living soul, goes back to its source, not losing its identity, but coming more immediately in connection with its Creator, retaining its personality, and, as the Targum paraphrases, "returning to stand in judgment before him who gave it." Concerning the ignorance of what comes after death, our author is quite in accord with the reticence of the Old Testament, and has not learned from a Greek school to speak in this cautious manner. But it is in regard to the enjoyment of life that Ecclesiastes is said to have chiefly borrowed from Epicurean teaching. That, as some have supposed, he recommends a coarse sensuality needs no refutation; but even the "modified Epicureanism" which some read in his pages has no place there; the misconception arises from a false interpretation of certain phrases, especially as taken in connection with their context. There is one which often occurs, *e.g.* "It is good and comely for one to eat and to drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labour that he taketh under the sun all the days of his life" (ch. v. 18; comp. ch. ii. 24; iii. 22; viii. 15). This expression, "to eat and drink," had not, to the ears of a Hebrew, simply the lower meaning which it carries now, as if it implied only the enjoyment of the pleasures of the table. Reproaching Shallum for his declension from righteous ways, Jeremiah (xxii. 15) asks, "Did not thy father eat and drink, and do judgment and justice, and then it was well with him?" Does the prophet signify that Josiah pleased God by his Epicurean life? Is it not evident that the phrase is a metaphor for prosperity, ease, and comfort? When Koheleth inquires (ch. ii. 25), "Who can eat, or who can have enjoyment, more than I?" he means that no one has had better opportunities than he for enjoying life generally. One would have thought it scarcely necessary to insist on the extended signification of this metaphor. The bountifulness of Jehovah is thus expressed: "The Lord is the Portion of mine inheritance and of my cup;" "Thou preparest a table before me" (Ps. xvi. 5; xxiii. 5); and the joys of heaven are adumbrated by terms appropriate to a glorious banquet: "I appoint unto you a kingdom," said Christ (Luke xxii. 29), "that ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom;" "Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God," cried one, in reference to the

life of glory beyond the grave (Luke xiv. 15; comp. Rev. xix. 9). In this and similar phrases used by the Preacher, such as "to rejoice," "to see good," etc., the idea intended is not to encourage the selfish sensuality of the voluptuary, but a well-regulated contentment with and enjoyment of the good which God gives. Nothing more than this is in man's power, and to this he ought to confine his aim; that is, he ought to make the best of the present, knowing that he is not the architect of his own happiness, but that this is the gift of God, to be thankfully accepted as a boon from heaven, whenever and in whatever fashion it may come. It is true that the good and the evil often seem to be and are treated in the same manner (ch. ix. 1, 2); but this is no reason for despair and inaction; nay, as the present life is the only time for work, it behoves us to use it in the best way: "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might." Here is no counsel of Epicurean ἀραψία, a passionless tranquillity which disturbs itself about nothing, but rather a call to an active performance of duties as the best guarantee of happiness. The only other passage which seems to favour licence and immorality is one towards the end (ch. xi. 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 thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes." These words at first sight, and taken by themselves, do seem to encourage youth to give free scope to its passions; but they must not be separated from their solemn conclusion: "But know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment." And the advice really comes to this: youth is the time for enjoyment, while the senses are keen, and the taste is unimpaired, and you do well to make the best of this time; this is your portion and lot given by God; but in all that you do, remember the end, remember the account which you will have to give; take your pleasure with this thought always before you.

That Ecclesiastes cannot be justly accused of scepticism has been already shown incidentally. This and such-like errors are imputed by readers who regard isolated expressions divorced from the context, and neglect the general tone prevalent in the treatise. The idea is supported by such passages as ch. i. 8, 12—18; iii. 9; and viii. 16, 17, in which Koheleth professes man's inability to understand God's doings, and the uselessness of wisdom in satisfying human aspirations. He does not affirm that man can know nothing, apprehend nothing; he is not a disciple of agnosticism—that mean excuse for declining to assent to revealed truth—he asserts that human reason cannot fathom the depth of God's designs. Reason can receive facts, and compare and arrange and argue from them; but it cannot explain everything; it has limits which it cannot pass; perfect intellectual satisfaction is beyond mortals' attainment. Is this equivalent to denying to man the power of gaining any certitude or mastering any verity? Again, when he intimates the vanity of wisdom and knowledge, he is stating the truth that the course of events is beyond man's control, that no human wisdom can secure happiness, which is absolutely the gift

of God. A profound belief in a governing Providence underlies all his utterances; it is the mysteriousness, the secret working, of this government that arrests his attention and leads him to contrast with it man's ignorance and impotence, and to lay skill, prudence, science, under the feet of the great Disposer of hearts and circumstances. In all this he is not speculative; there is no theorizing or philosophizing; it is wholly practical, tending to rules of daily life, not to questions of metaphysics or minute theology.

There is another point on which the Preacher is said to exhibit the taint of scepticism, and that is on the question of the immortality of the soul. Some would make him a predecessor of the Sadducees; some cannot find a trace of the orthodox doctrine in his pages, and indeed consider it to have been unknown at his epoch; others venture to say that he had not even the Greek's idea of the soul and immortality, and held that man, in the matter of life, differed nothing from the beast, had nothing to expect after death. Without entering upon the general question how far the Old Testament countenances the dogma of the immortality of the soul, we will see what Koheleth says upon this absorbing topic. The first passage which bears upon the subject is found in the last five verses of the third chapter, where the destiny and being of men are compared with those of beasts. Properly translated and explained, the words enunciate certain unimpeachable facts. First they say that man, regarded as a mere animal, irrespectively of the relation in which he stands to God, has no more power than the lower creatures; is, no more than they, master of his own fate. Then it is added that the lot of men and beasts is the same; both have the breath of life; when this is withdrawn, both die; so in this respect man has no advantage over the beast—both come from dust and both return to dust. There is no question here of the soul's continued existence; the animal life alone is spoken of, the physical breath or power which gives life to all animals of whatever nature they may be; and all are placed in the same category by having to succumb to the law of death. There is no scepticism thus far; but round the twenty-first verse controversy has gathered. This is rendered in the Revised Version, "Who knoweth the spirit of man whether it goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast whether it goeth downward to the earth?" If we surrender the Authorized translation, "The spirit of man that goeth upward," etc., which states a truth not before enunciated, we must see whether the charge of scepticism is sustained by the Revised Version, which has the authority of the Septuagint, Vulgate, Syriac, and Targum. Now, it may be that Koheleth merely affirms that there are but few who arrive at any knowledge on the subject, or he may say that no one knows for certain anything about the respective destinies of the life of man and brute; but he does not deny, if he refrains here from expressly affirming, the continued existence of the personal soul. If we conceive that he is referring only to the animal life, he intimates that in the manner of death no one can tell what difference there is between the withdrawal of

life from man and from brute. If he refers to the spirit, the *ego* of man, his question implies belief in a continued existence after death; if it was annihilated, if it perished with its earthly tabernacle, there could be no inquiry as to what became of it. To assert that no one can track its course is to certify that it has a course before it, though this be not capable of demonstration. Plainly, too, he differentiates the fate of man and beast. The vital principle of the latter may go with the body to the dust; the spirit of the former may, as he says later (ch. xii. 7), return to the God who gave it; to hold the impossibility of attaining to certainty in this mysterious subject by human reason or senses, does not make a man a sceptic. The stage of the argument required this unsatisfying statement of the case; it is not till the close of the book that doubt is cleared away, and faith shines forth undimmed. There is a further difficulty in the final clause of this paragraph: "For who shall bring him [back] to see what shall be after him?" Some have explained this clause, "What shall become of him after his death?" by which may be signified a doubt whether he has any future or not. But what is intended is either the thought that we cannot tell whether after death we shall have any knowledge of what passes on earth, or else that we cannot foresee what will happen to us or to any one in the future in this world. In either case there is no denial of the great verity of the immortality of the soul. But what is Koheleth's view of the judgment to come? In ch. ix. he speaks of the dead thus: "To him that is joined with all the living there is hope: for a living dog is better than a dead lion. For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not anything, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten. As well their love as their hatred . . . is now perished; neither have they any more a portion for ever in anything that is done under the sun . . . Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in Sheol whither thou goest." The existence of the soul after death is here presupposed; its condition in the other world is the point elaborated. This is considered in accordance with the view that obtains in Job, the Psalms, and other writings of the Old Testament. Sheol is a place beneath the earth, gloomy, awful, whither go the souls of the dead. In the utterances of the poets it has its gates, bars, valleys; its inhabitants are called *rephaim*, "the weak." Their mode of existence differs from that of their brethren in the upper world. They know nothing; they are cut off from action; they have no scope for the exercise of passion or affection; they are joyless, deprived of all that made life worth living; but they retain their individuality and have to undergo a particular judgment. That Koheleth believed in this last event has been questioned, and passages which seem to warrant the idea have been distorted and explained away, or boldly dismissed as interpolations. But taking for granted the integrity of the book as it has come down to us, we cannot fairly escape from such inference. Thus, in view of the partiality and iniquity of men in high position, our author comforts

himself with the reflection that in good time God will judge the righteous and the wicked (ch. iii. 16, 17). The vague but emphatic "there"—"there is a time *there*"—implies the world beyond the grave, the adverb referring probably to God, who is named in the preceding clause. This same thought enables the wise man to endure affliction patiently, "for to everything there is a time and judgment" (ch. viii. 6)—the oppressor shall meet with his reward. It is plain that retribution in the present life is not meant; for Koheleth's complaint is that moral government is not invariably enforced in this world; he must therefore refer to another state of existence, wherein full justice shall be done. This is made quite clear by the warning to the young in ch. xi. 9, "Know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment;" and the solemn close of the whole treatise, "God shall bring every work into judgment, with every hidden thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil." This judgment is supposed to take place when the soul returns to God. Of its course and details nothing more is said; neither Koheleth nor any Old Testament scribe throws any light upon this mysterious subject, in this respect differing materially from the heathen who have treated of the same. Had he borrowed from the works of Egyptians, Greeks, or Romans, he would have been at no loss for descriptions of Hades and its denizens; the mythologies of those peoples would have supplied prolix details. But a sacred reticence restrains our author; he speaks as he is moved, and gives no rein to his imagination. Human thought could not pierce the darkness which enveloped the abode of the dead, and could deal only in vague conjecture or unsubstantial dreams, contrasted with earthly, sensible realities. So at this stage of revelation seers could describe the future only on its negative side, as the privation of the joys, emotions, and pursuits of this present life. To elucidate the positive side of this state, further revelation was needed. Only of the great fact the writer is absolutely certain, and he employs the truth as a consolation in trouble, as an explanation of God's long-suffering, as a motive for restraint and self-denial, as an event which shall solve the difficulties and remove the anomalies which are found in the course and constitution of this world.

Having thus endeavoured to relieve Ecclesiastes from the misapprehensions to which it has been subjected; having, as we hope, shown the unfounded nature of the accusations of Stoicism, Epicureanism, fatalism, scepticism, Hellenism,—we are in a position to state briefly our own view of the plan and scope of the book. What do we gather to have been the circumstances under which it was composed? The case seems to have been the following: The period was a trying one. Oppression and injustice reigned; fools and proletarians were promoted to high positions; wise and pious men were wronged and crushed. Where was that moral government which the Law of Moses enunciated, and which had been the guide and support of the Hebrew people in all their early history? Did injustice meet with the punishment which they had been taught to expect? Did the good and

obedient prosper and live long in the land? Did not daily experience give the lie to the promise of temporal retribution set forth in Scripture? And if revelation was false in this respect, why not in others also? By this doubt the very foundation of religion was sapped; the hopes that the exiles had brought with them, on their return to their native land, were cruelly crushed, and the bitter cry arose, "Is there a God that judgeth the earth?" Malachi had been gathered to his rest; no prophet was there to lead the way to better things or to console the desponding people for the falsification of their expectations. What was the result? Some took refuge in simple unbelief, saying in their hearts, "There is no God;" some, laying aside all consideration of the future, revelled in the present, lived in debauchery and sensuality, with the thought, "Let us eat and drink; for to-morrow we die;" others, as if to constrain God to fulfil old prophecies, and to grant their temporal desires, practised a scrupulous observance of the outward duties of religion, a formal rigorism which anticipated that later Pharisaism which meets us in the gospel history. These tendencies are reflected in Ecclesiastes, and are more or less corrected herein. This rectification is not effected in a formal, logical method. The work is by no means a regular treatise, moral or religious. Some have likened it to St. Augustine's 'Confessions,' or to Pascal's 'Pensées.' It is, perhaps, not quite analogous to either of these, especially as it is written under an assumed name; but it does unveil the author's hidden self, and teaches by recounting personal experiences, and may thus be termed 'Confessions,' or 'Thoughts,' rather than a dissertation or poem. Its subject is the vanity of all that is human and earthly, and by contrast and implication the steadfastness and importance of the unseen. The writer desires, in the first place (virtually, though not expressly), to comfort his countrymen under their present depressed circumstances, to teach them not to set their hopes on earthly success, or to fancy that their own efforts could secure happiness, but to make the best of the present, and to receive with thankfulness the good that God sends or permits. He also urges the avoidance of externalism in religion, and shows wherein true devotion consists. And, in the second place, he warns against despair or reckless licence, as though it mattered not what one did, as if there were no higher Power that regarded; he solemnly asserts his faith in an overruling providence, though we cannot trace the reason or course of its working; his conviction that all is ordered for the best; his unswerving faith in the life everlasting and in a future judgment, which shall remedy the seeming anomalies of this present existence. In all the problems of life, in all the disappointments and difficulties that meet our best and noblest efforts, there is nothing to cling to, no anchor on which to rest, but the fear of God and obedience to his commands. Whatever happens, or however things may seem to go contrary to one's wishes and aspirations, amid the outward prosperity of the wicked and the humiliation of the good, he triumphs in the assurance that he knows certainly that it shall be well with them that fear God (ch. viii. 12). To

convey this instruction the author does not compose a carefully ordered and well-arranged dissertation, nor does he propound a moral discourse; he takes another method; he puts forth his views under the mask of Solomon, the king whose name had become proverbial for wisdom. He makes this celebrated personage recount his wide experiences, and, under this veil, hiding his own personality, he presents his peace offering to his contemporaries. No one had such varied knowledge of man's powers and circumstances as Solomon; no one like him could command attention and respect at the hand of the Hebrew people; the impersonation secured an audience, and enabled the writer to say much to them that would have come with less grace and weight from another. Though the work has a certain unity, and its great subject is continually recurring, the writer does not confine himself within narrow limits; he takes occasion to give rules of life; he mingles practice with theory. It is as though he commenced his work with some idea of writing formally and methodically, and then, carried away by the influence of his subject, overwhelmed by the thought of the nothingness of human endeavour, he cannot get beyond this reflection, and while uttering maxims of wisdom and parables of common sense, he connects them with his predominant view, mingling aphorisms and confessions with some incongruity. It seemed good to him to record the opinions which crossed his mind at various times, and the modifications which he felt constrained to admit; thus he shows the progress of his thought towards the great conclusion which closes the treatise. This conclusion is the clue to the interpretation of the whole. Resting on this rock, Koheleth could relate his doubts, perplexities, disquietudes, without fear of being misunderstood or leading others astray.

The work has its natural place in the teaching of revelation and the progress of true religion. If the literal tendency of Mosaic legislation was in the direction of the strong belief in temporal rewards and punishments, and if this notion cramped all higher aspirations and set the heart on gross earthly hopes, it was Koheleth's business to introduce a spiritual element in these expectations, to supplement the earlier reticence concerning the life beyond the grave by giving expression to the belief in immortality. By showing the inapplicability of the ancient idea to all the circumstances of the present life, he led men to look to another life, and to see another meaning in those antique utterances which spake of temporal rewards and punishments, earthly success, earthly calamity. It was ordered by Providence that religious knowledge should be communicated gradually, that it should be revealed as men were able to bear it, here a little, there a little. Each book adds something to the store of dogma, just as each saint in old story reflects some feature of perfect manhood, and helps the conception of the character of Jesus Christ. The doctrine of future retribution, which is taken for granted in the New Testament, forms a very slight portion of the teaching of the earlier Scriptures; and the Holy Spirit has allowed the writers of Job, Psalms, and Ecclesiastes to express the sense of perplexity

which the apparent anomalies in moral government presented to the thoughtful observer. Our author, indeed, finds a solution; but it is only by an exercise of faith in God's justice and goodness that he rises superior to the depressing effect of experience; and beyond this conviction of the ultimate victory of goodness he has nothing definite to offer. The way to the fuller revelation of the gospel is thus laid open. The mental struggles of this ancient Hebrew seer are a lesson for all time, and point to a need of further explication, which was duly to be given. And as the same questions have always been a source of solicitude and disquieted men's minds in every age, it has seemed good to Divine Providence to set these trials of faith in the pages of Scripture, that others, reading them, may see that they stand not alone, that their doubts have been the experience of many minds, and that as such as Koheleth, with imperfect knowledge and a partial revelation, rose superior to difficulties and let faith conquer mistrust, so Christians, who are better instructed, who stand in the full light of completer knowledge, should never for a moment feel misgiving concerning the dealings of God's providence; but in unswerving trust, "commit the keeping of their souls to him in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator," casting all their care upon him, knowing that he careth for them.

§ 4. CANONICITY, UNITY, AND INTEGRITY.

Ecclesiastes has been received without controversy in the Christian Church as a book of the Bible. In all the extant catalogues, conciliar and private, it occurs undisputed. The Jewish Church, however, has not been quite so unanimous in its full acceptance; for although it is found in all the lists of sacred books, and had its place among the five rolls (*Megilloth*), there was, towards the end of the first Christian century, some hesitation in rabbinical schools to recognize its complete inspiration, and to commend its public recitation. Objections were made on the ground of apparent contradictions contained in different parts, of its want of harmony with other portions of Holy Scripture, and of certain heretical statements. Of these objections it is to be observed that they regard rather the retention of the book in the canon than its admission therein; and that, appearing first in the first Christian century, they show that up to that time, at any rate, *Ecclesiastes* had been included in the sacred catalogue. The seeming contradictions and discrepancies arise from a partial view of the contents, from taking isolated passages uncorrected and unexplained by other statements and the general tendency. For instance, Koheleth is said, in ch. ii. 2 and viii. 15, to commend mirth; and in ch. vii. 3 to prefer sorrow to laughter; in one place to praise the dead (ch. iv. 2); in another to prefer a live dog to a dead lion (ch. ix. 4). So again we read, "Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart" (ch. xi. 9), whereas Moses warns against seeking after one's own heart and one's own eyes (Numb. xv. 39). These misapprehensions were soon set at rest, the ortho-

doxy of the final verses could not be questioned, the inspiration of the work was acknowledged, and it has ever since been received alike by the Jewish and Christian Churches. That it is not quoted in the New Testament, and is thus far deprived of the authorization afforded by such reference, detracts in no respect from its Divine character, nor is this affected by the transference of its authorship from Solomon to an unknown writer. The grounds on which it has been admitted into the sacred canon are independent of any such external confirmation, and the Holy Spirit compels recognition at the hands of the Church by evidence that is self-revealing and indubitable. It is clear also that, in our Lord's time, Ecclesiastes formed one of the twenty-two books of the Hebrew Scripture, most of which were endorsed by citation, and a virtual sanction was thus given to the rest of the collection.

The unity and integrity of our book have been called in question, chiefly by those who have noted the apparent contradictions which it contains, and have failed to apprehend the author's standpoint, and his reason for the introduction of these anomalies. Thus exception is taken by some against the seeming want of connection between ch. iv. 13, 14 and verses 15, 16; others have discovered dislocations in various passages, and wished to arrange the work in different fashion, according to their view of the writer's intention. Others, again, have detected interpolations and later additions. Thus Cheyne, having made up his mind that Koheleth did not believe in future retribution, strikes out as spurious all passages that favour the idea of a coming judgment; in a similar spirit Geiger and Nöldeke affect to see late insertions in ch. xi. 9 and xii. 7. But all this is surely uncritical. There is no pretence of proving that the incriminated passages differ *toto cælo* in language and treatment from the rest of the work, or that they could not have been written by the author. An opinion concerning Koheleth's dogma is adopted and boldly asserted, and any expression which opposes this idea is at once attributed to a later editor, who foisted his own sentiments into the text. If this free handling of ancient documents is allowed when they seem to be in advance of what a perhaps shallow criticism deems to be the spirit of the age, how are we to maintain the genuineness of any unfettered thinker's work? Concerning the epilogue, however, there is a little more difficulty made by those who do not look upon it as the crown and conclusion of the whole, without which the work would be unsatisfactory and lack completion. The objections to this paragraph are twofold—linguistic and dogmatic. It is said that it contains expressions deviating from those that occur in the former parts. The discussion seems to end at ver. 8 of the last chapter; and the final passage differs in style and other particulars from the rest. But an examination of the language shows that it can be paralleled in every particular from the earlier pages, and the difference in style is necessitated by the subject. In this appendix, or postscript, the writer reveals himself, *in propria persona*, no longer under the veil of

Solomon, but taking the reader, as it were, into his confidence, showing what he really is, and his claim to attention. Far from being superfluous, the addition puts the seal to the whole production. Speaking of Koheleth in the third person, he virtually acknowledges the fictitious use of Solomon's authority. At the same time, he maintains that the work has not lost its value because it cannot vindicate its authorship at the hands of the great king. He himself has been inspired to write it; the same "Shepherd" who guided the pens of Solomon and other wise men directed him likewise. As to the momentous conclusion, every one who thinks with us concerning the religious views of the writer, and the design of his work, will agree that it is most apposite, and is the only conceivable summing-up that satisfies the requirements of the treatise. It is also in full accord with what has preceded. The solution of the anomalies in life, offered by the fact of a future judgment, has been intimated more than once in other parts of the book; it is here only presented again with more emphasis and in a more striking position. We may add that no doubt concerning the genuineness of the epilogue was ever raised by the Jewish schools which hesitated to allow full inspiration to Ecclesiastes. Indeed, it was the undoubted orthodoxy of the closing verses which finally overcame all opposition.

§ 5. LITERATURE.

The literature connected with Ecclesiastes is of enormous extent. We can here only enumerate a few of the most useful commentaries and kindred works.

Among the Fathers we have these: Origen, 'Scholia'; Gregory Thaumaturgus, 'Metaphrasis'; Gregory Nyssen., 'Conciones'; Jerome, Version and 'Commentary'; Olympiodorus, 'Enarratio.' The mediæval and later expositions are innumerable: Hugo A. S. Victore, 'Homiliæ'; the Jews, Rashi, Rashbam, and Ibn Ezra; Luther, 'Annotationes'; Pineda, 'Commentarii'; Cornelius à Lapide; Grotius, 'Annotationes'; Reynolds, 'Annotations'; Smith, 'Explicatio'; Schmidt, 'Commentarius'; Mendelssohn, 'D. Buch Koheleth'; Umbreit, 'Uebers. und Darstell.', and 'Koheleth Scepticus'; Knobel, 'Comment.'; Herzfeld, 'Uebers. und Erläut.'; Hitzig, 'Erklärung'; Stuart, 'Commentary'; Vaihinger, 'Uebers. und Erklär.'; Hengstenberg, 'Auslegung'; Ginsburg, 'Koheleth'; Plumptre, 'Ecclesiastes'; Wright, 'Book of Koheleth'; Tyler, 'Ecclesiastes'; Renan, 'L'Ecclesiaste Traduit'; Zöckler, in Lange's 'Bibelwerk,' and edited by Tayler Lewis; Delitzsch, in Clarke's 'For. Library'; Grätz, 'Kohélet'; Gietmann, in 'Cursus Script. Sacr.' (1890); Motais, 'Solomon et l'Ecclesiaste,' and in 'La Sainte Bible avec Commentaires'; Nowack, in 'Kurzgef. Exeg. Handbuch'; Volck, in 'Kurzgef. Kommentar' (1889); Bishop Wordsworth, 'Bible with Notes'; Bullock, in 'Speaker's Commentary'; Salmon, in Bishop Ellicott's 'Commentary for English Readers'; Cox, 'Expository Lectures,' and 'Book of Ecclesiastes' (1891).

§ 6. DIVISION INTO SECTIONS.

The attempts to dissect the book and to arrange its contents methodically have been as numerous as the editors themselves. Every exegete

has tried his hand at this work, and the difference of the results arrived at is at once a proof of the difficulty of the subject. Between the idea, on the one hand, that the book is a rough mass of materials, without form, argument, or method, and that which regards it as a well-balanced poem, with strophes and antistrophes, etc., there is wide scope for disagreement and dispute. Rejecting as arbitrary and unwarranted the transposition of verses, to which some critics have had recourse, we note a few of the most feasible arrangements offered by those who recognize the unity of the work, and the existence of a central idea which throughout is kept more or less prominently in view.

Many divide the book into four parts. Thus Zöckler, Keil, and Vaihinger: I. ch. i., ii.; II. ch. iii.—v.; III. ch. vi. 1—viii. 15; IV. ch. viii. 16—xii. 7; epilogue, ch. xii. 8—14. So Ewald, except that his second division comprises ch. iii. 1—vi. 9. McClinton and Strong: I. ch. i., ii.; II. ch. iii. 1—vi. 9; III. ch. vi. 10—viii. 15; IV. ch. viii. 16—xii. 8. According to Tyler, the work separates into two chief parts—the first, ch. i. 2—vi. 12, being the negative side, exhibiting the author's disappointments; the second, ch. vii. 1—xii. 8, the positive side, giving the philosophy of the matter, with some practical rules of life. Kleinert, in Herzog and Plitt's 'Real-Encyclop.,' analyzes thus: I. ch. i. 12—ii. 23, inductive proof of vanity from experience; II. ch. ii. 24—iii. 22, God's ordering; III. ch. iv.—vi., a collection of shorter sentences, expressing partly the result of I. and II.; IV. ch. vii. 1—ix. 10; V. ch. ix. 11—xii. 8. Ginsburg gives, prologue, four sections, and epilogue, viz.: prologue, ch. i. 2—11; I. ch. i. 12—ii. 26; II. ch. iii. 1—v. 19; III. ch. vi. 1—viii. 15; IV. ch. viii. 16—xii. 7; epilogue, ch. xii. 8—14.

From the above given details it will be seen that it is no easy matter to systematize the treatise, and to force it into logical periods. It was plainly never intended to be so taken, and cannot, without violence, be made to assume precise regularity. There is, indeed, no designed plan; it has a theme which gives it consistency and adherence; but, satisfied with this central idea, the author allows himself a certain liberty of treatment, and often branches off into collateral subjects. We think, however, that it contains two main divisions, the first of which conveys the extended proof of the vanity of earthly things, obtained by personal experience and observation; while the second deduces certain practical conclusions from the previous considerations, presenting warnings, counsels, and rules of life. Taking this view, we divide the book in the following manner:—

TITLE of the book. Ch. i. 1.

PROLOGUE. Vanity of earthly things, and their oppressive monotony. Ch. i. 2—11.

DIVISION I. Proof of the vanity of earthly things from personal experience and general observation. Ch. i. 12—vi. 12.

Section 1. Vanity of striving after wisdom and knowledge. Ch. i. 12—18.

Section 2. Vanity of striving after pleasure and wealth. Ch. ii. 1—11.

Section 3. Vanity of wisdom, in view of the fate that awaits the wise and the fool, and the uncertainty of the future. Ch. ii. 12—26.

- Section 4. The impotence of man before the providence of God, and the consequent duty to make the best of the present. Ch. iii. 1—22.
- Section 5. Things which interrupt or destroy men's happiness, such as oppression, envy, useless toil, isolation, fickle popularity. Ch. iv. 1—16.
- Section 6. Vanity in popular religion, worship, and vows. Ch. v. 1—7.
- Section 7. Dangers in a despotic state, and the unprofitableness of wealth. Ch. v. 8—17.
- Section 8. Man should enjoy all the good which God gives him. Ch. v. 18—20.
- Section 9. Vanity of wealth without power of enjoying it. Ch. vi. 1—6.
- Section 10. The insatiability of desire. Ch. vi. 7—9.
- Section 11. Man's short-sightedness and powerlessness against Providence. Ch. vi. 10—12.
- DIVISION II.** Deductions from the above-named experiences, with warnings and rules of life. Ch. vii. 1—xii. 8.
- Section 1. Practical rules of life set forth in proverbial form, recommending earnestness in preference to frivolity. Ch. vii. 1—7.
- Section 2. True wisdom is shown in resignation to the ordering of God's providence. Ch. vii. 8—14.
- Section 3. Warnings against excesses, and praise of the golden mean. Ch. vii. 15—22.
- Section 4. Wickedness is folly; woman is the most evil thing in the world; man has perverted an originally good nature. Ch. vii. 23—29.
- Section 5. True wisdom counsels obedience to the ruling powers, however oppressive, and submission to the decrees of Providence. Ch. viii. 1—9.
- Section 6. The difficulty concerning the prosperity of the evil and the misery of the righteous in this world: how to be solved and met. Ch. viii. 10—15.
- Section 7. The course of God's moral government is inexplicable. The uncertainty of life and the certainty of death ought to lead man to make the best of the present. Ch. viii. 16—ix. 10.
- Section 8. The issues and duration of life cannot be calculated upon. Ch. ix. 11, 12.
- Section 9. Wisdom is not always rewarded when it does good service. Ch. ix. 13—16.
- Section 10. Some proverbs concerning wisdom and folly. Ch. ix. 17, 18.
- Section 11. Wisdom is marred by the intrusion of a little folly. Ch. x. 1—3.
- Section 12. Illustration of wise conduct under capricious rulers. Ch. x. 4—7.
- Section 13. Proverbs intimating the benefit of prudence and caution. Ch. x. 8—11.
- Section 14. Contrast between words and acts of the wise man and of the fool. Ch. x. 12—15.
- Section 15. The misery of a state under a foolish ruler, and advice to subjects thus cursed. Ch. x. 16—20.
- Section 16. The first remedy for the perplexities of life: the duty of benevolence; one should do one's duty diligently, leaving results to God. Ch. xi. 1—6.
- Section 17. The second is a cheerful and contented spirit. Ch. xi. 7—9.
- Section 18. The third is piety practised in early life, and before the faculties are numbed by the approach of age. The last days of the old man are graphically described under certain images and analogies. Ch. xi. 10—xii. 7. The book ends with the refrain, "All is vanity." Ch. xii. 8.
- EPilogue.** Observations commendatory of the author, explaining his standpoint, the object of the book, and the grand conclusion to which it leads. Ch. xii. 9—14.

ECCLESIASTES; OR, THE PREACHER.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER I

Ver. 1.—THE TITLE.

Ver. 1.—The words of the Preacher, the son of David, King in Jerusalem; Septuagint, "King of Israel in Jerusalem" (comp. ver. 12). The word rendered "Preacher" is *Koheleth*, a feminine noun formed from a verb *kalal*, "to call" (see Introduction, § 1), and perhaps better rendered "Convener" or "Debater." It is found nowhere else but in this book, where it occurs three times in this chapter (vers. 1, 2, 12), three times in ch. xii. 8, 9, 10, and once in ch. vii. 27. In all but one instance (viz. ch. xii. 8) it is used without the article, as a proper name. Jerome, in his commentary, translates it, 'Concionator,' in his version 'Ecclesiastes.' It would seem to denote one who gathered around him a congregation in order to instruct them in Divine lore. The feminine form is explained in various ways. Either it is used abstractedly, as the designation of an office, which it seems not to be; or it is formed as some other words which are found with a feminine termination, though denoting the names of men, indicating, as Gesenius notes (§ 107, 3 c), a high degree of activity in the possessor of the particular quality signified by the stem; e.g. *Alemeth*, *Azmaveth* (1 Chron. viii. 36; ix. 42), *Poche-reth* (Ezra ii. 57), *Sophereth* (Neh. vii. 57); or, as is most probable, the writer desired to identify *Koheleth* with Wisdom, though it must be observed that the personality of the author often appears, as in ch. i. 16—18; vii. 23, etc.; the rôle of Wisdom being for the nonce forgotten. The word "king" in the title is shown by the accentuation to be in apposition to "*Koheleth*" not to "*David*;" and there can be no doubt that the description is intended to denote Solomon, though his

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name is nowhere actually given, as it is in the two other works ascribed to him (Prov. i. 1; Cant. i. 1). Other intimations of the assumption of Solomon's personality are found in ch. i. 12, "I *Koheleth* was king," etc.; so in describing his consummate wisdom (ch. i. 13, 16; ii. 15; comp. 1 Kings iii. 12; v. 12), and in his being the author of many proverbs (ch. xii. 9; comp. 1 Kings iv. 32)—accomplishments which are not noted in the case of any other of David's descendants. Also the picture of luxury and magnificence presented in ch. ii. suits no Jewish monarch but Solomon. The origin of the name applied to him may probably be traced to the historical fact mentioned in 1 Kings viii. 55, etc., where Solomon gathers all Israel together to the dedication of the temple, and utters the remarkable prayer which contained blessing and teaching and exhortation. As we have shown in the Introduction (§ 2), the assumption of the name is a mere literary device to give weight and importance to the treatise to which it appertains. The term, "King in Jerusalem," or, as in ver. 12, "King over Israel in Jerusalem," is unique, and occurs nowhere else in Scripture. David is said to have reigned in Jerusalem, when this seat of government is spoken of in contrast with that at Hebron (2 Sam. v. 5), and the same expression is used of Solomon, Rehoboam, and others (1 Kings xi. 42; xiv. 21; xv. 2, 10); and the phrase probably denotes a time when the government had become divided, and Israel had a different capital from Judah.

Vers. 2—11.—PROLOGUE. The vanity of all human and mundane things, and the oppressive monotony of their continued recurrence.

Ver. 2.—Vanity of vanities, saith the

Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity (comp. ch. xii. 8). "Vanity" is *hebel*, which means "breath," and is used metaphorically of anything transitory, frail, unsatisfying. We have it in the proper name Abel, an appropriate designation of the youth whose life was cut short by a brother's murderous hand. "Vanity of vanities," like "heaven of heavens" (1 Kings viii. 27), "song of songs" (Cant. i. 1), etc., is equivalent to a superlative, "most utterly vain." It is here an exclamation, and is to be regarded as the key-note of the whole subsequent treatise, which is merely the development of this text. Septuagint, *ματαιότης ματαιότητων*; other Greek translators, *ἀτμός ἀτμίδων*, "vapour of vapours." For "saith" the Vulgate gives *dixit*; the Septuagint, *εἶπεν*; but as there is no reference to any previous utterance of the Preacher, the present is more suitable here. In affirming that "all is vanity," the writer is referring to human and mundane things, and directs not his view beyond such phenomena. Such a reflection is common in sacred and profane writings alike; such experience is universal (comp. Gen. xlvii. 9; Ps. xxxix. 5—7; xc. 3—10; Jas. iii. 14). "Pulvis et umbra sumus," says Horace ('Carm.,' iv. 7. 16. "O curas hominum! O quantum est in rebus inane!") (Persius, 'Sat.,' i. 1). If Dean Plumptre is correct in contending that the Book of Wisdom was written to rectify the deductions which might be drawn from Koheleth, we may contrast the caution of the apocryphal writer, who predicates vanity, not of all things, but only of the hope of the ungodly, which he likens to dust, froth, and smoke (see Wisd. ii. 1, etc.; v. 14). St. Paul (Rom. viii. 20) seems to have had Ecclesiastes in mind when he spoke of the creation being subjected to vanity (*τῇ ματαιότητι*), as a consequence of the fall of man, not to be remedied till the final restitution of all things. "But a man will say, If all things are vain and vanity, wherefore were they made? If they are God's works, how are they vain? But it is not the works of God which he calls vain. God forbid! The heaven is not vain; the earth is not vain: God forbid! Nor the sun, nor the moon, nor the stars, nor our own body. No; all these are very good. But what is vain? Man's works, pomp, and vain-glory. These came not from the hand of God, but are of our own creating. And they are vain because they have no useful end. . . . That is called vain which is expected indeed to possess value, yet possesses it not; that which men call empty, as when they speak of 'empty hopes,' and that which is fruitless. And generally that is called vain which is of no use. Let us see, then, whether all human things are not of this

sort" (St. Chrysostom, 'Hom. xii. in Ephes.').

Ver. 3.—**What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun?** Here begins the elucidation of the fruitlessness of man's ceaseless activity. The word rendered "profit" (*γίθρον*) is found only in this book, where it occurs frequently. It means "that which remains over, advantage," *περίσσελα*, as the LXX. translates it. As the verb and the substantive are cognate in the following words, they are better rendered, *in all his labour wherein he laboureth*. So Euripides ('Androm.,' 134) has, *Τὶ μόνον μοχθεῖς*, and ('And. Fragm.,' vii. 4), *Τοῖς μοχθοῦσι μόνον εὐτυχῶς συνεκπύετο*. Man is *Adam*, the natural man, unenlightened by the grace of God. *Under the sun* is an expression peculiar to this book (comp. vers. 9, 14; ch. ii. 11, 17, etc.), but is not intended to contrast this present with a future life; it merely refers to what we call sublunary matters. The phrase is often met with in the Greek poets. Eurip., 'Alcest.,' 151—

Γυνὴ τ' ἀρίστη τῶν ὑπ' ἡλίῳ μακρῇ.

"By far the best of all beneath the sun."

Homer, 'Iliad,' iv. 44—

Αἱ γὰρ ὑπ' ἡελίου τε καὶ οὐρανῷ ὑπερρέντι
Ναιετάουσι πόλεις ἐπιχθονίων ἀνθρώπων.

"Of all the cities occupied by man
Beneath the sun and starry cope of heaven."
(Cowper.)

Theognis, 'Parcem.,' 167—

Ὁλβιος οὐδὲς
Ἀνθρώπων, ὁπόσους ἥλιος καθορᾷ.

"No mortal man
On whom the sun looks down is wholly blest."

In an analogous sense we find in other passages of Scripture the terms "under heaven" (ver. 13; ch. ii. 3; Exod. xvii. 14; Luke xvii. 24) and "upon the earth" (ch. viii. 14, 16; Gen. viii. 17). The interrogative form of the verse conveys a strong negative (comp. ch. vi. 8), like the Lord's word in Matt. xvi. 26, "What shall a man be profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul?" The epilogue (ch. xii. 13) furnishes a reply to the desponding inquiry.

Ver. 4.—**One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh.** The translation rather weakens the force of the original, which is, *a generation goeth, and a generation cometh*. Man is only a pilgrim on earth; he soon passes away, and his place is occupied by others. Parallelisms of this sentiment will occur to every reader. Thus Ben-Sira, "All flesh waxeth old as a garment: for the covenant from the beginning is, Thou shalt die the death. As of the

green leaves on a thick tree, some fall and some grow; so is the generation of flesh and blood, one cometh to an end, and another is born. Every work rotteth and consumeth away, and the worker thereof shall go withal" (Eccolus. xiv. 17, etc.; comp. Job x. 21; Ps. xxxix. 13). The famous passage in Homer, 'Iliad,' vi. 146, etc., is thus rendered by Lord Derby—

"The race of man is as the race of leaves :
Of leaves, one generation by the wind
Is scattered on the earth; another soon
In spring's luxuriant verdure bursts to
light.
So with our race: these flourish, those
decay."

(Comp. *ibid.*, xxi. 464, etc.; Horace, 'Ars Poet,' 60.) But (*and*) the earth abideth for ever. While the constant succession of generations of men goes on, the earth remains unchanged and immovable. If men were as permanent as is their dwelling-place, their labours might profit; but as things are, the painful contrast between the two makes itself felt. The term, "for ever," like the Greek *eis tōn aiōna*, does not necessarily imply eternity, but often denotes limited or conditioned duration, as when the slave is engaged to serve his master "for ever" (Exod. xxi. 6), or the hills are called "everlasting" (Gen. xlix. 26). This verse gives one instance of growth and decay in contrast with insensate continuance. The following verses give further examples.

Ver. 5.—The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down. The sun is another instance of ever-recurring change in the face of an enduring sameness, rising and setting day by day, and resting never. The legendary 'Life of Abram' relates how, having been hidden for some years in a cave in order to escape the search of Nimrod, when he emerged from his concealment, and for the first time beheld heaven and earth, he began to inquire who was the Creator of the wonders around him. When the sun arose and flooded the scene with its glorious light, he at once concluded that that bright orb must be the creative Deity, and offered his prayers to it all day long. But when it sank in darkness, he repented of his illusion, being persuaded that the sun could not have made the world and be itself subject to extinction (see 'Abraham: his Life and Times,' p. 12). And hasteth to his place where he arose; literally, and *pantheth* (equivalent to *hasteth, longeth to go*) to its place arising there; i.e. the sun, sinking in the west, eagerly during the night returns to the east, duly to rise there in the morning. The "place" is the region of reappearance. The Septuagint gives, "The sun arises, and the sun sets, and draws (ἐλκεῖ) unto its

place;" and then carries the idea into the following verse: "Arising there, it proceedeth southward," etc. The Vulgate supports the rendering; but there is no doubt that the Authorized Version gives substantially the sense of the Hebrew text as accented. The verb *שָׁאֵף* (*shaaph*), as Delitzsch shows, implies "panting," not from fatigue, but in eager pursuit of something; and all notions of panting steeds or morning exhalations are quite foreign from the conception of the passage. The notion which Kobleth desires to convey is that the sun makes no real progress; its eager panting merely brings it to the old place, there to recommence its monotonous routine. Rosenmüller quotes Catullus, 'Carm.,' v. 4—6, on which Doering cites Lotich., 'Eleg.,' iii. 7. 23—

"Ergo ubi permensus coelum sol occidit,
idem

Purpureo vestit lumine rursus humum;
Nos, ubi decidimus, defuncti munere vitæ,
Urget perpetua lumina nocte sopor."

But our passage does not contrast the revival of the sun every morning with man's eternal sleep in death.

Ver. 6.—The wind goeth toward the south, and turneth about unto the north; literally, *going towards the south, and circling towards the north*. These words, as we have seen above, are referred to the sun by the Septuagint, Vulgate, and Syriac; but it is best to make this verse refer only to the wind—a fresh example of motion continually repeated with no real progress to an end. Thus each verse comprises one subject and idea, ver. 4 being concerned with the earth, ver. 5 with the sun, ver. 6 with the wind, and ver. 7 with the waters. There seems to be no particular force in the naming of north and south, unless it be in contrast to the sun's motion from east to west, mentioned in the preceding verse. The words following show that these two directions are not alone intended. Thus the four quarters are virtually included. It whirleth about continually. The original is more forcible, giving by its very form the idea of weary monotony. The subject is delayed till the last, thus: *Going towards the south . . . circling, circling, goeth the wind*; i.e. it blows from all quarters at its own caprice. And the wind returneth again according to his circuits. And on its circlings returneth the wind; it comes back to the point whence it started. The wind, seemingly the freest of all created things, is bound by the same law of immutable changeableness, insensate repetition.

Ver. 7.—All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full. Here is another instance of unvarying operation producing no tangible result. The phenomenon mentioned is often the subject of remark and

speculation in classical authors. Commentators cite Aristophanes, 'Clouds,' 1293—

Αὕτη μὲν (sc. ἡ θάλαττα) οὐδὲν γίγνεται
Ἐπιφρέοντων τῶν ποταμῶν πλείων.

"The sea, though all the rivers flow therein, Waxeth no greater."

Lucretius attempts to account for the fact, 'De Rer. Nat.,' vi. 608—

"Nunc ratio reddunda, augmen quin nesciat
æquor.

Principio mare mirantur non reddere majus
Naturam, quo sit tantus decursus aquarum,
Omnia quo veniant ex omni flumina parte."

This Dr. Busby thus versifies—

"Now in due order, Muse, proceed to show
Why the deep seas no augmentation know,
In ocean that such numerous streams discharge
Their waters, yet that ocean ne'er enlarge,"
etc.

No particular sea is intended, though some have fancied that the peculiarities of the Dead Sea gave occasion to the thought in the text. Doubtless the idea is general, and such as would strike every observer, however little he might trouble himself with the reason of the circumstance (comp. Eccles. xl. 11). *Unto the place from whence the rivers come, thither they return again; rather, unto the place whither the rivers go, thither they go again.* As Wright and Delitzsch observe, *ὅθεν* after verbs of motion has often the signification of *πρὸς*; and the idea is that the streams continue to make their way into the sea with ceaseless iteration. The other rendering, which is supported by the Vulgate *unde*, seems rather to favour the Epicurean poet's solution of the phenomenon. Lucretius, in the passage cited above, explains that the amount of water contributed by rivers is a mere drop in the ocean; that a vast quantity rises in exhalations and is spread far and wide over the earth; and that another large portion finds its way back through the pores of the ground to the bed of the sea. Plumptre considers that this theory was known to Koheleth, and was introduced by him here. The rendering which we have given above would make this opinion untenable; it likewise excludes the idea (though that, indeed, may have been entertained by the Hebrews, Ps. civ. 10 and Prov. viii. 28) of the clouds being produced by the sea and feeding the springs. Thus Eccles. xl. 11, "All things that are of the earth do turn to the earth again; and that which is of the waters doth return into the sea."

Ver. 8.—*All things are full of labour.* Taking the word *dabar* in the sense of "word" (compare the Greek *ῥῆμα*), the

LXX. translates, "All words are wearisome;" i.e. to go through the whole catalogue of such things as those mentioned in the preceding verses would be a laborious and unprofitable task. The Targum and many modern expositors approve this rendering. But besides that, the word *yaged* implies suffering, not causing, weariness (Deut. xxv. 18; Job iii. 17); the run of the sentence is unnecessarily interrupted by such an assertion, when one is expecting a conclusion from the instances given above. The Vulgate has, *cunctæ res difficiles*. The idea, as Motais has seen, is this—Man's life is constrained by the same law as his surroundings; he goes on his course subject to influences which he cannot control; in spite of his efforts, he can never be independent. This conclusion is developed in succeeding verses. In the present verse the proposition with which it starts is explained by what follows. All things have been the object of much labour; men have elaborately examined everything; yet the result is most unsatisfactory, the end is not reached; words cannot express it, neither eye nor ear can apprehend it. This is the view of St. Jerome, who writes, "Non solum de physicis, sed de ethicis quoque scire difficile est. Nec sermo valet explicare causas naturæque rerum, nec oculus, ut rei poscit dignitas, intueri, nec auris, institutis doctores, ad summam scientiam pervenire. Si enim nunc 'per speculum videmus in ænigmate; et ex parte cognoscimus, et ex parte prophetamus,' consequenter nec sermo potest explicare quod nescit; nec oculus in quo cæcutit, aspicere; nec auris, de quo dubitat, impleri." Delitzsch, Nowack, Wright, and others render, "All things are in restless activity;" i.e. constant movement pervades the whole world, and yet no visible conclusion is attained. This, however true, does not seem to be the point insisted on by the author, whose intention is, as we have said, to show that man, like nature, is confined to a circle from which he cannot free himself; and though he uses all the powers with which he is endowed to penetrate the enigma of life and to rise superior to his environments, he is wholly unable to effect anything in these matters. *Man cannot utter it.* He cannot explain all things. Koheleth does not affirm that man can know nothing, that he can attain to no certitude, that reason will not teach him to apprehend any truth; his contention is that the inner cause and meaning elude his faculties, that his knowledge is concerned only with accidents and externals, and that there is still some depth which his powers cannot fathom. The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing. Use his sight as he may, listen to the sounds around him, attend to

the instructions of professed teachers, man makes no real advance in knowledge of the mysteries in which he is involved; the paradox is inexplicable. We have, in Prov. xxvii. 20, "Sheol and Abaddon are never satisfied; and the eyes of man are never satisfied." Plumptre quotes Lucretius's expression (ii. 1038), "*Fessus satiate videndi*," "Remember," says Thomas à Kempis ('*De Imitat.*' i. l. 5), "the proverb, that the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear with hearing. Endeavour, therefore, to withdraw thy heart from the love of visible things, and to transfer thyself to the invisible. For they that follow their sensuality do stain their conscience and lose the grace of God."

Ver. 9.—The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be. The LXX. and the Vulgate render the first clauses of the two parts of the verse in both cases interrogatively, thus: "What is that which hath been? The very thing which shall be. And what is that which hath been done? The very thing which shall be done." What has been affirmed of phenomena in the material world is now affirmed of the events of man's life. They move in an analogous circle, whether they are concerned with actions or morals. Plumptre sees here an anticipation or a reproduction of the Stoic doctrine of a recurring cycle of events, such as Virgil mentions in his fourth 'Eclogue'—

"Magnus ab integro sæclorum nascitur ordo," etc.

But Koheleth is speaking merely from experience, and is indulging in no philosophical speculations. There is no new thing under the sun. The Vulgate transfers this clause to the next verse, which, indeed, supports the assertion. From classical authors commentators have culled examples of the same thought. Thus Tacitus, '*Annal.*' iii. 55, "Nisi forte rebus cunctis inest quidam velut orbis, ut quem ad modum temporum vices, ita morum vertantur." Seneca, '*Epist.*' xxiv., "Nullius rei finis est, sed in orbem nexa sunt omnia; fugiunt ac sequuntur. . . . Omnia transeunt ut revertantur, nihil novi video, nihil novi facio. Fit aliquando et hujus rei nausea." M. Aurelius, '*Medit.*' vi. 37, "He that sees the present has seen all things, both that which has been from everlasting and that which shall be in the future. All things are of one birth and one form." Again, vii. 1, "There is nothing new; all things are common and quickly over;" xii. 26, "Everything that comes to pass was always so coming to pass, and will take place again." Justin Martyr, '*Apol.*' i. 57, has, perhaps, a reminiscence of this passage when he writes, Οὐ γὰρ δεδολκαμεν θάνατον τοῦ πάντος ἀποθανεῖν

δολογουμένου, καὶ μηδὲνς ἄλλου καινοῦ ἄλλ' ἢ τῶν αὐτῶν ἐν τῇδε τῇ διοικήσει ὄντων.

Ver. 10.—Is there any thing whereof it may be said, See, this is new! The writer conceives that objection may be taken to his statement at the end of the preceding verse, so he proceeds to reiterate it in stronger terms. "Thing" is *dabar* (see on ver. 8). Septuagint, "He who shall speak and say, Behold, this is new," *eccl.* Where is he? Vulgate, "Nothing is new under the sun, nor is any one able to say, Lo! this is fresh." The apparent exceptions to the rule are mistaken inferences. It hath been already of old time, which was before us. In the vast æons of the past, recorded or unrecorded, the seeming novelty has already been known. The discoveries of earlier time are forgotten, and seem quite new when revived; but closer investigation proves their previous existence.

Vet. 11.—There is no remembrance of former things; rather, of former men—persons who lived in former times. As things are considered novel only because they had been forgotten, so we men ourselves shall pass away, and be no more remembered. Bailey, 'Festus'—

"Adversity, prosperity, the grave,
Play a round game with friends. On some
the world
Hath shot its evil eye, and they are passed
From honour and remembrance; and a
star
Is all the mention of their names receives;
And people know no more of them than
they know
The shapes of clouds at midnight a year
hence."

Neither shall there be any remembrance of things that are to come with those that shall come after; rather, and even of later generations that shall be there will be no remembrance of them with those that shall be in the after-time. Wright quotes Marcus Aurelius, who has much to say on this subject. Thus: cap. ii. 17, "Posthumous fame is oblivion;" cap. iii. 10, "Every man's life lies all within the present; for the past is spent and done with, and the future is uncertain;" cap. iv. 33, "Those words which were formerly current and proper are now become obsolete and barbarous. Alas! this is not all: fame tarnishes in time, too, and men grow out of fashion as well as language. Those celebrated names of ancient story are antiquated; those of later date have the same fortune; and those of present celebrity must follow. I speak this of those who have been the wonder of their age, and shined with unusual lustre; but as for the rest, they are no sooner dead than forgotten" (comp. Wisd. ii. 4). (On the keen desire to live in

the memory of posterity, see Eccles. xxxvii. 26; xlv. 7, etc.)

Ver. 12.—ch. vi. 12.—Division I. PROOF OF THE VANITY OF EARTHLY THINGS FROM PERSONAL EXPERIENCE AND GENERAL OBSERVATION.

Vers. 12-18.—Section 1. *Vanity of striving for wisdom and knowledge.*

Ver. 12.—I the Preacher was king over Israel in Jerusalem. Koheleth relates his own experience as king, in accordance with his assumption of the person of Solomon. The use of the past tense in this verse is regarded by many as strong evidence against the Solomonic authorship of the book. "I have been king" (not "I have become king," as Grätz would translate) is a statement introducing the supposed speaker, not as a reigning monarch, but as one who, in time past, exercised sovereignty. Solomon is represented as speaking from the grave, and recalling the past for the instruction of his auditors. In a similar manner, the author of the Book of Wisdom (viii. 1-13) speaks in his impersonation of Solomon. That king himself, who reigned without interruption to his death, could not have spoken of himself in the terms used here. He lost neither his throne nor his power; and, therefore, the expression cannot be paralleled (as Mr. Bullock suggests) by the complaint of Louis XIV., unsuccessful in war and weary of rule, "When I was king." Solomon *redivivus* is introduced to give weight to the succeeding experiences. Here is one who had every and the most favourable opportunity of seeing the best side of things; and yet his testimony is that all is vanity. In the acquisition of wisdom, the contrast between the advantage of learned leisure and the interruptions of a laborious life is set forth in Eccles. xxxviii. 24, etc. *King over Israel*. The expression indicates a time before the division of the kingdom. We have it in 1 Sam. xv. 26, and occasionally elsewhere. The usual phrase is "King of Israel." (For *in Jerusalem*, see on ver. 1.)

Ver. 13.—I gave my heart (ver. 17; ch. vii. 25; Dan. x. 12). The heart, in the Hebrew conception, was the seat, not of the affections only, but of the understanding and intellectual faculties generally. So the expression here is equivalent to "I applied my mind." To seek and search out. The two words are not synonymous. The former verb (פָּרַח, *darash*) implies penetrating into the depth of an object before one; the other word (חָקַר, *tur*) taking a comprehensive survey of matters further away; so that two methods and scopes of investigation are signified. By wisdom; ἐν τῇ σοφίᾳ (Septuagint). Wisdom was the means or instru-

ment by which he carried on his researches, which were directed, not merely to the collecting of facts, but to investigating the causes and conditions of things. Concerning all things that are done under heaven; i.e. men's actions and conduct, political, social, and private life. We have "under the sun" in ver. 9, and again in ver. 14. Here there is no question of physical matters, the phenomena of the material world, but only of human circumstances and interests. This sore travail (rather, *this is a sore travail that*) God hath given to the sons of man to be exercised therewith. The word rendered "travail" (πῶς, *inyan*) occurs often in this book (e.g. ch. ii. 23, 26, etc.), and nowhere else in the Old Testament. The same root is found in the word translated "exercised;" hence Wright has, "It is a woeful exercise which God has given to the sons of men wherewith to exercise themselves." If we keep to the word "travail," we may render, "to travail therein." It implies distracting business, engrossing occupation. Septuagint, περισσασμόν; Vulgate, *occupationem*. Man feels himself constrained to make this laborious investigation, yet the result is most unsatisfactory, as the next verse shows. "God" is here *Elohim*, and so throughout the book, the name *Jehovah* (the God of the covenant, the God of Israel) never once occurring. Those who regard Solomon as the author of the book account for this on the plea that the king, in his latest years, reflecting sadly on his backsliding and fall, shrank from uttering with his polluted lips the adorable Name once so often used with filial reverence and beloved. But the true reason is found in the design of Koheleth, which was to set forth, not so much Israel's position under the covenant, as the condition of man in the face of the God of nature. The idiosyncrasies and peculiar features of the chosen people are not the subject of his essay; he deals with a wider sphere; his theme is man in his relation to Divine providence; and for this power he uses that name, common alike to the true and false religions, *Elohim*, applied to the Supreme Being by believers and idolaters.

Ver. 14.—Here is the result of this examination of human actions. I have seen all the works that are done under the sun. In his varied experience nothing had escaped his notice. And behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit; *reuth ruach*; *afflictio spiritus* (Vulgate); *προαίρεσις πνεύματος*, "choice of spirit," or, "wind" (Septuagint); *νομή ἀνέμου* (Aquila and Theodotion); *βόσκησις ἀνέμου*, "feeding on wind" (Symmachus). This last translation, or "striving after wind," seems to be most agreeable to the etymology of the word *נוּחַ*, which, except in this book (ch. ii. 11, 17, 26, etc.), occurs

elsewhere only in the Chaldee portion of Ezra (v. 17; vii. 18). Whichever sense is taken, the import is much the same. What is implied is the unsubstantial and unsatisfying nature of human labours and endeavours. Many compare Hos. xii. 2, "Ephraim feedeth on wind," and Isa. xlv. 20, "He feedeth on ashes." In contrast, perhaps, to this constantly recurring complaint, the author of the Book of Wisdom teaches that murmuring is unprofitable and blasphemous (Wisd. i. 11). Bailey, in 'Festus,' sings—

"Of all life's aims, what's worth the thought
we waste on't?

How mean, how miserable, seems every
care!

How doubtful, too, the system of the mind!
And then the ceaseless, changeless, hope-
less round

Of weariness, and heartlessness, and woe,
And vice, and vanity! Yet these make
life—

The life, at least, I witness, if not feel.

No matter, we are immortal."

Ver. 15.—That which is crooked cannot be made straight. This is intended as a confirmation of ver. 14. By the utmost exercise of his powers and faculties man cannot change the course of events; he is constantly met by anomalies which he can neither explain nor rectify (comp. ch. vii. 13). The above is probably a proverbial saying. Knobel quotes Suidas: *Εὐλόν ἀγκύλον οὐδέ- ποτ' ὁρθόν*. The Vulgate takes the whole maxim as applying only to morals: "Perverse men are hardly corrected, and the number of fools is infinite." So too the Syriac and Targum. The Septuagint rightly as the Authorized Version. The writer is not referring merely to man's sins and delinquencies, but to the perplexities in which he finds himself involved, and extrication from which is impracticable. That which is wanting cannot be numbered. The word *ῥῆμα*, "loss, defect," is *ἄραξ λεγόμενον* in the Old Testament. We cannot reckon where there is nothing to count; no skill in arithmetic will avail to make up for a substantial deficit. So nothing man can do is able to remedy the anomalies by which he is surrounded, or to supply the defects which are pressed upon his notice.

Ver. 16.—Koholeth now arrives at his first conclusion, that wisdom is vanity. I commended with mine own heart. The expression suggests, as it were, an internal dialogue, as the Greek Venetian puts it, *Διελέγμαι ἐγὼ ἑνὶ τῇ καρδίᾳ μου* (comp. ch. ii. 1, 15). Lo, I am come to great estate. If this be taken by itself, it makes Koholeth speak of his power and majesty first, and of his progress in wisdom afterwards; but it is best

to connect it with what follows, and to confine the clause to one idea; thus: "I have obtained great and ever greater wisdom"—I have continually added to my stores of knowledge and experience. Than all they (*above all*) that have been before me in (*over*) Jerusalem. Who are the rulers alluded to? Solomon himself was only the second of the Israelite kings who reigned there; of the Canaanite princes who may have made that their capital, we have no knowledge, nor is it likely that Solomon would compare himself with them. The Targum has altered the approved reading, and gives, "Above all the wise men that were in Jerusalem before me." The reading, "in [instead of 'over'] Jerusalem," has indeed some manuscript authority, and is confirmed by the Septuagint, Vulgate, and Syriac, but it is evidently a correction of the text by critics who saw the difficulty of the authorized wording. Motaïs and others assert that the preposition in the Masoretic text, *וְי* (*ab*), often means "in," as well as "over," when the reference is to an elevated spot; e.g. Isa. xxxviii. 20; Hos. xi. 11. But even granting this, we are still uncertain who are the persons meant. Commentators point to Melchizedek, Adonizedek, and Araunah among rulers, and to Ethan, Heman, Chalcol, and Darda (1 Kings iv. 31) among sages. But we know nothing of the wisdom of the former, and there is no tangible reason why the latter should be designated "before me in Jerusalem." Doubtless the words point to a succession of kings who had reigned in Jerusalem, and the writer, involuntarily, perhaps, betrays his assumed character, involving an excusable anachronism, while giving to the personated monarch a position which could not belong to the historical Solomon. Yea, my heart had great experience of (*hath seen abundantly*, *κατὰ πολὺ Venetian*) wisdom and knowledge. *וְיָדָה* used adverbially qualifies the word before it, "hath seen." The heart, as we have observed (ver. 13), is considered the seat of the intellectual life. In saying that the heart hath seen wisdom, the writer means that his mind has taken it in, apprehended and appropriated it (comp. ch. viii. 16; Job iv. 8). *Wisdom and knowledge*; *chokmah and daath*; *σοφία καὶ γνῶσις* (Septuagint), the former regarding the ethical and practical side, the latter the speculative, which leads to the other (comp. Isa. xxxiii. 6; Rom. xi. 33).

Ver. 17.—And I gave my heart. He reiterates the expression in order to emphasize his earnestness and energy in the pursuit of wisdom. And knowing, as St. Jerome says, that "contrariis contraria intelliguntur," he studies the opposite of wisdom, and learns the truth by contrasting it with error. And

to know madness and folly (ch. ii. 12). The former word, *holeloth* (intensive plural), by its etymology points to a confusion of thought, i.e. an unwisdom which deranges all ideas of order and propriety; and folly (here *sikluth*), throughout the sapiential books, is identified with vice and wickedness, the contradictory of practical godliness. The LXX. has *παραβολὰς καὶ ἐπιστήμην*, "parables and knowledge," and some editors have altered the Hebrew text in accordance with this version, which they consider more suitable to the context. But Koheleth's standpoint is quite consistent. To use the words of St. Jerome in his 'Commentary,' "*Æqualis studii fuit Salomoni, scire sapientiam et scientiam, et e regione errores et stultitiam, ut in aliis appetendis et aliis declinandis vera ejus sapientia probaretur.*" On the other hand, Ben-Sira gives a much-needed warning against touching pitch (Ecclus. xiii. 1), and argues expressly that "the knowledge of wickedness is not wisdom" (Ecclus. xix. 22). Plumptre unnecessarily sees in the use of the term "madness" an echo of the teaching of the Stoics, who regarded men's weaknesses as forms of insanity. The moralist had no need to travel beyond his own experience in order to learn that sin was the acme of unwisdom, a declension from reason which might well be called madness. The subject is handled by Cicero, 'Tusc. Disput.,' iii. 4, 5. We are reminded of Horace's expression ('Carm.,' ii. 7. 27)—

"Recepto
Dulce mihi furere est amico,"

And Anacreon's (xxxi.), *Θέλω, θέλω μανῆναι*. Thus far we have had Koheleth's secret thoughts—what he communed with his own heart (ver. 16). The result of his studies was most unsatisfying. I perceived that this also is vexation of spirit; or, a *striving after wind*, as ver. 14, though the word is somewhat different. All such labour is wasted, for man cannot control issues.

Ver. 18.—For in much wisdom is much grief. The more one knows of men's lives, the deeper insight one obtains of their actions and circumstances, the greater is the cause of grief at the incomplete and unsatisfactory nature of all human affairs. He that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow; not in others, but in himself. With added experience and more minute examination, the wise man becomes more conscious of his own ignorance and impotence, of the unsympathizing and uncontrollable course of nature, of the gigantic evils which he is powerless to remedy; this causes his sorrowful confession (ver. 17b). St. Gregory, taking the religious view of the passage, comments, "The more a man begins to know what he has lost, the more he begins to bewail the sentence of his corruption, which he has met with" ('Moral.,' xviii. 65); and, "He that already knows the high state which he does not as yet enjoy is the more grieved for the low condition in which he is yet held" (ibid., i. 34). The statement in our text is paralleled in Ecclus. xxi. 12, "There is a wisdom which multiplieth bitterness," and contrasted in Wisd. viii. 16 with the comfort and pleasure which true wisdom brings.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1, 12.—*Koheleth, the Preacher*. I. THE PREACHER'S NAME. Koheleth, signifying: 1. *The Assembler*, or Collector (Delitzsch, Bleek, Keil), not of sentences (Grotius), but of people. Hence: 2. *The Preacher* (Delitzsch, Wright), since the object for which he calls or convenes the assembly is to address it with words of wisdom (ch. xii. 9). 3. *The Debater* (Plumptre), since "the *Ecclesiastes* was not one who called the ecclesia or assembly together, or addressed it in a tone of didactic authority; but rather an ordinary member of such assembly (the political unit of every Greek state) who took part in its discussions" (ibid.).

II. THE PREACHER'S PERSON. 1. *Solomon*. In support of this, the traditional view, may be urged: (1) That the work is, or seems to be, ascribed to him by the writer (ver. 1). (2) That the experiences assigned to the Preacher (ch. ii. 1—3), the works declared to have been wrought by him (ch. ii. 4, 5), and the wisdom represented as possessed by him (ver. 17), are in perfect accord with what is known of the historical Solomon. (3) That the composition of this book cannot be proved to have been beyond the ability of Solomon (1 Kings iii. 12; x. 3, 4; xi. 41; 2 Chron. i. 12; ix. 22, 23). (4) That the writer obviously wished his words to be accepted as proceeding from Solomon. (5) That if Solomon was not the author, then the author is unknown—which is, to say the least, unfortunate. 2. *A late writer*, belonging to the Persian period (Delitzsch, Bleek, Keil, Plumptre, Hengstenberg, Wright, Cox). Arguments in support of this view are: (1) The author expressly distinguishes himself from

Solomon (ch. xii. 9—14), which, however, assumes that the Preacher could not have spoken about himself in the third person. (2) The Preacher writes of himself in the past tense (ver. 12), which Solomon would not have done, it is thought, though a late writer might have done so, putting his words into Solomon's mouth. This argument loses part of its validity if "was" is taken as equivalent to "was and still am" (Professors Douglas and Given), or if Solomon wrote towards the end of his reign (Fausset). (3) The Preacher talks of kings as having been before him in Jerusalem (ver. 16; ch. ii. 9), whereas anterior to Solomon only David reigned in Jerusalem. But a late writer could just as little as Solomon have used the expression cited, since it was Solomon whom the late writer intended to represent as speaking. Besides, as Jerusalem had been a royal city from the days of Melchizedek, it was open quite as much to Solomon to take into his mouth as to a post-exilic author to put into his mouth the words alluded to. (4) The real Solomon could not have written as the Preacher represents (ch. iv. 1; v. 8; x. 4, 7, 16, 20); which once more assumes that Solomon could only write of what he beheld in his own dominions, and not of what he may have learnt concerning other peoples with whom he had come into contact. (5) The language bears the stamp of the post-exilic period, being full of Aramaisms or Chaldaisms (see Exposition). If this be undeniable, it is partly counterbalanced by the fact that Ecclesiastes contains Solomonic words occurring in Proverbs—which may certainly have been derived by a late writer from a study of pre-existing Solomonic writings, but which may also be explained by common authorship—and partly accounted for by supposing that Solomon adopted them from pre-existing Aramaic writings, "owing to the Aramaic influences which surrounded and pressed upon him, and owing to the influence which he desired to exert throughout his widely extended dominions, which embraced the whole of the Aramaic communities as far as the Euphrates" (Professor Douglas, in Keil). (6) "The gloomy view of the world, and the philosophy of life which meet us in it, point us at once to the times after the exile" (Keil); but similar views and philosophies have more or less characterized all periods. (7) The complaint about much book-making must have issued from a late age (Bleek). Probably the preponderance of argument will be held as lying on the side of the non-Solomonic authorship of the book; though from the considerations just advanced two things will appear—*first*, that the Solomonic authorship is not destitute of foundation; and *second*, that the non-Solomonic authorship is not absolutely unassailable.

III. THE PREACHER'S CHARACTER. 1. *Not an atheist*. Since besides making frequent (thirty-seven times) mention of the name of God, he expressly recognizes God as the true God, exalted above the world (ch. v. 8), the Object of man's fear (ch. v. 7; xii. 13) and worship (ch. v. 1, 2), and the Disposer and Governor of all (ch. vii. 13); acknowledges the existence in man of a spirit (ch. xii. 7), and of such things as truth and error, right and wrong, holiness and sin (ch. v. 4—6; vii. 15, 16; ix. 2, 3); places the sum of duty as well as the secret of happiness in fearing God and keeping his commandments (ch. xii. 13); and hints his belief in the coming of a day when God will bring the secrets of all into judgment (ch. xi. 9). 2. *Not a pantheist*. The God he believes in is a personal Divinity, distinguished from the works he has made (ch. iii. 11) and the man he has created (ch. xii. 1); who issues commandments (ch. xii. 13), and can be worshipped by prayer, sacrifice, and vows (ch. v. 1—7); who should be feared (ch. v. 7), and who can accept the service of his intelligent creatures (ch. ix. 7). 3. *Not a pessimist*. Though at times seeming to indulge in gloomy views of life, to imagine that all things on earth are going to the bad, that the sum of human happiness is more than counterbalanced by that of human misery, that life is not worth living, and that the best a wise man can do is to escape from it in the easiest and most comfortable way he can; yet that these were not his deliberate opinions may be gathered from the frequency with which he exhorts men to cultivate a cheerful mind, and to enjoy the good of all their labour which God giveth them under the sun (ch. ii. 24—26; iii. 12; ix. 7; xi. 9), and from the emphatic manner in which he repudiates morose conclusions concerning the degeneracy of the times (ch. vii. 10). 4. *Not a libertine*. This notion (Plumptre) may appear to derive countenance from what the preacher says of himself (ch. ii. 1—3); but his language hardly warrants the conclusion that the author of this book had in his lifetime been a person of dissolute morals and profligate manners. If he was, before he penned this work he must have seen the error of his

way. 5. *But a deeply thinking and religious man.* When he looked upon the mystery of life he felt perplexed. He saw that, apart from God and religion, life was an emptiness and vanity. Yet was he not thereby driven to despair, or impelled to renounce life as an unmixed evil; but rather offered it as his opinion that man's highest duty was to fear God and keep his commandments, to accept whatever good Providence might pour into his cup, bear with equanimity and submission whatever trials might be mingled in his lot, and prepare himself for the moment when he should pass into the unseen to render an account for the things done in the body (2 Cor. v. 10).

IV. THE PREACHER'S AIM. Neither: 1. *To expound the doctrines of pessimism*—to show "that the past has been like the present," and "the present like that which is to come," that "the present is bad," that "the past has not been better," and "that the future will not be preferable" (Renan). Nor: 2. *To furnish an autobiographical confession* (ideal, but based on personal experiences) of the progress of a Jewish youth from scepticism through sensuality to faith (Plumptre). But possibly: 3. *To comfort God's people, the Hebrew Church, under oppression*—that of Persian rule, e.g., supposing the book to be a late composition, by showing them the vanity of earthly things, and exhorting them "to seek elsewhere their happiness; to draw it from those inexhaustible eternal fountains, which even at that time were open to all who chose to come." (Hengstenberg). And certainly: 4. *To exhibit the true secret of felicity in the midst of life's vanities*, which consisted, as above explained, in fearing God and keeping his commandments.

LESSONS. 1. The inspiration of a Scripture not dependent on a knowledge of its date or author. 2. The value of the Bible as a key to the problem of the universe. 3. The succession of Heaven-sent preachers that have appeared all down the centuries.

Vers. 2—11.—"*Vanity of vanities.*" I. THE UNPROFITABLE CHARACTER OF ALL HUMAN LABOUR. (Ver. 3.) Passing over the pathetic picture these words instinctively call up of human life as a ceaseless round of toil—a picture which modern civilization, with all its appliances and refinements, has not obliterated, but rather, in the experience of many, painted in still more lurid colours; a picture which has always possessed for poetic minds, sacred (Job vii. 1, 2) no less than profane (Thomas Hood, 'Song of the Shirt'), a peculiar fascination—readers may note the melancholy truth to which the Preacher here adverts, viz. that the solid outcome of human labour, in the shape of permanent advantage to either society at large or the individual, is comparatively small. 1. *This cannot mean that labour is wholly useless* (ch. v. 19), since without labour man cannot find that bread which is needful for his bodily sustenance (Gen. iii. 19). It would be misconceiving the Preacher to suppose he disapproved of all that has been effected by human industry and genius to enrich, enlighten, and civilize the race, or desired to teach that men had better times of it on earth when they lived like savages upon the spontaneous fruits of the earth. 2. Nor is it likely that he designed to glance at what has been a sore evil under the sun ever since men began to divide themselves into labourers and capitalists, viz. *the small portion of labour's fruits which usually fall to the former*, without whom there would be little or no fruits at all. 3. It is rather probable that the writer was thinking, not of labourers so called, to the exclusion of other workers, but of *all toilers without distinction*, when he said that the outcome of man's activity, so far at least as attaining to felicity was concerned, was practically nothing.

II. THE UNCEASING CHANGE TO WHICH ALL MUNDANE THINGS ARE SUBJECT. (Vers. 4—7.) 1. *Illustrated in four particulars.* (1) The passing by of human generations, in comparison with which the globe seems stable (ver. 4); (2) the daily revolution of the sun (ver. 5); (3) the circling of the winds (ver. 6); and (4) the returning of the rivers to the seas (ver. 7). The writer means not to assert that these different cycles have no uses in the economy of nature—which uses may be here illustrated; merely he pitches upon what belongs to them in common, the element of changefulness, to him a picture of man's condition on the earth generally. 2. *Explained by four clauses.* It is as if he said, "Look around and behold! All things on earth are perpetually on the move—the sun in the sky, the winds in the firmament, the clouds in the air, the waters in the ocean, the rivers on the meadow, man himself upon the surface of the globe. Nothing bears the stamp of finality. Everything is shifting. Nothing remains

long in one stay. "All things are full of labour and weariness; man cannot utter it: the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor is the ear filled with hearing" (ver. 8)—by which he means that the changeful condition is never done; there never comes a time when the eye says, "Enough!" or the ear repeats, "Behold! I am full." This view of life had occurred to many before the Preacher's day (Gen. xlvii. 9; 1 Chron. xxix. 15; Job iv. 19, 20; vii. 6; viii. 9), as it has occurred to some since—to the Greek philosophers who described nature as in a state of perpetual flux, to modern poets such as Shakespeare, and to sacred writers like John (1 John ii. 17) and Paul (1 Cor. vii. 31.)

III. THE WEARISOME MONOTONY OF LIFE. (Vers. 9, 10.) 1. *What the Preacher could not have meant.* That no new occurrence ever happens on the earth, that no new contrivance ever is devised, that no new experience ever emerges. Because since the Preacher's day multitudes of new discoveries and inventions have been made in all departments of science; while in the sphere of religion at least one new thing has taken place, viz. the Incarnation (Jer. xxxi. 22), and another will take place (Isa. lxxv. 17). 2. *What the Preacher did mean.* That the general impression made by life upon beholders is that of sameness. Going back to the above illustrations, he would have said, "See how it is in nature. No doubt one new day succeeds another, one gale of wind follows another, and one body of waters hastens after another. But every day and always it is the same thing over again; the same old sun which reappears in the east; and the same gusts of wind to which we are accustomed that blow from the north to the south, and whirl about continually to all points of the compass; and the same stream that keeps on filling up its fountains and sending forth its waters to the sea. And if you will look at the world of humanity it is the same. A new generation appears on the globe every thirty years, and every hour of every day new individuals are being born; but they are substantially the same old men and women that were here before. 'Fed by the same food, hurt by the same weapons, warmed and cooled by the same summer and winter' as those who preceded them, they go through the same experiences their fathers and mothers went through before them." This feeling of monotony is even more emphasized when attention is fixed on the individual. Try to think of how monotonous and wearisome an ordinary human life is! An attempt to realize this will awaken surprise.

IV. THE UNIVERSAL OBLIVION INTO WHICH MEN AND THINGS MUST EVENTUALLY SINK. (Ver. 11.) So obvious is this that it scarcely needs illustration. Consider what a small portion of the earth's incidents during the past six thousand years have survived in history, and how few of the world's great ones have left behind them more than their names. The memory has been preserved of a Flood, but what about the ordinary words and actions that make up everyday life during the years between the Creation and the Deluge? A few particulars have been preserved of the histories of an Abraham and a David, a Sennacherib and a Nebuchadnezzar, an Alexander and a Cæsar; but what about the myriads that formed their contemporaries? How much has been transmitted to posterity of the history of these islands? How few of the events of last year have been recorded? How many of those who then died are still remembered? This is, no doubt, all as it should be; but still it is a proof of the vanity of things below, if these be regarded simply in themselves.

CONCLUSION. This view of life should not be possible to a Christian who enjoys the fuller and clearer light of the New Testament revelation, and views all things in their relations to God, duty, and immortality.

Ver. 15.—*Concerning crooked things and things wanting.* I. IRREGULARITIES AND DEFECTS EXIST IN THE WORLD'S PROGRAMME. This the teaching of the two proverbs, that crooked things cannot be straightened, i.e. by man, or wanting things numbered. To the seeker after wisdom, who surveys all the works that are done under the sun, and gives his heart to search into and to seek out by wisdom with regard to these what is their end and issue, there appear in the physical, mental, and moral worlds anomalies, irregularities, excrescences, deviations from the straight line of natural order, as well as defects, wants, imperfections, gaps, cleavages, interruptions, failures to reach completeness, which arrest attention and excite astonishment. 1. *Of irregularities or crooked things*, such phenomena as these may be cited: (1) In the physical world, storms, tempests, accidents, diseases, sudden and unexpected calamities. (2) In the

mental world, perverted judgments, erroneous beliefs, false conclusions. (3) In the moral world, wicked principles and depraved actions, sins of every kind, transgressions of human and Divine law. 2. *Of things wanting or defects*, may be reckoned these: (1) In the material realm, scenes where some element is wanting to complete their beauty or utility, as *e.g.* a Sahara without a green leaf to refresh the eye, or a well at which to quench the thirst; or forms of life that never attain to maturity, as *e.g.* buds that drop before ripening into flowers or fruit. (2) In the intellectual sphere, ignorance, limited knowledge, defective education, one-sided apprehension of truth, narrow and imperfect views. (3) In the moral domain, actions that, without being wholly wrong, yet fall short of being fully right, as *e.g.* where one tells a half-truth, or does less in particular circumstances than duty demands of him.

II. *SUCH IRREGULARITIES AND DEFECTS ARE BEYOND THE POWER OF MAN TO REMOVE OR REMEDY.* This, at least, is the doctrine of the above two proverbial sayings. 1. *The doctrine, however, is not absolutely and universally true.* In the physical, mental, and moral worlds, man can do something to straighten what is crooked and supply what is lacking. For instance, by skill and foresight he can guard himself to some extent against the virulence of disease, the violence of storms and tempests, the destructiveness of unexpected calamities; by education he can protect himself and others against the perils arising from defective knowledge and erroneous judgments; by personal cultivation of virtue he can at least diminish the quantity of its opposite, vice, in the world. If he cannot straighten out all the crooks, he can even some; if he cannot remedy every defect, he can remove a few. 2. *Yet the doctrine is true in the sense intended by the Preacher.* This is, that after man has done his utmost there will remain anomalies that baffle him to explain, a sense of incompleteness which nothing he can attempt will remove. Let him prosecute his investigations ever so widely and vigorously, there always will be "more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in his philosophy"—enigmas he cannot solve, antinomies he cannot reconcile, defects he cannot fill up.

III. *THE EXISTENCE OF SUCH IRREGULARITIES AND DEFECTS SUGGESTS SOME IMPORTANT LESSONS.* As: 1. *That the present system of things is not final.* Nothing that is imperfect can be final. The crooked things that want straightening and the lacking things that need supplying contain a dim prophecy of a future and better order, in which the crooked things will be straightened and the defective things supplied. 2. *That man's power of apprehending things is incomplete.* From this probably arises not a little of that sense of disorder and incompleteness in the outer world of which he complains. 3. *That things impossible to man may be possible to God.* Though man's faculties are limited, it does not follow that God's power is. The crooked things that man cannot straighten, God can straighten if it seem good to his wisdom. 4. *That man's duty meanwhile is to submit and wait.* Instead of fretting at what he cannot rectify, he should aim at extracting from it that moral discipline which, doubtless, it is intended to impart; and instead of rushing to hasty conclusions from what he only imperfectly apprehends, he ought in a spirit of hopefulness to wait for further light.

Ver. 18.—*Increase of knowledge, increase of sorrow.* I. *BECAUSE NOT WITHOUT LABOUR AND PAIN, OFTENTIMES PROTRACTED AND ACUTE, CAN KNOWLEDGE OF ANY KIND BE INCREASED.* No royal road to wisdom any more than to wealth. He who would acquire knowledge must dig for it as for hidden treasures (Prov. ii. 4). Those who have attained to greatest distinction, as philosophers, poets, astronomers, etc., have all been hard workers. The information that renders them so wise and their society so agreeable has been slowly and painfully collected by diligent and unremitting effort, sustained through years, often amid hardships, and by means of self-denials which would have caused them to abandon their enterprises had they been common men, sometimes at the expense of restless days and sleepless nights, and in the midst of bodily infirmities not soothed but aggravated by close and severe study. No doubt, to one inspired with a love of knowledge, such labours and anxieties are more than compensated by the knowledge so acquired; but the proposition of the Preacher is that the largest amount of wisdom one may gather is an insufficient requital for all this toil and anxiety, if the knowledge be only earthly and secular—*i.e.* has no connec-

tion with God, duty, or immortality—and one cannot help asking if the Preacher is not right.

II. BECAUSE, AS THE CIRCLE OF KNOWLEDGE WIDENS, THE SPHERE OF IGNORANCE APPEARS TO ENLARGE. One is prone to imagine that, as the circle of information widens, that of ignorance contracts—which it does in the sense that, the more one knows, the sum of what remains to be known diminishes; but in another and important sense the amount of what remains to be known increases. As in mountain-climbing, the higher one ascends he sometimes discovers heights beyond of which previously he had no suspicion, so in footing it up the steep and difficult slopes of Parnassus, one actually comes to see that the more extensive the boundaries of this knowledge become, the vaster grow the regions beyond into which he has not yet penetrated. A child, for instance, looking up for the first time into the evening sky, imagines he has understood it all at a glance; but afterwards, when he has learnt the elementary truths of astronomy, there rushes on him the conviction that what he knows is but a small part of a very large whole; and as he prosecutes his search into the wonders of star-land, he realizes that the more he knows of it the more there remains to be known, till he feels that with respect to this, at least, "he that increases knowledge increases sorrow." Nor is this experience confined to one department of knowledge, but in every department it is the same; the larger and clearer one's acquaintance becomes with it, it only seems to open up untrodden realms beyond, the bare contemplation of which exercises on the mind a strangely depressing influence.

III. BECAUSE AS ONE EXTENDS HIS KNOWLEDGE HIS DIFFICULTIES SEEM TO MULTIPLY. Especially in dealing with the problem of existence. Contrast the states of childhood and manhood, of ignorance and learning, of savage peoples and of civilized nations. The child is unconscious of anxieties that oppress the parental bosom. The peasant, innocent of geology, biology, astronomy, and history, is not troubled with mental, moral, and religious difficulties such as perplex those acquainted with these themes. The heathen, with crude and ill-defined ideas of God, duty, and immortality, are incapable of appreciating those questionings concerning the future life that proceed in Christian minds. Not that it is not better to increase in knowledge, even should such increase awaken and foster doubts; only to increase in knowledge does not necessarily bring peace to the heart or happiness to the soul. It enables one to discern dark problems where none were discerned before; it pushes one on to inquire after solutions for those problems which, nevertheless, constantly elude the grasp. In the region of morals and religion especially it burdens one with a sense of weariness and pain, because of the endless questionings it raises and cannot answer. One who has never been launched upon this sea of doubt can hardly appreciate the wretchedness of those who have been tossed by its raging billows. Those who can hold on by ideas of God, duty, and immortality for the most part escape these perplexities; the man who tries to solve the problem of the universe without these fundamental and regulative conceptions does not, but becomes entangled in a labyrinth of difficulties, and commonly ends by finding himself "in wandering mazes lost."

IV. BECAUSE AS ONE EXTENDS HIS KNOWLEDGE, HE EXTENDS AT THE SAME TIME HIS ACQUAINTANCE WITH THE WORLD'S SORROW. Often said, "One half of the world knows not how the other half lives." How much, *e.g.*, does the civilized Briton know of the degradation of "darkest Africa;" or the religiously educated youth or maiden of the sin that runs rampant in modern society; or the well-fed, well-clothed, and well-housed citizen of the aching hearts and miserable lives of the houseless and breadless poor who herd in great cities? Because these things are not known, the Christians of Great Britain are comparatively indifferent to the sad and sorrowful condition of the poor and criminal classes at home, and of the heathen abroad. Did they properly consider these things, they would be filled with sorrow. Should this be adduced as a reason why one should not trouble himself with such disagreeable subjects, the answer is that if God, duty, and immortality are fictions, it is perhaps better to let the world stew in its own wretchedness and profligacy, and to guard one's felicity from being invaded by such disquieting influences; but if God, duty, and immortality are realities, it may be perilous to exhibit such indifference towards the world's wretchedness and sin.

V. BECAUSE INCREASE OF KNOWLEDGE AUGMENTS MAN'S POWER BOTH OF CAUSING AND OF FEELING SORROW. Knowledge is power. Insight into nature's laws enables

one to apply these to mechanical uses which, in the absence of such insight, would be impossible. A person of large intelligence and mature experience can do things transcending the capacity of youth. Yet this increased efficiency, which springs from increased knowledge, does not always augment the sum of happiness. If it helps man to multiply instruments for good, it also enlarges his ability to perpetrate evil. It was once believed that crime and misery would disappear from society with the general diffusion of education. No one believes that now. Mere knowledge has no tendency to make men good. (Milton's Satan was not a fool.) It will help such as are good to means and opportunities for doing good; but just as certainly it will aid the wicked in their wickedness, and add to their power of causing misery. Then, in so far as knowledge or education has a tendency to refine the nature, intensify the feelings, quicken the susceptibilities, to that extent it augments the sum of human sorrow.

Learn: 1. Not to glorify ignorance or despise knowledge, but to seek first that "wisdom which cometh from above" (Jas. i. 5; iii. 17). 2. To seek other knowledges, so much for their own sakes, as for the purpose of using them in God's service and for his glory.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ver. 2.—"*All is vanity.*" If we regard this book as Solomon's own record and statement of his remarkable experience of human life, it must be deemed by us a most valuable lesson as to the hollowness and emptiness of worldly greatness and renown. If, on the other hand, we regard the book as the production of a later writer, who lived during the troubled and depressed period of Jewish history which followed the Captivity, it must be recognized as casting light upon the providentially appointed consequences of national sin, apostasy, and rebellion. In the former case the moral and religious significance of Ecclesiastes is more personal, in the latter case more political. In either case, the treatise, as inspired by Divine wisdom, demands to be received and studied with reverential attention. Whether its lessons be congenial or unwelcome, they deserve the consideration of those of every age, and of every station in society. Some readers will resent the opening words of the treatise as gloomy and morbid; others will hail them as the expression of reason and wisdom. But the truth they contain is independent of human moods and temperaments, and is only to be fully appreciated by those whose observation is extensive and whose reflection is profound. The wise man makes a broad and unqualified statement, that all things earthly and human are but vanity.

I. THIS MAY BE A STATEMENT OF A MERE MOOD OF FEELING OWING TO INDIVIDUAL EXPERIENCE. There are times when every man who lives is distressed and disappointed, when his plans come to nought, when his hopes are blasted, when his friends fail him, when his prospects are clouded, when his heart sinks within him. It is the common lot, from which none can expect to be exempt. In some instances the stormy sky clears and brightens, whilst in other instances the gloom thickens and settles. But it may be confidently asserted that, at some period and in some circumstances, every human being, whose experience of life is large and varied, has felt as though he has been living in a scene of illusion, the vanity of which has been perhaps suddenly made apparent to him, and then the language of the writer of Ecclesiastes has risen to his lips, and he has exclaimed in bitterness of soul, "Vanity of vanities; all is vanity!"

II. THIS MAY BE A STATEMENT OF PAINFUL EXPERIENCE, DEPENDENT UPON THE SPECIAL TIMES—POLITICAL AND ECCLESIASTICAL—IN WHICH THE LOT IS CAST. Such is the mutability of human affairs, that every nation, every Church, passes through epochs of prosperity, confidence, energy, and hope; and again through epochs of adversity, discouragement, depression, and paralysis. The Israelites had their times of conquest and of progress, and they had also their times of defeat, of captivity, of subjection, of humiliation. So has it been with every people, every state. Nor have the Churches into which Christian communities have been formed, escaped the operation of the same law. So far as they have been human organizations, they have been affected by the laws to which all things human are subject. In times when a nation is feeble at home and despised abroad, when faction and ambition have reduced its power and crippled its enterprise, there is proneness, on the part of the reflecting and sensitive among the

citizens and subjects, to lament over the unprofitableness and vanity of civil life. Similarly, when a Church experiences declension from the Divine standard of faith, purity, and consecration, how natural is it that the enlightened and spiritual members of that Church should, in their grief over the general deadness of the religious community, give way to feelings of discouragement and foreboding, which find a fitting expression in the cry, "Vanity of vanities; all is vanity!"

III. THIS MAY BE A STATEMENT OF PHILOSOPHICAL REFLECTION UPON THE FACTS OF NATURE AND OF HUMAN LIFE. It would be a mistake to suppose that the cry of "Vanity!" is always the evidence of a merely transitory though powerful mood of morbid feeling. On the contrary, there have been nations, ages, states of society, with which it has been a settled conviction that hollowness and emptiness characterize all human and earthly affairs. Pessimism may be a philosophical creed, as with the ancient Buddhists and some of the modern Germans; it may be a conclusion reached by reflection upon the facts of life. To some minds unreason is at the heart of the universe, and in this case there is no ground for hope. To other minds, not speculative, the survey of human affairs is suggestive of aimlessness in the world, and occasions despondency in the observant and reflective mind. Thus even some who enjoy health and prosperity, and in whose constitution and circumstances there is nothing to justify discouragement and hopelessness, are nevertheless found, without any serious satisfaction in existence, ready to sum up their conclusions, derived from a perhaps prolonged and extensive survey of human life, in the words of the writer of Ecclesiastes, "All is vanity!"

IV. THIS MAY BE A STATEMENT OF RELIGIOUS CONVICTION, BOTH SPRINGING FROM AND LEADING TO THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE ETERNAL AND GLORIOUS GOD. The student of physical science looks at facts; it is his duty to observe and to classify facts; their arrangement under certain relations, as of likeness and of sequence, is his business, in the discharge of which he renders a great service to mankind. But thought is as necessary as observation. A higher explanation than physical science can give is imperatively required by human nature. We are constrained, not only to observe *that* a thing is, but also to ask *why* it is. Here metaphysics and theology come in to complete the work which science has begun. Human life is composed not only of movements, which can be scientifically accounted for, but of actions, of which the explanation is hyperphysical, is spiritual. Similarly with the world at large, and with human life and history. The facts are open to observation; knowledge accumulates from age to age; as experience widens, grander classifications are made. Still there is a craving for explanation. Why, we ask, are things as they are? It is the answer to this question which distinguishes the pessimist from the theist. The wise, the enlightened, the religious, seek a spiritual and moral significance in the universe—material and psychical. In their view, if things, as they are and have been, be regarded by themselves, apart from a Divine reason working in and through them, they are emptiness and vanity. On the other hand, if they be regarded in the light of that Divine reason, which is order, righteousness, and love, they are suggestive of what is very different indeed from vanity. To the thoughtful and reverent mind, apart from God, all is vanity; seen in the light of God, nothing is vanity. Both these seeming contradictions are true, and they are reconciled in a higher affirmation and unity. Look at the world in the light of sentience and the logical understanding, and it is vanity. Look at it in the light of reason, and it is the expression of Divine wisdom and Divine goodness.

APPLICATION. It is well to see and feel that all is vanity, if we are thus led to turn from the phenomenal to the real, the abiding, the Divine. But it will be to our hurt if we dwell upon the vanity of all things, so that pessimism be fostered, so that we fail to recognize Infinite Reason at the heart of all things, so that we regard this as the worst of all worlds, so that for us the future has no brightness.—T.

Vers. 3, 4.—*The vanity of man's life.* At the very outset of his treatise, the wise man gives his readers to understand that the vanity which is ascribed to all things that are, is distinctive in an especial and obvious manner of human life. This is the most interesting of all things to observe and study, as it is the most precious to possess. And there is some danger lest, if the study of it lead to despondency, the possession of it should cease to be valued.

I. THE FACTS UPON WHICH THE CONVICTION OF THE VANITY OF LIFE IS FOUNDED.

1. The unsatisfying character of human toil. Labour is the destiny of man, and is in most cases the indispensable condition of not only life itself, but of those things for the sake of which many men value life—wealth, comfort, pleasure, and fame. Yet in how many cases does toil fail to secure the objects for the sake of which it is undertaken! Men labour, but reap no harvest of their painful, wearying efforts. And when the result is obtained, how commonly does it yield little or nothing of the satisfaction desired! Men toil for years, and when they attain that upon which their hearts were set, disappointment and dissatisfaction take possession of their nature. 2. The brevity of human life, and the rapid succession of the generations. The reflection of the wise man is a reflection which must have been current among men from the earliest ages. No sooner has a laborious and successful man reached the summit of his ambition, grasped the object of his desire, than he is taken away from the enjoyment of that for the sake of which he was content to “scorn delights, and live laborious days.” The next generation renews the quest, only to repeat the experience of disappointment. Changes and improvements take place in many details of our life; but life itself remains throughout the ages, subject to the same limitations and the same calamities, to the same uncertainties and the same close. 3. The contrast between the transitoriness of human life and the stability of the unconscious earth. It appears strange and inexplicable that man, with the great possibilities of his nature, should be so short-lived, and that the earth should outlast generation after generation of mankind. The writer of Ecclesiastes felt, as every reflecting observer must feel, the sadness of this contrast between the perpetuity of the dwelling-place and the brief sojourn of its successive inhabitants. 4. The impossibility of any generation reaping the harvest for which it has sown. The toil, the genius, the enterprise of a generation may indeed bear fruit, but it is the generation which follows that enjoys that fruit. All men labour more for posterity than for themselves. “This also is vanity.”

II. THE CHARACTER OF THE INFERENCE FROM THESE FACTS, VIZ. THAT LIFE IS PROFITLESS AND VAIN. 1. It is attributable to the reflecting and aspiring nature of man. A being less endowed with susceptibilities and imagination, with moral capacities and far-reaching aims and hopes, would be incapable of such emotions and such conclusions as this book expresses. The brute is content to eat and drink, to sleep, and to follow its several instincts and impulses. But of man we may say that nothing that he can be and do can give him perfect rest and satisfaction. It is owing to an innate and noble dissatisfaction that he is ever aiming at something better and higher, and that the narrow range and brief scope of human life cannot content him, cannot furnish him with all the opportunity he desires in order to acquire and to achieve. 2. It is attributable to the very nature of earthly things, which, because they are finite, are incapable of satisfying such a nature as that described. They may and do answer a high purpose when their true import is discerned—when they are recognized as symbolical and significant of what is greater than themselves. But no material good, no terrestrial distinctions, can serve as “profit” of labour. If so regarded, their vanity must sooner or later be apparent. There is a divinely ordained disproportion between the spirit of man and the scenes and occupations and emoluments of earth.

APPLICATION. 1. There is in human life a continuity only discerned by the reflecting and the pious. The obvious and striking fact is the disconnection of the generations. But as evolution reveals a physical continuity, philosophy finds an intellectual and moral continuity in our race. 2. The purpose of God is unfolded to successive generations of men. The modern study of the philosophy of history has brought this fact prominently and effectively before the attention of the scholarly and thoughtful. We see this continuity and progress in the order of revelation; but all history is, in a sacred sense, a revelation of the Eternal and Unchanging. 3. It is well that what we do we should do deliberately and seriously, not for our own good merely, but for mankind, and in the truest sense for God. This will lend “profit” to the unprofitable. 4. This state is not all. Life explains school; summer explains spring; and so eternity shall explain the disappointments, perplexities, and anomalies of time.—T.

Vers. 5—7.—*The cycles of nature.* This is not to be taken as the language of one who makes complaints of nature, wishing that the great forces of the world were

ordered otherwise than they actually are. It is the language of one who observes nature, and is baffled by its mysteries; who asks what all means, and why everything is as it is. Even at that distant time it was recognized that the processes of nature are cyclic. The stars accomplish their revolutions, and the seasons return in their appointed order. There is unity in diversity, and changes succeed one another with remarkable regularity. These observations seem to have suggested to the writer of Ecclesiastes the inquiry—Is man's life and destiny in this respect similar to the order of nature? Is our human experience as cyclic as are the processes of the material universe? Is there no real advance for man? and is he destined to pass through changes which in the end will only leave him where he was?

I. NATURE PRESENTS A SPECTACLE OF CONSTANT CHANGE AND RESTLESSNESS. The three examples given in these passages are such as must strike every attentive observer of this earth and the phenomena accessible to the view of its inhabitants. The sun runs his daily course through the heavens, to return on the next morning to fulfil the same circuit. The wind veers about from one quarter to another, and quits one direction only in a few hours, or a few days, or at most a few weeks, to resume it. The rivers flow on in an unceasing current, and find their way into the sea, which (as is now known) yields in evaporation its tribute to the clouds, whence the water-springs are in due time replenished. Modern science has vastly enlarged our view of similar processes throughout all of the universe which is accessible to our observation. "Nothing continueth in one stay." There is in the world nothing immovable and unchangeable. It is believed that not an atom is at rest.

II. NATURE SEEMS TO EFFECT NO PROGRESS BY ALL THE CHANGES EXHIBITED. Not only is there a want, an absence, of stability, of rest; there is no apparent advance and improvement. Things move from their places only to return to them; their motion is rather in a circle than in a straight line. It was this cyclic tendency in natural processes which arrested the attention and perplexed the inquiring mind of the wise man. And modern science does not in this matter effect a radical change in our beliefs. Evolutionists teach us that *rhythm* is the ultimate law of the universe. Evolution is followed by involution, or dissipation. A planet or a system evolves until it reaches its climax, and thenceforward its course is reversed, until it is resolved into the elements of which it was primitively composed. In the presence of such speculations the intellect reels, dizzy and powerless.

III. REFLECTION MAY, HOWEVER, SUGGEST TO US THAT THERE IS UNITY IN DIVERSITY, STABILITY IN CHANGE; THAT THERE IS A DIVINE PURPOSE IN NATURE. If there be evidence of reason in the universe, if nature is the expression of mind, the vehicle by which the Creator-Spirit communicates with the created spirits he has fashioned in his own likeness, then there is at least the suggestion of what is deeper and more significant than the cycles of phenomena. There is rest for the intelligence in such a conviction as that of the theist, who rises above the utterances to the Being who utters forth his mind and will in the world which he has made, and which he rules by laws that are the expression of his own reason. He looks behind and above the mechanical cycles of nature, and discovers the Divine mind, into whose purposes he can only very partially penetrate, but in whose presence and control he finds repose.

IV. ANALOGY POINTS OUT THAT IN AND BENEATH THE MUTABILITY OF THE HUMAN LOT AND LIFE THERE IS DIVINE PURPOSE OF INSTRUCTION AND BLESSING. If, as it seems, it occurred to the mind of the wise man that, as in nature, so in human existence, all things are cyclic and unprogressive, such an inference was not unnatural. Yet it is not a conclusion in which the reasonable mind can rest. The fuller revelation with which we have been favoured enlightens us with respect to the intentions of Eternal Wisdom and Love. Our Saviour has founded upon earth a kingdom which cannot be moved. And the figures which he himself has employed to set forth its progress are an assurance that it is not bounded by time or space; that it shall grow until its dimensions and beneficence exceed all human expectations, and satisfy the heart of the Divine Redeemer himself. Each faithful Christian, however feeble and however lowly, may work in his Master's cause with the assurance that his service shall be not only acceptable, but effective. Better shall be the end than the beginning. The seed shall give rise to a tree of whose fruit all nations shall taste, and beneath whose shadow humanity itself shall find both shelter and repose.—T.

Ver. 8.—*The insatiability of sense.* Man is on one side akin to the brutes, whilst he is on the other side akin to God. Sense he shares with the inferior animals; but the intellect and conscience by which he may use his senses in the acquisition of knowledge, and his physical powers in the fulfilment of a moral ideal, these are peculiar to himself. On this account it is impossible for man to be satisfied with mere sensibility; if he makes the attempt, he fails. To say this is not to disparage sense—a great and wonderful gift of God. It is simply to put the senses in their proper place, as the auxiliaries and ministers of reason. Through the exercise of sense man may, by Divine aid, rise to great spiritual possessions, achievements, and enjoyments.

I. AN INFINITE VARIETY OF OBJECTS APPEAL TO THE SENSES OF SIGHT AND HEARING. These are chosen as the two noblest of the senses—those by whose means we learn most of nature, and most of the thoughts and purposes of our fellow-men and of our God. Around, beneath, and above us are objects to be seen, sounds and voices to be heard. The variety is as marvellous as the multiplicity.

II. WONDERFUL IS THE ADAPTATION OF THE SENSES TO RECEIVE THE VARIED IMPRESSIONS PRODUCED BY NATURE. The susceptibility of the nerves of the eye to the undulations of ether, of the ear to atmospheric vibrations, has only been fully explained in recent times. There is no more marvellous instance of design than the mutual adaptations of the voice, the atmosphere, and the auditory nerve; of the molecular structure of coloured body, the ether, and the retinal structure of the optic nerve. And these are only some of the arrangements between nature and sense which meet us at every turn and at every moment of our conscious existence.

III. IT IS IMPOSSIBLE THAT THE MERE EXERCISE OF SENSE SHOULD AFFORD A FULL SATISFACTION TO THE NATURE OF MAN. It is not to be supposed that any reasonable being should seek his gratification merely in the enjoyment of the impressions upon the senses. But even curiosity fails to find satisfaction, and those who crave such satisfaction make it manifest that their craving is in vain. The restlessness of the sight-seer is proverbial. When the impressions of sense are used as the material for high intellectual and spiritual ends, the case is otherwise. But it remains true as in the days of Koheleth, "The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing."

IV. IT WOULD BE AN ERROR TO REGARD THIS FACT AS A PROOF OF THE INHERENT BADNESS OF THE SENSES. Such an inference has sometimes been drawn by enthusiastic minds; and mystics have inculcated abstinence from the exercise of the senses as essential in order to intellectual and spiritual illumination. The error here lies in overlooking the distinction between making ourselves the slaves of our senses, and using the senses as our helpers and servants.

V. BUT IT IS JUST TO REGARD THIS FACT AS AN INDICATION THAT MEN SHOULD SEEK THEIR SATISFACTION IN WHAT IS HIGHER THAN SENSE. When the eyes are opened to the works of God, when we look upon the form of the Son of God, when we hear the Divine Word speaking in conscience and speaking in Christ, our senses then become, directly or indirectly, the instrumentality by means of which our higher nature is called into exercise and finds abundant scope. Our reason may thus find rest in truth; our sympathies may thus respond to the revealed love of the Eternal Father known by his blessed Son; our whole heart may rise into fellowship with him from whom all our faculties and capacities are derived, and in whom alone his spiritual children can find a perfect satisfaction and an unshaken repose.—T.

Vers. 9, 10.—*Novelty.* If, in the ancient days in which this book was written, men were already experiencing the weariness which comes from their familiarity with the scenes of earth and the incidents of life, how much more must this be the case at the present time! It is, indeed, ever characteristic of the favourites of fortune, that they "run through" the possibilities of excitement and of pleasure before their capacity for enjoyment is exhausted, and cry for new forms of amusement and distraction. It is remarkable how soon such persons are reduced to the painful conviction that there is nothing new under the sun.

I. THE LOVE AND QUEST OF NOVELTY ARE NATURAL TO MAN. When we examine human nature, we find there a deep-seated 'interest' in change. What is called "relativity," the passage from one experience to another, is indeed an essential con-

dition of mental life. And transition from one mode of excitement to another is a constituent of a pleasurable life. Thus, in the case of the intellectual man, the aim is to know and to study ever new things; whilst in the case of the man of energy and activity, the impulse is to view new scenes, to undertake new enterprises. It is this principle in our nature which accounts for the efforts men put forth, and for the sacrifices to which men willingly submit.

II. THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF REAL NOVELTY IN THE NATURAL WORLD AND IN HUMAN AFFAIRS. A little reflection will convince us that continuous novelty is unattainable. The laws of nature remain the same, and their sameness produces effects which with familiarity produce the effect of monotony. The conditions of human life do not materially vary from year to year, from age to age. And human nature possesses certain constant factors, in virtue of which men's employments and pleasures, hopes, sufferings, and fears remain substantially as they were in former times. The chief exception to this rule arises from the fact that what is old to one generation is for a while new to its successor. But it must not be forgotten that the individual, if favourably circumstanced, soon exhausts the variety of human experience. The voluptuary offers a reward to him who can invent a new pleasure. The hero weeps for want of a new world to conquer. The child of fortune experiences in the satisfaction of his wants, and even his caprices, the *ennui* which is a proof that he has followed the round of occupations and pleasures until all have been exhausted. Thus the most favoured are in some cases the least happy, and the most ready to join in the complaint, "Vanity of vanities; all is vanity!"

III. IT IS THE SPIRITUAL REALM WHICH IS ESPECIALLY CHARACTERIZED BY NEWNESS. If it is impossible that the Book of Ecclesiastes should be written over again in the Christian ages, the reason is that the fuller and sublime revelations made by the Son of God incarnate have enriched human thought and life beyond all calculation. There is no comparison between the comparative poverty of knowledge and of life, even under the Mosaic economy in ancient times, and "the unsearchable riches of Christ." None can exhaust the treasures of knowledge and wisdom, the possibilities of consecrated service and spiritual progress, distinctive of the Christian dispensation. Christianity is emphatically a religion of newness. It is itself the new covenant; its choicest gift to man is the new heart; it summons the disciples of the Redeemer to newness of life; it puts in their mouth a new song; whilst it opens up in the future the glorious prospect of new heavens and a new earth. God comes in the Person of his Son to this sin-stricken humanity, and his assurance and promise is this: "Behold, I make all things new." And in fulfilment of this assurance, the Church of Christ rejoices in the experience expressed in the declaration, "Old things have passed away; behold, all things are become new."—I.

Vers. 12—18.—*The vanity of human wisdom.* Solomon was one of the great, magnificent, and famous kings of the East, and was eminent both for possessions and abilities. The splendour of his court and capital may have impressed the popular mind more profoundly than anything else attaching to him. But his wisdom was his most distinctive and honourable peculiarity. At the beginning of his reign he had sought this from God as his supreme gift, and the gift had been bestowed upon him and continued to him. Its evidences were striking and universally acknowledged. As a king, a judge, an administrator, a writer, a religious teacher, Solomon was pre-eminently wise. It must be admitted that he did not always make the best use of the marvellous talents entrusted to him. But he was well able to speak from his own experience of the gift of wisdom; and none was ever better able to speak of its vanity.

I. THE POSSESSION AND EXERCISE OF WISDOM. 1. This implies natural ability, as a foundation; and, if this be absent, eminence is impossible. 2. It implies also good opportunities. There are doubtless many endowed with native powers, to whom are denied the means of calling forth and training those powers, which accordingly lie dormant throughout the whole of life. 3. It implies the diligent cultivation of natural powers, and the diligent use of precious opportunities. 4. It implies prolonged experience—"years that bring the philosophic mind."

II. THE LIMITATION OF HUMAN WISDOM. To the view of the uncultivated and inexperienced, the knowledge of the accomplished student seems boundless, and the

wisdom of the sage almost Divine. But the wise man knows himself too well to be thus deluded. The wisest man is aware that there are (1) problems he cannot solve; (2) errors he cannot correct; (3) evils he cannot remedy. On every side he is reminded how limited are his speculative and his practical powers. He is often all but helpless in the presence of questions that baffle his ingenuity, of difficulties that defy his endeavours and his patience.

III. THE DISAPPOINTMENT AND DISTRESS OF WISDOM. 1. One erroneous inference from the considerations adduced must be carefully guarded against, viz. the inference that folly is better than wisdom. The wise man may not always come to a just conclusion as to belief and practice, but the fool will usually be misled by his folly. 2. The wise man is gradually disillusioned regarding himself. He may start in life with the persuasion of his power and commanding superiority; but his confidence is perhaps by slow degrees undermined, and he may end by forming a habit of self-distrust. 3. At the same time, the wise man becomes painfully conscious that he does not deserve the reputation which he enjoys among his fellow-men. 4. But, above all, he feels that his wisdom is folly in the presence of the all-wise God, to whose omniscience all things are clear, and from whose judgment there is no appeal. 5. Hence the wise man acquires the most valuable lesson of modesty and humility—qualities which give a crowning grace to true wisdom. The wise man assuredly would not exchange with the fool, but he would fain be wiser than he is; and he cherishes the conviction that whatever light illumines him is but a ray from the central and eternal Sun.—T.

Vers. 2, 3.—*Human life and human labour.* What is the worth of our human life? This is an old and ever-recurring question; the answer to it depends far less on what surrounds us than on what is within us, far less upon our circumstances than upon our spirit. But it must be acknowledged—

I. THAT THE WORTH OF OUR LIFE DEPENDS LARGELY UPON ITS ACTIVITIES. We have to ask—How are we related to our fellows? What is the number and what the nature of the objects that minister to our comforts? What opportunities are there for leisure, for repose, for recreation? But the largest of all questions is this: *What is the character of our activities?* Are these congenial or uninviting, burdensome or moderate, tedious or interesting, fruitful or barren, passing or permanent in their effects?

II. THAT HUMAN ACTIVITY HAS ITS DEPRESSING ASPECTS. So depressing were they to "the Preacher," that he pours forth his dejection of spirit in the strong exclamation of the text. The valuelessness of all human labour made life itself seem to him to be vain. Three things there are that dwarf it. 1. *Its slowness.* A few men accomplish that which is observable, remarkable, worthy of being chronicled and remembered, making its mark on the page of history or of poetry; but how few they are! The great majority of mankind spend all their strength in doing that which is of small account, which produces no calculable effect upon their times, of which no man thinks it worth while to speak or sing. 2. *Its dependence on others.* There are but very few indeed whose labour can be said to be original, independent, or creative. Almost every man is so working that if any of those who are co-operating with him were to withdraw *their* labour, his would be of no avail; his work would be quite unprofitable but for their countenance and support. 3. *Its insecurity.* This is the main thought of the text. What is the use of a man building up that which his neighbour may come and pull down; of gathering laboriously together that which the thief may take away; of expending toilsome days and exhausting energies on something which may be taken from our grasp in the compass of an hour, at the bidding of one strong human will; of making long and weary preparation for later life, when the tie that binds us to the present sphere may be snapped in a moment? Insecurity, arising from one of a number of sources—the elemental forces of nature, the malice and treachery of men, despotism in government, the chances and changes of trade and commerce, failure of health and strength, sudden death, etc.—marks all the products of human activity with its own stamp, and brings down their value, who shall estimate how much? The Preacher says to *nothing*. But let it be remembered—

III. THAT HUMAN ACTIVITY HAS ITS REDEEMING QUALITIES. This is only one view

of it. Another and a healthier view may be taken of the subject. 1. All honest and faithful labour is worthy in the sight of the wise man and of the Wise One (Prov. xiv. 23). 2. All conscientious labour provides a sphere for the active service of God; by its honourable and faithful discharge, as in his sight, we can serve and please our Lord. 3. All such labour has a happy reflex influence on ourselves, strengthening us in body, in mind, in character. 4. All earnest work is really constructive of the kingdom of Christ. Although we see not its issues and cannot estimate its worth, we may be sure that "the day will declare it," and that it will be found at last that every true stroke we struck did tell and count for truth and righteousness, for the cause of humanity and of Christ.—C.

Vers. 4—7.—*The stability of nature.* The Preacher was struck with the strong contrast between the permanence of nature and the transiency of human life; and the thought oppressed and pained him. We may take his view of the subject—and our own. We look at the stability of nature—

I. AS IT APPEARS TO OUR SENSES. To the outward eye things do continue as they were—

"Changeless march the stars above,
Changeless morn succeeds to even,
And the everlasting hills,
Changeless, watch the changeless heaven."

The hills, "rock-ribbed and ancient as the sun;" the "unchanging, everlasting sea;" the rivers that flow down the centuries as well as through the lands; the plains that stretch for long ages beneath the skies;—these aspects of nature are impressive enough to the simplest imagination; they make this earth which is our home to be charged with deepest interest and clothed with truest grandeur. No man, who has an eye to see and a heart to feel, can fail to be affected by them.

II. AS IT APPEALS TO OUR REASON. The stability of all things about and above us: 1. Gives us time to study the nature and the causes of things, and enables one generation to hand down the results of its researches to another, so that we are constantly accumulating knowledge. 2. Gives us proof of the unity of God. 3. Assures us of the mighty power of the great Author of nature, who is seen to be strong to sustain and preserve and renew.

III. AS IT AFFECTS OUR LIFE. For what would happen if everything were inconstant and uncertain? What would be the effect on human labour and on human life if there were no dependence to be placed on the continuance, as they are, of land and sea, of earth and sky, of hill and plain? How does the security of all the great objects and systems of the world add incentive to our industry! how does it multiply our achievements! how does it enlarge and enrich our life! That we shall be able to complete what we have begun, and that we have a good hope of handing down our work to our successors,—is not this a large factor, a powerful inspiration, among us?

IV. AS IT DWARFS OUR INDIVIDUAL CAREER. The Preacher seemed to feel this acutely. What a small, slight, evanescent thing is a human life when compared with the long ranges of time that the ancient earth and the more ancient heavens have known! A generation comes and goes, while a river hardly changes its course by a single curve; many generations pass, while the face of the rocks is not visibly affected by all the waves that beat upon its surface night and day; all the generations of men, from the time that a human face was first turned up to heaven, have been looked down upon by those silent stars! Why make so much of so transient a thing as a human life? Ay, but look at it—

V. IN THE LIGHT OF THE SPIRITUAL AND THE ETERNAL. 1. The worth of spiritual life is not determined by its duration. The life of a human spirit—if that be the life of purity, holiness, reverence, love, generosity, aspiration—is of more account in the estimate of Divine wisdom, even though it be extended over a mere decade of years, than the existence which knows nothing of these nobilities, even though it should be extended over many thousands of years. 2. Moreover, holy human life on earth leads on and up to the life which is eternal. So that we, whose course upon the earth is so short, who are but of yesterday and with whom to-morrow may not be, do yet

begin upon the earth a life which will abound in all that is beautiful and blessed, in all that is great and noble, when the "everlasting hills" have crumbled into dust.—C.

Vers. 7, 8.—*Weariness and rest.* We have here—

I. THE COMPLAINT OF THE UNSATISFIED. "All things are full of weariness" (Revised Version). 1. There are many obvious sources of satisfaction. Life has many pleasures, and many happy activities, and much coveted treasure. Human affection, congenial employment, the pursuit of knowledge, "the joys of contest," the excitements of the field of sport, the attainment of ambition, etc. 2. All of them together fail to satisfy the heart. The eye is *not* satisfied with seeing, nor the ear with hearing, nor the tongue with tasting, nor the hand with handling, nor the mind with investigating and discovering. All the streams of temporal and worldly pleasure run into the sea of the human soul, but they do not fill it. The heart, on whatsoever it feeds, is still a-hungred, is still athirst. It may seem surprising that when so much that was craved has been possessed and enjoyed, that when so many things have ministered to the mind, there should still be heart-ache, unrest, spiritual disquietude, the painful question—Who will show us any good? Is life worth having? The profundity, the commonness and constancy of this complaint, is a very baffling and perplexing problem. We surely ought to be satisfied, but we are not. The unilluminated mind cannot explain it, the uninspired tongue "cannot utter it." What is the solution?

II. ITS EXPLANATION. Its solution is not far to seek; it is found in the truth so finely uttered by Augustine, "O God, thou hast made us for thyself, and our heart findeth no rest until it resteth in thee." The human spirit, created in God's image, constituted to possess his own spiritual likeness, formed for truth and righteousness, intended to spend its noble and ever-unfolding powers in the high service of the Divine,—is it likely that such a one as this, that can *be* so much, that can *know* so much, that can *love* the best and highest, that can *aspire* to the loftiest and purest well-being, can be *satisfied* with the love that is human, with the knowledge that is earthly, with the treasure that is material and transient? The marvel is, and the pity is, that man, with such powers within him and with such a destiny before him, can sometimes sink so low as to be filled and satisfied with the husks of earth, unfilled with the bread of heaven.

III. ITS REMEDY. To us, to whom Jesus Christ has spoken, there is a plain and open way of escape from this profound disquietude. We hear the Master say, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you . . . and ye shall find rest unto your souls." (1) In the reconciliation to God, our Divine Father, which we have in Jesus Christ; (2) in the happy love of our souls to that Divine Friend and Saviour; (3) in the blessed service of our rightful, faithful, considerate Lord; (4) in the not unavailing service we render to those whom he loved and for whom he died; (5) in the glorious hope of immortal life beyond the grave, we do "find rest unto our souls."—C.

Vers. 9, 10.—*The changing and the abiding.* We are not to take the Preacher's words in too absolute a sense. There is that which has been but which is not now. We are sometimes powerfully affected by—

I. THE CHANGING. Of those things which bear the marks of time, we may mention : 1. The face of nature. 2. The handiwork of man. We look on prostrate palaces, fallen temples, buried cities, disused and decaying harbours, etc. 3. Historical characters. We have been familiar with the faces and forms of men that have played a great part in their country's history or created an epoch in philosophy, or poetry, or science; but where are they now? 4. Human science. Whether medical or surgical, whether geographical, geological, philosophical, theological, or of any other order, human science is changing continually. The top-stone of yesterday is the stepping-stone of to-day. 5. The character of philanthropic work. This was once represented by almsgiving, but to-day we feel that almsgiving is as much of an evil as a good, and that we want to do that for men which will remove for ever all "charity" on the one side and all dependence on the other. But look at—

II. THE ABIDING. Many things remain and will remain; among these are: 1. *The*

main features of human life. Labour, sorrow, care, struggle, death; love, pleasure, success, honour. 2. *Typical human characters.* We still have with us the false, the licentious, the cruel, the servile, the ambitious, etc.; and we still have the meek, the grateful, the generous, the pure-hearted, the devout, etc. 3. *The spiritual element.* Men have not done, and they never will have done, with the mysterious, the supernatural, the Divine. They still ask—Whence came we? By whose power are we sustained? To whom are we responsible? Whither do we go? How can we know and serve and please God? 4. *The truth of Jesus Christ.* Heaven and earth may pass away, but his words “will not pass away.” They are with us still, and they will remain, amid all wreckage, to enlighten our ignorance, to cheer our sorrow, to accompany our loneliness, to conquer our sin, to light up our departure, to bless and to enrich us, ourselves, with the blessings and the treasures that are not of earth but of heaven.—C.

Ver. 11.—*Oblivion and its consolations.* We have here—

I. A NATURAL HUMAN ASPIRATION. We do not like to think that the time is coming when we shall be wholly forgotten; we should like to live on in the memory of men, especially in the memory of the wise and good. We shrink from the idea of being entirely forgotten; we do not care to think that the hour will come when the mention of our name will not awaken the slightest interest in any human circle. There is something exceedingly attractive in the thought of fame, and repelling in that of oblivion. There is that within us which responds to the fine line of Horace, in which he tells us that he has built for himself a monument more enduring than brass; and to the aspiration of our own Milton, that he might prove to have written something which “the world would not willingly let die.”

II. ITS INEVITABLE DISAPPOINTMENT. 1. It is indeed true that “the memory of the just is blessed,” and that they who have lived well, loved faithfully, wrought nobly, suffered meekly, striven bravely, will be remembered and honoured after death; they may be long, even very long, remembered and revered. 2. There are just a few men whose names and histories will go down the long stream of time, of whom the very last generation will speak and learn. 3. But the vast majority of men will soon be forgotten. Their names may be inscribed on memorial-stones, but in a very few years none will care to read them; the eye that lights upon them will glance from them with indifference; there will be “no remembrance” of them. The world will take its way, will do its work and find its pleasure, regardless altogether of the fact that these men once trod its surface and now lie beneath it.

III. OUR TRUE CONSOLATION. This is certainly not found in the commonness of our lot. It is no consolation to me that my neighbour is as ill off as myself; that ought to be an aggravation of my trouble. It is, in fact, twofold. 1. We may be always living in the deathless *influence* our faithful lives exerted and handed down. For good influences do never die; they are scattered and lost sight of, but they are not extinguished; they live on in human hearts and lives from generation to generation. 2. We shall be loved and honoured elsewhere. What if we be forgotten here upon the earth? Are there not other parts of the kingdom of God? And is there not one where God will have found for us a sphere, and in the minds and hearts of those who will be our friends and fellow-labourers there we shall hold our place, honouring and honoured, loving and beloved?—C.

Ver. 18.—*Knowledge and sorrow.* This is one of those utterances which contain much truth and leave much to be supplied. “In much wisdom *is* much grief;” but there is much beside grief to be found in it. So we look at—

I.—THE TRUTH WHICH IT CONTAINS. Of the wisdom or the knowledge which brings sadness to the heart we have to reckon the following. 1. Our deeper insight into ourselves. As we go on we find ourselves capable of worse things than we once supposed we were—selfish aims, evil thoughts, unhallowed passions, etc. Neither David nor Peter supposed himself capable of doing the deed to which he fell. 2. Childhood’s corrected estimate of the good. We begin by thinking all good men and women perfect; then, as experience enlarges, we have reluctantly and sorrowfully to acknowledge to ourselves that there are flaws even in the life and character of the best. And

disillusion is a very painful process. 3. Maturity's acquaintance with evil. We may go some way into life before we know one-half of "the evil which is in the world." Indeed, it is the wisdom and the duty of many—of even a large proportion of the race—not to know much that might be revealed. But as a widening knowledge unveils the magnitude and heinousness of moral evil, there is sorrow indeed to the pure and sympathetic soul. The more we know of the sins and the sorrows of our race—of its cruelties on the one hand and its sufferings on the other, of its enormities and its privations, of its toils and troubles, of its degradation and its death in life—the more we are distressed in spirit; "in much wisdom is much grief."

II. ITS LARGE QUALIFICATIONS. There is much truth belonging to the subject which lies outside this statement, qualifying though not contradicting it. 1. There is much pleasure in the act of acquisition. The study of one of the sciences, the reading of history, the careful observation of nature and mastery of its secrets, the investigation of the nature of man, etc.,—there is a pure and invigorating delight in all this. 2. Knowledge is power; and it is power to acquire that which will surround us with comfort, with freedom, with friendship, with intellectual enlargement. 3. The knowledge which is heavenly wisdom is, in itself, a source of elevation and of deep spiritual thankfulness and happiness. 4. The knowledge of God, as he is known to us in Jesus Christ, is the one unfailing source of unfading joy.—C.

Vers. 1-11.—*The summary of a life's experience.* "Solomon and Job," says Pascal, "had most perfect knowledge of human wretchedness, and have given us the most complete description of it: the one was the most prosperous, the other the most unfortunate, of men; the one knew by experience the vanity of pleasure, the other the reality of sorrow." In such diverse ways does God lead men to the same conclusion—that in human life, apart from him, there is no true satisfaction or lasting happiness, that the immortal spirit cannot find rest in things seen and temporal. The words, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity: what profit hath man of all his labour wherein he laboureth under the sun?" (Revised Version), are the key-note of the whole book—the theme which the author maintains by arguments and illustrations drawn from a most varied experience. If Solomon be not the speaker, if we have in Ecclesiastes the composition of a later writer, no more appropriate personage could have been found than the ancient Jewish king to set forth the teaching which the book contains. For he had tasted all the good things human life has to give. On him God had bestowed wisdom and knowledge, riches, wealth, honour, and length of days. All these he had enjoyed to the full, and therefore speaks, or is made to speak, as one from whom nothing had been kept that his soul desired, and who found that nothing results from the mere satisfaction of appetites and desires but satiety and loathing and disappointment. We may contrast with this retrospect of life that given us by One whose aim it was to fulfil the Law of God and secure the well-being of his fellow-men; and we may thus discover the secret of Solomon's failure to win happiness or to reach any lasting result. At the close of his life the Redeemer of mankind summed up the history of his career in the words addressed to God, "I glorified thee on the earth, having accomplished the work which thou hast given me to do" (John xvii. 4). It may seem to some a dreary task to follow the course of Solomon's morbid thoughts, but it cannot fail to be profitable, if we undertake the task in the earnest desire to discover the causes of his melancholy and disappointment, and learn from the study how to guide our own lives more successfully, and to enter into the peace and contentment of spirit which, after all his efforts, he failed to make his own. In the first eleven verses of this chapter we have revealed to us the despair and weariness which fell upon the soul of him whose splendour and wisdom raised him above all the men of his time, and made him the wonder of all succeeding ages. Life seemed to him the emptiest and poorest thing possible—"a vapour that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away." He might have used the words of the modern philosopher Amiel, "To appear and to vanish,—there is the biography of all individuals, whatever may be the length of the cycle of existence which they describe; and the drama of the universe is nothing more. All life is the shadow of a smoke-wreath, a gesture in the empty air, a hieroglyphic traced for an instant in the sand and effaced a moment afterwards by a breath of wind, an air-bubble expanding and vanishing on the surface of the great river of being—an appearance, a

vanity, a nothing." But this nothing is, however, the symbol of universal being, and this passing bubble is the epitome of the history of the world." It seemed to him that life *yielded no permanent results*, that it was *insufferably monotonous*, and that it was *destined to end in utter oblivion*. The futility of effort, the monotony of life, and the oblivion that engulfs it at last are the topics of this opening passage of the book. Let us take them up one after the other.

I. *THAT LIFE YIELDS NO PERMANENT RESULTS.* (Vers. 1—3.) We have before us, then, the deliberate judgment of one who had full experience of all that men busy themselves with—"the labour wherein they labour under the sun"—the pursuit of riches, the enjoyment of power, the satisfaction of appetites and desires, and so on, and his conclusion is that there is no profit in it all. And his sentence is confirmed by the words of Christ, "What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" In the case of Solomon, therefore, we have a record of permanent significance and value. We cannot deprive his sombre utterances of their weight by saying that he spoke simply as a sated voluptuary, and that others might with more skill or discretion extract from life what he failed to find in it. For, as we shall see, he did not confine himself to mere pursuit of pleasure, but sought satisfaction in intellectual employments and in the accomplishment of great tasks, for which the power and wealth at his disposal were drawn upon to the utmost. His melancholy is not a form of mental disease, but the result of the exhaustion of his energies and powers in the attempt to find satisfaction for the soul's cravings. And in melancholy of this kind philosophers have found a proof of the dignity of human nature. "Man's unhappiness," says one of them, "comes of his greatness: it is because there is an infinite in him, which, with all his cunning, he cannot quite bury under the finite. . . . He requires, if you consider it, for his permanent satisfaction and saturation, simply this allotment, no more and no less: God's infinite universe altogether to himself, therein to enjoy infinitely, and fill every wish as fast as it rises. . . . Try him with half of a universe, of an omnipotence, he sets to quarrelling with the proprietor of the other half, and declares himself the most maltreated of men. Always there is a black spot in our sunshine; it is even the shadow of ourselves" (Carlyle). The very consciousness of the unprofitableness of life, of failure to attain to perfect satisfaction in the possession of earthly benefits, painful as it is, should convince us of the value of the higher and better inheritance, which may be ours, and in which alone we can find rest; and we should take it as a Divine warning to seek after those things that are eternal and unchangeable. Our dissatisfaction and our sorrows are like those of the exile who pines for the pleasant land from which by a hard fate he is for a time dissevered; like the grief of a king who has been deposed. And it is to those whose hunger and thirst cannot be satisfied by things of earth, who find, like Solomon, that there is "no profit in a man's labour wherein he laboureth under the sun," that God issues the gracious invitation, "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 labour for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness." The idea of the unprofitableness of human labour expressed by Solomon is calculated, if carried too far, to put an end to all healthy and strenuous effort to use the powers and gifts God has bestowed upon us, and to lead to indifference and despair. If no adequate result can be secured, if all that remains after prolonged exertion is only a sense of weariness and disappointment, why should we labour at all? But such thoughts are dishonouring to God and degrading to ourselves. He has not sent us into the world to spend our labour in vain, to be overcome with the consciousness of our poverty and weakness. There *are* ways in which we can glorify him and serve our generation; and he has promised to bless our endeavours, and supply that wherein we come short. Every sincere and unselfish effort we make to help the weak, to relieve the suffering, to teach the ignorant, to diminish the misery that meets us on every hand, and to advance the happiness of our fellows, is made fruitful by his blessing. Something positive and of enduring value may be secured in this way, even "treasure laid up in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal." We may so use the goods, the talents, now committed to our charge, as to create for ourselves friends, who will

receive us into everlasting habitations when the days of our stewardship are over, and this visible, tangible world fades away from us.

II. The second reflection of the royal Preacher is that HUMAN LIFE IS INSUFFERABLY MONOTONOUS; that under all outward appearances of variety and change there is a dreary sameness (vers. 4—10). Generation succeeds generation, but the stage is the same on which they play their parts, and one performance is very like another. The incessant motion of the sun, travelling from east to west; the shifting of the wind from one point to another, and then back again; the speedy current of the rivers to join the ocean, which yet is not filled by them, but returns them in various ways to water the earth, and to feed the springs, "whence the rivers come;" the commonplace events of human life, are all referred to as examples of endless and monotonous variation. The law of mutability, without progress, seems to the speaker to prevail in heaven and in earth—to rule in the material world, in human society, and in the life of the individual. The lordship over creation, bestowed upon man, appeared to him a vain fancy. Man himself was but a stranger, sojourning here for but a very short time, coming like a wandering bird from the outer darkness into the light and warmth of a festive hall, and soon flitting out back again into the darkness. And, to one in this sombre mood, it is not wonderful that all natural phenomena should wear the aspect of instability and change. To the pious mind of the psalmist the sun suggested thoughts of God's glory and power; the majesty of the creature gave him a more exalted idea of the greatness of the Creator, and he expatiated upon the splendour of that light that rules the day. "The heavens were his tabernacle;" morning by morning he was as "a bridegroom coming forth from his chamber, and rejoicing as a strong man to run a race." Our Saviour saw in the same phenomenon a proof of God's impartial and bountiful love to the children of men: "He maketh his sun to rise upon the evil and the good." But to the melancholy and brooding mind of our author nothing more was suggested, by it than monotonous reiteration, a dreary routine of rising and setting. "The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to his place where he arose." "He issues forth, day after day, from the east, mounts up the vault of heaven until he has reached the meridian, and then he descends at once towards the western horizon. He never stops in his course at midday, as though he had attained the end for which he issued forth with the dawn; he never sinks beneath the horizon to enjoy repose. Even throughout the night he is still hastening onward, that, at the appointed hour, he may again reach his eastern starting-place. The wind, great though its changes may be, seems never to have accomplished the purpose for which it puts forth its power. It never subsides into a state of lasting quiescence; it never even finds a station which it can permanently occupy. It 'veereth about continually,' yet it ever 'bloweth again according to its circuits.' The streams flow onward to the ocean; but the time never comes when the sea, filled to overflowing, refuses to receive their waters. The thirst of the sea is never quenched; the waters of the rivers are lost; and yet, with unavailing constancy, they still pour their contributions into its bosom" (Tyler). And so with regard to all the other things on which the eye rests, or of which the ear hears—weariness clothes everything; an unutterable monotony amid their changes and variations. Human life, too, all through, is characterized by the same unrest and ceaseless, fruitless labour. Sometimes a new discovery seems to be made; the monotony seems to be broken, and fresh and great results are anticipated by those who are ignorant of the world's past history. But the initiated, those whose experience has made them wise, or whose knowledge has made them learned, recognize the new thing as something that was known in times long ago; they can tell how barren it was of results then, how little, therefore, can be expected from it now. There is scarcely anything more discouraging, especially to the young, than this kind of moralizing. We feel, perhaps, that we can carry out some scheme that will be of benefit to the society about us, and are met with lamentable accounts of how similar schemes were once tried and failed disastrously. We feel moved to attack the evils that we meet in the world, and are assured that they are too great, and our own strength too puny for us to accomplish anything worth while. And in the mean time our fervour grows cold, our courage oozes away, and we really lose the power for good we might have had. Now, this teaching of Solomon is not meant for the young and hopeful. Indeed, those who collected together the books of the Old Testament were rather doubtful about including Ecclesiastes among the others, and it ran a narrow

chance of being omitted from the sacred canon. But it has its place in the Word of God; and those who have known anything of the doubts and speculations contained in it will find it profitable to trace the course of thought that runs through it, until they find the solid and positive teaching which the Preacher at last gives. The distressing fact remains, and must be encountered, that to those who have had long experience of the world, and whose horizon is bounded by it, who see only the things that are done "under the sun," in the midst of ever-recurring changes, there seems to be little or no progress, and that which appears to be new is but a repetition of the old. But they should remember that this world is meant as a place of probation for us—a school in which we are to learn great lessons; and that all the changing circumstances of life serve, and are meant to serve, to develop our nature and character. If it were to be our abiding-place, many improvements in it might be suggested. It is not by any means the best of possible worlds; but for purposes of education, discipline, and testing, it is perfectly adapted. "Rest yet remaineth for the people of God;" it is not here, but in a world to come. This truth is admirably stated by the poet Spenser, who perhaps unconsciously reproduces the melancholy thoughts of Solomon, and answers them. He speaks of Mutability seeking to be honoured above all the heavenly powers, as being the chief ruler in the universe, and as indeed governing all things. In a synod of the gods, she is silenced by Nature, who combats her claims, and speaks of a time to come when her present apparent power will come to an end—

"But time shall come that all shall changed bee,
And from thenceforth none no more change shall see."

And then the poet adds—

"When I bethinke me on that speech whylearn [former]
Of Mutability, and well it way,
Me seemes, that though she all unworthy were
Of the Heav'ns Rule; yet, very sooth to say,
In all things else she bears the greatest away:
Which makes me loath this state of life so tickle [unsure],
And love of things so vain to cast away;
Whose flow'ring pride, so fading and so fickle,
Short Time shall soon cut down with his consuming sickle.

"Then gin I thinke on that which Nature sayd,
Of that same time when no more Change shall be,
But stedfast rest of all things, firmly stayd
Upon the pillours of Eternity,
That is contrayr to Mutability;
For all that moveth doth in Change delight:
But thence-forth all shall rest eternally
With him that is the God of Sabbaoth hight:
O! that great Sabbaoth God, grant me that Sabbaoth's sight!"

III. LIFE DESTINED TO END IN UTTER OBLIVION. To all these considerations of the resultlessness of life, of changefulness and monotony, is added that of the *oblivion* that sooner or later overtakes man and all his works (ver. 11). "There is no remembrance of the former generations; neither shall there be any remembrance of the latter generations that are to come, among those that shall come after" (Revised Version). One generation supersedes another; the new come up with fresh interests and schemes of their own, and hustle the old off the stage, and are themselves in their turn forced to give place to those who come up after them. Nations disappear from the earth's surface and are forgotten. The memorials of former civilizations lie buried in the sand, or are defaced and destroyed to make room for something else. On every page of creation we find the sentence written, that there is nothing here that lasts. Almost no means can be devised to carry down to succeeding generations even the names of the greatest conquerors, of men who in their time seemed to have the strength of gods, and to have changed the history of the world. The earth has many secrets in her keeping, and is sometimes forced to yield up a few of them. "The ploughshare strikes against the foundations of buildings which once echoed to human mirth; skeletons of men to whom life once was dear; urns and coins that

remind the antiquary of a magnificent empire now long passed away." And so the process goes on. Everything passes. A few years ago and we were not; a hundred years hence, and there may be none who ever heard our names. And a day will come when

"The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve;
And . . . leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff
As dreams are made on, and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep."

Abundant material, then, had the Preacher, the son of David, for sombre meditation; abundant material for contemplation does he suggest to us. And if we cannot get much further on in speculation than he did, if since his time very little new light has been cast upon the problems which he discusses, we may still refuse to be depressed by melancholy like his. Granted that all is vanity, that restlessness and monotony mark everything in the world, and that its glories soon pass away and are forgotten; still it is not our home. It may dissolve and leave us no poorer. The tie that binds together soul and body may be loosened, and the place that knows us now may soon know us no more. Our confidence is in him, who has promised to take us to himself, that where he is we may be also. "God is our Refuge and Strength, . . . therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed." In contrast with the Preacher's desponding, despairing words about the fruitlessness of life, its monotony and its brevity, we may set the hopeful, triumphant utterance of Christ's apostle: "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 me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing."—J. W.

Vers. 12-18.—*Speculative study of the world.* Solomon has made serious allegations concerning human life, and he now proceeds to substantiate them. He has declared that it yields no permanent results, that it is tedious beyond expression, and that it is soon overtaken by oblivion. "Vanity of vanities; all is vanity!" The monotony of things in the natural world—the permanence of the earth in contrast with the changes in human life, the mechanical routine of sunrise and sunset, the ceaseless agitation of the atmosphere, the constant course of rivers to the sea, and so on—had not been the sole ground for his conclusions. He had considered also "all the works that are done under the sun," the whole range of human action, and found in them evidence justifying his allegations. Both in natural phenomena and in human efforts and attainments he found that all was vanity and vexation of spirit. He had, he tells us (ver. 12), all the resources of a great monarch at his command—riches, authority, capacity, and leisure; and he applied himself,—he gave his heart to discover, by the aid of wisdom, the nature of earthly pursuits, and found that they were fruitless. He concentrated all his mental energy upon the course of investigation, and continued in it until the conclusion was forced upon him that "in much wisdom is much grief, and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow." So different is the estimate of wisdom and knowledge formed by the Jewish king from that held by other great philosophers and sages, that it is worth while to inquire into the cause of the difference. The explanation is to be found in ver. 15, "That which is crooked cannot be made straight: and that which is wanting cannot be numbered." It was a practical end that Solomon had in view—to remedy evils and to supply deficiencies. He did not engage in the pursuit of wisdom and knowledge for the sake of the pleasure yielded by intellectual activity. In the case of ordinary philosophers and scientists the aim is a different one. "A truth, once known, falls into comparative insignificance. It is now prized, less on its own account than as opening up new ways to new activity, new suspense, new hopes, new discoveries, new self-gratulation. It is not knowledge, it is not truth, that the votary of science principally seeks; he seeks the exercise of his faculties and feelings. Absolute certainty and absolute completion would be the paralysis of any study; and the last worst calamity that could befall man, as he is at present constituted, would be that full and

final possession of speculative truth which he now vainly anticipates as the consummation of his intellectual happiness. And what is true of science is true, indeed, of all human activity. It is ever the contest that pleases us, and not the victory. Thus it is in play; thus it is in hunting; thus it is in the search of truth; thus it is in life. The past does not interest, the present does not satisfy; the future alone is the object which engages us. 'It is not the goal, but the course, that makes us happy,' says Richter" (Hamilton, 'Metaphysics'). But in the case before us we find that the pleasure afforded by intellectual activity is not regarded by the Preacher as an end sufficient in itself to engage his energies. It is a practical end he has in view; and when he finds that earthly pursuits cannot alter destinies, cannot change the conditions under which we live, cannot set right that which is wrong, or supply that which is wanting for human happiness, he loathes them altogether. The very wisdom and knowledge which he had acquired in his investigations seem to him useless lumber. He wanted to find in life an adequate aim and end, something in which man could find repose. He found it not. "The light which the wisdom he had learned cast on human destiny only exhibited to him the illusions of life, but did not show him one perfect object on which he might rest as a final aim of existence. And therefore he says that 'he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow,' since he only thus perceives more and more illusions, whilst nothing is the result, and nihilism is only sorrow of heart" (*vide* Martensen, 'Christian Ethics'). The Preacher then says about the pursuit of wisdom, that though it is implanted by God in the heart of man (ver. 13), it is (1) *a severe and laborious task*, and (2) *the results it yields are grief and sorrow*.

I. In the first place, then, HE DESCRIBES THE PURSUIT OF WISDOM AS A SEVERE AND LABORIOUS TASK. He looks back upon the course of inquiry he had followed, and declares that it has been a rugged, thorny road. "This sore travail hath God given to the sons of man to be exercised therewith." And it is quite in harmony with the spirit of the book that the name of God, which occurs here for the first time, should be coupled with the thought of his laying heavy burdens upon men, since it was by him that this profitless search had been appointed. He remembers all the labours of the way by which he had come—the weariness of brain, the laborious days, the sleepless nights, the frustrated hopes, the disappointments he had experienced; and he counts the pursuit of wisdom but another of the vanities of life. The common run of men, who have no high aims, no desires after a wisdom more than that needed for procuring a livelihood, who are undisturbed by the great problems of life, are spared this painful discipline. It is those who rise above their fellows, that are called to spend their strength and resources, to deny themselves pleasures, and to separate themselves from much of that in which mankind delight and find solace, only to find keener sorrows than those known to their fellows. They do indeed hear and obey the voice of God, but it calls them to suffering and to self-sacrifice. In these days, when the sciences open up before men vast fields for research, there must be many who can verify from their own experience what Solomon says about the laboriousness of the methods used. The infinite patience needed, the observation and cataloguing of multitudinous facts, the inventing of fresh mechanical appliances for facilitating research, the varied experiments, the careful examination of evidence, and the construction and testing of new theories and hypotheses, are the "sore travail" here spoken of.

II. In the second place, THE WISDOM AND KNOWLEDGE SO LABORIOUSLY GAINED ONLY MEAN INCREASE OF GRIEF AND SORROW. (Ver. 18.) There is abundant evidence of the truth of this statement in the experience of those who have made great attainments in intellectual wisdom. For progress in knowledge only convinces man of the little he knows, as compared with the vast universe of being that lies undiscovered. He is convinced of the weakness of his powers, the shortness of the time at his disposal, and the infinite extent of the field, which he desires, but can never hope to take possession of. This thought is expressed in the well-known words of Sir Isaac Newton: "I seem to have been only like a boy playing on the seashore, and diverting myself now and then with a smoother pebble or a prettier shell than ordinary, while the ocean of truth lay undiscovered before me." With increase of intellectual knowledge, with enlarged acquaintance with the thoughts of men, and the various theories of the universe that have been held, and the various solutions of difficulties that have been given, there often comes, too, unwillingness or inability to rest content with any

theory or any solution. Doubts, which frequently settle down into definite agnosticism, beset the man who is given to great intellectual activity. And then, too, the fact remains that we cannot by sheer reasoning come to any definite conclusions as to any of the great questions which most concern our happiness. No one can by searching find out God—reach definite knowledge concerning him, his existence, nature, and character; or be assured of the fact of there being an overruling Providence, of the efficacy of prayer, of a life beyond the grave, or of the immortality of the soul. Probable or plausible opinions may be formed, but certainty comes only by revelation and faith. Hence it is that Milton describes some of the fallen angels as wandering hopelessly through these labyrinths of thought and conjecture, and finding in so doing intellectual occupation, but neither solace nor rest.

"Others apart sat on a hill retired,
In thoughts more elevate, and reason'd high
Of providence, foreknowledge, will, and fate;
Fix'd fate, free-will, foreknowledge absolute,
And found no end, in wandering mazes lost.
Of good and evil much they argued then,
Of happiness and final misery,
Passion and apathy, and glory and shame,
Vain wisdom all, and false philosophy."

And it has been said that one of the attractions which this Book of Ecclesiastes has for the present age is in its sceptical questioning, and restless, fluctuating uncertainty. The age can adopt as its own its sombre declarations. "Science boasts vaingloriously of her progress, yet mocks us with her grand discovery of progress through pain, telling of small advantages for the few purchased by enormous waste of life, by internecine conflict and competition, and by a deadly struggle with Nature herself, 'red in tooth and claw with ravin,' greedy to feed on the offspring of her own redundant fertility. The revelations of geology and astronomy deepen our depression. The littleness of our lives and the insignificance of our concerns become more conspicuous in comparison with the long and slow procession of the æons which have gone before, and with the vast ocean of being around us, driven and tossed by enormous, complicated, and unresting forces. A new significance is thus given to the words, 'In much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow'" (Tyler). In his celebrated engraving of 'Melancholia,' Albert Dürer has with wonderful skill depicted this mood of intellectual depression. He represents a winged figure, that of a woman seated by the seashore and looking intently into the distance, with bent brows and proud, pensive demeanour. Her thoughts are absorbed in sombre meditation, and her wings are folded. A closed book is in her lap. Near her stands a dial-plate, and above it a bell, that strikes the hours as they pass. The sun is rapidly nearing the horizon-line, and darkness will soon enshroud the earth. In her right hand she holds a compass and a circle, emblematic of that infinity of time and space upon which she is meditating. Around her are scattered the various implements of art, and the numerous appliances of science. They have served her purpose, and she now casts them aside, and listlessly ponders on the vanity of all human calculations. Above her is an hour-glass, in which the sands are running low, emblematic of the shortness of the time yet left for fresh schemes and efforts. In like manner the Preacher found that on the *moral* side increase of knowledge meant increase of sorrow. Knowledge of the true ideal only made him the more conscious of the distance we are from it, and of the hopelessness of our efforts to reach it. The further the research is carried, the more abundant is the evidence discoverable of our moral nature being in a condition of disorder. We find that conscience too often reigns without governing, that natural appetites and desires refuse to submit to her rule, that often motives and feelings which she distinctly condemns, such as pride, envy, selfishness, and cruelty, direct and animate our conduct. All schools of philosophy have recognized the fact of moral disorder in our nature. It is, indeed, unfortunately too evident to be denied or explained away. Aristotle says, "We are more naturally disposed towards those things which are wrong, and more easily carried away to excess than to propriety of conduct." And Hume, "We naturally desire what is forbidden, and often take a pleasure in performing actions merely because they are unlawful.

The notion of duty when opposite to the passions is not always able to overcome them; and when it fails of that effect, is apt rather to increase and irritate them, by producing an opposition in our motives and principles." But it is not necessary to multiply testimony to a fact so generally acknowledged. How this moral disorder originated in human nature is a problem which philosophy is unable to solve, just as it is lacking in ability to correct it. It can discern the symptoms and character of the disease, and describe the course it takes, but cannot cure it. And so the existence of disturbing and lawless forces in our moral nature, the power of evil habit, the social inequalities and disorders which result from the perversity of the individuals of whom society is made up, and the varying codes of morals which exist in the world, are all calculated to distress and perplex him who seeks to make that straight which is crooked, and to supplement that which is defective. Increase of knowledge brings increase of sorrow. —J. W.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER II.

Vers. 1—11.—Section 2. *Vanity of striving after pleasure and wealth.*

Ver. 1.—Dissatisfied with the result of the pursuit of wisdom, Koheleth embarks on a course of sensual pleasure, if so be this may yield some effect more substantial and permanent. I said in mine heart, Go to now, I will prove thee with mirth. The heart is addressed as the seat of the emotions and affections. The Vulgate misses the direct address to the heart, which the words, rightly interpreted, imply, translating, *Vadam et effluam delicias*. The Septuagint correctly gives, *Δεῦρο δὲ περιπαρὼ σὲ ἐν εὐφροσύνῃ*. It is like the rich fool's language in Christ's parable, "I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, be merry" (Luke xii. 10). Therefore enjoy pleasure; literally, *see good* (ch. vi. 6). "To see" is often used figuratively in the sense of "to experience, or enjoy." Wright compares the expressions, "see death" (Luke ii. 26), "see life" (John iii. 36). We may find the like in Ps. xxxiv. 13; Jer. xxix. 32; Obad. 13 (comp. ch. ix. 9). The king now tries to find the *summum bonum* in pleasure, in selfish enjoyment without thought of others. Commentators, as they saw Stoicism in the first chapter, so read Epicureanism into this. We shall have occasion to refer to this idea further on (see on ch. iii. 22). Of this new experiment the result was the same as before. Behold, this also is vanity. This experience is confirmed in the next verse.

Ver. 2.—I said of laughter, it is mad. Laughter and mirth are personified, hence treated as masculine. He uses the term "mad" in reference to the statement in ch. i. 17, "I gave my heart to know madness and folly." Septuagint, "I said to laughter, Error (περιφορὰν);" Vulgate, *Risum reputavi errorem*. Neither of these is as accurate as the Authorized Version. Of mirth, What

doeth it? What does it effect towards real happiness and contentment? How does it help to fill the void, to give lasting satisfaction? So we have in Prov. xiv. 13, "Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful; and the end of mirth is heaviness;" though the context is different. The Vulgate renders loosely, *Quid frustra deciperis?*

Ver. 3.—I sought in mine heart; literally, *I spied out* (as ch. i. 13) *in my heart*. Having proved the fruitlessness of some sort of sensual pleasure, he made another experiment in a philosophical spirit. To give myself unto wine; literally, *to draw (mashak) my flesh with wine*; i.e. to use the attraction of the pleasures of the table. Yet acquainting my heart with wisdom. This is a parenthetical clause, which Wright translates, "While my heart was acting [guiding] with wisdom." That is, while, as it were, experimenting with pleasure, he still retained sufficient control over his passions as not to be wholly given over to vice; he was in the position of one who is being carried down an impetuous stream, yet has the power of stopping his headlong course before it becomes fatal to him. Such control was given by wisdom. Deliberately to enter upon a course of self-indulgence, even with a possibly good intention, must be a most perilous trial, and one which would leave indelible marks upon the soul; and not one person in a hundred would be able to stop short of ruin. The historical Solomon, by his experiment, suffered infinite loss, which nothing could compensate. The Septuagint renders not very successfully, "I examined whether my heart would draw (ἐλκύσει) my flesh as wine; and my heart guided me in wisdom." The Vulgate gives a sense entirely contrary to the writer's intention; "I thought in my heart to withdraw my flesh from wine, that I might transfer my mind to wisdom." And to lay hold on folly. These words are dependent upon "I sought in my heart," and refer to the sensual pleasures in which he indulged for a certain object.

"Dulce est desipere in loco," says Horace ('Carm.' iv. 12. 28); 'Εν μὲν μαίνομένοις μάλα μαίνομαι (Theognis, 313). Till I might see. His purpose was to discover if there was in these things any real good which might satisfy men's cravings, and be a worthy object for them to pursue all the days of their life.

Ver. 4.—This commences a new experience in the pursuit of his object. Leaving this life of self-indulgence, he takes to art and culture, the details being drawn from the accounts of the historical Solomon. I made me great works; literally, *I made great my works*; Septuagint, 'Εμεγάλυνα πολὺν μου; Vulgate, *Magnificavi opera mea*. Among these works the temple, with all its wonderful structural preparations, is not specially mentioned, perhaps because no one could think of Solomon without connecting his name with this magnificent building, and it was superfluous to call attention to it; or else because the religious aspect of his operations is not here in question, but only his taste and pursuit of beauty. But the omission tells strongly against the Solomonic authorship of the book. I builded me houses. Solomon had a passion for erecting magnificent buildings. We have various accounts of his works of this nature in 1 Kings vii. and ix.; 2 Chron. viii. There was the huge palace for himself, which occupied thirteen years in building; there was the "house of the forest of Lebanon," a splendid hall constructed with pillars of cedar; the porch of pillars; the hall of judgment; the harem for the daughter of Pharaoh. Then there were fortresses, store-cities, chariot-towns, national works of great importance; cities in distant lands which he founded, such as Tadmor in the wilderness. I planted me vineyards. David had vineyards and oliveyards (1 Chron. xxvii. 27, 28), which passed into the possession of his son; and we read in Cant. viii. 11 of a vineyard that Solomon had in Baal-hamon, which some identify with Belamon (Judith viii. 3), a place near Shunem, in the Plain of Esdraelon.

Ver. 5.—I made me gardens and orchards. Solomon's love of gardens appears throughout the Canticles (vi. 2, etc.). He had a king's garden on the slope of the hills south of the city (2 Kings xxv. 4); and Beth-hachcherem, "the House of the Vine," at Ain Karim, about six miles east of Jerusalem (Jer. vi. 1); and at Baal-hamon another extensive vineyard (Cant. viii. 11). The word rendered "orchard" (*parder*) occurs also in Cant. iv. 13 and Neh. ii. 8. It is a Persian word, and passed into the Greek form *παρδάσιος* (Xenophon, 'Anab.,' i. 2. 7), meaning "a park" planted with forest and fruit trees, and containing herds of animals.

It is probably derived from the Zend *pairidaeza*, "an enclosure." (For the trees in such parks, see Cant. iv. 13, 14; and for an estimate of Solomon's works, Josephus, 'Ant.,' viii. 7. 3.)

Ver. 6.—Pools of water. Great care was exercised by Solomon to provide his capital with water, and vast operations were undertaken for this purpose. "The king's pool," mentioned in Neh. ii. 14, may have been constructed by him (Josephus, 'Bell. Jud.,' v. 4. 2); but the most celebrated work ascribed to him is the water-supply at Etham, south-west of Bethlehem, and the aqueduct leading from thence to Jerusalem. Most modern travellers have described these pools. They are three in number, and, according to Robinson's measurement, are of immense size. The first, to the east, is 582 feet long, 207 wide, and 50 deep; the second, 432 by 250, and 39 feet deep; the third, 380 by 236, and 25 feet deep. They are all, however, narrower at the upper end, and widen out gradually, flowing one into the other. There is a copious spring led into the uppermost pool from the north-east, but this supply is augmented by other sources now choked and ruined. The water from the pools was conveyed round the ridge on which Bethlehem stands in earthen pipes to Jerusalem. Dr. Thomson ('The Land and the Book,' p. 326) says, "Near that city it was carried along the west side of the Valley of Gihon to the north-western end of the lower Pool of Gihon, where it crossed to the east side, and, winding round the southern declivity of Zion below *Neby Dáúd*, finally entered the south-eastern corner of the temple area, where the water was employed in the various services of the sanctuary." Etham is, with good reason, identified with the beautiful valley of Urtas, which lies south-west of Bethlehem, in the immediate neighbourhood of the pools of Solomon. The fountain near the present village watered the gardens and orchards which were planted here, the terraced hills around were covered with vines, figs, and olives, and the prospect must have been delightful and refreshing in that thirsty land. To water therewith the wood that bringeth forth trees; Revised Version, *to water therefrom the forest where trees were reared*; literally, *in order to irrigate a wood sprouting forth trees*; i.e. a nursery of saplings. So we read how the Garden of Eden was watered (Gen. ii. 10; xiii. 10)—a most necessary feature in Eastern countries, where streams and pools are not constructed for picturesque reasons, but for material uses.

Ver. 7.—I got me—I bought, procured—servants and maidens. These are distinct from those mentioned immediately after.

wards, servants born in my house; Septuagint, *οἰκονομοί*; called in the Hebrew, "sons of the house" (Ger. xv. 3). They were much more esteemed by their masters, and showed a much closer attachment to the family than the bought slaves or the conquered aboriginals, who were often reduced to this state (1 Kings ix. 20, 21). The number of Solomon's attendants excited the wonder of the Queen of Sheba (1 Kings iv. 26, etc.; x. 5), and with good reason, if Josephus's account is to be believed. This writer asserts that the king had some thousand or more chariots, and twenty thousand horses. The drivers and riders were young men of comely aspect, tall and well-made; they had long flowing hair, and wore tunics of Tyrian purple, and powdered their hair with gold dust, which glittered in the rays of the sun ('Ant.,' viii. 7. 3). Attended by a cavalcade thus arrayed, Solomon used to betake himself to his "paradise" at Etham, to enjoy the refreshing coolness of its trees and pools. **Great and small cattle; oxen and sheep.** The enormous amount of Solomon's herds and flocks is proved by the extraordinary multitude of the sacrifices at the consecration of the temple (1 Kings viii. 63), and the lavish provision made daily for the wants of his table (1 Kings iv. 22, 23). The cattle of David were very numerous, and required special overlookers (1 Chron. xxvii. 29—31). Job (i. 3) had, before his troubles, seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen, and five hundred she-asses, and these items were all doubled at the return of his prosperity. Among Solomon's possessions, horses are not here mentioned, though they formed no inconsiderable portion of his live stock, and added greatly to his magnificence. Koheleth, perhaps, avoided boasting of this extravagance in consideration of the religious sentiment which was strongly opposed to such a feature. **That were in Jerusalem before me** (so ver. 9; see ch. i. 16). But the reference here may not necessarily be to kings, but to chieftains and rich men, who were celebrated for the extent of their possessions.

Ver. 8.—**I gathered me also silver and gold.** Much is said of the wealth of the historical Solomon, who had all his vessels of gold, armed his body-guard with golden shields, sat on an ivory throne overlaid with gold, received tribute and presents of gold from all quarters, sent his navies to distant lands to import precious metals, and made silver as common in Jerusalem as stones (see 1 Kings ix. 28; x. 14—27; 2 Chron. i. 15; ix. 20—27). The peculiar treasure of kings and of the provinces. The word rendered "the provinces" (*hammedinoth*), in spite of the article, seems to mean, not the twelve districts into

which Solomon divided his kingdom for fiscal and economical purposes (1 Kings iv. 7, etc.), but countries generally exterior to Palestine, with which he had commercial or political relations, and which sent to him the productions for which they were each most celebrated. So the districts of the Persian empire were required to furnish the monarch with a certain portion of their chief commodities. His friendship with Hiram of Tyre brought him into connection with the Phœnicians, the greatest commercial nation of antiquity, and through them he accumulated riches and stores from distant and various lands beyond the limits of the Mediterranean Sea. The word *מדינא* (*medinah*) occurs again in ch. v. 7 and in 1 Kings xx. 14, etc.; but is found elsewhere only in exilic or post-exilic books (e.g. Lam. i. 1; Esth. i. 1, etc.; Dan. ii. 48, etc.). The "kings" may be the tributary monarchs, such as those of Arabia (1 Kings iv. 21, 24; x. 15); or the expression in the text may imply simply such treasure as only kings, and not private persons, could possess. **Men-singers and women-singers.** These, of course, are not the choir of the temple, of which women formed no part, but musicians introduced at banquets and social festivals, to enhance the pleasures of the scene. They are mentioned in David's days (2 Sam. xix. 35) and later (see Isa. v. 12; Amos vi. 5; Eccclus. xxxv. 5; xlix. 1). The females who took part in these performances were generally of an abandoned class; hence the warning of Ben-Sira, "Use not much the company of a woman that is a singer, lest thou be taken with her attempts" (Eccclus. ix. 4). Such exhibitions were usually accompanied with dancing, the character of which in Eastern countries is well known. The Jews, as time went on, learned to tolerate many customs and practices, imported often from other lands, which tended to lower morality and self-respect. **And the delights of the sons of men;** the sensual pleasures that men enjoy. The expression is euphemistic (comp. Cant. vii. 6). **Musical instruments, and that of all sorts** (*shiddah veshiddoth*). The word (given here first in the singular number and then in the plural emphatically to express multitude) occurs nowhere else, and has, therefore, been subjected to various interpretations. The Septuagint gives, *οἰνοχοὶ καὶ οἰνοχόαι*, "a male cupbearer and female cupbearers;" and so the Syriac and Vulgate, *Scyphos et urceos in ministerio ad vina fundenda*—which introduces rather a bathos into the description. After the clause immediately preceding, one might expect mention of Solomon's numerous harem (1 Kings xi. 3; Cant. vi. 8), and most modern commentators consider the word to mean "concubine," the whole expression denoting multiplicity, "wife and wives." The

Authorized Version is not very probable, though somewhat supported by Kinchi, Luther, etc., and the Greek Venetian, which has, *σύνθημα καὶ συνθήματα*, a musical term signifying "combination of tones," or harmony. Other interpretations are "captives," "litters," "coaches," "baths," "treasures," "chests," "demons." Ewald, followed by Motais and others, suggests that the word implies a strong or high degree of a quality, so that, connecting the two clauses together, we should render, "And in a word, all the delights of the sons of men in abundance." This seems a more appropriate termination to the catalogue than any specification of further sources of pleasure; but there is no very strong etymological reason to recommend it; and we can hardly suppose that, in the enumeration of Solomon's prodigalities, his multitudinous seraglio would be omitted. Rather it comes in here naturally as the climax and completion of his pursuit of earthly delight.

Ver. 9.—**So I was great** (see on ch. i. 16). This refers to the magnificence and extent of his possessions and luxury, as the former passage to the surpassing excellence of his wisdom. We may compare the mention of Abraham (Gen. xvi. 13), "The man waxed great, and grew more and more until he became very great" (so Job i. 3). **Also my wisdom remained with me; perseveravit mecum** (Vulgate); *ἐσθλὴν μοι* (Septuagint). In accordance with the purpose mentioned in ver. 3, he retained command of himself, studying philosophically the effects and nature of the pleasures of which he partook, and keeping ever in view the object of his pursuit. Voluptuousness was not the end which he sought, but one of the means to obtain the end; and what he calls his wisdom is not pure Divine wisdom that comes from above, but an earthly prudence and self-restraint.

Ver. 10.—**Whatsoever mine eyes desired.** The lust of the eyes (1 John ii. 16), all that he saw and desired, he took measures to obtain. He denied himself no gratification, however foolish (ver. 3). **For my heart rejoiced in all my labour; i.e. found joy in what my labour procured for it** (comp. Prov. v. 18). This was the reason why he withheld not his heart from any joy; kept it, as it were, ready to taste any pleasure which his exertions might obtain. **This was my portion of all my labour.** Such joy was that which he won from his labour. He had his reward, such as it was (Matt. vi. 2; Luke xvi. 25). This term "portion" (*cheleg*) recurs often (e.g. ver. 21; ch. iii. 22; v. 18, etc.; so Wisd. ii. 9) in the sense of the result obtained by labour or conduct. And what a meagre and unsatisfying result it was which he gained! Contrast the apostle's teaching, "All that is in the world,

the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the vain-glory of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever" (1 John ii. 16, 17).

Ver. 11.—**Then I looked on—I turned to contemplate—all the works which my hands had wrought.** He examined carefully the effects of the conduct and proceedings mentioned in vers. 1-10, and he now gives his matured judgment concerning them. They had contributed nothing to his anxious inquiry for man's real good. His sorrowful conclusion again is that all was vanity, a hunting of wind; in all the pursuits and labours that men undertake there is no real profit (ch. i. 3), no lasting happiness, nothing to satisfy the cravings of the spirit.

Vers. 12-26.—Section 3. *Vanity of wisdom, in view of the fate that awaits the wise man equally with the fool, and the uncertainty of the future of his labours, especially as man is not master of his own fate.*

Ver. 12.—**And I turned myself to behold wisdom, and madness, and folly** (ch. i. 17). He studied the three in their mutual connection and relation, comparing them in their results and effects on man's nature and life, and deducing thence their real value. On one side he set wisdom, on the other the action, and habits which he rightly terms "madness and folly," and examined them calmly and critically. **For what can the man do that cometh after the king? even that which hath been already done.** Both the Authorized Version and Revised Version render the passage thus, though the latter, in the margin, gives two alternative renderings of the second clause, viz. *even him whom they made king long ago*, and, as in the Authorized Version margin, *in those things which have been already done*. The LXX., following a different reading, gives, "For what man is there who will follow after counsel in whatsoever things he employed it?" Vulgate, "What is man, said I, that he should be able to follow the King, his Maker?" Wright, Delitzsch, Nowack, etc., "For what is the man that is to come after the king whom they made so long ago?" i.e. who can have greater experience than Solomon made king in old time amid universal acclamation (1 Chron. xxix. 22)? or, who can hope to equal his fame?—which does not seem quite suitable, as it is the abnormal opportunities of investigation given by his unique position which would be the point of the query. The Authorized Version gives a fairly satisfactory (and grammatically unobjectionable) meaning—What can any one effect who tries

the same experiment as the king did? He could not do so under more favourable conditions, and will only repeat the same process and reach the same result. But the passage is obscure, and every interpretation has its own difficulty. If the *ki* with which the second portion of the passage begins ("for what," etc.) assigns the reason or motive of the first portion, shows what was the design of Koheleth in contrasting wisdom and folly, the rendering of the Authorized Version is not inappropriate. Many critics consider that Solomon is here speaking of his successor, asking what kind of man he will be who comes after him—the man whom some have already chosen? And certainly there is some ground for this interpretation in vers. 18, 19, where the complaint is that all the king's greatness and glory will be left to an unworthy successor. But this view requires the Solomonic authorship of the book, and makes him to refer to Rehoboam or some illegitimate usurper. The wording of the text is too general to admit of this explanation; nor does it exactly suit the immediate context, or duly connect the two clauses of the verse. It seems best to take the successor, not as one who comes to the kingdom, but as one who pursues similar investigations, repeats Koheleth's experiments.

Ver. 13.—Then (*and*) I saw that wisdom excelleth folly, as far as light excelleth darkness; or, *there is profit, advantage* (*μελίσσεια*, Septuagint, ch. i. 3) *to wisdom over folly, as the advantage of light over darkness*. This result, at any rate, was obtained—he learned that wisdom had a certain value, that it was as much superior to folly, in its effects on men, as light is more beneficial than darkness. It is a natural metaphor to represent spiritual and intellectual development as light, and mental and moral depravity as darkness (comp. Eph. v. 8; 1 Thess. v. 5).

Ver. 14.—The wise man's eyes are in his head; but the fool walketh in darkness. This clause is closely connected with the preceding verse, showing how wisdom excelleth folly. The wise man has the eyes of his heart or understanding enlightened (Eph. i. 18); he looks into the nature of things, fixes his regard on what is most important, sees where to go; while the fool's eyes are in the ends of the earth (Prov. xvii. 24); he walks on still in darkness, stumbling as he goes, knowing not whither his road shall take him. And I myself also (*Even I*) perceived that one event happeneth to them all. "Event" (*מִלְכָּה*); *συνάντημα* (Septuagint); *interitus* (Vulgate); not chance, but death, the final event. The word is translated "hap" in Ruth ii. 3, and "chance" in 1 Sam. vi. 9; but the connection here points to a definite termination; nor would it be

consistent with Koheleth's religion to refer this termination to fate or accident. With all his experience, he could only conclude that in one important aspect the observed superiority of wisdom to folly was illusory and vain. He saw with his own eyes, and needed no instructor to teach, that both wise and fool must succumb to death, the universal leveller. Horace, in many passages, sings of this: thus "Carm.," ii. 3. 21—

"Divesne prisco natus ab Inacho,
Nil interest, an pauper et infima
De gente sub divo moreris,
Victima nil miserantis Orcl."

(Comp. *ibid.*, i. 28. 15, etc.; ii. 14. 9, etc.) Plato ('Phædo,' lvii. p. 108, A) refers to a passage in 'Telephus,' a lost play of Æschylus, which is restored thus—

'Ἀπλὴ γὰρ οἶμος πάντας εἰς Ἀΐδου φέρει.

"A single path leads all unto the grave."

Ver. 15.—Then (*and*) said I in my heart (ch. i. 16), As it happeneth to the fool, so it happeneth even to me. He applies the general statement of ver. 14 to his own case. The end that overtakes the fool will ere long overtake him; and he proceeds, Why was I then more wise? "Then" (*כֵּן*), may be understood either logically, *i.e.* in this case, since such is the fate of wise and foolish; or temporally, at the hour of death regarded as past. He puts the question—To what end, with what design, has he been so excessively wise, or, as it may be, wise overmuch (ch. vii. 16)? His wisdom has, as it were, recoiled upon himself—it taught him much, but not content; it made him keen-sighted in seeing the emptiness of human things, but it satisfied not his cravings. Then I said in my heart, that this also is vanity. This similarity of fate for philosopher and fool makes life vain and worthless; or rather, the meaning may be, if the superiority of wisdom over folly conduces to no other end than this, that superiority is a vanity. The LXX. has glossed the passage, followed herein by the Syriac, "Moreover, I spake in my heart that indeed this is also vanity, because the fool speaks out of his abundance"—ver. 16 giving the substance of the fool's thoughts. Vulgate. *Locutusque cum mente mea, animadverti quod hoc quoque esset vanitas*. Our Hebrew text does not confirm this interpretation or addition.

Ver. 16.—For there is no remembrance of the wise more than of the fool for ever; Revised Version, more emphatically, *for of the wise man, even as of the fool, there is no remembrance for ever*. This, of course, is not absolutely true. There are men whose names are history, and will endure

as long as the world lasts; but speaking generally, oblivion is the portion of all; posterity soon forgets the wisdom of one and the folly of another. Where the belief in the future life was not a strong and animating motive, posthumous fame exercised a potent attraction for many minds. To be the founder of a long line of descendants, or to leave a record which should be fresh in the minds of future generations, these were objects of intense ambition, and valued as worthy of highest aspirations and best efforts. The words of classical poets will occur to our memory; e.g. Horace, 'Carm.,' iii. 30.

"Exegi monumentum ære perennius . . .
Non omnis moriar, multaue pars mei
Vitatit Libitinam."

Ovid, 'Amor,' i. 15. 4—

"Ergo etiam, cum me supremus adederit
ignis,
Vivam, parsque mei multa superstes
erit."

But Koheleth shows the vanity of all such hopes; they are based on grounds which experience proves to be unsubstantial. Though Solomon's own fame gives the lie to the statement received without limitation (comp. Wisd. viii. 13), yet his reflections might well have taken this turn, and the writer is quite justified in putting the thought into his mouth, as the king could not know how subsequent ages would regard his wisdom and attainments. Seeing that which now is in the days to come shall all be forgotten. The clause has been variously translated. Septuagint, "Forasmuch as the coming days, even all the things, are forgotten;" Vulgate, "And future times shall cover all things equally with oblivion." Modern editors give, "Since in the days that are to come they are all forgotten;" "As in time past, so in days to come, all will be forgotten;" "In the days which are coming [it will be said by-and-by], 'The whole of them are long ago forgotten.'" This is a specimen of the uncertainty of exact interpretation, where the intended meaning is well ascertained. "All" (הכל) may refer either to wise and foolish, or to the circumstances of their lives. And how dieth the wise man? as the fool. Better taken as one sentence, with an exclamation, *How doth the wise man die (even as) the fool!* (For "with" (im), equivalent to "as," comp. ch. vii. 11; Job ix. 26; Ps. cvi. 6.) "How" (הֵכָּה) is sarcastic, as Isa. xiv. 4, or sorrowful, as 2 Sam. i. 19. The same complaint falls from a psalmist's lips, "He seeth that wise men die; the fool and the brutish together

perish" (Ps. xlix. 10). So David laments the death of the murdered leader, "Should Abner die as a fool dieth?" (2 Sam. iii. 33). Plumptre considers that the author of the Book of Wisdom expands this view with the design of exposing its fallacy, and introducing a better hope (ch. ii. 1—9). But that writer would not have designated Solomon's sentiments as those of "the ungodly" (ἀσεβείς), nor foisted these utterances of sensualists and materialists upon so honoured a source. At the same time, it is only as being victims, *nisi miserantis Orci*, the prey of the pitiless and indiscriminating grave, that the wise and foolish are placed in the same category. There is the widest difference between the death-beds of the two, as the experience of any one who has watched them will testify, the one happy with the consciousness of duty done honestly, however imperfectly, and bright with the hope of immortality; the other darkened by vain regrets and shrinking despair, or listless in brutish insensibility.

Ver. 17.—Therefore I hated life; *et idcirco tædūit me vitæ meæ*. Be a man wise or foolish, his life leads only to one end and is soon forgotten; hence life itself is burdensome and hateful. The bitter complaint of Job (iii. 20, etc.; vi. 8, 9) is here echoed, though the words do not point to suicide as the solution of the riddle. It is the *ennui* and unprofitableness of all life and action in view of the inevitable conclusion, which is here lamented. *Because the work that is wrought under the sun is grievous unto me; literally, for evil unto me* (Ecl. iii. 9) *is the work which is done under the sun*. The toil and exertions of men pressed upon him like a burden too heavy for him to bear. Symmachus, *Κακόν μοι ἐφάνη τὸ ἔργον*; Septuagint, *Πονηρὸν ἐπ' ἐμὲ τὸ ποίημα*, κ.τ.λ. He repeats the expression, "under the sun," as if to show that he was regarding human labour only in its earthly aspect, undertaken and executed for temporal and selfish considerations alone. The apostle teaches a better lesson, and the worker who adopts his rule is saved from this crushing disappointment: "Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the recompense of the inheritance: ye serve the Lord Christ" (Col. iii. 23, 24). **For all is vanity.** He comes back to the same miserable refrain; it is all emptiness, striving after wind.

Ver. 18.—Such had been his general view of men's actions; he now brings the thought home to his own case, which makes his distress more poignant. **Yea (and), I hated all my labour which I had taken under the sun.** He is disgusted to reflect upon all the trouble he has taken in life, when he thinks of what will become of the productions of his genius

and the treasures which he has amassed. Because I should leave it (my labour, *i.e.* its results) unto the man that shall be after me. It is impossible that Solomon could thus have spoken of Rehoboam; and to suppose that he wrote thus after Jeroboam's attempt (1 Kings ii. 26, etc.), and in contemplation of a possible usurper, is not warranted by any historical statement, the absolute security of the succession being all along expected, and the growing discontent being perfectly unknown to, or contemptuously disregarded by, the king. The sentiment is general, and recurs more than once; *e.g.* ch. iv. 8; v. 14; vi. 2. Thus Horace, 'Epist.,' ii. 2. 175—

"Sic quia perpetuus nulli datur usus, et
heres
Heredem alterius velut unda supervenit
undam,
Quid vici prosunt aut horrea?"

Ver. 19.—Who knoweth whether he shall be a wise man or a fool? The bitter feeling that he has to leave the fruits of his lifelong labour to another is aggravated by the thought that he knows not the character of this successor, whether he will be worthy or not. As the psalmist says, "He heapeth up riches, and knoweth not who shall gather them" (Ps. xxxix. 6). Again in the parable, "The things which thou hast prepared, whose shall they be?" (Luke xii. 20; comp. Eccles. xi. 18, 19). Yet shall he have rule, etc. Whatever may be his character, he will have free use and control of all that I have gathered by my labour directed by prudence and wisdom. Vulgate, *Domabitur in laboribus meis quibus desudavi et sollicitus fui.*

Ver. 20.—Therefore I went about to cause my heart to despair; *Ἐπέστρεψα ἐγὼ* (Septuagint). "I turned" in order to examine more closely. So in ver. 12 we had, "I turned myself," though the verbs are not the same in the two passages, and in the former the LXX. has *ἐπέβλεψα*. I turned from my late course of action to give myself up to despair. I lost all hope in labour; it had no longer any charm or future for me. Septuagint, *Τοῦ ἀποτάξασθαι τὴν καρδίαν μου ἐν παντὶ μόχθῳ μου, κ.τ.λ.*

Ver. 21.—For there is a man whose labour is in wisdom. "In," *ἐν*, "with," directed and performed with wisdom. The author speaks of himself objectively, as St. Paul (2 Cor. xii. 2) says, "I know a man in Christ," etc. His complaint now is, not that his successor may misuse his inheritance (ver. 19), but that this person shall have that on which he has bestowed no skill or toil, shall enjoy what modern phraseology terms "unearned increment." This, which was set forth as one of the blessings of the promised land

(Deut. vi. 10, 11), Koheleth cannot bear to contemplate where it touches himself—not from envy or grudging, but from the feeling of dissatisfaction and want of energy which it generates. In (*with*) knowledge and in (*with*) equity. *Kishron*, translated "equity" in the Authorized Version; *ἀνδρεία*, "manliness," in the Septuagint; and *solicitudine* in the Vulgate, seems rather here to signify "skill" or "success." It occurs also in ch. iv. 4 and v. 10, and there only in the Old Testament.

Ver. 22.—What hath man of all his labour? *i.e.* what is to be the result to man? *Ἰστέται ἐν τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ*; (Septuagint); *Quid enim proderit homini?* (Vulgate). There is, indeed, the pleasure that accompanies the pursuit of objects, and the successful accomplishment of enterprise; but this is poor and unsubstantial and embittered. And of the vexation of his heart; the striving, the effort of his mind to direct his labour to great ends. What does all this produce? The answer intended is, "Nothing." This striving, with all its wisdom and knowledge and skill (ver. 21), is for the labourer fruitless.

Ver. 23.—All his days are sorrow, and his travail grief (comp. ch. v. 16, 17). These are the real results of his lifelong efforts. All his days are pains and sorrows, bring trouble with them, and all his labour ends in grief. "Sorrows" and "grief" are predicated respectively of "days" and "travail." Abstract nouns are often so used. Thus ch. x. 12, "The words of a wise man's mouth are grace." The free-thinkers in Wisd. ii. 1 complain that life is short and tedious (*λειτουργός*). Yea, his heart taketh not rest in the night. He cannot sleep for thinking over his plans and hopes and disappointments. Not for him is the sweet sleep of the labouring man, who does his day's work, earns his repose, and frets not about the future. On the one hand care, on the other satiety, murder sleep, and make the night a torment.

Vers. 24-26.—From what has been said, Koheleth concludes that man may indeed enjoy the good things which he has provided, and find a certain happiness therein, but only according to God's will and permission; and to expect to win pleasure at one's own caprice is vain.

Ver. 24.—There is nothing better for a man, than that he should eat and drink. The Vulgate makes the sentence interrogative, which the Hebrew does not sanction, *Nonne melius est comedere et bibere?* Septuagint, *Οὐκ ἔστιν ἀγαθὸν ἀνθρώπῳ δὲ φάγεται καὶ ἔπιεται*, "There is naught good to a man to eat or drink;" St. Jerome and others insert *nisi*, "except for a man to eat," etc.

This and the Authorized Version, which are more or less approved by most critics, make the writer enunciate a kind of modified Epicureanism, quotations in confirmation of which will be found set forth by Plumptre. It is not pretended that the present Hebrew text admits this exposition, and critics have agreed to modify the original in order to express the sense which they give to the passage. As it stands, the sentence runs, "It is not good in (2) man that he should eat," etc. This is supposed to clash with later statemisms; e.g. ch. iii. 12, 13; viii. 15; and to condemn all bodily pleasure even in its simplest form. Hence commentators insert ו ("than") before לֹא־כֵן, supposing that the initial *mem* has dropped out after the terminal of the preceding word, *adam* (comp. ch. iii. 22). This solution of a difficulty might be allowed were the Hebrew otherwise incapable of explanation without doing violence to the sentiments elsewhere expressed. But this is not the case. As Motais has seen, the great point lies in the preposition ו, and what is stated is that it does not depend on man, it is not in his power, he is not at liberty to eat and drink and enjoy himself simply at his own will; his power and ability proceed wholly from God. A higher authority than his decides the matter. The phrase, "to eat and drink," is merely a periphrasis for living in comfort, peace, and affluence. St. Gregory, who holds that here and in other places Koheleth seems to contradict himself, makes a remark which is of general application, "He who looks to the text, and does not acquaint himself with the sense of the Holy Word, is not so much furnishing himself with instruction as bewildering himself in uncertainty, in that the literal words sometimes contradict themselves; but whilst by their oppositeness they stand at variance with themselves, they direct the reader to a truth that is to be understood" ('Moral,' iv. 1). They who read Epicureanism into the text fall into the error here denounced. They take the expression, "eat and drink," in the narrowest sense of bodily pleasure, whereas it was by no means so confined in the mind of a Hebrew. To eat bread in the kingdom of God, to take a place at the heavenly banquet, represents the highest bliss of glorified man (Luke xiv. 15; Rev. xix. 9, etc.). In a lower degree it signifies earthly prosperity, as in Jer. xxii. 15, "Did not thy father eat and drink, and do judgment and justice? then it was well with him." So in our passage we find only the humiliating truth that man in himself is powerless to make his life happy or his labours successful. There is no Epicureanism, even in a modified form, in the Hebrew text as it has come down to us. With other supposed traces of this philosophy we shall

have to deal subsequently (see on ch. iii. 12; vi. 2). And that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labour; i.e. taste the enjoyment of his labour, get pleasure as the reward of all his exertions, or find it in the actual pursuit. This also I saw, that it was from the hand of God. This is the point—the power of enjoyment depends on the will of God. The next verse substantiates this assertion.

Ver. 25.—For who can eat, or who else can hasten hereunto, more than I? This is the translation of the received text. "Eat" means enjoy one's self, as in the preceding verse; "hasten hereunto" implies eager pursuit of pleasure; and Koheleth asks—Who had better opportunity than he for verifying the principle that all depends upon the gift of God? Vulgate, *Quis ita deorabit, et deliciis affluet ut ego?* The Septuagint had a different reading, which obtains also in the Syriac and Arabic versions, and has been adopted by many modern critics. Instead of וְאִי־יֵאָכֵל, they read וְאִי־יֵאָכֵל, "without him," i.e. except from God. "For who shall eat or who shall drink without him (πάρεξ αὐτοῦ)?" This merely repeats the thought of the last verse, in agreement with the saying of St. James (i. 17), "Every good gift and every perfect boon is from above, coming down from the Father of lights." But the received reading, if it admits the rendering of the Authorized Version (which is somewhat doubtful), stands in close connection with the personal remark just preceding, "This also I saw," etc., and is a more sensible confirmation thereof than a tautological observation can be. The next verse carries on the thought that substantial enjoyment is entirely the gift of God, and granted by him as the moral Governor of the world.

Ver. 26.—For God giveth to a man that is good in his sight. The subject "God" is not, in the Hebrew, an omission which is supposed to justify its virtual insertion in ver. 25. The Vulgate boldly supplies it here, *Homini bono in conspectu suo dedit Deus*. To the man that finds favour in God's sight (1 Sam. xxix. 6; Neh. ii. 5), i.e. who pleases him, he gives blessings, while he withholds them or takes them away from the man who displeases him. The blessings specified are wisdom, and knowledge, and joy. The only true wisdom which is not grief, the only true knowledge which is not sorrow (ch. i. 18), and the only joy in life, are the gifts of God to those whom he regards as good. But to the sinner he giveth travail, to gather and to heap up. The sinner takes great pains, expends continuous labour, that he may amass wealth, but it passes into other (more worthy) hands. Horace, 'Carm.,' ii. 14. 25—

"Absumet heres Cæcuba dignior
Servata centum olivibus."

The moral government of God is here recognized, as below, ch. iii. 15, 17, etc., and a further thought is added on the subject of retribution: That he may give to him that is good before God. This idea is found in Prov. xxviii. 8, "He that augmenteth his substance by usury and increase, gathereth it for him that hath pity upon the poor;" and ch. xiii. 22, "The wealth of the sinner is laid up for the righteous" (comp. Job xxvii. 16, 17). So in the parable of the talents, the talent of the unprofitable servant is given unto him who had made best use of his money (Matt. xxv. 28). This also is vanity. It is a question what is the reference here. Delitzsch considers it to be the striving after pleasure in and from labour

(ver. 24); Knobel, the arbitrary distribution of the good things of this life; but, put thus baldly, this could hardly be termed a "feeding on wind;" nor could that expression be applied to the "gifts of God" to which Bullock confines the reference. Wright, Hengstenberg, Grätz, and others deem that what is meant is the collecting and heaping up of riches by the sinner, which has already been decided to be vanity (vers. 11, 17, 18); and this would limit the general conclusion to a particular instance. Taking the view contained in ver. 24 as the central idea of the passage, we see that Kobschke feels that the restriction upon man's enjoyment of labour imposed by God's moral government makes that toil vain because its issue is not in men's hands, and it is a striving for or a feeding on wind because the result is unsatisfying and vanishes in the grasp.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1-11.—*The vanity of pleasure—an experiment in three stages.* I. THE WAY OF SENSUOUS ENJOYMENT. (Vers. 1, 2.) In this first stage Solomon, whether the real or the personated king, may be viewed as the representative of mankind in general, who, when they cast aside the teachings and restraints of religion, exclude from their minds the thought of a Divine Being, erase from their bosoms all convictions of duty, and refuse to look into the future, commonly addict themselves to pleasure, saying, "Enjoyment, be thou my god;" prescribing to themselves as the foremost task of their lives to minister to their own gratification, and adopting as their creed the well-known maxim, "Let us eat and drink; for to-morrow we die" (1 Cor. xv. 32). 1. *The investigation was vigorously conducted.* The Preacher was in earnest, not merely thinking in his heart, but addressing it, rather like the rich farmer in the parable (Luke xii. 19) than like the singer in the psalm (xvi. 2), and stirring it up as the brickmakers of Babel did one another: "Go to now!" (Gen. xi. 3, 4). That the investigation was so conducted by the real Solomon may be inferred from the preserved details of his history (1 Kings x. 5; xi. 1, 3); that it has often been so conducted since, not merely in fiction, as by Goethe's 'Faust,' but in actual life, as by 'Abelard and Heloise' in the eleventh century, admits of demonstration; that it is being at present so conducted by many whose principal aim in life is not to obey the soul's noblest impulses, but to hamper the body's lower appetite, is palpable without demonstration. 2. *The result has been clearly recorded.* The Preacher found the way of pleasure as little fitted to conduct to felicity as that of wisdom; discovered, in fact, that laughter occasioned by indulgence in sensual delights was only a species of insanity, a kind of delirious intoxication which stupefied the reason and overthrew the judgment, if it did not lead to self-destruction, and that no solid happiness ever came out of it, but only vanity and striving after wind. So has every one who has sought his chief good in such enjoyment found. They who live in pleasure are dead while they live (1 Tim. v. 6)—dead to all the soul's higher aspirations; are self-deceived (Titus iii. 3); and will in the end have a rude awakening, when they find that their short-lived pleasures (Heb. xi. 25) have only been nourishing them for slaughter (Jas. v. 5).

II. THE WAY OF BANQUETING AND REVELRY. (Ver. 3.) In this second stage of the experiment, neither Solomon nor the Preacher (if he was different) stood alone. The path on which the ancient investigator now depicts himself as entering had been and still is: 1. *Much travelled.* The number of those who abandon themselves to wine and wassail, drunkenness and dissipation, chambering and wantonness, may not be so great as that of those who join in the pursuit of pleasure, many of whom would disdain to partake of the intoxicating cup; but still it is sufficiently large to justify the epithet employed. 2. *Appallingly fatal.* Apart altogether from the rightness or the wrongness

of total abstinence, which the Preacher is not commending or even thinking of, this much is evident, that no one need hope to secure true happiness by surrendering himself without restraint to the appetite of intemperance. Nor is the issue different when the experiment is conducted with moderation, i.e. without losing one's self-control, or abandoning the search for wisdom. Solomon and the Preacher found that the result was, as before vanity, and a striving after wind. 3. *Perfectly avoidable*. One requires not to tread in this way in order to perceive whither it leads. One has only to observe the experiment, as others are unfortunately conducting it, to discern that its goal is not felicity.

III. THE WAY OF CULTURE AND REFINEMENT. (Vers. 4—11.) In the third stage of this experiment the picture is drawn from the experiences of Solomon—whether by Solomon himself or by the Preacher is immaterial, so far as didactic purposes are concerned. Solomon is introduced as telling his own story. 1. *His magnificence had been most resplendent*. (1) His works were great. He had prepared for himself buildings of architectural beauty, such as "the house of the forest of Lebanon, the pillared hall [porch], the hall of judgment, the palace intended for himself and the daughter of Pharaoh" (1 Kings vii. 1—12); he had strengthened his kingdom by the erection of such towns as Tadmor in the wilderness, the store-cities of Hamath and Baalath, with the two fortresses of Beth-horon the Upper and Beth-horon the Nether (2 Chron. viii. 3—6); he had planted vineyards, of which Baal-hamon, with its choicest wine, was one (Cant. viii. 11), and perhaps those of Engedi (Cant. i. 14) others; he had caused to be constructed, no doubt in connection with his palaces, gardens and orchards, with all kinds of fruit trees, and "pools of water to water therefrom the forest where trees were reared" (Cant. iv. 13; vi. 2). (2) His possessions were varied. In addition to those above mentioned, he had slaves, male and female, purchased with money (Gen. xxxvii. 28), and born in his house (Gen. xv. 3; xvii. 12), with great possessions of flocks and herds. The number of the former was so large as to excite the Queen of Sheba's astonishment (1 Kings x. 5), while the abundance of the latter was proved both by the daily provision for Solomon's household (1 Kings iv. 22, 23), and by the hecatombs sacrificed at the consecration of the temple (1 Kings viii. 63). (3) His wealth was enormous. Of silver and gold, and the peculiar treasure of the kings and of the provinces, he had amassed a heap. The ships of Hiram had fetched him from Ophir four hundred and twenty talents of gold (1 Kings ix. 28); the Queen of Sheba presented him with one hundred and twenty talents of gold (1 Kings x. 10); the weight of gold which came to him in one year was six hundred and sixty-six talents (1 Kings x. 14); while as for silver "the king made it to be in Jerusalem as stones" (1 Kings x. 27). "The peculiar treasure of kings and of the provinces" may either signify such rare and precious jewels as were prized by foreign sovereigns and states and presented to him as tribute; or describe Solomon's wealth as royal and public, in contradistinction from that of private citizens. (4) His pleasures were delicious. He had singing-men and singing-women to regale his jaded senses with music at court banquets, after the manner of Oriental sovereigns; while over and above he had "the delights of the sons of men," or "concubines very many"—"a love and loves" (Wright), "mistress and mistresses" (Delitzsch). Clearly Solomon had conducted the experiment of extracting happiness from worldly glory under the most favourable circumstances; hence special interest attaches to the result he obtained. What was it? 2. *His misery was most pronounced*. Although he had had every gratification that eye could desire, heart wish, or hand procure, he had found to his chagrin that true happiness eluded him like a phantom; that all was vanity and a striving after wind; that, in fact, there was no profit of a lasting kind to be derived from pleasure in its highest any more than in its lowest forms.

Learn: 1. The way of pleasure, however inviting, is not the way of safety or the way of peace. 2. While it cannot impart happiness to any, it may lead to everlasting misery and shame. 3. The pursuit of pleasure is not only incompatible with religion, but even at the best its sweets are not to be compared with religion's joys.

Vers. 12—16.—*Wisdom and folly*. I. *FOLLY AS GOOD AS WISDOM*. Three things seemed to proclaim this. 1. *The chances of life*. These appeared to be as favourable to the fool as to the wise man. The experiences of both were much alike; the lot of

each little different. "I perceived," said he, "that one event happeneth to them all" (ver. 14). "As it happeneth to the fool, so will it happen even to me; and why was I then more wise?" (ver. 15). This observation apparently had struck him with much force, as he refers to it more than once (ch. viii. 14; ix. 2). It was not an original observation, as long before Job had remarked upon the seeming indifference with which providential allotments were made to the righteous and the wicked (Job ix. 22; xxi. 7). Nevertheless, it was and is a true observation that, so far as purely external circumstances are concerned, it may be doubtful if the wise man fares better than the fool.

2. *The onrush of oblivion.* With pitiless maw this devours the wise and the fool alike (ver. 16). If the human heart craves after one thing more than another, it is an assurance that name and memory shall not quite perish from the earth when one himself is gone. Such as are indifferent to a personal immortality beyond the grave in a realm of heavenly felicity, are often found to be supremely desirous of this lesser immortality which men call posthumous fame. For this the Egyptian Pharaohs erected pyramids, temples, mausoleums; for this men strive to set themselves on pinnacles of power, fame, wealth, or wisdom before they die; yet the number of those who are remembered many weeks beyond the circle of their immediate friends is small. Even of the so-called great who have flourished upon the earth, how few are rescued from oblivion!

"Their memory and their name are gone,
Alike unknowing and unknown."

Who beyond a few scholars knows anything of the Pharaohs who built the pyramids, or of Assurbanipal, the patron of learning in Assyria, of Homer, of Socrates, or of Plato? If one thinks of it, the amount of remembrance accorded to almost all the leaders of mankind consists in this—that their names will be found in dictionaries.

3. *The descent of death.* The wise man might have derived consolation from the fact—had it been a fact—that though after death his fate would be hardly distinguishable from that of the fool, nevertheless before and at death, or in the manner of dying, there would be a wide distinction. But even this poor scrap of comfort is denied him, according to the Preacher. "How doth the wise man die? as the fool!" (ver. 16). To appearance, at least, it is so, because in reality a difference wide asunder as the poles separates the dying of "him who is driven away in his wickedness," and "him who has hope in his death" (Prov. xiv. 32). But contemplating death from the outside, as a purely natural phenomenon, it is the same exactly in the experience of the wise man as in that of the fool. In both the process culminates in the loosening of the silver cord and the breaking of the golden bowl (ch. xii. 6).

II. WISDOM SUPERIOR TO FOLLY. As light excelleth darkness, so wisdom excels folly. Three grounds of superiority. 1. *The path of wisdom a way of light; that of folly a way of darkness.* That the latter is essentially a way of darkness, and therefore of uncertainty, difficulty, and danger, had been declared by Solomon (Prov. ii. 13; iv. 19). The Preacher adds an explanation by likening the foolish man to a person walking backwards, or "with his eyes behind;" so that he knows neither whither he is going, nor at what he is stumbling, nor the peril into which he is advancing. Had the Preacher said nothing more than this, he would have been entitled to special thanks. Thousands live in the delusion that the way of pleasure, frivolity, dissipation, extravagance, prodigality, is the way of light, wisdom, safety, felicity—which it is not. The traveller who would journey in comfort and security must walk with his eyes to the front, considering the direction in which he moves, pondering the paths of his feet, and turning neither to the right hand nor to the left (Prov. iv. 25—27). In other words, the wise man's eyes must be in his head, exercising at once forethought, circumspection, and attention.

2. *The source of wisdom from above; that of folly from beneath.* As the light descends from the pure regions of the upper air, so this wisdom of which the Preacher speaks, like that to which Job (xxviii. 23), David (Ps. li. 6), Solomon (Prov. ii. 6), Daniel (ii. 23), Paul (1 Cor. i. 30), and James (i. 5; iii. 15) allude, comes from God (ver. 26). As the darkness may be said to spring from the earth, so folly has its birthplace in the heart. The individual that turns away from the light of wisdom presented to him in the moral intuitions of the heart, the revelations of Scripture, or the teachings of nature, by that act condemns his spirit to dwell

in darkness. 3. *The end of wisdom, safety; that of folly, destruction.* The light of wisdom illuminates the path of duty for the individual; the darkness of folly covers it with gloom. Specially true of heavenly wisdom as contrasted with wickedness and sin. Even with regard to ordinary wisdom, its superiority over folly is not to be denied. The wise man has at least the satisfaction of knowing whither he is going, and of realizing the unsatisfactory character of the course he is pursuing. It may not be a great advantage which the wise man has over the fool, that whereas the fool is a madman and knows it not, the wise man cannot follow after wisdom (in itself and for itself) without discovering that it is vanity; but still it is an advantage—an advantage like that which a man has who walks straight before him, with his eyes in his head and directed to the front, over him who either puts out his eyes, or blindfolds himself, or turns his eyes backward before he begins to travel.

LESSONS. 1. Get wisdom, especially the best. 2. Eschew folly, more particularly that which is irreligious. 3. Learn to discriminate between the two; much evil will thereby be avoided.

Vers. 17—26.—*The vanity of toil.* I. THE SECRET OF HAPPINESS LIES NOT IN BUSINESS. Granting that one applies himself to business, and succeeds through ability, perseverance, and skill in building up a fortune, if he looks for felicity either in his labour or in his riches, he will find himself mistaken. Three things are fatal to a man's chances of finding happiness in the riches that come from business success. 1. *Sorrow in the getting of them.* Toiling and molling, labouring and striving, drudging and slaving, planning and plotting, scheming and contriving, rising up early and lying down late, hurrying and worrying—by these means for the most part are fortunes built up. How expressive is the Preacher's language concerning the successful man of business, that "all his days are sorrows, and his travail is grief," or "all his days are pains, and trouble is his occupation," "yea, even in the night his heart taketh no rest" (ver. 23)! 2. *Sorrow in the keeping of them.* A constant anxiety besets the rich man, night and day, lest the riches he has amassed should suddenly take wings and flee away; by day looking out for safe investments, and by night wondering if his ventures will prove good, if the money he has painfully collected may not some day disappear and leave him in the lurch. And even should this not happen, how often is it seen that when a man has made his fortune, he finds there is nothing in it; that success has been too long in coming, and that now, when he has wealth, he wants the power to enjoy it (ver. 22; cf. ch. vi. 2); as the duke says to Claudio in the prison—

"And when thou art old and rich,
Thou hast neither heat, affection, limb, nor beauty,
To make thy riches pleasant."

('Measure for Measure,' act iii. sc. 1.)

3. *Sorrow in the parting with them.* The results of all his labour he must leave to the man who shall be after him, without knowing whether that successor shall be a wise man or a fool (vers. 18, 19; cf. ch. v. 15); and though this does not greatly trouble the Christian, who knows there is laid up for him a better and more enduring substance in heaven, yet for the worldly or insincerely religious man it is an agitating thought. Mazarin, the cardinal, and first minister of Louis XIV., was accustomed, as he walked through the galleries of his palace, to whisper to himself, "I must quit all this;" and Frederick William IV. of Prussia on one occasion, as he stood upon the Potsdam terrace, turned to Chevalier Bunsen beside him, and remarked, as they looked out together on the garden, "This too I must leave behind me" (see Plumptre, *in loco*).

II. BUSINESS MAY MINISTER TO MAN'S ENJOYMENT. The Preacher does not wish to teach that happiness lies beyond man's reach, but rather that it is attainable, if sought in the right way. He recognizes: 1. *That there is nothing wrong in seeking after happiness, or even earthly enjoyment.* He admits there is nothing better, more permissible or desirable, among men than that one "should eat and drink, and make his soul enjoy good in his labour" (ver. 24). He even allows that this is from the hand of God, which makes it plain that he is not now alluding to sinful indulgence of the bodily appetite, but speaking of that moderate enjoyment of the good things of life God has so richly provided for man's support and entertainment. It is not God's

wish, he says, that man should be debarred or should debar himself from all enjoyment. Rather it is his earnest desire that man should eat and drink and enjoy what has been furnished for his entertainment, should not make of himself an ascetic, under pretence of religion denying himself of lawful pleasures and gratifications, but should so use them as to contribute to his highest welfare. 2. *That no man can make a good use of life's provisions unless in connection with the thought of God.* "Who can eat or have enjoyment, apart from him [*i.e.* God]?" (Revised Version, margin). This corrective thought the Preacher lays before his readers, that while the world's good things cannot impart happiness by themselves and apart from God, they can if enjoyed in conjunction with him, *i.e.* if recognized as coming from him (1 Chron. xxix. 14; 1 Tim. vi. 17; Jas. i. 17), and used for his glory (1 Cor. x. 31). The last passages show that this was the New Testament ideal of life (1 Tim. iv. 4). 3. *That he who seeks happiness in this way will succeed.* "For God giveth to a man that is good in his sight [or, 'that pleaseth him'] wisdom, and knowledge, and joy" (ver. 26). So far from pronouncing felicity a dream, an unattainable good, a shadow without a substance, the Preacher believes that if a man will take God and religion with him into the world, and, remembering both the shortness of time and the certainty of a future life, will enjoy the world's good things in moderation and with thankfulness, he will derive therefrom, if not absolute and unmingled happiness, as near an approximation to it as man can expect to reach on-earth. God will graciously assist such a man to gather the best fruits of wisdom and knowledge, both human and Divine, and will inspire him with a joy the world can neither give nor take away (Job xxii. 21; Ps. xvi. 8, 9; cxii. 1, 7, 8; John xvi. 22). This, if not happiness, is at least a lot immensely superior to that God assigns to the sinner, *i.e.* to the man who excludes God, religion, and immortality from his life. The lot of such a man is often as the Preacher describes, to toil away in making money, to heap it up till it becomes a pile, and then to die and leave it to be scattered to the winds, enjoyed by he knows not whom, and not unfrequently by the good men he has despised (Job xxvii. 16, 17; Prov. xiii. 22; xxviii. 8).

LESSONS. 1. Be diligent in business (Rom. xii. 11). "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do," etc. (ch. ix. 10). 2. But be "servant in spirit, serving the Lord" (Rom. xii. 11). 3. Seek happiness in God himself rather than in his gifts (Ps. iv. 7; ix. 2; xl. 16; Luke i. 47; Phil. iii. 1).

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—11.—*The vanity of wealth, pleasure, and greatness.* There is certainly a strange reversal here of the order of experience which is usual and expected. Men, disappointed with earthly possessions and satiated with sensual pleasures, sometimes turn to the pursuit of some engrossing study, to the cultivation of intellectual tastes. But the case described in the text is different. Here we have a man, convinced by experience of the futility and disappointing character of scientific and literary pursuits, applying himself to the world, and seeking satisfaction in its pleasures and distractions. Such experience as is here described is possible only to one in a station of eminence; and if Solomon is depicted as disappointed with the result of his experiment, there is no great encouragement for others, less favourably situated, to hope for better results from similar endeavours.

I. THE WORLDLY MAN'S AIM. This is to learn what the human heart and life can derive from the gifts and enjoyments of this world. Man's nature is impulsive, acquisitive, yearning, aspiring. He is ever seeking satisfaction for his wants and desires. He turns now hither and now thither, seeking in every direction that which he never finds in anything earthly, in anything termed "real."

II. THE WORLDLY MAN'S MEANS TO THIS END. How shall satisfaction be found? The world presents itself in answer to this question, and invites its votary to acquisition and appropriation of its gifts. This passage in Ecclesiastes offers a remarkable and exhaustive catalogue of the emoluments and pleasures, the interests and occupations, with which the world pretends to satisfy the yearning spirit of man. There are enumerated: 1. Bodily pleasure, especially the pleasure of abundance of choice wine. 2. Feminine society. 3. Riches, consisting of silver and gold, of flocks and herds.

4. Great works, as palaces, parks, etc. 5. Household magnificence. 6. Treasures of art, and especially musical entertainments. 7. Study and wisdom, associated with all diversions and distractions of every kind. It seems scarcely credible that one man could be the possessor of so many means of enjoyment, and it is not to be wondered at that "Solomon in all his glory" should be mentioned as the most amazing example of this world's greatness and delights. It needed a many-sided nature to appreciate so vast a variety of possessions and occupations; the largeness of heart which is ascribed to the Hebrew monarch must have found abundant scope in the palaces of Jerusalem. It is instructive that Holy Writ, which presents so just a view of human nature, should record a position so exalted and opulent and a career so splendid as those of Solomon.

III. THE WORLDLY MAN'S FAILURE TO SECURE THE END BY THE USE OF THE MEANS DESCRIBED. 1. All such gratifications as are here enumerated are in themselves insufficient to satisfy man's spiritual nature. There is a disproportion between the soul of man and the pleasures of sense and the gifts of fortune. Even could the wealth and luxury, the delights and splendour, of an Oriental monarch be enjoyed, the result would not be the satisfaction expected. There would still be "the aching void the world can never fill." 2. It must also be remembered that, by a law of our constitution, even pleasure is not best obtained when consciously and deliberately sought. To seek pleasure is to miss it, whilst it often comes unsought in the path of ordinary duty. 3. When regarded as the supreme good, worldly possessions and enjoyments may hide God from the soul. They obscure the shining of the Divine countenance, as the clouds conceal the sun that shines behind them. The works of God's hand sometimes absorb the interest and attention which are due to their Creator; the bounty and beneficence of the Giver are sometimes lost sight of by those who partake of his gifts. 4. The good things of earth may legitimately be accepted and enjoyed when received as God's gifts, and held submissively and gratefully "with a light hand." 5. Earth's enjoyments may be a true blessing if, failing to satisfy the soul, they induce the soul to turn from them to God, in whose favour is life.—T.

Vers. 12—17.—*The comparison between wisdom and folly.* To the ordinary observer the contrast between men's condition and circumstances is more expressive than that between their character. The senses are attracted, the imagination is excited, by the spectacle of wealth side by side with squalid poverty, of grandeur and power side by side with obscurity and helplessness. But to the reflecting and reasonable there is far more interest and instruction in the distinction between the nature and life of the fool, impelled by his passions or by the influence of his associations, and the nature and life of the man who considers, deliberates, and judges, and, as becomes a rational being, acts in accordance with nature and well-weighed convictions. Very noble are the words which the poet puts into the lips of Philip van Artevelde—

"All my life long
Have I beheld with most respect the man
Who knew himself, and knew the ways before him;
And from amongst them chose deliberately,
And with clear foresight, not with blindfold courage;
And having chosen, with a steadfast mind
Pursued his purposes."

I. THE NATURAL CONTRAST BETWEEN WISDOM AND FOLLY. 1. The distinction is one founded in the very nature of things, and is similar to that which, in the physical world, exists between light and darkness. This is as much as to say that God himself is the All-wise, and that reasonable beings, in so far as they participate in his nature and character, are distinguished by true wisdom; whilst, on the other hand, departure from God is the same thing as abandonment to folly. 2. The distinction is brought out by the just exercise or the culpable misuse of human faculty. "The wise man's eyes are in his head," which is a proverbial and figurative way of saying that the wise man uses the powers of observation and judgment with which he is endowed. The position and the endowments of the organs of vision is a plain indication that they were intended to guide the steps; the man who looks before him will not miss his way

or fall into danger. Similarly, the faculties of the understanding and reason which are bestowed upon man are intended for the purpose of directing the voluntary actions, which, becoming habitual, constitute man's moral life. The wise man is he who not only possesses such powers, but makes a right use of them, and orders his way aright. The fool, on the contrary, "walketh in darkness;" i.e. he is as one who, having eyes, makes no use of them—shuts his eyes, or walks blindfold. The natural consequence is that he wanders from the path, and probably falls into perils and into destruction.

II. THE APPARENT EQUALITY OF THE LOT OF THE WISE MAN AND THAT OF THE FOOL. The writer of this Book of Ecclesiastes was impressed with the fact that in this world men do not meet with their deserts; that, if there is retribution, it is of a very incomplete character; that the fortune of men is not determined by their moral character. This is a mystery which has oppressed the minds of observant and reflecting men in every age, and has been to some the occasion of falling into scepticism and even atheism. 1. The wise man and the fool in many cases meet with the same fortune here upon earth: "One event happeneth to them all." Wisdom does not always meet with its reward in earthly prosperity, nor does folly always bring down upon the fool the penalty of poverty, suffering, and shame. A man may be ignorant, unthinking, and wicked; yet by the exercise of shrewdness and cunning he may advance himself. A wise man may be indifferent to worldly ends, and may neglect the means by which prosperity may be secured. Moral means secure moral ends; but there may be spiritual prosperity which is not crowned by worldly greatness and wealth. 2. The wise man and the fool are alike forgotten after death. "All shall be forgotten;" "There is no remembrance of the wise more than of the fool for ever." All men have some sensitiveness to the reputation which shall survive them; the writer of this book seems to have been particularly sensitive upon this point. He was impressed by the fact that no sooner has a wise and good man departed this life than straightway men proceed to forget him. A few years past, and the memory of the dead itself dies, and good and bad alike are forgotten by a generation interested only in its own affairs. A common oblivion overtakes us all. Such considerations led the author of this book into distress and disheartenment. He was tempted to hate life; it was grievous unto him, and all was vanity and vexation of spirit. A voice within, plausible and seductive, urges—Why trouble as to the moral principles by which you are guided? Whether you are wise or foolish, will it not soon be all the same? Nay, is it not all the same even now?

III. THE REAL SUPERIORITY OF WISDOM OVER FOLLY. If we were to look at some verses of this book only, we might infer that the author's mind was quite unhinged by the spectacle of human life; that he really doubted the superintendence of Divine providence; that he did not care to make a fight for truth, righteousness, and goodness. But although he had doubts and difficulties, though he passed through moods of a pessimistic character, it appears plain that when he came to state his deliberate and reasoned convictions, he showed himself to be a believer in God, and not in fate; in resolute and self-denying virtue, and not in self-indulgence and cynicism. In this passage are brought together facts which occasion most men perplexity, which bring some men into scepticism. Yet the deliberate conclusion to which the author comes is this: "I saw that wisdom excelleth folly." He had, as we all should have, a better and higher standard of judgment, and a better and higher law of conduct, than the phenomena of this world can supply. It is not by temporal and earthly results that we are to form our judgments upon morality and religion; we have a nobler and a truer standard, even our own reason and conscience, the voice of Heaven to which to listen, the candle of the Lord by which to guide our steps. Judged as God judges, judged by the Law and the Word of God, "wisdom excelleth folly." Let the wise and good man be afflicted in his body, let him be plunged into adversity, let him be deserted by his friends, let him be calumniated or forgotten; still he has chosen the better part, and need not envy the good fortune of the fool. Even the ancient Stoics maintained this. How much more the followers of Christ, who himself incurred the malice and derision of men; who was despised and rejected and crucified, but who, nevertheless, was approved and accepted of God the All-wise, and was exalted to everlasting dominion! "Wisdom is justified of her children." The wise man is not to be shaken either by the storms of adversity or by the taunts of the foolish. His is the right path, and his

will persevere in it; and he is not only sustained by the approbation of his conscience, he is satisfied with the fellowship of his Master, Christ.—T.

Vers. 18—23.—*Concern for posterity.* It is distinctive of man that he is a being that looks before and after; he cannot be satisfied to regard only the present; he investigates the former days, and the ancestry from which he has derived life and circumstances; he speculates as to the days to come, and “all the wonder yet to be.” It appeared to the “Preacher” of Jerusalem that too great solicitude regarding our posterity is an element in the “vanity” which is characteristic of this life.

I. IT IS NATURAL THAT MEN SHOULD ANTICIPATE THEIR POSTERITY WITH INTEREST AND SOLICITUDE. Family life is so natural to man that there is nothing strange in the anxiety which most men feel with regard to their children, and even their children's children. Men do not like the prospect of their posterity sinking in the social scale. Prosperous men find a pleasure and satisfaction in “founding a family,” in perpetuating their name, preserving their estates and possessions to their descendants, and in the prospect of being remembered with gratitude and pride by generations yet unborn. In the case of kings and nobles such sentiments and anticipations are especially powerful.

II. IT IS A MATTER OF FACT THAT IN MANY INSTANCES MEN'S ANTICIPATIONS REGARDING POSTERITY ARE DISAPPOINTED. The wide and accurate observations of the author of Ecclesiastes convinced him that such is the case. 1. The rich man's descendants scatter the wealth which he has accumulated by means of labour and self-denial. It need not be proved, for the fact is patent to all, that it is the same in this respect in our own days as it was in the Hebrew state. In fact, we have an English proverb, “One generation makes money; the second keeps it; the third spends it.” 2. The wise man's descendant proves to be a fool. Notwithstanding what has been maintained to be a law of “hereditary genius,” the fact is unquestionable that there are many instances in which the learned, the accomplished, the intellectually great, are succeeded by those bearing their name, but by no means inheriting their ability. And the contrast is one painful to witness, and humiliating to those to whose disadvantage it is drawn. 3. The descendants of the great in many instances fall into obscurity and contempt. History affords us many examples of such descent; tells of the posterity of the noble, titled, and powerful working with their hands for daily bread, etc.

III. THE PROSPECT OF AN UNFORTUNATE POSTERITY OFTEN DISTRESSES AND TROUBLES MEN, ESPECIALLY THE GREAT. The “wise man” knew what it was to brood over such a prospect as opened up to his foreseeing mind. He came to hate his labour, and to cause his heart to despair; all his days were sorrow, and his travail grief; his heart took not rest in the night; and life seemed only vanity to him. Why should I toil, and take heed, and care, and deny myself? is the question which many a man puts to himself in the sessions of silent thought. My children or my children's children may squander my riches, alienate my estates, sully my reputation; my work may be undone, and my fond hopes may be mocked. What is human life but hollowness, vanity, wind?

IV. THE TRUE CONSOLATION BENEATH THE PRESSURE OF SUCH FOREBODINGS. It is vain to attempt to comfort ourselves by denying facts or by cherishing unfounded and unreasonable hopes. What we have to do is to place all our confidence in a wise and gracious God, and to leave the future to his providential care; and at the same time to do our own duty, not concerning ourselves overmuch as to the conduct of others, of those who shall come after us. It is for us to “rest in the Lord,” who has not promised to order and overrule all things for our glory or happiness, but who will surely order and overrule them for the advancement of his kingdom and the honour of his Name.—T.

Ver. 24.—*All good is from God.* Revelation ever presents to man a standard of conduct equally removed from selfish gratification and from proud asceticism. It condemns the habit, too common with the prosperous and fortunate, of seeking all satisfaction in the pleasures and luxuries of the world, in the enjoyments of sense; and it at the same time condemns the tendency to despise the body and the things of time and sense, as if such independence of earth were of necessity the means to spiritual enrichment and blessing. On the one hand, we are invited to partake freely and gladly of

the gifts of Divine providence; on the other hand, we are admonished to receive all things as "from the hand of God."

I. GOD'S BOUNTY PROVIDES THE FAVOURS BY WHICH MAN'S EARTHLY LIFE IS ENRICHED. Food and drink are mentioned here as examples of the good gifts of the Eternal Father, who "openeth his hand, and supplieth the wants of every living thing." Manifold is the provision of the Divine beneficence. The whole material world is an apparatus by which the bounty of the Creator ministers to the wants of his creatures. And all God's gifts have a meaning and value beyond themselves; they reveal the Divine character, they symbolize the Divine goodness. To despise them is to despise the Giver.

II. GOD'S KINDNESS BESTOWS FACILITIES ADAPTED TO THE ENJOYMENT OF HIS GIFTS. The adaptation is obvious and instructive between the bounties of God's providence, and the bodily constitution in virtue of which man is able to appropriate and enjoy what God bestows. Food and drink presuppose the power to partake of them, and to use them for the continued life, health, and vigour of the body. The correspondence may be traced throughout the whole of our physical nature; between the eye and light, between hearing and sound, between the lungs and the atmosphere—in fact, between the organism and the environment.

III. GOD EXPECTS THAT WE SHOULD USE HIS GIFTS AS HE COMMANDS, AND FOR HIS GLORY. All Divine bestowments are a kind of test and trial for man, who does not of necessity follow appetite, but who can exercise his reason and his will in dealing with the circumstances of his being, with the provisions of God's bounty. All are susceptible of use and of abuse. The Preacher gives us the key to a right use of providential bounties, when he reminds us that all is "from the hand of God." The man who sees the Giver in the gift, who partakes with gratitude of that which is bestowed, recognizing its spiritual significance, and using it as the means to spiritual improvement,—such a man fulfils his probation aright, and does not live the earthly life in vain.

IV. UPON COMPLIANCE WITH OR NEGLECT OF THE DIVINE REQUIREMENT DEPENDS THE EFFECT OF GOD'S GIFTS UPON US, WHETHER THEY SHALL BE A BLESSING OR A CURSE. It would be very easy to read amiss the teaching of this Book of Ecclesiastes. Let a man read it when under the influence of a hedonistic and optimistic temper of mind, and he may be encouraged to abandon himself to the pleasures of life, to the joys of sense, to seek his welfare and satisfaction in what this world can give. Let a man read the book when passing through bitter experience of the ills and woes and disappointments of life, in a pessimistic mood, and he may be encouraged to dejection, despondency, and cynicism. But the true lesson of the book is this: Life is a Divine discipline, and its purpose should never be lost sight of; the gifts of Providence are intended for our enjoyment, our grateful appropriation, but not for the satisfaction of the spiritual nature; Divine wisdom summons us to the reverential service of the Eternal himself; we should then receive with joy what God bestows, and give up without undue mourning what God takes away, for all of life is "from the hand of God."—T.

Ver. 26.—*Retribution.* Here at length the Preacher propounds the doctrine of God's moral government, which in the earlier part of the book has been kept in abeyance. It is one thing to treat of human life, and another thing to treat of theology. The first may, and does to the thoughtful mind, suggest the second; but there are many who never take the step from the one to the other. The author of this book has recorded his experience, with such generalizations and obvious lessons as such experience naturally suggests; he has drawn such conclusions as an observant and reflecting student could scarcely avoid. But hitherto he has refrained from the province of faith, of insight, of revelation. Now, however, he boldly affirms the fact that the world is the scene of Divine retribution; that behind all natural law there is a law which is supernatural; that the Judge of all the earth doeth right.

I. GOD IS INTERESTED IN HUMAN CHARACTER AND LIFE. The ancient Epicurean notions that the gods were above all care for the concerns of men is not extinct; for many even now deem it derogatory to the Deity that he should be considered to interest himself either in the experiences or in the character of men. This passage in Ecclesiastes justly assumes that what men are and what they pass through are matters of real concern to the Creator and Lord of all.

II. GOD ALLOWS IN HUMAN LIFE SCOPE FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF MEN'S MORAL

CHARACTER. He endows man with a constitution properly supernatural, with capacities and faculties higher than those which are amenable to physical law. Interesting as is the necessary development of the universe under the control of natural forces, far more interesting is the unfolding of the moral character of men. This, indeed, is for us the most significant and momentous of all things that exist. Man is made not merely to enjoy or to suffer, but to form character, to acquire habits of virtue and piety; to become assimilated, in moral disposition and purpose, to the Divine Author of his being. To this end all circumstances may conduce; for experience shows us that there is no condition of human life, no range of human experience, which may not minister to spiritual improvement and welfare.

III. GOD IS THE RIGHTFUL RULER AND JUDGE OF MEN. All human relationships fail adequately to set forth the character and offices of the Eternal; yet many such relationships serve to afford us some glimpse into the excellences of him who is judicially and morally the Supreme. There is no incompatibility between the representation that God is a Father, and that which attributes to him the functions of a Judge. The human relationships are based upon the Divine, and it is unjust to regard the human as simply figures of the Divine. Having all power, God is able to apportion the lot of the creature; being infinitely righteous, such apportionment on his part must be beyond all criticism and censure. The life of man should be lived under a constant sense of the Divine observation and judgment; for thus the probationer of earth will secure the advantage of the loftiest standard of righteousness, and the motive to rectitude and to progress which the Divine government is fitted to supply. Distributive justice—to use the expression familiar in moral philosophy—is the function of the Supreme.

IV. GOD HIMSELF DETERMINES THE MEASURE IN WHICH RETRIBUTION SHALL BE CARRIED OUT IN THIS EARTHLY LIFE. The passage now under consideration lays stress upon the earthly reward and penalty, though it does not represent these as exhaustive and complete. "God giveth to a man that is good in his sight wisdom, and knowledge, and joy." This is something very different from what is termed "poetical justice;" these are gifts which are consistent with adversity and affliction. In fact, the lesson seems to be conveyed that moral goodness meets with moral recompense, as distinct from the doctrine of children's story-books, which teach that "virtue will be rewarded with a coach-and-six"! And the sinner is warned that he will receive the reward of his sin in travail, disappointment, and dissatisfaction. "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." A man must be blind who does not see in the constitution of human nature and human society the traces of a righteous Lawgiver and Administrator; and at the same time, the man must be short-sighted who does not detect indications of incompleteness in these judicial arrangements.

V. GOD GIVES US IN THE PARTIAL RETRIBUTION OF THE PRESENT A SUGGESTION OF A LIFE TO COME, IN WHICH HIS GOVERNMENT SHALL BE COMPLETED AND VINDICATED. That the convictions and expectations of the ancient Hebrews with regard to a future existence were as developed and decisive as those of Christians, none would contend. But this and other books afford indications that the enlightened Jews had an anticipation of judgment to come. If this world were all, vanity and vexation of spirit would have been the only impression produced by the experience and contemplation of human life. But it was seen, even if dimly, that this earthly state requires, in order to its completeness, an immortality which is the scene of Divine judgment and of human retribution.—T.

Vers. 1—11.—*The trial of pleasure.* We have to consider—

I. THE CONSTANT QUESTION OF THE HUMAN HEART. In what shall we find the good which will make our life precious to us? What is there that will meet the cravings of the human heart, and cover our whole life with the sunshine of success and of contentment?

II. A VERY NATURAL RESORT. We have recourse to some kind of excitement. It may be that which acts upon the senses (vers. 3, 8). Or it may be that which gratifies the mind; the sense of possession and of power (vers. 7—9). Or it may be found in agreeable and inviting activities (vers. 4—6).

III. ITS TEMPORARY SUCCESS. "My heart rejoiced" (ver. 10). It would be simply

false to contend that there is *no* delight, no satisfaction, in these sources of good. There is, for a while. There is a space during which they fill the heart as the wine fills the cup into which it is poured. The heart rejoices; it utters its joy in song; it declares itself to be completely happy. It "sits in the sun;" it rolls the sweet morsel between its teeth. It flatters itself that it has found its fortune, while the angels of God weep over its present folly and its coming doom.

IV. ITS ACTUAL AND UTTER INSUFFICIENCY. (Ver. 11.) Pleasure may be coarse and condemnable; it may go down to fleshly gratifications (vers. 3, 8); it may be refined and chaste, may expend itself in designs and executions; it may be moderated and regulated with the finest calculation, so as to have the largest measure spread over the longest possible period; it may "guide itself with wisdom" (ver. 3). But it will be a failure; it will break down; it will end in a dreary exclamation of "Vanity!" Three things condemn it as a solution of the great quest after human good. 1. *Experience*. This proves, always and everywhere, that the deliberate and systematic pursuit of pleasure fails to secure its end. Pleasure is not a harvest, to be sedulously sown and reaped; it is a plant that grows, unsought and uncultivated, all along the path of duty and of service. To seek it and to labour for it is to miss it. All human experience shows that it soon palls upon the taste, that it fades fast in the hands of its devotee; that there is no company of men so utterly weary and so wretched as the tired hunters after pleasurable excitement. 2. *Philosophy*. This teaches us that a being made for something so much higher than pleasure can never be satisfied with anything so low; surely we cannot expect that the heart which is capable of worship, of service, of holy love, of heroic consecration, of spiritual nobility, will be filled and satisfied with "the delights of the sons of men." 3. *Religion*. For this introduces the sovereign claims of the Supreme One; it places man in the presence of God; it shows a life of frivolity to be a life of culpable selfishness, of sin, of shame. It summons to a purer and a wiser search, to a worthier and a nobler course; it promises the *peace* which waits on rectitude; it offers the *joy* which only God can give, and which no man can take away.—C.

Vers. 12—14.—*Sagacity and stupidity*. The "wisdom" and the "folly" of the text are perhaps best represented by the words "sagacity" and "stupidity." The distinction is one of the head rather than of the heart; of the understanding rather than of the entire spirit. We are invited, therefore, to consider—

I. THE WORTH OF SAGACITY. 1. It stands much lower down than heavenly wisdom; *that* is the direct product of the Spirit of God, and makes men blessed with a good which cannot be taken away. It places them above the reach of adversity, and makes them invulnerable to the darts of death itself (see ver. 14). 2. It has its own distinct advantages. "The wise man's eyes are in his head;" he sees whither he is going; he does not delude himself with the idea that he can violate all the laws of his nature with impunity. He knows that the wages of sin is death, that if he sows to the flesh he will reap corruption; he understands that, if he would enjoy the esteem of men and the favour of God, he must subdue his spirit, control his passions, regulate his life according to the standards of truth and virtue. This sagacity of the wise will therefore (1) save him from some of the most egregious and fatal blunders; (2) keep him sufficiently near to the path of virtue to be saved from the darker excesses and more crushing sorrows of life; (3) secure for himself and his family some measure of comfort and respect, and place some of the purer pleasures within his reach; (4) keep him within hearing of the truth of God, where he is more likely to find his way into the kingdom of God.

II. THE PITIFULNESS OF STUPIDITY. "The fool walketh blindly." 1. He has no eye to see the fair and the beautiful around him, no heart to appreciate the nobility that might be within him or the glories that are above him. 2. He fails to discern the real wretchedness of his present condition—his destitution, his condemnation, his exile. 3. He does not shrink from the evil which impends. He is walking toward the precipice, below which is utter ruin, eternal death. Truly "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and to depart from evil, *that* is understanding."—C.

Vers. 18—24.—*The complaint of the successful*. The man who labours and who fails
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to acquire may be pitied, and if he finds his life to have a large measure of vanity he may be excused for complaining; but here is—

I. THE COMPLAINT OF THE SUCCESSFUL. The speaker (of the text) is made (or makes himself) miserable because he has gained much by the expenditure of time and strength, and he has to leave it behind him when he dies; he has to leave it to one who "has not laboured" (ver. 21), and possibly to a man who is not as wise as himself, but is "a fool" (ver. 19), and he may scatter or misuse it. And the thought of the insecurity of life, together with the certainty of leaving all behind to the man who comes after, whoever or whatever he may be, makes day and night wretched (ver. 23).

II. WHEREIN IT IS SOUND. It is quite right that a man should ask himself what will become of his acquisition. To be satisfied with present pleasure is ignoble; to be careless of what is coming after us—"Après moi le deluge"—is shamefully selfish. It becomes every man to consider what the *long* results of his labour will be, whether satisfactory or unfruitful.

III. WHEREIN IT IS UNSOUND. 1. There is nothing painful in the thought of parting with our treasure. We inherited much from those who went before us, and we may be well content to hand down all we have to those who come after us. We spent no labour on that which we inherited: why should we be aggrieved because our heirs will have spent none on what they take from us? 2. If we did not hoard our treasures, but distributed them while we lived, putting them into the hands of the wise; or if (again) we chose our heirs according to their spiritual rather than their fleshly affinities, we should be spared the misery of accumulating the substance which a fool will scatter. But let us look at a still better aspect of the subject.

IV. THE LEGACY AND THE HOPE OF THE WISE. 1. His best legacy. We may and we should so spend our time and our strength that what we leave behind us is not wealth that *can* be dissipated or stolen, but worth that cannot fail to bless—Divine truth lodged in many minds, good principles planted in many hearts, a pure and noble character built up in many souls. This is what no fool can divert or destroy; this is that which will live on, and multiply and bless, when we are far from all mortal scenes. Inmeasurably better is the legacy of holy influence than that of "uncertain riches;" the former must be a lasting blessing, the latter may be an incalculable curse. 2. His best and purest hope. What if the dying man feels that his grasp on earthly gain is about to be finally relaxed? is he not about to open his hand in a heavenly sphere, where the Divine Father will enrich him with a heavenly heritage, which will make all material treasures seem poor indeed?—C.

Ver. 24.—(See homily on ch. iii. 12, 13, 22.)—C.

Ver. 26.—*Piety and impiety; recompense and penalty.* We ask and answer the twofold question, viz. what is—

I. OUR EXPECTATION. We should certainly expect two things, judging antecedently. 1. That piety would be richly rewarded; for who would not expect that the bountiful, just, and resourceful Father would give liberally, in many ways, to those who sought his favour, and were "good in his sight"? 2. That impiety would bear plain marks of Divine disapproval; for who would suppose that men would defy their Maker, break his laws, injure his children, spoil his holy and benignant purpose, and *not* suffer marked and manifold evils as the just penalty of their presumption and their guilt? We naturally look for much happiness and prosperity for the former, much misery and defeat for the latter.

II. OUR EXPERIENCE. What do we find? 1. *That God does reward his servants.* The Preacher mentions three good gifts of his hand; they are not exhaustive, though they include or suggest much of the righteous man's heritage. (1) *Knowledge.* Most of all and best of all, the knowledge of *God* himself; and to know God is the very essence and substance of true human life. Beside this, the knowledge of man. It is, in truth, only the good man who understands human nature. Vice, iniquity, flatters itself that it has this knowledge. But it is mistaken; its conception of mankind is distorted, erroneous, fatally mistaken. It does not know what it is in man to be and to do and to become. "Only the good discern the good," and only they have a knowledge of our race which is profoundly true. (2) *Wisdom.* An enlightened conception

of human life, so that its beauty and its blessedness are appreciated and pursued, so that, on the other hand, its ugliness and its evil are recognized and shunned. The wisdom of the wise includes also that practical good sense which keeps its disciples from the mistakes and entanglements that lead to destitution, which also leads its possessors to heights of honour and well-being. (3) *Joy*. In the worship of Christ, in the service of man, in the culture of our own character, in walking along the path of sacred duty and holy usefulness, is abounding and abiding joy. 2. *That sin is visited with penalty*. Do we find that God giveth "to the sinner travail, to gather and to heap up"? We do. (1) Sin necessitates the worst of all bad labours—that of deliberately and persistently breaking down the walls of conscience, of breaking through the fences which the God of righteousness and love has put up to guard his children from moral evil. (2) Sin includes much hurtful and damaging struggle against the will and against the laws of the wise and good. Bad men have to encounter and to contest the opposition of the upright. (3) Sin frequently means low and degrading toil. The "sinner" is brought down so low that he is fain to "go into the fields to feed swine;" to do that from which he would once have indignantly recoiled. (4) Sin constantly condemns the toiler to labour on in utter discontent, if not positive wretchedness of soul. Life without the light of heavenly truth and the song of sacred service proves an intolerable burden.—C.

Vers. 1—3.—*An experiment: riotous mirth*. Solomon had found that wisdom and knowledge are not the means by which the search after happiness is brought to a successful issue. He then resolved to try if indulgence in sensual delights would yield any lasting satisfaction. This, as he saw, was a course on which many entered, who like him desired happiness, and he would discover for himself whether or not they were any nearer the goal than he was. And so he resolved to enjoy pleasure—"to give his heart to wine," and "to lay hold of folly." Like the rich man in the parable, who said to his soul, "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink and be merry," so did he address his heart, "Come, I will prove thee with mirth." He had tried wisdom, and found it fruitless for his purpose, and now would try folly. He lays aside the character and pursuits of a student, and enters the company of fools, to join in their revelry and mirth. The conviction that his learning was useless, either to satisfy his own cravings or to remedy the evils that exist in the world, made it easy for him to cast away, for a time at any rate, the intellectual employments in which he had engaged, and to live as others do who give themselves up to sensual pleasures. Wearied of the toil of thought, sickened of its illusions and of its fruitlessness, he would find tranquillity and health of mind in frivolous gaiety and mirth. This was not an attempt to stifle his cravings after the highest good, for he deliberately determined to analyze his experience at every point, in order to discover whether any permanent gain resulted from his search in this new quarter. "I sought," he says, "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." For the sake of others as well as for himself, he would try this pathway and see whither it would lead. But the experiment failed. In a very short time he discovered that vanity was here too. The laughter of fools was, as he says elsewhere (ch. vii. 6), like the crackling of burning thorns; the blaze lasted but for a moment, and the gloom that followed was but the deeper and more enduring. Where the fire of jovial revelry and boisterous mirth had been, there remained but cold, grey ashes. The mood of reckless enjoyment was followed by that of cynical satiety and bitter disappointment. He said of laughter, "It is mad," and of mirth, "What doeth it?" In his moments of calm reflection, when he communed with his own heart, he recognized the utter folly of his experiment, and felt that from his own dear-bought experience he could emphatically warn all in time to come against seeking satisfaction for the soul in sensual pleasures. Not in this way can the hunger and thirst with which the spirit of man is consumed be allayed. At most, a short period of oblivion can be secured, from which the awakening is all the more terrible. The sense of personal responsibility, the feeling that we are called to seek the highest good and are doomed to unrest and misery until we find it, the conviction that our failures only make ultimate success the more doubtful, is not to be

quenched by any such coarse anodyne. Various reasons may be found to explain why this kind of experiment failed and must fail.

I. In the *first* place, it consisted in AN ABUSE OF NATURAL FACULTIES AND APPETITES. Some measure of joy and pleasure is needed for health of mind and body. Innocent gaiety, enjoyment of the gifts God has bestowed upon us, reasonable satisfaction of the appetites implanted in us, have all a rightful place in our life. But over-indulgence in any one of them violates the harmony of our nature. They were never intended to rule us, but to be under our control and to minister to our happiness, and we cannot allow them to govern us without throwing our whole life into disorder.

II. In the *second* place, THE PLEASURE EXCITED IS ONLY TRANSITORY. From the very nature of things it cannot be kept up for any long time by mere effort of will; the brain grows weary and the bodily powers become exhausted. A jest-book is proverbially very tiresome reading. At first it may amuse, but the attention soon begins to flag, and after a little the most brilliant specimen of wit can scarcely evoke a smile. The drunkard and the glutton find that they can only carry the pleasures of the table up to a certain point; after that has been reached the bodily organism refuses to be still further stimulated.

III. In the *third* place, SUCH PLEASURE CAN ONLY BE GRATIFIED BY SELF-DEGRADATION. It is inconsistent with the full exercise of the intellectual faculties which distinguish man from the brute, and destructive of those higher and more spiritual faculties by which God is apprehended, served, and enjoyed. Self-indulgence in the gross pleasures of which we are speaking actually reduces man below the level of the beasts that perish, for they are preserved from such folly by the natural instincts with which they are endowed.

IV. In the *fourth* place, THE INEVITABLE RESULT OF SUCH AN EXPERIMENT IS A DEEPER AND MORE ENDURING GLOOM. Self-reproach, enfeeblement of mind and body, satiety and disgust, come on when the mad fit is past, and, what is still worse, the apprehension of evils yet to come—the knowledge that the passions excited and indulged will refuse to die down; that they have a life and power of their own, and will stimulate and almost compel their slave to enter again on the evil courses which he first tried of his own free will and with a light heart. The prospect before him is that of bondage to habits which he knows will yield him no lasting pleasure, and very little of the fleeting kind, and must involve the enfeeblement and destruction of all his powers. Mirth and laughter and wine did not banish Solomon's melancholy; but after the feverish excitement they produced had passed away, they left him in a deeper gloom than ever. "Like phosphorus on a dead man's face, he felt that it was all a trick, a lie; and like the laugh of a hyena among the tombs, he found that the worldling's frolic can never reanimate the joys which guilt has slain and buried." "I said of laughter, It is mad: and of mirth, What doeth it?" The well-known story of the melancholy patient being advised by a doctor to go and see Grimaldi, and answering, "I am Grimaldi," and that of George Fox being recommended by a minister whom he consulted to dispel the anxieties which his spiritual fears and doubts and aspirations had excited within him, by "drinking beer and dancing with the girls" (Carlyle, 'Sartor Resartus,' iii. 1), may be used to illustrate the teaching of our text. Some stanzas, too, of Byron's last poem give a pathetic expression to the feelings of satiety and disappointment which are the retribution of sensuality—

"My days are in the yellow leaf;
The flowers and fruits of love are gone;
The worm, the canker, and the grief
Are mine alone!

"The fire that on my bosom preys
Is lone as some volcanic isle;
No torch is kindled at its blaze—
A funeral pile.

"The hope, the fear, the jealous care,
The exalted portion of the pain
And power of love I cannot share,
But wear the chain."

Vers. 4—11.—*Another experiment: refined voluptuousness.* Riotous mirth having failed miserably to give him the settled happiness after which he sought, our author records another and more promising experiment which he made, the search for happiness in a life of culture—"the pursuit of beauty and magnificence in art." More promising it was, because it brought into play higher and purer emotions than those to which ordinary sensuality appeals; it cultivated the side of the nature which adjoins, and almost merges into, the spiritual. The Law of Moses, forbidding as it did the making of images or representations of natural objects or of living creatures for purposes of worship, had prevented much advance being made in sculpture and painting; but there were still extensive fields of artistic development left for cultivation. Architecture and gardening afforded abundant scope for the exhibition and gratification of a refined taste. And so Solomon built splendid palaces, and planted vineyards, and laid out parks and gardens, and filled them with the choicest fruit trees, and dug pools for the irrigation of his plantations in the time of summer drought. Nothing was omitted that could minister to his sense of the beautiful, or that could enhance his splendour and dignity. A large household, great flocks of cattle, heaps of silver and gold, precious treasures from distant lands, the pleasures of music and of the harem are all enumerated as being procured by his wealth and power, and employed for his gratification. All that the eye could rest on with delight, all that the heart could desire, was brought within his reach. And all the time wisdom was with him, guiding him in the pursuit of pleasure, and not abandoning him in the enjoyment of it. Nothing occurred to prevent the experiment being carried through to the very end. The delights he enumerates were in themselves lawful, and therefore were indulged in without any uneasy sensation of transgressing against the Law of God or the dictates of conscience. Nay, the very fact that he had a moral end in view when he began the experiment seemed to give a high sanction to it. He was not interrupted by the intrusion of other thoughts and cares. No foreign enemy disturbed his peace; sickness did not incapacitate him; his wealth was not exhausted by the large demands made upon it for the support of his magnificence and luxury. And so he went to the utmost bounds of refined enjoyment, and found much that for a time amply rewarded him for the efforts he put forth. "My heart," he says, "rejoiced in all my labour" (ver. 10). His busy mind was kept occupied; his senses were charmed by the beauty and richness of the treasures he had gathered together, and of the great works which gave such abundant evidence of his taste and wealth. His experiment was not quite fruitless, therefore. Present gratification he found in the course of his labours; but when they were completed, the pleasure they had yielded passed away. The charm of novelty was gone. Possession did not yield the joy and delight which acquisition had done. When the palaces were finished, the gardens planted, the gems and rarities accumulated, the luxurious household established, and nothing left to do but to rest in the happiness that those things had been expected to secure, the sense of defeat and disappointment again fell upon the king. "Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do: and, behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun." He does not try to explain the cause of his failure, but simply records the fact that he did fail. "He does not moralize, still less preach; he just paints the picture of his soul's sad wanderings, of the baffled effort of a human heart, and passes on." But we may find it highly profitable to inquire what were the causes why the life of culture—which, without harshness, may be called a refined voluptuousness—fails to give satisfaction to the human soul.

I. In the *first* place, IT IS A LIFE OF ISOLATION FROM GOD. As Solomon represents the course he followed, we see that the thought of God was excluded from his mind. The Divine gifts were enjoyed, the love of the beautiful which is implanted in the soul of man was gratified, every exquisite sensation of which we are capable was indulged, but the one thing needed to sanctify the happiness obtained and render it perfect was omitted. "God," says St. Augustine, "has made us for himself, and we cannot rest until we rest in him." Emotions of gratitude, adoration, humility, and self-consecration to His service cannot be suppressed without great loss—the loss even of that security and tranquillity of spirit which are essential to true happiness. All the resources upon which Solomon drew may furnish helps to happiness, but none of them, nor all of them together, could, apart from God, secure it. Compare with the failure

of Solomon the success of those who have often, in circumstances of extreme discomfort and suffering, enjoyed the peace of God that passeth all understanding. The sixty-third psalm, written by David in the time of exile and hardship, illustrates the truth that in communion with God the soul enjoys a happiness which cannot be found elsewhere. "A man's life does not consist in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." Apart from the favour of God and the service of God, the richest possessions and the most skilful employment of them can secure no lasting satisfaction. For we are so constituted as creatures that our life is not complete if we are dissevered from our Creator.

II. In the *second* place, IT IS A SELFISH LIFE. All that Solomon describes are his efforts to secure certain durable results for himself; to indulge his love for the beautiful in nature and art, and to surround himself with luxury and splendour. He would have been more successful in his search for happiness if he had endeavoured to relieve the wants of others—to clothe the naked, to feed the hungry, to comfort the afflicted, and to instruct the ignorant. Self-denial and self-sacrifice for the sake of others would have brought him nearer the goal of his desire. The penalty of his selfish pursuit fell heavily upon him. He could not live at a height above mankind, in the enjoyment of his own felicity, for long; "the riddle of the painful earth" filled him with thoughts of self-loathing and despair, which shattered all his happiness. Do what he might, old age, disease, and death were foes he could not conquer, and all about him in human society he could discern moral evils and inequalities which he could not set right nor even explain. Such selfish isolation as that into which for a time he had withdrawn himself failed to secure the object he had in view, for he could not really dis sever his lot from that of his fellows, or escape the evils which afflicted them. The idea of a life of luxurious ease, undisturbed by the sight or thought of the miseries and hardships of life, was a vain dream, from which he soon awoke. In his poem, 'The Palace of Art,' Tennyson has given a most luminous and suggestive commentary upon this portion of the Book of Ecclesiastes. In it he represents the soul as seeking forgiveness for the sin of selfish isolation by penitence, prayer, and self-renunciation, and as anticipating a resumption of all the joys of culture and art in companionship with others. In communion with God, in fellowship with others, all things that are noble and pure and lovely are taken into holy keeping, and form a lasting source of joy and happiness.—J. W.

Vers. 12—17.—*The value and the futility of wisdom.* Solomon had now made many experiments to try and discover something that was good in itself, that was an end for which one might labour, a goal for which one might make, a resting-place for the soul. The acquisition of knowledge had first of all attracted him, but after a long course of study, in which he traversed the whole field of learning and reached the limits of human thought, the futility of his labours dawned upon him. Then he turned to sensual enjoyments, and gave himself up to them for a time, with the deliberate purpose of seeking to discover if there were in this quarter any permanent gain; if it were possible so to prolong the pleasures of life as to silence, if not to satisfy, the cravings of the soul. The experiment was but a short one; he soon found out that pleasure is short-lived, and that mirth and laughter are followed by weariness and melancholy. His resources were not, however, yet exhausted. A new course was open to him, and one which his richly endowed nature qualified him for trying, and his kingly power and wealth laid open to him. This was the cultivation of those arts by which human life is beautified; the gratification of those tastes that distinguish man from the lower creatures, and that have something in them that is noble and pure. He built stately palaces, planted gardens and forests; he surrounded himself with all the luxury and pageantry of an Oriental court; he accumulated treasures such as kings only could afford to procure; music and song, and whatever could delight a refined taste, and a love of the beautiful were sedulously cultivated. But all in vain; æstheticism proved as fruitless as the pursuit of knowledge, or the indulgence of the coarser appetites, to give rest to the soul. And now in sober meditation he reviewed all his experience; having come to the end of his resources, he inquires into actual results attained, and pronounces upon them. First of all, he is convinced that he has given a fair trial to all the various means by which men seek

for the highest good. He had failed to find that satisfaction, but it was not because he had been ill equipped for carrying on the search. No one that came after him (ver. 12) could surpass him by a more complete and thorough investigation. God had given him "a wise and understanding heart," and had endowed him with wealth and power; and in both particulars he excelled all his fellows. Accordingly, he has no hesitation in laying down great general principles drawn from careful observation of the phenomena of human life.

I. THE GREAT ADVANTAGE WHICH WISDOM HAS OVER FOLLY. The wise man walks in light, and has the use of his eyes; the fool is blind, and walks in darkness. The wisdom here praised is not that holy, spiritual faculty which springs from the fear of God and obedience to his will (Job xxviii. 28; Deut iv. 6; Ps. cxi. 10), and which is so strikingly personified, almost deified, in the Book of Proverbs and in that of Job (Prov. viii., ix.; Job xxviii. 12—28); but is ordinary science, knowledge of the laws of nature, and of the powers and limitations of human life. This wisdom can only be acquired by long and painful labour, and though by it we cannot discover God or find out the way of winning and retaining his favour, or provide for the wants of the soul, it has, in its sphere, high value. It gives some pleasure; it affords some guidance and direction to its possessor. It enables him to acquire some good; it teaches him to avoid some evils. Progress in civilization is only possible by the cultivation of this wisdom. Wider acquaintance with the laws of health, for example, has enabled men to stamp out certain forms of disease, or, at any rate, to prevent their frequent recurrence, and to alleviate the sufferings caused by others. Consider the immense benefit to the race the progress of medical science has secured. The inventions that we owe to the cultivation of natural knowledge are beyond number, and by them incalculable benefits have been brought within our reach—better cultivation of the soil, less exhausting labour, discovery of the uses of the metals stored up in the bowels of the earth, more rapid distribution of the productions of nature and of human industry, swifter means of communication between one part of the world and another. "The improvement of natural knowledge," says a great authority, "whatever direction it has taken, and however low the aims of those who may have commenced it, has not only conferred practical benefits on men, but in so doing has effected a revolution in their conceptions of the universe and of themselves, and has profoundly altered their modes of thinking and their views of right and wrong" (Huxley, 'Lay Sermons'). Does not this amply justify Solomon's assertion that "wisdom excels folly, as light darkness; that the wise man hath the use of his eyes, the fool is blind"?

II. THE FUTILITY OF WISDOM. All the delight in the charms of wisdom is quenched by the thought of the levelling power of death, which overwhelms both the wise and the foolish indiscriminately (vers. 14b—17). For a brief space there is a distinction between them—the one endowed with priceless gifts, the other ignorant and poor. But what, after all, was the use of the short-lived superiority? Like an extinguished torch, the wisdom of the sage is blown out by death, and the very memory of his attainments and triumphs is buried in oblivion. For a time, perhaps, he is missed, but the gap is soon filled up, the busy world goes on its way, and in a very short time it forgets all about him. Thus even the posthumous fame, after which the purest and noblest minds have longed, to secure which they have been content to endure poverty, hardship, and neglect in their lifetime, is denied to the vast majority, even of those who have richly deserved it. There were wise men before Solomon (1 Kings iv. 31), but no memorial survives of them but their names; no illustrations of their wisdom are given to explain their reputation. And how faint is the impression which the wisdom of Solomon himself makes upon the actual life of the present world! Enshrined though it is in the sacred volume, it seems foreign to our modes of thought; its voice is not heard in our schools of philosophy. The fact of death is a certainty both to the wise and to the fool; the manner of it may be similar; the doubts and fears and anxieties concerning the life to come may perplex both. What can we suggest to relieve the sad picture, or to counteract the paralyzing effect which the spectacle of the futility of wisdom and effort is calculated to produce? The conviction that this life is not all, that there is a life beyond the grave, is the great corrective to the gloom in which otherwise every thinking mind would be enwrapped. This present life is a state of infancy, of probation, in which we receive education for eternity. And to ask in melancholy

tones what is the use of acquiring wisdom if death is so soon to cut short our career here, is as foolish as to ask what is the use of a sapling growing vigorously in a nursery garden if it is to be afterwards transplanted. The place from which it was taken may soon know it no more. But the loss is slight; the tree itself lives and flourishes still under the eye and care of the almighty Husbandman. No fruitless regrets over the brevity and uncertainty of human fame need interfere with present effort. We may soon be forgotten on earth, but no attainments in wisdom or holiness we have made will have been in vain; they will have qualified us for a higher service and a truer enjoyment of God than we could otherwise have known.—J. W.

Vers. 18—23.—*Riches, though obtained by much toil, are vanity.* The thought of death, which sweeps away the wise man as well as the fool, and of the eternal oblivion which swallows up the memory of them both, was very depressing; but a new cause for deeper dejection of spirit is found in the reflection that the man who has toiled in the accumulation of wealth must leave it all to another, of whom he knows nothing, and who will perhaps dissipate it in a very brief time.

I. The *first* mortifying thought is—HE BUT GATHERS FOR A SUCCESSOR. (Ver. 18.) He himself, when the moment of death comes, must leave his possessions and depart into the world of shadows as naked as he was when he entered upon life. The fact that such a reflection should be bitter proves how deeply the soul is corroded by covetous and selfish aggrandizement. The heart is absorbed in the things of the present, and the anticipation of heavenly and spiritual joys grows faint and dies away. To be torn from the wealth and possessions acquired upon earth is regarded as losing everything; to be forced to leave them to another, even to a son, is almost as bad as being plundered of them by a thief. This feeling of bitter regret at having to give up all they possess at the call of death, has often been experienced by those who have found their chief occupation and happiness in life in the acquisition of earthly treasures. "Mazarin walks through the galleries of his palace and says to himself, 'Il faut quitter tout cela.' Frederick William IV. of Prussia turns to his friend Bunsen, as they stand on the terrace at Potsdam, and says as they look out on the garden, 'Das auch, das soll ich lassen' ('This too I must leave behind me')." (Plumptre).

II. The *second* mortifying thought is—THAT IT IS QUITE UNCERTAIN WHAT CHARACTER THE SUCCESSOR WILL BE OF, AND WHAT USE HE WILL MAKE OF HIS INHERITANCE. (Ver. 19.) He may be a wise man, or he may be a fool; he may make a prudent use of his inheritance, or he may in a very short time scatter it to the winds. The very change in his circumstances, the novelty of his new situation, may turn his head and lead him into courses of folly which otherwise he might have avoided. Some have thought that the character of the youthful Rehoboam was already so far developed as to suggest this mortifying reflection to Solomon. But this is quite conjectural. The early career of the headstrong, arrogant sovereign whose folly broke up the kingdom of Israel is an illustration of the truth of this general statement, and may have been in the thoughts of the writer, if he were not Solomon but some later sage. The special reference to this one historical example of an inheritance dissipated by an unworthy son need not be pressed. For, unfortunately, in every generation there are only too many instances of a like kind. So frequent are they, indeed, as to suggest very humiliating reflections to every one who has spent his life in acquiring riches or collecting treasures of art. As he sees fortunes squandered and collections of rarities broken up, the thought must recur to his mind whose are to be the things which he has treasured up so carefully (Ps. xxxix. 6; Luke xii. 20).

III. The *third* mortifying thought is—THAT THE CHARACTER OF THE SUCCESSOR MAY NOT BE A MATTER OF DOUBT; he may be a man of a positively foolish and vicious disposition (ver. 21). The case presents itself of a man who has laboured in wisdom and knowledge and equity having to leave to another who is devoid of these virtues, who has never sought to acquire them, all that his prudence and diligence have enabled him to acquire. There is thus a climax in the thoughts of the writer. First of all, there is some matter for irritation, especially to a selfish mind, in the idea of giving up to another what one has spent years of laborious toil in gathering together. Then there is the torturing doubt as to the possible character of the new owner, and the use he will make of what is left to him. But worst of all is the conviction that he is both foolish and

vicious. This is enough to poison all present enjoyment, and to paralyze all further effort. Why should a man spend laborious days and sleepless nights, if this is to be the end of it all? What has he left to show for all his exertions? What but weariness and exhaustion, and the bitter reflection that all has been in vain? Yet a little time after he has been forced by death to part with his possessions, and they will be made to minister to the frivolity and vice of one who has never laboured for them, and ultimately will be scattered like chaff before the wind. Thus a final discovery of the vanity of all earthly employments is made. The acquisition of wisdom and knowledge, the gratification of the pleasures of sense, the cultivation and indulgence of artistic tastes, had all been tried as possible avenues to lasting happiness, and tried in vain. To these must now be added the accumulation by prudent and lawful means, of great wealth. This, too, was discovered to be vanity. It could only be accomplished by years of toil, and brought with it fresh cares; and in the end all that had been gained must be given up to another. Mortifying though the experiments had turned out to be, they had at least been of negative value. Though they had not revealed where happiness was to be found, they had revealed where it was not to be found. The last disappointment, the discovery of the vanity of riches, taught the great truth which might become a clue to lead to the much-desired happiness, that "a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth" (Luke xii. 15).—J. W.

Vers. 24—26.—*The condition of pure enjoyment.* Up to this point the thoughts of our author have been gloomy and despairing. Wisdom is better, he declares, than folly, but death sweeps away both the wise and the foolish. The learning of the sage, the fortune accumulated by the successful worker, represent the labours of a lifetime; but at the end, what are they worth? The results are twofold, partly internal and partly external. The student or worker acquires skill in the use of his faculties, he develops his strength, he becomes, as his life goes on, more proficient in his profession or craft; but death quenches all these attainments. He leaves to those who are perhaps unworthy of them all the external results of his labours, and perhaps in a very little time it will be difficult to find anything to remind one of him. We who have the light of Christian truth may have much to console us and give us strength, even when we are brought face to face with the dark and dreary facts upon which our author dwells. We may think of this life as a preparation for a new and higher existence in the world to come, and believe that every effort we make to use rightly the faculties God has given us will tend to equip us better for service of him in another state of being. But to our author's mind the thought of a future life is not vivid enough to be the source of consolation and strength. What then? Does he find no escape from the gloomy labyrinth of withering doubt, and decide that happiness is a boon for which one may sigh in vain? No; strangely enough, at the very moment when the depression is deepest, light breaks upon him from an unexpected quarter. Simple joys, moderate hopes, contentment with one's lot, thankful acceptance of the gifts of God, may yield a peace and satisfaction unknown to those who are consumed by ambition, who make riches, state, luxury, the object of their desires. The darkness of night will soon close upon our lives, our tenure of our possessions is precarious in the extreme, but some measure of joy is within the reach of us all. In few but suggestive words the Preacher describes—

I. THE NATURE OF A HAPPY LIFE. (Ver. 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 labour." At first one might think the judgment here expressed somewhat poor and gross, and unworthy of the reputation of the wise king to whom it is ascribed, not to say of the Word of God in which we find it. But when we look more closely into it, these impressions disappear. It is not an idle, useless life of self-enjoyment that is here commended to us, but one in which useful labour is seasoned by healthy pleasures. The man eats and drinks, and makes his soul enjoy good in his labour. The enjoyment is not such as to waste and exhaust the energies of the soul, otherwise it would be very short-lived. The risk of abusing the counsel in the first part of the sentence is avoided by attending to the safeguard implied in the concluding words. It is not the decision of the sensualist, "Let us eat and drink; for to-morrow we die" (1 Cor. xv. 32), but

the admonition of one who perceives that a thankful participation of the good things of life is compatible with the sincerest piety. Eating and drinking mean satisfying the natural appetites, and not ministering to artificial and self-created cravings; and over-indulgence in so doing is tacitly forbidden. The words suggest to us the simple healthy life and habits of the industrious peasant or workman, who takes pleasure in his daily employment, and finds in the innocent joys which sweeten his lot a happiness which mere wealth cannot buy.

“The shepherd’s homely curds,
His cold thin drink out of his leather bottle,
His wonted sleep under a fresh tree’s shade,
All which secure and sweetly he enjoys,
Is far beyond a prince’s delicates,
His viands sparkling in a golden cup,
His body couched in a curious bed,
When care, mistrust, and treason wait on him.”

(‘Henry VI.,’ Part III., act ii. sc. 5.)

II. In the *second* place, our author tells us THE SOURCE OF THIS HAPPINESS—IT IS THE GIFT OF GOD. (Ver. 24b.) “This also I saw, that it was from the hand of God. For who can eat or who can have enjoyment apart from him?” (Revised Version margin). These words are quite sufficient to convince us that a low Epicureanism is far from the writer’s thoughts when he speaks of there being nothing better for a man than “to eat and drink, and make his soul enjoy good in his labour.” One thing is necessary for the accomplishment of this end, and that is the Divine blessing. Satisfaction in work and in pleasure is a gift bestowed by him upon those who deserve it. “What we get here is the recognition of what we have learnt to call the moral government of God in the distribution of happiness. It is found to depend, not on outward but inward condition, and the chief inward condition is the character that God approves. The Preacher practically confesses that the life of the pleasure-seeker, or the ambitious, or the philosopher, seeking wisdom as an end, was not good before God, and therefore failed to bring contentment” (Plumptre). The source, then, of happiness in life is in obedience to the Divine will. To the gifts of his providence God adds the temper in which to enjoy them; from his hand both must be sought. Those who seek to be independent of him find that all they may acquire is insufficient to satisfy them; those who place all their confidence in him are contented with even the hardest lot (Phil. iv. 11—13). “Wisdom, knowledge, and joy” are the portion of the good, whether they be poor or rich in this world’s wealth; but the sinner has only the fruitless labour from which he can derive no satisfaction (ver. 26). And over again the Preacher writes the dreary sentence, “This also is vanity and vexation of spirit,” upon the life in which God is not.—J. W.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER III.

Vers. 1—22.—Section 4. In confirmation of the truth that man’s happiness depends upon the will of God, Koheleth proceeds to show how *Providence arranges even the minutest concerns; that man can alter nothing, must make the best of things as they are, bear with anomalies, bounding his desires by this present life.*

Vers. 1—8.—The providence of God disposes and arranges every detail of man’s life. This proposition is stated first generally, and then worked out in particular by means

of antithetical sentences. In Hebrew manuscripts and most printed texts vers. 2—8 are arranged in two parallel columns, so that one “time” always stands under another. A similar arrangement is found in Josh. xii. 9, etc., containing the catalogue of the conquered Canaanite kings; and in Esth. ix. 7, etc., giving the names of Haman’s ten sons. In the present passage we have fourteen pairs of contrasts, ranging from external circumstances to the inner affections of man’s being.

Ver. 1.—To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven.

"Season" and "time" are rendered by the LXX. *καιρός* and *χρόνος*. The word for "season" (*zeman*), denotes a fixed, definite portion of time; while *eth*, "time," signifies rather the beginning of a period, or is used as a general appellation. The two ideas are sometimes occurrent in the New Testament; e.g. Acts i. 7; 1 Thess. v. 1 (comp. also Dan. ii. 21, where the Septuagint has *καιρός* καὶ *χρόνος*; and Dan. vii. 12, where we find the singular *καιρὸν* καὶ *καιρὸν* in Theodotion, and *χρόνον* καὶ *καιρὸν* in the Septuagint). So in Wisd. viii. 8, "Sho [wisdom] foreseeth signs and wonders, and the events of seasons and times (*ἐκβάσεις καιρῶν καὶ χρόνων*)."
Every thing refers especially to men's movements and actions, and to what concerns them. *Purpose; chephets*, originally meaning "delight," "pleasure," in the later Hebrew came to signify "business," "thing," "matter." The proposition is—In human affairs Providence arranges the moment when everything shall happen, the duration of its operation, and the time appropriate thereto. The view of the writer takes in the whole circumstances of men's life from its commencement to its close. But the thought is not, as some have opined, that there is naught but uncertainty, fluctuation, and imperfection in human affairs, nor, as Plumptre conceives, "It is wisdom to do the right thing at the right time, that inopportuneness is the bane of life," for many of the circumstances mentioned, e.g. birth and death, are entirely beyond men's will and control, and the maxim, *Καὶρὸν γὰρ θύει*, cannot apply to man in such cases. Koheleth is confirming his assertion, made in the last chapter, that wisdom, wealth, success, happiness, etc., are not in man's hands, that his own efforts can secure none of them—they are distributed at the will of God. He establishes this dictum by entering into details, and showing the ordering of Providence and the supremacy of God in all men's concerns, the most trivial as well as the most important. The Vulgate gives a paraphrase, and not a very exact one, *Omnia tempus habent, et suis spatiis transeunt universa sub celo*. Koheleth intimates, without attempting to reconcile, the great *crux* of man's free-will and God's decree.

Ver. 2.—**A time to be born, and a time to die.** Throughout the succeeding catalogue marked contrasts are exhibited in pairs, beginning with the entrance and close of life, the rest of the list being occupied with events and circumstances which intervene between those two extremities. The words rendered, "a time to be born," might more naturally mean "a time to bear;" *καιρὸς τοῦ γενεῖν*, Septuagint; as the verb is in the infinitive active, which, in this particular verb,

is not elsewhere found used in the passive sense, though other verbs are so used sometimes, as in Jer. xxv. 34. In the first case the catalogue commences with the beginning of life; in the second, with the season of full maturity: "Those who at one time give life to others, at another have themselves to yield to the law of death" (Wright). The contrast points to the passive rendering. There is no question of untimely birth or suicide; in the common order of events birth and death have each their appointed season, which comes to pass without man's interference, being directed by a higher law. "It is appointed unto men once to die" (Heb. ix. 27). Koheleth's teaching was perverted by sensualists, as we read in Wisd. ii. 2, 3, 5. **A time to plant.** After speaking of human life it is natural to turn to vegetable life, which runs in parallel lines with man's existence. Thus Job, having intimated the shortness of life and the certainty of death, proceeds to speak of the tree, contrasting its revivifying powers with the hopelessness of man's decay (Job xiv. 5, etc.). And . . . to pluck up that which is planted. This last operation may refer to the transplanting of trees and shrubs, or to the gathering of the fruits of the earth in order to make room for new agricultural works. But having regard to the opposition in all the members of the series, we should rather consider the "plucking up" as equivalent to destroying. If we plant trees, a time comes when we cut them down, and this is their final cause. Some commentators see in this clause an allusion to the settling and uprooting of kingdoms and nations, as Jer. i. 10; xviii. 9, etc.; but this could not have been the idea in Koheleth's mind.

Ver. 3.—**A time to kill, and a time to heal.** The time to kill might refer to war, only that occurs in ver. 8. Some endeavour to limit the notion to severe surgical operations performed with a view of saving life; but the verb *harag* does not admit of the meaning "to wound" or "cut." It most probably refers to the execution of criminals, or to the defence of the oppressed; such emergencies and necessities occur providentially without man's prescience. So sickness is a visitation beyond man's control, while it calls into exercise the art of healing, which is a gift of God (see Eccles. x. 10; xxxviii. 1, etc.). **A time to break down, and a time to build up.** The removal of decaying or unsuitable buildings is meant, and the substitution of new and improved structures. A recollection of Solomon's own extensive architectural works is here introduced.

Ver. 4.—**A time to weep, and a time to laugh, grouped naturally with a time to mourn, and a time to dance.** The funeral and the wedding, the hired mourners and

the guests at the marriage-feast, are set against one another. The first clause intimates the spontaneous manifestation of the feelings of the heart; the second, their formal expression in the performances at funerals and weddings and on other solemn occasions. The contrast is found in the Lord's allusion to the sulky children in the market-place, who would not join their companions' play: "We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented" (Matt. xi. 17). Dancing sometimes accompanied religious ceremonies, as when David brought up the ark (2 Sam. vi. 14, 16).

Ver. 5.—**A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together.** There is no question about building or demolishing houses, as that has been already mentioned in ver. 3. Most commentators see an allusion to the practice of marring an enemy's fields by casting stones upon them, as the Israelites did when they invaded Moab (2 Kings iii. 19, 25). But this must have been a very abnormal proceeding, and could scarcely be cited as a usual occurrence. Nor is the notion more happy that there is an allusion to the custom of flinging stones or earth into the grave at a burial—a Christian, but not an ancient Jewish practice; this, too, leaves the contrasted "gathering" unexplained. Equally inappropriate is the opinion that the punishment of stoning is meant, or some game played with pebbles. It seems most simple to see herein intimated the operation of clearing a vineyard of stones, as mentioned in Isa. v. 2; and of collecting materials for making fences, wine-press, tower, etc., and repairing roads. **A time to embrace.** Those who explain the preceding clause of the marring and clearing of fields connect the following one with the other by conceiving that "the loving action of embracing stands beside the hostile, purposely injurious, throwing of stones into a field" (Delitzsch). It is plain that there are times when one may give himself up to the delights of love and friendship, and times when such distractions would be incongruous and unseasonable, as on solemn, penitential occasions (Joel ii. 16; Exod. xix. 15; 1 Cor. vii. 5); but the congruity of the two clauses of the couplet is not obvious, unless the objectionable position of stones and their advantageous employment are compared with the character of illicit (Prov. v. 20) and legitimate love.

Ver. 6.—**A time to get (seek), and a time to lose.** The verb *abad*, in piel, is used in the sense of "to destroy" (ch. vii. 7), and it is only in late Hebrew that it signifies, as here, "to lose." The reference is doubtless to property, and has no connection with the last clause of the preceding verse, as Delitzsch

would opine. There is a proper and lawful pursuit of wealth, and there is a wise and prudent submission to its inevitable loss. The loss here is occasioned by events over which the owner has no control, differing from that in the next clause, which is voluntary. The wise man knows when to exert his energy in improving his fortune, and when to hold his hand and take failure without useless struggle. Loss, too, is sometimes gain, as when Christ's departure in the flesh was the prelude and the occasion of the sending of the Comforter (John xvi. 7); and there are many things of which we know not the real value till they are beyond our grasp. **A time to keep, and a time to cast away.** Prudence will make fast what it has won, and will endeavour to preserve it unimpaired. But there are occasions when it is wiser to deprive one's self of some things in order to secure more important ends, as when sailors throw a cargo, etc., overboard in order to save their ship (comp. Jonah i. 5; Acts xxvii. 18, 19, 38). And in higher matters, such as almsgiving, this maxim holds good: "There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth. . . . The liberal soul shall be made fat, and he that watereth shall be watered also himself" (Prov. xi. 24, 25). Plumptre refers to Christ's so-called paradox, "Whosoever would (ὅς ἀν θέλη) save his life shall lose it, and whosoever shall lose his life for my sake shall find it" (Matt. xvi. 25).

Ver. 7.—**A time to rend, and a time to sew** (καὶ τὸ ρήξαι, καὶ καὶ τὸ ράψαι). This is usually understood of the rending of garments in token of grief (Gen. xxxvii. 29, 34, etc.), and the repairing of the rent then made when the season of mourning was ended. The Talmudists laid down careful rules concerning the extent of the ritual tear, and how long it was to remain un-mended, both being regulated by the nearness of the relationship of the deceased person. In this interpretation there are these two difficulties: first, it makes the clause a virtual repetition of ver. 4; and secondly, it is not known for certain that the closing of the rent was a ceremonial custom in the times of Koheleth. Hence Plumptre inclines to take the expression metaphorically of the division of a kingdom by schism, and the restoration of unity, comparing the Prophet Ahijah's communication to Jeroboam (1 Kings xi. 30, 31). But surely this would be a most unlikely allusion to put into Solomon's mouth; nor can we properly look for such a symbolical representation amid the other realistic examples given in the series. What Koheleth says is this—There are times when it is natural to tear clothes to pieces, whether from grief, or anger, or any other cause, e.g. as being old

and worthless, or infected; and there are times when it is equally natural to mend them, and to make them serviceable by timely repairs. Connected with the notion of mourning contributed by this clause, though by no means confined to that notion, it is added, **A time to keep silence, and a time to speak.** The silence of deep sorrow may be intimated, as when Job's friends sat by him in sympathizing silence (Job ii. 13), and the psalmist cried, "I was dumb with silence, I held my peace, even from good; and my sorrow was stirred" (Ps. xxxix. 2); and Elisha could not bear to hear his master's departure mentioned (2 Kings ii. 3, 5). There are also occasions when the sorrow of the heart should find utterance, as in David's lament over Saul and Jonathan (2 Sam. i. 17, etc.) and over Abner (2 Sam. iii. 33, etc.). But the gnome is of more general application. The young should hold their peace in the presence of their elders (Job xxxii. 4, etc.); silence is often golden: "Even a fool, when he holdeth his peace, is counted wise: when he shutteth his lips, he is esteemed as prudent" (Prov. xvii. 28). On the other hand, wise counsel is of infinite value, and must not be withheld at the right moment, and "a word in due season, how good is it!" (Prov. xv. 23; xxv. 11). "If thou hast understanding, answer thy neighbour: if not, lay thy hand upon thy mouth" (Ecclus. v. 12; see more, Ecclus. xx. 5, etc.).

Ver. 8.—**A time to love, and a time to hate.** This reminds one of the gloss to which our Lord refers (Matt. v. 43), "Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy," the first member being found in the old Law (Lev. xix. 18), the second being a misconception of the spirit which made Israel God's executioner upon the condemned nations. It was the maxim of Bias, quoted by Aristotle, 'Rhet.' ii. 13, that we should love as if about some day to hate, and hate as if about to love. And Philo imparts a still more selfish tone to the gnome, when he pronounces ('De Carit.' 21, p. 401, Mang.), "It was well said by them of old, that we ought to deal out friendship without absolutely renouncing enmity, and practise enmity as possibly to turn to friendship." **A time of war, and a time of peace.** In the previous couplets the infinitive mood of the verb has been used; in this last hemistich substantives are introduced, as being more concise and better fitted to emphasize the close of the catalogue. The first clause referred specially to the private feelings which one is constrained to entertain towards individuals. The second clause has to do with national concerns, and touches on the statesmanship which discovers the

necessity or the opportuneness of war and peace, and acts accordingly. In this and in all the other examples adduced, the lesson intended is this—that man is not independent; that under all circumstances and relations he is in the hand of a power mightier than himself, which frames time and seasons according to its own good pleasure. God holds the threads of human life; in some mysterious way directs and controls events; success and failure are dependent upon his will. There are certain laws which regulate the issues of actions and events, and man cannot alter these; his free-will can put them in motion, but they become irresistible when in operation. This is not fatalism; it is the mere statement of a fact in experience. Koheleth never denies man's liberty, though he is very earnest in asserting God's sovereignty. The reconciliation of the two is a problem unsolved by him.

Ver. 9.—If thus man, in all his actions and under all circumstances, depends upon time and seasons which are beyond his control, we return to the same desponding question already asked in ch. i. 3. **What profit hath he that worketh in that wherein he laboureth?** The preceding enumeration leads up to this question, to which the answer is "None." Since time and tide wait for no man, since man cannot know for certain his opportunity, he cannot reckon on reaping any advantage from his labour.

Ver. 10.—15.—There is a plan and system in all the circumstances of man's life; he feels this instinctively, but he cannot comprehend it. His duty is to make the best of the present, and to recognize the immutability of the law that governs all things.

Ver. 10.—**I have seen the travail which God hath given to the sons of men to be exercised in it; i.e. to busy themselves therewith (ch. i. 13).** This travail, exercise, or business is the work that has to be done under the conditions prescribed of time and season in face of the difficulty of man's free action and God's ordering. We take infinite pains, we entertain ample desires, and strive restlessly to carry them out, but our efforts are controlled by a higher law, and results occur in the way and at the time arranged by Providence. Human labour, though it is appointed by God and is part of man's heritage imposed upon him by the Fall (Gen. iii. 17, etc.), cannot bring contentment or satisfy the spirit's cravings.

Ver. 11.—**He hath made every thing beautiful in his (its) time.** "Everything" (*eth-hacol*) does not refer so much to the original creation which God made very good (Gen. i. 31), as to the travail and busi-

ness mentioned in ver. 10. All parts of this have, in God's design, a beauty and a harmony, their own season for appearance and development, their work to do in carrying on the majestic march of Providence. Also he hath set the world in their heart. "The world;" *eth-haolam*, placed (as *hacol* above) before the verb, with *eth*, to emphasize the relation. There is some uncertainty in the translation of this word. The LXX. has, *Σύμφωνα τὸν αἰῶνα*; Vulgate, *Mundum tradidit disputationi eorum*. The original meaning is "the hidden," and it is used generally in the Old Testament of the remote past, and sometimes of the future, as Dan. iii. 33, so that the idea conveyed is of unknown duration, whether the glance looks backward or forward, which is equivalent to our word "eternity." It is only in later Hebrew that the word obtained the signification of "age" (*aión*), or "world" in its relation to time. Commentators who have adopted the latter sense here explain the expression as if it meant that man in himself is a microcosm, a little world, or that the love of the world, the love of life, is naturally implanted in him. But taking the term in the signification found throughout the Bible, we are justified in translating it "eternity." The pronoun in "their heart" refers to "the sons of men" in the previous verse. God has put into men's minds a notion of infinity of duration; the beginning and the end of things are alike beyond his grasp; the time to be born and the time to die are equally unknown and uncontrollable. Koheleth is not thinking of that hope of immortality which his words unfold to us with our better knowledge; he is speculating on the innate faculty of looking backward and forward which man possesses, but which is insufficient to solve the problems which present themselves every day. This conception of eternity may be the foundation of great hopes and expectations, but as an explanation of the ways of Providence it fails. So that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end; or, without man being able to penetrate; yet so that he cannot, etc. Man sees only minute parts of the great whole; he cannot comprehend all at one view, cannot understand the law that regulates the time and season of every circumstance in the history of man and the world. He feels that, as there has been an infinite past, there will be an infinite future, which may solve anomalies and demonstrate the harmonious unity of God's design, and he must be content to wait and hope. Comparison of the past with the present may help to adumbrate the future, but is inadequate to unravel the complicated thread of the world's history (comp. ch. viii. 16,

17, and ix. 1, where a similar thought is expressed).

Ver. 12.—I know that there is no good in them, but for a man to rejoice; rather, *I knew, perceived, that there was no good for them*; i.e. for men. From the facts adduced, Koheleth learned this practical result—that man had nothing in his own power (see on ch. ii. 24) which would conduce to his happiness, but to make the best of life such as he finds it. Vulgate, *Cognovi quod non esset melius nisi lætari*. To do good in his life; *Τὸ ποιεῖν ἀγαθόν* (Septuagint); *Facere bene* (Vulgate). This has been taken by many in the sense of "doing one's self good, prospering, enjoying one's self," like the Greek *εὖ πράττειν*, and therefore nearly equivalent to "rejoice" in the former part of the verse. But the expression is best taken here, as when it occurs elsewhere (e.g. ch. vii. 20), in a moral sense, and it thus teaches the great truth that virtue is essential to happiness, that to "trust in the Lord . . . to depart from evil, and to do good" (Ps. xxxvi. 3, 27), will bring peace and content (see in the epilogue, ch. xii. 13, 14). There is no Epicureanism in this verse; the enjoyment spoken of is not licentiousness, but a happy appreciation of the innocent pleasures which the love of God offers to those who live in accordance with the laws of their higher nature.

Ver. 13.—And also that every man should eat and drink . . . it is the gift of God. This enforces and intensifies the statement in the preceding verse; not only the power to "do good," but even to enjoy what comes in his way (see on ch. ii. 24), man must receive from God. When we pray for our daily bread, we also ask for ability to take, assimilate, and profit by the supports and comforts afforded to us. "It" is better omitted, as "is the gift of God" forms the predicate of the sentence. Eccles. xi. 17, "The gift of the Lord remaineth with the godly, and his favour bringeth prosperity for ever."

Ver. 14.—I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever. A second thing (see ver. 12) that Koheleth knew, learned from the truths adduced in vers. 1—9, is that behind man's free action and volition stands the will of God, which orders events with a view to eternity, and that man can alter nothing of this providential arrangement (comp. Isa. xlv. 10; Ps. xxxiii. 11). Nothing can be put to it, nor anything taken from it. We cannot hasten or retard God's designs; we cannot add to or curtail his plans. Septuagint, "It is impossible to add (*οὐκ ἔστι προσθεῖναι*) to it, and it is impossible to take away from it." Thus Eccles. xviii. 6, "As for the wondrous works of the Lord, it is impossible to lessen or to

add to them (οὐκ ἔστιν ἐλαττώσαι οὐδὲ προσθεῖναι), neither can the ground of them be found out." God doeth it, that men should fear before him. There is a moral purpose in this disposal of events. Men feel this uniformity and unchangeableness in the working of Providence, and thence learn to cherish a reverential awe for the righteous government of which they are the subjects. It was this feeling which led ancient etymologists to derive *Θεός* and *Deus* from *δέος*, "fear" (comp. Rev. xv. 3, 4). This is also a ground of hope and confidence. Amid the jarring and fluctuating circumstances of men God holds the threads, and alters not his purpose. "I the Lord change not; therefore ye, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed" (Mal. iii. 6). The Vulgate is not very successful: *Non possumus eas quidquam addere, nec auferre, quæ fecit Deus ut timeatur*, "We cannot add anything unto, or take anything away from, those things which God hath made that he may be feared."

Ver. 15.—That which hath been is now; so Septuagint; "That which hath been made, the same remaineth" (Vulgate); better, *that which hath been, long ago it is*; i.e. was in existence long before. The thought is much the same as in ch. i. 9, only here it is adduced not to prove the vanity and endless sameness of circumstances, but the orderly and appointed succession of events under the controlling providence of God. That which is to be hath already been. The future will be a reproduction of the past. The laws which regulate things change not; the moral government is exercised by him who "is, and was, and is to come" (Rev. i. 8), and therefore in effect history repeats itself; the same causes produce the same phenomena. God requireth that which is past; literally, *God seeketh after that which hath been chased away*; Septuagint, "God will seek him who is pursued (τὸν διωκόμενον);" Vulgate, "God reneweth that which is passed (*instaurat quod abiit*). The meaning is—God brings back to view, recalls again into being, that which was past and had vanished out of sight and mind. The sentence is an explanation of the preceding clauses, and has nothing to do with the inquisition at the day of judgment. Hengstenberg has followed the Septuagint, Syriac, and Targum, in translating, "God seeks the persecuted," and seeing herein an allusion to the punishment of the Egyptians for pursuing the Israelites to the Red Sea, or a general statement that God succours the oppressed. But this idea is quite alien to the intention of the passage, and injures the coherence.

Vers. 16-22.—Acknowledging the provi-

dential government of God, which controls events and places man's happiness out of his own power, one is confronted also by the fact that there is much wickedness, much injustice, in the world, which oppose all plans for peaceful enjoyment. Doubtless there shall be a day of retribution for such iniquities; and God allows them now in order to try men and to teach them humility. Meantime man's duty and happiness consist, as before said, in making the best use of the present and improving the opportunities which God gives him.

Ver. 16.—And moreover I saw under the sun the place of judgment. Koheleth records his experience of the prevalence of iniquity in high places. The place of judgment (*mishpat*); where justice is administered. The accentuation allows (cf. Gen. i. 1) this to be regarded as the object of the verb. The Revised Version, with Hitzig, Ginsburg, and others, take *שִׁפְט* as an adverbial expression equivalent to "in the place." The former is the simpler construction. "And moreover," at the commencement of the verse, looks back to ver. 10, "I have seen the travail," etc. That wickedness (*resha*) was there. On the judicial seat iniquity sat instead of justice. The place of righteousness (*tsedek*). "Righteousness" is the peculiar characteristic of the judge himself, as "justice" is of his decisions. That iniquity (*resha*) was there. The word ought to be translated "wickedness" or "iniquity" in both clauses. The Septuagint takes the abstract for the concrete, and at the end has apparently introduced a clerical error, which has been perpetuated in the Arabic and elsewhere, "And moreover I saw under the sun the place of judgment, there was the ungodly (*ἀσεβής*); and the place of the righteous, there was the godly (*εὐσεβής*)." The Complutensian Polyglot reads *ἀσεβής* in both places. It is impossible to harmonize these statements of oppression and injustice here and elsewhere (e.g. ch. iv. 1; v. 8; viii. 9, 10) with Solomon's authorship of the book. It is contrary to fact that such a corrupt state of things existed in his time, and in writing thus he would be uttering a libel against himself. If he was cognizant of such evils in his kingdom, he had nothing to do but to put them down with a high hand. There is nothing to lead to the belief that he is speaking of other countries and other times; he is stating his own personal experience of what goes on around him. It is true that in Solomon's latter days disaffection secretly prevailed, and the people felt his yoke grievous (1 Kings xii. 4); but there is no evidence of the existence of corruption in

judicial courts, or of the social and political evils of which he speaks in this book. That he had a prophetic foresight of the disasters that would accompany the reign of his successor, and endeavours herein to provide consolation for the future sufferers, is a pious opinion without historical basis, and cannot be justly used to support the genuineness of the work.

Ver. 17.—I said in mine heart, God shall judge the righteous and the wicked. In view of the injustice that prevails in earthly tribunals, Koheleth takes comfort in the thought that there is retribution in store for every man, when God shall award sentence according to deserts. God is a righteous Judge strong and patient, and his decisions are infallible. Future judgment is here plainly stated, as it is at the final conclusion (ch. xi. 14). They who refuse to credit the writer with belief in this great doctrine resort to the theory of interpolation and alteration in order to account for the language in this and analogous passages. There can be no doubt that the present text has hitherto always been regarded as genuine, and that it does clearly assert future retribution, though not so much as a conclusion firmly established, but rather as a belief which may explain anomalies and afford comfort under trying circumstances. For there is a time there for every purpose and for every work. The adverb rendered "there" (ὅϋ, *sham*) is placed emphatically, at the end of the sentence. Thus the Septuagint, "There is a reason for every action, and for every work there (ἐκεῖ)." Many take it to mean "in the other world," and Plumptre cites Eurip., "Med., 1073—

Ἐνδαιμονοῖτον, ἀλλ' ἐκεῖ τὰ δ' ἐνθάδε
Πατρὶ ἀφείλετ'.

"All good be with you! but it must be *there*; Here it is stolen from you by your sire."

But it is unexampled to find the elliptical "there," when no place has been mentioned in the context, and when we are precluded from interpreting the dark word by a significant gesture, as Medea may have pointed downwards in her histrionic despair. Where the words, "that day," are used in the New Testament (e.g. Luke x. 12; 2 Tim. i. 18, etc.), the context shows plainly to what they refer. Some take the adverb here in the sense of "then." Thus the Vulgate, *Justum et impium judicabit Deus, et tempus omnis rei tunc erit.* But really no time has been mentioned, unless we conceive the writer to have been guilty of a clumsy tautology, expressing by "then" the same idea as "a time for every purpose," etc. Ewald would understand it of the past; but this is quite arbitrary, and limits the signification of the sentence unnecessarily. It is

best, with many modern commentators, to refer the adverb to God, who has just been spoken of in the preceding clause. A similar use is found in Gen. xlix. 24. With God, *apud Deum*, in his counsels, there is a time of judgment and retribution for every act of man, when anomalies which have obtained on earth shall be rectified, injustice shall be punished, virtue rewarded. There is no need, with some commentators, to read *ϋ*, "he appointed;" the usual reading gives a satisfactory sense.

Ver. 18.—The comfort derived from the thought of the future judgment is clouded by the reflection that man is as powerless as the beast to control his destiny. Concerning the estate of the sons of men; rather, it happens on account of the sons of men. God allows events to take place, disorders to continue, etc., for the ultimate profit of men, though the idea that follows is humiliating and dispiriting. The LXX. has *περὶ λαλίας*, "concerning the speech of the sons of men." So the Syriac. The word *dilrah* may indeed bear that meaning, as it is also used for "word" or "matter;" but we cannot conceive that the clause refers solely to words, and the expression in the text signifies merely "for the sake, on account of," as in ch. viii. 2. That God might manifest them; rather, that God might test them; *Ut probaret eos Deus* (Vulgate). God allows these things, endures them patiently, and does not at once redress them, for two reasons. The first of these is that they may serve for the probation of men, giving them opportunity of making good or bad use of them. We see the effect of this forbearance on the wicked in ch. viii. 11; it hardens them in impenitence; while it nourishes the faith of the righteous, and helps them to persevere (see Dan. xi. 35 and Rev. xxii. 11). And that they might see that they themselves are beasts. The pronoun is repeated emphatically, "that they themselves are [like] beasts, they in themselves." This is the second reason. Thus they learn their own powerlessness, if they regard merely their own animal life; apart from their relation to God and hope of the future, they are no better than the lower creatures. Septuagint. "And to show (τοῦ δεῖξαι) that they are beasts." So the Vulgate and Syriac. The Masoretic reading adopted in the Anglican Version seems best.

Vers. 19—21 are best regarded as a parenthesis explanatory of vers. 16—18, elucidating man's impotence in the presence of the anomalies of life. The conclusion in ver. 22 is connected with vers. 16—18. We must acknowledge that there are disorders in the world which we cannot remedy, and

which God allows in order to demonstrate our powerlessness; therefore the wisest course is to make the best of present circumstances.

Ver. 19.—For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; literally, *chance are the sons of men, and chance are beasts* (see on ch. ii. 14); Septuagint, “Yea, and to them cometh the event (*συμάντημα*) of the sons of men, and the event of the beast.” Koheleth explains in what respect man is on a level with the brute creation. Neither are able to rise superior to the law that controls their natural life. So Solon says to Cræsus (Herod. i. 32), *πάν ἔστι ἄνθρωπος συμφορῆς*, “Man is naught but chance;” and Artabanus reminds Xerxes that chances rule men, not men chances (*ibid.*, vii. 49). Even one thing befalleth them. A third time is the ominous word repeated, “One chance is to both of them.” Free-thinkers perverted this dictum into the materialistic language quoted in the Book of Wisdom (ii. 2): “We are born at haphazard, by chance (*αὐτοσχεδῶς*),” etc. But Koheleth’s contention is, not that there is no law or order in what happens to man, but that neither man nor beast can dispose events at their own will and pleasure; they are conditioned by a force superior to them, which dominates their actions, sufferings, and circumstances of life. As the one dieth, so dieth the other. In the matter of succumbing to the law of death man has no superiority over other creatures. This is an inference drawn from common observation of exterior facts, and touches not any higher question (comp. ch. ii. 14, 15; ix. 2, 3). Something similar is found in Ps. xlix. 20, “Man that is in honour, and understandeth not, is like the beasts that perish.” Yea, they have all one breath (*ruach*). This is the word used in ver. 23 for the vital principle, “the breath of life,” as it is called in Gen. vi. 17, where the same word is found. In the earlier record (Gen. ii. 7) the term is *nishma*. Life in all animals is regarded as the gift of God. Says the psalmist, “Thou sendest forth thy spirit (*ruach*), they are created” (Ps. civ. 30). This lower principle presents the same phenomena in men and in brutes. Man hath no pre-eminence above a beast; i.e. in regard to suffering and death. This is not bare materialism, or a gloomy deduction from Greek teaching, but must be explained from the writer’s standpoint, which is to emphasize the impotence of man to effect his own happiness. Taking only a limited and phenomenal view of man’s circumstances and destiny, he speaks a general truth which all must acknowledge. Septuagint, “And what hath the man more than the beast? Nothing.” For all is

vanity. The distinction between man and beast is annulled by death; the former’s boasted superiority, his power of conceiving and planning, his greatness, skill, strength, cunning, all come under the category of vanity, as they cannot ward off the inevitable blow.

Ver. 20.—All go unto one place. All, men and brutes, are buried in the earth (ch. xii. 7). The author is not thinking of Sheol, the abode of departed spirits, but merely regarding earth as the universal tomb of all creatures. Plumptre quotes Lucretius, ‘De Rer. Nat.’ v. 260—

“Omniparens eadem rerum commune sepulchrum.”

“The mother and the sepulchre of all.”

Thus Bailey, ‘Festus’—

“The course of nature seems a course of death;

The prize of life’s brief race, to cease to run;

The sole substantial thing, death’s nothingness.”

All are of the dust (Gen. iii. 19; Ps. civ. 29; cxlvi. 4). So Eccles. xli. 10, “All things that are of earth shall turn to earth again.” This is true of the material part of men and brutes alike; the question of the destiny of the immaterial part is touched in the next verse.

Ver. 21.—Who knoweth the spirit of man that goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast that goeth downward to the earth? The statement is here too categorically rendered, though, for dogmatical purposes, the Masorites seem to have punctuated the text with a view to such interpretation. But, as Wright and others point out, the analogy of two other passages (ch. ii. 19 and vi. 12), where “who knoweth” occurs, intimates that the phrases which follow are interrogative. So the translation should be, “Who knoweth as regards the spirit (*ruach*) of the sons of men whether it goeth upward, and as regards the spirit (*ruach*) of the beast whether it goeth downward under the earth?” Vulgate, *Quis novit si spiritus, etc.*? Septuagint, *Τίς εἶδε πνεῦμα υἱῶν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου εἰ ἀναβαίνει ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς*; “Who ever saw the spirit of the sons of man, whether it goeth upward?” The Authorized Version, which gives the Masoretic reading, is supposed to harmonize better with the assertion at the end of the book (ch. xii. 7), that the spirit returns to the God who gave it. But there is no formal denial of the immortality of the soul in the present passage as we render it. The question, indeed, is not touched. The author is confirming his previous assertion that, in one point of view, man is not superior to brute. Now he says,

looking at the matter merely externally, and taking not into consideration any higher notion, no one knows the destiny of the living powers, whether God deals differently with the spirit of man and of beast. Phenomenally, the principle of life in both is identical, and its cessation is identical; and what becomes of the spirit in either case neither eye nor mind can discover. The distinction which reason or religion assumes, viz. that man's spirit goes upward and the brute's downward, is incapable of proof, is quite beyond experience. What is meant by "upward" and "downward" may be seen by reference to the gnome in Prov. xv. 24, "To the wise the way of life goeth upward, that he may depart from Sheol beneath." The contrast shows that Sheol is regarded as a place of punishment or annihilation; this is further confirmed by Ps. xlix. 14, 15, "They are appointed as a flock for Sheol: death shall be their shepherd . . . their beauty shall be for Sheol to consume. . . . But God will redeem my soul from the power of Sheol; for he shall receive me." Koheleth neither denies nor affirms in this passage the immortality of the soul; that he believed in it we learn from other expressions; but he is not concerned with parading it here. Commentators quote Lucretius' sceptical thought ('De Rer. Nat.' i. 113—116)—

"Ignoratur enim quæ sit natura animæ,
Nata sit, an contra nascentibus insinuetur,
Et simul intreat nobiscum, morte di-
remta,
An tenebras Orci visat vastasque lacunas."

"We know not what the nature of the soul,
Born in the womb, or at the birth infused,
Whether it dies with us, or wings its way
Unto the gloomy pools of Orcus vast."

But Koheleth's inquiry suggests the possibility of a different destiny for the spirits of man and brute, though he does not at this moment make any definite assertion on the subject. Later on he explains the view taken by the believer in Divine revelation (ch. xii. 7).

Ver. 22.—After all, the writer arrives at the conclusion intimated in ver. 12; only here the result is gathered from the acknowledgment of man's impotence (vers. 16—18), as there from the experience of life. Wherefore I perceive that there is nothing better, etc.; rather, so, or *wherefore I saw that there was nothing*, etc. As man is not master of his own lot, cannot order events as he would

like, is powerless to control the forces of nature and the providential arrangements of the world, his duty and his happiness consist in enjoying the present, in making the best of life, and availing himself of the bounties which the mercy of God places before him. Thus he will free himself from anxieties and cares, perform present labours, attend to present duties, content himself with the daily round, and not vex his heart with solicitude for the future. There is no Epicureanism here, no recommendation of sensual enjoyment; the author simply advises men to make a thankful use of the blessings which God provides for them. **For who shall bring him to see what shall be after him?** The Revised Version, by inserting "back"—*Who shall bring him back to see?*—affixes a meaning to the clause which it need not and does not bear. It is, indeed, commonly interpreted to signify that man knows and can know nothing that happens to him after death—whether he will exist or not, whether he will have cognizance of what passes on earth, or be insensible to all that befalls here. But Koheleth has completed that thought already; his argument now turns to the future in this life. Use the present, for you cannot be sure of the future;—this is his exhortation. So he says (ch. vi. 12), "Who can tell a man what shall be after him under the sun?" where the expression, "under the sun," shows that earthly life is meant, not existence after death. Ignorance of the future is a very common topic throughout the book, but it is the terrestrial prospect that is in view. There would be little force in urging the impotence of men's efforts towards their own happiness by the consideration of their ignorance of what may happen when they are no more; but one may reasonably exhort men to cease to torment themselves with hopes and fears, with labours that may be useless and preparations that may never be needed, by the reflection that they cannot foresee the future, and that, for all they know, the pains which they take may be utterly wasted (cf. ch. vii. 14; ix. 3). Thus in this section there is neither scepticism nor Epicureanism. In brief, the sentiment is this—There are injustices and anomalies in the life of men and in the course of this world's events which man cannot control or alter; these may be righted and compensated hereafter. Meantime, man's happiness is to make the best of the present, and cheerfully to enjoy what Providence offers, without anxious care for the future.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—9.—*Times and seasons ; or, Heaven's order in man's affairs.* I. THE EVENTS AND PURPOSES OF LIFE. 1. *Great in their number.* The Preacher's catalogue exhausts not, but only exemplifies, the "occupations and interests," occurrences and experiences, that constitute the warp and woof of mortal existence. Between the cradle and the grave, instances present themselves in which more things happen than are here recorded, and more designs are attempted and fulfilled than are here contemplated. There are also cases in which the sum total of experience is included in the two entries, "born," "died;" but the generality of mortals live long enough to suffer and to do many more things beneath the sun. 2. *Manifold in their variety.* In one sense and at one time it may seem as if there were "no new thing under the sun" (ch. i. 9), either in the history of the race or in the experience of the individual; but at another time and in another sense an almost infinite variety appears in both. The monotony of life, of which complaint is often heard (ch. i. 10), exists rather in the mind or heart of the complainant than in the texture of life itself. What more diversified than the events and purposes the Preacher has catalogued? Entering through the gateway of birth upon the mysterious arena of existence, the human being passes through a succession of constantly shifting experiences, till he makes his exit from the scene through the portals of the grave, planting and plucking up, etc.

"All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players;
They have their exits and their entrances;
And one man in his time plays many parts,
His acts being seven ages."

(As You Like It, act ii. sc. 7.)

3. *Antithetic in their relations.* Human life, like man himself, may almost be characterized as a mass of contradictions. The incidents and interests, purposes and plans, events and enterprises, that compose it, are not only manifold and various, but also, it would seem, diametric in their opposition. Being born is in due course succeeded by dying; planting by plucking up; and killing—it may be in war, or by administration of justice, or through some perfectly defensible cause—if not by actual raising from death, which lies confessedly beyond the power of man (1 Sam. ii. 6; 2 Kings v. 7), at least by healing every malady short of death. Breaking down, whether of material structures (2 Chron. xxiii. 17) or of intellectual systems, whether of national (Jer. i. 10) or religious (Gal. ii. 18) institutions, is after an interval followed by the building up of those very things which were destroyed. Weeping endureth only for a night, while joy cometh in the morning (Ps. xxx. 5). Dancing, on the other hand, gives place to mourning. In short, whatever experience man at any time has, before he terminates his pilgrimage he may almost confidently count on having the opposite; and whatever action he may at any season perform, another season will almost certainly arrive when he will do the reverse. Of every one of the antinomies cited by the Preacher, man's experience on the earth furnishes examples. 4. *Fixed in their times.* Though appearing to come about without any order or arrangement, the events and purposes of mundane existence are by no means left to the guidance, or rather no-guidance, of chance; but rather have their places in the vast world-plan determined, and the times of their appearing fixed. As the hour of each man's entrance into life is decreed, so is that of his departure from the same (Hob. ix. 27; 2 Tim. iv. 6). The date at which he shall step forth upon the active business of life, represented in the Preacher's catalogue by "planting and plucking up," "breaking down and building up," "casting away stones and gathering stones together," "getting and losing;" the period at which he shall marry (ver. 4), with the times at which weddings and funerals (ver. 4) shall occur in his family circle; the moment when he shall be called upon to stand up valiantly for truth and right amongst his contemporaries (Prov. xv. 23), or to preserve a discreet and prudent silence when talk would be folly (Prov. x. 8), or even hurtful to the cause he serves; the times when he shall either suffer his affections to flow forth in an uninterrupted stream towards the good,

or withhold them from unworthy objects; or, if he be a statesman, the occasions when he shall go to war and return from it, are all predetermined by infinite wisdom. 5. *Determined in their durations.* How long each individual life shall continue (Ps. xxxi. 15; Acts xvii. 26), how long each experience shall last, and how long each action shall take to perform, is equally a fixed and ascertained quantity, if not to man's knowledge, certainly to that of the supreme Disposer of events.

II. THE TIMES AND SEASONS OF LIFE. 1. *Appointed by and known only to God.* As in the material and natural world the Creator hath appointed times and seasons, as, e.g., to the heavenly bodies for their rising and setting (Ps. civ. 19), to plants for their growing and decaying (Gen. viii. 22; Numb. xiii. 20; Judg. xv. 1; Jer. i. 16; Mark xi. 13), and to animals for their instinctive actions (Job xxxix. 1, 2; Jer. viii. 7), so in the human and spiritual world has he ordained the same (Acts xvii. 26; Eph. i. 10; Titus i. 3); and these times and seasons, both in the natural and in the spiritual world, hath God reserved to himself (Acts i. 7). 2. *Unavoidable and unalterable by man.* As no man can predict the day of his death (Gen. xxvii. 2; Matt. xxv. 13), any more than know beforehand that of his birth, so neither can he fathom beforehand the incidents that shall happen, or the times when they shall fall out during the course of his life (Prov. xxvii. 1). Nor by any precontriving can he change by so much as a hair's breadth the place into which each incident is fitted, or the moment when it shall happen.

Learn: 1. The changefulness of human life, and the duty of preparing wisely to meet it. 2. The Divine order that pervades human life, and the propriety of accepting it with meekness. 3. The difficulty (from a human point of view) of living well, since no man can be quite certain that for anything he does he has found the right season. 4. The wisdom of seeking for one's self the guidance of him in whose hands are times and seasons (Acts i. 7).

Vers. 11—14.—*All things beautiful; or, God, man, and the world.* I. THE BEAUTIFUL RELATION OF THE WORLD TO GOD. Expressed by four words. 1. *Dependence: no such thing as independence, self-subsistence, self-origination, self-regulation, in mundane affairs.* The universe, out to its circumference and in to its centre, from its mightiest structure down to its smallest detail, is the handiwork of God. Whatever philosophers may say or think upon the subject, it is simple absurdity to teach that the universe made itself, or that the incidents composing the sum of human life and experience have come to pass of themselves. It will be time enough to believe things are their own makers when effects can be discovered that have no causes. Persons of advanced (?) intelligence and culture may regard the Scriptures as behind the age in respect of philosophic insight and scientific attainment; it is to their credit that their writers never talk such unphilosophic and unscientific nonsense as that mundane things are their own creators. Their common sense—if not permissible to say their inspiration—appears to have been strong and clear enough to save them from being befooled by such vagaries as have led astray many modern savants, and to have taught them that the First Cause of all things is God (Gen. i. 1; Exod. xx. 11; Neh. ix. 6; Job xxxviii. 4; Ps. xix. 1; Isa. xl. 28; Acts xiv. 15; xvii. 24; Rom. xi. 36; Eph. iii. 9; Heb. iii. 4; Rev. iv. 11). 2. *Variety: no monotony in mundane affairs.* Obvious as regards both the universe as a whole and its individual parts. The supreme Artificer of the former had no idea of fashioning all things after one model, however excellent, but sought to introduce variety into the works of his hands; and just this is the principle upon which he has proceeded in arranging the programme of man's experiences upon the earth. To this diversity in man's experience the twenty-eight instances of events and purposes given by the Preacher (vers. 2—8) allude; and this same diversity is a mark at once of wisdom and of kindness on the part of the Supreme. As the material globe would be monotonous were it all mountain and no valley, so would human life be uninteresting were it an unchanging round of the same few incidents. But it is not. If there are funerals and deaths, there are as well marriages and births; if nights of weeping, days of laughing; if times of war, periods of peace. 3. *Order: no chance or accident in mundane affairs.* To short-sighted and feeble man, human life is full of accidents or chances; but not so when viewed from the standpoint of God. Not only does no event happen without his permission (Matt. x. 29; Luke xii. 6), but

each event occurs at the time and falls into the place appointed for it by infinite wisdom. Nor is this true merely of such events as are wholly and exclusively in his power, like births and deaths (ver. 2), but of such also as to some extent at least are within man's control, as *e.g.* the planting of a field and the plucking up of that which is planted (ver. 2), killing and healing, breaking down and building up (ver. 3), weeping and laughing (ver. 4), etc. Men may flatter themselves that of these latter actions they are the sole originators, have both the choosing of their times and the fixing of their forms; but according to the Preacher, God's supremacy is as little to be disputed in them as in the matter of man's coming into or going out from the world. We express this thought by citing the well-known proverb, "Man proposes, but God disposes," or the familiar words of Shakespeare—

"There's a divinity that shapes our ends,
Rough-hew them how we will."

(*'Hamlet,' act v. sc. 2.*)

4. *Beauty: no defect or deformity in mundane affairs.* This cannot signify that in such events and actions as "killing," "hating," "warring," there is never anything wrong; that God regards them only as good in the making, and generally that sin is a necessary stage in the development of human nature. The Preacher is not pronouncing judgment upon the moral qualities of the actions he enumerates, but merely calling attention to their fitness for the times and seasons to which they have been assigned by God. Going back in thought to the "Very good!" of the Creator when he rested from his labours at the close of the sixth day (Gen. i. 31), the Preacher cannot think of saying less of the work God is still carrying on in evolving the plan and programme of his purpose. "God hath made everything beautiful in its time" (cf. ver. 11): beautiful in itself, so far as it is a work of his; but beautiful not less in its time, even when the work, as not being entirely his, is not beautiful in itself, or in its inward essence. Cf. Shakespeare's—

"How many things by season seasoned are
To their right praise and true perfection!"

(*'Merchant of Venice,' act v. sc. 1.*)

Beautiful in themselves and their times are the seasons of the year, the ages of man, and the changing experiences through which he passes; beautiful, at least in their times, are numerous human actions which God cannot be regarded as approving, but which nevertheless he permits to occur because he sees the hour has struck for their occurring. As it were, the glowing wheels of Divine providence never fail to keep time with the great clock of eternity.

II. THE BEAUTIFUL RELATION OF MAN TO THE WORLD. Also expressed in four words.

1. *Weariness: no perfect rest in the midst of mundane affairs.* Not only is man tossed about continually by the multitudinous vicissitudes of which he is the subject, but he derives almost no satisfaction from the thought that in all these changes there is a beautiful because divinely appointed harmony, and a beneficent because Heaven-ordained purpose. The order pervading the universe is something outside of and beyond him. The fixing of the right times is a work in which he cannot, even in a small degree, co-operate. As a wise man, he may wish to have every action in which he bears a part performed at the set time marked out for it on the clock of eternity; but the very attempt to find out for each action the right time only aggravates the fatigue of his labour, and increases the sense of weariness under which he groans. "What profit hath he that worketh in that wherein he laboureth?" Not, certainly, "no profit," but not enough to give him rest or even free him from weariness. And this, when viewed from a moral and religious standpoint, is beautiful inasmuch as it prevents (or ought to prevent) man from seeking happiness in mundane affairs.

2. *Ignorance: no perfect knowledge of mundane affairs.* "No man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end." One more proof of the vanity of human life—that no man, however wise and far-seeing, patient and laborious, can discover the plan of God either in the universe as a whole or in his own life; and what renders this a special sorrow is the fact that God hath set "the world [or, 'eternity'] in

his heart." If the "world" be accepted as the true rendering (Jerome, Luther, Ewald), then probably the meaning is that, though each individual carries about within his bosom in his own personality an image of the world—is, in fact, a microcosmos in which the macrocosmos or great world is mirrored—nevertheless the problem of the universe eludes his grasp. If, however, the translation "eternity" be adopted (Delitzsch, Wright, Plumptre), then the import of the clause will be that God hath planted in the heart of man "a longing after immortality," given him an idea of the infinite and eternal which lies beyond the veil of outward things, and inspired him with a desire to know that which is above and beyond him, yet he cannot find out the secret of the universe in the sense of discovering its plan. With an infinite behind and before him, he can grasp neither the beginning of the work of God in its purpose or plan, nor the end of it in its issues and results, whether to the individual or to the whole. What his eye looks upon is the middle portion passing before him here and now—in comparison with the whole but an infinitesimal speck—and so he remains with reference to the whole like a person walking in the dark. 3. *Submission: no ground for complaining as to mundane affairs.* Rather in the view presented is much to comfort man. Had the ordering of the universe, or even of his own lot, been left to man, man himself would have been the first to regret it. As Laplace is credited with having said that, if only the Almighty had called him into counsel at the making of the universe, he could have given the Almighty some valuable hints, so are there equally foolish persons who believe they could have drafted for themselves a better life-programme than has been done for them by the supreme Disposer of events. A wise man, however, will always feel grateful that the Almighty has retained the ordering of events in his own hand, and will meekly submit to the same, believing that God's times are the best times, and that his ways are ever "mercy and truth unto such as keep his covenant and his testimonies" (Ps. xxv. 10). 4. *Fear: no justification for impiety or irreverence in mundane affairs.* A proper study of the constitution and course of nature, a due recognition of the order pervading all its parts, with a just consideration both of the perfection and permanence (ver. 14) of the Divine working, ought to inspire men with "fear"—of such sort as both to repress within them irreligion and impiety, and to excite within them humility and awe.

Ver. 15.—*Requiring that which is past.* I. IN THE REALM OF NATURE. God seeks after that which is past or has been driven away, in the sense that he recalls or brings again phenomena that have vanished; as e.g. the reappearance of the sun with its light and heat, the various seasons of the year with their respective characteristics, the circling of the winds with other meteorological aspects of the firmament. The thought here is the uniformity of sequence in the physical world (ch. i. 4—7).

II. IN THE SPHERE OF INDIVIDUAL EXPERIENCE. God seeks after that which has been driven away in the sense that he reproduces in the life of one individual experiences that have existed in another, or in himself at a former point in his career. The thought is, that by Heaven's decree a large amount of sameness exists in the phases of thought and feeling through which different individuals pass, or the same individuals at successive stages of their development.

III. IN THE DOMAIN OF HISTORY. God seeks after that which has been driven away, in the sense that, on the broad theatre of action which men name "time," or "the world," he frequently, in the evolutions of his providence, seems to recall the past by reproducing "situations," "incidents," "events," "experiences," similar to, if not identical with, those which occurred before. The thought is that history frequently repeats itself.

IV. IN THE PROGRAMME OF THE UNIVERSE. God will eventually seek after that which has been driven away, by calling up again out of the past for judgment every individual that has lived upon the globe, with every word that has been spoken and every act that has been done, with every secret thought and imagination, whether it has been good or whether it has been bad. The thought is that the distant past and the distant future will one day meet. The place will be before the great white throne; the time will be the last day.

Ver. 16, 18.—*Wickedness in the place of judgment; or, the mystery of providence.*

I. THE PROFOUND PROBLEM. The moral disorder of the universe. "I saw under the sun in the place of judgment that wickedness was there, and in the place of righteousness that wickedness was there" (ver. 16). 1. *The strange spectacle.* What fascinated the Preacher's gaze and perplexed the Preacher's heart was not so much the existence as the triumph of sin—the fact that sin existed where and as it did. Had he always beheld sin in its naked deformity, essential loathsomeness, and abject baseness, receiving the due reward of its misdeeds, trembling as a culprit before the bar of providential judgment, and suffering the punishment its criminality merited, the mystery and perplexity would most likely have been reduced by half. What, however, he did witness was iniquity, not trembling but triumphing, not sorrowing but singing, not suffering the due recompense of her own evil deeds but snatching off the rewards and prizes that belonged to virtue. In short, what he perceived was the complete moral disorder of the world—as it were society turned topsy-turvy; the wicked up and the righteous down; bad men exalted and good men despised; vice arrayed in silks and bedizened with jewels, and virtue only half covered with tattered rags. 2. *Two particular sights.* (1) Iniquity usurping the place of judgment; thrusting itself into the very council-chambers where right and justice should prevail; now as a judge who deliberately holds the scales uneven because the one litigant is rich and the other poor, anon as an advocate who employs all his ingenuity to defend a prisoner whom he knows to be guilty, and again as a witness who has accepted a bribe and calmly swears to a lie. (2) Iniquity preoccupying the place of righteousness; i.e. the tribunal, whether secular or ecclesiastical, whose efforts should be all directed to finding out and maintaining the cause of righteousness.

II. THE PERPLEXING MYSTERY. "I said in mine heart" (ver. 17). The Preacher was troubled about it, as David (Ps. xxxvii. 1, 7), Job (xxi. 7), Asaph (Ps. lxxiii. 3), and Jeremiah (xii. 1) had been. To him, as to them, it was an enigma. But why should it have been? 1. *On one hypothesis it is no enigma.* On the supposition that God, duty, and immortality are non-existent, it is not a mystery at all that vice should prevail and virtue have a poor time of it so long as it remains above ground, for (on the hypothesis) fleeing to a better country beyond the skies is out of the question. The mystery would be that it were otherwise. 2. *On another hypothesis it is an enigma.* What creates the mystery is that these things occur while God is, duty presses, and immortality awaits. Since God is, why does he suffer these things to happen? Why does he not interpose to put matters right? If right and wrong are not empty phrases, how comes it that moral distinctions are so constantly submerged? With "eternity in their hearts," how is it to be explained that men are so regardless of the future?

III. THE PROPOSED SOLUTION. This lay in three things. 1. *The certainty of a future judgment.* "I said in mine heart, God shall judge the righteous and the wicked; for there is a time for every purpose and for every work" (ver. 17). Convinced that God, duty, and immortality were no fictions but solemn realities, the Preacher saw that these implied the certainty of a judgment in the future world when all the entanglements of this world would be sorted out, its inequalities evened, and its wrongs righted; and seeing this, he discerned in it a sufficient reason why God should not be in a hurry to cast down vice from its undeserved eminence and exalt virtue to its rightful renown. 2. *The discrimination of human character.* The Preacher saw that God allowed wickedness to triumph and righteousness to suffer, in order that he might thereby "prove them," i.e. sift and distinguish them from one another by the free development of their characters. Were God by external restraints to place a check on the ungodly or by outward helps to recompense the pious, it might come to be doubtful who were the sinful and who the virtuous; but granting free scope to both, each manifests its hidden character by its actions, according to the principle, "Every tree is known by its fruits" (Matt. vii. 16—20). 3. *The revelation of human depravity.* Because a future judgment awaits, it is necessary that the wickedness of the wicked should be revealed. Hence God abstains from interfering prematurely with the world's disorder that men may see to what thorough inherent depravity they have really come; that, oppressing and destroying one another, they are little better than brute beasts who, without consideration or remorse, prey on each other.

LESSONS. 1. Patience. 2. Confidence. 3. Hopefulness.

Vers. 19—22.—*Are men no better than beasts?* I. BOTH ALIKE EMANATE FROM THE SOIL. "All are of the dust" (ver. 20). This the first argument in support of the monstrous proposition that man hath no pre-eminence above a beast. 1. *The measure of truth it contains.* In so far as it asserts that man, considered as to his material part, possesses a common origin with the beasts that perish, that both were at first formed from the ground, and are so allied to the soil that, besides emerging from it, they are every day supported by it and will eventually return to it, being both resolved into indistinguishable dust, it accords exactly with the teaching of Scripture (Gen. i. 24; ii. 7), science, and experience. Compare the language of Arnobius, "Wherein do we differ from them? Our bones are of the same materials; our origin is not more noble than theirs" ('Ad Gentes,' ii. 16). 2. *The amount of error it conceals.* It overlooks the facts that, again according to Scripture (Gen. i. 27; ii. 7; ix. 6), man was created in the Divine image, which is never said of the lower creatures; was endowed with intelligence far surpassing that of the creatures (Job xxxii. 8); and so far from being placed on a level with the lower animals, was expressly constituted their lord (Gen. i. 28). Read in this connection Shakespeare's "What a piece of work is man!" etc. ('Hamlet,' act ii. sc. 2). Moreover, it ignores what is patent on every page of Scripture as well as testified by every chapter in human experience, viz. that God deals with man as he does not deal with the beasts, subjecting him as not them to moral discipline, and accepting of him what is never asked of them, the tribute of freely rendered service, inviting him as they are never invited to enter into conscious fellowship with himself, punishing him as never them for disobedience, and making of him an object of love and grace to the extent of devising and completing on his behalf a scheme of salvation, as is never done or proposed to be done for them. Unless, therefore, Scripture be set aside as worthless, it will be impossible to hold that in respect of origin and nature man hath no pre-eminence over the beasts.

II. BOTH ALIKE ARE THE SPORT OF CHANCE. "That which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them;" or, "Chance are the sons of men, chance is the beast, and one chance is to them both" (ver. 19). 1. *The assertion under limitations may be admitted as correct.* Certainly no ground exists for the allegation that the course of providence, whether as it relates to man or as it bears upon the lower animals, is a chance, a peradventure, a haphazard. Yet events, which in the programme of the Supreme have their fixed places and appointed times, may seem to man to be fortuitous, as lying altogether beyond his calculation and not within his expectation; and what the present argument amounts to is that man is as helpless before these events as the unthinking creatures of the field are—that they deal with him precisely as with the beasts, sweeping down upon him with resistless force, falling upon him at unexpected moments, and tossing him about with as much indifference as they do them. 2. *The assertion, however, must be qualified.* It follows not from the above concessions that man is as helpless before unforeseen occurrences as the beasts are. Not only can he to some extent by foresight anticipate their coming, which the lower creatures cannot do, but, unlike them also, he can protect himself against them when they have come. To man belongs a power not (consciously at least) possessed by the animals, of not merely accommodating himself to circumstances—a capability they to some extent share with him—but of rising above circumstances and compelling them to bend to him. If to this be added that if time and chance happen to man as to the beasts he knows it, which they do not, and can extract good from it, which they cannot, it will once more appear that ground exists for disputing the degrading proposition that man hath no pre-eminence over the beasts.

III. BOTH ALIKE ARE THE PREY OF DEATH. "As the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath" (ver. 19). 1. *Seeming correspondences between the two in the matter of dying.* (1) In both death means the extinction of physical life and the dissolution of the material frame. (2) In both the mode of dying is frequently the same. (3) The same grave receives both when the vital spark has departed. (4) The only difference between the two is that man commonly gets a coffin and a funeral, a mausoleum and a monument, whereas the beast gets none of these luxuries. 2. *Obvious discrepancies between the two in respect of dying.* (1) Man living knows that he must die (ch. ix. 5), which the beast does not. (2) Man has the choice and power, if he accepts the provisions of grace, of meeting death without a fear. (3) Even if he does

not, there is something nobler in the spectacle of a man going forth with eyes open to the dread conflict with the king of terrors, than in that of a brute expiring in unconscious stupidity. (4) If one thinks of him dying, as he often does die, like a Christian, it will be seen more absurd than ever to assert that a man hath no pre-eminence over a beast.

IV. BOTH, DYING, PASS BEYOND THE SPHERE OF HUMAN KNOWLEDGE. "Who knoweth the spirit of man, whether it goeth upward? and the spirit of the beast, whether it goeth downward to the earth?" (ver. 21). 1. *Admitted so far as scientific knowledge is concerned.* The agnostics of the Preacher's day, like those of modern times, could not say what became of a man's spirit, if he had one (of which they were not sure), after it had escaped from his body, any more than they could tell where a beast's—and the beast was as likely to have a spirit as the man—went to after its carcase sank into the soil. Whether it was the man's that went upward and the beast's downward, or *vice versâ*, lay outside their ken. Their scientific apparatus did not enable them to report, as the scientific apparatus of the nineteenth century does not enable it to report, upon the post-mundane career of either beast or man; and so they assumed the position from which the agnostics of to-day have not departed, that it is all one with the man and the beast when the grave hides them, and that a man hath no pre-eminence over a beast. 2. *Denied so far as religious knowledge is concerned.* Refusing to hold that the anatomist's scalpel, or chemist's retort, or astronomer's telescope, or analyst's microscope are the ultimate tests of truth, and that nothing is to be credited which cannot be detected by one or other of these instruments, we are not so hopelessly in the dark about man's spirit when it leaves its earthly tabernacle as are agnostics whether ancient or modern. On the high testimony of this Preacher (ch. xii. 7), on the higher witness of Paul (2 Cor. v. 1; Phil. i. 23), and on the highest evidence attainable on the subject (2 Tim. i. 10), we know that when the spirit of a child of God forsakes the body it does not disperse into thin air, but passes up into the Father's hand (Luke xxiii. 46), and that when a good man disappears from earth he forthwith appears in heaven (Luke xxiii. 43; Phil. i. 23), amid the spirits of the just made perfect (Heb. xii. 23); so that another time we decline to endorse the sentiment that man hath no pre-eminence over a beast.

V. BOTH ALIKE, PASSING FROM THE EARTH, NEVER MORE RETURN. "Who shall bring him back to see that which shall be after him?" (ver. 29). Accepting this as the correct rendering of the words (for other interpretations consult the Exposition): 1. *It may be granted* that no human power can recall man from the grave any more than it can reanimate the beast; that the realm beyond the tomb, so far as the senses are concerned, is "an undiscovered country, from whose bourne no traveller returns." 2. *It is contended* that nevertheless there is a power which can and ultimately will despoil the grave of its human victims, and that man will eventually come back to dwell, if not upon the old soil and beneath the old sky, at least beneath a new heavens and upon a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.

LESSONS. 1. The dignity of man. 2. The solemnity of life. 3. The certainty of death.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—8.—*The manifold interests and occupations of life.* There is nothing so interesting to man as human life. The material creation engages the attention and absorbs the inquiring activities of the student of physical science; but unless it is regarded as the expression of the Divine ideas, the vehicle of thought and purpose, its interest is limited and cold. But what men are and think and do is a matter of concern to every observant and reflecting mind. The ordinary observer contemplates human life with curiosity; the politician, with interested motives; the historian, hoping to find the key to the actions of nations and kings and statesmen; the poet, with the aim of finding material and inspiration for his verse; and the religious thinker, that he may trace the operation of God's providence, of Divine wisdom and love. He who looks below the surface will not fail to find, in the events and incidents of human existence, the tokens of the appointments and dispositions of an all-wise

Ruler of the world. The manifold interests of our life are not regulated by chance; for "to everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven."

I. LIFE'S PERIODS (ITS BEGINNING AND CLOSE) ARE APPOINTED BY GOD. The sacredness of birth and death are brought before us, as we are assured that "there is a time to be born, and a time to die." The believer in God cannot doubt that the Divine Omniscience observes, as the Divine Omnipotence virtually effects, the introduction into this world, and the removal from it, of every human being. Men are born, to show that God will use his own instruments for carrying on the manifold work of the world; they die, to show that he is limited by no human agencies. They are born just when they are wanted, and they die just when it is well that their places should be taken by their successors. "Man is immortal till his work is done."

II. LIFE'S OCCUPATIONS ARE DIVINELY ORDERED. The reader of this passage is forcibly reminded of the substantial identity of man's life in the different ages of the world. Thousands of years have passed since these words were penned, yet to how large an extent does this description apply to human existence in our own day! Organic activities, industrial avocations, social services, are common to every age of man's history. If men withdraw themselves from practical work, and from the duties of the family and the state, without sufficient justification, they are violating the ordinances of the Creator. He has given to every man a place to fill, a work to do, a service of helpfulness to render to his fellow-creatures.

III. THE EMOTIONS PROPER TO HUMAN LIFE ARE OF DIVINE APPOINTMENT. These are natural to man. The mere feelings of pleasure and pain, the mere impulses of desire and aversion, man shares with brutes. But those emotions which are man's glory and man's shame are both special to him, and have a great share in giving character to his moral life. Some, like envy, are altogether bad; some, like hatred, are bad or good according as they are directed; some, like love, are always good. The Preacher of Jerusalem refers to joy and sorrow, when he speaks of "a time to laugh, and a time to weep;" to love and hate, for both of which he declares there is occasion in our human existence. There has been no change in these human experiences with the lapse of time; they are permanent factors in our life. Used aright, they become means of moral development, and aid in forming a noble and pious character.

IV. THE OPERATION OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE IS APPARENT IN THE VARIED FORTUNES OF HUMANITY. This passage tells of accumulation and consequent prosperity, of loss and consequent adversity. The mutability of human affairs, the disparities of the human lot, were as remarkable and as perplexing in the days of the Hebrew sage as in our own. And they were regarded by him, as by rational and religious observers in our own time, as instances of the working of physical and social laws imposed by the Author of nature himself. In the exercise of divinely entrusted powers, men gather together possessions and disperse them abroad. The rich and the poor exist side by side; and the wealthy are every day impoverished, whilst the indigent are raised to opulence. These are the lights and shades upon the landscape of life, the shifting scenes in life's unfolding drama. Variety and change are evidently parts of the Divine intention, and are never absent from the world of our humanity.

V. THE MORAL AND SPIRITUAL ISSUES OF HUMAN LIFE BEAR MARKS OF DIVINE WISDOM AND ORDER. It cannot be the case that all the phases and processes of our human existence are to be apprehended simply in themselves, as if they contained their own meaning, and had no ulterior significance. Life is not a kaleidoscope, but a picture; not the promiscuous sounds heard when the instrumentalists are "tuning up," but an oratorio; not a chronicle, but a history. There is a unity and an aim in life; but this is not merely artistic, it is moral. We do not work and rest, enjoy and suffer, hope and fear, with no purpose to be achieved by the experiences through which we pass. He who has appointed "a season, and a time for every purpose under the heaven," designs that we should, by toil and endurance, by fellowship and solitude, by gain and loss, make progress in the course of moral and spiritual discipline, should grow in the favour and in the likeness of God himself.—T.

Vers. 9—13.—*The mystery and the meaning of life.* The author of Ecclesiastes was too wise to take what we call a one-sided view of human life. No doubt there are times and moods in which this human existence seems to us to be all made up of

either toil or endurance, delight or disappointment. But in the hour of sober reflection we are constrained to admit that the pattern of the web of life is composed of many and diverse colours. Our faculties and capacities are many, our experiences are varied, for the appeals made to us by our environment change from day to day, from hour to hour. "One man in his time plays many parts."

I. IN LIFE THERE IS MYSTERY TO SOLVE. The works and the ways of God are too great for our feeble, finite nature to comprehend. We may learn much, and yet may leave much unlearned and probably unlearnable, at all events in the conditions of this present state of being. 1. There are speculative difficulties regarding the order and constitution of things, which the thoughtful man cannot avoid inquiring into, which yet often baffle and sometimes distress him. "Man cannot find out the work that God hath done from the beginning even to the end." 2. There are practical difficulties which every man has to encounter in the conduct of life, fraught as it is with disappointment and sorrow. "What profit hath he that worketh in that wherein he laboureth?"

II. IN LIFE THERE IS BEAUTY TO ADMIRE. The mind that is not absorbed in providing for material wants can scarcely fail to be open to the adaptations and the manifold charms of nature. The language of creation is as harmonious music, which is soothing or inspiring to the ear of the soul. What a revelation is here of the very nature and benevolent purposes of the Almighty Maker! "He hath made everything beautiful in its time." And beauty needs the æsthetic faculty in order to its appreciation and enjoyment. The development of this faculty in advanced states of civilization is familiar to every student of human nature. Standards of beauty vary; but the true standard is that which is offered by the works of God, who "hath made everything beautiful in its time." There is a beauty special to every season of the year, to every hour of the day, to every state of the atmosphere; there is a beauty in every several kind of landscape, a beauty of the sea, a beauty of the heavens; there is a beauty of childhood, another beauty of youth, of healthful manhood and radiant womanhood, and even a certain beauty peculiar to age. The pious observer of the works of God, who rids himself of conventional and traditional prejudices, will not fail to recognize the justice of this remarkable assertion of the Hebrew sage.

III. IN LIFE THERE IS WORK TO DO. Labour and travail are very frequently mentioned in this book, whose author was evidently deeply impressed by the corresponding facts—first, that God is the almighty Worker in the universe; and, secondly, that man is made by the Creator like unto himself, in that he is called upon by his nature and his circumstances to effort and to toil. Forms of labour vary, and the progress of applied science in our own time seems to relieve the toiler of some of the severer, more exhausting kinds of bodily effort. But it must ever remain true that the human frame was not intended for indolence; that work is a condition of welfare, a means of moral discipline and development. It is a factor that cannot be left out of human life; the Christian is bound, like his Master, to finish the work which the Father has given him to do.

IV. IN LIFE THERE IS GOOD TO PARTICIPATE. There is no asceticism in the teaching of this Book of Ecclesiastes. The writer was one who had no doubt that man was constituted to enjoy. He speaks of eating and drinking as not merely necessary in order to maintain life, but as affording gratification. He dwells appreciatively upon the happiness of married life. He even commends mirth and festivity. In all these he shows himself superior to the pettiness which carps at the pleasures connected with this earthly existence, and which tries to pass for sanctity. Of course, there are lawful and unlawful gratifications; there is a measure of indulgence which ought not to be exceeded. But if Divine intention is traceable in the constitution and condition of man, he was made to partake with gratitude of the bounties of God's providence.

V. ALL THE PROVISIONS WHICH DIVINE WISDOM ATTACHES TO HUMAN LIFE ARE TO BE ACCEPTED WITH GRATITUDE AND USED WITH FAITHFULNESS, AND WITH A CONSTANT SENSE OF RESPONSIBILITY. In receiving and enjoying every gift, the devout mind will exclaim, "It is the gift of God." In taking advantage of every opportunity, the Christian will bear in mind that wisdom and goodness arrange human life so that it shall afford repeated occasion for fidelity and diligence. In his daily work he will make it his aim to "serve the Lord Christ."

APPLICATION. 1. There is much in the provisions and conditions of our earthly life which baffles our endeavours to understand it; and when perplexed by mystery, we are summoned to submit with all humility and patience to the limitations of our intellect, and to rest assured that God's wisdom will, in the end, be made apparent to all. 2. There is a practical life to be lived, even when speculative difficulties are insurmountable; and it is in the conscientious fulfilment of daily duty, and the moderate use of ordinary enjoyments, that as Christians we may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour.—T.

Ver. 14.—*The purposes of Providence.* Different minds, observing and considering the same facts, are often very differently affected by them. The measure of previous experience and culture, the natural disposition, the tone and temper with which men address themselves to what is before them,—all affect the conclusion at which they arrive. The conviction produced in the mind of the Preacher of Jerusalem is certainly deserving of attention; he saw the hand of God in nature and in life, where some see only chance or fate. To see God's hand, to admire his wisdom, to appreciate his love, in our human life,—this is an evidence of sincere and intelligent piety.

I. GOD'S WORK IS PERFECT AND UNALTERABLE. "Nothing can be put to it, nor anything taken from it." This cannot be said to be the general conviction; on the contrary, men are always finding fault with the constitution of things. If they had been consulted in the creation of the universe, and in the management of human affairs, all would have been far better than it is! Now, all depends upon the end in view. The scientific man would make an optical instrument which should serve as both microscope and telescope—a far more marvellous construction than the eye. The pleasure-seeker would eliminate pain and sorrow from human life, and would make it one prolonged rapture of enjoyment. But the Creator had no intention of making an instrument which should supersede human inventions; his aim was the production of a working, everyday, useful organ of vision. The Lord of all never aimed at making life one long series of gratification; he designed life to be a moral discipline, in which suffering, weakness, and distress fulfil their own service of ministering to man's highest welfare. For the purposes intended, God's work needs no apology and admits of no improvement.

II. GOD'S WORK IS ETERNAL. All men's works are both unstable and transitory. Fresh ends are ever being approved and sought by fresh means. The laws of nature know no change; the principles of moral government are the same from age to age. When we learn to distrust our own fickleness, and to weary of human uncertainty and mutability, then we fall back upon the unchanging counsels of him who is from everlasting to everlasting.

III. GOD'S WORK HAS A PURPOSE WITH REFERENCE TO MAN. What God has done in this world he has done for the benefit of his spiritual family. Everything that is may be regarded as the vehicle of communication between the creating and the created mind. The intention of God is "that men should fear before him," *i.e.* venerate and glorify him. Our human probation and education as moral and accountable beings is his aim. Hence the obligation on our part to observe, inquire, and consider, to reverence, serve, and obey, and thus consciously and voluntarily secure the ends for which the Creator designed and fashioned us.—T.

Vers. 16, 17.—*Man's unrighteousness contrasted with God's righteousness.* Every observant, judicial, and sensitive mind shares this experience. Human society, civil relations, cannot be contemplated without much of disapproval, disappointment, and distress. And who, when so affected by the spectacle which this world presents, can do other than raise his thoughts to that Being, to those relationships that are characterized by a moral excellence which corresponds to our highest ideal, our purest aspirations?

I. THE PREVALENCE OF WICKEDNESS UPON EARTH AND AMONG MEN. The observation of the wise man was naturally directed to the state of society in his own times and in his own and of the neighbouring countries. Local and temporal peculiarities do not, however, destroy the applicability of the principle to human life generally. Wickedness was and is discernible wherever man is found. Unconscious nature obeys physical laws,

brute nature obeys automatic and instinctive impulse. But man is a member of a rational and spiritual system, whose principles he often violates in the pursuit of lower ends. In the earliest ages "the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." A remedial system has checked and to some extent counteracted these evil tendencies; yet to how large an extent is the same reflection just!

II. WICKEDNESS, IN THE FORM OF INJUSTICE, PREVAILS EVEN WHERE JUSTICE SHOULD BE IMPARTIALLY ADMINISTERED. It is well known that in every age complaints have been made of the venality of Eastern magistrates. In the Old Testament references are frequent to the "gifts," the bribes, by which suitors sought to obtain decisions in their favour. Corruption here is worse than elsewhere, for it is discouraging to uprightness, and lowers the tone of public morals. We may be grateful that, in our own land and in our own day, such corruption is unknown—that our judges are above even temptation to bribery. But the fact has to be faced that injustice, whether from motives of malice or from motives of avarice, has existed widely in human communities.

III. THE UNIVERSAL JUDGMENT OF A RIGHTEOUS GOD. The atheist has no refuge from such observations and reflections as those recorded in ver. 16. But the godly man turns from earth to heaven, and rests in the conviction that there is a Divine and righteous Judge, to whose tribunal all men must come, and by whose just decisions every destiny must be decided. 1. All characters, the righteous and the wicked alike, will be judged by the Lord of all. Has the unjust escaped the penalty due from a human tribunal? He shall not escape the righteous judgment of God. Has the innocent been unjustly sentenced by an earthly and perhaps corrupt judge? There is for him a court of appeal, and his righteousness shall shine as the noonday. 2. All kinds of works shall meet with retribution; not only the acts of private life, but also acts of a judicial and governmental kind. The unjust judge shall meet with his recompense, and the wronged and persecuted shall not be unavenged.—T.

Vers. 18—21.—*The common destiny of death.* The double nature of man has been recognized by every student of human nature. The sensualist and materialist lays stress upon the physical side of our humanity, and endeavours to show that the intellect and the moral sentiments are the outgrowth of the bodily life, the nervous structure and its susceptibilities and its powers of movement. But such efforts fail to convince alike the unsophisticated and the philosophic. It is generally admitted that it would be more reasonable to resolve the physical into the psychical than the psychical into the physical. The author of Ecclesiastes was alive to the animal side of man's nature; and if some only of his expressions were considered, he might be claimed as a supporter of the baser philosophy. But he himself supplies the counteractive. The attentive reader of the book is convinced that the author traced the human spirit to its Divine original, and looked forward to its immortality.

I. THE COMMUNITY OF MEN WITH BEASTS IN THE ANIMAL NATURE AND LIFE. If we look upon one side of our humanity, it appears that we are to be reckoned among the brutes that perish. The similarity is obvious in: 1. The corporeal, fleshly constitution with which man and brute are alike endowed. 2. The brevity of the earthly life appointed for both without distinction. 3. The resolution of the body into dust.

II. THE SUPERIORITY OF MEN OVER BEASTS IN THE POSSESSION OF A SPIRITUAL AND IMPERISHABLE NATURE AND LIFE. It is difficult for us to treat this subject without bringing to bear upon it the knowledge which we have derived from the fuller and more glorious revelation of the new covenant. "Christ has abolished death, and has brought life and immortality to light by the gospel." We cannot possibly think of such themes without taking to their consideration the convictions and the hopes which we have derived from the incarnate Son of God. Nor can we forget the sublime speculations of philosophers of both ancient and modern times. 1. In his spiritual nature man is akin to God. Physical life the Creator imparted to the animal organisms with which the world was peopled. But a life of quite another order was conferred upon man, who participates in the Divine reason, who is able to think the thoughts of God himself, and who has intuitions of moral goodness of which the brute creation is for ever incapable. Instead of man's mind being a function of

organized matter, as a base sensationalism and empiricism is wont to affirm, the truth is that it is only as an expression and vehicle of thought, of reason, that matter has a dependent existence. 2. In his consequent immortality man is distinguished from the inferior animals. The life possessed by these latter is a life of sensation and of movement; the organism is resolved into its constituents, and there is no reason to believe that the sensation and movement are perpetuated. But "the spirit of man goeth upward;" it has used its instrument, the body, and the time comes—appointed by God's inscrutable providence—when the connection, local and temporary, which the spirit has maintained with earth, is sundered. In what other scenes and pursuits the conscious being is continued, we cannot tell. But there is not the slightest reason for conceiving the spiritual life to be dependent upon the organism which it uses as its instrument. The spiritual life is the life of God; and the life of God is perishable.

"The sun is but a spark of fire,
A transient meteor in the sky;
The soul, immortal as its Sire,
Can never die."

T.

Ver. 22.—*The earthly portion.* When a man is, perhaps suddenly, awakened to a sense of the transitoriness of life and the vanity of human pursuits, what more natural than that, under the influence of novel conceptions and convictions, he should rush from a career of self-indulgence into the opposite extreme? Life is brief: why concern one's self with its affairs? Sense-experiences are changeable and perishable: why not neglect and despise them? Earth will soon vanish: why endeavour to accommodate ourselves to its conditions? But subsequent reflection convinces us that such practical inferences are unjust. Because this earth and this life are not everything, it does not follow that they are nothing. Because they cannot satisfy us, it does not follow that we should not use them.

I. IT IS POSSIBLE TO LIMIT OUR VIEW OF THIS EARTHLY LIFE UNTIL IT LOSES ITS INTEREST FOR US. 1. Man's works, to the observant and reflecting mind, are perishable and poor. 2. Man's joys are often both superficial and transitory. 3. The future of human existence and progress upon earth is utterly uncertain, and, if it could be foreseen, would probably occasion bitter disappointment.

II. IT IS UNWISE AND UNSATISFACTORY SO TO LIMIT OUR VIEW OF LIFE. There is true wisdom in the wise man's declaration, "There is nothing better than that a man should rejoice in his works; for that is his portion." The epicurean is wrong who makes pleasure his one aim. The cynic is wrong who despises pleasure as something beneath the dignity of his nature. Neither work nor enjoyment is the whole of life; for life is not to be understood save in relation to spiritual and disciplinary purposes. Man has for a season a bodily nature; let him use that nature with discretion, and it may prove organic to his moral welfare. Man is for a season stationed upon earth; let him fulfil earth's duties, and taste earth's delights. Earthly experience may be a stage towards heavenly service and bliss.—T.

Vers. 1—10.—*Opportunity; opportuneness; ordination.* This view of life embraces—

I. OPPORTUNITY, OR THE WISDOM OF WAITING. Everything comes in its turn; if we weep to-day, we shall laugh to-morrow; if we have to be silent for the present, we shall have the opportunity of speech further on; if we must strive now, the time of peace will return. Human life is neither unshadowed brightness nor unbroken gloom. "Shadow and shine is life . . . flower and thorn." Let no man be seriously discouraged, much less hopelessly disheartened: what he is now suffering from will not always remain; it will pass and give place to that which is better. Let us only patiently wait our time, and our turn will come. "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning"—at any rate, and at the furthest, in the morning of eternity. Only let us wait in patience and in prayerful hope, doing all that we can do in the paths of duty and of service, and the hour of opportunity will arrive.

". . . with succeeding turns God tempers all,
That man may hope to rise, yet fear to fall."

II. OPPORTUNENESS. The words of the text may suggest to us, though the thought may not have been in the writer's mind, that some things are good or otherwise according to their timeliness. There is a time to speak in the way of rebuking, or of jesting, or of contending, and, when well-timed, such words may be right and wise in a very high degree; but, if ill-timed, they would be wrong and foolish, and much to be condemned. The same thought is applicable to the demonstration of friendliness, or of any strong emotion (vers. 5, 7); to the exercise of severity or of leniency (ver. 3); to the manifestation of sorrow or of joy (ver. 4); to the action of economy or of generosity (ver. 6). Hard-and-fast rules will not cover the infinite particulars of human life. Whether we shall act or be passive, whether we shall speak or be silent, what shall be our demeanour and what the tone we shall take,—this must depend upon particular circumstances and a number of new combinations; and every man must judge for himself, and must remember that there is great virtue in opportuneness.

III. ORDINATION. There is a season, an "appointed time for every undertaking" (Cox). "What profit hath he that worketh," when all this "travail" with which "the sons of men" are exercised results in such fixed and inevitable changes? That is the spirit of the moralist here. We reply: 1. That it is indeed true that much is already appointed for us. We have no power, or but little, over the seasons and the elements of nature, and not very much (individually) over the institutions and customs of the land in which we live; we are compelled to conform our behaviour to forces which are superior to our own. 2. But there is a very large remainder of freedom. Within the lines that are laid down by the ordination of Heaven or the "powers that be" on the earth, there is ample scope for free, wise, life-giving choice of action. We are free to choose our own conduct, to form our own character, to determine the complexion and aspect of our life in the sight of God, to decide upon our destiny.—C.

Ver. 11.—"*This unintelligible world.*" How shall we solve all those great problems which continually confront us, which baffle and bewilder us, which sometimes drive us to the very verge of distraction or even of unbelief? The solution is partly found in—

I. A WIDE VIEW OF THE WORTH OF PRESENT THINGS. If we look long and far, we shall see that, though many things have an ugly aspect at first sight, God "has made everything beautiful in its time." The light and warmth of summer are good to see and feel; but is not the cold of winter invigorating? and what is more beautiful to the sight than the untrodden snow? The returning life of spring is welcome to all hearts; but are not the brilliant hues of autumn fascinating to every eye? Youth is full of ardour, and manhood of strength; but declining years possess much richness of gathered wisdom, and there is a dignity, a calm, a reverence, in age which is all its own. There is a joy in battle as well as a pleasantness in peace. Wealth has its treasures; but poverty has little to lose, and therefore little cause for anxiety and trouble. Luxury brings many comforts, but hardness gives health and strength. Each climate upon the earth, every condition in life, the various dispositions and temperaments of the human soul,—these have their own particular advantage and compensation. Look on the other side, and you will see something that will please, if it does not satisfy.

II. THE HELP WE GAIN FROM THE GREAT ELEMENT OF FUTURITY. "Also he hath set eternity" (marginal reading, Revised Version) "in their heart." We are made to look far beyond the boundary of the visible and the present. The idea of "the eternal" may help us in two ways. 1. That we are created for the unseen and the eternal accounts for the fact that nothing which is earthly and sensible will satisfy our souls. Nothing of that order *ought* to do so; and it would put the seal upon our degradation if it *did* so. Our unsatisfiable spirit is the signature of our manhood and the prophecy of our immortality. 2. The inclusion of the future in our reasoning makes all the difference to our thought. Admit only the passing time, this brief and uncertain life, and much that happens is inexplicable and distressing indeed; but include the future, add "eternity" to the account, and the "crooked is made straight," the perplexity is gone. But, even with this aid, there is—

III. THE MYSTERY WHICH REMAINS, AND WILL REMAIN. "No man can find out," etc. We do well to remember that what we see is only a very small part indeed of the whole—only a page of the great volume, only a scene in the great drama, only a field

of the large landscape—and we may well be silenced, if not convinced. But even that does not cover everything. We need to remember that we are human, and not Divine; that we, who are God's very little children, cannot hope to understand all that is in the mind of our heavenly Father—cannot expect to fathom his holy purpose, to read his unfathomable thoughts. We see enough of Divine wisdom, holiness, and love to believe that, when our understanding is enlarged and our vision cleared, we shall find that “all the paths of the Lord were mercy and truth”—even those which most troubled and bewildered us when we dwelt upon the earth.—C.

Vers. 12, 13, 22 (with ch. ii. 24).—*The conclusion of folly or the faith of the wise?* In what catalogue shall we place these words of the text? On whose lips are they to be found? Are they—

I. THE REFUGE OF THE SCEPTIC? They may be such. The epicure who has lost his faith in God says, “Let us eat and drink; for to-morrow we die.” There is no sacredness in the present, and no solid hope for the future. What is the use of aiming at a high ideal? Why waste breath and strength on duty, on aspiration, on piety? Why attempt to rise to the pursuit of the eternal and the Divine? Better lose ourselves in that which is at hand, in that which we can grasp as a present certainty. The best thing, the only certain good, is to eat and drink and to labour; is to minister to our senses, and to work upon the material which is visible to our eye and responsive to our touch. So speaks the sceptic; this is his miserable conclusion; thus he owns himself defeated and (we may say) dishonoured. For what is human life worth when the element of sacredness is expunged, when piety and hope are left out of it? It is no wonder that the ages of unbelief have been the times when men have had no regard for other people's dues, and very little for their own. Or shall we rather find here—

II. AN ARTICLE OF A WISE MAN'S FAITH? It is not certain what was the mood in which the Preacher wrote; but let us prefer to think that behind his words, actuating and inspiring him, was a true spirit of faith in God and in Divine providence; let us take him to mean—what we know to be true—that, in spite of all evidence to the contrary, a wise and loyal-hearted man will hold that there is much that is worth pursuing and possessing in the simple pleasures, in the daily duties, and in the ordinary services which are open to us all. 1. Daily God invites us to eat and drink, to partake of the bounties of his hand; let us appreciate his benefits with moderation and gratitude. 2. Daily he bids us go forth to “our work and to our labour until the evening;” let us enter upon it and carry it out in the spirit of conscientiousness and fidelity toward both God and man (Col. iii. 23). 3. Daily God gives us the means of getting good to ourselves and doing good to others; let us eagerly embrace our opportunity, let us gladly avail ourselves of our privilege; so doing we shall make our life peaceful, happy, worthy.

In the light that shines into our hearts from the truth of Christ we judge: 1. That these lesser things—pleasure, activity, acquisition—are well in their way and in their measure. “Bodily exercise profiteth a little.” But: 2. That human life has possibilities and obligations which immeasurably transcend these things; such, that to put these into the front rank and to fill our life with them is a fatal error. Made subordinate to that which is higher, they take their place and they render their service—a place and a service not to be despised; but made primary and supreme, they are usurpers that do untold injury, and that must be relentlessly dethroned.—C.

Vers. 14, 15.—*Divine constancy and human piety.* With the outer world of nature and with our human nature and character before us, these words may somewhat surprise us; it is necessary to take a preliminary view of—

I. HUMAN ACTION UPON THE DIVINE. 1. There is a sense in which man has *modified* the Divine action according to the Divine purpose. God has given us the material, and he says to us, “Work with it and upon it; mould, fashion, transform, develop it as you will; make all possible use of it for bodily comfort, for mental enlargement, for social enjoyment, for spiritual growth.” Man has made large use of this his opportunity, and, with the advance of knowledge and of science, he will make much more in the centuries to come. He cannot indeed “put to” or “take from” the substance with which God supplies him, but he can do much to change its form and

to determine the service it shall render. 2. There is a sense in which man has *temporarily thwarted* the Divine idea. For is not all sin, and are not all the dire consequences of sin, a sad and serious departure from the purpose of the Holy One? Surely infidelity, blasphemy, vice, cruelty, crime; surely poverty, misery, starvation, death;—all this is not what the heavenly Father meant for his human children when he breathed into man's nostrils the breath of life. But the leading idea of the text is—

II. THE PERMANENCY OF THE DIVINE THOUGHT. This truth includes: 1. *The fixedness of the Divine purpose.* "The counsel of the Lord standeth for ever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations" (Ps. xxxiii. 11). We believe that from the beginning God intended to work out the righteousness and the blessedness of the human race; and whatever has come between him and the realization of his gracious end will be cleared away. Man will one day be all that the Eternal One designed that he should become. 2. *The constancy of the Divine Law.* The same great moral laws, and the same physical laws also, which governed the action and the destiny of men in primeval times still prevail, and will always abide. Sin has meant suffering and sorrow, righteousness has worked out well-being and joy; diligence has been followed by fruitfulness, and idleness by destitution; generosity has been recompensed with love, and selfishness with leanness of soul, etc. As it was at the beginning, so will it be with the action of all Divine laws, even to the end. 3. *The permanency of the Divine attitude.* (1) What God always felt toward sin he feels to-day; it is the thing which he hates. In Jesus Christ, as fully and as emphatically as in the Law, his holy intolerance of sin is revealed, his Divine determination to conquer and to destroy it. (2) What God always felt toward the sinner he feels to-day—a Divine grief and an infinite compassion; a readiness to forgive and to restore the penitent.

III. THE DIVINE DESIGN. "God doeth it, that men should fear before him." God's one unchanging desire is that his children should live a reverential, holy life before him. All the manifestations of his character that he gives us are intended to lead up to and issue in this. And surely the Divine constancy is calculated to promote this as nothing else would. It is God's desire and his design concerning us, because he knows (1) that it is the only right relationship for us to sustain; and (2) that it is the one condition of peace, purity, blessedness, life.—C.

Vers. 18—21.—*Before and after Christ.* These words have a strange sound in our ears; they evidently do not belong to New Testament times. They bring before us—

I. MAN'S UNENLIGHTENED CONCEPTION OF HIMSELF. It is evidently possible that, under certain conditions, men may judge themselves to be of no nobler nature than that of "the beasts that perish." It may be (1) bodily suffering or weakness; or (2) untoward and disappointing circumstances; or (3) bewilderment of mind after vain endeavours to solve great spiritual problems; or (4) the distracted and unnatural state of the society in which we are placed (see Cox's 'Quest of the Chief Good'); but, owing to some one of many possible causes, men may be driven to take the lowest view of human nature; so much so that they may lose all respect for themselves—may shut the future life entirely out of view, and live in the narrow circle of the present; may confine their ambition and aspiration to bodily enjoyment and the excitements of present occupation; may practically own themselves to be defeated, and go blindly on, 'hoping nothing, believing nothing, and fearing nothing.' Such a melancholy conclusion (1) does us sad dishonour; (2) has a demoralizing influence on character and life; (3) yields a wretched harvest of despair and self-destruction. In most happy contrast with this is—

II. THE VIEW OF OUR NATURE WHICH CHRIST HAS GIVEN US. He asks us to think how "much a man is better than a sheep," and reminds us that we are "of more value than many sparrows." He bids us realize that one human soul is worth more than "the whole world," and that there is nothing so costly that it will represent its value. He reveals to us the supreme and most blessed fact that each human spirit is the object of Divine solicitude, and may find a home in the Father's heart of love at once, and in his nearer presence soon. He assures us that there is a glorious future before every man that becomes the subject of his kingdom, and serves faithfully to the end. Under his teaching, instead of seeing that "they themselves are beasts," his disciples find themselves "children of their Father who is in heaven," "kings and priests unto God,"

“heirs of eternal life.” Coming after Christ, and learning of him, we see that we are capable of a noble heritage now, and move toward a still nobler estate a little further on.—C.

Vers. 1—8.—*Opportuneness.* Our author makes a fresh start. He drops the autobiographical style of the first two chapters, and casts his thoughts into the form of aphorisms, based not merely upon the reminiscences of his own life, but upon the experience of all men. He gives a long list of the events, actions, emotions, and feelings which go to make up human life, and asserts of them that they are governed by fixed laws above our knowledge, out of our control. The time of our entrance into the world, the condition of life in which we are placed, are determined for us by a higher will than our own, and the same sovereign power fixes the moment of our departure from life; and in like manner all that is done, enjoyed, and suffered between birth and death is governed by forces which we cannot bend or mould, or even fully understand. That there is a fixed order in the events of life is, to a certain extent, an instinctive belief which we all hold. The thought of an untimely birth or of an untimely death shocks us as something contrary to our sense of that which is fit and becoming, and those crimes by which either is caused are generally regarded as specially repulsive. Yet there is an appointed season for the other incidents of life, though less clearly manifest to us. Our wisdom lies, not in mere acquiescence in the events of life, but in knowing our duty for the time. The circumstances in which we are placed are so fluctuating, and the conditions in the midst of which we find ourselves are so varying, that a large space is left for us to exercise our discretion, to discern that which is opportune, and to do the right thing at the right time. The first class of events alluded to, the time of birth and the time of death, is that of those which are involuntary; they are events with which there can be no interference without the guilt of gross and exceptional wickedness. The actions and emotions that follow are voluntary, they are within our power, though the circumstances that call them forth at a precise time are not. The relations of life which are determined for us by a higher power give us the opportunity for playing our part, and we either succeed or fail according as we take advantage of the time or neglect it. The catalogue given of the events, actions, and emotions which make up life seems to be drawn up without any logical order; the various items are apparently taken capriciously as examples of those things that occupy men's time and thoughts, and at first sight the teaching of our author does not seem to be of a distinctively spiritual character. To a superficial reader it might appear as if we had not in it much more than the commonplace prudence to be found in the maxims and proverbs current in every country: “Take time by the forelock;” “He that will not when he may, when he would he shall have nay;” “Time and tide wait for no man,” etc. But we are taught by Christ himself that knowing how to act opportunely is a large part of that wisdom which is needed for our salvation. He himself came to earth in the “fulness of time” (Gal. iv. 4), when the Jewish people and the nations of the world were prepared by Divine discipline for his teaching and work (Acts xvii. 30, 31; Luke ii. 30, 31). The purpose of the mission of John the Baptist, calculated as it was to lead men to godly sorrow for sin, was in harmony with the austerity of his life and the sternness of his exhortations. It was a time to mourn (Matt. xi. 18). The purpose of Christ's own mission was to reconcile the world to God and to manifest the Father to men, so that joy was becoming in his disciples (Mark ii. 18—20). He taught that there was a time to lose, when all possessions that would alienate the heart from him should be parted with (Mark x. 21, 23); and that there would be a time of gain, when in heaven the accumulated treasures would become an abiding possession (Matt. vi. 19, 20). “That which the Preacher insists on is the thought that the circumstances and events of life form part of a Divine order, are not things that come at random, and that wisdom, and therefore such a measure of happiness as is attainable, lies in adapting ourselves to the order, and accepting the guidance of events in great things and small, while shame and confusion come from resisting it.” But such teaching is applicable, as we have seen, to the conduct of our spiritual as well as of our secular concerns. The fact that there are great changes through which we must pass in order to be duly prepared for the heavenly state, that we may have to forfeit the temporal to secure the eternal, that the new life has new duties for the discernment and fulfilment of which all our powers and faculties need to be called into full exercise—should make us earnestly

desire to be filled with this wisdom that prompts to opportune action. "If any of you lack wisdom," says St. James, "let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him" (i. 5).—J. W.

Vers. 9—11.—*Desiderium æternitatis*. The thought of there being a fixed order in the events of life, of laws governing the world which man cannot fully understand or control, brings with it no comfort to the mind of this Jewish philosopher. It rather, in his view, increases the difficulty of playing one's part successfully. Who can be sure that he has hit upon the right course to follow, the opportune time at which to act? Do not "the fixed phenomena" and "iron laws of life" render human effort fruitless and disappointing? Another conclusion is drawn from the same facts by a higher Teacher. We cannot by taking thought alter the conditions of our lives, and should, therefore, Christ has taught us, place our trust in our heavenly Father, who governs all things, and whose love for the creatures he has made is seen in his feeding the birds and clothing with beauty the flowers of the field (Matt. vi. 25—34). The anxiety which the thought of human weakness in the presence of the immutable laws of nature excites is charmed away by the consolatory teaching of Jesus. But no solution is given of the difficulties that occasioned it. These will always exist as they spring from the limitations of our nature. We are finite creatures, and God is infinite. We endure but for a few years; he is from everlasting to everlasting. Our apprehension of these facts, of infinitude and eternity, prevents our being satisfied with that which is finite and temporal. "God has set eternity" (*vide* Revised Version margin) "in our hearts." Though we are limited by time, we are related to eternity. "That which is transient yields us no support; it carries us on like a rushing stream, and constrains us to save ourselves by laying hold on eternity" (Delitzsch). We cannot rest satisfied with fragmentary knowledge, but strive to pass on from it to the great worlds of truth yet undiscovered and unknown; we would see the whole of God's work from beginning to end (ver. 1), and find ourselves precluded from accomplishing our desire. From Solomon's point of view, in which the possibility or certainty of a future life is not taken into account, this *desiderium æternitatis* is only another of the illusions by which the soul of man is vexed. But we should contradict our better knowledge, and ungratefully neglect the Divine aids to faith which have been given us in the fuller revelation of the New Testament, if we were to cherish the same opinion. Dissatisfaction with the finite and the temporal is not a morbid feeling in those who believe that they have an immortal nature, and that they are yet to come into "an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away" (1 Pet. i. 4).—J. W.

Vers. 12, 13.—*Another condition of pure happiness*. In these words we have a repetition of the conclusion already announced (ch. ii. 24) as to the method by which some measure of happiness can be secured by man, but there is a very important addition made to the former declaration. Our author is referring to temporal things, and tells the secret by which the happiness they may procure for us is to be won. It consists of two particulars: (1) a cheerful enjoyment of the gifts of God, and (2) a benevolent use of them. This latter is the addition to which I have referred. It is a distinct advance upon the previous utterance, as it introduces the idea of an unselfish use of the gifts which God has bestowed upon us—an employment of them for the benefit of others less fortunately circumstanced than ourselves. "Over and above the life of honest labour and simple joys which had been recognized as good before, the seeker has learnt that 'doing good' is in some sense the best way of getting good" (Plumptre). It may be that beneficence is only a part of what is meant by "doing good," but in the connection in which the phrase is here employed it must be a large part, because it evidently suggests something more as desirable than a selfish enjoyment of the good things of life. This twofold duty of accepting with gratitude the gifts of God and of applying them to good uses was prescribed by the Law of Moses (Deut. xxi. 1—14); and, to a truly pious mind, the one part of the duty will suggest the other. The thought that God in his bounty has enriched us, who are unworthy of the least of all his mercies, will lead us to be compassionate to those who are in want, and we shall find in relieving their necessities the purest and most exquisite of all joys. We shall in this way discover for ourselves the truth of that saying of our Lord's, "It is more blessed to give

than to receive" (Acts xx. 35). While those who selfishly keep all they have for themselves find that, however their goods increase, their satisfaction in them cannot be increased—nay, rather that it rapidly diminishes. Hence it is that the apostle counsels the rich "to do good, to be rich in good works, to be ready to distribute, willing to communicate" (1 Tim. vi. 17—19). The general teaching of the Scriptures, therefore, is in harmony with the results of our own experience, and leads to the same conclusion, that "doing good" is a condition of pure happiness.—J. W.

Vers. 14—17.—An argument in support of the statement that *a present use and enjoyment of the gifts of God is advisable*, is found in the fact of the unchangeable character of the Divine purposes and government. He who has given may take away, and none can stay his hand. While, therefore, we are in possession of benefits he has bestowed on us, we should get the good of them, seeing that we know not how long we shall have them. Exception has been taken to this teaching. "The lesson to cheerfulness under such bidding seems a hard one. Men have recited it over the wine-cup in old times and new, in East and West. But the human heart, with such shadows gathering in the background, has recognized its hollowness, and again and again has put back the anodyne from its lips" (Bradley). But though the thought of the Divine unchangeableness may be regarded by some as a stimulus to a reckless enjoyment of the present, it is calculated to have a wholesome influence upon our views of life, and upon our conduct. Acquiescence in one's lot, and reverential fear of God, leading to an avoidance of sin, are naturally suggested by it. The conviction that the will of God is righteous will prevent acquiescence in it becoming that apathetic resignation which characterizes the spirit of those who believe that over all the events of life an iron destiny rules, against which men strive in vain.

I. THE CHARACTER OF THE DIVINE GOVERNMENT. (Ver. 14.) It is eternal and unalterable. In the phenomena of the natural world, we see it manifested in laws which man cannot control or change; in the providential government of human affairs, the same rule of a higher Power over all the events of life is discernible; and in the revelations of the Divine will, recorded in the Scriptures, we see steady progress to an end foreseen and foretold from the beginning. What God does stands fast; no created power can nullify or change it (Ps. xxiii. 11; Isa. xli. 9, 10; Dan. iv. 35).

II. THE EFFECT WHICH THIS UNCHANGEABLENESS SHOULD PRODUCE. (Ver. 14b.) "That men should fear before him." It should fill our heart with reverence. This is, indeed, the purpose for which God has given this revelation of himself, and no other view of the Divine character is calculated to produce the same effect. The thought of God's infinite power would not impress us in like manner if at the same time we believed that his will was variable, that it could be propitiated and changed. But the conviction that his will is righteous and immutable should lead us to "sanctify him in our hearts, and make him our Fear and our Dread" (Isa. viii. 13), and give us hope and confidence in the midst of the vicissitudes of life (Mal. iii. 6). In the earlier part of his work (ch. i. 9, 10) the Preacher had dwelt upon the uniformity of sequence in nature, as if he were impressed with a sense of monotony, as he watched the course of events happening and recurring in the same order. And now, as he looks upon human history, he sees the same regularity in the order of things. "That which hath been is now, and that which is to be hath already been." But the former feeling of weariness and oppression is modified by the thought of God's perfection, and by the "fear" which it excites. He recognizes the fact of a personal will governing the events of history. It is no mechanical process of revolution that causes the repetition time after time of similar events, the same causes producing the same effects; no wheel of destiny alternately raising and depressing the fortunes of men. It is God who recalls, "who seeks again that which is passed away" (ver. 15b). "The past is thought of as vanishing, put to flight, receding into the dim distance. It might seem to be passing into the abyss of oblivion; but God recalls it, brings back the same order, or an analogous order of events, and so history repeats itself" (Plumptre). And out of this belief in God's wise providence a healthy spirit should gather strength to bear patiently and cheerfully the difficulties and trials of life. The belief that our life is governed by an unalterable law is calculated, as I have said, to lead to a listless, hopeless state of mind, in which one ceases to strive against the inevitable. But that state of mind is very different from

the resignation of those who believe that the government of the world is regular and unchangeable, because unerring wisdom guides him who is the Creator and Preserver of all things. Their faith can sustain them in the greatest trials, when God's ways seem most inscrutable; they can hope against hope, and, in spite of all apparent contradictions, believe that "all things work together for good to them that love God."—J. W.

Vers. 18—22.—*The darkness of the grave.* In these words our author reaches the very lowest depth of misery and despair. His observation of the facts of human life leads him to the humiliating conclusion that it is almost hopeless to assign to man a higher nature and a more noble destiny than those which belong to the beasts that perish. The moral inequalities of the world, the injustice that goes unpunished, the hopes by which men are deluded, the uncertainty of life, the doubtfulness of immortality, seem to justify the assertion "that a man hath no pre-eminence over a beast." The special point of comparison on which he dwells is the common mortality of both. Man and beast are possessed of bodies composed of the same elements, nourished by the same food, liable to the same accidents, and destined to return to the kindred dust from which they sprang. Both are ignorant of the period of life assigned to them; a moment before the stroke of death falls on them they may be unconscious that evil is at hand, and when they realize the fact they are equally powerless to avert it. What there is in common between them is manifest to all, while the evidence to be adduced in favour of the superiority of man is, from its very nature, less convincing. The spiritually minded will attach great weight to arguments against which the natural reason may draw up plausible objections. Let us, then, see the case stated at its very worst, and consider if there are any redeeming circumstances which are calculated to relieve the gloom which a cursory reading of the words calls up.

I. The *first* statement is that MEN, LIKE BEASTS, ARE CREATURES OF ACCIDENT. (Ver. 19a.) Not that they are both the results of blind chance; but that, "being conditioned by circumstances over which there can be no control, they are subject, in respect to their whole being, actions, and sufferings, as far as mere human observation can extend, to the law of chance, and are alike destined to undergo the same fate, *i.e.* death" (Wright). A parallel to the thought of this verse is to be found in the very striking words of Solon to Croesus (Herodotus, i. 32), "Man is altogether a chance;" and in Ps. xlix. 14, 20, "Like sheep they are laid in the grave. . . . Man that is in honour, and understandeth not, is like the beasts that perish."

II. The *second* statement is that AS IS THE DEATH OF THE ONE, SO IS THE DEATH OF THE OTHER (ver. 19b), for in both is the breath of life, and this departs from them in like manner. So that any superiority on the part of man over the beast is incredible in the face of this fact, that death annuls distinctions between them. One resting-place receives them all at last—the earth from which they sprang (ver. 20). A belief in the immortality of the soul of man would at once have relieved the gloom, and convinced the Preacher that the humiliating comparison he institutes only reaches to a certain point, and is based upon the external accidents of human life, and that the true dignity and value of human nature remain unaffected by the mortality of the corporeal part of our being. "Put aside the belief in the prolongation of existence after death, that what has been begun here may be completed, and what has gone wrong here may be set right, and man is but a more highly organized animal, the 'cunningest of nature's clocks,' and the high words which men speak as to his greatness are found hollow. They too are 'vanity.' He differs from the brutes around him only, or chiefly, in having, what they have not, the burden of unsatisfied desires, the longing after an eternity which after all is denied him" (Plumptre).

III. The *third* statement is the saddest of all—that of THE UNCERTAINTY OF KNOWLEDGE AS TO WHETHER, AFTER ALL, THERE IS THIS HIGHER ELEMENT IN HUMAN NATURE—"a spirit that at death goeth upward"—or whether the living principles of both man and beast perish when their bodies are laid in the dust (ver. 21). It is quite fruitless to deny that it is a sceptical question that is asked—If the spirit of the beast goeth downward to the earth, who knows that that of man goeth upward? Attempts have been made to obliterate the scepticism of the passage, as may be seen in the Massoretic punctuation followed in the Authorized Version of our English Bible, but departed from in the Revised Version, "Who knoweth the spirit of man that

goeth upward," etc.? as though an ascent of the spirit to a higher life were affirmed. The rendering of the four principal versions, and of all the best critics, convinces us that it is indeed a sceptical question as to the immortality of the soul that is here asked. A very similar passage is found in the great poem of Lucretius (i. 113—116)—

"We know not what the nature of the soul,
Or born or entering into men at birth,
Or whether with our frame it perisheth,
Or treads the gloom and regions vast of death."

It is to be noted, however, about both the question of the Preacher and the words of the heathen poet, that they do not contain a denial of immortality, but a longing after more knowledge resting on sufficient grounds. Sad and depressing as uncertainty on such a point is to a sensitive mind, a denial of immortality would be infinitely worse; it would mean the death of all hope. The very suggestion of a higher life for man, after "this mortal coil has been shuffled off" than for the beast implies that, far from denying the immortality of the soul, the writer seeks for adequate ground on which to hold it. Arguments in favour of the doctrine of immortality were not wanting to the Preacher. He has just spoken of the *desiderium æternitatis* implanted in the heart of man (ver. 11), which, like the instincts of the lower creation, is given by the Creator for our guidance, and not to tantalize and deceive us. The inequalities and evils of the present life render a final judgment in a world beyond the grave a moral necessity (ch. xii. 14). But still these are, after all, but indirect arguments, which have not the weight of positive demonstration. It is only faith that can return any certain reply to his doubting question; its weight, thrown into the balance, inclines it to the hopeful side. And this happy conclusion he reached at last, as he distinctly affirms in ch. xii. 7, "Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it." That the Preacher should ever have doubted this great truth, and spoken as though no certainty concerning it were within the reach of man, need not surprise us. In the revelation given to the Jewish people, the doctrine of rewards and punishments in a future state was not set forth. The rewards and punishments for obedience to the Law, and for transgressions against it, were all temporal. Almost nothing was communicated touching the existence of the soul after death. In the passage quoted by Christ in the Gospels, for the confutation of the Sadducees, who denied the resurrection, the doctrine of immortality is implied rather than stated (Matt. xxii. 23—32). And in a matter so far beyond the power of the human intellect to search out, the absence of a word of revelation rendered the darkness doubly obscure. It is, however, utterly monstrous for any of us now who believe in Christ to ask the question, "Who knoweth the spirit of man, whether it goeth upward?" The revelation given us by him is full of light on this point. "He hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (2 Tim. i. 10). His own resurrection from the dead, and ascension to heaven is the proof of a life beyond the grave, and a pledge to all who believe in him of a future and an everlasting life. It was not wonderful that the Preacher, in the then stage of religious knowledge, should have spoken as he does here; but nothing could justify us, to whom so much fresh light has been given, in using his words, as though we were in the same condition with him.

IV. The *fourth* and concluding statement is, strangely enough, that since we know not what will come after death, A CHEERFUL ENJOYMENT OF THE PRESENT is the best course one can take. This is the third time he has given this counsel (ch. ii. 24; iii. 12, 13). A calm and happy life, healthy labour, and tranquil enjoyment, are to be valued and taken advantage of to the full. It is an epicureanism of a spiritual cast that he commends, and not the coarse and degraded animalism of those who say, "Let us eat and drink; for to-morrow we die." He recognizes the good gifts of the present as a "portion" given by God, and says—Rejoice in them, though the future be all unknown. The very gloom out of which his words spring give a dignity to them. "We feel that we are in the presence of one who has the germ given him of some courage, equanimity, and calmness, which may grow into other and better things. His spirit is torn by, suffers with, all the pangs that beset the inquiring human heart. He feels for all the woes of humanity; cannot put them by, and fly to the wine-cup and crown himself with

garlands. He has hated life, yet he will not lose his courage. 'Be of good cheer,' he says, even in his dark hour; 'work on, and enjoy the fruits of work; it is thy portion. Do not curse God and die'" (Bradley). His words are not, as they might seem at first, frivolous and heartless. It is a calm and peaceful happiness, a life of honest endeavour and of single-hearted enjoyment of innocent pleasures, that he commends; and, after all, it is only by genuine faith in God that such a life is possible—a faith that enables one to rise above all that is dark and mysterious and perplexing in the world about us.—J. W.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER IV.

Vers. 1-16.—Section 5. Koheleth proceeds to give further illustrations of *man's inability to be the architect of his own happiness*. There are many things which interrupt or destroy it.

Vers. 1-3.—First of all, he adduces the oppression of man by his fellow-man.

Vers. 1.—So I returned, and considered all the oppressions that are done under the sun. This is equivalent to, "again I saw," as ver. 7, with a reference to the wickedness in the place of judgment which he had noticed in ch. iii. 16. *Ashukim*, "oppressions," is found in Job xxxv. 9 and Amos iii. 9, and, being properly a participle passive, denotes oppressed persons or things, and so abstractedly "oppressions." *Tās συκοφαντίας* (Septuagint); *calumnias* (Vulgate). The verb is used of high-handed injustice, of offensive selfishness, of the hindrances to his neighbour's well-being caused by a man's careless disregard of aught but his own interests (comp. 1 Sam. xii. 4; Hos. xii. 8, etc.). Behold the tears of such as were oppressed; *τῶν συκοφαντούμενων* (Septuagint); *innocentium* (Vulgate). He notes now not merely the fact of wrong being done, but its effect on the victim, and intimates his own pity for the sorrow. And they had no comforter. A sad refrain, echoed again at the end of the verse with touching pathos. *Οὐκ ἔστιν αὐτοῖς παρακαλῶν* (Septuagint); they had no earthly friends to visit them in their affliction, and they as yet knew not the soothing of the Holy Ghost, the Comforter (*Παράκλητος*). There was no one to wipe away their tears (Isa. xxv. 8) or to redress their wrongs. The point is the powerlessness of man in the face of these disorders, his inability to right himself, the incompetence of others to aid him. On the side of their oppressors there was power (*koach*), in a bad sense, like the Greek *bia*, equivalent to "violence." Thus the ungodly say, in the Book of Wisdom ii. 11, "Let our strength be the law of justice." Vulgate, *Neo posse resistere eorum*

violentia, cunctorum auxilio destitutos. It is difficult to suppose that the state of things revealed by this verse existed in the days of King Solomon, or that so powerful a monarch, and one admired for "judgment and justice" (1 Kings x. 9), would be content with complaining of such disorders instead of checking them. There is no token of remorse for past unprofitableness or anguish of heart at the thought of failure in duty. If we take the words as the utterance of the real Solomon, we do violence to history, and must correct the existing chronicles of his reign. The picture here presented is one of later times, and it may be of other countries. Persian rule, or the tyranny of the Ptolemies, might afford an original from which it might be taken.

Vers. 2.—In view of these patent wrongs Koheleth loses all enjoyment of life. Wherefore (and) I praised the dead which are already dead; or, *who died long ago*, and thus have escaped the miseries which they would have had to endure. It must, indeed, have been a bitter experience which elicited such an avowal. To die and be forgotten an Oriental would look upon as the most calamitous of destinies. More than the living which are yet alive. For these have before them the prospect of a long endurance of oppression and suffering (comp. ch. vii. 1; Job iii. 13, etc.). The Greek gnome says—

Κρεῖσσον τὸ μὴ ζῆν ἔστιν, ἢ ζῆν ἀθλίως.

"Better to die than lead a wretched life."

The Septuagint version is scarcely a rendering of our present text: "Above the living, as many as are living until now."

Vers. 3.—Yea, better is he than both they, which hath not yet been. Thus we have Job's passionate appeal (iii. 11), "Why died I not from the womb? why did I not give up the ghost when I came forth," etc.? And in the Greek poets the sentiment of the text is re-echoed. Thus Theognis, 'Paroem.,' 425—

*πάντων μὲν μὴ φῦνα ἐπιχθονίοισιν ἄριστον,
μῆδ' ἐσιδεῖν αὐγὰς ὄξος ἡελίου
φύντα δ', ὅπως ὤκιστα πύλας Αἴδαο περῆσαι,
καὶ κείσθαι πολλὴν γῆν ἐπαμνησάμενον.*

" 'Tis best for mortals never to be born,
Nor ever see the swift sun's burning rays;
Next best, when born, to pass the gates of
death
Right speedily, and rest beneath the
earth."

(Comp. Soph., 'Œd. Col.' 1225—1228.)
Cicero, 'Tusc. Disp.' i. 48, renders some
lines from a lost play of Euripides to the
same effect—

"Nam nos decebat, cæstus celebrantes,
domum
Lugere, ubi esset aliquis in lucem editus,
Humanæ vitæ varia reputantes mala;
At qui labores morte finisset graves,
Hunc omni amicos laude et lætitia ex-
sequi."

Herodotus (v. 4) relates how some of the
Thracians had a custom of bemoaning a
birth and rejoicing at a death. In our own
Burial Service we thank God for delivering
the departed "out of the miseries of this
sinful world." Keble alludes to this bar-
barian custom in his poem on 'The Third
Sunday after Easter.' Speaking of a
Christian mother's joy at a child's birth, he
says—

"No need for her to weep
Like Thracian wives of yore,
Save when in rapture still and deep
Her thankful heart runs o'er.

They mourned to trust their treasure on
the main,

Sure of the storm, unknowing of their
guide:

Welcome to her the peril and the pain,
For well she knows the home where they
may safely hide."

(See on ch. vii. 1; comp. Gray's ode 'On a
Prospect of Eton College;' and for the
classical notion concerning life and death,
see Plato, 'Laches,' p. 195, D, *sqq.*;
'Gorgias,' p. 512, A.) The Buddhist reli-
gion does not recommend suicide as an escape
from the evils of life. It indeed regards man
as master of his own life; but it considers
suicide foolish, as it merely transfers a man's
position, the thread of life having to be
taken up again under less favourable circum-
stances. See 'A Buddhist Catechism,' by
Subhadra Bhikshu (London: Redway, 1890).
Who hath not seen the evil work that is
done under the sun. He repeats the words,
"under the sun," from ver. 1, in order to show
that he is speaking of facts that came under
his own regard—outward phenomena which
any thoughtful observer might notice (so
again ver. 7).

Vers. 4—6.—Secondly, success meets with
envy, and produces no lasting good to the

worker; yet, however unsatisfactory the re-
sult, man must continue to labour, as idleness is ruin.

Ver. 4.—Again, I considered all travail,
and every right work. The word rendered
"right" is *kishron* (see on ch. ii. 21), and
means rather "dexterity," "success." Kohe-
leth says that he reflected upon the industry
that men exhibit, and the skill and dexterity
with which they ply their incessant toil.
There is no reference to moral rectitude in
the reflection, and the allusion to the ostracism
of Aristides for being called "Just" over-
shoots the mark (see Wordsworth, *in loc.*).
Septuagint, *ὁμπασαν ἀνδρῶν τοῦ ποιήματος*,
"all manliness of his work." That for this
a man is envied of his neighbour. *Kinah*
may mean either "object of envy" or "en-
vious rivalry;" i.e. the clause may be translated
as above, or, as in the Revised Version margin,
"it cometh of a man's rivalry with his neigh-
bour." The Septuagint is ambiguous, "Ὁτι
αὐτὸς (ἄλλος ἀνδρὸς ἀπὸ τοῦ ἐταίρου αὐτοῦ, "That
this is a man's envy from his comrade;" Vul-
gate, *Industrias animadverti patere invidiam
proximi*, "Lay open to a neighbour's envy."
In the first case the thought is that unusual
skill and success expose a man to envy and
ill will, which rob labour of all enjoyment.
In the second case the writer says that this
superiority and dexterity arise from a mean
motive, an envious desire to outstrip a neigh-
bour, and, based on such low ground, can lead
to nothing but vanity and vexation of spirit,
a striving after wind. The former explana-
tion seems more in accordance with Kohe-
leth's gloomy view. Success itself is no
guarantee of happiness; the malice and ill
feeling which it invariably occasions are
necessarily a source of pain and distress.

Ver. 5.—The connection of this verse with
the preceding is this: activity, diligence,
and skill indeed bring success, but success
is accompanied by sad results. Should we,
then, sink into apathy, relinquish work, let
things slide? Nay, none but the fool (*keeth*),
the insensate, half-brutish man, doth this.
The fool foldeth his hands together. The
attitude expresses laziness and disinclination
for active labour, like that of the sluggard
in Prov. vi. 10. And eateth his own flesh.
Ginsburg, Plumptre, and others take these
words to mean "and yet eats his meat," i.e.
gets that enjoyment from his sluggishness
which is denied to active diligence. They
refer, in proof of this interpretation, to Exod.
xvi. 8; xxi. 28; Isa. xxii. 13; Ezek. xxxix.
17, in which passages, however, the phrase
is never equivalent to "eating his food."
The expression is really equivalent to
"destroys himself," "brings ruin upon him-
self." Thus we have in Ps. xxvii. 2, "Evil-
doers came upon me to eat up my flesh;"

and in Micah iii. 3, "Who eat the flesh of my people" (comp. Isa. xlix. 26). The sluggard is guilty of moral suicide; he takes no trouble to provide for his necessities, and suffers extremities in consequence. Some see in this verse and the following an objection and its answer. There is no occasion for this view, and it is not in keeping with the context; but it contains an intimation of the true exposition, which makes ver. 6 a proverbial statement of the sluggard's position. The verbs in the text are participial in form, so that the Vulgate rendering, which supplies a verb, is quite admissible: *Stultus complicat manus suas, et comedit carnes suas, dicens: Melior est, etc.*

Ver. 6.—Better is a hand full with quietness; literally, *better a hand full of rest*. Than both the hands full with travail and vexation of spirit; literally, *than two hands full of travail*, etc. This verse, which has been variously interpreted, is most simply regarded as the fool's defence of his indolence, either expressed in his own words or fortified by a proverbial saying. One open hand full of quietness and rest is preferable to two closed hands full of toil and vain effort. The verse must not be taken as the writer's warning against sloth, which would be out of place here, but as enunciating a maxim against discontent and that restless activity which is never satisfied with moderate returns.

Vers. 7-12.—Thirdly, avarice causes isolation and a sense of insecurity, and brings no satisfaction.

Ver. 7.—Then I returned. Another reflection serves to confirm the uselessness of human efforts. The vanity under the sun is now avarice, with the evils that accompany it.

Ver. 8.—There is one alone, and there is not a second; or, *without a second*—a solitary being, without partner, relation, or friend. Here, he says, is another instance of man's inability to secure his own happiness. Wealth indeed, is supposed to make friends, such as they are; but miserliness and greed separate a man from his fellows, make him suspicious of every one, and drive him to live alone, churlish and unhappy. Yes, he hath neither child nor brother; no one to share his wealth, or for whom to save and amass riches. To apply these words to Solomon himself, who had brothers, and one son, if not more, is manifestly inappropriate. They may possibly refer to some circumstance in the writer's own life; but of that we know nothing. Yet is there no end of all his labour. In spite of this isolation he plies his weary task, and ceases not to hoard. Neither is his eye satisfied with riches; so that he is content with what he has (comp. ch. ii. 10; Prov. xxvii. 20). The insatiable thirst for

gold, the dropsy of the mind, is a commonplace theme in classical writers. Thus Horace, 'Carm.' iii. 16. 17—

"Crescentem sequitur cura pecuniam,
Majorumque fames."

And Juvenal, 'Sat.' xiv. 133—

"Interea pleno quum turget sacculus ore,
Crescit amor nummi, quantum ipsa pecunia crevit."

Neither, saith he, For whom do I labour, and bereave my soul of good? The original is more dramatic than the Authorized Version or the Vulgate, *Nec recogitat, dicens, Cui laboro*, etc.? The writer suddenly puts himself in the place of the friendless miser, and exclaims, "And for whom do I labour," etc.? We see something similar in ver. 15 and ch. ii. 15. Here we cannot find any definite allusion to the writer's own circumstances. The clause is merely a lively personification expressive of strong sympathy with the situation described (comp. ch. ii. 18). *Good* may mean either riches, in which case the denial to the soul refers to the enjoyment which wealth might afford, or happiness and comfort. The Septuagint has ἀγαθωσύνης, "goodness," "kindness"—which gives quite a different and not so suitable an idea. *Sore travail*; a sad business, a woeful employment.

Ver. 9.—Kohleleth dwells upon the evils of isolation, and contrasts with them the comfort of companionship. Two are better than one. Literally, the clause refers to the two and the one mentioned in the preceding verse (Ἀγαθὸν οἱ δύο ὑπὲρ τὸν ἓνα, Septuagint); but the gnome is true in general. "Two heads are better than one," says our proverb. Because (asher here conjunctive, not relative) they have a good reward for their labour. The joint labours of two produce much more effect than the efforts of a solitary worker. Companionship is helpful and profitable. Ginsburg quotes the rabbinical sayings, "Either friendship or death;" and "A man without friends is like a left hand without the right." Thus the Greek gnome—

Ἄνθρω γὰρ ἄνδρα, καὶ πόλιν σώζει πόλιν.

"Man helps his fellow, city city saves."

Χεὶρ χεῖρα νίπτει δάκτυλός τε δάκτυλον.

"Hand cleanseth hand, and finger cleanseth finger."

(Comp. Prov. xvii. 17; xxvii. 17; Eccles. vi. 14.) So Christ sent out his apostles two and two (Mark vi. 7).

Ver. 10.—Kohleleth illustrates the benefit of association by certain familiar examples. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow. If one or the other fall, the companion will aid him. The idea is that two

travellers are making their way over a rough road—an experience that every one must have had in Palestine. Vulgate, *Si unus ceciderit*. Of course, if both fell at the same time, one could not help the other. Commentators quote Homer, 'Iliad,' x. 220—226, thus rendered by Lord Derby—

"Nestor, that heart is mine; I dare alone
Enter the hostile camp, so close at hand;
Yet were one comrade giv'n me, I should go
With more of comfort, more of confidence.
Where two combine, one before other sees
The better course; and ev'n though one
alone

The readiest way discover, yet would be
His judgment slower, his decision less."

Woe to him that is alone. The same interjection of sorrow, *וָא*, occurs in ch. x. 16, but elsewhere only in late Hebrew. The verse may be applied to moral falls as well as to stumbling at natural obstacles. Brother helps brother to resist temptation, while many have failed when tried by isolation who would have manfully withstood if they had had the countenance and support of others.

"Clear before us through the darkness
Gleams and burns the guiding light;
Brother clasps the hand of brother,
Stepping fearless through the night."

Ver. 11.—The first example of the advantage of companionship spoke of the aid and support that are thus given; the present verse tells of the comfort thus brought. If two lie together, then they have heat. The winter nights in Palestine are comparatively cold, and when, as in the case of the poorer inhabitants, the outer garment worn by day was used as the only blanket during sleep (Exod. xxii. 26, 27), it was a comfort to have the additional warmth of a friend lying under the same coverlet. Solomon could have had no such experience.

Ver. 12.—The third instance shows the value of the protection afforded by a companion's presence when danger threatens. If one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; better, if a man overpower the solitary one, the two (ver. 9) will withstand him. The idea of the traveller is continued. If he were attacked by robbers, he would be easily overpowered when alone; but two comrades might successfully resist the assault. And a threefold cord is not quickly broken. This is probably a proverbial saying, like our "Union is strength." Hereby the advantage of association is more strongly enforced. If the companionship of two is profitable, much more is this the case when more combine. The cord of three strands was the strongest made. The number three is used as the symbol of completeness and perfection. *Funiculus triplex difficile rum-*

pitur, the Vulgate rendering, has become a trite saying; and the gnome has been constantly applied in a mystical or spiritual sense, with which, originally and humanly speaking, it has no concern. Herein is seen an adumbration of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, the Eternal Three in One; of the three Christian virtues, faith, hope, and charity, which go to make the Christian life; of the Christian's body, soul, and spirit, which are consecrated as a temple of the Most High.

Vers. 13—16.—High place offers no assurance of security. A king's popularity is never permanent; he is supplanted by some clever young aspirant for a time, whose influence in turn soon evaporates, and the subject-people reap no benefit from the change.

Ver. 13.—Better is a poor and wise child than an old and foolish king. The word translated "child" (*yeled*), is used sometimes of one beyond childhood (see Gen. xxx. 26; xxxvii. 30; 1 Kings xii. 8), so here it may be rendered "youth." *Mishen*, *πενθς* (Septuagint), *pauper* (Vulgate), "poor," is found also at ch. ix. 15, 16, and nowhere else; but the root, with an analogous signification, occurs at Deut. viii. 9 and Isa. xl. 20. The clause says that a youth who is clever and adroit, though sprung from a sordid origin, is better off than a king who has not learned wisdom with his years, and who, it is afterwards implied, is dethroned by this young man. Who will no more be admonished; better, as in the Revised Version, *who knoweth not how to receive admonition any more*. Age has only fossilized his self-will and obstinacy; and though he was once open to advice and hearkened to reproof, he now bears no contradiction and takes no counsel. Septuagint, *ὅς οὐκ ἔγνω τοῦ προειπεῖν ἐγώ*, "Who knows not how to take heed any longer;" which is perhaps similar to the Vulgate, *Qui nescit providere in posterum*, "Who knows not how to look forward to the future." The words will bear this translation, and it accords with one view of the author's meaning (see below); but that given above is more suitable to the interpretation of the paragraph which approves itself to us. The sentence is of general import, and may be illustrated by a passage from the Book of Wisdom (iv. 8, 9), "Honourable age is not that which stauddeth in length of time, nor that is measured by length of years. But wisdom is the grey hair unto men, and an unspotted life is old age." So Cicero, 'De Senect.' xviii. 62, "Non cani nec rugæ repente auctoritatem arripere possunt, sed honeste acta superior ætas fructus capit auctoritatis extremos." Some have thought that Solomon is here speaking of himself,

avowing his folly and expressing his contrition, in view of his knowledge of Jeroboam's delegation to the kingdom—the crafty youth of poor estate (1 Kings xi. 26, etc.), whom the Prophet Abijah had warned of approaching greatness. But there is nothing in the recorded history of Solomon to make probable such expression of self-abasement, and our author could never have so completely misrepresented him. Here, too, is another proof that Ecclesiastes is not written by Solomon himself.

Ver. 14.—For out of prison he cometh to reign; whereas also he that is born in his kingdom becometh poor. The ambiguity of the pronouns has induced different interpretations of this verse. It is plain that the paragraph is intended to corroborate the statement of the previous verse, contrasting the fate of the poor, clever youth with that of the old, foolish king. The Authorized Version makes the pronoun in the first clause refer to the youth, and those in the second to the king, with the signification that rich and poor change places—one is abased as the other is exalted. Vulgate, *Quod de carcere catenisque interdum quis egrediatur ad regnum; et alius natus in regno inopia consummatur*. The Septuagint is somewhat ambiguous, "Ὅτι ἐξ οἴκου τῶν δεσφίων ἐξελεύσεται τοῦ βασιλεῦσαι, ὅτι καὶ γε ἐν βασιλείᾳ αὐτοῦ ἐγενήθη πένις," "For from the house of prisoners he shall come forth to reign, because in his kingdom he [who?] was born [or, 'became'] poor." It seems, however, most natural to make the leading pronouns in both clauses refer to the youth, and thus to render: "For out of the house of prisoners goeth he forth to reign, though even in his kingdom he was born poor." *Beth hasurim* is also rendered "house of fugitives," and Hitzig takes the expression as a description of Egypt, whither Jeroboam fled to escape the vengeance of Solomon. Others see here an allusion to Joseph, who was raised from prison, if not to be king, at least to an exalted position which might thus be designated. In this case the old and foolish king who could not look to the future is Pharaoh, who could not understand the dream which was sent for his admonition. Commentators have wearied themselves with endeavouring to find some other historical basis for the supposed allusion in the passage. But although many of these suggestions (e.g. Saul and David, Josiah and Amaziah, Cyrus and Astyages, Herod and Alexander) meet a part of the case, none suit the whole passage (vers. 13—16). It is possible, indeed, that some particular allusion is intended to some circumstance or event with which we are not acquainted. At the same time, it seems to us that, without

much straining of language, the reference to Joseph can be made good. If it is objected that it cannot be said that Joseph was born in the kingdom of Egypt, we may reply that the words may be taken to refer to his cruel position in his own country, when he was despoiled and sold, and may be said metaphorically to have "become poor;" or the word *nolad* may be considered as equivalent to "came," "appeared," and need not be restricted to the sense of "born."

Ver. 15.—I considered all the living which walk under the sun; or, I have seen all the population. The expression is hyperbolic, as Eastern monarchs speak of their dominions as if they comprised the whole world (see Dan. iv. 1; vi. 25). With the second child that shall stand up in his stead. "With" (by) means "in company with," "on the side of;" and the clause should be rendered, as in the Revised Version, *That they were with the youth, the second, that stood up in his stead*. The youth who is called the second is the one spoken of in the previous verses, who by general acclamation is raised to the highest place in the realm, while the old monarch is dethroned or depreciated. He is named *second*, as being the successor of the other, either in popular favour or on the throne. It is the old story of worshipping the rising sun. The verse may still be applied to Joseph, who was made second to Pharaoh, and was virtually supreme in Egypt, standing in the king's place (Gen. xli. 40—44).

Ver. 16.—There is no end of all the people, even of all that have been before them. The paragraph plainly is carrying on the description of the popular enthusiasm for the new favourite. The Authorized Version completely obscures this meaning. It is better to translate, *Numberless were the people, all, at whose head he stood*. Koheleth places himself in the position of a spectator, and marks how numerous are the adherents who flock around the youthful aspirant. "Nullus finis omni populo, omnibus, quibus praeuit" (Gesenius, Rosenmüller, Volek). Yet his popularity was not lasting and his influence was not permanent. They also that come after shall not rejoice in him. In spite of his cleverness, and notwithstanding the favour with which he is now regarded, those of a later generation shall flout his pretensions and forget his benefits. If we still continue the allusion to Joseph, we may see here in this last clause a reference to the change that supervened when another king arose who knew him not (Exod. i. 8), and who, oblivious of the services of this great benefactor, heavily oppressed the Israelites. This experience leads to the same result; it is all vanity and vexation of spirit.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—3.—*Two pessimistic fallacies; or, the glory of being born.* I. THE FIRST FALLACY. That the dead are happier than the living. 1. *Even on the assumption of no hereafter, this is not evident.* The already dead are not praised because they enjoyed better times on earth than the now living have. But (1) if they had better times when living, they have these no more, having ceased to be; while (2) if their times on earth were not superior to those of their successors, they have still only escaped these by subsiding into cold annihilation, and it has yet to be proved that “a living dog” is not “better than a dead lion” (ch. ix. 4). Besides, (3) it is not certain there is no hereafter, which makes them pause and hesitate to jump the life to come. When they discuss with themselves the question—

“Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
And by opposing end them?”—

they generally come to Hamlet's conclusion, that it is better to

“Bear the ills we have,
Than fly to others that we know not of.”

2. *On the assumption that there is a hereafter, it is less certain that the dead are more to be praised than the living.* It depends on who the dead are, and what the kind of existence is into which they have departed. (1) If they have lived unrighteously on earth, it will not be safe, even on grounds of natural reason, to conclude that their condition in the unseen land into which they have vanished is better than that of the living who are yet alive, even should these also be wicked; since for these there are still time and place for repentance, which cannot be affirmed of the ungodly dead. (2) If their lives on earth have been pious—e.g. if as Christians they have fallen asleep in Jesus—it need hardly be doubted that their condition is better even than that of the godly living, who are still dwellers in this vale of tears, subject to imperfections, exposed to temptations, and liable to sin.

II. THE SECOND FALLACY. That better than both the living and the dead are the not yet born. 1. *On the assumption that this life is all, it is not universally true that not to have been born would have been a preferable lot to having been born and being dead.* No doubt it is sad that one born into this world is sure, while on his pilgrimage to the tomb, to witness spectacles of oppression such as the Preacher describes; and sadder that many before they die will be the victims of such oppressions; while of all things, perhaps the saddest is that a man may even live to become the perpetrator of such cruelties; yet no one can truly affirm that human life generally contains nothing but oppression on the one side and tears upon the other, or that in any individual's life naught exists but wretchedness and woe, or that in the experiences of most the joys do not nearly counterbalance, if not actually outweigh, the griefs, while in that of not a few the pleasures far exceed the pains. 2. *On the assumption of a hereafter, only one case or class of cases can be pointed to in which it would have been decidedly better not to have been born, viz. that in which one who has been born, on departing from this world, passes into an undone eternity.* Christ instanced one such case (Matt. xxvi. 24); and if there be truth in the representations given by Christ and his apostles of the ultimate doom of those who die in unbelief and sin (Matt. xi. 22; xiii. 41, 42; xxii. 13; xxiv. 51; John v. 29; 2 Thess. i. 9; Rev. xxi. 8), it will not be difficult to see that in their case also the words of the Preacher will be true. 3. *In every other instance, but chiefly in that of the good, who does not see how immeasurably more blessed it is to have been born?* For consider what this means. It means to have been made in the Divine image, endowed with an intellect and a heart capable of holding fellowship with and serving God. And if it also signifies to have been born into a state of sin and misery in consequence of our first parents' fall, it should not be forgotten that it signifies, in

addition, to have been born into a sphere and condition of existence in which God's grace has been before one, and is waiting to lift one up, completely and for ever, out of that sin and misery if one will. No one accepting that grace will ever afterwards deem it a misfortune that he was born. Thomas Halyburton, the Scottish theologian (A.D. 1674—1712), did not so regard his introduction to this lower world, with all its vicissitudes and woes. "Oh, blessed be God that I was born!" were his dying words. "I have a father and a mother, and ten brothers and sisters, in heaven, and I shall be the eleventh. Oh, blessed be the day that ever I was born!"

Learn: 1. The existence of sin and suffering no proof that life is an evil thing. 2. The wickedness of undervaluing existence under the sun. 3. The folly of over-praising the dead and underrating the living. 4. A worse thing than seeing "evil work" beneath the sun is doing it.

Vers. 4—8.—*Three sketches from life.* I. THE INDUSTRIOUS WORKER. 1. *The success that attends his toil.* Every enterprise to which he puts his hand prospers, and in this sense is a "right" work. Never an undertaking started by him fails. Whatever he touches turns into gold. He is one of those children of fortune upon whom the sun always shines—a man of large capacity and untiring energy, who keeps plodding on, doing the right thing to pay, and doing it at the right time, and so building up for himself a vast store of wealth. 2. *The drawbacks that wait on his success.* The Preacher does not hint that his work has been wrong; only that success such as his has its drawbacks. (1) It can only be attained by hard work. By Heaven's decree it is the fruit of toil; and sometimes he who finds it must sweat and labour for it, tugging away at the oar of industry like a very galley-slave, depriving his soul of good, and condemning his body to the meanest drudgery. (2) It often springs from unworthy motives in the worker, as *e.g.* from ambition, or a desire to outstrip his competitors in the race for wealth; from covetousness, or a hungry longing for other people's gold; or from avarice, which means a sordid thirst for possession. (3) It commonly leads to envy in beholders, especially in those to whom success has been denied. That it ought not to do so may be conceded; that it will not do so in those who consider that success, like every other thing, comes from God (Ps. lxxv. 6, 7), and that a man can receive nothing except it be given him from above (John iii. 27) is certain; that it does so, nevertheless, is apparent. In every department of life success incites some who witness it to depreciation, censoriousness, and even to backbiting and slander. "Envy spies out blemishes, that she may lower another by defeat," and when she cannot find, seldom wants the wit to invent them. Detraction is the shadow that waits upon the sun of prosperity. (4) It is usually attended by anxiety. The man to whom success is given is often one to whom success can be of small account, being "one that is alone and hath not a second," without wife or child, brother or friend, to whom to leave his wealth, so that as this increases his perplexity augments as to what he shall do with it.

II. THE HABITUAL IDLER. 1. *The folly he exhibits.* Not indisposed to partake of the successful man's wealth, he is yet disinclined to the labour by which alone wealth can be secured. He is one on whom the spirit of indolence has seized. Averse to exertion, like the sluggard, he is slumberous and slothful (Prov. vi. 10; xxiv. 33); and when he does awake, finds that other men's day is half through. If one must not depreciate the value of sleep, which God gives to his beloved (Ps. cxxvii. 2), or pronounce all fools who have evinced a capacity for the same, since according to Thomson ('Castle of Indolence')—

"Great men have ever loved repose,"

one may recognize the folly of expecting to succeed in life while devoting one's day to indolence or slumber. 2. *The wretchedness that springs from his folly.* That the habitual idler should "eat his own flesh"—not have a pleasant time of it, in spite of his indolence, attain to the fruition of his desires without work (Ginsburg, Plumtre), but reduce himself to poverty and starvation, and consume himself with envy and vexation (Delitzsch, Hengstenberg, Wright)—is according to the fitness of things, as well as the teachings of Scripture (Prov. xiii. 4; xxiii. 21; ch. x. 18; 2 Thess. iii. 10). "Idleness is the bane of body and mind, the nurse of naughtiness, the chief

author of all misery, one of the seven deadly sins, the cushion upon which the devil chiefly reposes, and a great cause not only of melancholy, but of many other diseases" (Burton).

III. THE SAGACIOUS MORALIZER. 1. *His character defined.* Neither of the two former, he is a happy mean between both. If he toils not like him who always succeeds, he loafs not about like the fool who never works. If he amasses not wealth, he equally escapes poverty. He works in moderation, and is contented with a competence. 2. *His wisdom extolled.* If he attains not to riches, he avoids the sore travail requisite to procure riches, and the vexation of spirit, or "feeding upon wind," which riches bring. If he succeeds in gathering only one fistful of the goods of earth, he has at least the priceless pearl of quietness, including ease of mind as well as comfort of body.

LESSONS. 1. Industry and contentment two Christian virtues (Rom. xii. 11; Eph. iv. 28; 1 Tim. vi. 8; Heb. xiii. 5). 2. Idleness and sloth two destructive sins (Prov. xii. 24; ch. x. 8).

Vers. 9—12.—*Two better than one; or, companionship versus isolation.* I. THE DISADVANTAGES OF ISOLATION. 1. *Its causes.* Either natural or moral, providentially imposed or deliberately chosen. (1) Examples of the former: the individual who has no wife or friend, son or brother, because these have been removed by death (Ps. lxxxviii. 18); the traveller who journeys alone through some uninhabited waste (Job xxxviii. 26; Jer. ii. 6) or voiceless solitude; a stranger who lands on a foreign shore, with whose inhabitants he can hold no converse, because of not understanding their speech, and who lacks the assistance of a friendly interpreter. (2) Instances of the latter: the younger son, who forsakes the parental roof, leaving behind him parents, brothers, and sisters, as well as friends and companions, acquaintances and neighbours, and departs into a far country alone to see life and make a fortune; the elder brother, who, when the old people have died, and the younger branches of the family have removed, remains unmarried, because he chooses to live entirely for himself; the busy merchant, self-contained and prosperous, who stands apart from his employees, and, without either colleague or counsellor, partner or assistant, takes upon his own broad shoulders the whole weight and responsibility of a large "concern;" the student, who loves his books better than his fellows, and, eschewing intercourse with these, broods in solitude over problems too deep for his unaided intellect, that might be solved in a few hours' talk with a friend; the selfish soul, who has heart to give to no thing or person outside of self, and who fears lest his own stock of happiness should be diminished were he in an inadvertent moment to augment that of others. 2. *Its miseries.* Manifold and richly deserved—at least where the isolation springs from causes moral and self-chosen. Amongst the lonely man's woes may be enumerated these: (1) the absence of those advantages and felicities that arise from companionship—a theme treated of in the next main division of this homily; (2) the intellectual and moral deterioration that inevitably ensues on the suppression of the soul's social instincts, and the attempt to educate one's manhood apart from the family, the community, the race, of which it forms a part; (3) the inward wretchedness that by the just decree of Heaven attends the crime (where the isolation spoken of assumes this form) of living entirely for self; and, (4) aside from ideas of crime and guilt, the insatiable greed of self, which makes even larger demands upon one's labour, and deeper inroads upon one's peace, than all the claims of others would were the soul to honour these, and which, like an unpitying taskmaster, impels the soul to unceasing toil, and fills it with unending care (ver. 8; cf. ch. ii. 23).

II. THE BENEFITS OF COMPANIONSHIP. The "good reward" for their labour which two receive in preference to one points to the advantages that flow from union. These are four. 1. *Reciprocal assistance.* The picture sketched by "the great orator" is that of two wayfaring men upon a dark and dangerous road, who are helpful to each other in turn as each stumbles in the path, rendered difficult to tread by gloom overhead or uneven places underfoot. Whereas each one by himself might deem it hazardous to pursue his journey, knowing that if he fell when alone he might be quite unable to rise, and might even lose his life through exposure to the inclemencies of the night or the perils of the place, each accompanied by the other pushes on with quiet

confidence, realizing that, should a moment come when he has need of a second to help him up, that second will be beside him in the person of his friend.

“When two together go, each for the other
Is first to think what best will help his brother;
But one who walks alone, tho’ wise in mind,
Of purpose slow and counsel weak we find.”

(Homer, ‘Iliad,’ x. 224—226.)

The application of this principle of mutual helpfulness to almost every department of life, to the home and to the city, to the state and to the Church, to the workshop and to the playground, to the school and to the university, is obvious. 2. *Mutual stimulus.* Illustrated from the case of two travellers, who on a cold night lie under one blanket (Exod. xxiii. 6), and keep each other warm; whereas, should they sleep apart, they would each shiver the whole night through in miserable discomfort. The counterpart of this, again, may be found in every circle of life, but more especially in the home and the Church, in both of which the inmates are enjoined and expected to be helpers and comforters of each other, considering one another to provoke unto love and good works (Heb. x. 24). 3. *Efficient protection.* The writer notes the peril of the pilgrim whom, if alone, a robber may overpower, but whom, if accompanied by a comrade, the highwayman would not venture to attack. So multitudes of dangers assail the individual, against which he cannot protect himself by his own unaided strength, but which the friendly assistance of another may aid him to repel. As illustrations will at once present themselves, cases of sickness, temptations to sin, assaults upon the youthful believer’s faith. In ordinary life men know the value of co-operation as a means of defence against invasions of what are deemed their natural rights; might the Christian Church not derive from this a lesson as to how she can best meet and cope with the assaults to which she is subjected by infidelity on the one hand, and immorality on the other? 4. *Increased strength.* As surely as division and isolation mean loss of power, with consequent weakness, so surely do union and co-operation signify augmented might and multiplied efficiency. The Preacher expresses this by saying, “The three-fold cord will not quickly be broken.” As the thickest rope may be snapped if first untwisted and taken strand by strand, so may the most formidable army be defeated, if only it can be dealt with in detached battalions, and the strongest Church may be laid in ruins if its members can be overthrown one by one. But then the converse of this is likewise true. As every strand twisted into a cable imparts to it additional strength, so every grace added to the Christian character makes it stronger to repel evil, and gives it larger ability for Christian service; while every additional believer incorporated into the body of Christ renders it the more impregnable by sin, and the more capable of furthering the progress of the truth.

LESSONS. 1. The sinfulness of isolation. 2. The duty of union. 3. The value of a good companion.

Vers. 13—16.—*The vicissitudes of royalty; or, the experience of a king.* I. *WELCOMED IN YOUTH.* The picture sketched that of a political revolution. “An old and foolish king, no longer understanding how to be warned,” who has fallen out of touch with the times, and neither himself discerns the governmental changes demanded by the exigencies of the hour, nor is willing to be guided by his state councillors, is deposed in favour of a youthful hero who has caught the popular imagination, perceived the necessities of the situation, learnt how to humour the fickle crowd, contrived to install himself in their affections, and succeeded in promoting himself to be their ruler. 1. *Climbing the ladder.* Originally a poor man’s son, he had raised himself to be a leader of his countrymen, perhaps as Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, did in the days of Rehoboam (1 Kings xi. 26—28), interesting himself in the social and political condition of his fellow-subjects, sympathizing with their grievances, probably acting as their spokesman in laying these before the aged sovereign; and, when their demands were unheeded, possibly fanning their discontent, and even helping them to plot insurrection—for which, having been detected, he was cast into prison. Nevertheless, neither his humble birth nor his forcible incarceration had been sufficient to degrade him in the people’s eyes. 2. *Standing on the summit.* Accordingly, when the

tide of discontent had risen so high that they could no longer tolerate their senile and imbecile monarch, and their courage had waxed so valiant as to enable them successfully to carry through his deposition, they bethought themselves of the imprisoned hero who had espoused and was then suffering for their cause, and having fetched him forth from confinement, proceeded with him to the then deserted palace, where they placed upon his head the crown, amid shouts of jubilant enthusiasm, crying, "God save the king!" It is doubtless an ideal picture, which in its several details has often been realized; as, e.g., when Joseph was fetched from the round house of Heliopolis, and seated on the second throne of Egypt (Gen. xli. 14, 40); as when David was crowned at Hebron on Saul's death by the men of Judah (2 Sam. ii. 4), and Jeroboam at Shechem by the tribes of Israel (1 Kings xii. 20); as when Athaliah was deposed, and the boy Joash made king in her stead (2 Kings xi. 12). 3. *Surveying his fortune.* So far as the new-made king was concerned, the commencement of his reign was auspicious. It doubtless never occurred to him that the sun of his royal person would ever know decline, or that he would ever experience the fate of his predecessor. It was with him the dawn of rosy-fingered morn; how the day would develop was not foreseen, least of all was it discerned how the night should fall!

II. HONOURED IN MANHOOD. 1. *Extending his renown.* Seated on his throne, he wields the sceptre of irresponsible authority for a long series of years. As the drama of his life unfolds, he grows in the affections of his people. With every revolution of the sun his popularity increases. The affairs of his kingdom prosper. The extent of his dominions widens. All the kingdoms of the earth come to place themselves beneath his rule. Like another Nebuchadnezzar, Cyrus, Xerxes, Alexander, Cæsar, he is a world-governing autocrat. "All the living who walk under the sun" are on the side of the man who had been born poor, and had once languished in a prison; neither is there any end to all the people at whose head he is. 2. *Enjoying his felicity.* One would say, as perhaps in the heyday of his prosperity he said to himself, the cup of his soul's happiness was full. He had obtained all the world could bestow of earthly glory, power the most exalted, influence the most extended, riches the most abundant, fame the most renowned, popularity the most secure! What could he wish else? The sun of his royal highness was shining in meridian splendour, and prostrate nations were adoring him as a god. No one surely would venture to suggest that the orb of his majestical divinity might one day suffer an eclipse. We shall see! Strange things have happened on this much-agitated planet.

III. DESPISED IN AGE. 1. *The shadows gathering.* The brightest earthly glory is liable to fade. One who has reached the topmost pinnacle of fame, and is the object of admiration to millions of his fellows, may yet sink so low that men shall say of him, as Mark Antony said of the fallen Cæsar—

"Now lies he there,
And none so poor to do him reverence."

The idol of one age may become an object of execration to the next. As in ancient Egypt another king arose who knew not Joseph, so in the picture of the Preacher given to manhood another generation which knew not the poor wise youth who had been his country's deliverer. He of whom it had once been said—

"All tongues speak of him, and the bleared sights
Are spectacled to see him . . . and such a pother [made about him]
As if that whatsoever God who leads him
Were silly crept into his human powers,
And gave him graceful posture"—

('Coriolanus,' act ii. sc. 1.)

lived to be an object of derision to his subjects. 2. *The night descending.* In the irony of history, the same (or a similar) fate overtook him as had devoured his predecessor. As the men and women of a past age had counted his predecessor an imbecile and a fool, so were the men and women of the present age disposed to look on him. If they did not depose him, they did not "rejoice in him," as their fathers had done when they hailed him as their country's saviour; they simply suffered him to

drop into ignominious contempt, and perhaps well-merited oblivion. Such spectacles of the vanity of kingly state had been witnessed before the Preacher's day, and have been not unknown since. So fared it with the boy-prince Joash (2 Kings xi. 12; 2 Chron. xxiv. 25), and with Richard II., whose subjects cried "All hail!" to him in the day of his popularity, but to whom, when he put off his regal dignity,

"No man cried, 'God save him!'
No joyful tongue gave him his welcome home,
But dust was thrown upon his sacred head."

('King Richard II.,' act v. sc. 2.)

Learn: 1. The vanity of earthly glory. 2. The fickleness of popular renown. 3. The ingratitude of men.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ver. 1.—*The oppressed and the oppressor.* Liberty has ever been the object of human desire and aspiration. Yet how seldom and how partially has this boon been secured during the long period of human history! Especially in the East freedom has been but little known. Despotism has been and is very general, and there have seldom been states of society in which there has been no room for reflections such as those recorded in this verse.

I. THE TYRANNY OF THE OPPRESSOR. 1. This implies *power*, which may arise from physical strength, from hereditary authority, from rank and wealth, or from civil and political position and dignity. Power will always exist in human society; drive it out at one door, and it will re-enter by another. It may be checked and restrained; but it is inseparable from our nature and state. 2. It implies the *misuse* of power. It may be good to have a giant's strength, but "tyrannous to use it like a giant." The great and powerful use their strength and influence aright when they protect and care for those who are beneath them. But our experience of human nature leads us to believe that where there is power there is likely to be abuse. Delight in the exercise of power is too generally found to lead to the contempt of the rights of others; hence the prevalence of oppression.

II. THE SORROWFUL LOT OF THE OPPRESSED. 1. The sense of oppression creates grief and distress, depicted in the tears of those suffering from wrong. Pain is one thing; wrong is another and a bitterer thing. A man will endure patiently the ills which nature or his own conduct brings upon him, whilst he frets or even rages under the evil wrought by his neighbour's injustice. 2. The absence of consolation adds to the trouble. Twice it is said of the oppressed, "They had no comforter." The oppressors are indisposed, and fellow-sufferers are unable, to succour and relieve them. 3. The consequence is the slow formation of the habit of dejection, which may deepen into despondency.

III. THE REFLECTIONS SUGGESTED BY SUCH SPECTACLES. 1. No right-minded person can look upon instances of oppression without discerning the prevalence and lamenting the pernicious effects of sin. To oppress a fellow-man is to do despite to the image of God himself. 2. The mind is often perplexed when it looks, and looks in vain, for the interposition of the just Governor of all, who defers to intervene for the rectification of human wrongs. "How long, O Lord!" is the exclamation of many a pious believer in Divine providence, who looks upon the injustice of the haughty and contemptuous, and upon the woes of the helpless who are smitten and afflicted. 3. Yet there is reason patiently to wait for the great deliverance. He who has effected a glorious salvation on man's behalf, who has "visited and redeemed his people," will in due time humble the selfish tyrant, break the bonds of the captive, and let the oppressed go free.—T.

Vers. 2, 3.—*Pessimism.* It would be a mistake to regard this language as expressing the deliberate and final conviction of the author of Ecclesiastes. It represents a mood of his mind, and indeed of many a mind, oppressed by the sorrows, the wrongs, and the perplexities of human life. Pessimism is at the root a philosophy; but its manifestation

is in a habit or tendency of the mind, such as may be recognized in many who are altogether strange to speculative thinking. The pessimism of the East anticipated that of modern Europe. Though there is no reason for connecting the morbid state of mind recorded in this Book of Ecclesiastes with the Buddhism of India, both alike bear witness to the despondency which is naturally produced in the mental habit of not a few who are perplexed and discouraged by the untoward circumstances of human life.

I. THE UNQUESTIONABLE FACTS UPON WHICH PESSIMISM IS BASED. 1. The unsatisfying nature of the pleasures of life. Men set their hearts upon the attainment of enjoyments, wealth, greatness, etc. When they gain what they seek, the satisfaction expected does not follow. The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear with hearing. Disappointed and unhappy, the votary of pleasure is "sour" with life itself, and asks, "Who will show us any good?" 2. The brevity, uncertainty, and transitoriness of life. Men find that there is no time for the acquirements, the pursuits, the aims, which seem to them essential to their earthly well-being. In many cases life is cut short; but even when it is prolonged, it passes like the swift ships. It excites visions and hopes which in the nature of things cannot be realized. 3. The actual disappointment of plans and the failure of efforts. Men learn the limitations of their powers; they find circumstances too strong for them; all that seemed desirable proves to be beyond their reach.

II. THE HABIT OF MIND IN WHICH PESSIMISM CONSISTS. 1. It comes to be a steady conviction that life is not worth living. Is life a boon at all? Why should it be prolonged, when it is ever proving itself insufficient for human wants, unsatisfying to human aspirations? The young and hopeful may take a different view, but their illusions will speedily be dispelled. There is nothing so unworthy of appreciation and desire as life. 2. The dead are regarded as more fortunate than the living; and, indeed, it is a misfortune to be born, to come into this earthly life at all: "The sooner it's over, the sooner asleep." Consciousness is grief and misery; they only are blest who are at rest in the painless Nirvana of eternity.

III. THE ERRORS INVOLVED IN THE PESSIMISTIC INFERENCE AND CONCLUSION. 1. It is assumed that pleasure is the chief good. A great living philosopher deliberately takes it for granted that the question—Is life worth living? is to be decided by the question—Does life yield a surplus of agreeable feeling? This being so, it is natural that the disappointed and unhappy should drift into pessimism. But, as a matter of fact, the test is one altogether unjust, and can only be justified upon the supposition that man is merely a creature that feels. It is the hedonist who is disappointed that becomes the pessimist. 2. There is a higher end for man than pleasure, viz. spiritual cultivation and progress. It is better to grow in the elements of a noble character than to be filled with all manner of delights. Man was made in the likeness of God, and his discipline on earth is to recover and to perfect that likeness. 3. This higher end may in some cases be attained by the hard process of distress and disappointment. This seems to have been lost sight of in the mood which found expression in the language of these verses. Yet experience and reflection alike concur to assure us that it may be good for us to be afflicted. It not infrequently happens that

"The soul
Gives up a part to take to it the whole."

APPLICATION. As there are times and circumstances in all persons' lives which are naturally conducive to pessimistic habits, it behoves us to be, at such times and in such circumstances, especially upon our guard lest we half consciously fall into habits so destructive of real spiritual well-being and usefulness. The conviction that Infinite Wisdom and Righteousness are at the heart of the universe, and not blind unconscious fate and force, is the one preservative; and to this it is the Christian's privilege to add an affectionate faith in God as the Father of the spirits of all flesh, and the benevolent Author of life and immortal salvation to all who receive his gospel and confide in the mediation of his blessed Son.—T.

Ver. 4.—*Envy*. There is no vice more vulgar and despicable, none which affords more painful evidence of the depravity of human nature, than envy. It is a vice which

Christianity has done much to discourage and repress; but in unchristian communities its power is mighty and disastrous.

I. THE FACTS FROM WHICH ENVY SPRINGS. 1. Generally, the inequality of the human lot is the occasion of envious feelings, which would not arise were all men possessed of an equal and a satisfying portion of earthly good. 2. Particularly, the disposition, on the part of one who is *not* possessed of some good, some desirable quality or property, to grasp at what is possessed by another.

II. THE FEELINGS AND DESIRES IN WHICH ENVY CONSISTS. We do not say that a man is envious who, seeing another strong or healthy, prosperous or powerful, wishes that he enjoyed the same advantages. Emulation is not envy. The envious man desires to take another's possessions from him—desires that the other may be impoverished in order that he may be enriched, or depressed in order that he may be exalted, or rendered miserable in order that he may be happy.

III. THE MISCHIEF TO WHICH ENVY LEADS. 1. It may lead to unjust and malevolent action, in order that it may secure its gratification. 2. It produces unhappiness in the breast of him who cherishes it; it gnaws and corrodes the heart. 3. It is destructive of confidence and cordiality in society.

IV. THE TRUE CORRECTIVE TO ENVY. 1. It should be considered that whatever men acquire and enjoy is attributable to the Divine favour and loving-kindness. 2. And that all men have blessings far beyond their deserts. 3. It becomes us to think less of what we do not or do *possess*, and more of what we *do*. 4. And to cultivate the spirit of Christ—the spirit of self-sacrifice and benevolence.—T.

Ver. 6.—*The handful with quietness.* The lesson here imparted is proverbial. Every language has its own way of conveying and emphasizing this practical truth. Yet it is a belief more readily professed than actually made the basis of human conduct.

I. ABUNDANT MATERIAL WEALTH ATTRACTS ATTENTION AND EXCITES DESIRE.

II. THE DISPOSITION AND HABIT OF MIND WITH WHICH OUR POSSESSIONS ARE ENJOYED IS OF MORE IMPORTANCE THAN THEIR AMOUNT. 1. This appears from a consideration of human nature. "A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesses." 2. And experience of human life enforces this lesson; for every observer of his fellow-men has remarked the unhappiness and pitiable moral state of some wealthy neighbours, and has known cases where narrow means have not hindered real well-being and felicity.

III. IT IS HENCE INFERRED THAT A QUIET MIND WITH POVERTY IS TO BE PREFERRED TO WEALTH WITH VEXATION. So it seemed even to Solomon in all his glory, and similar testimony has been borne by not a few of the great of this world. Nor, on the other hand, is it uncommon to find the healthy, happy, and pious among the poor rejoicing in their lot, and cherishing gratitude to God for the station to which they were born, and for the work to which they are called.

APPLICATION. 1. The comparison made by the wise man in this passage is a rebuke to envy. Who can tell what, if his two hands were filled with earthly good, he might, in consequence of his wealth, be called upon to endure of sorrow and of care? 2. On the other hand, this comparison is an encouragement to contentment. A handful is sufficient; and a quiet heart, grateful to God and at peace with men, can make what others might deem poverty not only endurable but welcome. It is God's blessing which maketh rich; and with it he addeth no sorrow.—T.

Ver. 8.—*The pain of loneliness.* The picture here drawn is one of pathetic interest. It cannot have originated in personal experience, but must have been suggested by incidents in the author's wide and varied observation. A lonely man without a brother to share his sorrows and joys, without a son to succeed to his name and possessions, is represented as toiling on through the years of his life, and as accumulating a fortune, and then as awaking to a sense of his solitary state, and asking himself for whom he thus labours and endures? It is vanity, and a sore travail!

I. THE COMPANIONSHIP OF DOMESTIC AND SOCIAL LIFE IS THE ORDER OF NATURE AND THE APPOINTMENT OF GOD'S PROVIDENCE. There are cases in which men are called upon to deny themselves such companionship, and there are cases in which they have been, by no action of their own, but by the decree of God, deprived of it. But the

constitution of the individual's nature and of human society are evidence that the declaration regarding our first father holds good of his posterity—that is, in normal circumstances—"It is not good for the man to be alone."

II. SUCH COMPANIONSHIP SUPPLIES A MOTIVE AND A RECOMPENSE FOR TOIL. A man can work better, more efficiently, perseveringly, and happily, when he works for others than when he works only for himself. Many a man owes his habits of industry and self-denial, his social advancement and his moral maturity, to the necessity of labouring for his family. He may be called upon to maintain aged parents, to provide for the comfort of a sickly wife, to secure the education of his sons, to save a brother from destitution. And such a call may awaken a willing and cheerful response, and may, under God, account for a good work in life.

III. THE ABSENCE OF SUCH COMPANIONSHIP MAY BE A SORE AFFLICTION, AND MAY BE THE OCCASION OF UNWISE AND BLAMABLE DISSATISFACTION AND MURMURING. Under the pressure of loneliness, a man may relax his efforts, or he may fall into a discontented, desponding, and cynical frame of mind. He may lose his interest in life and in human affairs generally. He may even become misanthropic and sceptical.

IV. THE TRUE CORRECTIVE OF SUCH UNHAPPY TENDENCIES IS TO BE FOUND IN THE CULTIVATION OF SPIRITUAL FELLOWSHIP WITH CHRIST, AND IN A WIDE CIRCLE OF SYMPATHY AND BENEVOLENCE. No one need be lonely who can call his Saviour his Friend; and Christ's friendship is open to every believer. And all Christ's disciples and brethren are of the spiritual kindred of him who trusts and loves the Redeemer. Where kindred "according to the flesh" are wanting, there need be no lack of spiritual relatives and associates. All around the lonely man are those who need succour, kindly aid, education, guardianship, and the heart purifies and refines as it takes in new objects of pity, interest, and Christian affection. And the day shall come when the Divine Saviour and Judge shall say to those who have responded to his appeal, "Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye did it unto me."—T.

Vers. 9—12.—*The advantages of fellowship.* There is a sense in which we have no choice but to be members of society. We are born into a social life, trained in it, and in it we must live. "None of us liveth unto himself." But there is a sense in which it rests with us to cultivate fellowship with our kind. And such voluntary association, we are taught in this passage, is productive of the highest benefits.

I. FELLOWSHIP MAKES LABOUR EFFECTIVE. "Two have a good reward for their labour." If this was so in the day of the writer of Ecclesiastes, how much more strikingly and obviously is it so to-day! Division of labour and co-operation in labour are the two great principles which account for the success of industrial enterprise in our own time. There is scope for such united efforts in the Church of Christ—for unity and brotherly kindness, for mutual help, consideration, and endeavour.

II. FELLOWSHIP PROVIDES SUCCOUR IN CALAMITY. When two are together, he who falls may be lifted up, when if alone he might be left to perish. This is a commonplace truth with reference to travellers in a strange land, with reference to comrades in war, etc. Our Lord Jesus sent forth his apostles two and two, that one might supply his neighbour's deficiencies; that the healthy might uphold the sick; and the brave might cheer the timid. The history of Christ's Church is a long record of mutual succour and consolation. To raise the fallen, to cherish the weakly, to relieve the needy, to assist the widow and fatherless,—this is true religion. Here is the sphere for the manifestation of Christian fellowship.

III. FELLOWSHIP IS PROMOTIVE OF COMFORT, WELL-BEING, AND HAPPINESS. "How can one be warm alone?" asks the Preacher. Every household, every congregation, every Christian society, is a proof that there is a spirit of mutual dependence wherever the will of the great Father and Saviour of mankind is honoured and obeyed. The more there is of brotherly love within the Church, the more effective will be the Church's work of benevolence and missionary aggression upon the ignorance and sin of the world.

IV. FELLOWSHIP IMPARTS STRENGTH, STABILITY, AND POWER OF RESISTANCE. Two, placing themselves shoulder to shoulder, can withstand an onset before which one alone would fall. "The threefold cord is not quickly broken." It must be remembered that the work of religious men in this world is no child's play; there are forces of evil to

resist, there is a warfare to be maintained. And in order to succeed, two things are needful: first, dependence upon God; and secondly, brotherhood with our comrades and fellow-soldiers in the holy war.—T.

Vers. 13, 14.—*Folly a worse evil than poverty.* This is no doubt a paradox. For one man who seeks to become wise, there are a hundred who desire and strive for riches. For one man who desires the friendship of the thoughtful and prudent, there are ten who cultivate the intimacy of the prosperous and luxurious. Still, men's judgment is fallible and often erroneous; and it is so in this particular.

I. WISDOM ENNOBLES YOUTH AND POVERTY. Age does not always bring wisdom, which is the gift of God, sometimes—as in the case of Solomon—conferred in early life. True excellence and honour are not attached to age and station. Wisdom, modesty, and trustworthiness may be found in lowly abodes and in youthful years. Character is the supreme test of what is admirable and good. A young man may be wise in the conduct of his own life, in the use of his own gifts and opportunities, in the choice of his own friends; he may be wise in his counsel offered to others, in the influence he exerts over others. And his wisdom may be shown in his contented acquiescence in the poverty of his condition and the obscurity of his station. He will not forget that the Lord of all, for our sakes, became poor, dwelt in a lowly home, wrought at a manual occupation, enjoyed few advantages of human education or of companionship with the great.

II. FOLLY DEGRADES AGE AND ROYALTY. In the natural order of things, knowledge and prudence should accompany advancing age. It is "years that bring the philosophic mind." In the natural order of things, high station should call out the exercise of statesmanship, thoughtful wisdom, mature and weighty counsel. Where all these are absent, there may be outward greatness, splendour, luxury, empire, but true kingship there is not. There is no fool so conspicuously and pitifully foolish as the aged monarch who can neither give counsel himself nor accept it from the experienced and trustworthy. And the case is worse when his folly is apparent in the mismanagement of his own life. It may be questioned whether Solomon, in his youth, receiving in answer to prayer the gift of wisdom, and using it with serious sobriety, was not more to be admired than when, as a splendid but disappointed voluptuary, he enjoyed the revenues of provinces, dwelt in sumptuous palaces, and received the homage of distant potentates, but yet was corrupted by his own weaknesses into connivance at idolatry, and was unfaithful to the Lord to whose bounty he was indebted for all he possessed.

APPLICATION. This is a word of encouragement to thoughtful, pure-minded, and religious youth. The judgment of inspiration commends those who, in the flower of their age, by God's grace rise above the temptations to which they are exposed, and cherish that reverence toward the Lord which is the beginning of wisdom.—T.

Vers. 1—3.—*Pessimism and Christian life.* It is a very significant fact that this pessimistic note (of the text) should be as much heard as it is in this land and in this age;—in this land, where the hard and heavy oppressions of which the writer of Ecclesiastes had to complain are comparatively unknown; in this age, when Christian truth is familiar to the highest and the lowest, is taught in every sanctuary and may be read in every home. There are to be found (1) not only many who, without the courage of the suicide, wish themselves in their grave; but (2) also many more who believe that human life is worth nothing at all, even less than nothing; who would say with the Preacher, "better than both is he who hath not been;" who would respond to the English poet of this century in his lament—

"Count o'er the joys thy life has seen,
Count o'er thy days from sorrow free;
But know, whatever thou hast been,
'Tis something better not to be."

There is an unfailing remedy for this wretched pessimism, and that is found in an earnest Christian life. No man who heartily and practically appropriates all that Christian truth offers him, and who lives a sincere and genuine Christian life, could

cherish such a sentiment or employ such language as this. For the disciple of Jesus Christ who really loves and follows his Divine Master has—

I. COMFORT IN HIS SORROWS. He never has reason to complain that there is “no comforter.” Even if human friends and earthly consolations be lacking, there is One who fulfils his word, “I will not leave you comfortless;” “I will come to you;” “I will send you another Comforter, even the Spirit of truth.” Whether suffering from oppression, or from loss, or bereavement, or bodily distress, there are the “consolations which are in Jesus Christ;” there is the “God of all comfort” always near.

II. REST IN HIS HEART. That peace of mind, that rest of soul which is of simply incalculable worth (Matt. xi. 28; Rom. v. 1); a sacred, spiritual calm, which the world “cannot take away.”

III. RESOURCES WHICH ARE UNFAILING. In the fellowship he has with God, in the elevated enjoyments of devotion, in the intercourse he has with holy and earnest souls like-minded with himself, he has sources of sacred joy, “springs that do not fail.”

IV. THE SECRET OF HAPPINESS IN ALL HIS HUMBLEST LABOUR. He does everything, even though he be a servant or even a slave, as “unto Christ the Lord;” and all drudgery is gone; life is filled with interest, and toil is crowned with dignity and nobleness.

V. JOY IN UNSELFISH SERVICE OF HIS KIND.

VI. HOPE IN DEATH.—C.

Vers. 4—6.—*Practical wisdom in the conduct of life.* What shall we pursue—distinction or happiness? Shall we aim to be markedly successful, or to be quietly content? What shall be the goal we set before us?

I. THE FASCINATION OF SUCCESS. A great many men resolve to attain distinction in their sphere. They put forth “labour, skilful labour,” inspired by feelings of rivalry; they are animated by the hope of surpassing their fellows, of rising above them in the reputation they achieve, in the style in which they live, in the income they earn, etc. There is very little that is profitable here. 1. It must necessarily be attended with a large amount of failure: where many run, “but one receiveth the prize.” 2. The satisfaction of success is short-lived; it soon loses its keen relish, and becomes of small account. 3. It is a satisfaction of a very low order.

II. THE TEMPTATION TO INDOLENCE. Many men are content to go through life moving along a much lower level than their natural capacities, their educational advantages, and their social introductions fit them and entitle them to maintain. They crave quietude; they want to be free from the bustle, the worry, the burden of the strife of life; they prefer to have a very small share of worldly wealth, and to fill a very little space in the regard of their neighbours, if only they can be well left alone. “The sluggard foldeth his hands; yea, he eateth his meat” (Cox). There is a measure of sense in this; much is thereby avoided which it is desirable to shun. But, on the other hand, such a choice is ignoble; it is to decline the opportunity; it is to retreat from the battle; it is to leave the powers of our nature and the opportunities of our life idle and unemployed.

III. THE WISDOM OF THE WISE. This is: 1. *To be contented with our lot*; not to be dissatisfied because there are others above us in the trade or the profession in which we are engaged; not to be envious of those more successful than ourselves; to recognize the goodness of our Divine Father in making us what we are and giving us what we have. 2. *To let our labours be inspired* by high and elevating motives; to work with all our strength, because (1) God loves faithfulness; (2) we cannot respect ourselves nor earn the esteem of the upright if we are indolent or faulty; (3) diligence and devotedness conduct to an honourable success, and enable us to render greater service both to Christ and to mankind.—C.

Vers. 9—12.—*Mutual service.* There is a measure of separateness, and even of loneliness, which is inseparable from human life. There are times and occasions when a man must determine for himself what choice he will make, what course he will pursue. Each human soul must “bear its own burden” in deciding what shall be its final attitude toward revealed truth; what shall be its abiding relation to God; whether it will accept or decline the crown of eternal life. Nevertheless, we thank

God for human companionship; we rejoice greatly that he has so "fashioned our hearts alike," and so interwoven our human lives, that we can be much to one another, and do much for one another, as we go on our way. "Two are better than one." The union of hearts and lives means—

I. SHARING SUCCESS. "They have a good reward for their labour." If two men work apart, and succeed in their labour, each has his own separate satisfaction. But if they confide their hopes, and tell their triumphs, and share their joys together, each man has much more "reward for his labour" than if he strove apart. It is one of the blessings of earlier life that its victories are so much enhanced by their being shared with others; it is one of the detractions from later life that *its* successes are confined to so small a sphere.

II. RESTORATION. (Ver. 10.) The falling of the solitary traveller in the unfrequented and dangerous path is a picture of the more serious and often fatal falling of the pilgrim in the path of life. To fall into disgrace, or (what is worse) into sin and evil habit, and to have no true and loyal friend to stand by and to hold out the uplifting hand, to cover the shame with the mantle of his unspotted reputation, to lead back the erring soul with his strength and rectitude into the way of wisdom, into the kingdom of God—to such a man, in such necessity, the "woe" of the preacher may well be uttered.

III. ANIMATION. (Ver. 11.) "In Syria the nights are often keen and frosty, and the heat of the day makes men more susceptible to the nightly cold. The sleeping-chambers, moreover, have only unglazed lattices, which let in the frosty air. . . . And therefore the natives huddle together for the sake of warmth. To lie alone was to lie shivering in the chill night air." Moreover, it may be said that to sleep in the cold is, in certain temperatures, to be in danger of losing life, while the warmth given by contact with life would preserve vitality. To be "alone" is to live a cold, cheerless, inanimate existence; to be warmed by human friendship, to be animated by contact with living men, is to have a measure, a fulness, of life not otherwise enjoyed.

IV. DEFENCE. (Ver. 12.) "Our two travellers (see above), lying snug and warm on their common mat, buried in slumber, were very likely to be disturbed by thieves who had dug a hole into the barn or crept under the tent. . . . If one was thus aroused, he would call on his comrade for help" (Cox). It is not only the prowling thief against whom a man may defend his companion. By timely warning, by wise suggestion, by sound instruction, by faithful entreaty, by practical sympathy, we may so stand by one another, that we may save from the worst attacks of our most deadly spiritual enemies; thus we may save one another from falling into error, into unbelief, into vice, into shame and sorrow, "into the pit." We conclude, therefore: 1. That we should prize human friendship most highly, as that which furnishes us with the opportunity of highest service (see Isa. xxxii. 2). 2. That we should so choose our companions that we shall have from them the help we need in the trying hour. 3. That we should gain for ourselves the strength and succour of the Divine Friend.—C.

Ver. 12 (latter part).—*A threefold cord.* Many bonds of many kinds bind us in many ways. Of these some are hard and cruel, and these we have to break as best we can; the worst of them may be snapped when we strive with the help that comes from Heaven. But there are others which are neither hard nor cruel, but kind and beneficent, and these we should not shun, but gladly welcome. Such is the threefold cord which binds us to our God and to his service. It is composed of—

I. DUTY. To know, to reverence, to love, to serve God, is our supreme obligation. For we came forth from him; we are indebted to him for all that makes us what we are, owing all our faculties of every kind to his creative power. We have been sustained in being every moment by his Divine visitation; we have been enriched by him with everything we possess, our hearts and our lives owing to his generous kindness all their joys and all their blessings; it is in him that we live and move and have our being; we sum up all obligations, we touch the height and depth of exalted duty, when we say that "he is our God." Moreover, all this natural obligation is enhanced and multiplied manifold by all that he has done for us, and *all that he has endured for us* in the salvation which is in Jesus Christ, his Son.

II. INTEREST. To know, to love, to serve God,—this is our highest and truest interest. 1. It means the possession of his Divine favour; and that surely is much, not to say *everything*, to us. 2. It constitutes our real, because our spiritual, well-being; it causes us thereby and therein to realize the ideal of our humanity; we are at our very best imaginable when we are in fellowship with God and are possessing his likeness. 3. It secures to us a happy life below, filled with hallowed contentment, and charged with sacred joy, while it conducts to a future which will be crowned with immortal glory.

III. AFFECTION. To live in the service of Jesus Christ is to act as our human relationships demand that we should act. It is to give the deepest and purest satisfaction to those from whom we have received the most self-denying love; it is also to lead those for whom we have the strongest affection in the way of wisdom, in the paths of honour, joy, eternal life.—C.

Vers. 13—16.—*Circumstance and character.* This very obscure passage is thus rendered by Cox ('The Quest of the Chief Good'): "Happier is a poor and wise youth than an old and foolish king, who even yet has not learned to be admonished. For a prisoner may go from a prison to a throne, whilst a king may become a beggar in his own kingdom. I see all the living who walk under the sun flocking to the sociable youth who standeth up in his place; there is no end to the multitude of the people over whom he ruleth. Nevertheless, those who live after him will not rejoice in him; for even this is vanity and vexation of spirit." Thus read, we have a very clear meaning, and we are reminded of a very valuable lesson. We may learn—

I. THE VANITY OF TRUSTING IN CIRCUMSTANCE APART FROM CHARACTER. It is well enough to bear a royal name, to have a royal retinue, to move among royal surroundings. Old age may forget its infirmities in the midst of its rank, its honours, its luxuries. But when royalty is dis severed from wisdom, when it has not learned by experience, but has grown downwards rather than upwards, the outlook is poor enough. The foolish king is likely enough to be dethroned, and to "become a beggar in his own kingdom." An exalted position makes a man's follies seem larger than they are; and as they injuriously affect every one, they are likely to lead to universal condemnation and to painful penalty. It is of little use to be enjoying an enviable position if we have not character to maintain and ability to adorn it. The wheel of fortune will soon take to the bottom the man who is now rejoicing on the top of it.

II. THE NEEDLESSNESS OF DESPAIR IN THE DEPTH OF MISFORTUNE. Whilst the old and foolish king may decline and fall, the wise youth, who has been disregarded, will move on and up to honour and to power, and even the condemned prisoner may mount the throne. The history of men and of nations proves that nothing is impossible in the way of recovery and elevation. Man may "hope to rise" from the bottom, as he should "fear to fall" from the top of the scale. Let those who are honestly and conscientiously striving, though it may be with small recognition or recompense, hope to attain to the honour and the reward which are their due. Let those who have suffered saddest disappointment and defeat remember that men may rise from the very lowest estate even to the highest.

III. THE ONE UNFAILING SOURCE OF SATISFACTION. The old and foolish king may deserve to be dethroned, but he *may* retain his position until he dies; the wise youth *may* fail to reach the honours to which he is entitled; the innocent prisoner may languish in his dungeon even until death opens the door and releases him. There is no certainty in this world, where fortune is so fickle, and circumstance cannot be counted upon even by the most sagacious. But there is one thing on which we may reckon, and in which we may take refuge. To be upright in our heart, to be sound in our character, to be true and faithful in life—this is to be *what is good*; it is to *enjoy that which is best*—the favour of God and our own self-respect; it is to *move toward that which is blessed*—a heavenly future.—C.

Vers. 1—3.—*Oppression of man by his fellows.* Many different phases of human misery are depicted in this book, many different moods of depression recorded; some springing from the disquietude of the writer's mind, others from the disorders he witnessed in the world about him. Sensuous pleasure he had declared (ch. iii. 12, 13,

22) to be the only good for man, but now he finds that even that is not always to be secured. There are evils and miseries that afflict his fellows, against which he cannot shut his eyes. A vulgar sensualist might drown sorrow in the wine-cup, but *he* cannot. "His merriment is spoiled by the thought of the misery of others, and he can find nothing 'under the sun' but violence and oppression. In utter despair, he pronounces the dead happier than the living" (Cheyne). If he does not actually deny the immortality of the soul, and is therefore without the consolation of believing that in a life to come the evils of the present may be reversed and compensated for, he ignores it as something of which we cannot be sure. We may see in this passage the germ of a higher character than is to be formed by the most elaborate self-culture; the spontaneous and deep compassion for the sufferings of others which the writer manifests tells us that a nobler emotion than the desire of personal enjoyment fills his mind. He tells us what he saw in his survey of society, and the feelings which were excited within him by the sight.

I. THE WIDESPREAD MISERY CAUSED BY INJUSTICE AND CRUELTY. (Ver. 1.) His description has been only too frequently verified in one generation after another of the world's history.

"Man's inhumanity to man
Makes countless thousands mourn."

The barbarities of savage life, the wars and crusades carried on in the name of religion, the cruelties perpetrated by despotic rulers to secure their thrones, the hardships of the slave, the pariah, and the down-trodden, fill out the picture suggested by the words, "I considered all the oppressions that are done under the sun." They all spring from the abuse of power (ver. 1), which might and should have been used for the protection and comfort of men. The husband and father, the king, the priest, the magistrate, are all invested with rights and authority of a greater or less extent over others, and the abuse of this power leads to hardships and suffering on the part of those subject to them which it is almost impossible to remedy. For many of the evils that may afflict a community a revolution may seem the only way of deliverance; and yet that in the vast majority of cases means, in the first instance, multiplying disorders and inflicting fresh sufferings. Anarchy is a worse evil than bad government, and the fact that this is so, is calculated to make the most ardent patriot hesitate before attempting to set wrong right with a strong hand.

II. THE FEELINGS EXCITED BY A CONTEMPLATION OF HUMAN MISERY. (Vers. 2, 3.) One good point in the character of the speaker we have already noticed, and that is that he cannot banish the thought of the distresses of others by attending to his own ease and self-enjoyment. He is not like the rich man in the parable, who fared sumptuously every day, and took no notice of the hungry, naked beggar covered with sores that lay at his gate (Luke xvi. 19—21). On the contrary, a deep compassion fills his heart at the thought of the oppressed who have no comfort, and the fact that he cannot deliver them or ameliorate their lot does not lead him to consider it unnecessary for him to distress himself about them; it rather tends to deepen the despondency he feels, and to make him think those happy who have done with life, and rest in the place where "the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary be at rest" (Job iii. 17). Yea, better, he thinks, never to have been than to see the evil work that is done under the sun (ver. 3). The distress which the sight of the sufferings of the oppressed produces is unrelieved by any consolatory thought. The writer does not, as I have said, anticipate a future life in which the righteous are happy, and the wicked receive the due reward of their deeds; he does not invoke the Divine interposition on behalf of the oppressed in the present life, or speak of the salutary discipline of sufferings meekly borne. In short, we do not find here any light cast upon the problem of evil in a world governed by a God of infinite power, wisdom, and love, such as is given in other passages of Holy Scripture (Job, *passim*; Ps. lxxiii.; Heb. xii. 5—11). But we may freely admit that the depth and intensity of feeling with which our author speaks of human misery is infinitely preferable to a superficial optimism founded, not upon Christian faith, but upon an imperfect appreciation of moral and spiritual truth, and generally accompanied by a selfish indifference to the welfare of others. A striking parallel to the thought in this passage is to be found in the

teaching of Buddhism. The spectacle of miseries of old age, disease, and death, drove the Indian prince, Cakya Mouni, to find in Nirvana (annihilation, or unconscious existence) a solution of the great problem. But both are superseded by the teaching of Christ, who gives us to understand that "not to have been born" is not a blessing which the more spiritually minded might covet, but a state better only than that exceptional misery which is the doom of exceptional guilt (Matt. xxvi. 24).—J. W.

Vers. 4—6.—*Ambition and indolence.* The Preacher turns from the great, and to him insoluble, problems connected with the misery and suffering in which so many of the children of men are sunk. "His mood is still bitter; but it is no longer on the oppressions and cruelty of life that he fixes his eye, but on its littleness, its mutual jealousies, its greed, its strange reverses, its shams and hollowness. He puts on the garb of the satirist, and lashes the pettiness and the follies and the vain hurry of mankind" (Bradley). As it were, he turns from the evils which no foresight or effort could ward off, to those which spring from preventible causes.

I. **RESTLESS AMBITION.** (Ver. 4.) Revised Version, "Then I saw all labour and every skilful work, that it cometh of a man's rivalry with his neighbour" (margin). The Preacher does not deny that labour and toil may be crowned with some measure of success, but he notices that the inspiring motive is in most cases an envious desire on the part of the worker to surpass his fellows. Hence he asserts that in general no lasting good is secured by the individual worker (Wright). The general community may benefit largely by the results achieved, the progress of civilization may be advanced by the competition of artist with artist, but without a moral gain being attained by those who have put forth all their strength and exerted to the utmost all their skill. They may still feel that their ideal is higher than their achievements; they may see with jealous resentment that their best work is surpassed by others. The poet Hesiod, in his 'Works and Days,' distinguishes between two kinds of rivalry—the one beneficent and provocative of honest enterprise, the other pernicious and provocative of discord. The former is like that alluded to here by the Preacher, and is the parent of healthy competition.

"Beneficent this better envy burns—
Thus emulous his wheel the potter turns,
The smith his anvil beats, the beggar throng
Industrious ply, the bards contend in song."

But our author, looking at the motive rather than the result of the work, brands as injurious the selfish ambition from which it may have sprung.

II. **INDOLENCE.** (Ver. 5.) "The fool foldeth his hands together, and eateth his own flesh." While there are some who fret and wear themselves out in endeavours to surpass their neighbours, others rust out in ignoble sloth. The hands of the busy artist are deftly used to shape and fashion the materials in which he works, and to embody the ideas or fancies conceived in his mind; the indolent fold their hands together, and make no attempt either to excel others or to provide a living for themselves. The one may, after all his toil, be doomed to failure and disappointment; the other most certainly dooms himself to want and misery. "He feeds upon his own flesh," and destroys himself. The sinfulness of indolence, and the punishment which it brings down upon itself, are plainly indicated in many parts of Holy Scripture (Prov. vi. 10, 11; xiii. 4; xx. 4; Matt. xxv. 26; 2 Thess. iii. 10). But the special point of the reference to the vice here seems to be the contrast which it affords to that of feverish ambition. The two dispositions depicted are opposed to each other; both are blameworthy. It is foolish to seek to escape the evils of the one by incurring those of the other. A middle way between them is the path of wisdom. This is taught us in ver. 6: "Better is an handful with quietness, than both the hands full with travail and vexation of spirit." The rivalry that consumes the strength, and leads almost inevitably to disappointment and vexation of spirit, is deprecated; so also, by implication, is the inactivity of the indolent. The "quietness" which refreshes the soul, and gives it contentment with a moderate competence, is not idleness, or the rest of sloth. It is rest after labour, which the ambitious will not allow themselves to take. The indolent do not enjoy it, their strength wastes away from want of exercise;

while those of moderate, chastened desires can both be diligent in business and mindful of their higher interests; they can labour assiduously without losing that tranquillity of spirit and peace of mind which are essential to happiness in life.—J. W.

Vers. 7-12.—*Friendship a gain in life.* A new thought dawns upon our author. In his observation of the different phases of human life, he notes much that is disappointing and unsatisfactory, but he also perceives some alleviations of the evils by which man is harassed and disturbed. Amidst all his depreciation of the conditions under which we live, he admits positive blessings which it is our wisdom to discern and make the most of. Amongst these latter he counts friendship. It is a positive gain, by which the difficulties of life are diminished and its enjoyments increased. In vers. 8-12 he describes an isolated life wasted in fruitless, selfish toil, and dilates with something like enthusiasm upon the advantages of companionship. In order, I suppose, to make the contrast between the two states more vivid, he chooses a very pronounced case of solitariness—not that of a man merely isolated from his fellows, say living by himself on a desert island, but that of one utterly separate in spirit, a miser intent only on his own interests. We may call the passage a description of the evils of a solitary life and the value of friendship.

I. THE EVILS OF A SOLITARY LIFE. (Vers. 7, 8.) The picture is drawn with a very few touches, but it is remarkably distinct and vivid. It represents a "solitary, friendless money-maker—a Shylock without even a Jessica; an Isaac of York with no faithful Rebecca." He is alone, he has no companion, no relative or friend, he knows not who will succeed him in the possession of his heaped-up treasures; and yet he toils on with unremitting anxiety, from early in the morning till late at night, unwilling to lose a moment from his work as long as he can add anything to his gains. "There is no end of all his labour." The assiduity with which he at first applied himself to the task of accumulating riches distinguishes him to the end of life. At first, perhaps, he had to force himself to cultivate habits of industry and application, but now he cannot tear himself away from business. His habits rule him, and take away from him both the ability and the inclination to relax his labours and to enjoy the fruit of them. Have we not often seen instances of this folly in our own experience? Those who have lived a laborious life, and have been successful in their undertakings, toiling on to the very last, afflicted with an insatiable avarice, never satisfied with their riches, and only enjoying the mere consciousness of possessing them? Have we not noticed how such a man gets to be penurious and fretful and utterly unfeeling? He gathers in eagerly, and often unscrupulously, and gives out reluctantly and sparingly. He starves himself in the midst of abundance, grudges the most necessary expenses, and denies himself and those dependent upon him the commonest comforts. The misery he inflicts upon himself does not open his eyes to the folly of his conduct; he grows gradually callous to discomforts, and finds in the sordid gains which his parsimony secures an abundant compensation for all inconveniences. And not only does he doom himself to material discomfort and to intellectual impoverishment by setting his desires solely upon riches, but he degrades his moral and spiritual character. If he must keep all he has to himself, he must often ignore the just claims of others upon him; he must steel his heart against the appeals of the poor and needy, and he must look with scorn and contempt upon all those who are generous and liberal in helping their fellows. And so we find such men gradually growing harsher and more unsympathetic, until it seems at last as if they regarded every one about them with suspicion, as seeking to wrest from their hands their hard-earned gains. And what is the pleasure of such a life? How is it such men do not say within themselves, "For whom do I labour, and bereave my soul of good?" The folly of their conduct springs from two causes. 1. They forget that unremitting, fruitless toil is a curse. As a means to an end toil is good, as an end in itself it is evil. It was never contemplated, even when man was innocent, that he should be idle. He was placed in the garden of Eden to dress and to keep it. But it is either his fault or his misfortune if he is all his life a slavish drudge. It may be that he is forced by the necessities of his position to labour incessantly and to the very end, to make a livelihood for himself and for those dependent upon him, but his condition is not an ideal one. If he could secure a little leisure and relaxation, it would be all the better for him in every sense of the word.

And therefore for the miser to toil like a mere slave, when he might save himself the trouble, is an evidence of how blinded he is by the vice to which he is addicted. 2. A second cause of the miser's folly is his ignoring the fact that riches have only value when made use of. The mere accumulation of them is not enough; they must be employed if they are to be of service. No real, healthy enjoyment of them is to be obtained by merely contemplating them and reckoning them up. Used in that way they only feed an unnatural and morbid appetite.

II. Over against the miseries of a selfish, solitary life, our author sets **THE ADVANTAGE OF COMPANIONSHIP**. (Vers. 9—12.) Friendship affords considerable mitigation of the evils by which life is beset, and a positive gain is secured by those who cultivate it. Three very homely figures are used to describe these advantages. The thought which connects them all together is that of life as a journey, or pilgrimage, like that which Bunyan describes in his wonderful book. If a man is alone in the journey of life, he is liable to accidents and discomforts and dangers which the presence of a friend would have averted or mitigated. He may fall on the road, and none be by to help him; he may at night lie shivering in the cold, if he has no companion to cherish him with kindly warmth; he may meet with robbers, whom his unaided strength is insufficient to beat off. All these figures illustrate the general principle that in union there is mutual helpfulness, comfort, and strength, verification of which we find in all departments of life—in the family, in the intercourse of friends, and in the Church. The benefits of such fellowships are undeniable. "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 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 restore him to the paths of righteousness" (Wardlaw). So far as the application of the principle to the case of ordinary friendship is concerned, the wisdom of our author is instinctively approved of by all. The writings of moralists in all countries and times teem with maxims similar to his. Some have thought that this virtue of friendship is too secular in its character to receive much encouragement in the teaching of Christianity; that it is somewhat overshadowed, if not relegated to comparative insignificance, by the obligations which a highly spiritual religion imposes. The fact that the salvation of his soul is the one great duty of the individual might have been expected to lead to a new development of selfishness, and the fact that devotion to the Saviour is to take precedence of all other forms of affection might have been expected to diminish the intensity of love which is the source of friendship. And not only have such ideas existed in a speculative form, but they have led, in many cases, to actual attempts to realize them. The ancient hermits sought to cultivate the highest form of Christian life by complete isolation from their fellows; they fled from society, dis severed themselves from all the ties of blood and friendship, and shunned all association with their kind as something contaminating. And in our own time, among many to whom the monastical life is specially repulsive, the very same delusion which lay at the root of it is still cherished. They think that love of husband, wife, child, or friend conflicts with love of God and Christ; that if the human love is too intense it becomes a form of sin. And along with this is generally found a cruel and dishonouring conception of the Divine character. God is thought of as jealous of those who take his place in the affections, and the loss of those loved is spoken of as a removal by him of the "idols" who had usurped his rights. That such teaching is a perversion of Christianity is very evident. The New Testament takes all the forms of natural human love as types of the Divine. As the father loves his children, so does God love us. As Christ loved the Church ought a husband to love his wife, ought his followers to love one another. No bounds can be set to affection; "he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God." The one great check, that our love for another should not be allowed to lead us to do wrong or condone wrong, is not upon

the intensity, but upon the perversion of affection, and leads to a purer, holier, and more satisfying exercise of affection. That Christ, whose love was universal, did not discourage friendship is evident from the fact that he chose twelve disciples, and admitted them to a closer intimacy with himself than others enjoyed, and that even among them there was one whom he specially loved. It was seen, too, in the affection which he manifested to the family in Bethany—Martha and Mary and their brother Lazarus. In the time of his agony in Gethsemane he chose three of the disciples to watch with him, seeking for some solace and support in the fact of their presence and sympathy. The truth of Solomon's statement that "two are better than one" was confirmed by Christ's sending out his disciples "two and two together" (Luke x. 1), and by the Divine direction given by the Holy Ghost when Barnabas and Saul were set apart to go together on their first great missionary enterprise (Acts xiii. 2). But over and above these instances of Christ's example in cultivating friendship, and of the advantages of mutual co-operation in Christian work, the great principle remains that true religion cannot come to any strength in an isolated life. We cannot worship God aright if we "forsake the assembling of ourselves together;" we cannot cultivate the virtues of which holiness consists—justice, compassion, forbearance, purity, and love—if we isolate ourselves; for all these virtues imply our conducting ourselves in certain ways in all our relations with others. We lose the opportunity of helping the weak, of cheering the disheartened, and of co-operating with those who are striving to overcome the evils by which the world is burdened, if we withdraw into ourselves and ignore others. So far, then, from the wisdom of Solomon in this matter being, in comparison with the fuller revelation through Christ, of an inferior and almost pagan character, it is of permanent and undiminished value. Our acquaintance with Christian teaching is calculated to lead us to form quite as decided a judgment as Solomon did as to *the evils of a solitary life*, and the *advantages of friendship*.—J. W.

Vers. 13—16.—*Mortifications of royalty*. Yet another set of instances of folly and disappointment occurs to our author's mind; they are drawn from the history of the strange vicissitudes through which many of those who have sat upon thrones have passed. His references are vague and general, and no success has attended the attempts of those who have endeavoured to find historical examples answering exactly to the circumstances he here describes. But the truthfulness of his generalizations can be abundantly illustrated out of the records of history, both sacred and profane. The reason why he adds these instances of failure and misfortune to his list is pretty evident. He would have us understand that no condition of human life is exempt from the common lot; that though kings are raised above their fellows, and are apparently able to control circumstances rather than to be controlled by them, as a matter of fact as surprising examples of mutability are to be found in their history as in that of the humbler ranks of men. He sets before us—

I. The image of "AN OLD AND FOOLISH KING, WHO WILL NO MORE BE ADMONISHED;" who, though "born in his kingdom, becometh poor." He is debauched by long tenure of power, and scorns good advice and warning. "We see him driven from his throne, stripped of his riches, and becoming in his old age a beggar." His want of wisdom undermines the stability of his position. Though he has in the regular course inherited his kingdom, and has an indefeasible right to the crown he wears—though for many years his people have patiently endured his misgovernment—his tenure of office becomes more and more uncertain. A time comes when it is a question whether the nation is to be ruined, or a wiser and more trustworthy ruler put in his place. He is compelled to abdicate, or is forcibly deposed or driven from his kingdom by an invader, whose power he is unable to resist. His noble birth, his legal rights as a sovereign, his grey hairs, the amiability of his private character, do not avail to secure for him the loyal support of a people whom his folly has alienated from him. The same idea of folly vitiating the dignity of old age is found in Wisd. iv: 8, 9, "Honourable age is not that which standeth in length of time, nor that is measured by number of years. But wisdom is the grey hair unto men, and unspotted life is old age." The biographies of Charles I. and James II. of England, and of Napoleon III., furnish examples of kings who learned nothing from experience, and scorned all warnings, and brought upon themselves misery like that hinted at by Solomon. The first of them

met his death at the hands of his exasperated subjects, and the other two, after deep humiliations, died in exile.

II. The second instance of strange vicissitude is that of ONE WHO STEPS FROM A DUNGEON TO A THRONE. It is by his wisdom that he raises himself to the place of ruler over the neglected community. From obscurity he attains in a moment to the height of popular favour; thousands flock to do him homage (vers. 15, 16a, "I saw all the living which walk under the sun, that they were with the youth, the second, that stood up in his stead. There was no end of all the people, even of all them over whom he was," Revised Version). The scene depicted of the ignominy into which the worthless old king falls, and the enthusiasm with which the new one is greeted, reminds one of Carlyle's vivid description of the death of Louis XV. and the accession of his grandson. The courtiers wait with impatience for the passing away of the king whose life had been so corrupt and vile; he dies unpitied upon his loathsome sick-bed. "In the remote apartments, dauphin and dauphiness stand road-ready; . . . waiting for some signal to escape the house of pestilence. And, hark! across the Oeil-de-Bœuf, what sound is that—sound 'terrible and absolutely like thunder'? It is the rush of the whole court, rushing as in wager, to salute the new sovereigns: 'Hail to your Majesties!'" The body of the dead king is unceremoniously committed to the grave. "Him they crush down and huddle underground; him and his era of sin and tyranny and shame; for behold! a New Era is come; the future all the brighter that the past was base" ('French Revolution,' vol. i. ch. iv.). The same kind of picture has been drawn by Shakespeare, in 'Richard II.,' act v. sc. 2, where he describes the popularity of Bolingbroke, and the contempt into which the king he displaced had sunk. Yet, according to the Preacher, the breeze of popular favour soon dies away, and the hero is soon forgotten. "They also that come after him shall not rejoice in him." The dark cloud of oblivion comes down and envelops in its shade both those who deserve to be remembered, and those who have been unworthy of even the brief popularity they enjoyed in their lifetime. "Who knows," says Sir Thos. Browne, "whether the best of men be known, or whether there be not more remarkable persons forgot than any that stand remembered on the known account of time?" ('Urn-burial').

The fickle and short-lived character of all earthly fame should convince us of the futility of making the desire of the applause of men the ruling motive of our lives; it should lead us to do that which is good because it is good, and not in order "to be seen of men," and because we are responsible to God, in whose book all our deeds are written, whether they be good or whether they be evil. The sense of disappointment at the vanity of human fame should dispose our hearts to find satisfaction in the favour of God, by whom all our good deeds will be remembered and rewarded (Ps. xxxvii. 5, 6; Gal. vi. 9; Matt. xxv. 21).—J. W.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER V.

Vers. 1—7.—Section 6. Man's outward and secular life being unable to secure happiness and satisfaction, can these be found in *popular religion*? Religious exercises need the observation of strict rules, which are far from meeting with general attention. Koheleth proceeds to give instruction, in the form of maxims, concerning public worship, prayer, and vows.

Vers. 1.—This verse, in the Hebrew, Greek, and Latin Bibles, forms the conclusion of ch. iv., and is taken independently; but the division in our version is more natural, and the connection of this with the following

verses is obvious. **Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God.** Some read "feet" instead of "foot," but the singular and plural numbers are both found in this signification (comp. Ps. cxix. 59, 105; Prov. i. 15; iv. 26, 27). To "keep the foot" is to be careful of the conduct, to remember what you are about, whither you are going. There is no allusion to the sacerdotal rite of washing the feet before entering the holy place (Exod. xxx. 18, 19), nor to the custom of removing the shoes on entering a consecrated building, which was a symbol of reverential awe and obedient service. The expression is simply a term connected with man's ordinary life transferred to his moral and religious life. *The house of God* is the temple. The tabernacle is called "the

house of Jehovah" (1 Sam. i. 7; 2 Sam. xii. 20), and this name is commonly applied to the temple; e.g. 1 Kings iii. 1; 2 Chron. viii. 16; Ezra iii. 11. But "house of God" is applied also to the temple (2 Chron. v. 14; Ezra v. 8, 15, etc.), so that we need not, with Bullock, suppose that Koheleth avoids the name of the Lord of the covenant as "a natural sign of the writer's humiliation after his fall into idolatry, and an acknowledgment of his unworthiness of the privileges of a son of the covenant." It is probable that the expression here is meant to include synagogues as well as the great temple at Jerusalem, since the following clause seems to imply that exhortation would be heard there, which formed no part of the temple service. The verse has furnished a text on the subject of the reverence due to God's house and service from Chrysostom downwards. And be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools. Various are the renderings of this clause. Wright, "For to draw near to hear is (better) than the fools offering sacrifices." (So virtually Knobel, Ewald, etc.) Ginsburg, "For it is nearer to obey than to offer the sacrifice of the disobedient;" i.e. it is the straighter, truer way to take when you obey God than when you merely perform outward service. The Vulgate takes the infinitive verb as equivalent to the imperative, as the Authorized Version, *Appropinqua ut audias*; but it is best to regard it as pure infinitive, and to translate, "To approach in order to hear is better than to offer the sacrifice of fools." The sentiment is the same as that in 1 Sam. xv. 22, "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." The same thought occurs in Prov. xxi. 3; Ps. l. 7—15; and continually in the prophets; e.g. Isa. i. 11; Jer. vii. 21—23; Hos. vi. 6, etc. It is the reaction against the mere ceremonialism which marked the popular religion. Koheleth had seen and deplored this at Jerusalem and elsewhere, and he enunciates the great truth that it is more acceptable to God that one should go to his house to hear the Law read and taught and expounded, than to offer a formal sacrifice, which, as being the offering of a godless man is called in proverbial language "the sacrifice of fools" (Prov. xxi. 27). The verb used here, "give" (*nathan*), is not the usual expression for offering sacrifice, and may possibly refer to the feast which accompanied such sacrifices, and which often degenerated into excess (Delitzsch). That the verb rendered "to hear" does not mean merely "to obey" is plain from its reference to conduct in the house of God. The reading of the Law, and

probably of the prophets, formed a feature of the temple service in Koheleth's day; the expounding of the same in public was confined to the synagogues, which seem to have originated in the time of the exile, though there were doubtless before that time some regular occasions of assembling together (see 2 Kings iv. 23). For they consider not that they do evil; "Οτι οὐκ εἰδότες τοῦ ποιῆσαι κακόν (Septuagint); *Qui nesciunt quid faciunt mali* (Vulgate); "They are without knowledge, so that they do evil" (Delitzsch, Knobel, etc.); "As they (who obey) know not to do evil" (Ginsburg). The words can scarcely mean, "They know not that they do evil;" nor, as Hitzig has, "They know not how to be sorrowful." There is much difficulty in understanding the passage according to the received reading, and Nowack, with others, deems the text corrupt. If we accept what we now find, it is best to translate, "They know not, so that they do evil;" i.e. their ignorance predisposes them to err in this matter. The persons meant are the "fools" who offer unacceptable sacrifices. These know not how to worship God heartily and properly, and, thinking to please him with their formal acts of devotion, fall into a grievous sin.

Ver. 2.—Koheleth warns against thoughtless words or hasty professions in prayer, which formed another feature of popular religion. Be not rash with thy mouth. The warning is against hasty and thoughtless words in prayer, words that go from the lips with glib facility, but come not from the heart. Thus our Lord bids those who pray not to use vain repetitions (*μὴ βαττολογῆσθε*), as the heathen, who think to be heard for their much speaking (Matt. vi. 7). Jesus himself used the same words in his prayer in the garden, and he continually urges the lesson of much and constant prayer—a lesson enforced by apostolic admonitions (see Luke xi. 5, etc.; Phil. iv. 6; 1 Thess. v. 17); but it is quite possible to use the same words, and yet throw the whole heart into them each time that they are repeated. Whether the repetition is vain or not depends upon the spirit of the person who prays. Let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God. We should weigh well our wishes, arrange them discreetly, ponder whether they are such as we can rightly make subjects of petition, ere we lay them in words before the Lord. "Before God" may mean in the temple, the house of God, where he is specially present, as Solomon himself testified (1 Kings viii. 27, 30, 43). God is in heaven. The infinite distance between God and man, illustrated by the contrast of earth and the illimitable heaven, is the ground of the admonition to reverence

and thoughtfulness (comp. Ps. cxv. 3, 16; Isa. lv. 8, 9; lxvi. 1). Therefore let thy words be few, as becomes one who speaks in the awful presence of God. Ben-Sira seems to have had this passage in mind when he writes (Eccles. vii. 14), "Prate not in a multitude of elders, and repeat not (*μη δευτερώσης*) the word in prayer." We may remember the conduct of the priests of Baal (1 Kings xviii. 26). Ginsburg and Wright quote the Talmudic precept ('Berachoth,' 68. a), "Let the words of a man always be few in the presence of God, according as it is written," and then follows the passage in our text.

Ver. 3.—The first clause illustrates the second, the mark of comparison being simply the copula, mere juxtaposition being deemed sufficient to denote the similitude, as in ch. vii. 1; Prov. xvii. 3; xxvii. 21. For a dream cometh through (*in consequence of*) the multitude of business. The verse is meant to confirm the injunction against vain babbling in prayer. Cares and anxieties in business or other matters occasion disturbed sleep, murder the dreamless repose of the healthy labourer, and produce all kinds of sick fancies and imaginations. Septuagint, "A dream cometh in abundance of trial (*πειρασμοί*);" Vulgate, *Multas curas sequuntur somnia*. And a fool's voice is known by multitude of words. The verb should be supplied from the first clause, and not a new one introduced, as in the Authorized Version, "And the voice of a fool (cometh) in consequence of many words." As surely as excess of business produces fevered dreams, so excess of words, especially in addresses to God, produces a fool's voice, *i.e.* foolish speech. St. Gregory points out the many ways in which the mind is affected by images from dreams. "Sometimes," he says, "dreams are engendered of fullness or emptiness of the belly, sometimes of illusion, sometimes of illusion and thought combined, sometimes of revelation, while sometimes they are engendered of imagination, thought, and revelation together" ('Moral,' viii. 42).

Ver. 4.—Koheleth passes on to give a warning concerning the making of vows, which formed a great feature in Hebrew religion, and was the occasion of much irreverence and profanity. When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it. There is here plainly a reminiscence of Deut. xxiii. 21—23. Vows are not regarded as absolute duties which every one was obliged to undertake. They are of a voluntary nature, but when made are to be strictly performed. They might consist of a promise to dedicate certain things or persons to God (see Gen. xxviii. 20; Judg. xi. 30), or to abstain from doing certain things, as in the case of the Nazarites. The rabbinical injunction quoted

by our Lord in the sermon on the mount (Matt. v. 33), "Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths," was probably levelled against profane swearing, or invoking God's Name lightly, but it may include the duty of performing vows made to or in the Name of God. Our Lord does not condemn the practice of *corban*, while noticing with rebuke a perversion of the custom (Mark vii. 11). For he hath no pleasure in fools. The non-fulfilment of a vow would prove a man to be impious, in proverbial language "a fool," and as such God must regard him with displeasure. The clause in the Hebrew is somewhat ambiguous, being literally, *There is no pleasure (chephets) in fools*; *i.e.* no one, neither God nor man, would take pleasure in fools who make promises and never perform them. Or it may be, *There is no fixed will in fools*; *i.e.* they waver and are undecided in purpose. But this rendering of *chephets* appears to be very doubtful. Septuagint, "Οτι οὐκ ἔστι θέλημα ἐν ἄφροσι," which reproduces the vagueness of the Hebrew; Vulgate, *Displicet enim ei (Deo) infidelis et stulta promissio*. The meaning is well represented in the Authorized Version, and we must complete the sense by supplying in thought "on the part of God." Pay that which thou hast vowed. Ben-Sira re-echoes the injunction (Eccles. xviii. 22, 23), "Let nothing hinder thee to pay thy vow (*ἐν χρόνῳ*) in due time, and defer not until death to be justified [*i.e.* to fulfil the vow]. Before making a vow (*ἐν ᾧ σφαι*) prepare thyself; and be not as one that tempteth the Lord." The verse is cited in the Talmud; and Dukes gives a parallel, "Before thou vowest anything, consider the object of thy vow" ('Rabb. Blumenl.,' p. 70). So in Prov. xx. 25 we have, according to some translations, "It is a snare to a man rashly to say, It is holy, and after vows to make inquiry." Septuagint, "Pay thou therefore whatsoever thou shalt have vowed (*ὅσα ἐὰν ἐβήσῃ*)."

Ver. 5.—Better is it that thou shouldest not vow. There is no harm in not vowing (Deut. xxiii. 22); but a vow once made becomes of the nature of an oath, and its non-performance is a sin and sacrilege, and incurs the punishment of false swearing. We gather from the Talmud that frivolous excuses for the evasion of vows were very common, and called for stern repression. One sees this in our Lord's references (Matt. v. 33—37; xxiii. 16—22). St. Paul severely reprehends those women who break their vow of widowhood, "having condemnation, because they have rejected their first faith" (1 Tim. v. 12).

Ver. 6.—Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin. "Thy flesh" is equivalent

to "thyself," the whole personality, the idea of the flesh, as a distinct part of the man, sinning, being alien from Old Testament ontology. The injunction means—Do not, by uttering rash or inconsiderate vows, which you afterwards evade or cannot fulfil, bring sin upon yourself, or, as others render, bring punishment upon yourself. Septuagint, "Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin (*τοῦ ἐξαμαρτῆσαι τὴν σάρκα σου*);" Vulgate, *Ut peccare facias carnem tuam*. Another interpretation, but not so suitable, is this—Do not let thy mouth (*i.e.* thy appetite) lead thee to break the vow of abstinence, and indulge in meat or drink from which (as, *e.g.*, a Nazarite) thou wast bound to abstain. Neither say thou before the angel, that it was an error. If we take "angel" (*malak*) in the usual sense (and there seems no very forcible reason why we should not), it must mean the angel of God in whose special charge you are placed, or the angel who was supposed to preside over the altar of worship, or that messenger of God whose duty it is to watch man's doings and to act as the minister of punishment (2 Sam. xxiv. 16). The workings of God's providence are often attributed to angels; and sometimes the names of God and angel are interchanged (see Gen. xvi. 9, 13; xviii. 2, 3, etc.; Exod. iii. 2, 4; xxiii. 20, etc.). Thus the Septuagint here renders, "Say not before the face of God (*πρὸ προσώπου τοῦ Θεοῦ*)." If this interpretation be allowed, we have an argument for the literal explanation of the much-disputed passage in 1 Cor. xi. 10, *διὰ τοὺς ἀγγέλους*. Thus, too, in 'The Testaments of the XII. Patriarchs,' we have, "The Lord is witness, and his angels are witnesses, concerning the word of your mouth" ('Levi,' 19). But most commentators consider that the word here means "messenger" of Jehovah, in the sense of priest, the announcer of the Divine Law, as in the unique passage Mal. ii. 7. Traces of a similar use of *ἄγγελος* may be found in the New Testament (Rev. i. 20; ii. 1, etc.). According to the first interpretation, the man comes before God with his excuse; according to the second, he comes to the priest, and confesses that he was thoughtless and overhasty in making his vow, and desires to be released from it, or, at any rate, by some means to evade its fulfilment. His excuse may possibly look to the cases mentioned in Numb. xv. 22, etc., and he may wish to urge that the vow was made in ignorance (Septuagint, "*Ὅτι ἄγνοία ἐστίν*," "It is an ignorance"), and that therefore he was not responsible for its incomplete execution. We do not know that a priest or any officer of the temple had authority to release from the obligation of a vow, so that the excuse made "before" him would seem to be

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objectless, while the evasion of a solemn promise made in the Name of God might well be said to be done in the presence of the observing and recording angel. The Vulgate rendering, *Non est providentia*, makes the man account for his neglect by assuming that God takes no heed of such things; he deems the long-suffering of God to be indifference and disregard (comp. ch. viii. 11; ix. 3). The original does not bear this interpretation. Wherefore should God be angry at thy voice—the words in which thy evasion and dishonesty are expressed—and destroy the work of thine hands? *i.e.* punish thee by calamity, want of success, sickness, etc., God's moral government being vindicated by earthly visitations.

Ver. 7.—For in the multitude of dreams and many words there are also divers vanities. The Hebrew is literally, *For in multitude of dreams, and vanities, and many words*; *i.e.*, as Wright puts it, "In the multitude of dreams are also vanities, and (in) many words (as well)." Koheleth sums up the sense of the preceding paragraph, vers. 1—6. The popular religion, which made much of dreams and verbosity and vows, is vanity, and has in it nothing substantial or comforting. The superstitious man who puts his faith in dreams is unpractical and unreal; the garrulous man who is rash in his vows, and in prayer thinks to be heard for his much speaking, displeases God and never secures his object. Ginsburg and Bullock render, "For it is (it happens) through the multitude of idle thoughts and vanities and much talking," the reference being either to the foolish speaking of ver. 2 or to the wrath of God in ver. 6. The Septuagint rendering is elliptical, "*Ὅτι ἐν πλῆθει ἐνυπνίων καὶ ματαιότητων καὶ λόγων πολλῶν, ὅτι οὐ τὸν Θεὸν φοβοῦ*." To complete this, some supply, "Many vows are made or excused;" others, "There is evil." Vulgate, *Ubi multa sunt somnia, plurimæ sunt vanitates, et sermones innumerati*. The Authorized Version gives the sense of the passage. But fear thou God. In contrast with these spurious forms of religion, which the Jews were inclined to adopt, the writer recalls men to the fear of the one true God, to whom all vows should be performed, and who should be worshipped from the heart.

Vers. 8—17.—Section 7. *Perils to which one is exposed in a despotic state, and the unprofitableness of riches.*

Vers. 8, 9.—In political life there is little that is satisfactory; yet one must not surrender one's belief in a superintending Providence.

Ver. 8.—If thou seest the oppression of the poor. From errors in the service of God,

it is natural to turn to faults in the administration of the king (Prov. xxiv. 21). Koheleth has already alluded to these anomalies in ch. iii. 16 and iv. 1. Violent perverting; literally, *robbery*; so that judgment is never rightly given, and justice is withheld from applicants. In a province (*medinah*, ch. ii. 8); the district in which the person addressed dwells. It may, perhaps, be implied that this is remote from the central authority, and therefore more liable to be injuriously dealt with by unscrupulous rulers. Marvel not at the matter (*shephets*, ch. iii. 1). Be not surprised or dismayed (Job xxvi. 11) at such evil doings, as though they were unheard of, or inexperienced, or disregarded. There is here nothing of the Greek maxim, reproduced by Horace in his "Nil admirari" ('Epist.' i. 6. 1). It is like St. John's "Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you" (1 John iii. 13); or St. Peter's "Think it not strange concerning the fiery trial among you" (1 Pet. iv. 12). The stupid and unintelligent observation of such disorders might lead to arraignment of Providence and distrust in the moral government of God. Against such mistakes the writer guards. For he that is higher than the highest regardeth. Both the words are in the singular number. Septuagint, ὁ ὑψηλὸς ἐπάνω ὑψηλοῦ φουλάει. One thinks of the Persian satraps, who acted much as the Turkish pashas in later times, the petty rulers oppressing the people, and being themselves treated in the same fashion by their superiors. The whole is a system of wrong-doing, where the weaker always suffers, and the only comfort is that the oppressor himself is subject to higher supervision. The verb (*shamar*) translated "regardeth" means to observe in a hostile sense, to watch for occasions of reprisal, as 1 Sam. xix. 11; and the idea intended is that in the province there were endless plottings and counterplottings, mutual denunciations and recriminations; that such things were only to be expected, and were no sufficient cause for infidelity or despair. "The higher one" is the monarch, the despotic king who holds the supreme power over all these maladministrators and perverters of justice. And there be higher than they. "Higher" is here plural (*gebolim*), the plural of majesty, as it is called (comp. ch. xii. 1), like *Elohim*, the word for "God," the assonance being probably here suggestive. Over the highest of earthly rulers there are other powers, angels, principalities, up to God himself, who governs the course of this world, and to whom we may leave the final adjustment. Who are meant seems purposely to be left undetermined; but the thought of the righteous Judge of all is intimated in accordance with the view of ch. iii. 17. This

is a far more satisfactory explanation of the passage than that which regards as the highest of all "the court favourites, king's friends, eunuchs, chamberlains," etc. In this view Koheleth is merely asserting the general system of injustice and oppression, and neither accounting for it nor offering any comfort under the circumstances. But his object throughout is to show man's inability to secure his own happiness, and the need of submission to Divine providence. To demonstrate the anomalies in the events of the world, the circumstances of men's lives would be only one part of his task, which would not be completed without turning attention to the remedy against hasty and unfair conclusions. This remedy is the thought of the supreme Disposer of events, who holds all the strings in his hand, and will in the end bring good out of evil.

Ver. 9.—It has been much debated whether this verse should be connected with the preceding or the following paragraph. The Vulgate takes it with the preceding verse, *Et insuper universa terra rex imperat servienti*; so the Septuagint; and this seems most natural, avarice, wealth, and its evils in private life being treated of in vers. 10 and many following. Moreover the profit of the earth is for all: the king himself is served by the field. The writer seems to be contrasting the misery of Oriental despotism, above spoken of, with the happiness of a country whose king was content to enrich himself, not by war, rapine, and oppression, but by the peaceful pursuits of agriculture, by cherishing the natural productions of his country, and encouraging his people in developing its resources. Such was Uzziah, who "loved husbandry" (2 Chron. xxvi. 10); and in Solomon's own time the arts of peace greatly flourished. There is much difficulty in interpreting the verse. The Vulgate rendering, "And moreover the King of the whole earth rules over his servant," probably means that God governs the king. But the present Hebrew text does not support this translation. The Septuagint has, *Kal nephosia yhs eni panti esti, basileus tou agrou eipnasmevou*, which makes more difficulties. "Also the abundance of the earth is for every one, or upon every thing; the king (is dependent on) the cultivated land, or, there is a king to the land when cultivated," i.e. the throne itself depends on the due cultivation of the country. Or, removing the comma, "The profit of the land in everything is a king of the cultivated field." The Hebrew may safely be rendered, "But the profit of a land in all things is a king devoted to the field," i.e. who loves and fosters agriculture. It is difficult to suppose that Solomon himself wrote this sentence, however we may interpret it. According to

the Authorized Version, the idea is that the profit of the soil extends to every rank of life; even the king, who seems superior to all, is dependent upon the industry of the people, and the favourable produce of the land. He could not be unjust and oppressive without injuring his revenues in the end. Ben-Sira sings the praises of agriculture: "Hate not laborious work, neither husbandry, which the Most High hath ordained" (Eccles. vii. 15). Agriculture held a very prominent position in the Mosaic commonwealth. The enactments concerning the firstfruits, the sabbatical year, landmarks, the non-alienation of inheritances, etc., tended to give peculiar importance to cultivation of the soil. Cicero's praise of agriculture is often quoted. Thus ('De Senect.', xv. sqq.; 'De Off.', i. 42): "Omnium rerum, ex quibus aliquid acquiritur, nihil est agricultura melius, nihil uberius, nihil dulcius, nihil homine libero dignius."

Vers. 10—17.—The thought of the acts of injustice and oppression noticed above, all of which spring from the craving for money, leads the bard to dwell upon the evils that accompany this pursuit and possession of wealth, which is thus seen to give no real satisfaction. Avarice has already been noticed (ch. iv. 7—12); the covetous man now reprobated is one who desires wealth only for the enjoyment he can get from it, or the display which it enables him to make, not, like the miser, who gloats over its mere possession. Various instances are given in which riches are unprofitable and vain.

Ver. 10.—He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver. "Silver," the generic name for money, as Greek *ἀργύριον* and French *argent*. The insatiableness of the passion for money is a common theme of poets, moralists, and satirists, and is found in the proverbs of all nations. Thus Horace ('Ep.', i. 2. 56): "Semper avarus eget;" to which St Jerome alludes ('Epist.', 53), "Antiquum dictum est, Avaro tam deest, quod habet, quam quod non habet." Comp. Juvenal, 'Sat.', xiv. 139—

"Interea pleno quum turget sacculus ore,
Crescit amor nummi, quantum ipsa pecunia
crevit."

"For as thy strutting bags with money rise,
The love of gain is of an equal size."
(Dryden.)

There is much more of similar import in Horace. See 'Carm.', ii. 2. 13, sqq.; iii. 16. 17, 28; 'Ep.', ii. 2. 147; and Ovid, 'Fast.', i. 211—

"Creverunt et opes et opum furiosa cupido,
Et, quum possideant plura, plura volunt."

"As wealth increases grows the frenzied thirst

For wealth; the more they have, the more they want."

Nor he that loveth abundance with increase. The Authorized Version scarcely presents the sense of the passage, which is not tautological, but rather that given by the Vulgate, *Et qui amat divitias fructum non capiet ex eis*, "He who loveth abundance of wealth hath no fruit therefrom;" he derives no real profit or enjoyment from the luxury which it enables him to procure; rather it brings added trouble. And so the old conclusion is again reached, this is also vanity. Hitzig takes the sentence as interrogative, "Who hath pleasure in abundance which brings nothing in?" But such questions are hardly in the style of Koheleth, and the notion of capital without interest is not a thought which would have been then understood. The Septuagint, however, reads the clause interrogatively, *Kal tis ἡγάπησεν ἐν πλῆθει αὐτῶν (αὐτοῦ, αὐ.) γένημα;* "And who has loved [or, has been content with] gain in its fulness?" But *ἡ* is not necessarily interrogative, but here indefinite, equivalent to "whosoever."

Ver. 11.—Koheleth proceeds to notice some of the inconveniences which accompany wealth, which go far to prove that God is over all. When goods increase, they are increased that eat them. The more riches a man possesses, the greater are the claims upon him. He increases his household, retainers, and dependents, and is really none the better off for all his wealth. So Job in his prosperous days is said to have had "a very great household" (Job i. 3), and the servants and labourers employed by Solomon must have taxed to the utmost even his abnormal resources (1 Kings v. 13, etc.). Commentators from Pineda downwards have quoted the remarkable parallel in Xenoph., 'Cyropæd.', viii. 3, wherein the wealthy Persian Phaulas, who had risen from poverty to high estate, disabuses a young Sæcian friend of the idea that his riches made him happier or afforded supreme content. "Do you not know," said he, "that I neither eat, nor drink, nor sleep with any more pleasure now than I did when I was poor? By having this abundance I gain merely this, that I have to guard more, to distribute more among others, and to have the trouble of taking care of more. For now numerous domestics demand of me food, drink, clothes; some want the doctor; one comes and brings me sheep that have been torn by wolves, or oxen killed by falling down a precipice, or tells of a murrain that has affected the

cattle; so that I seem to myself to have more afflictions in my abundance than I had when I was poor. . . . It is obligatory on him who possesses much to expend much both on the gods and on friends and on strangers; and whosoever is greatly pleased with the possession of riches will, you may be assured, be greatly annoyed at the expenditure of them." What good is there to the owners thereof, saving the beholding of them with their eyes? What it is that the owners behold is doubtful. Ginsburg considers that the increased number of devourers is meant; but surely this sight could hardly be called *kishron*, "success," "profit." So it is better to take the sight to be the amassed wealth. The contemplation of this is the only enjoyment that the possessor realizes. So the Vulgate, *Et quid prodest possessori, nisi quod cernit divitias oculis suis?* Septuagint, καὶ τί ἀνδρεία τῶ παρ' αὐτῆς; ὅτι ἀρχὴ τοῦ ὁρᾶν ὀφθαλμοῖς αὐτοῦ, "And in what does the excellence of the owner consist? except the power of seeing it with his eyes." A Lapide quotes Horace's portrait of the miser ('Sat.,' i. l. 66, *sqq.*)—

"Populus me sibilat; ut mihi plaudo
Ipse domi, simul ac, nummos contempnim in
arca . . .

. . . congestis undique saccis
Indormis inhians et tanquam parcere sacris
Cogeris aut pictis tanquam gaudere tabellis."

"He, when the people hissed, would turn
about,

And drily thus accost the rabble-rout:
'Hiss on; I heed you not, ye saucy wags,
While self-applauses greet me o'er my
bags.' . . .

O'er countless heaps in nicest order stored,
You pore agape, and gaze upon the hoard,
As relics to be laid with reverence by,
Or pictures only meant to please the eye."

(Howes.)

Ver. 12.—Another inconvenience of great wealth—it robs a man of his sleep. The sleep of a labouring man is sweet, whether he eat little or much. The labourer is the husbandman, the tiller of the ground (Gen. iv. 2). The Septuagint, with a different pointing, renders δούλου, "slave," which is less appropriate, the fact being generally true of free or bond man. Whether his fare be plentiful or scanty, the honest labourer earns and enjoys his night's rest. But the abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep. The allusion is not to the overloading of the stomach, which might occasion sleeplessness in the case of the poor equally with the rich man, but to the cares and anxieties which wealth brings. "Not a soft couch, nor a bedstead overlaid with silver, nor the quietness that exists throughout the house,

nor any other circumstance of this nature, are so generally wont to make sleep sweet and pleasant, as that of labouring, and growing weary, and lying down with a disposition to sleep, and very greatly needing it. . . . Not so the rich. On the contrary, whilst lying on their beds, they are frequently without sleep through the whole night; and, though they devise many schemes, they do not obtain such pleasure" (St. Chrysostom, 'Hom. on Stat.,' 22). The contrast between the grateful sleep of the tired worker and the disturbed rest of the avaricious and moneyed and luxurious has formed a fruitful theme for poets. Thus Horace, 'Carm.,' iii. l. 21—

"Somnus agrestium
Lenis virorum non humiles domos
Fastidit umbrosamque ripam,
Non Zephyris agitata Tempe."

"Yet sleep turns never from the lowly shed
Of humbler-minded men, nor from the
eaves
In Tempe's graceful vale is banished,
Where only Zephyrs stir the murmuring
leaves."

(Stanley.)

And the reverse, 'Sat.,' i. l. 76, *sqq.*—

"An vigilare metu exanimem, noctesque
diesque
Formidare malos fures, incendia, servos,
Ne te compilent fugientes, hoc juvat?"

"But what are your indulgencies? All day,
All night, to watch and shudder with dis-
may,
Lest ruffians fire your house, or slaves by
stealth
Rifle your coffers, and abstract your wealth?
If this be affluence—this her boasted fruit,
Of all such joys may I live destitute."

(Howes.)

Comp. Juvenal, 'Sat.,' x. 12, *sqq.*; xiv. 304. Shakespeare, 'Henry IV.,' Pt. II., act iii. sc. 1—

"Why rather, sleep, liest thou in smoky
cribs,
Upon uneasy pallets stretching thee,
And hush'd with buzzing night-flies to thy
slumber,
Than in the perfumed chambers of the
great,
Under the canopies of costly state,
And lulled with sounds of sweetest
melody?"

Vers. 13—17.—Another view of the evils attendant upon riches is here presented; the owner may lose them at a stroke, and leave nothing for his children. This thought is presented in different lights.

Ver. 13.—There is also a sore evil which

I have seen under the sun (so ver. 16). The fact that follows is, of course, not universally true, but occasionally seen, and is a very bitter evil. The Septuagint calls it *ἀπώρτια*; the Vulgate, *infirmilas*. Riches kept for the owners thereof to their hurt; rather, *preserved by the possessor*, hoarded and guarded, only to bring their lord added grief when by some reverse of fortune he loses them, as explained in what follows.

Ver. 14.—Those riches perish by evil travail; thing or circumstance. There is no need to confine the cause of the loss to unsuccessful business, as many commentators do. The rich man does not seem to be a tradesman or speculator; he loses his property, like Job, by visitations for which he is in no way answerable—by storm or tempest, by robbers, by fire, by exactions, or by lawsuits. And he begetteth a son, and there is nothing in his hand. The verb rendered “begetteth” is in the past tense, and used as it were, hypothetically, equivalent to “hath he begotten a son,” supposing he has a son. His misery is doubled by the reflection that he has lost all hope of securing a fortune for his children, or founding a family, or passing on an inheritance to posterity. It is doubtful to whom the pronoun “his” refers. Many consider that the father is meant, and the clause says that when he has begotten a son, he finds he has nothing to give him. But the suffix seems most naturally to refer to the son, who is thus left a pauper. Vulgate, *Generavit filium qui in summa egestate erit*. Having a thing in the hand means having power over it, or possessing it.

Ver. 15.—The case of the rich man who has lost his property is here generalized. What is true of him is, in a measure, true of every one, so far as he can carry nothing away with him when he dies (Ps. xlix. 17). As he came forth of his mother's womb, naked shall he return to go as he came. There is a plain reference to Job i. 21, “Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither.” The mother is the earth, human beings being regarded as her offspring. So the psalmist says, “My frame was curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth” (Ps. cxxxix. 15). And Ben-Sira, “Great trouble is created for every man, and a heavy yoke is upon the sons of Adam, from the day that they go out of their mother's womb till the day that they return to the mother of all things.” 1 Tim. vi. 7, “We brought nothing into the world, neither can we carry anything out.” Thus Propertius, ‘Eleg.’ iii. 5. 13—

“Haud ullas portabis opes Acherontis ad undas,
Nudus ab inferna, stultc, vehere rate.”

“No wealth thou'lt take to Acheron's dark shore,
Naked, th' infernal bark will bear thee o'er.”

Shall take nothing of his labour; rather, *for his labour*, the preposition being *ᾱ* of price. He gets nothing by his long toil in amassing wealth. Which he may carry away in his hand, as his own possession. The ruined Dives points a moral for all men.

Ver. 16.—This also is a sore evil. The thought of ver. 15 is emphatically repeated. In all points as he came; i.e. naked, helpless. And what profit hath he that laboureth for the wind? The answer is emphatically “nothing.” We have had similar questions in ch. i. 3; ii. 22; iii. 9. To labour for the wind is to toil with no result, like the “feeding on wind,” “pursuing of vanity,” which is the key-note of the book. The wind is the type of all that is empty, delusive, unsubstantial. In Prov. xi. 29 we have the phrase, “to inherit the wind.” Job calls futile arguments “words of wind” (Job xvi. 3; xv. 2). Thus the Greek proverb, Ἀνέμους θηρᾶν ἐν δικτύοις, “to try to catch the wind;” and the Latin, “Ventos pascere,” and “Ventos colere” (see Erasmus, ‘Adag.’ s.v. “Inanis opera”). Septuagint, Καὶ τίς ἡ κερδοσκία αὐτοῦ ἢ μοχθεῖ εἰς ἀνέμους; “And what is his gain for which he labours for the wind?”

Ver. 17.—The misery that accompanies the rich man's whole life is summed up here, where one has to think chiefly of his distress after his loss of fortune. All his days also he eateth in darkness; i.e. passes his life in gloom and cheerlessness. *ἡμέρας*, “all his days,” is the accusative of time, not the object of the verb. To eat in darkness is not a common metaphor for spending a gloomy life, but it is a very natural one, and has analogies in this book (e.g. ch. ii. 24; iii. 13, etc.), and in such phrases as “sit in darkness” (Micah vii. 8), and to “walk in darkness” (Isa. l. 10). The Septuagint, reading differently, translates, Καὶ γὰρ πᾶσαι αἱ ἡμέραι αὐτοῦ ἐν σκότει καὶ ἐν πένθει, “Yea, and all his days are in darkness and in mourning.” But the other versions reject this alteration, and few modern commentators adopt it. And he hath much sorrow and wrath with his sickness; literally, *and much vexation, and sickness, and wrath*; Revised Version, *he is sore vexed, and hath sickness and wrath*. Delitzsch takes the last words as an exclamation, “And oh for his sorrow and hatred!” The man experiences all kinds of vexation when his plans fail or involve him in trouble and privation; or he is morbid and diseased in mind and body; or he is angry and envious when others succeed better than himself. The sentiment is

expressed by St. Paul (1 Tim. vi. 9), "They that desire (βουλόμενοι) to be rich fall into a temptation and a snare, and many foolish and hurtful lusts, such as drown men (βυθίζουσι τοὺς ἀνθρώπους) in destruction and perdition." "For," he proceeds, "the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, which some reaching after have been led astray from the faith, and have pierced themselves through (ἐαυτοὺς περιέπειραν) with many sorrows." The Septuagint continues its version, "And in much passion (θυμῷ) and in infirmity and wrath." The anger may be directed against himself, as he thinks of his folly in taking all this trouble for nothing.

Vers. 18—20.—Section 8. The inconveniences of wealth lead the writer back to his old conclusion, that *man should make the best of life, and enjoy all the good that God gives with moderation and contentment.*

Ver. 18.—Behold that which I have seen: it is good and comely, etc. The accentuation is against this rendering, which, however, has the support of the Syriac and the Targum. The Septuagint gives, Ἰδοὺ, εἶδον ἐγὼ ἀγαθόν, ὃ ἐστὶ καλόν, "Behold, I have seen a good which is comely;" and it is best to translate, with Delitzsch and others, "Behold, what I have seen as good, what as beautiful, is this." My conclusion holds good. They who seek for traces of Greek influence in Koheleth find Epicureanism in the sentiment, and the familiar combination, καλὸν καὶ ἀγαθόν, in the language. Both ideas are baseless. (For supposed Epicureanism, see on ch. ii. 24 and iii. 12.) And the juxtaposition of καλὸς and ἀγαθός is only a fortuitous rendering of the Hebrew, upon which no argument for Grecism can be founded. To eat and to drink, etc.; i.e. to use the common blessings which God bestows with thankfulness and contentment. As St. Paul says, "Having food and covering, we shall be therewith content" (1 Tim. vi. 8). Which God giveth him. This is the point so often insisted upon. These temporal blessings are God's gifts, and are not to be considered as the natural and assured result of man's own exertions. Man, indeed, must labour, but God giveth the increase. For it is his portion (ch. iii. 22). This calm enjoyment is allotted to man by God, and nothing more must be expected. Ben-Sira gives similar advice, "Defraud not thyself of a good day, and let not the share in a right pleasure pass by thee. . . . Give, and take, and beguile thy soul; for there is no seeking of dainties in Hades" (Ecclesi. xiv. 14, etc.).

Ver. 19.—Every man also. The sentence

is anacoluthic, like ch. iii. 13, and may best be rendered, *Also for every man to whom . . . this is a gift of God.* Ginsburg connects the verse closely with the preceding one, supplying, "I have also seen that a man," etc. Whichever way we take the sentence, it comes to the same thing, implying man's absolute dependence upon God's bounty. To whom God hath given riches and wealth. Before he can enjoy his possessions a man must first receive them from God's hands. The two terms here used are not quite synonymous. While the former word, *osher*, is used for wealth of any kind whatever, the latter, *nekasim*, means properly "wealth in cattle," like the Latin *pecunia*, and thence used generally for riches (*volék*). Hath given him power to eat thereof. Abundance is useless without the power to enjoy it. This is the gift of God, a great and special bounty from a loving and gracious God. Thus Horace, 'Epist., i. 4. 7—

"Di tibi divitias dederunt artemque fruendi."

"The gods have given you wealth, and (what is more)

Have given you wisdom to enjoy your store."

(Howes.)

Ver. 20.—For he shall not much remember the days of his life. The man who has learned the lesson of calm enjoyment does not much concern himself with the shortness, uncertainty, or possible trouble of life. He carries out the counsel of Christ, "Be not anxious for the morrow, for the morrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof" (Matt. vi. 34). Ginsburg gives an entirely opposite rendering to the clause, "He should remember that the days of his life are not many;" i.e. the thought of the shortness of life should urge us to enjoy it while it lasts. But the Authorized Version is supported by the Septuagint and Vulgate and most modern commentators, and seems most appropriate to the context. The marginal rendering, "Though he give not much, yet he remembereth," etc., which Ginsburg calls a literary curiosity, must have been derived from the version of Junius, which gives, "Quod si non multum (*supple*, est illud quod dederit Deus, ex *versu* præc.)," etc. Because God answereth him in the joy of his heart. The man passes a calm and contented life, because God shows that he is pleased with him by the tranquil joy shed over his heart. The verb רָצַח (the hiph. participle of רָצַח) is variously rendered. The Septuagint gives, ὁ Θεὸς περισπᾷ αὐτὸν ἐν εὐφροσύνῃ καρδίας αὐτοῦ, "God distracts him in the mirth of his heart;" Vulgate, *Et quod Deus occupet deliciis cor ejus*; Gins-

burg, "God causeth him to work for the enjoyment of his heart," i.e. God assigns him work that he may thence derive enjoyment; Köster, "God makes him sing in the joy of his heart;" Delitzsch, Wright, and Plumptre, "God answers (corresponds with) the joy of his heart," which the latter explains to mean "is felt to approve it as harmonizing, in its calm evenness, with his

own blessedness, the tranquillity of the wise man mirroring the tranquillity of God." But this modified Epicureanism is alien from the teaching of Koheleth. Rather the idea is that God answers him with, imparts to him, joy of heart, makes him sensible of his favourable regard by this inward feeling of satisfaction and content.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—7.—*Vanities in worship.* I. **IRREVERENCE.** Specially exhibited in entering upon Divine service. Discommended and rebuked as: 1. *Inconsistent with the sanctity of the place of worship*—the house of God. Wherever men convene to offer homage to the Divine Being, in a magnificent cathedral or in a humble upper room, upon hillsides and moors, or in dens and caves of the earth, there is a dwelling-place of Jehovah no less than in the temple (Solomonic or post-exilic) or in the synagogue, of both which the Preacher probably thought. What lends sanctity to the spot in which worshippers assemble is not its material surroundings, artificial or natural (architectural elegance or cosmical beauty); it is not even the convening there of the worshippers themselves, however exalted their rank or sacred the character of the acts in which they engage. It is the unseen and spiritual, but real and supernatural, presence of God in the midst of his assembled saints (Exod. xx. 24; Ps. xli. 4—7; Matt. xviii. 20; xxviii. 20); and the simple consideration of this fact, much more the realization of that nearness of God to which it points, should awaken in the breast of every one proceeding towards and crossing the threshold of a Christian sanctuary the feeling of awe which inspired Jacob on the heights of Bethel (Gen. xxviii. 17), Ethan the Ezrahite (Ps. lxxxix. 7), and Isaiah in the temple (vi. 1). The thought of God's immediate neighbourhood and of all that it implies, his observance of both the persons of his worshippers (Gen. xvi. 16), and the secrets of their hearts (Ps. cxxxix. 1), should put a hush on every spirit (Hab. ii. 20; Zech. ii. 13), and dispose each one to "keep his foot," metaphorically, to "put off his shoe," as Moses did at the bush (Exod. iii. 5), and Joshua in presence of the Captain of Jehovah's host (Josh. v. 15). 2. *Opposed to the true character of Divine worship.* When congregations assemble in the house of God to do homage to him whose presence fills the house, this end cannot be attained by offering the sacrifice of fools, i.e. by rendering such service as proceeds from unbelieving, disobedient, and hypocritical hearts (Prov. xxi. 27), but only by assuming the attitude of one willing to hear (1 Sam. iii. 10; Ps. lxxxv. 8) and to obey not man but God (Ps. xl. 8). If unaccompanied by a disposition to do God's will, mere external performances are of no value whatever, however imposing their magnificence or costly their production. What God desires in his servants is not the outward offering of sacrifices or celebration of ceremonies, but the inward devotion of the spirit (1 Sam. xv. 22; Ps. li. 16, 17; Jer. vii. 21—23; Hos. vi. 6). The highest form of worship is not speaking of or giving to God, but hearing and receiving from God. 3. *Proceeding from ignorance* both of the sanctity of the place and of the spirituality of its worship. However the final clause may be rendered (see Exposition), its sense is that irreverence springs from ignorance—from failing properly to understand the character either of that God they pretend to worship, or of that worship they affect to render. Ignorance of God, of his nature as spiritual, of his character as holy, of his presence as near, of his knowledge as all-observant, of his majesty as awe-inspiring, of his power as irresistible, is the prime root of all wrong worship, as Christ said of the Samaritans (John iv. 22), and as Paul told the Athenians (Acts xvii. 23).

II. **FORMALITY.** Manifested when engaged in Divine service and more particularly in prayer. Two phases of this evil commented on. 1. *Rashness in prayer.* (Ver. 2.) Hasty utterance of whatever comes uppermost, as if any jangle of words might suffice for devotion—a manner of prayer totally inconsistent with the thought that one is standing in the Divine presence. If a petitioner would hardly venture to lay his requests before an earthly sovereign, how much less should a suppliant draw near to Heaven's throne

without calm forethought and deliberation? Moreover, it is inconsistent with the real nature of prayer, which is a making known to God of the soul's needs with thankful acknowledgment of the Divine mercies; and how can one either state his own wants or record God's mercies who has never taken time to investigate the one or count up the other? 2. *Prolixity in prayer.* Much speaking, endless and unmeaning repetitions—a characteristic of Pharisaic devotions adverted to by Christ (Matt. vi. 7), and difficult to harmonize either with a due regard to the majesty of God or with the possession of that inward calm which is a necessary condition of all true prayer. As a dreamer's eloquence, usually turgid and magniloquent, proceeds from an unquiet state of the brain, which during day has been unduly excited by a rush of business or by the worries of waking hours, so the multitude of words emitted by a "fool's" voice is occasioned by the inward disquiet of a mind and heart that have not attained to rest in God. At the same time, "the admonition, 'let thy words be few,' is not meant to set limits to the fire of devotion, being directed, not against the inwardly devout, but against the superficially religious, who fancy that in the multitude of their words they have an equivalent for the devotion they lack" (Hengstenberg).

III. *INSINCERITY.* Displayed after leaving Divine service, more especially in the non-fulfilment of vows voluntarily taken while engaged in worship. Against this wickedness the preacher inveighs. 1. *Because such conduct cannot be other than displeasing to God.* "When thou vowest a vow, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed." As the Almighty himself is "the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever," "without variableness or shadow of turning," and "changeth not," so he desires in all his worshippers the reflection at least of this perfection, and cannot regard with favour one who plays fast and loose with his promises to men, and far less with his vows to God. 2. *Because such conduct is in no sense unavoidable.* A worshipper is under no obligation to vow anything to Jehovah. Whatever is done in this direction must proceed from the clearest free-will. Hence, to escape the sin of breaking one's vows, one is at liberty not to vow (Deut. xxiii. 21—23). Hence also should one cautiously guard against the utterance of rash and sinful vows like those of Jephthah (Judg. xi. 30) and of Saul (1 Sam. xiv. 24), lest through fulfilling (no less than through breaking) them one should incur sin. Similarly, "we must not vow that which through the frailty of the flesh we have reason to fear we shall not be able to perform, as those that vow a single life and yet know not how to keep their vow" (Matthew Henry). The same remark applies to taking vows of total abstinence from meats and drinks. 3. *Because such conduct cannot escape the just judgment of God.* The rashly uttered vow, afterwards left unfulfilled, sets the speaker of it in the place of a sinner, upon whom as guilty God will inflict punishment. Thus through his mouth, his "flesh," or his body, i.e. his whole personality, of which the flesh or body is the outer covering, is caused to suffer. Being just and holy, God can by no means clear the guilty (Exod. xxxiv. 7), although he can justify the ungodly (Rom. iv. 6). Hence the vow-breaker cannot hope to elude the due reward of his infidelity. 4. *Because such conduct is practically indefensible.* To say before the angel or presiding minister in the temple or synagogue in whose hearing the vow had been registered that the registration of it had been an error, was, in the judgment of the Preacher, no excuse, but rather an aggravation of the original offence, and a sure means of drawing down upon the offender the anger of God, and of causing God to effectually thwart and utterly destroy the designs his pretended worshipper had, first in making his vows and afterwards in breaking them; and so, when one retreats from protestations and promises made to God, it is no justification of his conduct in the eyes of others who may have listened to or become aware of his votive engagements, to aver that he had made them in error. Nor is it sufficient to excuse one in God's sight to say that one was mistaken in having promised to do so-and-so. Hence, if one vows before God with regard to matters left in his option, it is his duty to fulfil these vows, even should it be to his hurt. But in all respects it is wiser and better not to vow except in such things as are already enjoined upon one by God; and should it be said that no possible need can arise for taking upon one's self by voluntary obligation what already lies upon one by Divine prescription, this will not be denied. Yet one may vow to do what God has commanded in the sense of resolving to do it—always in dependence on promised grace; and with regard to this no better counsel can be offered than that given by Harvey—

"Call to thy God for grace to keep
 Thy vows; and if thou break them, weep.
 Weep for thy broken vows, and vow again:
 Vows made with tears cannot be still in vain."

LESSONS. 1. The condescension of God in accepting human worship. 2. The dignity of man that he can render such worship as God can accept. 3. The spirituality of all sincere worship of God. 4. The displeasure of God against all worship that is merely external.

Vers. 8, 9.—*The picture of an ideal state.* I. THE SOIL WELL CULTIVATED. As the land of a country is its principal source of wealth, where this is left untilld only destitution to the people upon it can ensue. Access to the broad acres of earth, to extract therefrom by means of labour the treasures therein deposited, constitutes an indispensable prerequisite to the material prosperity of any province or empire. Hence the Preacher depicts, or enables us to depict, a state or condition of things in which this is realized—the common people spread abroad upon the soil and engaged in its cultivation; the upper classes or feudal lords deriving their support from the same soil in the shape of rents, and even the king receiving from it in the form of taxes his imperial revenues.

II. THE LAW EQUALLY ADMINISTERED. The opposite of this is the picture sketched by the Preacher, who probably transferred to his pages a spectacle often witnessed in Palestine during the years of Persian domination—"the oppression of the poor, and violent perverting of judgment and justice in a province;" the labouring classes despoiled of their scanty savings, and even denied their fair share in the fruits of their own industry, ground down and oppressed by the tyranny and avarice of their social and political superiors, the satraps and other officers who ruled them, and these again preyed on by fiercer harpies above them, and so on, up through each ascending rank of dignitaries, till the last and highest was reached. Reverse the state of matters thus described, and imagine all classes in the community dwelling together in harmony, and conspiring to advance each other's comfort and happiness—the toiling millions cheerfully, honestly, and diligently cultivating the soil, and manufacturing its products into higher forms of wealth and beauty, the upper classes jealously guarding the rights and furthering the welfare of these industrious artisans, and each regarding the other with confidence and esteem—the poet's dream of Utopia, in which "all men's good" should be "each man's rule," would then be realized.

III. THE SOVEREIGN BENEFICENTLY ENTERPRISING. Not in pushing forward his own personal aggrandizement, which in ancient Oriental countries was often done at the expense of his subjects, as by Pharaoh of Egypt (Exod. i. 11) and Solomon of Israel and Judah (1 Kings xii. 4), but by devoting his energies to further the material (and intellectual) advancement of his people. "But the profit of a land every way is a king that maketh himself servant to the field," or "is a king over the cultivated field" (Revised Version margin), or is a king devoted to agriculture (Rosenmüller, Delitzsch, Wright), like Uziah of Judah, who "loved husbandry" (2 Chron. xxvi. 10). It is only amplifying this thought to represent the ideal state as one in which the king or emperor consecrates his life and powers to the honourable and laborious task of promoting the material prosperity and temporal happiness of his subjects by removing the yoke from agriculture, fostering trade and commerce, encouraging manufactures and inventions, aiding science and art, diffusing education, and stimulating his people upward in every possible way towards the ideal of all free peoples, viz. self-government.

IV. THE DEITY APPROVING. Here again the Preacher's picture must be changed. What he beheld was wholesale oppression and robbery practised by the upper and powerful classes against the under and powerless classes, or in modern phrase, "the masses," and God over both looking on in calm silence (Ps. l. 21), but by no means unperturbed indifference (Zeph. i. 12), accurately noting all the wickedness going on beneath the sun (Ps. xxxiii. 13—15), and quietly waiting his own time to call it to account (ch. iii. 15, 17; xi. 9; xii. 14). What must be substituted is a state of matters in which over the well-organized, industrious, peaceful, co-operating community the almighty Disposer of events, the King of nations and King of kings, presides, beaming

on them with his gracious smile (Numb. vi. 24—26) and establishing the work of their hands upon them (Ps. xc. 17).

Learn: 1. The duty of the state to seek the welfare of all. 2. The duty of each to promote the welfare of the state.

Vers. 8—17.—*A sermon on the vanity of riches.* I. FREQUENTLY ACQUIRED BY WRONG. As, for instance, by oppression and robbery (ver. 8). That honest labour sometimes leads to affluence cannot be denied (Prov. x. 4); more often, however, it is the ungodly who increase in riches (Ps. lxxiii. 12), and that, too, by means of their ungodliness (Prov. i. 19; xxii. 16; xxviii. 20; Hab. ii. 6, 9; 1 Tim. vi. 9, 10). Hence the question arises whether, if riches cannot be obtained without plunging into all sorts of wickedness, they are worth seeking to obtain at all; whether, if to secure them a man must not only practise dishonesty, theft, oppression, and perhaps worse, but convert his soul into a harbour of divers pernicious lusts, such as avarice, covetousness, and envy, it is really a good bargain to secure them at such a cost. Christ's question, "What shall it profit a man," etc. (Matt. xvi. 26) has a bearing on this. (On the evils that have come with the great accumulation of wealth, see 'Socialism New and Old,' p. xxxviii.: International Scientific Series.)

II. ALWAYS INCAPABLE OF YIELDING SATISFACTION. "He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase" (ver. 10). In addition to the well-known fact that material wealth has no power to impart solid satisfaction to the better instincts of the soul (Luke xii. 15)—a fact eloquently commented on by Burns ('Epistle to Davie')—

"It's no in titles nor in rank,
It's no in wealth like Lon'on Bank,
To purchase peace and rest," etc.

—the appetite for wealth grows by what it feeds on. The rich are ever craving for more. "The avaricious man is always wanting," said Horace ('Epist.,' i. 2. 26); while Ovid ('Fasti,' i. 211, 212) wrote of rich men, "Both their wealth and a furious lust of wealth increase, and when they possess the most they seek for more." Hence, to use another rendering, "He whose love cleaveth to abundance hath nothing of it" (Delitzsch). "He who hangs his heart on the continual tumult, noise, pomp, of more numerous and greater possessions if possible, to all real profit—i.e. all pleasant, peaceful enjoyment—is lost" (ibid.).

III. OFTEN MULTIPLY THEIR OWNER'S CARES. 1. *Numerous dependents.* Unless he is a miser, "who shuts up his money in chests and only feeds himself in looking at it with closed doors" (Delitzsch), the rich man, like Job (i. 3) and Solomon (1 Kings iv. 2, etc.), will maintain a large and expensive household, which will eat up his substance, so that, notwithstanding all his wealth, he shall have little more for his portion in the same than the satisfaction of seeing it pass through his hands (ver. 11). As Phaulas the Persian observed to a Scian youth, who congratulated him on being rich, "Do you think, Scian, that I live with more pleasure the more I possess? Do you not know that I neither eat nor drink nor sleep with a particle more pleasure now than when I was poor? But by having this abundance I gain merely this, that I have to guard more, to distribute more to others, and to have the trouble of taking care of more; for a great many domestics now demand of me their food, their drink, and their clothes. . . . Whosoever, therefore, is greatly pleased with the possession of riches will, be assured, feel annoyed at the expenditure of them" (Xenophon, 'Cyropædia,' viii. 3. 39—44). 2. *Increased anxieties.* The rich man, through the abundance of his riches, is worried with cares, which pursue him into the night, and will not suffer him to sleep (ver. 12), for thinking of how he shall protect his wealth against the midnight prowler, of how he shall increase it by successful trade and profitable investment, of how he shall employ it so as to extract from it the largest quantity of enjoyment; whereas the labouring man, whether he eats little or much, drops into refreshing slumber the moment he lays his head upon his pillow, untroubled by anxious thoughts as to how he shall dispose of his wealth, which consists chiefly in the fewness of his wants. So sang Horace long ago of "gentle sleep," which "scorns not the humble abodes of ploughmen" ('Odes,' iii. 1. 21—23); and Virgil of the tillers of the soil, who

"want not slumber sweet beneath the trees" ('Georg.,' ii. 469); so wrote Shakespeare of the "honey-heavy dew of slumber" ('Julius Cæsar,' act ii. sc. 1), describing it as

"Sore labour's bath,
Balm of hurt minds, great nature's second course,
Chief nourisher in life's feast;"

('Macbeth,' act ii. sc. 2.)

representing it as lying rather

"In smoky cribs
Than in the perfumed chambers of the great;"

('Henry IV.,' Part II., act iii. sc. 1.)

and depicting the shepherd's "wonted sleep under a fresh tree's shade" as "far beyond a prince's delicates" ('Henry VI.,' act ii. sc. 5).

IV. NOT SELDOM DISAPPOINT THE HOPES THEY HAVE RAISED. 1. *The hope of never-failing happiness.* The rich man hopes that in future years his wealth will be to him a source of comfort (Luke xii. 19). As the years go by he discovers they have only been kept to his hurt (ver. 13)—if not physically or mentally, at least morally and spiritually (1 Tim. vi. 10, 17); and the fact is often so, whether he discovers it or not. 2. *The hope of never knowing want.* The rich man expects that, having safely locked them up in a prudent speculation, he will keep them at least during his lifetime; but alas! the speculation turns out "an evil adventure," and his much-prized riches perish (ver. 14). 3. *The hope of perpetuating his name.* Once more the rich man pleases himself with the prospect of founding a family by leaving his son the fortune he has heaped up by toil, thrift, and profitable speculation. By the time he comes to die he has nothing in his hand to bequeath, and so is forced to bid farewell to his hopes and leave his son a pauper.

V. MUST EVENTUALLY BE LEFT BY ALL. 1. *Absolutely.* However rich a man may grow in his lifetime, of all he has amassed he must divest himself at the grave's mouth, as Claudio in the prison is reminded by the duke—

"If thou art rich, thou art poor;
For, like an ass whose back with ingots bows,
Thou bear'st thy riches but a journey,
And death unloads thee."

('Measure for Measure,' act iii. sc. 1.)

"As he came forth of his mother's womb, naked shall he return to go as he came, and shall take nothing of his labour, which he may carry away in his hand" (ver. 15; cf. Job i. 21); for as "we brought nothing into this world," so it is "certain we can carry nothing out" (1 Tim. vi. 7). 2. *Without compensation.* "What profit," then, the Preacher asks, has the rich man who has laboured all his days to amass wealth? The answer is, "Nothing! he has simply laboured for the wind." Nor is this the worst. To have had a pleasant time of it before being obliged to part with his wealth would have been a compensation, however slight, to the rich man; but for the most part even this is denied him. In order to amass his riches he has commonly been found to play the part of a miser, "eating in the dark to save candle-light, or working all day and waiting till nightfall before he sits down to a meal" (Plumptre); or, if the words "eating in darkness" be taken metaphorically, while gathering gold he has passed his existence in gloom and sadness, having no light in his heart (Hengstenberg), he has fallen into sore vexation at the failure of many of his plans, become morbidly disposed, "diseased in mind and body," and even waxed wrathful at God, himself, and all the world.

LESSONS. 1. The duty of moderating one's pursuit of earthly riches. 2. The wisdom of laying up for one's self treasures in heaven. 3. The happiness enjoyed by the poor.

Vers. 18—20.—*The picture of a "good and comely" life.* I. THE LABOUR OF THE HANDS REWARDED. The toiler spends not his strength for nought and in vain (Isa. xlix. 4), but with the sweat of his brow earns for himself bread to eat, water to drink,

and raiment to put on (Gen. xxviii. 20). Work and food the two first requisites of a good and comely life.

II. THE GOOD THINGS OF LIFE ENJOYED. Not only has the toiler the pleasant satisfaction of being able to earn through his personal exertions something, yea, enough, to eat and drink and to clothe himself withal, but over and above he can eat and drink and wear that which he has earned, and generally rejoice in that which his hands have won. Health and cheerfulness the next two requisites of a good and comely life.

III. THE ILLS OF EXISTENCE FORGOTTEN. If not entirely exempt from ills, since there is no man born of woman who is not heir to trouble (Job v. 7; xiv. 1), yet these affect him so slightly and leave so small impression on his soul, that the even tenor of his life flows on, and he hardly remembers the days as they pass. Equanimity and hopefulness a third pair of requisites for a good and comely life.

IV. THE GOODNESS OF HEAVEN RECOGNIZED. A "good and comely" life differs from mere animal existence in this, that it acknowledges all it receives and enjoys as a portion marked out for it by the sovereign appointment, and bestowed upon it by the gracious bounty of God (Jas. i. 17). Gratitude and religion a fourth pair of requisites for a good and comely life.

V. THE APPROBATION OF GOD EXPERIENCED. The joy of such a life, being more than mere sensuous gratification, and springing up within the deep recesses of the soul, being in fact pure heart-joy, is not displeasing to God, but, on the contrary, is by him observed, answered, and confirmed. Peace and joy the last and highest pair of requisites for a good and comely life.

Learn : 1. The propriety of striving after an ideal life. 2. The necessity of aiming at improved surroundings of existence. 3. The impossibility of reaching Utopia either for the state or the individual without religion.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ver. 1.—*The temple and the worshippers.* It is evident that the services of the pious Israelites were by no means merely sacrificial and ceremonial. There is a reflective and intellectual character attributed to the approach of the Hebrew worshippers to their God. The practical admonitions of this passage have reference, not to a formal, but to an intelligent and thoughtful worship.

I. THE HOUSE OF GOD. By this is to be understood no doubt a place, a building, probably the temple at Jerusalem. But clearly it follows from this language that in the view of the writer of Ecclesiastes the idea of the locality, the edifice, is almost lost sight of in the idea of the spiritual presence of Jehovah, and in the society and fellowship of sincere and devout worshippers. God, it was well understood, dwelleth not in temples made with hands, but abideth in his people's hearts.

II. THE SACRIFICE OF FOLLY. In every large gathering of professed worshippers there is reason to fear there are those with whom worship is nothing but a form, a custom. The sacrifice of such is outward only; their postures, their words, may be unexceptionable, but the heart is absent from the service. Inattention, want of true interest, unspirituality, take the place of those penitential acknowledgments—that heavenward aspiration—which are acceptable to him who searcheth the hearts and trieth the reins of the children of men. The sacrifice of such formal and irreverent worshippers is justly designated a sacrifice of fools. They consider not their own nature, their own needs; they consider not the attributes of him whom they profess to approach with the language of adoration, of gratitude, of petition. They are, therefore, not only irreligious; they are foolish, and they seem to say to every sensible observer that they are fools.

III. THE WORSHIP OF THE WISE. In contrast with the careless and undevout we have here depicted the spirit and the demeanour of true worshippers. They are characterized by : 1. *Self-restraint.* The modest repression of all that savours of self-assertion seems to be intended by the admonition, "Keep thy foot," which is as much as to say, "Take heed to thy steps, observe with care thy way, wander not from the path of sincerity, beware of indifference and of obtrusiveness." 2. *Reverence.* Such as becomes the creature in approaching the Creator in whose hand his breath is, and whose are all his ways;

such as becomes the sinner in addressing a holy God, whose Law has been broken, whose favour has to be implored. 3. *A spirit of attentive and submissive hearing.* "Speak, Lord; for thy servant heareth," is language becoming to the lowly and reverent worshipper; he shall be made acquainted with God's Law, and he shall rejoice in God's promises.—T.

Ver. 2.—*Reverence, reticence, and brevity in devotion.* What a contrast is there between this sound and sober counsel, and the precepts and customs prevalent among the heathen! These latter have corrupted the very practice of devotion; whilst those who acknowledge the authority of the Scriptures condemn themselves if their worship is superficial, pretentious, formal, and insincere.

I. THE RULES OF DEVOTION. 1. *Avoid profane rashness and precipitancy.* When rashness and haste are forbidden, it is not intended to condemn ejaculatory or extempore prayer. There are occasions when such prayer is the natural and appropriate expression of the deep feelings of the heart; when one cannot pause to weigh one's words, when one cannot fall back upon liturgy or litany, however scriptural and rich. What is censured is ill-considered prayer, which is not properly prayer at all, but the outpouring of ill temper and petulance. Such utterances may be profane, and are certainly unsuitable, unbecoming. 2. *Avoid verbiage.* When praise and prayer take shape in many words, there is danger of using "vain repetitions," against which our Lord Christ has so urgently warned his disciples. Long and diffuse devotions are probably addressed rather to men than to God. They are unnecessary and unprofitable, for God does not need them; they are irreverential, for they betoken a mind more occupied about self than about the Supreme. But this precept does not preclude urgency and even repetition when such are dictated by profound feeling and by special circumstances.

II. THE REASON OF THESE RULES. 1. *The nature, the character of God himself.* "He is in heaven." By heaven we are to understand the eternal sphere apart from and above time, earth, and sense. We are not to rank God with earthly potentates, but are to bear in mind his distinctness and superiority. As our Creator, he knows both our emotions and our wants; as our Lord and Judge, he knows our sins and frailties; as our Saviour, he knows our penitence and faith. Such considerations may well preclude familiarity, rashness, verbosity, irreverence. To think rightly of God, to feel aright with regard to him, is to be preserved from such faults and errors as are here mentioned with censure. 2. *The position of men.* Being upon earth, men partake in the feebleness and finiteness of the created. They are *suppliants*; and as such they should ever approach the throne of grace with reverence and humiliation. They are *sinners*; and should imitate the spirit of him who, when he came up into the temple to pray, cried, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" This was a short prayer; but he who offered it was accepted and justified.—T.

Vers. 4, 5.—*The law of the vow.* There are those who would disapprove of the violation of a promise given to a fellow-man, who think lightly of evading a promise solemnly volunteered to the Creator. It may be said that a fellow-man might suffer from such neglect or dereliction, but that God can suffer no loss or harm if a vow be not fulfilled. Such an extenuation or excuse for violating vows arises from the too common notion that the moral character of an action depends upon the consequences that follow it, and not upon the principles that direct it. A man's conduct may be wrong even if no one is injured by it; for he may violate both his own nature and the moral law itself.

I. THE NATURE OF THE VOW. When some signal favour has been experienced, some forbearance exercised on a man's behalf, he desires to evince his gratitude, to do something which in ordinary circumstances he would probably not have done, and he makes a vow unto God, sacredly promising to offer some gift, to perform some service. Or even more commonly, the vow is made in hope of some benefit desired, and its fulfilment is conditional upon a petition being favourably answered, a desire being gratified.

II. THE VOLUNTARINESS OF THE VOW. It is presumed that no constraint is exercised, that the promise made to Heaven is the free and spontaneous expression of religious

feeling. The language of Peter to Ananias expresses this aspect of the proceeding: "Whiles it remained, did it not remain thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thy power?"

III. THE OBLIGATION OF THE VOW. It is questionable whether vows are in all cases expedient. A vow to act sinfully is certainly not binding. And there are some vows which it is unwise in some circumstances, if not in all circumstances, to make; this is the case especially with vows which seem to make too great a demand upon human nature, which are indeed against nature; e.g. vows of celibacy, and of obedience to fellow-creatures as fallible as are those who bind themselves to obey. But if a vow be made knowingly and voluntarily, and if its fulfilment be not wrong, then the text assures us it is obligatory, and should be paid.

IV. THE FOLLY OF DEFERRING TO PAY THE VOW. There are disagreeable duties, which weak persons admit to be duties, and intend to discharge, but the discharge of which they postpone. Such duties do not become easier or more agreeable because deferred. Generally speaking, when conscience tells us that a certain thing ought to be done, the sooner we do it the better. So with the vow. "Defer not to pay it; for God hath no pleasure in fools."

V. THE SIN OF NEGLECTING AND REPUDIATING THE VOW. The vow is an evidence, it may be presumed, that there existed at the time, in the mind of him who made it, strong feelings and earnest purposes. Now, for one who has passed through such experiences so far to forget or abjure them as to act as if the vow had never been made, is a proof of religious declension and of inconsistency. How common is such "back-sliding"! It is said, "Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay." He who vows not contracts no special obligation, whilst he who vows and withholds payment repudiates a solemn obligation which he has undertaken. A warning is thus given to which it is important for those especially to give heed who are liable to religious excitement and enthusiasm. If such characters yield as readily to evil influences as to good, their impressions may be a curse rather than a blessing, or at least may be the occasion of moral deterioration. None can feel and resolve and pray, and then afterwards act in opposition to their purest feelings, their highest resolves, their fervent prayers, without suffering serious harm, without weakening their moral power, without incurring the just displeasure of the righteous Governor and Lord of all.—T.

Ver. 8.—*The oppressor's accountability.* We are not taught in this verse to disregard the wrongs of our fellow-creatures, to shut our eyes to deeds of iniquity, to close our ears against the cry of the suffering, to steel our heart against the anguish of the oppressed. But we are cautioned against drawing hasty and ill-considered conclusions from the prevalence of injustice; we are encouraged to cherish faith in the overruling and retributive providence of God.

I. THE FACT OF OPPRESSION. Such cases as are here referred to exist in every state; but in the East they have always existed in great numbers. Despotie governments are more favourable to oppression than those states where free institutions are established and where popular rights are respected. Reference is made: 1. To the maltreatment of the poor, who are powerless to defend themselves, and who have no helper. 2. To the withholding and perversion of justice.

II. THE DISTRESS AND PERPLEXITY NATURALLY OCCASIONED BY THE EXISTENCE OF OPPRESSION. 1. To the sufferers themselves; who are in some cases deprived of liberty, in some cases robbed of their property, in other cases injured in their person. 2. The spectators of such wrongs are aroused to sympathy, pity, and indignation. No rightly constituted mind can witness injustice without resentment. Even those who themselves exercise rights and enjoy privileges lose much of the pleasure and advantage of their own position by reason of the wrongs which their neighbours endure at the hand of power and cruelty. 3. Society is in danger of corruption when the laws are over-ridden by selfishness, avarice, and lust; when righteousness is scoffed at, and when men's best instincts and convictions are outraged.

III. THE REDRESS FOR WRONG IN THE UNIVERSAL GOVERNMENT OF GOD. 1. Oppression is not unnoticed. Whether the oppressor hopes to escape, or fears to be called to account, it is for the spectator of his evil deeds to remember that "One higher than the

high regardeth," 2. Oppression is not unrecorded. The iniquities of the unjust judge, of the arbitrary sovereign, of the villainous workman who violently hinders his fellow-workman from earning an honest livelihood,—all are written in the book of God. Even when deeds of oppression are wrought in the sacred name of religion by the persecutor and the inquisitor, such deeds are remembered, and will in due time be brought to light. 3. Oppression will not be unavenged. Either now in this world, or hereafter in the state of retribution, the oppressor, like every other sinner, shall be brought to the bar of Divine justice. God shall bring every man into judgment. As a man soweth, so shall he also reap. The wicked shall not go unpunished.—T.

Ver. 9.—*The earth and man.* Whatever obscurity may attach to the interpretation of this verse; in any case it represents the dependence of the inhabitants of earth upon the produce of the soil.

I. THE FACT OF THE BOUNTIFULNESS OF THE FRUITFUL EARTH. 1. Man's body is fashioned out of its dust. Whatever may have been the process by which the animal nature of man was prepared as the lodging and the vehicle of the immortal spirit, there is no question as to the fact that the human body is a part of nature, that it is composed of elements of a nature similar to those existing around, that it is subject to physical law. All this seems implied in the statement that the human frame was formed of the dust of the ground. 2. Man's body is supported by its produce. Directly or indirectly, man's corporeal nature is nourished by the material substances which exist in various forms upon the surface of the earth. The vegetable and animal creation minister to man's needs and growth. 3. Man's body is resolved into its substance. "Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." The earth provides man with his food, his raiment, his dwelling, and his grave.

II. THE UNIVERSALITY OF THE BOUNTIFULNESS OF THE EARTH. 1. The least is not overlooked, the poorest is cared for, fed, and sheltered. 2. The greatest is not independent. All men share the same nature, and sit at the same table: "The king himself is served by the field."

LESSONS. 1. We have to learn our dependence upon what is lower than ourselves. Whilst we are in this earth, whilst we share this corporeal nature, the material ministers to bodily needs, and must not be disdained or despised. 2. We should rise to an apprehension of our real dependence upon Divine providence. "The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof." It is ordered by God's wisdom that the earth should be the instrument of good to all his creatures, even to the highest. And the enlightened and thoughtful will not fail to ascend from the instrument to him that fashioned it, from the abode to him that built it, from the means of well-being to him who appointed and provided them all, and who intended the earth and all that is in it to teach his intelligent creatures something of his glorious character and gracious purposes.—T.

Vers. 10—17.—*The unsatisfying nature of riches.* To love wealth for its own sake is ridiculous. To desire it for the sake of the advantages it may secure is natural, and (within limits) is not blamable. To set the heart upon it for such purposes, to long for it above higher good, to be absorbed in its quest, is sinful. The wise man points out the insufficiency of material possessions to satisfy the nature of man. The reflections here recorded are the result of wide observation and of personal experience.

I. RICHES CANNOT AFFORD SATISFACTION TO THOSE WHO SET THEIR AFFECTION UPON THEM. A man who uses his property for lawful ends, and regards it in the true light as a provision made by God's wisdom and bounty for his wants, need know nothing of the experience recorded in ver. 10. But he who *loves*—i.e. desires with ardent desire, and as the chief good of life—silver and abundance, shall not be satisfied with wealth when it is attained. It is not in the nature of earthly good to quench the deep desires of man's immortal spirit.

II. RICHES ARE CONSUMED BY THOSE WHO ARE DEPENDENT UPON THEM. A large family, a circle of dependents, needy relatives, are the cause of the disappearance even of large revenues. This is no trouble to a man who judges justly; but to a foolish man whose one desire is to accumulate, it is a distress to witness the necessary expenditure involved in family and social claims.

III. RICHES ARE A SOURCE OF ANXIETY TO THE POSSESSOR. The labouring man,

who earns and eats his daily bread, and depends for to-morrow's supply upon to-morrow's toil, sleeps sweetly; whilst the capitalist and investor are wakeful by reason of many anxieties. A ship richly freighted may be wrecked, and the cargo lost; a company in which large sums have been invested may fail; a mine of precious metal upon which money has been spent, and from which much is hoped, may cease to be productive. An estate may no longer be profitable; thieves may break through and steal jewels and bullion. As surely as a man owns more than is needed for the supply of his daily wants, so surely is he liable to solicitude and care.

IV. RICHES MAY EVEN PROVE INJURIOUS TO THEIR OWNER. In some states of society the possession of wealth is likely to bring down upon the rich the envy and cupidity of a despotic ruler, who ill treats the wealthy in order to secure his riches for himself. And in all states of society there is danger lest wealth should be the occasion of moral injury, by enkindling evil passions, envy on the part of the poor, and in return hatred and suspicion on the part of the wealthy; or by leading to flattery, which in turn produces vanity and contemptuousness.

V. RICHES ARE OF NO AVAIL BEYOND THIS LIFE. They thus add, in the case of the avaricious, another sting to death; for clutch and grasp them as he may, they must be left behind. A man spends his whole life, and exhausts all his energies, in gathering together a "fortune;" no sooner has he succeeded than he is summoned to return naked to the earth, carrying nothing in his hand, poor as he came into the scene of his toils, his success, his disappointments. The king of terrors cannot be bribed. A mine of wealth cannot buy a day of life.

VI. RICHES MAY BE WASTED BY THE RICH MAN'S HEIRS. This was a misfortune of which the writer of Ecclesiastes seems to have been well aware from his prolonged observation of human life. One may gather; but who shall scatter? He to whom wealth is everything has no security that his property shall not, after his death, come into the hands of those who shall squander it in dissipation, or waste it in reckless speculations. This also is vanity.

APPLICATION. These things being so, the moral is obvious. The poor man may rest contented with his lot, for he knows not whether increase of possessions would bring him increase of happiness. The prosperous man may well give heed to the admonition, "If riches increase, set not your heart upon them."—T.

Vers. 18—20.—*The good things appointed for man by God.* Some detect in these verses the ring of Epicurean morals. But the difference is vast between desiring and rejoicing in the things of this world as mere means of pleasure, and accepting them with gratitude and using them with moderation and prudence, as the gifts of a Father's bounty and the expression of a Father's love.

I. THE GOOD THINGS OF THIS WORLD COME FROM GOD. It is God's earth which provides our sustenance; it is God's creative wisdom that provides our companionships; it is God who gives us power to acquire, to use, and to enjoy his gifts. All is from God.

II. THE ENJOYMENT OF THINGS IN THEMSELVES GOOD IS INTENDED, AND APPOINTED BY DIVINE WISDOM AND GOODNESS. They were not given to tempt or to curse man, but to gladden his heart and to enrich his life. Benevolence is the impulse of the Divine nature. God is "good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works."

III. THE ENJOYMENT OF THESE GOOD THINGS MAY BE RENDERED THE OCCASION OF FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD AND THANKSGIVING TO GOD. Thus even the common things of earth may be glorified and made beautiful by their devotion to the highest of all purposes. Through them the Giver of all may be praised, and the heart of the grateful recipient may be raised to fellowship with "the Father of the spirits of all flesh."

IV. THE ABUSE OF GOD'S GOOD GIFTS IS OWING TO HUMAN ERROR AND SIN. They are so often abused that it is not to be wondered at that men come to think them evil in themselves. But in such cases, the blame lies not with the Giver, but with the recipient, who turns the very honey into gall.—T.

Vers. 1, 2.—*Acceptable service.* Although the precise meaning of the Preacher is open to some doubt, we shall not go wrong in letting these words speak to us of—

I. THE FUTILITY OF FORMAL WORSHIP. Reference is made to (1) the offering of

sacrifice (ver. 1), and (2) the repetition of devotional phrases. We may find a Christian parallel in the reception of sacraments, and in the "prayers" and psalmody of the Church. We know that the purest spirituality may breathe in these, and may be nourished by these, but we know also (1) that they may fail to express any real and pure devotion; (2) that in this case they also fail in winning the favour of God; and (3) that they leave the soul rather the worse than the better, for in such futile worship there is a dangerous delusiveness which is apt to lead to a false and even fatal sense of security.

II. ACCEPTABLE SERVICE. This is threefold. 1. *Reverence*. This is strongly implied, especially in the second verse. Let the worshipper realize that he is in "the house of God," none other and no less than that (see Gen. xxviii. 17). Let him realize that "God is in heaven," etc.; that he is bowing before the Infinite One himself; that he is addressing him who, in his Divine nature and in his unapproachable rank, is immeasurably removed above himself; that he is speaking to One who sees the actions of every life, and knows the secrets of all hearts, and who needs not, therefore, to be informed of what we do or what we feel. Let language be spared, let sacred thought and solemn feeling flow; let a sense of human littleness and of the Divine majesty silence all insincerity, and fill the soul with reverential awe. 2. *Docility*. "Be more ready ['draw nigh,' Revised Version] to hear," etc. There is much virtue in docility. Our Lord strongly commended the child-spirit as the condition of entrance into the kingdom; and was not this principally because the spirit of childhood is that of docility—eagerness to know, readiness to receive? We should draw nigh to God in his house, not that we may hear our favourite dogmas once more exalted or enforced, but that we may hear the mind and know the will of Christ better than we have done before; that we may "be filled with the knowledge of his will;" that it may become increasingly true that "we have the mind of Christ." To desire to part with our errors, our ignorance, our prejudices, our half-views, our misconceptions, and to have a closer vision of our Lord and of his Divine truth,—this is acceptable worship. 3. *Obedience*. "Keep thy foot;" "go to the house of God 'with a straight foot,' a foot trained to walk in the path of holy obedience." Go to the house of God as one that "has clean hands and a pure heart;" as one that "lifts up holy hands" unto God. To go up to "offer sacrifice," or "make long prayers," with the determination in the heart to continue a life of impurity, or intemperance, or dishonesty, or injustice, or harshness toward the weak and the dependent,—this is to mock our Maker; it is to grieve the Father of spirits, the Lord of holiness and love. But, on the other hand, to go up to his sanctuary with a pure desire and real resolve to turn from our evil way, and to strive, against all outward hostility and all inward impulses, to walk in our integrity,—this is acceptable with God. "To obey is better than sacrifice;" and it is the spirit of obedience rather than the overt act of correctness for which the righteous Lord is looking.—C.

Vers. 4—6.—*Vowing and paying*. We may regard the subject of vows in two aspects.

I. THEIR CHARACTER. They may be of: 1. *An entirely obligatory character*. We may solemnly promise to God that which we may not withhold without sin. But this may be shortly summed up in one word—*ourselves*. We owe to him ourselves, all that we are and have, our powers and our possessions. And the first thing that becomes us all is to present ourselves before God in a most solemn act of surrender, in which we deliberately resolve and undertake to yield to him our heart and life thenceforth and for ever. In this great crisis of our spiritual history we make the one supreme vow with which all others are incomparable. It should be made in the exercise of all the powers of our nature; not under any kind of compulsion, but as freely as fully, as intelligently as heartily. It is one that is, of course, to be renewed, and this both *regularly*, and also on *all special occasions*. It is a vow to be confirmed every time we bow in the sanctuary, and every time we gather at the table of the Lord. 2. *Optional*. And of these vows which may be described as optional, there are (1) those that are *conditional*; as when a man promises that if God give him wealth he will devote a large proportion of it to his direct service (see Gen. xxviii. 22); or that if God restore his health he will consecrate all his time and all his possessions

to the proclamation of his truth. (2) Those that are *unconditional*; as when (a) a man determines that thenceforth he will give a certain fixed proportion of his income to the cause of Christ; or (b) when he pledges himself to abstain from some particular indulgence which is hurtful to himself or is a temptation to others.

II. THE SPIRIT IN WHICH THEY SHOULD BE MADE AND FULFILLED. 1. *With devout deliberation*. It is a serious mistake for a man to undertake that which he fails to carry out. (1) It is offensive to God (ver. 4). (2) It is injurious to the man himself; he is in a distinctly worse spiritual position after failure than he would have been if he had not entered into an engagement (ver. 5). We should not promise anything in ignorance of ourselves, and then lose our self-respect by a humiliating withdrawal. 2. In a spirit of *prompt and cheerful obedience*. What we vow to do we should do (1) without delay, "deferring not." There is always danger in delay. To-morrow we shall be further in time from the hour of solemn resolution, and its force will be lessened by the distance. Also (2) cheerfully; for we may be sure that God loveth a cheerful promise-keeper—one that does what he undertook to do, although it proves to be of greater dimensions or to be attended with severer effort than he at first imagined it would. 3. *With patient persistency*; not allowing anything to come between himself and his honourable fulfilment. (1) Are we fully redeeming our vows of Christian consecration in the daily life that we are living? (2) Are we paying the vows we made in some dark hour of need (see Ps. lvi. 13, 14)?—C.

Vers. 8—16.—*Comfort in confusion*. In the time and the country to which the text belongs there was a very large amount of injustice, rapacity, insecurity. Men could not count on enjoying the fruits of their labour; they were in serious danger of being wronged, or even "done to death;" there were not the constitutional guards and fences with which we are familiar now and here. The political and social conditions of the age and of the land added much to the seriousness of the great problems of the moralist. But though he was perplexed, he was not without light and comfort. There was that—

I. AFFORDED BY REASON AND EXPERIENCE. What if it were true that oppression was often to be witnessed, and, with oppression, the suffering of the weak, yet it was to be remembered that: 1. There was *often an appeal* to a higher authority, and the unrighteous sentence was reversed (ver. 8). 2. There was always reason to hope that *injustice and tyranny would be short-lived* (ver. 9). The king was served by the field; he was by no means independent of those who lived by manual labour; he was as much their subject in fact and truth as they were his in form and in law; he could not afford to live in their disregard and disapproval. 3. Successful oppression was far from being satisfactory to those who practised it. (1) No avaricious man was ever satisfied with the money he made; he was always coveting more; the thirst for gold lived on, and grew by what it gained (ver. 10). (2) The wealthy man found that he could not enjoy more than a fraction of what he acquired; he was compelled to see others partaking of that which his own toil had earned (ver. 11). The successful man was worried and burdened with his own wealth; the fear of losing balanced, if it did not more than counterbalance, the enjoyment of acquisition (ver. 12). (4) No rich man could be sure of the disposition of his hardly won and carefully stored treasure; his son might scatter it in sin and folly (vers. 13, 14). (5) No man can take a solitary fraction of his goods beyond the boundary of life (vers. 15, 16). 4. *Obscurity is not without its own advantage*. (1) It sleeps the sweet sleep of security; it has nothing to lose; it holds out no bait to the despoiler (ver. 12). (2) It enjoys the fruit of its labour, untroubled by the ambitions, unwearied with the excessive toils, unworried by the frequent vexations of those who aim at higher posts and move in larger spheres.

II. AFFORDED BY REVELATION. The godly man, and more especially he to whom Jesus Christ has spoken, contents himself—so far as it is right and well to be contented in the midst of confusion and perversion—with the peace-bringing considerations: 1. That Infinite Wisdom is overruling, and will direct all things to a right issue. 2. That it is not our circumstances, but our character, that should chiefly concern us. To be pure, true, loyal, helpful, Christ-like, is immeasurably more than to have and to hold any quantity of treasure, any place or rank whatsoever. 3. That we who travel

to a heavenly home, who look forward to a "crown of life," can afford to wait for our heritage.—C.

Vers. 15, 16.—*The difference at death.* Even when we have been long looking for the departure of one whose powers as well as his days are spent, his death, when it does come, makes a great difference to us. Between life at its lowest and death there is a great and felt interval. How much more must this be the case to the departed himself! What a difference to him between this life and that to which he goes! Perhaps less than we imagine, yet doubtless very great. The text suggests to us—

I. WHAT WE MUST LEAVE BEHIND US AT DEATH. 1. *Our worldly goods.* This is an obvious fact, which painfully impressed the Preacher (text), and which comforted the psalmist (Ps. xlix. 16, 17). It is a fact that should make the wise less careful to acquire and to save. 2. *Our reputation.* The reputation for wisdom or folly, for integrity or dishonesty, for kindness or severity, which our life has been building up, death cannot destroy, through whatever experiences we may then pass. We must be content to leave that behind to be associated with our name in the memories of men, for their benediction or for their reproach. 3. *The influence* for good or evil we have exerted on human souls. These we cannot remove, nor can we stay to deepen or to counteract them; they are our most important legacies.

II. WHAT WE MAY LEAVE BEHIND US. 1. *A wise disposition of our property.* A sagacious statesman once said that he never quite made up his mind about his neighbour's character until he had seen his will. What disposition we make of that we leave behind is a very serious act of our life; there are very few single acts so serious. (1) It is usually a good thing for a man to dispose of a large proportion of all that he has earned during his life when he is here to superintend it. (2) It is criminally careless to cause additional sorrow at death by negligence in the matter of disposition of means. (3) The kindest thing we can do for our relatives is not to provide absolutely for their wants, but to facilitate their own self-support. 2. *Wise counsels* to those who will heed them. There are usually those who will pay great regard to the wishes of the dying, apart from any "legal instructions." We may leave with those we love such recommendations as shall save them from grave mistakes, and guide them to good and happy courses. 3. *A valued testimony* to the power and preciousness of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

III. WHAT WE MAY TAKE WITH US. 1. *Our faith in Jesus Christ*; that settled attitude of the soul toward him which is one of trustfulness and love, which determines our place in the kingdom of God (John iii. 15, 16, 18, 36). 2. *Our Christian life*—its record in the heavenly chronicles; that Christian service which, in its faithfulness or its imperfection, will gain for us the larger or the smaller measure of our Lord's approval (Luke xix. 16—19). 3. *Qualification*, gained by steadfastness, patience, zeal, for the sphere which "the righteous Judge" will award us and will have ready for us.—C.

Ver. 1.—*Vanity in religion*: 1. *Thoughtlessness.* From secular life the Preacher turns to religious. He has sought in many quarters for peace and satisfaction, but has found none. Royal palaces, huts where poor men lie, cells of philosophers, banqueting-halls, are all alike, if not all equally, infested by vanities which poison pleasure and add to the burden of care. But surely in the house of God, where men seek to disengage their thoughts from things that are seen and temporal, and to fix them upon things that are unseen and eternal, where they endeavour to establish and maintain communion with their Creator, one may count upon finding a haven of refuge for the soul from vanity and care. But here, too, he perceives that, by thoughtlessness, formalism, and insincerity, the purpose for which worship was instituted, and the blessings it may secure, are in danger of being defeated and nullified. But a change is manifest in the tone in which he reproves these faults. He lays down the whip of the satirist, he suppresses the fierce indignation which the sight of these new follies might have excited within him, and with sober earnestness exhorts his hearers to forsake the faults which separate between them and God, and hinder the ascent of their prayers to him and the descent of his blessings upon them. His feelings of reverence, and his

conviction that in obedience to God and in communion with him peace and satisfaction may be found, forbid his saying of genuine religion that it is "vanity and vexation of spirit." So far as the spirit of his exhortation is concerned, it is applicable to all forms of worship, but we find some difficulty in ascertaining the kind of scene which was in his mind's eye when he spoke of "the house of God." If we are convinced that it is Solomon speaking in his own person, we know that he must refer to the stately building which he erected for the service of God in Jerusalem; and we understand from his words that he is not depreciating the offering of sacrifices, but is giving the admonition so often on the lips of the prophets, that the external act without accompanying devotion and love of righteousness, is in vain (1 Sam. xv. 22; Ps. l. 8, 9; Prov. xxi. 3; Isa. i. 11—17; Jer. vii. 22, 23; Mark xii. 33). But if we have here the utterance of a later writer, may there not be a reference to the synagogue service, in which the reading of the Word of God and exposition of its meaning were the principal religious exercises employed? May not the writer be understood as affirming "that a diligent listening to the teaching imparted in the synagogue is of more real value than the 'sacrifices' offered up in the temple by 'fools'?" The answer we give is determined by the opinion we form as to the date of the book. But even if we are unable to decide this point, the exhortation before us will lose none of its significance and weight. The underlying truth is the same, whether the primary reference be to the gorgeous ritual of the temple, or to the simple, unadorned services of the synagogue, which in later times furnished the pattern for Christian worship. The first fault against which the Preacher would have his hearers be on their guard is that of *thoughtlessness*—entering the house of God inconsiderately (ver. 1). The form in which the admonition is expressed is probably intended to remind his readers of the Divine command to Moses in the desert when he drew near to the bush that burned with fire: "Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground" (Exod. iii. 5; cf. also Josh. v. 15).

I. Our first duty in entering the house of God is, therefore, **TO BE REVERENT BOTH IN MANNER AND IN SPIRIT.** The outward expression of this feeling, whatever form, according to the custom of our time, or country, or Church, it may take, is to be an indication of the frame of mind in which we enter upon the service of God. It is true that there may be a reverent manner without devoutness of spirit, but it is equally true that there cannot be devoutness of spirit without reverence of manner. The true frame of mind is that which springs from a due sense of the solemnity attaching to the house of God, and of the purpose for which we assemble in it. It is not superstition, but genuine religious sentiment, that would lead us to be mindful of the fact that it is no common ground which is enclosed by the sacred walls; that it is here that we meet with him whom "the heaven of heavens cannot contain." Though we are at all times in his presence, his house is the place in which we entreat him to manifest himself to his congregated people. Yet, though we know that the place and the purpose of our frequenting it are of the most holy and solemn nature, it is only by a strong effort that we can maintain the frame of mind we should be in when we wait upon God in his house. It is only by resolutely determining so to do that we can control our wandering thoughts, suppress frivolous and sinful imaginations, and divest ourselves of the secular cares and anxieties which occupy only too much of our attention in the world outside the sanctuary.

II. Our second great duty is **THAT OF OBEDIENCE TO THE DIVINE LAW**; "for to draw near to hearken is better than to give the sacrifice of fools, for they know not that they do evil" (Revised Version). Not only should there be reverence of manner and spirit in the presence of God, but a desire to know what he requires from us, and a disposition to render it. Love of holiness, and endeavours to exemplify it, are essential to all true service of God. By hearkening is evidently meant an attitude of mind which leads directly to obedience to the words spoken, to repentance and amendment when faults are reproved, and to a love and practice of the virtues commended. In the Epistle of James (i. 19—25) we have an inspired commentary upon this precept in the Book of Ecclesiastes. The Christian teacher enforces the same lesson, and depicts the contrast between the "forgetful hearer" and the "doer of the Word." The one is like a man looking for a moment into a mirror, and going on his way, and speedily forgetting what he looked like; the other is like a man who uses the revelation the mirror gives him

of himself, to correct what in him is faulty. The latter returns again and again to examine himself in the faithful glass, for the purpose of removing those stains which it may show are upon him. This reverence of manner and spirit and this love of righteousness alone give value to worship; omission of them through thoughtlessness is a *positive* offence against God.—J. W.

Vers. 2, 3.—*Vanity in religion: 2. Rash prayers.* From an admonition as to the spirit in which we should enter the house of God, our author proceeds to counsel us as to the religious exercises we engage in there. Our utterances in prayer are to be calm and deliberate. A multitude of wishes may fill our hearts, and, unless we take care, find expression in a volume of ill-considered words. But we are to remember that only some of our wishes can be lawfully turned into prayers, and that an appropriate expression of the requests we feel we can offer, is due from us. The counsel here given is twofold: (1) it relates to our words, which often outrun our thoughts, and (2) to our hearts or minds, which are often the homes of vain imaginations and desires. Over both we must exercise control if we are to offer acceptable prayers. One great safeguard against offending in this matter is *brevity* in our addresses to heaven's King. In a multitude of words even the wisest are in danger of giving indications of folly. Definite petitions, duly weighed, and expressed in simple, earnest language, become us who stand at such a distance from the throne of God. Our Lord reiterates the admonition in the sermon on the mount (Matt. vi. 7, 8): "When ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him." And in the parable of the Pharisee and the publican (Luke xviii. 9—14) he contrasts the voluble utterance of the self-righteous and complacent worshipper with the brief, sincere confession and supplication of the true penitent. The greatest of all safeguards against the evil here condemned consists in our having before our minds a true idea of what prayer is. It is our offering petitions to God as creatures who are dependent upon his goodness, as children whom he loves. If we take as our example that offered by our Saviour in the garden of Gethsemane (Matt. xxvi. 39), we learn that the aim of prayer is not to determine the will of God. Some one thing we may ask for, but we leave it to God to grant or to deny, and seek above all that our will may be changed into his will (see Robertson of Brighton, vol. iv. serm. 3, "Prayer").—J. W.

Vers. 4—7.—*Vanity in religion: 3. Broken vows.* A vow is a promise to dedicate something to God, on certain conditions, such as his granting deliverance from death or danger, success in one's undertakings, or the like, and is one of the most ancient and widespread of religious customs. The earliest we read of is that of Jacob at Bethel (Gen. xxviii. 18—22; xxxi. 13). The Mosaic Law regulated the practice, and the passage before us is an almost exact reproduction of the section in Deuteronomy (xxiii. 21—23) in which general directions are given about the discharge of such obligations. The vow consisted in the dedication of persons or possessions to sacred uses. The worshipper's self, or child, or slave, or property, might be devoted to God. Vows were entirely voluntary, but, once made, were regarded as compulsory, and evasion of performance of them was held to be highly irreligious (Numb. xxx. 2; Deut. xxiii. 21—23; ch. v. 4). The kind of sin referred to here is that of making a vow inconsiderately, and drawing back when the time of performance comes. No obligation to vow rested upon any man (Deut. xxiii. 22), but when the vow had once been made, no one could without dishonour refuse to fulfil it. Of course, it was to be taken for granted that the vow was such as could be fulfilled without violating any law or ordinance of God. And, accordingly, provision was made in the Mosaic Law for the cancelling of any such obligation undertaken inadvertently, and found on maturer consideration to be immoral. It could be set aside, and the offence of having made it be atoned for as a sin of ignorance (Lev. v. 4—6). But when no such obstacle stood in the way of performance, nothing but a prompt and cheerful fulfilment of the vow could be accepted as satisfactory. A twofold fault is described in the passage before us: (1) an unseemly delay in fulfilling the vow (ver. 4) leading, perhaps, to an omission to fulfil it at all; and (2) a deliberate evasion of it, the insincere worshipper going to

the angel (priest), and saying that the vow had been made in ignorance, and should not therefore be kept literally (ver. 6). And in correspondence with the respective degrees of guilt incurred by such conduct, the Divine indignation takes a less or more intense form: ver. 4, "He hath no pleasure in fools;" ver. 6, "Wherefore should God be angry at thy voice, and destroy the work of thine hands?" The idea of the former of the two statements of the Divine displeasure is far from being trivial or from being a tame anticipation of the latter. "The Lord first ceases to delight in a man, and then, after long forbearance, gives him over to destruction" (Wright). The one great source of these three forms of evil which so often vitiate religious life—*thoughtlessness, rash prayers, and broken vows*—is irreverence, and against it the Preacher lifts up his voice (ver. 7): "For in the multitude of dreams and many words there are also divers vanities: but fear thou God." Just as occasional dreams may be coherent, so few well-considered utterances may be characterized by wisdom. But a crowd of dreams, and hasty, babbling speech, are sure to contain confused images and offensive folly. The fear of God, therefore, if it habitually influence the mind, will preserve a man from being "rash with his mouth;" it will hinder his making inconsiderate vows, and afterwards seeking excuses for not fulfilling them.—J. W.

Ver. 8.—*A misgoverned state.* From the follies only too prevalent in the religious world, the Preacher turns to the disorders of the political; and although he admonishes his readers in a later section of the book (ch. viii. 2) to be mindful of the duties to which they are pledged by their oath of allegiance, it is very evident that he felt keenly the misery and oppression caused by misgovernment. For these evils he could suggest no cure; a hopeless submission to the inevitable is his only counsel. Like Hamlet, his heart is wrung by the thought of evils against which it was almost useless to strive—

"The oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely
 . . . the law's delay,
 The insolence of office, and the spurns
 That patient merit of the unworthy takes."

The subordinate magistrates tyrannized over the people, those who were higher in office watched their opportunity for oppressing them. From the lowest up to the very highest rank of officials the same system of violence and jealous espionage prevailed. Those that were in the royal household and had the ear of the king, his most intimate counsellors, who were in a sense higher than any of the satraps or governors he employed, were able to urge him to use his power for the destruction of any whose ill-gotten riches made him an object of envy (comp. ch. x. 4, 7, 16, etc.). The whole system of government was rotten to the core, the same distrust and jealousy pervaded every part of it. "Marvel not," says the Preacher, "at oppression and injustice in the lower departments of official life, for those who are the superiors of the tyrannical judge or governor, and should be a check on him, are as bad as he." Such seems to be the sense of the words. At first sight, indeed, the impression left on one's mind is that the Preacher counsels his readers not to be perplexed or unduly dismayed at the wrong they are forced to witness, on the ground that over and above the highest of earthly tyrants is the power of God, and that it will in due time be manifested in the punishment of the evil-doer. As though he had said, God who is "higher than the highest regardeth," beholds the wrong-doing; and when he comes to judgment, the proudest will have to submit to his power (comp. ch. iii. 17). But this interpretation, though very ancient, is not in harmony with the general character of the utterance. The thought of God's power and justice is indeed calculated to give some consolation to the oppressed, but not to explain why they are oppressed. The latter part of the verse is assigned as a reason for not marvelling at the prevalence of evil. If, therefore, reference be made to the power of God, by which the evil might be restrained or abolished, the marvel of its prevalence would only be increased. We are, therefore, to understand his words as meaning, "Do not be surprised at the corruption and baseness of the lower officials, in so much as the same corruption prevails among those in far higher positions." He is not here seeking to cheer up the sufferer by bidding him look higher; he is describing the evil state of affairs everywhere existing in the empire in

his own day (Wright). There is nothing very heroic or inspiring in the counsel. It is simply an admonition, based on prudence, to escape personal danger by stolidly submitting to evils which one's own power can do nothing to abolish or alleviate. To those who under an Oriental despotism had become hopeless and dispirited, the words might seem worthy of a wise counsellor; but surely there is a servile ring about them which ill harmonizes with the love of freedom and intolerance of tyranny which are native to a European mind. There is but one relieving circumstance in connection with them, and that is that submission to oppression is not commanded in them or asserted to be a duty; and therefore those in whose hearts the love of country and of justice burns brightly, and who find that a pure and devoted patriotism moves them to make many sacrifices for the good of their fellows, violate no canon of Scripture when they rise superior to the prudential considerations dwelt upon here. Granted that submission to the inevitable is the price at which material safety and happiness may be bought, it is still a question at many times whether the patriot should not hazard material safety and happiness in the attempt to win for his country and for himself a higher boon.—J. W.

Ver. 9.—*A well-ordered state.* In contrast with the evils produced by an administration in which all the officials, from the lowest to the highest, seek to enrich themselves, our author now sets the picture of a well-governed community, in which the efficient cultivation of the land is a matter of the first consideration, and all classes of the population, up to the king himself, share in the consequent prosperity. (The verse has been differently rendered, but the translation of both our Revised and Authorized Versions is probably the best reproduction of the original words.) From the kings who wasted the resources of the lands over which they ruled in carrying on bloody wars, and in the indulgence of their capricious tastes, he turns to those who, like Uzziah, encouraged agriculture, and under whose beneficent rule Judah enjoyed the blessings of peace and prosperity (2 Chron. xxvi. 10). "The profit of the earth is for all." All are dependent upon the labours of the husbandman for the supply of the necessaries of life. By the judicious cultivation of the soil wealth is accumulated, by which comforts and luxuries are to be procured, so that even "the king himself is served by the field." The king, indeed, is more dependent upon the husbandman than the husbandman upon the king; without his labours there would be no bread for the royal palace, and no luxuries could make up for the absence of this necessary of life. We have, surely, in this consideration a strong proof of the dignity and value of the humblest labour, and in the fact of the mutual dependence of all classes upon each other an argument for the necessity of mutual forbearance and co-operation. A very striking illustration of the teaching here given is afforded in an incident which took place at Heidelberg in the reign of Frederic I. (1152—1190). "This prince invited to a banquet all the factious barons whom he had vanquished at Seckingen, and who had previously ravaged and laid waste great part of the palatinate. Among them were the Bishop of Mentz and the Margrave of Baden. The repast was plentiful and luxurious, but there was no bread. The warrior-guests looked round with surprise and inquiry. 'Do you ask for bread?' said Frederic, sternly; 'you who have wasted the fruits of the earth, and destroyed those whose industry cultivates it? There is no bread. Eat, and be satisfied; and learn henceforth mercy to those who put the bread into your mouths'" (quoted in 'Sketches of Germany,' by Mrs. Jameson).—J. W.

Vers. 10—20.—*The drawbacks upon wealth.* The series of aphorisms which begins in ver. 10 is not unconnected with what precedes it. It is for wealth generally that the unjust judge and oppressive ruler barter his peace of mind, sells his very soul. As the means for procuring sensual gratification, for surrounding one's self with ostentatious luxury, and for carrying out ambitious schemes, riches have great fascination. The Preacher, however, records at length the drawbacks connected with them, which are calculated to diminish the envy with which the poor very often regard those who possess them. Probably the bulk of mankind would say that they are willing to put up with the drawbacks if only they could possess the riches. But surely those who read the Word of God reverently and with a docile spirit are disposed to profit by the

wise counsels and warning it contains. The gross and presumptuous frame of mind, which would lead any to laugh at the drawbacks upon wealth as imaginary, when compared with the happiness they think it must secure, deserves severe censure. Both rich and poor may draw appropriate lessons from the Preacher's words: the rich may learn humility; the poor, contentment.

I. **INSATIABLENESS OF AVARICE.** (Ver. 10.) Those who begin to amass money cultivate an appetite which can never be satisfied, which only grows in fierceness as it is supplied with food. Those who love silver will never count themselves rich enough; they will always hunger for more, and the amount that would once have seemed abundance to them will be spurned as paltry, as their ideas and desires are enlarged. Dissatisfaction with what they have, and greed to acquire more, poison their pleasure in all that they have accumulated. Happy are those who have learned to be content with little, whose wants are few and moderate, who, having food and raiment, desire no more—they are really rich.

II. Another thought calculated to diminish envy of the rich is that, AS **WEALTH INCREASES, THOSE THAT CONSUME IT INCREASE ALSO.** (Ver. 11.) Along with the more abundant possessions, there is generally a larger retinue of servants and dependants. So that, with more to provide for, the wealthy man may be poorer than he was in earlier days when his means were smaller. Fresh demands are made upon him; the outward display he is forced to make becomes a daily increasing burden; he has to labour for the supply of others rather than for himself. A striking passage in Xenophon—quoted by Plumptre—expresses the same thought. "Do you think that I live with more pleasure the more I possess? . . . By having this abundance I gain merely this, that I have to guard more, to distribute more to others, and to have the trouble of taking care of more; for a great many domestics now demand of me their food, their drink, and their clothes. . . . Whosoever, therefore, is greatly pleased with the possession of riches will, be assured, feel much annoyed at the expenditure of them" ('Cypor.,' viii. 3). The only compensation that the rich man may have is that of being able to look on his treasures and say, "These are mine." Is it, after all, a sufficient reward for his toils and cares?

III. Another boon which the poor may always enjoy, but which the rich may often sigh for in vain, is **SWEET SLEEP.** (Ver. 12.) The labourer enjoys refreshing sleep, whether his food be abundant or not; the toils of the day ensure sound slumber at night. While the very abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep; all kinds of cares, projects, and anxieties rise within his mind, and will not suffer him to be at rest. The dread of losing his riches may make him wakeful, feverish excitement may result from his luxurious mode of living, and rob him of the power to compose himself to slumber, and, like the ambitious king, he may envy the ship-boy rocked and lulled by the tossing of "the rude, imperious surge" (Shakespeare, 'Henry IV.,' Part II., act iii. sc. 1).

IV. **RICHES MAY INJURE ITS POSSESSOR.** (Ver. 13.) It may mark him out as a suitable victim for spoliation by a lawless tyrant or a revolutionary mob. Or it may furnish him with the means of indulging vicious appetites, and increase greatly the risks and temptations that make it difficult to live a sober, righteous, and godly life, and ruin him body and soul. As says the apostle, "They that desire to be rich fall into a temptation and a snare, and many foolish and hurtful lusts, such as drown men in destruction and perdition" (1 Tim. vi. 9, 10).

V. Another evil attendant on wealth is **THE DANGER OF SUDDEN AND IRRETRIEVABLE LOSS.** (Ver. 14.) "Not only do riches fail to give any satisfying joy, but the man who reckoned on founding a family, and leaving his heaped-up treasures to his son, gains nothing but anxieties and cares, he may lose his wealth by some unfortunate chance, and leave his son a pauper." The case of Job would seem to be in the writer's mind as an example of this sudden downfall from prosperity and wealth. In any case, death robs the rich man of all his possessions; in the twinkling of an eye he is stripped of his wealth, as a traveller who has fallen in with a troop of banditti, and is forced to depart from life as poor in goods as when he entered it (vers. 15, 16).

VI. Lastly, come **THE INFIRMITY AND PEEVISHNESS WHICH ARE OFTEN THE COMPANIONS OF WEALTH.** (Ver. 17.) Riches cannot cure disease, or ward off the day of death, or compensate for the sorrows and disappointments of life, and may only tend to

aggravate them; a deeper dissatisfaction with self, and with the providential government of the world, a more intense feeling of misanthropy and embitterment are likely to be the portion of the godless rich than of those who have had all through life to labour for their bread, and have never risen much above the position in which they first found themselves.

As a practical conclusion, the Preacher reiterates for the fourth time his old advice (vers. 18—20): "If you have little, be content with it. If you have much, enjoy it without excess, and without seeking more. God gives life and earthly blessings, and the power to enjoy them." And in words that are less clear than we could wish, he seems to intimate that in this pious disposition of mind and heart will be found the secret of a serene and happy life, which no changes or disappointments will be able wholly to overcast. "For he shall not much remember the days of his life; because God answereth him in the joy of his heart"—words which seem to imply, "The man who has learned the secret of enjoyment is not anxious about the days of his life; does not brood even over its transitoriness, but takes each day tranquilly as it comes, as God's gift to him; and God himself corresponds to his joy, is felt to approve it, as harmonizing, in its calm evenness, with his own blessedness. The tranquillity of the wise man mirrors the tranquillity of God" (Plumptre).—J. W.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER VI.

Vers. 1—6.—Section 9. Koheleth proceeds to illustrate the fact which he stated at the end of the last chapter, viz. that the possession and enjoyment of wealth are alike the free gift of God. We may see men possessed of all the gifts of fortune, yet denied the faculty of enjoying them. Hence we again conclude that *wealth cannot secure happiness*.

Ver. 1.—There is an evil which I have seen under the sun. The writer presents his personal experience, that which has fallen under his own observation (comp. ch. v. 13; x. 5). And it is common among men. *Rab*, translated "common," like *πολὺς* in Greek, is used of number and of degree; hence there is some doubt about its meaning here. The Septuagint has *πολλὰ*, the Vulgate *frequens*. Taking into account the fact that the circumstance stated is not one of general experience, we must receive the adjective in its tropical signification, and render, *And it is great* [lies heavily] *upon men*. Comp. ch. viii. 6, where the same word is used, and the preposition *by* is rather "upon" than "among" (Isa. xxiv. 20).

Ver. 2.—A man to whom God hath given riches, wealth, and honour. This is the evil to which reference is made. Two of the words here given, "riches" and "honour," are those used by God in blessing Solomon in the vision at Gibeon (1 Kings iii. 13); but all three are employed in the parallel passage (2 Chron. i. 11). So that he wanteth nothing for his soul of all that he desireth. "His soul" is the man himself, his personality, as Ps. xlix. 19. So in the parable

(Luke xii. 19) the rich fool says to his soul, "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years." In the supposed case the man is able to procure for himself everything which he wants; has no occasion to deny himself the gratification of any rising desire. All this comes from God's bounty; but something more is wanted to bring happiness. Yet God giveth him not power to eat thereof. "To eat" is used in a metaphorical sense for "to enjoy," take advantage of, make due use of (see on ch. ii. 24). The ability to enjoy all these good things is wanting, either from discontent, or moroseness, or sickness, or as a punishment for secret sin. But a stranger eateth it. The "stranger" (*nokri*) is not the legal heir, but an alien to the possessor's blood, neither relation nor even necessarily a friend. For a childless Oriental to adopt an heir is a common custom at the present day. The wish to continue a family, to leave a name and inheritance to children's children, was very strong among the Hebrews—all the stronger as the life beyond the grave was dimly apprehended. Abraham expressed this feeling when he sadly cried, "I go childless, and he that shall be possessor of my house is Dammesek Eliezer" (Gen. xv. 2). The evils are two—that this great fortune brings no happiness to its possessor, and that it passes to one who is nothing to him. An evil disease; *ἀδυστορία πορνεία*, Septuagint, an evil as bad as the diseases spoken of in Dent. xxviii. 27, 28.

Ver. 3.—If a man beget an hundred children. Another case is supposed, differing from the preceding one, where the rich man dies childless. Septuagint, *Ἐὰν γεννήσῃ ἀνὴρ ἑκατόν*. "Sons," or "children," must be

supplied (comp. 1 Sam. ii. 5; Jer. xv. 9). To have a large family was regarded as a great blessing. The "hundred" is a round number, though we read of some fathers who had nearly this number of children; thus Ahab had seventy sons (2 Kings x. 1), Rehoboam eighty-eight children (2 Chron. xi. 21). Plumptre follows some commentators in seeing here an allusion to Artaxerxes Mnemon, who is said to have had a hundred and fifteen children, and died of grief at the age of ninety-four at the suicide of one son and the murder of another. Wordsworth opines that Solomon, in the previous verse, was thinking of Jeroboam, who, it was revealed unto him, should, stranger as he was, seize and enjoy his inheritance. But these historical references are the merest guesswork, and rest upon no substantial basis. Plainly the author's statement is general, and there is no need to ransack history to find its parallel. **And live many years, so that the days of his years be many; Et vixerit multos annos, et plures dies ætatis habuerit** (Vulgate). These versions seem to be simply tautological. The second clause is climacteric, as Ginsburg renders, "Yea, numerous as may be the days of his years." The whole extent of years is summed up in days. So Ps. xc. 10, "The days of our years are three score years and ten," etc. Long life, again, was deemed a special blessing, as we see in the commandment with promise (Exod. xx. 12). **And (yet if) his soul be not filled with good; i.e. he does not satisfy himself with the enjoyment of all the good things which he possesses.** Septuagint, *Kal ψυχὴ αὐτοῦ οὐ πλησθήσεται ἀπὸ τῆς ἀγαθότητος*, "And his soul shall not be satisfied with his good." And also that he have no burial. This is the climax of the evil that befalls him. Some critics, not entering into Koheleth's view of the severity of this calamity, translate, "and even if the grave did not wait for him," i.e. "if he were never to die," if he were immortal. But there is no parallel to show that the clause can have this meaning; and we know, without having recourse to Greek precedents, that the want of burial was reckoned a grievous loss and dishonour. Hence comes the common allusion to dead carcasses being left to be devoured by beasts and birds, instead of meeting with honourable burial in the ancestral graves (1 Kings xiii. 22; Isa. xiv. 18—20). Thus David says to his giant foe, "I will give the carcasses of the host of the Philistines this day unto the fowls of the air, and to the wild beasts of the earth" (1 Sam. xvii. 46); and about Jehoiakim it was denounced that he should not be lamented when he died: "He shall be buried with the burial of an ass, drawn and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem" (Jer. xxii. 18, 19).

The lot of the rich man in question is proclaimed with ever-increasing misery. He cannot enjoy his possessions; he has none to whom to leave them; his memory perishes; he has no honoured burial. **I say, that an untimely birth is better than he** (comp. ch. iv. 3). The abortion or still-born child is preferable to one whose destiny is so miserable (see Job iii. 16; Ps. lviii. 8). It is preferable because, although it has missed all the pleasures of life, it has at least escaped all suffering. The next two verses illustrate this position.

Ver. 4.—**For he cometh in with vanity; rather, for it came into nothingness.** The reference is to the fœtus, or still-born child, not to the rich man, as is implied by the Authorized Version. This, when it appeared, had no independent life or being, was a mere nothing. **And departeth in darkness; and goeth into the darkness.** It is taken away and put out of sight. **And his (its) name shall be covered with darkness.** It is a nameless thing, unrecorded, unremembered.

Ver. 5.—It has seen nothing of the world, known nothing of life, its joys and its sufferings, and is speedily forgotten. To "see the sun" is a metaphor for to "live," as ch. vii. 11; xi. 7; Job iii. 16, and implies activity and work, the contrary of rest. **This hath more rest than the other; literally, there is rest to this more than to that.** The rest that belongs to the abortion is better than that which belongs to the rich man. Others take the clause to say simply, "It is better with this than the other." So the Revised Version margin and Delitzsch, the idea of a "rest" being thus generalized, and taken to signify a preferable choice. Septuagint, *Kal οὐκ ἔγνω ἀναπαύειν τούτῳ ὑπὲρ τούτου*, "And hath not known rest for this more than that"—which reproduces the difficulty of the Hebrew; Vulgate, *Neque cognovit tantiam boni et mali*, which is a paraphrase unsupported by the present accentuation of the text. Rest, in the conception of an Oriental, is the most desirable of all things; compared with the busy, careworn life of the rich man, whose very moments of leisure and sleep are troubled and disturbed, the dreamless nothingness of the still-born child is happiness. This may be a rhetorical exaggeration, but we have its parallel in Job's lamentable cry in ch. iii. when he "cursed his day."

Ver. 6.—Yea, though he live a thousand years twice told, yet hath he seen no good. What has been said would still be true even if the man lived two thousand years. The second clause is not the apodosis (as the Authorized Version makes it), but the continuation of the protasis: if he lived the longest life, "and saw not good;" the conclusion is given in the form of a question.

The "good" is the enjoyment of life spoken of in ver. 3 (see on ch. ii. 1). The specified time seems to refer to the age of the patriarchs, none of whom, from Adam to Noah, reached half the limit assigned. Do not all go to one place? viz. to Sheol, the grave (ch. iii. 20). If a long life were spent in calm enjoyment, it might be preferable to a short one; but when it is passed amid care and annoyance and discontent, it is no better than that which begins and ends in nothingness. The grave receives both, and there is nothing to choose between them, at least in this point of view. Of life as in itself a blessing, a discipline, a school, Koheleth says nothing here; he puts himself in the place of the discontented rich man, and appraises life with his eyes. On the common destiny that awaits peer and peasant, rich and poor, happy and sorrow-laden, we can all remember utterances old and new. Thus Horace, 'Carm.,' ii. 3. 20—

"Divesne prius natus ab Inacho,
Nil interest, an pauper et infima
De gente sub divo moreris,
Victima nil miserantis Orcli.

"Omnes eodem cogimur."

Ovid, 'Met.,' x. 33—

"Omnia debentur vobis, paullumque morati
Seriur ac citius sedem properamus ad
unam.
Tendimus huc omnes, hæc est domus
ultima."

"Fate is the lord of all things; soon or late
To one abode we speed, thither we all
Pursue our way, this is our final home."

Vers. 7-9.—Section 10. *Desire is insatiable*; men are always striving after enjoyment, but they never gain their wish completely—which fortifies the old conclusion that man's happiness is not in his own power.

Ver. 7.—All the labour of man is for his mouth; i.e. for self-preservation and enjoyment, eating and drinking being taken as a type of the proper use of earthly blessings (comp. ch. ii. 24; iii. 13, etc.; Ps. cxxviii. 2). The sentiment is general, and does not refer specially to the particular person described above, though it carries on the idea of the unsatisfactory result of wealth. Luther translates strangely and erroneously, "To every man is work allotted according to his measure." Such an idea is entirely foreign to the context. And yet the appetite is not filled. The word rendered "appetite" is *nepheh*, "soul," and Zöckler contends that "mouth" and "soul" stand in contrast to each other as representatives of the purely sensual and therefore transitory enjoyment (comp. Job xii. 11; Prov. xvi. 26) as compared with

the deeper, more spiritual, and therefore more lasting kind of joy." But no such contrast is intended; the writer would never have uttered such a truism as that deep, spiritual joy is not to be obtained by sensual pleasure; and, as Delitzsch points out, in some passages (e.g. Prov. xvi. 26; Isa. v. 14; xxix. 8) "mouth" in one sentence corresponds to "soul" in another. The soul is considered as the seat of the appetitive faculty—emotions, desires, etc. This is never satisfied (ch. i. 8) with what it has, but is always craving for more. So Horace affirms that a man rightly obtains the appellation of king, "avidum domando spiritum," by subduing his spirit's cravings ('Carm.,' ii. 2. 9).

Ver. 8.—For what hath the wise more than the fool? i.e. What advantage hath the wise man over the fool? This verse confirms the previous one by an interrogative argument. The same labour for support, the same unsatisfied desires, belong to all, wise or foolish; in this respect intellectual gifts have no superiority. (For a similar interrogation implying an emphatic denial, see ch. i. 3.) What hath the poor, that knoweth to walk before the living? The Septuagint gives the verse thus: "Οτι τις πεπλοσσει (A, C, N²) τῷ σοφῷ ὑπὲρ τὸν ἄφρονα; διότι ὁ πένυς οἷδε πορευθῆναι κατέναντι τῆς ζωῆς," "For what advantage hath the wise man over the fool? since the poor man knows how to walk before life?" Vulgate, *Quid habet amplius sapiens a stulto? et quid pauper, nisi ut pergat illuc, ubi est vita?* "And what hath the poor man except that he go thither where is life?" Both these versions regard *חַיִּים* as used in the sense of "life," and that the life beyond the grave; but this idea is foreign to the context; and the expression must be rendered, as in the Authorized Version, "the living." The interpretation of the clause has much exercised critics. Plumptre adjoins to that of Berustein and others, "What advantage hath the poor over him who knows how to walk before the living?" (i.e. the man of high birth or station, who lives in public, with the eyes of men upon him). The poor has his cares and unsatisfied desires as much as the man of culture and position. Poverty offers no protection against such assaults. But the expression, *to know how to walk before the living*, means to understand and to follow the correct path of life; to know how to behave properly and uprightly in the intercourse with one's fellow-men; to have what the French call *savoir vivre*. (So Volck.) The question must be completed thus: "What advantage has the discreet and properly conducted poor man over the fool?" None, at least in this respect. The poor man, even though he be well versed in the rule of life,

has insatiable desires which he has to check or conceal, and so is no better off than the fool, who equally is unable to gratify them. The two extremities of the social scale are taken—the rich wise man, and the prudent poor man—and both are shown to fail in enjoying life; and what is true of these must be also true of all that come between these two limits, “the appetite is not filled” (ver. 7).

Ver. 9.—Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of the desire (*nephesh*, “the soul,” ver. 7). This is a further confirmation of the misery and unrest that accompany immoderate desires. “The sight of the eyes” means the enjoyment of the present, that which lies before one, in contrast to the restless craving for what is distant, uncertain, and out of reach. The lesson taught is to make the best of existing circumstances, to enjoy the present, to control the roaming of fancy, and to narrow the vast field of appetency. We have a striking expression in Wisd. iv. 12, *ρεμβασμὸς ἐκθιμίας*, by which is denoted the giddiness, the reeling intoxication, caused by unrestrained passion. The Roman satirist lashed the sin of unscrupulous greed—

“*Sed quæ reverentia legum,
Quis metus aut pudor est unquam prope-
rantis avari?*”

(Juven., ‘Sat.’ xiv. 177.)

“Nor law, nor checks of conscience will he hear,
When in hot scent of gain and full career.”
(Dryden.)

Zöckler quotes Horace, ‘Epist.’ i. 18. 96, *eqq.*—

“*Inter cuncta leges et percentabere doctos,
Qua ratione queas traducere leniter ævum;
Num te semper inops agitet vexetque
cupido,
Num pavor et rerum mediocriter utilium
spes.*”

“To sum up all—Consult and con the wise
In what the art of true contentment lies:
How fear and hope, that rack the human
will,
Are but vain dreams of things nor good
nor ill.”

(Howes.)

Marc. Aurel., ‘Meditat.’ iv. 26, “Has any advantage happened to you? It is the bounty of fate. It was all preordained you by the universal cause. Upon the whole, life is but short, therefore be just and prudent, and make your most of it; and when you divert yourself, be always on your guard” (J. Collier). Well is it added that this insatiability of the soul, which never leads to contentment, is **vanity and vexation of spirit**, a feeding on wind, empty, unsatis-

fying. Commentators refer in illustration to the fable of the dog and the shadow, and the proverb, “A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.”

Vers. 10—12.—Section 11. *All things are foreknown and foreordained by God; it is useless to murmur against or to discuss this great fact; and as the future is beyond our knowledge and control, it is wise to make the best of the present.*

Ver. 10.—That which hath been is named already; better, *whatsoever hath been; long ago hath its name been given*. The word rendered “already,” *kebar* (ch. i. 10; ii. 12; iii. 15; iv. 2), “long ago,” though used elsewhere in this book of events in human history, may appropriately be applied to the Divine decrees which predetermine the circumstances of man’s life. This is its significance in the present passage, which asserts that everything which happens has been known and fixed beforehand, and therefore that man cannot shape his own life. No attempt is here made to reconcile this doctrine with man’s free-will and consequent responsibility. The idea has already been presented in ch. iii. 1, etc. It comes forth in Isa. xlv. 9, “Shall the clay say to him that fashioneth it, What makest thou? or thy work, He hath no hands?” (comp. Rom. ix. 20); Acts xv. 18 (according to the Textus Receptus), “Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world.” The same idea is brought out more fully in the following clauses. Septuagint, “If anything ever was, already hath its name been called,” which gives the correct sense of the passage. The Vulgate is not so happy, *Qui futurus est, jam vocatum est nomen ejus*, being rather opposed to the grammar. And it is known that it is man. What is meant by the Authorized Version is doubtful. If the first clause had been translated, as in the margin of the Revised Version, “Whatsoever he be, his name was given him long ago,” the conclusion would come naturally, “and it is known that he is man” (*Adam*), and we should see an allusion to man’s name and to the ground (*adamah*) from which he was taken (Gen. ii. 7), as if his very name betokened his weakness. But the present version is very obscure. Cox gives, “It is very certain that even the greatest is but a man, and cannot contend with him,” etc. But the Hebrew will not admit this rendering. The clause really amplifies the previous statement of man’s predetermined destiny, and it should be rendered, “And it is known what a man shall be.” Every individual comes under God’s prescient superintendence. Septuagint, *Ἐγγράφη ὁ ἄνθρωπος*

ἄνθρωπος, "It is known what man is;" Vulgate, *Et scitur quod homo sit*. But it is not the nature of man that is in question, but his conditioned state. Neither may he contend with him that is mightier than he. The mightier One is God, in accordance with the passages quoted above from Isaiah, Acts, and Romans. Some consider that death is intended, and that the author is referring to the shortness of man's life. They say that the word *taggiph*, "mighty" (which occurs only in Ezra and Daniel), is never used of God. But is it used of death? And is it not used of God in Dan. iv. 3 (iii. 33, Hebrew), where Nebuchadnezzar says, "How mighty are his wonders!" To bring death into consideration is to introduce a new thought having no connection with the context, which is not speaking of the termination of man's life, but of its course, the circumstances of which are arranged by a higher Power. Septuagint, *Καὶ οὐ δυνήσεται κριθῆναι μετὰ τοῦ ισχυροτέρου ὑπὲρ αὐτόν*. With this we may compare 1 Cor. x. 22, "Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? are we stronger than he? (μη ισχυρότεροι αὐτοῦ ἴσμεν);"

Ver. 11.—Seeing there be many things that increase vanity. The noun rendered "things" (*dabar*) may equally mean "words;" and it is a question which signification is most appropriate here. The Septuagint has *λόγοι πολλοί*, "many words." So the Vulgate, *verba sunt plurima*. If we take the rendering of the Authorized Version, we must understand the passage to mean that the distractions of business, the cares of life, the constant disappointments, make men feel the hollowness and unsatisfactory nature of labour and wealth and earthly goods, and their absolute dependence upon Providence. But in view of the previous context, and especially of ver. 10, which speaks of contending (*dîn*) with God, it is most suitable to translate *debarim* "words," and to understand them of the expressions of impatience, doubt, and unbelief to which men give utterance when arraigning the acts or endeavouring to explain the decrees of God. Such profitless words only increase the perplexity in which men are involved. It is very possible that reference is here made to the discussions on the chief good, free-will, predestination, and the like subjects, which, as we know from Josephus, had begun to be mooted in Jewish schools, as they had long been rife in those of Greece. In these disputes Pharisees and Sadducees took opposite sides. The former maintained that some things, but not all, were the subject of fate (*τῆς ἐιμαρμένης*), and that certain things were in our own power to do or not to do; that is, while they attribute all that happens to fate, or God's

decrees, they hold that man has the power of assent, supposing that God tempers all in such sort, that by his ordinance and man's will all things are performed, good or evil. The Sadducees eliminated fate altogether from human actions, and asserted that men are in all things governed, not by any external force, but by their own will alone; that their success and happiness depended upon themselves, and that ill fortune was the consequence of their own folly or stupidity. A third school, the Essenes, held that fate was supreme, and that nothing could happen to mankind beyond or in contravention of its decree ('Joseph. Ant.' xiii. 5. 9; xviii. 1. 3, 4; 'Bell. Jud.' ii. 8. 14). Such speculative discussions may have been in Koheleth's mind when he wrote this sentence. Whatever may be the difficulties of the position, we Christians know and feel that in matters of religion and morality we are absolutely free, have an unfettered choice, and that from this fact arises our responsibility. What is man the better? What profit has man from such speculations or words of scepticism?

Ver. 12.—This verse in the Greek and Latin versions, as in some copies of the Hebrew, is divorced from its natural place, as the conclusion of the paragraph, vers. 10, 11, and is arranged as the commencement of ch. vii. Plainly, the Divine prescience of vers. 10, 11 is closely connected with the question of man's ultimate good and his ignorance of the future, enunciated in this verse. For who knoweth what is good for man in this life? Such discussions are profitless, for man knows not what is his real good—whether pleasure, apathy, or virtue, as philosophers would put it. To decide such questions he must be able to foresee results, which is denied him. The interrogative "Who knows?" is equivalent to an emphatic negative, as ch. iii. 21, and is a common rhetorical form which surely need not be attributed to Pyrrhonism (Plumptre). All the days of his vain life which he spendeth as a shadow. These words amplify and explain the term "in life" of the preceding clause. They may be rendered literally, *During the number of the days of the life (ch. v. 18) of his vanity, and he passeth them as a shadow*. A life of vanity is one that yields no good result, full of empty aims, unsatisfied wishes, unfulfilled purposes. It is the man who is here compared to the shadow, not his life. So Job xiv. 2, "He fleeth as a shadow, and continueth not." He soon passes away, and leaves no trace behind him. The thought is common. "Ye [Revised Version] are a vapour," says St. James (iv. 14), "that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away." Plumptre well quotes Soph. 'Ajax,' 125—

‘Ὁρῶ γὰρ ἡμᾶς οὐδὲν ὄντας ἄλλο πλὴν
Εἶδωλ’, ὅσοι περ ζῶμεν, ἢ κούφην σκιδν.

“In this I see that we, all we that live,
Are but vain shadows, unsubstantial
dreams.”

To which we may add Pind., ‘Pyth.’ viii.
95—

‘Ἐπάμενοι· τί δέ τις; τί δ’ οὐ τις; σκιᾶς ὄντα
Ἀνθρώπων.

“Ye creatures of a day!

What is the great man, what the poor?

Naught but a shadowy dream.”

The comparison of man's life to a shadow or vapour is equally general (comp. ch. viii. 13; 1 Chron. xxix. 15; Ps. cii. 11; cxliv. 4; Wisd. ii. 5; Jas. iv. 14). The verb used for “spendeth” is *asah*, “to do or make,” which recalls the Greek phrase, *χρόνον ποιεῖν* (Acts xv. 33, etc.; Demosth., ‘De Fals. Leg.’ p. 392, 17), and the Latin, *dies facere* (Cic., ‘Ad Attic.’ v. 20. 1); but we need not trace

Greek influence in the employment of the expression here. For who can tell a man what shall be after him under the sun? This does not refer to the life beyond the grave, but to the future in the present world, as the words, “under the sun,” imply (comp. ch. iii. 22; vii. 14). To know what is best for him, to arrange his present life according to his own wishes and plans, to be able to depend upon his own counsel for all the actions and designs which he undertakes, man should know what is to be after him, what result his labours will have, who and what kind of heir will inherit his property, whether he will leave children to carry on his name, and other facts of the like nature; but as this is all hidden from him, his duty and his happiness is to acquiesce in the Divine government, to enjoy with moderation the goods of life, and to be content with the modified satisfaction which is accorded to him by Divine beneficence.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—6.—*Sore evils beneath the sun; or, the misfortunes of a rich man.* I. A RICH MAN WITHOUT THE CAPACITY OF ENJOYMENT. 1. *A frequent occurrence.* The picture that of one who has attained to great wealth, power, and honour, who has been conscious of large ambitions and has realized them, who has been filled with insatiable desires and possessed the means of gratifying them, and yet has been unable to extract from all his possessions, pleasures, and pursuits any grain of real and solid happiness. 2. *A sorrowful experience.* The Preacher characterizes it as an evil which lies heavy upon men. Upon the individual himself, whose hopes are disappointed and plans frustrated, whose riches, wealth, and honours thus become mocking decorations rather than real ornaments, and whose pleasures and gratifications turn into apples of Sodom rather than prove, as he expected they would do, grapes of Eshcol. 3. *An instructive lesson.* The valuable truth that the soul's happiness is not, and cannot be, found in any creature, however excellent, but only in God (Ps. xxxvii. 4), is thus forcibly pressed home upon the hearts and consciences of rich men themselves, and of such as observe the experiences through which they pass.

II. A RICH MAN WITHOUT AN HEIR TO HIS WEALTH. A great diminution to the rich man's happiness, who, in having no son or child, lacks: 1. *That which is dearer to the heart of man than wealth, power, or fame.* Unless the instincts of human nature have been utterly perverted by avarice, covetousness, and ambition, the hearts of rich no less than of poor men cling to their offspring, and, rather than lose these by death, would willingly surrender all their wealth (2 Sam. xviii. 33). 2. *That without which wealth and honour lose the greater part of their attractions.* Abraham felt it a considerable detraction from the sweetness of Jehovah's promise that he had no heir, and that all his possessions would ultimately pass into the hands of his steward, Eliezer of Damascus (Gen. xv. 1—3). 3. *That which gives to wealth-gathering and power-seeking their best justification.* It is not certain that anything will justify these when inordinate; if anything will excuse a man for heaping up wealth in an honest and legitimate way, and for endeavouring to acquire power and influence amongst his fellows, it is the fact of his doing so with a view to promote the happiness of those God has made dependent on him, and bound to him by the ties of natural affection.

III. A RICH MAN WITHOUT A TOMB FOR HIS CORPSE. (For a different rendering of this clause, “And moreover he have no burial,” see the Exposition.) 1. *The case supposed.* That of a rich man surrounded by many (an hundred) children, who lives

long, but has no true enjoyment of his good fortune, and when he dies is denied the glory of a funeral such as Dives doubtless had (Luke xvi. 22), and the shelter of a grave such as was not withheld even from Lazarus. How he should come at last to have no burial, though not explained, may be supposed to happen either through the meanness of his relatives or their hatred of him, or through his perishing in such a way (e.g. in war, at sea, through accident, by violence) as to render burial by his children impossible. Commentators cite as an illustration of the case supposed the murder by Bagoas of Artaxerxes Ochus (B.C. 362-339), whose body was thrown to the cats. Another may be that of Jehoiakim, of whom it was predicted (Jer. xxii. 19), "He shall be buried with the burial of an ass, drawn and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem." 2. *The judgment pronounced.* That such a case is not to be compared in respect of felicity with that of "an untimely birth," which "cometh in vanity, and departeth in darkness, and the name thereof is covered with darkness;" i.e. which enters on a lifeless existence when born, and "is carried away in all quietness, without noise or ceremony," having received no name, and becoming forgotten as if it had never been (Delitzsch). The grounds on which the Preacher rests his judgment are three: (1) that an untimely birth never sees the sun, and so escapes all sight of and contact with the sufferings and miseries of earth; (2) that it never wakes to the exercise of intelligence, and so is never conscious of either the wickedness or the woe that is surging around it; and (3) that it rests better in the grave to which it goes than does the corpse of the joyless rich man. 3. *The correction needed.* This pessimistic view of life may be thus admirably qualified. The allegation here made "contains a thought to which it is not easy to reconcile one's self. For supposing that life were not in itself, as over against non-existence, a good, there is yet scarcely any life that is absolutely joyless; and a man who has become the father of a hundred children has, as it appears, sought the enjoyment of life principally in sexual love, and then also has found it richly. But also, if we consider his life less as relating to sense, his children, though not all, yet partly, will have been a joy to him; and has a family life so lengthened and rich in blessings only thorns, and no roses at all? And, moreover, how can anything be said of the rest of an untimely birth, which has been without motion and without life, as of a rest excelling the termination of the life of him who has lived long, since rest without a subjective reflection, a rest not felt, certainly does not fall under the point of view of more or less good or evil? The saying of the author on no side bears the probe of exact thinking" (Delitzsch).

IV. A RICH MAN WITHOUT A BETTER LOT THAN HIS NEIGHBOURS. "Do not all go to one place?" In the grave rich and poor differ not. The dusts of the patrician and of the plebeian, freely intermingled, no human chemistry can distinguish. A tremendous humiliation, no doubt, to human pride, that Solomon and the harlot's child, Caesar and his slave, Dives and Lazarus, must ultimately lie together in the same narrow house—that rich and poor, wise and unwise, powerful and powerless, honoured and abject, kings and subjects, princes and peasants, masters and servants, must ultimately sleep side by side on the same couch; but so it is. And this, also, in the eyes of worldlings, but not of good men, is a vanity, and a sore evil beneath the sun.

LESSONS. 1. Riches are not the chief good. 2. Temporal evils may be sources of spiritual good.

Vers. 7-9.—*The insatiableness of desire.* I. IT CONSUMES THE LABOUR OF ALL. "All the labour of man is for his mouth, and yet the appetite is not filled" (ver. 7). The appetite, as an imperious master, urges on the soul to labour with all its powers and energies to furnish food for its delectation; and yet the utmost man can provide is insufficient to fill its capacious maw. However varied man's works may be, they have all this end in common, to appease the hunger of the sensuous nature; and all alike fail in reaching it. The appetite grows by what it feeds on, and hence never cries, "Enough!"

II. IT AFFECTS THE CHARACTERS OF ALL. "What advantage hath the wise more than the fool? or what [advantage] hath the poor man, who knows to walk before the living, over the fool?" (ver. 8). 1. *Intellectual gifts do not argue the absence of desire.* The philosopher, no less than the peasant, is under its dominion. The former may attempt to control, and may even to some extent succeed in controlling, his bodily

appetites; but the appetite is there, impelling him to labour equally with the fool. 2. *Material poverty does not guarantee the absence of desire.* The poor man who knows how to walk before the living, i.e. who understands the art of living, is no more exempt from its sway than is the rich man, though a fool. The poor man may have learned how to put restraints upon himself, because of inability to gratify his desire, but the appetite is as much felt by him as by his rich neighbour.

III. IT DISAPPOINTS THE HOPES OF ALL. "Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of the desire" (ver. 9). Just because desire is never satisfied, it wanders on in pursuit of other objects which are often visionary, and almost always illusory; as a consequence, like the dog which snapped at his shadow and lost the meat he carried in his mouth, desire frequently misses such enjoyments as are within its reach through striving after those that are beyond its power.

LESSONS. 1. The danger of self-indulgence. 2. The difficulty of keeping the lower nature in subjection. 3. The propriety of preferring present and possible to future and perhaps impossible enjoyments.

Vers. 10-12.—*Four aspects of human life.* I. MAN AS A CREATURE OF DESTINY. "Whatsoever hath been, the name thereof was given long ago, and it is known that it is man" (ver. 10); or, "Whatsoever he be, his name was given him long ago, and it is known that he is man" (Revised Version margin); or, "That which hath been, its name hath long ago been named; and it is determined what a man shall be" (Delitzsch, Wright). These different readings suggest three thoughts. 1. *That man's appearance upon the earth had been long ago foreseen.* The sentiment holds good of man collectively or individually, i.e. of the race, or of the unit in the race. Neither did "man" originally spring into being by a happy accident, without the direct or indirect cognizance of God, nor does the "individual" so arrive upon the scene of time; but both the hour and the manner of man's arrival upon the globe, and of each individual's birth, were prearranged from eternity by him who "made the earth, and created man upon it" (Isa. xlv. 12), and who "giveth to all life and breath and all things" (Acts xvii. 25). 2. *That man's character as a creature had been long ago foreknown.* In this respect, indeed, he had in no way differed from other creatures. Known unto God had been all his works from the beginning of the world (Acts xv. 18). Human character is not in any instance an accidental product of blind forces, but is determined by fixed laws, moral and spiritual, which have been prearranged and instituted by the supreme moral Governor. Hence, within limits, it is possible for man to predict what himself or another shall become. "He that doeth righteousness" not only "is righteous" in the sense of already possessing the fundamental and essential principle of righteousness, viz. faith in, love of, and submission to God, but his righteousness shall eventually become within him the all-pervading and permanent quality of his being; and similarly "he that doeth unrighteousness" not only is potentially, but shall become permanently, unrighteous. Moral character in all men tends to fixity, whether of good or evil. Hence the greater possibility, amounting to certainty, that the Divine Mind, whose creation the laws are under which these results are wrought out, can, *ab initio*, foresee the issue to which, in every separate instance, they lead. 3. *That man's destiny as an individual had been long ago determined.* The doctrine of Divine predestination, however hard to harmonize with that of human freedom, is clearly revealed in Scripture (Exod. ix. 16; 2 Chron. vi. 6; Ps. cxxxv. 4; Isa. xlv. 1-7; Jer. i. 5; Matt. xi. 25, 26; John vi. 37; Rom. viii. 29; ix. 11), and is supported by the plain testimony of experience, which shows that

"There's a divinity that shapes our ends,
Rough-hew them how we will."

(*'Hamlet.'*)

Or, in the words of Cæsar, that nothing

"Can be avoided
Whose end is purposed by the mighty gods."

(*'Julius Cæsar.'*)

II. MAN AS THE POSSESSOR OF FREE-WILL. "Neither may [or, 'can'] he contend with him that is mightier than he" (ver. 10); in which are contained the following

thoughts: 1. *That mighty as man is* (in virtue of his free-will), *there is a mightier than he*. That mightier is not death (Plumptre), but God (Delitzsch), who also is a Being possessed of free-will, which must still less be interfered with by man's choices and intentions, than man's free-will must be impaired by God's purposes and plans. This thought frequently forgotten, that if man, in virtue of his free-will, must be able to carry out his volitions, much more must God be able to carry out the free decisions of his infinite mind. In this concession the whole doctrine of predestination, or election, is involved. 2. *That if in any instance man's purposes and God's come into collision, those of man must give way*. One has only to put the question, whether it is of greater moment that God's purposes with regard to the universe and the individual should be carried out, or that man's with regard to himself should, to perceive the absurdity of limiting the Divine sovereignty in order to avoid the appearance of restricting human freedom, rather than seeming to impair human freedom in order to preserve intact the absolute and entire supremacy of God. 3. *That God's determinations, when accomplished, will not be impeachable by man*. The veil of mystery now shrouding the Divine procedure will in the end be in great measure, perhaps wholly, uplifted, and man himself constrained to acknowledge that the supreme Ruler hath done all things well (Mark vii. 37).

III. MAN AS A VICTIM OF IGNORANCE. "Seeing there be many things [or, 'words'] that increase vanity, what is man the better? For who knoweth," etc.? and "who can tell?" (vers. 11, 12). 1. *The fact of his ignorance*. Elsewhere in Scripture explicitly asserted (Deut. xxxii. 28; Ps. xiv. 4; Prov. xix. 3; John i. 5; Eph. iv. 18), and abundantly confirmed by experience. 2. *The extent of his ignorance*. Restricting attention to the Preacher's words, two subjects may be noted concerning which man—apart, i.e., from God and religion—is comparatively unenlightened: (1) the supreme good (Ps. iv. 6), which he places now in pleasure, now in possessions, now in philosophy, now in power, never in God; and (2) the future, which is to him so much a sealed book that he cannot tell what a day may bring forth (Prov. xxvii. 1), and far less "what shall be after him under the sun." 3. *The strangeness of his ignorance*. Considering that man is a being possessed of high natural endowments, and is often much and earnestly engaged in searching after knowledge. That with all his lofty capacity, and devotion to intellectual pursuits, he should, if left to himself, be unable to tell either what is good for man in this life (all his discussions upon this subject having been little else than words, words, words), or how the course of events shall shape itself when he has passed from this earthly scene, is a surprising phenomenon which calls for examination. 4. *The explanation of his ignorance* lies in two things: (1) in the natural limitation of his faculties, which are finite, and not infinite; and (2) in the moral deprivation of his faculties, which are now those not of an unfallen, but of a fallen, being.

IV. MAN AS A DENIZEN OF EARTH. 1. *His continuance is not permanent*. He and his generation shall pass on, that those coming after may enter in and take possession (ch. i. 4). 2. *His days are not many*. His life he spendeth like a shadow, which has no substance, and abides not in one stay. "Man that is born of a woman is of few days," etc. (Job xiv. 1, 2). 3. *His life is not good*. Apart from God and religion it is "vain," i.e. empty of real happiness, and destitute of solid worth.

LESSONS. 1. The sovereignty of God. 2. The weakness of man. 3. The duty of submission to the Supreme. 4. The inability of earthly things to make man better. 5. The chief good for man on earth is God.

Ver. 12.—"Who can tell?" a sermon on human ignorance. I. THINGS THAT LIE BEYOND THE SCOPE OF HUMAN KNOWLEDGE. 1. *The nature of the Deity*. "Canst thou by searching find out God," etc.? (Job xi. 7). To define God as Spirit (John iv. 24), to characterize him as Love (1 John iv. 8, 16) or as Light (1 John i. 5), to ascribe to him attributes of omnipotence, omnipresence, omniscience, etc., is not so much to explain his essence as to declare it to be something that lies beyond the bounds of our finite understanding (Ps. cxxxix. 6). 2. *The mystery of the Incarnation*. "Great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh" (1 Tim. iii. 16). To show that Jesus Christ must have been "Emmanuel, God with us" (Matt. i. 23), may not surpass the powers of man; to give an adequate exhibition of the way in which in

Christ the human and Divine natures were and are united does. The best proof of this lies in the number of the theories of the Incarnation. 3. *The contents of the atonement.* That Christ, as a matter of fact, bore the sins of men so as to expiate their guilt and destroy their power, one can tell from the general tenor of Scripture declarations on the subject (Matt. xxvi. 28; Rom. iii. 24; 2 Cor. v. 21; 1 Tim. ii. 6; 1 Pet. ii. 24; 1 John ii. 2); but what it was in Christ's "obedience unto death" that constituted the propitiation is one of those "secret things" that belong to God. 4. *The movements of the Spirit.* "Thou canst not tell whence it [the wind] cometh, or whither it goeth; so is every one that is born of the Spirit" (John iii. 8). That the Holy Spirit is the Author of regeneration and of inspiration is perfectly patent to the understanding of the Christian. The theory that shall adequately explain how the Spirit renews or inspires the soul has not yet been elaborated. 5. *The events of the future.* "Who can tell a man what shall be after him under the sun?" or even what shall be on the morrow (Prov. xxvii. 1)?

II. THINGS THAT LIE WITHIN THE SCOPE OF HUMAN KNOWLEDGE. 1. *The character of God.* The Ninevites could not tell whether Jehovah would be gracious to them (Jonah iii. 9); we can tell from the revelation of Scripture, and especially from the teaching of Christ, that God is Love, and willeth not the death of any. 2. *The Divinity of Christ.* Human reason is perfectly competent to decide upon the question whether Jesus of Nazareth belonged to the category of common men, or whether he was a new order of man broken in upon the ordinary line of the race. The evidence for such a decision has been provided, and any one who seriously wishes can arrive at a just conclusion. 3. *The work of the Saviour.* This also has been fully discovered in the Scripture. Christ came to reveal the Father (John xiv. 9), to atone for sin (Matt. xx. 28), to exemplify holiness (1 Pet. ii. 21), and to establish the kingdom of heaven upon earth (Rev. i. 6). 4. *The fruits of the Spirit.* If a man cannot always judge whether the Spirit is in his own or another's heart, he should be at no loss to tell whether the Spirit's fruits, which are love, joy, peace, etc. (Gal. v. 22), are discernible in his or his neighbour's life. 5. *The goals of the future.* If the separate incidents that shall hereafter occur in any individual's life be concealed from view, the two termini, towards one or other of which every individual is moving—heaven or hell—have been clearly revealed.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1, 2.—*The unsatisfactoriness and transitoriness of earthly good.* Men are prone to be guided, in the conclusions they form regarding human life, by their own personal experience, and by the observations they make in their own immediate circle of acquaintance. So judging, they are prone to be one-sided in their estimate, and to take a view either too gloomy or too roseate. The author of Ecclesiastes was a man who had very large and varied opportunities of studying mankind, and who was in the habit of forming impartial conclusions. This accounts for what may perhaps seem to some readers opposed and inconsistent representations of the nature of man's life on earth. In fact, a more definite and decisive representation would have been less correct and fair.

I. MEN LOOKING UPON THEIR FELLOW-MEN ARE PRONE TO GIVE TOO LARGE A MEASURE OF ATTENTION TO THEIR OUTWARD CIRCUMSTANCES. The first question that occurs to many minds, upon forming a new acquaintance, is—What has he? *i.e.* what property? or—What is he? *i.e.* what is his rank in society? A man to whom God has given riches, wealth, and honour, who lacks nothing for his soul of all that he desireth, is counted fortunate. He is held in esteem; his friendship and favour are cultivated.

II. REFLECTING OBSERVERS BEAR IN MIND THAT THERE ARE OTHER ELEMENTS IN HUMAN WELFARE. For instance, it cannot be questioned that health of body and a sound and vigorous mind are of far more importance than wealth. And there may be family trouble, which mars the happiness of the most prosperous. The wise man had observed cases in which there was no power to enjoy the gifts of Providence; and other cases in which there were no children to succeed to the possession of accumulated wealth, so that it came into the hands of strangers. Bodily affliction and domestic

disappointment may cast a shadow over the lot which seems the fairest and most desirable. "This is vanity, and it is an evil disease."

III. THESE IMPERFECTIONS IN THE HUMAN LOT OFTEN GIVE RISE TO MELANCHOLY REFLECTIONS AND DISTRESSING DOUBTS. Those who not only remark what happens around them, but reflect upon what they witness, draw inferences which have a certain semblance of validity. If we judge only by the facts which come under our cognizance, we may be led to conclusions inconsistent with true religion. Men come to doubt the rule of a benevolent Governor of the universe, simply because they cannot reconcile certain facts with such convictions as Christianity encourages. Scepticism and pessimism often follow upon bitter experiences and upon frequent contact with the calamities of this mundane state.

IV. WISDOM SUGGESTS A REMEDY FOR SUCH DIFFICULTIES AND DOUBTS. 1. It should be remembered that what any individual observes is but an infinitesimal part of the varied and protracted drama of human life and history. 2. It should not be lost sight of that there are moral and spiritual purposes in our earthly existence. It is a discipline, a proving, an education. Its end is not—as men too often suppose that it should be—enjoyment and pleasure; but character—conformity to the Divine character, and submission to the Divine will. The highest benevolence aims at the highest ends, and to secure these it seems in many cases necessary that lower ends should be sacrificed. If temporal prosperity be marred by what seems misfortune, this may be in order that spiritual prosperity may be promoted. It may not be well for the individual that he should be encouraged to seek perfect satisfaction in the things of this world. It may not be well for society that great and powerful families should be built up, to gratify human pride and ambition. God's ways are not as our ways, but they are wiser and better than ours.—T.

Vers. 3—6.—*The gloom of disappointment.* The case supposed in these verses is far more painful than that dealt with in the preceding passage. It is now presumed that a man not only lives to an advanced age—"a thousand years twice told"—but that he begets "a hundred children." Yet he is unsatisfied with the experience of life, and dies without being regretted and honourably buried. And in such a case it is affirmed that the issue of life is vanity, and that it would have been better for such a one not to have been born. It must be borne in mind, when considering this melancholy conclusion, that it is based entirely upon what is earthly, visible, and sensible.

I. HERE IS AN EXAGGERATION OF THE IMPORTANCE OF OUTWARD PROSPERITY AND OF WORLDLY PLEASURE. The standard of the world may be a real one, but it is far from being the highest. Wealth, long life, important family connections, are good things; but they are not the best. Much of human unhappiness arises from first over-estimating external advantages, and then, as a natural consequence, when these are lost, attaching undue importance to the privation. If men did not exaggerate the value of earthly good, they would not be so bitterly disappointed, so grievously depressed, upon losing it.

II. HERE IS AN UNWARRANTABLE EXPECTATION OF SATISFACTION WITH WHAT EARTH CAN GIVE. Of the person imagined it is assumed "that his soul be not filled with good." The fact is that men seek satisfaction where it is not to be found, and in so doing prove their own folly and short-sightedness. God has given to man a nature which is not to be satisfied with the enjoyments of sense, with the provision made for bodily appetite, with the splendour, luxury, and renown, upon which men are so prone to set the desires of their hearts. If what this world can give be accepted with gratitude, whilst no more is expected from it than reason and Scripture justify us in asking, then disappointment will not ensue. But the divinely fashioned and immortal spirit of man cannot rest in what is simply intended to still the cravings of the body, and to render life tranquil and enjoyable.

III. HERE IS MOROSE DISSATISFACTION RESULTING FROM FAILURE TO SOLVE AN INSOLUBLE PROBLEM. Apply the hedonistic test, and then it may be disputed whether the sum of pain and disappointment is not in excess of the sum of pleasure and satisfaction; if it is, then the "untimely birth" is better than the prosperous voluptuary who fails to fill his soul with good, who feels the utter failure of the endeavour upon which he has staked his all. But the test is a wrong one, however hard it may be to

convince men that this is so. The question—Is life worth living? does not depend upon the question—Does life yield a surplus of agreeable feeling? Life may be filled with delights, and the lot of the prosperous may excite envy. Yet it may be nothing but vanity, and a striving after wind. On the other hand, a man may be doomed to adversity; poverty and neglect and contempt may be his portion; whilst he may fulfil the purpose of his being—may form a character and may live a life which shall be acceptable and approved above.—T.

Vers. 7—9.—*Satisfaction better than desire.* It has sometimes been represented that the quest of good is better than its attainment. The truth and justice of this representation lies in the unquestionable fact that it would not be for our good to possess without effort, without perseverance, without self-denial. Yet the end is superior to the means, however excellently adapted those means may be to the discipline of the character, to the calling out of the best moral qualities.

I. MAN'S NATURE IS CHARACTERIZED BY STRIVING, DESIRE, APPETITE, ASPIRATION. Man's is a yearning, impulsive, acquisitive constitution. His natural instincts urge him to courses of action which secure the continuance of his own being and of that of the race. His restless, eager desires account for the activity and energy which distinguish his movements. His intellectual impulses urge him to the pursuit of knowledge, to scientific and literary achievement. His moral aspirations are the explanation of heroism in the individual, and of true progress in social life.

II. OF HUMAN DESIRES, NONE CAN EVER BE FULLY SATISFIED, MANY CANNOT BE SATISFIED AT ALL. The testimony of those who have gone before us is uniform upon this point.

“We look before and after,
We pine for what is not;
Our sincerest laughter
With some pain is fraught:

Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought.”

Thus it becomes proverbial that man is made to desire rather than to enjoy. Of our aspirations some can never be gratified on earth. The lower animals have desires for which satisfaction is provided; but whilst their life is thus thoroughly adapted to their constitution, this cannot be said of man, who has capacities which cannot be filled, aspirations which cannot be satisfied, faculties for which no sufficient scope is attainable here on earth. His, as the poet tells us, is

“The desire of the moth for the star,
Of the night for the morrow;
The longing for something afar
From the sphere of our sorrow.”

III. EVEN WISDOM DOES BUT ENLARGE THE RANGE OF MAN'S INSATIABLE DESIRES. It is not only upon the lower grade of life that we observe a discordance between what is sought and what is attained. For the philosopher, as for the uncultured child of nature, there is an ideal as well as an actual. Prudence may enjoin the limitation and repression of our requirements. But thought ever looks out from the windows of the high towers, and gazes upon the distant stars.

“Who that has gazed upon them shining
Can turn to earth without repining,
Nor wish for wings to flee away,
And mix with their eternal day?”

IV. THESE CONSIDERATIONS TEND TO INCREASE THE UNHAPPINESS OF THE WORLDLY, WHILST THEY OPEN UP TO THE SPIRITUAL AND PIOUS MIND A GLORIOUS AND IMMORTAL PROSPECT. They to whom the bodily life and the material universe are everything, or even anything regarded by themselves, may well give way to dissatisfaction and despondency when they learn by experience “the vanity of human wishes.” On the other hand, such reflections may well prompt the spiritual to gratitude, for they cannot believe the universe to have been fashioned in vain; they cannot but see in the illusions

of earth suggestions of the heavenly realities. The storms of life are not to be hated if they toss the navigator of earth's sea into the haven of God's breast. The wandering of the desire may end in the sight of the eyes, when the pure in heart shall see God. "In his presence is fulness of joy, and at his right hand are pleasures for evermore."—T.

Ver. 10.—*Contending against power.* The limitation which is characteristic of the human life and lot is observable, not only in man's inability to attain the happiness he conceives and desires, but also in his inability to execute the purposes he forms. Conscious of powers which are yet undeveloped, inspired by an ambition that knows no bounds, he puts forth effort in many directions, at first with strong confidence and high hope. Experience alone convinces him of the truth expressed by the wise man in the assertion, "Neither can he contend with him that is mightier than he."

I. THE WAY OF RESISTANCE. The will may be strong, and naturally prone to self-assertion, to energetic volition, and to contention with any resisting force. 1. God is, as the providential Ruler of the world, the Lord and Controller of all circumstances, mightier than man. Men fret against the conditions and limitations of their lot; they would fain possess greater strength and health, a longer life, enjoyments more varied and unmixed, etc. They resent the imposition of laws in the determination of which they had no voice. They are even disposed to believe that the world has been ordered, not by a benevolent Intelligence, but by a hard and cruel fate. 2. God is, as the moral Administrator and Judge, mightier than man. In their selfishness and prejudice, men may and do question the sway of reason in the universe; they assign all things to chance; they deny any laws superior to such as are physical and political; they deem man the measure of all things; they ridicule responsibility. All this they may do; but it is of no avail. God is mightier than they. They may violate his laws, but they cannot escape from their action; they may spurn his authority, but that authority is all the same maintained and exercised. The time comes when the insurgent and the rebel are constrained to admit that they are powerless, and that the Almighty is, and that he works and rules, and effects his righteous purposes.

II. THE WAY OF SUBMISSION. It is the province of religion to point out to men that there is a Power in the universe which is above all, and to summon men to yield to this Power a cheerful subjection. 1. Submission is a just requirement on the part of God, and an honourable attitude on the part of man. He is no tyrant, capricious and unjust, who claims our loyalty and service; but the Being who is himself infinitely righteous. To do him homage is to bow, not before irresistible power merely, but before moral perfection. Resistance here is slavery; subjection is freedom. 2. Submission is the one only condition of efficient work and solid happiness. Whilst we resist God, we can do nothing satisfactory and good; when we accept his will and receive our commands from him, we become fellow-workers with God. Just as the secret of the mechanician's success is in obeying the laws of nature, i.e. the laws of God in the physical realm, so the secret of the success of the thinker and the philanthropist lies in the apprehension and acknowledgment of Divine law in the intellectual and moral kingdoms. Man may do great things when he labours under God and with God. And in such a course of life there is true peace as well as true success. "If God be for us, who can be against us?"—T.

Vers. 11, 12.—*What is man's good?* The author of this book constantly reverts to this inquiry, from which tendency we cannot fail to see how deep an impression the inquiry made upon his mind. In this he is not peculiar; the theme is one that grows not old with the lapse of centuries.

I. A NATURAL QUESTION, AND ONE BOTH LEGITIMATE AND NECESSARY. "There be many that say, Who will show us any good?" Sometimes the inquiry arises upon the suggestion of daily occupation; sometimes as the result of prolonged philosophical reflection. The good of man is certainly not obvious, or there would not be so many and varying replies to the question presented. A lower nature, not being self-conscious, could not consider such a question as the *summum bonum*; being what he is, a rational and moral creation, man cannot avoid it.

II. A QUESTION TO WHICH NO SATISFACTORY REPLY CAN BE GIVEN UPON THE BASIS

OF EXPERIENCE. 1. The occupations and enjoyments of the present are proved to be productive of vanity. "Many things increase vanity." Man "spendeth his vain life as a shadow." The several objects of human pursuit agree only in their failure to afford the satisfaction that is desired and sought. Yet the path which one has abandoned another follows, only to be misled like those who have gone before, only to be put further than ever from the destination desired. The objects which excite human ambition or cupidity remain the same from age to age; and they have no more power to give satisfaction than in former periods of human history. 2. The future is felt to be clouded by uncertainty. "Who can tell a man what shall be after him under the sun?" This element of uncertainty occasioned perplexity and distress in former times, as now. What shall be a man's reputation after his decease? Who shall inherit his estates? and what use shall be made of possessions accumulated with toil and difficulty? These and similar inquiries, made but not satisfactorily answered, disheartened even the energetic and the prosperous, and took the interest and joy out of their daily life. The present is unsatisfactory, and the future uncertain; where, then, shall we look for the true, the real good?

III. A QUESTION WHICH IS SOLVED ONLY BY FAITH. As long as we confine our attention to what can be apprehended by the senses, we cannot determine what is the real good in life. For that, in the case of rational and immortal natures, lies outside of the province in which supreme good must be sought. Good for man is not bodily or temporal good; it is something which appeals to his higher nature. The enjoyment of God's favour and the fulfilment of God's service—this is the good of man. This renders men independent of the prosperity upon which multitudes set their hearts. "Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us:" such is the desire and prayer of those who are emancipated from the bondage to time and sense, who see all things as in the light of Heaven, and whose thoughts and affections are not called away from the Giver of life and happiness by the gifts of his bounty, by the shadow of the substance that endures for ever. "Thy loving-kindness is better than life."—T.

Vers. 1—6.—*The insufficiency of circumstance.* The Preacher recurs to the same strain as that in which he spoke before (see ch. ii. 1—11). We have to face the same thoughts again.

I. AN IMAGINARY ENRICHMENT. Let a man have, by supposition: 1. All the money that he can spend. 2. All the honour that waits on wealth. 3. All the luxuries that wealth can buy of every kind, material and mental (ver. 2). 4. Let him have an unusual measure of domestic enrichment and affection; let him be the recipient of all possible filial affection and obedience (ver. 3). 5. Let his life be indefinitely prolonged (ver. 6), so that it extends over many ordinary human lives. Give to a man not only what God does give to many, but give him that which, as things are, is not granted to the most favoured of our race; and what then? What is—

II. THE PROBABLE RESULT. It will very likely end in simple and utter dissatisfaction. "God giveth him not the power to eat thereof;" "His soul is not filled with good;" he gets so little enjoyment out of all that he has at command, that "an untimely birth is better than he;" he feels that it would have been positively better for him if he had never been born. Subtract the evil from the good in his life, and you have nothing left but "a negative quantity." This is quite in accord with human experience. As much of profound discontent is found within the walls of the palace as under the cottage roof. The suicide is quite as likely to be found to be a "well-dressed man," belonging to "good society," as to be a man clad in rags and penance.

III. ITS EXPLANATION. The explanation of it is found in the fact that God has made us for himself, that he has "set eternity in our hearts" (ch. iii. 11), and that we are not capable of being satisfied with the sensible and the transient. Only the love and service of God can fill the heart that is made for the eternal and the Divine (see homily on ch. i. 7, 8).

IV. ITS CHRISTIAN CORRECTION. There need never live a man who has known Jesus Christ of whom so sad a statement as this has to be made. For a Christian life: 1. Even when spent in poverty and obscurity, is filled with a holy contentment; it includes high and sacred joys; it is relieved by very precious consolations. 2. Contains and transmits a valuable influence on others. 3. Constitutes an excellency which God

approves, and the angels of God admire. 4. Moves on to a glorious future. It does *not* end in the grave.—C.

Ver. 10.—*Heroism; infatuation; wisdom.* Translating the latter part of this passage thus, "And it is very certain that even the greatest is but man, and cannot contend with him who is mightier than he" (Cox), we have our attention directed to three things.

I. REAL HEROISM. This is found in opposing ourselves to the strong on behalf of the weak, even though the odds against us are very great, and apparently overwhelming. Wonderful triumphs have been achieved, even though the agents have "been but men," when they have courageously and devoutly addressed themselves to the work before them. They have triumphed over (1) powerful "interests;" (2) imperious passions; (3) deep-rooted prejudices; (4) mighty numbers, in the cause of (a) their country, (b) truth, (c) Jesus Christ.

II. PITIFUL INFATUATION. This is seen in those who are foolish enough to measure their poor strength (or their weakness) with the power of God, with "him who is mightier than they." And this they do when they: 1. Act as if he did not regard them; when they say, "How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the Most High?" (Ps. lxxiii. 11). 2. Imagine they can outwit him; when they think they will sin and be forgiven; will corrupt their lives and waste their powers, and yet find entrance at the last hour into his kingdom. But "God is not mocked; whatsoever a man sows, *that does he reap.*" Sin always carries its penalty at one time and in some form, if not in another. 3. Live in simple defiance of his rule; go on in conscious wrong-doing, in the vague and senseless hope that somehow they will "escape the judgment of God."

III. TRUE WISDOM. This is realized in: 1. Submitting to his will; in acknowledging his supreme claims, as Father and Saviour of our spirit, upon our worship and trust, our love, our service, and in yielding ourselves unreservedly to him. 2. Enlisting his Divine strength on our side. For if we are reconciled to him, and become his true and trusted children—"his disciples indeed"—then is God on our side; there is no need to speak of "contending" with him that is mightier than we; there is no further contest or variance. Surely "God is with us," bestowing upon us his fatherly favour, admitting us to his intimate friendship, accepting us as his fellow-labourers (1 Cor. iii. 9), overruling all adverse (or apparently adverse) forces and making them work our true and lasting good (Rom. viii. 28), guarding us from every evil thing, leading us on to a peaceful end and out to a glorious future.—C.

Vers. 1—6.—*Life without enjoyment valueless.* The problem which occupies the Preacher (vers. 1, 2) is virtually the same as that in ch. iv. 7, 8. It is not that which is discussed in the Book of Job, and the thirty-seventh and seventy-third psalms, viz. why the wicked often prosper, and the righteous often suffer adversity. It is that of men blessed with riches, with children, and with long life, and debarred all enjoyment of these blessings. In the Law of Moses these had been the rewards promised for obedience to God (Deut. xxviii. 1—14), but the Preacher sees that something more is needed for happiness than the mere possession of them. There is another "gift of God" needed in order that one may enjoy the good of any one of them.

I. The first picture (vers. 1, 2) is that of A RICH MAN, able to gratify every desire, but incapable of making his wealth yield him any pleasure or satisfaction. He may be a miser, afraid to make use of his riches; he may be in ill health, and find that his wealth cannot procure for him any alleviation of his pains; his domestic circumstances may be so unhappy as to cast a cloud over his prosperity. From various causes, such as these, the evil upon which our author remarks is common enough in human society—great wealth failing to procure for its possessor any enjoyment he can relish, and perhaps passing at last, on his death, into the hands of a stranger, for want of an heir to whom he might have had some satisfaction in leaving it.

II. A second case of a different kind is suggested in vers. 3—6. The rich man is NOT CHILDLESS, but has a numerous family, and lives out all his days; but he, too, often has no happiness in his life, and perhaps even fails to find honourable burial when he dies. His fate is worse than that of the stillborn child that has never tasted

of life. "The abortion has the advantage in not having known anything; 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" (Wardlaw). However gloomy these reflections of our author's may seem at first sight, when we examine them a little more closely we find that they are not so sombre in their character as many of the utterances of pessimistic philosophy. He does not contrast being with not-being, and declare that the latter is preferable, but he declares a joyless life to be inferior to that which has been "cut off from the womb." His teaching that the value of existence is to be measured by the amount of good that has been enjoyed in it, is so far from being the utterance of a despairing pessimism that most sober-minded persons would accept it as reasonable and true. Specimens of utterances which, to a superficial reader, might appear to be closely akin to his, but which really are the expression of a very much darker mood than his, might easily be given. Thus we have in Theognis (425—428)—

"Best lot for man is never to be born,
Nor ever see the bright rays of the morn;
Next best, when born, to haste with quickest tread
Where Hades' gates are open for the dead,
And rest with much earth gathered for our bed."

And in Sophocles ('Ed. Col.,' 1225)—

"Never to be at all
Excels all fame;
Quickly, next best, to pass
From whence we came."

And according to the teaching of Schopenhauer, the non-existence of the world is to be preferred to its existence. The world is cursed with four great evils—birth, disease, old age, and death. "Existence is only a punishment," and the feeling of misery which often accompanies it is "repentance" for the great crime of having come into the world by yielding to the "will to live" (Wright, 'Ecclesiastes,' p. 158). Such despairing utterances, when found in the writings of those who have not known God, move us to compassion, but we can scarcely avoid the feeling of indignation when we find them on the lips of those who have known God, but have not "retained him in their knowledge." And we must beware of concluding, after a hasty and superficial reading of the Book of Ecclesiastes, that its author, even in his darkest mood, sank to the depth of atheism and despair which they reveal.—J. W.

Vers. 7—9.—*The insatiability of desire.* In these words the Preacher lays stress upon the little advantage which one man has over another in regard to the attainment of happiness and satisfaction in life. All are tormented by desires and longings which can never be adequately satisfied. His reference is principally, if not entirely, to the cravings of natural appetites to which all are subject, and which cannot by any gratification or exercise of will be wholly silenced. The instinct of self-preservation, the necessity of sustaining the body with food, inspire labour, and yet no amount of labour is sufficient to put an end, once and for all, to the gnawings of desire. The sensuous element in man's nature is insatiable, and the appetites of which it consists grow in strength as they are indulged. Though the pressure of appetite differs in different cases, none are free from it. The wise as well as the foolish, the man of simple tastes and chastened temper, as well as he who gives free rein to all his impulses, feel it. Gifts of intellect, acquirements in culture, make no difference in this matter. Some little obscurity seems at first to hang over ver. 8b, but a little examination of the words disperses it. The whole verse runs (Revised Version), "For what advantage hath the wise man more than the fool? or what [advantage] hath the poor man [more than the fool], that knoweth to walk before the living?" "To know to walk before the living" is, as is now generally acknowledged, to understand the right rule of life, to possess the *savoir vivre*, to be experienced in the right art of living

(Delitzsch). The question accordingly is—What advantage has the wise over the fool? and what the poor, who, although poor, knows how to maintain his social position? The matter treated of is the insatiable nature of sensual desire. The wise seeks to control his desire; he who is spoken of as poor knows how to conceal it, for he lays restraints upon himself, that he may make a good appearance and maintain his reputation. But desire is present in both, and they have in this nothing above the fool, who follows the bent of his desire, and lives for the passing hour. In other words, "The idea of the passage seems to be, the desire of man is insatiable, he is never really satisfied; the wise man, however, seeks to keep his desires within bounds, and to keep them to himself, but the fool utters all his mind (Prov. xxix. 11). Even the poor man, who knows how to conduct himself in life, and understands the right art of living, though he keeps his secret to himself, feels within himself the stirrings of that longing which is destined never to be satisfied on earth" (Wright). The reference here to the poor man may possibly be made because the Preacher has already praised the lot of the labouring man (ch. v. 12) in comparison with that of the rich, whose abundance will not suffer him to sleep. If so, he virtually says here, half-humorously, "Don't imagine that poverty is the secret of contentment and happiness. Poverty covers cares and anxieties as well as riches. Both rich and poor are pretty much on the same level." A very simple and practical conclusion is drawn from the fact of the insatiability of desire, and that is the advisability of enjoying the present good that is within our reach (ver. 9). That which the eyes see and recognize as good and beautiful should not be forfeited because the thoughts are wandering after something which may be for ever unattainable by us. So far the teaching is not above that of the fable of the dog who lost the piece of flesh he had in his mouth, because he snapped at the reflection of it he saw on the surface of the water. And if this be thought but a poor, cold scrap of morality to offer to men for their guidance in life, the answer may be given that multitudes spend their life in fruitless endeavours after what is far above their reach, and bereave their souls of present good, from an insatiable greed which this fable rebukes. Constituted as we are, placed as we are amid many temptations, we need not despise any small scraps of moral teaching which may be even in threadbare fables, and homely, familiar proverbs. To say that the words, "Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of the desire," is about equivalent to the proverb, "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush," may seem irreverent to some, who would fain read into the text more than it contains. But instead of imagining that the Word of God is degraded by the comparison, let them recognize the good sense and prudent advice which lie in the proverb which corresponds so closely to the sense of the Preacher's words.—J. W.

Vers. 10—12.—*Inexorable destiny.* Before considering these words of the Preacher, we need to obtain a clear and precise idea of the statements he makes. A considerable measure of obscurity hangs over the passage, and renders it all the more difficult to catch the writer's meaning. This is apparent from the alternative renderings of several clauses in it which we have in the margin of the Revised Version. The general idea of the passage seems to be—*Man's powerlessness and short-sightedness with respect to destiny.* "Whatsoever hath been, the name thereof was given long ago, and it is known that it is man: neither can he contend with him that is mightier than he" (ver. 10). The difficult phrase is that thus translated—"it is known that it is man." But if we take the Hebrew phrase, as several eminent critics (Delitzsch, Wright) do, to be equal to *scitur id quod homo sit*—"it is known that which a man is"—an intelligible and appropriate meaning of the passage is obtained. It seems to point to the fact that man has been placed in certain unalterable conditions by the will of God, and to urge the advisability of submitting to the inevitable. Both as to time and place, the conditions have been fixed from of old, and no human effort can change them. The same thought occurs in St. Paul's address to the Athenians: "He made of one every nation of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed seasons, and the bounds of their habitation" (Acts xvii. 26, Revised Version). It is to be found also in Isaiah's saying, "Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker! a potsherd among the potsherd of the earth! Shall the clay say to him that fashioneth it, What makest thou? or thy work, He hath no hands?" And this

passage in Ecclesiastes seems to have been in the mind of the Apostle Paul quite as certainly as that just quoted from Isaiah, when he wrote the famous paragraph in the Epistle to the Romans on the potter and the clay (ix. 20, *et seq.*). That God has predetermined the conditions of our lives, and that it is useless to strive against his power, seems, therefore, the teaching of ver. 10. The obscurity in ver. 11 is caused by the translation, both in our Authorized Version and Revised Version, of the Hebrew *דברים* as "things" instead of "words." In the Revised Version "words" is given in the margin, but assuredly should be in the text, as in the ancient versions (LXX., Vulgate, Syriac): "Seeing there be many words that increase vanity, what is man the better?" (ver. 11). Most probably the reference is to discussions concerning man's freedom and God's decrees, that were coming into vogue among the Jews. The nascent school of the Pharisees maintained fatalistic views concerning human conduct, that of the Sadducees denied the existence of fate (Josephus, 'Ant.,' xiii. 5. 9; xviii. 1. 3, 4; 'Bell. Jud.,' ii. 8. 14). The uselessness of all such discussions is also asserted later in ch. xii. 12, and is pathetically reiterated in the famous passage of Milton's 'Paradise Lost,' in which some of the fallen angels are described as discussing

"Fixed fate, free-will, foreknowledge absolute;
Vain wisdom all, and false philosophy."

The twelfth verse is clear enough. After all discussion as to the true course of life, who can give a decided answer? Life is a shadow; the future is unknown to us. "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 one can read the words without being struck with the dark, despairing Pyrrhonism of their tone. "A cloud of irrepressible, inexpressible melancholy hangs around the writer, a leaden weight is on the spring of his spirit." And it is only when we consider that the spiritual education of the world by God has been gradual, that we can tolerate the words as expressing the thoughts of a mind not yet privileged to see truth in its fullness. If we believe that the light of truth is, like the light of the sun, increasing from the first faint rays that begin to dispel the darkness of midnight to the splendour of noonday, we shall not be surprised at the words of the Preacher. They *would* be highly inappropriate in one to whom the revelation of God in Christ had been given; as used by him, they would necessarily imply a gross unbelief, which would excite our indignation rather than our sympathy. Christianity puts the facts which the Preacher regarded as so sombre in a fresh light, and strips them of all their terror. Let us take them in order.

I. THAT WHICH HE CALLED FATE WE CALL PROVIDENCE. "Since fate bears sway, and everything must be as it is, why dost thou strive against it?" said the Stoic, Marcus Aurelius (xii. 13), and his words seem exactly similar to those before us. The idea of a fixed order in human life, a Divine will governing all things, does not necessarily fill us with the same gloomy thoughts, or summon us to a proud and scornful resignation to that which we cannot change or modify. In the teaching of Christ we have the fact of a preordination of things by God frequently alluded to, in such sentences as "Mine hour is not yet come;" "The hairs of your head are all numbered;" "Many be called, but few chosen;" "No man can come to me except the Father draw him;" "For the elect's sake whom he hath chosen God hath shortened the days." This is not a dark, inexorable fate governing all things, but the wise and gracious will of a Father, in which his children may trust with confidence and joy. The thought, I say, of all things being predetermined by the Divine will is prominent in the teaching of Christ, but it is set in such a light as to be a source of inspiration and strength. It prompts such comfortable assurances as, "Fear not, little flock; it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."

II. THE PREACHER WAS HUMILIATED AT THE THOUGHT OF HUMAN WEAKNESS. "Neither may he contend with one that is mightier than he." But we know more clearly than he did of the Divine compassion for the poor and feeble and helpless—a compassion that prompted God to send forth his Son for our redemption. We know that the Son of God took on him our nature, submitted to the toils, trials, privations, and temptations of a mortal lot, and overcame the worst foes by whom we are assailed—sin and death. If, as some think, "the mightier" one here referred to is death, we

believe that Christ took away his power, and that in his triumphant resurrection we have the pledge of everlasting life. And the one great lesson taught by the Church's history is that God has chosen the weak things of the world to confound the strong.

III. ANOTHER CAUSE OF GRIEF WAS THE FLEETING CHARACTER OF LIFE. "Vain life which man spendeth as a shadow." But this does not afflict us, who know that the grave is not the end of all things, but the door of a better life. The present existence acquires new value and solemnity when we consider it as the prelude to eternity, the time and place given us in which to prepare ourselves for the world to come. We have his words, "I am the Resurrection and the Life: . . . whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die." The sorrows and trials of the present dwindle into insignificance as compared with the reward we anticipate as in store for us if we are faithful to God. "Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal" (2 Cor. iv. 17, 18).

IV. A FINAL CAUSE OF GRIEF WAS THAT THE FUTURE WAS DARK AND UNKNOWN. "Who can tell a man what shall be after him under the sun?" This is still true in many departments of life. The mightiest potentate cannot tell how long the dynasty he has founded, or of which he may be the brightest ornament, will last. The conqueror may be distressed by the thought that the power, to obtain which he has squandered myriads of lives and countless treasures, may soon fade away, and in a short time after his death vanish "like the baseless fabric of a vision." The poet does not know that even the most brilliant of his works will be kept alive in the memories of men, and treasured among the things they will not willingly let die, within a generation or two after he has passed away. The successful merchant, who has built up a colossal fortune by the labours of a lifetime, cannot guard against its being dissipated in a very short time by those to whom he leaves it. But the Christian is in no such uncertainty. The cause of his Master he knows will prosper and grow to far vaster proportions in the time to come. The good work he has done will aid in the advancement of the kingdom of God, and no blight of failure will fall upon his efforts; the plans of God in which during his earthly life he co-operated will not be frustrated, and his own personal happiness is for ever secured. All the various causes of despondency by which the Preacher's mind was harassed and perplexed vanish before the brighter revelation of God's will given us in the mission and work of Christ. And it is only because we keep in mind that the truth vouchsafed to us was withheld from him, that we can read his words without being depressed by the burden by which his spirit was borne down and saddened. It would only be by our deliberately sinning against the light we enjoy that we could ever adopt his words as expressing our views of life.—J. W.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER VII.

Ver. 1—oh. xii. 8.—Division II. DEDUCTIONS FROM THE ABOVE-MENTIONED EXPERIENCES IN THE WAY OF WARNINGS AND RULES OF LIFE.

Vers. 1—7.—Section 1. Though no man knows for certain what is best, yet there are some practical rules for the conduct of life which wisdom gives. Some of these Koheleth sets forward in the proverbial form, recommending a serious, earnest life in preference to one of gaiety and frivolity.

Ver. 1.—A good name is better than

precious ointment. The paronomasia here is to be remarked, *tob shem mishemen tob*. There is a similar assonance in Cant. i. 3, which the German translator reproduces by the sentence, "Besser gut Gerücht als Wohlgeruch," or, "gute Gerüche," and which may perhaps be rendered in English, "Better is good favour than good flavour." It is a proverbial saying, running literally, *Better is a name than good oil*. *Shem*, "name," is sometimes used unqualified to signify a celebrated name, good name, reputation (comp. Gen. xi. 4; Prov. xxii. 1). Septuagint, Ἀγαθὸν ὄνομα ὑπὲρ ἔλαιον ἀγαθόν. Vulgate, *Melius est nomen bonum quam unguenta pretiosa*. Odorous unguents were very precious in the mind of an Oriental, and formed one

of the luxuries lavished at feasts and costly entertainments, or social visits (see ch. ix. 8; Ruth iii. 3; Ps. xlv. 6; Amos vi. 6; Wisd. ii. 7; Luke vii. 37, 46). It was a man's most cherished ambition to leave a good reputation, and to hand down an honourable remembrance to distant posterity, and this all the more as the hope of the life beyond the grave was dim and vague (see on ch. ii. 16, and comp. ch. ix. 5). The complaint of the sensualists in Wisd. ii. 4 is embittered by the thought, "Our name shall be forgotten in time, and no man shall have our works in remembrance." We employ a metaphor like that in the clause when we speak of a man's reputation having a good or ill odour; and the Hebrews said of ill fame that it stank in the nostrils (Gen. xxxiv. 30; Exod. v. 21; see, on the opposite side, Ecclus. xxiv. 15; 2 Cor. ii. 15). **And the day of death than the day of one's birth.** The thought in this clause is closely connected with the preceding. If a man's life is such that he leaves a good name behind him, then the day of his departure is better than that of his birth, because in the latter he had nothing before him but labour, and trouble, and fear, and uncertainty; and in the former all these anxieties are past, the storms are successfully battled with, the haven is won (see on ch. iv. 3). According to Solon's well-known maxim, no one can be called happy till he has crowned a prosperous life by a peaceful death (Herod., i. 32; Soph., 'Trachin.' 1—3; 'Œd. Tyr.' 1528, *sqq.*); as the Greek gnome runs—

Μήπω μέγαν εἴπῃ πρὶν τελευτήσαντ' ἴδῃς.

"Call no man great till thou hast seen him dead."

So Ben-Sira, "Judge none blessed (μὴ μακάριζε μηδένα) before his death; for a man shall be known in his children" (Ecclus. xi. 28).

Ver. 2.—It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting. The thought in the last verse leads to the recollection of the circumstances which accompany the two events therein mentioned—birth and death, feasting and joy, in the first case; sorrow and mourning in the second. In recommending the sober, earnest life, Koheleth teaches that wiser, more enduring lessons are to be learned where grief reigns than in the empty and momentary excitement of mirth and joyousness. The house in question is mourning for a death; and what a long and harrowing business this was is well known (see Deut. xxiv. 8; Ecclus. xxii. 10; Jer. xxii. 18; Matt. ix. 23, etc.). Visits of condolence and periodical pilgrimages to graves of departed relatives were considered duties (John xi. 19, 31), and conducted to the growth in the mind of sympathy,

seriousness, and the need of preparation for death. The opposite side, the house of carousal, where all that is serious is put away, leading to such scenes as Isaiah denounces (v. 11), offers no wise teaching, and produces only selfishness, heartlessness, thoughtlessness. What is said here is no contradiction to what was said in ch. ii. 24, that there was nothing better for a man than that he should eat and drink and enjoy himself. For Koheleth was not speaking of unrestrained sensualism—the surrender of the mind to the pleasures of the body—but of the moderate enjoyment of the good things of life conditioned by the fear of God and love of one's neighbour. This statement is quite compatible with the view that sees a higher purpose and training in the sympathy with sorrow than in participation in reckless frivolity. For that is the end of all men viz. that they will some day be mourned, that their house will be turned into a house of mourning. Vulgate, *In illa (domo) enim finis cunctorum admonetur hominum*, which is not the sense of the Hebrew. **The living will lay it to his heart.** He who has witnessed this scene will consider it seriously (ch. ix. 1), and draw from it profitable conclusions concerning the brevity of life and the proper use to make thereof. We recall the words of Christ, "Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted;" and "Woe unto you that laugh now! for ye shall mourn and weep" (Matt. v. 4; Luke vi. 25). Schultens gives an Arab proverb which says, "Hearest thou lamentation for the dead, hasten to the spot; art thou called to a banquet, cross not the threshold." The Septuagint thus translates the last clause, *Καὶ ὁ ζῶν δάσει ἀγαθὸν εἰς καρδίαν αὐτοῦ*, "The living will put good into his heart;" the Vulgate paraphrases fairly, *Et vivens cogitat quid futurum sit*, "The living thinks what is to come." "So teach us to number our days," prays the psalmist, "that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom" (Ps. xc. 12).

Ver. 3.—Sorrow is better than laughter. This is a further expansion of the previous maxim. *οὐρα* (*laas*), as contrasted with *πικρία*, is rightly rendered "sorrow," "melancholy," or, as Ginsburg contends, "thoughtful sadness." The Septuagint has *θυμός*, the Vulgate *ira*; but anger is not the feeling produced by a visit to the house of mourning. Such a scene produces saddening reflection, which is in itself a moral training, and is more wholesome and elevating than thoughtless mirth. For by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better. The feeling which shows itself by the look of sadness (comp. Gen. xl. 7; Neh. ii. 2) has a purifying effect on the heart, gives a moral tone to the character. Professor Tayler Lewis renders the clause, "For in the sad-

ness of the face the heart becometh fair;" i.e. sorrow beautifies the soul, producing, as it were, comeliness, spiritual beauty, and, in the end, serene happiness. The Vulgate translates the passage thus: *Melior est ira risu; quia per tristitiam vultus corrigitur animus deliquentis*, "Better is anger than laughter, because through sadness of countenance the mind of the offender is corrected." The anger is that either of God or of good men which reproves sin; the laughter is that of sinners who thus show their connivance at or approval of evil. There can be no doubt that this is not the sense of the passage. For the general sentiment concerning the moral influence of grief and suffering, we may compare the Greek sayings, *Tà παθήματα μάθηματα*, and *τί μαθόν; τί παθόν;* which are almost equivalent in meaning (comp. *Æschyl.*, 'Agam.' 170; *Herod.*, i. 207). The Latins would say, "Quæ nocent, docent," and we, "Pain is gain."

Ver. 4.—The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning. This is the natural conclusion from what was said in vers. 2, 3. The man who recognizes the serious side of life, and knows where to learn lessons of high moral meaning, will be found conversant with scenes of sorrow and suffering, and reflecting upon them. But the heart of fools is in the house of mirth. The fool, who thinks of nothing but present enjoyment, and how to make life pass pleasantly, turns away from mournful scenes, and goes only there where he may drown care and be thoughtless and merry.

Ver. 5.—It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise. *Gearah*, "rebuke," is the word used in Proverbs for the grave admonition which heals and strengthens while it wounds (see Prov. xiii. 1; xvii. 10). The silent lessons which a man learns from the contemplation of others' sorrow are rightly supplemented by the salutary correction of the wise man's tongue. Than for a man to hear the song of fools. *Shir*, "song," is a general term used of sacred or profane song; the connection here with the second clause of ver. 4, etc., leads one to think of the boisterous, reckless, often immodest, singing heard in the house of revelry, such as Ainos (vi. 5) calls "idle songs to the sound of the viol." Koheleth might have heard these in his own country, without drawing his experience from the licence of Greek practice or the impurity of Greek lyrics. The Vulgate renders the clause, *Quam stultorum adulatione decipi*, "Than to be deceived by the flattery of fools." This is a paraphrase; the correctness is negated by the explanation given in the following verse.

Ver. 6.—For as the crackling of thorns under a pot. There is a play of words in the Hebrew, "The crackling of *sirim* under

a *sir*," which Wright expresses by translating, "Like the noise of the nettles under the kettles." In the East, and where wood is scarce, thorns, hay, and stubble are used for fuel (*Ps.* lviii. 9; cxx. 4; *Matt.* vi. 30). Such materials are quickly kindled, blaze up for a time with much noise, and soon die away (*Ps.* cxviii. 12). So is the laughter of the fool. The point of comparison is the loud crackling and the short duration of the fire with small results. So the fool's mirth is boisterous and noisy, but comes to a speedy end, and is spent to no good purpose. So in *Job* (xx. 5) we have, "The triumphing of the wicked is short, and the joy of the godless but for a moment." All this profitless mirth is again nothing but vanity.

Ver. 7.—The verse begins with *kî*, which usually introduces a reason for what has preceded; but the difficulty in finding the connection has led to various explanations and evasions. The Authorized Version boldly separates the verse from what has gone before, and makes a new paragraph beginning with "surely:" Surely oppression maketh a wise man mad. Delitzsch supposes that something has been lost between vers. 6 and 7, and he supplies the gap by a clause borrowed from Prov. xvi. 8, "Better is a little with righteousness than great revenues without right;" and then the sentence proceeds naturally, "For oppression," etc. But this is scarcely satisfactory, as it is mere conjecture wholly unsupported by external evidence. The Vulgate leaves *kî* untranslated; the Septuagint has *ἔτι*. Looking at the various paragraphs, all beginning with *toḥ*, rendered "better," viz. vers. 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, we must regard the present verse as connected with what precedes, a new subject being introduced at ver. 8. Putting ver. 6 in a parenthesis as merely presenting an illustration of the talk of fools, we may see in ver. 7 a confirmation of the first part of ver. 5. The rebuke of the wise is useful even in the case of rulers who are tempted to excess and injustice. The "oppression" in the text is the exercise of irresponsible power, that which a man inflicts, not what he suffers; this makes him "mad," even though he be in other respects and under other circumstances wise; he ceases to be directed by reason and principle, and needs the correction of faithful rebuke. The Septuagint and Vulgate, rendering respectively *συκοφαντία* and *calumnia*, imply that the evil which distracts the wise man is false accusation. And a gift destroyeth the heart. The admission of bribery is likewise an evil that calls for wise rebuke. So Prov. xv. 27, "He that is greedy of gain troubleth his own house; but he that hateth gifts shall live." The phrase, "destroys the heart," means corrupts the understanding, deprives a man

of wisdom, makes him no better than a fool (comp. Hos. iv. 11, where the same effect is attributed to whoredom and drunkenness). The Septuagint has, ἀπώλλουσι τὴν καρδίαν εὐγενείας αὐτοῦ, "destroys the heart of his nobility;" the Vulgate, *perdet robur cordis illius*, "will destroy the strength of his heart." The interpretation given above seems to be the most reasonable way of dealing with the existing text; but Nowack and Volck adopt Delitzsch's emendation.

Vers. 8—14.—Section 2. Here follow some recommendations to patience and resignation under the ordering of God's providence. Such conduct is shown to be true wisdom.

Ver. 8.—Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof. This is not a repetition of the assertion in ver. 1 concerning the day of death and the day of birth, but states a truth in a certain sense generally true. The end is better because we then can form a right judgment about a matter; we see what was its purpose; we know whether it has been advantageous and prosperous or not. Christ's maxim, often repeated (see Matt. x. 22; xxiv. 13; Rom. ii. 7; Heb. iii. 6, etc.), is, "He that shall endure unto the end shall be saved." No one living can be said to be so absolutely safe as that he can look to the great day without trembling. Death puts the seal to the good life, and obviates the danger of falling away. Of course, if a thing is in itself evil, the gnome is not true (comp. Prov. v. 3, 4; xvi. 25, etc.); but applied to things indifferent at the outset, it is as correct as generalizations can be. The lesson of patience is here taught. A man should not be precipitate in his judgments, but wait for the issue. From the ambiguity in the expression *dabar* (see on ch. vi. 11), many render it "word" in this passage. Thus the Vulgate, *Melior est finis orationis, quam principium*; and the Septuagint, Ἀγαθὴ ἐσχάτη λόγων ὑπὲρ ἀρχὴν αὐτοῦ, where *φωνή*, or some such word, must be supplied. If this interpretation be preferred, we must either take the maxim as stating generally that few words are better than many, and that the sooner one concludes a speech, so much the better for speaker and hearer; or we must consider that the word intended is a well-merited rebuke, which, however severe and at first disliked, proves in the end wholesome and profitable. And the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit. "Patient" is literally "long of spirit," as the phrase, "short of spirit," is used in Prov. xiv. 29 and Job xxi. 4 to denote one who loses his temper and is impatient. To wait calmly for the result of an action, not to be hasty in arraigning Providence, is the part of a patient man; while the proud,

inflated, conceited man, who thinks all must be arranged according to his notions, is never resigned or content, but rebels against the ordained course of events. "In your patience ye shall win your souls," said Christ (Luke xxi. 19); and a Scotch proverb declares wisely, "He that weel bides, weel betides."

Ver. 9.—Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry. A further warning against the arrogance which murmurs at Providence and revolts against the checks of the Divine arrangement. The injunction in ch. v. 2 might be taken in this sense. It is not a general admonition against unrighteous anger, but is levelled at the haughty indignation which a proud man feels when things do not go as he wishes, and he deems that he could have managed matters more satisfactorily. For anger resteth in the bosom of fools. Such unreasonable displeasure is the mark of a foolish or sceptical mind, and if it rests (Prov. xiv. 33), is fostered and cherished there, may develop into misanthropy and atheism. If we adopt the rendering "word" in ver. 8, we may see in this injunction a warning against being quick to take offence at a rebuke, as it is only the fool who will not look to the object of the censure and see that it ought to be patiently submitted to. On the subject of anger St. Gregory writes, "As often as we restrain the turbulent motions of the mind under the virtue of mildness, we are essaying to return to the likeness of our Creator. For when the peace of mind is lashed with anger, torn and rent, as it were, it is thrown into confusion, so that it is not in harmony with itself, and loses the force of the inward likeness. By anger wisdom is parted with, so that we are left wholly in ignorance what to do; as it is written, 'Anger resteth in the bosom of a fool,' in this way, that it withdraws the light of understanding, while by agitating it troubles the mind" ('Moral,' v. 78).

Ver. 10.—The same impatience leads a man to disparage the present in comparison with a past age. What is the cause that the former days were better than these? He does not know from any adequate information that preceding times were in any respect superior to present, but in his moody discontent he looks on what is around him with a jaundiced eye, and sees the past through a rose-tinted atmosphere, as an age of heroism, faith, and righteousness. Horace finds such a character in the morose old man, whom he describes in 'De Arte Poet,' 173—

"Difficilis, querulus, laudator temporis acti
Se puero, castigator censorque minorum."

"Morose and querulous, praising former days

When he was boy, now ever blaming youth."

And 'Epist.,' ii. 1. 22—

"... et nisi quæ terris semota suisque Temporibus defuncta videt, fastidit et odit."

"All that is not most distant and removed From his own time and place, he loathes and scorns."

For thou dost not inquire wisely concerning this. In asking such a question you show that you have not reflected wisely on the matter. Every age has its light and dark side; the past was not wholly light, the present is not wholly dark. And it may well be questioned whether much of the glamour shed over antiquity is not false and unreal. The days of "Good Queen Bess" were anything but halcyon; the "merrie England" of old time was full of disorder, distress, discomfort. In yearning again for the flesh-pots of Egypt, the Israelites forgot the bondage and misery which were the accompaniments of those sensual pleasures.

Ver. 11.—Such hasty judgment is incompatible with true wisdom and sagacity. **Wisdom is good with an inheritance;** Septuagint, 'Αγαθή σοφία μετὰ κληρονομίας. Vulgate, *Utilior est sapientia cum divitiis*. The sentence thus rendered seems to mean that wealth lends a prestige to wisdom, that the man is happy who possesses both. The inheritance spoken of is an hereditary one; the man who is "rich with ancestral wealth" is enabled to employ his wisdom to good purpose, his position adding weight to his words and actions, and relieving him from the low pursuit of money-making. To this effect Wright quotes Menander—

Μακάριος ὁστις οὐδὲν καὶ νοῦν ἔχει
Χρηταὶ γὰρ οὗτος εἰς ἃ δεῖ ταύτη καλῶς.

"Blest is the man who wealth and wisdom hath,

For he can use his riches as he ought."

(Comp. Prov. xiv. 24.) Many commentators, thinking such a sentiment alien from the context, render the particle *ὡς* not "with," but "as;" Wisdom is [as] good as an inheritance" (see on ch. ii. 16). This is putting wisdom on rather a low platform, and one would have expected to read some such aphorism as "Wisdom is better than rubies" (Prov. viii. 11), if Koheleth had intended to make any such comparison. It appears then most expedient to take *ἡ* in the sense of "moreover," "as well as," "and" (comp. 1 Sam. xvii. 42, "ruddy, and (*ἡ*) of a fair countenance"). "Wisdom is good, and an inheritance is good;" both are good, but the advantages of the former, as ver. 12 intimates, far outweigh those of the latter. And by it there is profit to them that see the sun;

rather, and an advantage for those that see the sun. However useful wealth may be, wisdom is that which is really beneficial to all who live and rejoice in the light of day. In Homer the phrase, *ὄραν φῶς ἡελίοιο*, "to see the light of the sun" ('*Iliad*,' xviii. 61), signifies merely "to live;" Plumptre considers it to be used here and in ch. xix. 7 in order to convey the thought that, after all, life has its bright side. Cox would take it to mean to live much in the sun, *i.e.* to lead an active life—which is an imported modern notion.

Ver. 12.—**For wisdom is a defence, and money is a defence;** literally, *in the shade is wisdom, in the shade is money*; Septuagint, 'Ὅτι ἐν σκιά αὐτῆς ἡ σοφία ὡς σκιά ἀργυρίου, "For in its shadow wisdom is as the shadow of money." Symmachus has, *Σκέπει σοφία ὡς σκέπει τὸ ἀργύριον*, "Wisdom shelters as money shelters." The Vulgate explains the obscure text by paraphrasing, *Sicut enim protegit sapientia, sic protegit pecunia*. Shadow, in Oriental phrase, is equivalent to protection (see Numb. xiv. 9; Ps. xvii. 8; Lam. iv. 20). Wisdom as well as money is a shield and defence to men. As it is said in one passage (Prov. xiii. 8) that riches are the ransom of a man's life, so in another (ch. ix. 15) we are told how wisdom delivered a city from destruction. The literal translation given above implies that he who has wisdom and he who has money rest under a safe protection, are secure from material evil. In this respect they are alike, and have analogous claims to man's regard. But the excellency—profit, or advantage—of knowledge is, that wisdom giveth life to them that have it. "Knowledge" (*daath*) and "wisdom" (*chokmah*) are practically here identical, the terms being varied for the sake of poetic parallelism. The Revised Version, following Delitzsch and others, renders, *Wisdom preserveth the life of him that hath it*; *i.e.* secures him from passions and excesses which tend to shorten life. This seems to be scarcely an adequate ground for the noteworthy advantage which wisdom is said to possess. The Septuagint gives, *Καὶ περισσεία γνώσεως τῆς σοφίας ζωοποιήσει τὸν παρ' αὐτῆς*, "And the excellence of the knowledge of wisdom will quicken him that hath it." Something more than the mere animal life is signified, a climax to the "defence" mentioned in the preceding clause—the higher, spiritual life which man has from God. Wisdom in the highest sense, that is, practical piety and religion, is "a tree of life to them that lay hold of her, and happy is every one that retaineth her" (Prov. iii. 18), where it is implied that wisdom restores to man the gift which he lost at the Fall (comp. also Prov. viii. 35). The Septuagint

expression ζωοποιήσει recalls the words of Christ, "As the Father raiseth the dead and quickeneth (ζωοποιεῖ) them, even so the Son also quickeneth whom he will;" "It is the Spirit that quickeneth (τὸ ζωοποιεῖν)" (John v. 21; vi. 63). Koheleth attributes that power to wisdom which the more definite teaching of Christianity assigns to the influence of the Holy Spirit. Some would explain, "fortifies or vivifies the heart," i.e. imparts new life and strength to meet every fortune. The Vulgate rendering is far astray from the text, and does not accurately convey the sense of the passage, running thus: *Hoc autem plus habet eruditio et sapientia: quod vitam tribuunt possessori suo*, "But this more have learning and wisdom, that they give life to the possessor of them."

Ver. 13.—Consider the work of God. Here is another reason against murmuring and hasty judgment. True wisdom is shown by submission to the inevitable. In all that happens one ought to recognize God's work and God's ordering, and man's impotence. For who can make that straight, which he hath made crooked? The things which God hath made crooked are the anomalies, the crosses, the difficulties, which meet us in life. Some would include bodily deformities, which seems to be a piece of unnecessary literalism. Thus the Septuagint, *Τίς θυνήσεται κομῆσαι ὃν ἂν ὁ Θεὸς διαστρέψῃ αὐτόν*; "Who will be able to straighten him whom God has distorted?" and the Vulgate, *Nemo possit corrigere quem ille deseperit*, "No one can amend him whom he hath despised." The thought goes back to what was said in ch. i. 15, "That which is crooked cannot be made straight;" and in ch. vi. 10, man "cannot contend with him that is mightier than he." "As for the wondrous works of the Lord," says Ben-Sira, "there may be nothing taken from them, neither may anything be put unto them, neither can the ground of them be found out" (Eccles. xviii. 6). We cannot arrange events according to our wishes or expectations; therefore not only is placid acquiescence a necessary duty, but the wise man will endeavour to accommodate himself to existing circumstances.

Ver. 14.—In the day of prosperity be joyful; literally, *in the day of good be in good*, i.e. when things go well with you, be cheerful (ch. ix. 7; Esth. viii. 17); accept the situation and enjoy it. The advice is the same as that which runs through the book, viz. to make the best of the present. So Ben-Sira says, "Defraud not thyself of the good day, and let not a share in a good desire pass thee by" (Eccles. xiv. 14). Septuagint, *Ἐν ἡμέρᾳ ἀγαθῶν ἡσθί: ἐν ἀγαθῷ*, "In a day of good live in (an

atmosphere of) good;" Vulgate, *In die bona frui bonis*, "In a good day enjoy your good things." But in the day of adversity consider; in the evil day look well. The writer could not conclude this clause so as to make it parallel with the other, or he would have had to say, "In the ill day take it ill," which would be far from his meaning; so he introduces a thought which may help to make one resigned to adversity. The reflection follows. Septuagint, *Καὶ ἴδε ἐν ἡμέρᾳ κακῆς ἴδε, κ.τ.λ.*; Vulgate, *Et malam diem præcave*, "Beware of the evil day." But, doubtless, the object of the verb is the following clause. God also hath set the one over against the other; or, God hath made the one corresponding to the other; i.e. he hath made the day of evil as well as the day of good. The light and shade in man's life are equally under God's ordering and permission. "What?" cries Job (ii. 10), "shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?" Corn. à Lapidé quotes a saying of Plutarch to this effect: the harp gives forth sounds acute and grave, and both combine to form the melody; so in man's life the mingling of prosperity and adversity yields a well-adjusted harmony. God strikes all the strings of our life's harp, and we ought, not only patiently, but cheerfully, to listen to the chords produced by this Divine Performer. To the end that man should find nothing after him. This clause gives Koheleth's view of God's object in the admixture of good and evil; but the reason has been variously interpreted, the explanation depending on the sense assigned to the term "after him" (אַחֲרָיָא). The Septuagint gives *ὁπίσω αὐτοῦ*, which is vague; the Vulgate, *contra eum*, meaning that man may have no occasion to complain against God. Cheyne ('Job and Solomon') considers that Koheleth here implies that death closes the scene, and that there is then nothing more to fear, rendering the clause, "On the ground that man is to experience nothing at all hereafter." They who believe that the writer held the doctrine of a future life cannot acquiesce in this view. The interpretation of Delitzsch is this—God lets man pass through the whole discipline of good and evil, that when he dies there may be nothing which he has not experienced. Hitzig and Nowack explain the text to mean that, as God designs that man after his death shall have done with all things, he sends upon him evil as well as good, that he may not have to punish him hereafter—a doctrine opposed to the teaching of a future judgment. Wright deems the idea to be that man may be kept in ignorance of what shall happen to him beyond the grave, that the present life may afford no clue to the future.

One does not see why this should be a comfort, nor how it is compatible with God's known counsel of making the condition of the future life dependent upon the conduct of this. Other explanations being more or less unsatisfactory, many modern commentators see in the passage an assertion that God intermingles good and evil in men's lives according to laws with which they are unacquainted, in order that they may not disquiet themselves by forecasting the future, whether in this life or after their death, but may be wholly dependent upon God, casting all their care upon him, knowing that he careth for them (1 Pet. v. 7). We may safely adopt this explanation (comp. ch. iii. 22; vi. 12). The paragraph then contains the same teaching as Horace's oft-quoted ode—

"Prudens futuri temporis exitum," etc.
(*Carm.*, iii. 29. 29.)

Theognis, 1075—

Πρήματος ἀπρήκτου χαλεπώτατόν ἐστι
τελευτήν
Γνώαι, ὅπως μέλλει τοῦτο Θεὸς τελέσαι·
Ορφη γὰρ τέταται· πρὸ δὲ τοῦ μέλλοντος
ἔσθαι
Οὐ ξυνετὰ θνητοῖς πείρατ' ἀμχανίης.

"The issue of an action incomplete,
'Tis hard to forecast how God may dispose
it;
For it is veiled in darkest night, and man
In present hour can never comprehend
His helpless efforts."

Plumptre quotes the lines in Cleanthes's hymn to Zeus, vers. 18—21 (*Poet. Gnom.*, p. 114)—

* Ἀλλὰ σὺ καὶ τὰ περισσά, κ.τ.λ.

"Thou alone knowest how to change the
odd
To even, and to make the crooked straight;
And things discordant find accord in thee.
Thus in one whole thou blendest ill with
good,
So that one law works on for evermore."

Ben-Sira has evidently borrowed the idea in Eccles. xxxiii. (xxxvi.) 13—15 from our passage; after speaking of man being like clay under the potter's hand, he proceeds, "Good is set over against evil, and life over against death; so is the godly against the sinner, and the sinner against the godly. So look upon all the works of the Most High: there are two and two, one against the other."

Vers. 15—22.—Section 3. *Warnings against excesses, and praise of the golden mean*, which is practical wisdom and the art of living happily.

Vers. 15.—All things have I seen in the
ECCLESIASTES.

days of my vanity. Koheleth gives his own experience of an anomalous condition which often obtains in human affairs. "All," being here defined by the article, must refer to the cases which he has mentioned or proceeds to mention. "The days of vanity" mean merely "fleeting, vain days" (comp. ch. vi. 12). The expression denotes the writer's view of the emptiness and transitoriness of life (ch. i. 2), and it may also have special reference to his own vain efforts to solve the problems of existence. There is a just (*righteous*) man that perisheth in his righteousness. Here is a difficulty about the dispensation of good and evil, which has always perplexed the thoughtful. It finds expression in Ps. lxxiii., though the singer propounds a solution (ver. 17) which Koheleth misses. The meaning of the preposition (α) before "righteousness" is disputed. Delitzsch, Wright, and others take it as equivalent to "in spite of," as in Deut. i. 32, where "in this thing" means "notwithstanding," "for all this thing." Righteousness has the promise of long life and prosperity; it is an anomaly that it should meet with disaster and early death. We cannot argue from this that the author did not believe in temporal rewards and punishments; he states merely certain of his own experiences, which may be abnormal and capable of explanation. For his special purpose this was sufficient. Others take the preposition to mean "through," "in consequence of." Good men have always been persecuted for righteousness' sake (Matt. v. 10, 11; John xvii. 14; 2 Tim. iii. 12), and so far the interpretation is quite admissible, and is perhaps supported by ver. 16, which makes a certain sort of righteousness the cause of disaster. But looking to the second clause of the present verse, where we can hardly suppose that the wicked man is said to attain to long life in consequence of his wickedness, we are safe in adopting the rendering, "in spite of." There is a wicked man that prolongeth his life in (*in spite of*) his wickedness. The verb *arak*, "to make long," "to prolong," is used both with and without the accusative "days" (see ch. viii. 12, 13; Deut. v. 33; Prov. xxviii. 2). Septuagint, Ἐστὶν ἀσεβὴς μένων ἐν κακίᾳ αὐτοῦ, "There is an ungodly man remaining in his wickedness," which does not convey the sense of the original. According to the moral government of God experienced by the Hebrews in their history, the sinner was to suffer calamity and to be cut off prematurely. This is the contention of Job's friends, against which he argues so warmly. The writer of the Book of Wisdom has learned to look for the correction of such anomalies in another life.

He sees that length of days is not always a blessing, and that retribution awaits the evil beyond the grave (Wisd. i. 9; iii. 4, 10; iv. 8, 19, etc.). Abel perished in early youth; Cain had his days prolonged. This apparent inversion of moral order leads to another reflection concerning the danger of exaggerations.

Ver. 16.—**Be not righteous over much.** The exhortation has been variously interpreted to warn against too scrupulous observance of ritual and ceremonial religion, or the mistaken piety which neglects all mundane affairs, or the Pharisaical spirit which is bitter in condemning others who fall short of one's own standard. Cox will have it that the advice signifies that a prudent man will not be very righteous, since he will gain nothing by it, nor very wicked, as he will certainly shorten his life by such conduct. But really Koheleth is condemning the tendency to immoderate asceticism which had begun to show itself in his day—a rigorous, prejudiced, indiscreet manner of life and conduct which made piety offensive, and afforded no real aid to the cause of religion. This arrogant system virtually dictated the laws by which Providence should be governed, and found fault with divinely ordered circumstances if they did not coincide with its professors' preconceived opinions. Such religionism might well be called being "righteous over much." **Neither make thyself over wise;** Septuagint, *Μὴδὲ σοφίζου περισσά*; Vulgate, *Neque plus sapias quam necesse est*; better, *show not thyself too wise*; i.e. do not indulge in speculations about God's dealings, estimating them according to your own predilections, questioning the wisdom of his moral government. Against such perverse speculation St. Paul argues (Rom. ix. 19, etc.), "Thou wilt say unto me, Why doth he still find fault? For who withstandeth his will? Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why didst thou make me thus?" A good principle carried to excess may bring evil results. *Summum jus, summa injuria*. The maxim, *Μὴδὲν ἄγαν*, *Ne quid nimis*, "Moderation in all things," is taught here; and Aristotle's theory of virtue being the mean between the two extremes of excess and defect is adumbrated ('Ethic. Nicom.' ii. 6. 15, 16); though we do not see that the writer is "reproducing current Greek thought" (Plumptre), or that independent reflection and observation could not have landed him at the implied conclusion without plagiarism. **Why shouldest thou destroy thyself?** Septuagint, *Μὴ ποτὲ ἐκπλεῖσθης*, "Lest perchance thou be confounded;" Vulgate, *Ne obstupescas*, "Lest thou be stupefied." This is the primary

meaning of the special form of the verb here used (hitp. of *ספ*), and Plumptre supposes that the author intends thereby to express the spiritual pride which accompanies fancied excellence in knowledge and conduct, and by which the possessor is puffed up (1 Tim. iii. 6). But plainly it is not a mental, internal effect that is contemplated, but something that affects comfort, position, or life, like the corresponding clause in the following verse. Hitzig and Ginsburg explain the word, "Make thyself forsaken," "Isolate thyself," which can scarcely be the meaning. The Authorized Version is correct. A man who professes to be wiser than others, and, indeed, wiser than Providence, incurs the envy and animosity of his fellow-men, and will certainly be punished by God for his arrogance and presumption.

Ver. 17.—**Be not over much wicked, neither be thou foolish.** These two injunctions are parallel and correlative to those in ver. 16 concerning over-righteousness and over-wisdom. But the present verse cannot be meant, as at first sight it seems to do, to sanction a certain amount of wickedness provided it does not exceed due measure. To surmount this difficulty some have endeavoured to modify the term "wicked" (*rasha*), taking it to mean "engaged in worldly matters," or "not subject to rule," "lax," or again "restless," as some translate the word in Job iii. 17. But the word seems not to be used in any such senses, and bears uniformly the uncompromising signification assigned to it, "to be wicked, unrighteous, guilty." The difficulty is not overcome by Plumptre's suggestion of the introduction of a little "playful irony learned from Greek teachers," as if Koheleth meant, "I have warned you, my friends, against over-righteousness, but do not jump at the conclusion that licence is allowable. That was very far from my meaning." The connection of thought is this: in the previous verse Koheleth had denounced the Pharisaical spirit which virtually condemned the Divine ordering of circumstances, because vice was not at once and visibly punished, and virtue at once rewarded; and now he proceeds to warn against the deliberate and abominable wickedness which infers from God's long-suffering his absolute neglect and non-interference in mortal matters, and on this view plunges audaciously into vice and immorality, saying to itself, "God hath forgotten: he hideth his face; he will never see it" (Ps. x. 11). Such conduct may well be called "foolish;" it is that of "the fool who says in his heart, There is no God" (Ps. xiv. 1). The actual wording of the injunction sounds to us somewhat strange; but its form is determined by the requirements of parallelism, and the aphorism must not be pressed beyond its

general intention, "Be not righteous nor wise to excess; be not wicked nor foolish to excess." Septuagint, "Be not very wicked, and be not stubborn (*σκληρός*). Why shouldst thou die before thy time? literally, *not in thy time*; prematurely, tempting God to punish thee by retributive judgment, or shortening thy days by vicious excesses. (For the former, see Job xxii. 16; Ps. lv. 23; Prov. x. 27; and comp. 1 Sam. ii. 31, 33; and for the latter, Prov. v. 23; vii. 23—27; x. 21.) The Syriac contains a clause not given in any other version, "that thou mayest not be hated." As is often the case, both in this book and in Proverbs, a general statement in one place is reduced by a contrariant or modified opinion in another. Thus the prolongation of the life of the wicked, noticed in ver. 15, is here shown to be abnormal, impiety in the usual course of events having a tendency to shorten life. In this way hasty generalization is corrected, and the Divine arrangement is vindicated.

Ver. 18.—It is good that thou shouldst take hold of this; yes, also from this withdraw not thine hand. The pronouns refer to the two warnings in vers. 16 and 17 against over-righteousness and over-wickedness. Koheleth does not advise a man to make trial of opposite lines of conduct, to taste the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, that from a wide experience he may, like a man of the world, pursue a safe course; this would be poor morality, and unmeet for the stage at which his argument has arrived. Rather he advises him to lay to heart the cautions above given, and learn from them to avoid all extremes. As Horace says ('Epist.' i. 18. 9)—

"Virtus est medium vitiorum et utrinque reductum."

"Folly, as usual, in extremes is seen,
While virtue nicely hits the happy mean."
(Howes.)

The Vulgate has interpolated a word, and taken the pronoun as masculine, to the sacrifice of the sense and connection: *Bonum est te sustentare justum, sed et ab illo ne subtrahas manum tuam*. "It is good that thou shouldst support the just man, nay, from him withdraw not thy hand." For he that feareth God shall come forth of them all; shall escape both extremes together with their evil results. The fear of God will keep a man from all excesses. The intransitive verb *yatsa*, "to go forth," is here used with an accusative (comp. Gen. xlv. 4, which, however, is not quite analogous), as in Latin *ingredi urbem* (Livy, i. 29). Vulgate, *Qui timet Deum nihil negligit*. So Hitzig and Ginsburg, "Goes, makes his way with both," knows how to avail himself of piety and

wickedness, which, as we have seen, is not the meaning. St. Gregory, indeed, who uses the Latin Version, notes that to fear God is never to pass over any good thing that ought to be done ('Moral,' i. 3); but he is not professing to comment on the whole passage. Wright, after Delitzsch, takes the term "come out of" as equivalent to "fulfil," so that the meaning would be, "He who fears God performs all the duties mentioned above, and avoids extremes," as Matt. xxiii. 23, "These ought ye to have done, and not to have left the other undone." But this is confessedly a Talmudic use of the verb; and the Authorized Version may be safely adopted. The Septuagint gives, "For to them that fear God all things shall come forth well."

Ver. 19.—Wisdom strengtheneth the wise. The moderation enjoined is the only true wisdom, which, indeed, is the most powerful incentive and support. "Wisdom proves itself stronger" (as the verb is put intransitively) "to the wise man." Septuagint, *βελθύνει*, "will help;" Vulgate, *confortavit*, "hath strengthened." The spiritual and moral force of the wisdom grounded upon the fear of God is here signified, and is all the more insisted upon to counteract any erroneous impression conveyed by the caution against over-wisdom in ver. 16 (see note on ver. 17, at the end). More than ten mighty men which are in the city. The number ten indicates completeness, containing in itself the whole arithmetical system, and used representatively for an indefinite multitude. Thus Job (xix. 3) complains that his friends have reproached him ten times, and Elkanah asks his murmuring wife, "Am I not better to thee than ten sons?" (1 Sam. i. 8). Delitzsch thinks that some definite political arrangement is referred to, e.g. the dynasties placed by Persian kings over conquered countries; and Tyler notes that in the Mishna a city is defined to be a place containing ten men of leisure; and we know that ten men were required for the establishment of a synagogue in any locality. The same idea was present in the Anglo-Saxon arrangement of *tything* and *hundred*. The number, however, is probably used indefinitely here as *seven* in the parallel passage of Ecclesiasticus (xxxvii. 14), "A man's mind is sometime wont to tell him more than seven watchmen that sit above in a high tower." The sentence may be compared with Prov. x. 15; xxi. 22; xxiv. 5. The word rendered "mighty men" (*shullitim*) is not necessarily a military designation; it is translated "ruler" in ch. x. 5, and "governor" in Gen. xlii. 6. The Septuagint here has *ἑξουσιαστας τοὺς ὄντας ἐν τῇ πόλει*; the Vulgate, *principes civitatis*. The persons intended are not primarily men of valour in

war, like David's heroes, but rulers of sagacity, prudent statesmen, whose moral force is far greater and more efficacious than any merely physical excellence (comp. ch. ix. 16).

Ver. 20.—The wisdom above signified is, indeed, absolutely necessary, if one would escape the consequences of that frailty of nature which leads to transgression. Wisdom shows the sinner a way out of the evil course in which he is walking, and puts him back in that fear of God which is his only safety. **For there is not a just man upon earth.** The verse confirms ver. 19. Even the just man sinneth, and therefore needs wisdom. **That doeth good, and sinneth not.** This reminds us of the words in Solomon's prayer (1 Kings viii. 46; Prov. xx. 9). So St. James (iii. 2) says, "In many things we all offend;" and St. John, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1 John i. 8). A Greek *gnome* runs—

Ἀμαρτάνει τι καὶ σοφοῦ σοφώτερος.

"Erreth at times the very wisest man."

Ver. 21.—Also take no heed unto all words that are spoken; literally, *give not thy heart*, as ch. i. 13, etc. Here is another matter in which wisdom will lead to right conduct. You will not pay serious attention to evil reports either about yourself or others, nor regulate your views and actions according to such distortions of the truth. To be always hankering to know what people say of us is to set up a false standard, which will assuredly lead us astray; and, at the same time, we shall expose ourselves to the keenest mortification when we find, as we probably shall find, that they do not take us at our own valuation, but have thoroughly marked our weaknesses, and are ready enough to censure them. We have an instance of patience under unmerited reproof in the case of David when cursed by Shimei (2 Sam. xvi. 11), as he, or one like minded, says (Ps. xxxviii. 13), "I, as a deaf man, hear not; and I am as a dumb man that openeth not his mouth. Yea, I am as a man that heareth not, and in whose mouth are no reproofs." Corn. à Lapide comments in words to which no translation would do justice, "*Verba enim non sunt verba; aerem feriunt non hominem, nisi qui iis attendit mordetur, sauciatur.*" Lest thou hear thy servant curse thee. The servant is introduced as an example of a gossip or calumniator, because he, if any one, would be acquainted with his master's faults, and be most likely to disseminate his knowledge, and blame from such a quarter would be most intolerable. Commentators appositely quote Bacon's remarks on this passage in

his 'Advancement of Learning,' viii. 2, where he notes the prudence of Pompey, who burned all the papers of Sertorius unread, containing, as they did, information which would fatally have compromised many leading men in Rome.

Ver. 22.—Oftentimes also thine own heart knoweth that thou thyself likewise hast cursed others. The appeal to a man's own conscience follows. The fact that we often speak ill of others should make us less open to take offence at what is said of ourselves, and prepared to expect unfavourable comments. The Lord has said, "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 unto you" (Matt. vii. 1, 2). This is a universal law. "Who is he," asks Ben-Sira, "that hath not offended with his tongue?" (Eccles. xix. 16). Septuagint, *"Ὅτι πλείστακις ποιηρεύσεται σε, καὶ καθόδους πολλὰς κακώσει καρδίαν σου, ὅτι ὡς καίγε σὺ καταράσῃ ἑτέρους,"* "For many times he [thy servant] shall act ill to thee, and in many ways shall afflict thine heart, for even thou also hast cursed others." This seems to be a combination of two renderings of the passage. "It is the praise of perfect greatness to meet hostile treatment, without bravely and within mercifully. . . . Some things are more quickly dismissed from our hearts if we know our own misdemeanours against our neighbours. For whilst we reflect what we have been towards others, we are the less concerned that others should have proved such persons towards ourselves, because the injustice of another avenges in us what our conscience justly accuses in itself" (St. Gregory, 'Moral,' xxii. 26).

Vers. 23—29.—Section 4. Further insight into essential wisdom was not obtainable; but Koheleth learned some other practical lessons, viz. *that wickedness was folly and madness; that woman was the most evil thing in the world; that man had perverted his nature, which was made originally good.*

Ver. 23.—All this have I proved by wisdom; i.e. wisdom was the means by which he arrived at the practical conclusions given above (vers. 1—22). Would wisdom solve deeper questions? And if so, could he ever hope to attain it? I said, I will be wise. This was his strong resolve. He desired to grow in wisdom, to use it in order to unfold mysteries and explain anomalies. Hitherto he had been content to watch the course of men's lives, and find by experience what was good and what was evil for them; now he craves for an insight into the secret laws that regulate those external circum-

stances: he wants a philosophy or theosophy. His desire is expressed by his imitator in the Book of Wisdom (ix.), "O God of my fathers, . . . give me Wisdom, that sitteth by thy throne. . . . O send her out of thy holy heavens, and from the throne of thy glory, that being present she may labour with me." But it was far from me. It remained in the far distance, out of reach. Job's experience (xxviii.) was his. Practical rules of life he might gain, and had mastered, but essential, absolute wisdom was beyond mortal grasp. Man's knowledge and capacity are limited.

Ver. 24.—That which is far off, and exceeding deep, who can find it out? The broken, interjectional style of the original in this passage, as Professor Taylor Lewis terms it, is better brought out by translating, "Far off is that which is, and deep, deep: who can find it out?" Professor Lewis renders, "Far off! the past, what is it? Deep—a deep—oh, who can find?" and explains "the past" to mean, not merely the earthly past historically unknown, but the great past before the creation of the universe, the kingdom of all eternities with its ages of ages, its worlds of worlds, its mighty evolutions, its infinite variety. We prefer to retain the rendering, "that which is," and to refer the expression to the phenomenal world. It is not the essence of wisdom that is spoken of, but the facts of man's life and the circumstances in which he finds himself, the course of the world, the phenomena of nature, etc. These things—their causes, connection, interdependence—we cannot explain satisfactorily (comp. ch. iii. 11; viii. 17). In the Book of Wisdom (vii. 17—21) Solomon is supposed to have arrived at this abstruse knowledge, "for," he says, "God hath given me certain knowledge of the things that are (τῶν ὄντων γινώσκων ἀψευδῆ)," and he proceeds to enumerate the various departments which this "universitas literarum" has opened to him. The Septuagint (and virtually the Vulgate) connects this verse with the preceding, thus: "I said, I will be wise, and it (αὐτῇ) was far from me, far beyond what was (μακρὰν ὑπὲρ ὃ ἦν), and deep depth: who shall find it out?" (For the epithet "deep" applied to what is recondite or what is beyond human comprehension, comp. Prov. xx. 5; Job xi. 8.)

Ver. 25.—I applied mine heart to know; more literally, *I turned myself, and my heart was [set] to know*. We have the expression, "turned myself," referring to a new investigation in ch. ii. 20 and elsewhere; but the distinguishing the heart or soul from the man himself is not common in Scripture (see on ch. xi. 9), though the soul is sometimes apostrophized, as in Luke xii. 19 (comp. Ps. ciii. 1; cxlvi. 1). The writer

here implies that he gave up himself with all earnestness to the investigation. Unsatisfactory as his quest had been hitherto, he did not relinquish the pursuit, but rather turned it in another direction, where he could hope to meet with useful results. The Septuagint has, "I and my heart travelled round (ἐκύκλωσα), to know;" the Vulgate, *Lustravi universa animo meo ut scirem. And to search, and to seek out wisdom*. The accumulation of synonymous verbs is meant to emphasize the author's devotion to his self-imposed task and his return from profitless theoretical investigation to practical inquiry. And the reason of things, *Cheshbon* (ver. 27; ch. ix. 10) is rather "account," "reckoning," than "reason"—the summing-up of all the facts and circumstances rather than the elucidation of their causes. Vulgate, *rationem*; Septuagint, ψῆφον. The next clause ought to be rendered, *And to know wickedness as (or, to be) folly, and foolishness as (to be) madness*. His investigation led him to this conclusion, that all infringement of God's laws is a misjudging aberration—a wilful desertion of the requirements of right reason—and that mental and moral obtuseness is a physical malady which may be called madness (comp. ch. i. 17; ii. 12; x. 13).

Ver. 26.—One practical result of his quest Koheleth cannot avoid mentioning, though it comes with a suddenness which is somewhat startling. *And I find more bitter than death the woman*. Tracing men's folly and madness to their source, he finds that they arise generally from the seductions of the female sex. Beginning with Adam, woman has continued to work mischief in the world. "Of the woman came the beginning of sin," says Siracides, "and through her we all die" (Ecclus. xxv. 24); it was owing to her that the punishment of death was inflicted on the human race. If Solomon himself were speaking, he had indeed a bitter experience of the sin and misery into which women lead their victims (see 1 Kings xi. 1, 4, 11). It may be thought that Koheleth refers here especially to "the strange woman" of Prov. ii. 16, etc.; v. 3, etc.; but in ver. 23 he speaks of the whole sex without qualification; so that we must conclude that he had a very low opinion of them. It is no ideal personage whom he is introducing; it is not a personification of vice or folly; but woman in her totality, such as he knew her to be in Oriental courts and homes, denied her proper position, degraded, uneducated, all natural affections crushed or undeveloped, the plaything of her lord, to be flung aside at any moment. It is not surprising that Koheleth's impression of the female sex should be unfavourable. He is not singular in such an opinion. One might fill a large

page with proverbs and gnomes uttered in disparagement of woman by men of all ages and countries. Men, having the making of such apothegms, have used their licence unmercifully; if the maligned sex had equal liberty, the tables might have been reversed. But, really, in this as in other cases the mean is the safest; and practically those who have given the darkest picture of women have not been slow to recognize the brighter side. If, for instance, the Book of Proverbs paints the adulteress and the harlot in the sombrest, most appalling colours, the same book affords us such a sketch of the virtuous matron as is unequalled for vigour, truth, and high appreciation. And if, as in our present chapter, Koheleth shows a bitter feeling against the evil side of woman's nature, he knows how to value the comfort of married life (ch. iv. 8), and to look upon a good wife as one who makes a man's home happy (ch. ix. 9). Since the incarnation of our blessed Lord Jesus Christ, "the Seed of the woman," we have learned to regard woman in her true light, and to assign her that position to which she is entitled, giving honour unto her as the weaker vessel, and, at the same time, heir with us of the glorious hope and destiny of our renewed nature (1 Pet. iii. 7). **Whose heart is snares and nets**; more accurately, *who is snares, and nets in her heart*; Septuagint, "The woman who is a snare, and her heart nets;" Vulgate, *Quæ laqueus venatorum est, et sagena cor ejus*. The imagery is obvious (comp. Prov. v. 4, 22; vii. 22; xxii. 14; Hab. i. 15); the thoughts of the evil woman's heart are nets, occupied in meditating how she may entrap and retain victims; and her outward look and words are snares that captivate the foolish. *Mē ἰνδρῶν γυναικὶ ἐτραπισμένῃ*, says the Son of Sirach, "Lest thou fall into her snares" (Ecclus. ix. 3). Plautus, 'Asin.' i. 3. 67—

"Aucepts sum ego;

Esca est meretrix; lectus illex est; amatores aves."

"The fowler I;

My bait the courtesan; her bed the luro;
The birds the lovers."

So ancient critics, stronger in morals than in etymology, derive *Venus* from *venari*, "to hunt," and *mulier* from *mollire*, "to soften," or *malleus*, "a hammer," because the devil uses women to mould and fashion men to his will. And **her hands as bands**. *Asurim*, "bands" or "fetters," is found in Judg. xv. 14, where it is used of the chains with which the men of Judah bound Samson; it refers here to the wicked woman's voluptuous embraces. **Whoso pleaseth God** (more literally, *he who is good before God*) shall escape from her. He whom God regards as

good (ch. ii. 26, where see note) shall have grace to avoid these seductions. **But the sinner shall be taken by her**; *מָה*, "in her," in the snare which is herself. In some manuscripts of Ecclesiasticus (xxvi. 23) are these words; "A wicked woman is given as a portion to a wicked man; but a godly woman is given to him that feareth the Lord."

Ver. 27.—**Behold, this have I found**. The result of his search, thus forcibly introduced, follows in ver. 28. He has carefully examined the character and conduct of both sexes, and he is constrained to make the unsatisfactory remark which he there puts forth. **Saith the preacher**. *Koheleth* is here treated as a feminine noun, being joined with the feminine form of the verb, though elsewhere it is grammatically regarded as masculine (see on ch. i. 1). Many have thought that, after speaking so disparagingly of woman, it would be singularly inappropriate to introduce the official preacher as a female; they have therefore adopted a slight alteration in the text, viz. *וְהָיָה קוֹהֵלֶת* instead of *וְהָיָה קוֹהֵלֶת*, which is simply the transference of *he* from the end of one word to the beginning of the next, thus adding the article, as in ch. xii. 8, and making the term accord with the Syriac and Arabic, and the Septuagint, *εἶπεν ὁ Ἐκκλησιαστής*. The writer here introduces his own designation in order to call special attention to what is coming. Counting one by one. The phrase is elliptical, and signifies, adding one thing to another, or weighing one thing after another, putting together various facts or marks. To find out the account; to arrive at the reckoning, the desired result.

Ver. 28.—**Which yet my soul seeketh, but I find not**; or, *which my soul hath still sought, but I have not found*. The conclusion at which he did arrive was something utterly different from what he had hoped to achieve. The soul and the ego are separately regarded (comp. ver. 25); the whole intellectual faculties were absorbed in the search, and the composite individual gives his consequent experience. **One man (Adam) among a thousand have I found**. He found only one man among a thousand that reached his standard of excellence—the ideal that he had formed for himself, who could be rightly called by the noble name of *man*. The phrase, "one of a thousand," occurs in Job ix. 3; xxxiii. 23; Ecclus. vi. 6 (*εἰς ἅνδρα χιλίων*, as in the Septuagint here). *Adam*, the generic term, is used here instead of *ish*, the individual, to emphasize the antithetical *ishah*, "woman," in the following clause, or to lead the thought to the original perfection of man's nature. So in Greek *ἀνθρωπος* is sometimes used for *ἀνὴρ*, though generally

the distinction between the two is sufficiently marked, as we find in Herodotus, vii. 210, "Ὅτι πολλοὶ μὲν ἄνθρωποι εἰεν, δαίμοι δὲ ἄνδρες. But a woman among all those have I not found; i.e. not one woman in a thousand who was what a woman ought to be. Says the Son of Sirach, "All wickedness is but little to the wickedness of a woman; let the portion of a sinner fall upon her" (Eccles. xxv. 19). So the Greek gnome—

Θάλασσα, καὶ πῦρ, καὶ γυνή, κακὰ τρία.

"Three evils are there—sea, fire, and woman."

Solomon had a thousand wives and concubines, and his experience might well have been that mentioned in this passage.

Ver. 29.—*Lo, this only (or, only see! this) have I found.* Universal corruption was that which met his wide investigations, but of one thing he was sure, which he proceeds to specify—he has learned to trace the degradation to its source, not in God's agency, but in man's perverse will. That God hath made man upright. Koheleth believes that man's original constitution was *yashar*, "straight," "right," "morally good," and possessed of ability to choose and follow what was just and right (Gen. i. 26, etc.). Thus in the Book of Wisdom (ii. 23) we read, "God created man to be immortal, and made him an image of his own nature (*ἰδιότητος*). Nevertheless, through envy of the devil, came death into the world, and they that are his portion tempt it." But they (*men*) have sought out many inventions (*chishshebonoth*); 2 Chron. xxvi. 15, where the term implies works of invention, and is translated "engines," i.e. devices, ways of going astray and deviating from original righteousness. Man has thus abused his free-will, and employed the inventive faculty with which he was endowed in excogitating evil (Gen. vi. 5). How this state of things came about, how

the originally good man became thus wicked, the writer does not tell. He knows from revelation that God made him upright; he knows from experience that he is now evil; and he leaves the matter there. Plumptre quotes, as illustrating our text, a passage from the 'Antigone' of Sophocles, vers. 332, 365, 366, which he renders—

"Many the things that strange and wondrous are,
None stranger and more wonderful than man."

And lo, with all this skill,
Wise and inventive still,
Beyond hope's dream,
He now to good inclines,
And now to ill."

We may add Æschylus, 'Choeph.' vers. 585, etc.—

Πολλὰ μὲν γὰρ τρέφει
δευὰ δειμάτων ἄχνη . . .
ἀλλ' ὑπέρολμον ἀν-
δρὸς φρόνημα τίς λέγει;

"Many fearful plagues
Earth nonishes . . .
But man's audacious spirit
Who can tell?"

Horace, 'Carm.' i. 3. 25—

"Audax omnia perpeti
Gens humana ruit per vetitum nefas."

"The race of man, bold all things to endure,
Hurries undaunted to forbidden crime."

Vulgate, *Et ipse se infinitis miscuerit questionibus*, "And he entangled himself in multitudinous questions." This refers to unhalloved curiosity and speculation; but, as we have seen, the passage is concerned with man's moral declension, declaring how his "devices" lead him away from "uprightness."

HOMILETICS.

Ver. 1.—*A good name better than precious ointment.* I. MORE DIFFICULT OF ACQUISITION. Money will buy the "good nard," but the cost of a "good name" is beyond rubies. This which cannot be gotten for gold, neither shall silver be weighed for the price thereof, can be secured only by laborious personal exercise in goodness, always smiled on by Heaven's favour and assisted by Heaven's grace. It is the flower, fruit, and fragrance of a soul long practised in well-living and good-doing. If, therefore, things are valuable in proportion to the cost of obtaining them, the above proverbial utterance bears the stamp of truth.

II. MORE HONOURABLE IN POSSESSION. It is: 1. *An article of greater value in itself.* Precious ointment is, after all, only a production of the earth; whereas a good name is a spiritual aroma proceeding from the soul. 2. *An index of truer wealth.* Precious ointment at the best is material riches; a good name proclaims one possessed of riches which are spiritual. 3. *A mark of higher dignity.* Costly unguent a sign of social

rank among the children of men; a good name attests that one has qualities of soul, of mind, heart, and disposition, proclaiming him a son of God and a peer of heaven.

III. MORE SATISFYING IN ENJOYMENT. Perfumed oil may yield a pleasant fragrance which gratifies the sense of smell and revives the body's vigour; the spiritual aroma of a good name not only diffuses happiness amongst those who come to hear of it, but imparts a sweet joy, holy and refreshing, to him who bears it.

IV. MORE DIFFUSIVE IN INFLUENCE. The odour of precious ointment extends to those in its immediate vicinity; the savour of a good name goes far and wide, often pervades the community in which the owner of it lives; sometimes, as in the instance of Mary of Bethany (Mark xiv. 9), spreads itself abroad through the whole world.

V. MORE ENDURING IN CONTINUANCE. The fragrance of the unguent ultimately ceases. Becoming feebler the longer it is exposed to the air and the wider it diffuses itself, it ultimately dies away. The savour of a good name never perishes (Ps. cxii. 6). It passes on from age to age, being handed down by affectionate tradition to succeeding, frequently to latest, generations. Witness the names of Noah, the preacher of righteousness; Abraham, the father of the faithful; Moses, the law-giver of Israel; David, the sweet singer of the Hebrew Church; John, the beloved disciple; Peter, the man of rock; Paul, the Apostle of the Gentiles; with names like those of Polycarp, Cyprian, Origen, Athanasius, Augustine, Chrysostom, Luther, Calvin, Knox, etc.

VI. MORE BLESSED IN ITS ISSUE. Precious ointment can only secure for one entrance into earthly circles of rank and fashion; a good name will procure for him who bears it admission into the society of Heaven's peerage.

LESSONS. 1. Seek this good name. 2. Cherish it above all earthly distinctions. 3. Guard it from getting tarnished. 4. Walk worthy of it.

Vers. 1.—*The day of death and the day of birth.* I. The latter begins a life at the longest brief (Ps. xc. 10); the former a life which shall never end (Luke xx. 36).

II. The latter ushers into a field of toil (Ps. civ. 23); the former into a home of rest (Rev. xiv. 13).

III. The latter admits into a scene of suffering (Job v. 7; xiv. 1); the former into a realm of felicity (Rev. vii. 16).

IV. The latter introduces a life of sin (Gen. viii. 21; Job xiv. 4; Ps. li. 5; lviii. 3; Rom. v. 12); the former an existence of holiness (Jude 24; Rev. xxi. 27).

V. The latter opens a state of condemnation (Rom. v. 18); the former a state of glory (2 Cor. iv. 17).

LESSONS. 1. The secret of living well—keeping an eye on the day of one's death (Deut. xxxii. 29; Ps. xc. 12). 2. The secret of dying happily—living in the fear of God (Acts xiii. 36; Phil. i. 21).

Vers. 2—6.—*The house of mourning and the house of feasting.* I. THE HOUSE OF MOURNING A DIVINE INSTITUTION; THE HOUSE OF FEASTING AN ERECTION OF MAN. 1. *The house of mourning a Divine institution.* Though not true that "man was made to mourn" (Burns) in the sense that the Creator originally intended human experience on the earth to be one prolonged wail of sorrow, it is nevertheless certain that days of mourning, equally with days of death—and, indeed, just because of these—come to all by Heaven's decree. As no one of woman born can elude bereavement in some shape or form, so must every one in turn make acquaintance with the house of mourning. Hence mourning for departed relatives (Gen. xxiii. 2; xxvii. 41; 1. 4; Numb. xx. 29; Deut. xxxiv. 8; 2 Sam. xi. 27) has not only been a universal custom among mankind, but has commended itself to men's judgments as in perfect accordance with the divinely implanted instincts of human nature. To mourn for the dead in becoming manner is something more than to array one's self in "customary suits of solemn black," to affect the "windy suspiration of forced breath," with "the fruitful river in the eye," or to put on "the dejected 'haviour of the visage, together with all forms, modes, shapes of grief," which are at best only the outward "trappings and suits of woe" (Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, act i. sc. 2); it is more even than to utter selfish lamentations over one's own loss in being deprived of the society of the departed, sighing like the psalmist, "Lover and friend hast thou put far from me, and mine acquaintance into darkness" (Ps. lxxxviii. 18); it is to bewail their abstraction from the light of heaven and the

love of friends, saying, "Alas, my brother!" (1 Kings xiii. 30; the grief of Constance for her son: cf. 'King John,' act iii. sc. 4), though sorrow on this account is greatly tempered by the consolations of the gospel in respect of Christians (2 Thess. iv. 13); it is to express the heart's affection for those who have been removed from its embrace, like Rachel weeping for her children, and refusing to be comforted because they were not (Matt. ii. 18); it is even to pay a tribute of gratitude to God for the temporary loan of the precious gift he has withdrawn, as Job did when he lamented his dead sons and daughters (i. 21)—to record appreciation of its worth, and seek, if not its immediate return, its safe keeping till a future day, when they who have been severed here shall be reunited in immortal love. Hence it is easy to perceive how the house of mourning may be fitly spoken of as a house of Divine appointment. 2. *The house of feasting a purely human institution.* Not that feasting and dancing, considered in themselves, are sinful, or that there are not times and seasons when both may be indulged in without sin. Many such occasions may be found in actual life, as e.g. in connection with birthdays (Gen. xl. 20), marriages (Gen. xxix. 22; John ii. 1), and funerals (Deut. xxvi. 14; Job xlii. 11; Jer. xvi. 7; Ezek. xxiv. 17; Hos. ix. 4), with family rejoicings of other sorts and for other reasons. But the "house of feasting," contrasted with the abode of sorrow, is the tent of carousal, in which wine and wassail, song and dance, mirth and revelry, prevail without moderation, and with no other end in view than the gratification of sinful appetite. Such-like gatherings, having no sanction from Heaven, may be spoken of as instituted by man rather than as appointed by God.

II. THE HOUSE OF MOURNING FREQUENTED BY THE WISE; THE HOUSE OF FEASTING ATTENDED BY FOOLS. 1. *The heart of the wise in the house of mourning.* The wise are the good, serious, devout, religious, as distinguished from the wicked, frivolous, profane, and irreligious. The hearts of the wise are in the house of mourning, "even when their bodies are absent;" "they are constantly or very frequently meditating upon sad and serious things" (Poole); "they are much conversant with mournful subjects" (Henry); and as often as occasion offers and duty calls, they repair to the scene of sorrow and chamber of bereavement to sympathize with and comfort its inmates, as Job's friends did with him (Job ii. 11), and Mary's with her (John xi. 19), recognizing it to be their duty to "weep with them that weep," as well as to "rejoice with them that do rejoice" (Rom. xii. 15); and even on their own accounts to learn the wisdom which such a scene is fitted to impart. 2. *The heart of fools in the house of mirth.* To this they are attracted on the principle that "like draws to like"—the same principle that constrains the wise to repair to the house of mourning, and by the gratification there found for their folly, in the laughter which there provokes their mirth, and the revelry which there slakes their longing for self-indulgence.

III. THE HOUSE OF MOURNING A SCHOOL OF WISDOM; THE HOUSE OF FEASTING A SCHOOL OF FOLLY. 1. *The lessons taught by the house of mourning.* (1) The certainty of death for the wise man himself and for all others. What he sees in the chamber of bereavement is "the end of all men," the end to which all the bravery and glory of all men must eventually come (2 Sam. xiv. 14; Ps. lxxxix. 48; Isa. xl. 7; Heb. ix. 27), the final scene also in his own swiftly fleeting life (Ps. xxxix. 4); and so while he lives he lays it to heart, considers his end, numbers his days, and applies his soul unto wisdom (Deut. xxxii. 29; Ps. xc. 12). (2) The vanity of all earthly things, and especially of pleasure and frivolity. The "song of fools," whether the bacchanalian carol, the obscene ballad, the comic ditty, or the amorous sonnet, grates with harshness and pain upon his ear, while the laughter it evokes is like the crackling of thorns under a pot, or of nettles under kettles, noisy, short-lived, evanescent, and profitless, leaving nothing behind but ashes (Isa. xlv. 20), a bad taste in the mouth, a pain in the ear, a taint upon the conscience, a wound in the heart. (3) The duty and sweetness of sympathy—for him and sweetness for the bereaved. Weeping with them that weep (Rom. xii. 15), he learns how to bear another's burdens (Gal. vi. 2), appreciates the inward satisfaction which flows from the exercise of sympathy (Prov. xi. 17), sees the sustaining strength it yields to the weak and disconsolate (Prov. xvii. 17), and thus has his own soul confirmed and enlarged in goodness. "Sorrow," says Delitzsch, "penetrates the heart, draws the thought upward, purifies, transforms;" and thus, as the Preacher observes, "by the sorrow of the countenance the heart is made better." (4) The value of serious talk. The discourse that prevails in the

house of mourning is fitted to improve the serious listener. Should it sometimes lay rebukes upon one's spirit, these are felt to be better from a moral and spiritual point of view than the low and grovelling, frequently prurient and obscene, songs that in the Preacher's day were heard, as in our day they are not unknown, in a pothouse.

2. *The proficiency acquired in the house of feasting.* By no means in wisdom, either human or Divine. One will hardly assert that a person will become shrewder in business or brighter in intelligence by indulging in chambering and wantonness; it is certain he will not grow either holier or more spiritually minded. Whatever apologies may be offered for frequenting carousals—innocent feasting requires none—this cannot be urged, that it tends to make one purer in heart or devouter in spirit, incites one to holy living, or prepares one for happy dying. Rather, the instruction received in such haunts of dissipation is for the most part instruction in vice, or at the best in frivolity—a poor accomplishment for a man with a soul.

Vers. 7—10.—*Counsels for evil times.* I. **THE WRONG WAY OF BEHAVIOUR UNDER OPPRESSION.** 1. *Allowing it to unsettle one's judgment.* "Surely oppression," or extortion, "maketh a wise man mad," or foolish; *i.e.* driveth him to foolish actions through indignation and vexation, through the misery he endures, the hardship he suffers, the sense of injustice he feels, the rising doubts of which he is conscious. A soul thus driven to the wall and set at bay through the woes inflicted by imperious and pitiless tyranny, is prone to be unsettled in its judgments, fierce and even reckless in its actions. Of course, no amount of oppression or extortion should have this effect on any; but it sometimes has. 2. *Attempting to remove it by bribery.* "And a gift destroyeth the understanding." Equally of him that gives and him that receives a bribe is the saying true, that it perverts the judgment, disturbs the soul's perceptions of right and wrong, and leaves a blot upon the conscience. To seek the removal of oppression by currying favour with the oppressor through presentation of gifts, is to seek a right thing in a wrong way, and is to that extent to be condemned. 3. *Indulging in anger on account of it.* "Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry." Whether this anger be directed against the oppressor or against the oppression, or against God's providence, who has suffered both to come together and co-operate against the wise man, to give way to it is to part with one's wisdom, since "anger resteth in the bosom of fools," if it is not also (in the last case it is) to sin against God. It is always difficult to be angry and sin not (Ps. iv. 4, margin; Eph. iv. 26); hence Christians are exhorted not to be soon angry (Titus i. 7), indeed, to put off (Col. iii. 8) and put away (Eph. iv. 31) anger, as one of the works of the flesh (Gal. v. 20). 4. *Giving way to despair because of it.* Saying in one's heart that "the former days were better than these," and that all things are going to the bad. The Preacher pretty plainly hints that such a sentiment is an error, and yet it is one widely entertained by the ignorant and prone to be adopted by the unfortunate.

II. **THE RIGHT WAY OF BEHAVING UNDER OPPRESSION.** 1. *Permitting the evil to avenge itself on its perpetrator.* This it will do, if the propositions be correct that oppression practised even by a wise man will make him mad, and that a bribe accepted by a good man will corrupt his heart and destroy his understanding. "The oppressive exercise of power is so demoralizing that even the wise man, skilled in statecraft, loses his wisdom. There comes upon him, as the history of crime so often shows, something like a mania of tyrannous cruelty. And the same effect follows on the practice of corruption" (Plumptre). 2. *Reflecting that the evil will not continue for ever.* It will run its course, have its day, and come to an end as other evil things have done before it; and "better will its end be than its beginning." In the course of history this has often been observed, that seasons of oppression and periods of persecution have not been suffered to continue for ever, and have often been terminated (by some sudden turn in providence, by the death of the oppressor, or by a change of purpose in the persecutor) sooner than the victims expected. 3. *Exercising patience while the evil day continues.* "Better is the patient in spirit than the proud in spirit," better in respect of moral character and religious profiting. Philosophy and religion both teach that the way to rise superior to injustice and oppression, to extract the largest amount of profiting from it, and to bring it most speedily to an end, is to meekly endure it. Patience disarms the oppressor of his strongest weapon, and imparts to his victim double advantage over

his foe. Without patience tribulation cannot work out the soul's good (Rom. v. 3; Jas. i. 4). 4. *Cherishing a hopeful spirit in the darkest times.* Not despairing of the future either for one's self or for the world, but believing that all things work together for good to them that love God, and that through evil times as well as good times the world is slowly but surely moving on towards a better day.

LESSONS. 1. Never oppress. 2. Cultivate meekness. 3. Be hopeful.

Ver. 8.—*The end better than the beginning.* I. THE IMPORT OF THE PROVERB STATED. Not always true that the end of a thing is better than the beginning. Whether it is so depends largely on what the thing is, upon the character of its beginning and the nature of its end. 1. *Cases in which the maxim will not apply.* (1) Evil projects which reach their consummation; as e.g. the temptation of Eve by Satan (Gen. iii. 1, etc.), the wrath of Cain against Abel (Gen. iv. 8), the design of David against Uriah and Bathsheba (2 Sam. xi. 2—24), the murder of Naboth by Jezebel (1 Kings xxi. 14), the seduction of a youth by the strange woman (Prov. iv. 3, 4). (2) Undertakings which, though good, nevertheless fail to succeed; as e.g. the journey of Jacob and his sons to Egypt, which commenced in gladness and ended in bondage and oppression (Gen. xlv. 5, 6; Exod. i. 13); the voyage of the corn-ship of Alexandria which carried Paul, and which, though it left the Fair Havens with a soft south wind, was not long after caught by a tempestuous Euroclydon and wrecked on the island of Malta (Acts xxvii. 13, 14). (3) Works and lives which appear promising at the outset, but terminate in disappointment and disaster; as e.g. the kingship of Saul (1 Sam. x. 24; xxxi. 6), the apostleship of Judas (Matt. x. 4; xxvi. 14—16), the adventure of the prodigal (Luke xv. 11—16), the ministry of Demas (2 Tim. iv. 10). 2. *Cases in which the maxim will apply.* (1) Evil projects when they are defeated; as e.g. that of Satan to ruin man, which was counter-worked by Christ's mission to effect man's salvation (Heb. ii. 14, 15); or that of the same adversary to overthrow Job's faith and allegiance, which was overcome by Job's constancy and trust (Job xlii. 12); that of Haman to exterminate the Jews, which the skilfulness of Mordecai and Esther (Esth. viii. 7, 8) thwarted; and that of the Jews to assassinate Paul, which the tact of his sister's son (Acts xxiii. 16—31) enabled him to escape; that of the Spanish Armada to overthrow the Protestantism of England, and that of St. Bartholomew's Day to crush the Huguenots in France. (2) Good undertakings when successfully completed; as e.g. the building of Noah's ark to save himself and family from the Flood (Gen. vi. 22); and of Solomon's temple for the worship of Jehovah (1 Kings vi. 37, 38); the emancipation of Israel from Egypt under the leadership of Moses (Exod. xii. 51; xiv. 31); and afterwards from Babylon under that of Zerubbabel (Ezra i. 11); the work of human redemption which Christ completed on the cross (John xix. 30), and the life of a good man who dies in the faith (2 Tim. iv. 6—8).

II. THE TRUTH OF THE PROVERB JUSTIFIED. Of things to which the maxim will apply. 1. *The beginnings are attended with anxieties and fears as to ultimate success; while from all such the endings are delivered.* As no man can foretell what a day may bring forth, or provide against all possible contingencies, no one can calculate with absolute certainty that any scheme of his contriving will attain to success. Man proposes, but God disposes. When, however, success has been attained there is manifestly no further ground or room for apprehension. 2. *The beginnings have periods of labour before them; while the endings have all such periods behind them.* Not that labour is a bad thing, but that labour accomplished is better to contemplate than labour not yet attempted. In the former case failure is impossible; in the latter case it is still possible. In the latter, energy, thought, care, have still to be expended; in the former these are no more demanded. Instead of toil, there is repose; instead of peril, safety; instead of anxiety, peace. 3. *The beginnings are times of preparation, of effort, and of laying out, while the endings are seasons of fulfilment, of reward, and of gathering in.* Examples will be found in the reaping of a harvest in autumn as contrasted with its sowing in spring, the completion of a house as distinguished from its foundation-laying, the collection of profits from a fortunate speculation or investment in business, the gaining of distinction in learning after a long course of diligent study, the attainment of the "exceeding, even an eternal, weight of glory" at the close of a life of faith.

LESSONS. 1. A stimulus to diligence. 2. An argument for patience. 3. A caution against rashness.

Ver. 10.—“*The good old times*”—a popular delusion. I. THE DELUSION STATED. “That the former days were better than these.” The proposition may be understood as applying: 1. *To individual experience*, in which case it will signify that the former days of the speaker’s life were better than those in which he then was. Or: 2. *To mundane history*, in which case the sense will be that the earlier periods of the world’s history were better than the later, or that the times which preceded the speaker’s day were better than those in which he was living.

II. THE DELUSION EXEMPLIFIED. 1. *From sacred history*. (1) As to individual experience. Job was neither the first nor the last who cried, “Oh that I were as in months past!” (Job xxix. 2). Probably Jacob was in a similar mood of mind when he heard of Simeon’s detention in Egypt, and of Judah’s proposal to take Benjamin (Gen. xlii. 36; xliiii. 14). The old men who wept at the foundation of the second temple certainly believed that the days when as yet the first temple stood were incomparably more resplendent than those in which they then lived (Ezra iii. 12). (2) As to world-epochs. To many of the Sethites, no doubt, in the antediluvian era, “the days of old,” when man lived in innocence in Eden, were regarded as better than those in which their lot had fallen when all flesh had corrupted its way (Gen. vi. 12). To not a few in the days of the judges and of the kings it seemed as if “the years of ancient times,” and “of the right hand of the Most High,” when he brought forth the bondmen of Pharaoh from Egypt, were the glorious days of Israel as a nation (Ps. lxxvii. 5, 10). To the exiles who had returned from Babylon the golden age of their country was behind them in the days of David and Solomon, not before them in the era of Persian domination. 2. *From profane history*. “Illustrations crowd upon one’s memory. Greeks looking back to the age of those who fought at Marathon; Romans under the empire recalling the vanished greatness of the republic; Frenchmen mourning over the *ancien régime*; or Englishmen over the good old days of the Tudors, are all examples of this unwisdom” (Plumptre). Old men regretting the vanished days of their boyhood, or once rich but now poor men lamenting the disappearance of wealth which was theirs, or fallen great men sighing for the times when they were called “My lord!” are individual instances of this same delusion.

III. THE DELUSION EXPLAINED. Two things account for this widespread delusion as to the relative values of the past and present. 1. *An instinctive idealization of the past*. (1) The good things of the past, which one has either never known at all or counted only moderately good when he did know them, he now esteems as supremely excellent, on the principle that “distance lends enchantment to the view.” (2) The bad things of the past, which he complained of when he endured them, he has now through lapse of time largely forgotten; while if the bad things of the past were such as he never himself experienced but has only heard or read of, these are not likely to press him down so heavily as the lesser present evils under which he groans. 2. *An equally instinctive depreciation of the present*. (1) Its good things are never so sweet as some other good things which we have not, or which other people had. As the possession of pleasure is seldom so intoxicating as its pursuit, so is that which one has never so valuable as that which one once had or may yet have. (2) Its evil things being present always appear worse, i.e. heavier, than they really are. They are felt more acutely and oppress more severely than either the ills of other people one has never felt, or one’s own ills in the past which have been forgotten.

IV. THE DELUSION DISPROVED. The false judgment rests upon two foundations. 1. *A mistaken standard*. If “better” only means in the case of the individual “more free from anxiety, pain, or difficulty,” or in the case of communities or nations “more free from wars, troubles, revolutions, or social disturbances, the proposition complained of may be easily established; but if “better” signify more advantageous in the highest sense, i.e. more helpful to and beneficial for moral and spiritual good it will frequently be found that the proposition is false, and that for individuals, for instance, times of present trouble and seasons of present affliction may be better than past times of quiet and seasons of prosperity, and for communities and nations periods of social upheaval and foreign war better than antecedent days of stagnation

and civil death. 2. *An incomplete comparison.* It is commonly forgotten that each age has a dark as well as bright side, and that in estimating the worth of two different periods in the experience of an individual or the history of a nation, it will not do to contrast the dark side of the present with the bright side of the past, but the dark and bright sides of both must be brought into view.

LESSONS. 1. The duty of man in evil times, submission rather than complaining. 2. The wisdom of trying to make the best of the present instead of dreaming about the past. 3. The certainty that the most careful calculations concerning the relative values of past and present are tainted with error.

Vers. 11, 12.—*Wisdom and wealth.* I. THE GREAT POWER OF WEALTH. 1. *What it cannot do.* (1) Purchase salvation for the soul (Ps. xlix. 6, 7). (2) Impart happiness to the mind (Luke xii. 15). (3) Secure health for the body (2 Kings v. 1; Luke xvi. 22). 2. *What it can do.* (1) Defend the body against want and disease, at least partially. (2) Protect the mind against ignorance and error, also again to a limited extent. (3) Shield the heart, once more in a measure, from such anxieties as spring from material causes.

II. THE GREATER POWER OF WISDOM. 1. *It can do things that wealth can.* Nay, without it wealth can effect little. (1) It can often do much without wealth to avert want and disease from the body. (2) It can effectually dispel from the mind the clouds of ignorance and error. (3) It can help to keep anxiety altogether from the heart, to sustain the heart in bearing it when it does come, and to direct the heart how most speedily and effectually to get rid of it. 2. *It can do things that wealth cannot.* It—in its highest form, the fear of the Lord (ch. xii. 13; Ps. cxi. 10; Job xxviii. 28), the wisdom of God (1 Cor. ii. 7), the wisdom which is from above (Jas. iii. 17), the wisdom which consists in believing on Christ, loving God, living in the Spirit, walking in love, and following holiness—can “preserve the life of him that hath it:” (1) the soul’s life, by imparting to it the gift of God, which is eternal life; (2) the mind’s life, by flooding it with the light of truth; and (3) the body’s life, by communicating to it here on earth length of days (the first rule of health being to fear God and keep his commandments), and by restoring it at the resurrection to a condition of immortality.

LESSONS. 1. The superiority of wisdom. 2. The duty of preferring it to wealth.

Vers. 13, 14.—*Crooked things and straight.* I. COMPOSE THE TEXTURE OF HUMAN LIFE. 1. *Crooked things.* Such experiences, events, and dispensations as run counter or lie cross to the inclinations, as *e.g.* afflictions, disappointments, and trials of all sorts. Few lives, if any, are exempt from crosses; few estates are so good as to have no drawbacks. Examples: Abraham (Gen. xv. 2, 3), Naaman (2 Kings v. 1), Haman (Esth. v. 13), Paul (2 Cor. xii. 7). 2. *Straight things.* Such experiences as harmonize with the soul’s wishes, as *e.g.* seasons of prosperity, dispensations of good, and enjoyments of every kind; and, as nobody’s lot on earth is entirely straight, so on the other hand no one’s lot is wholly crooked—“there are always some straight and even parts in it.” “Indeed, when men’s passions, having got up, have cast a mist over their minds, they are ready to say all is wrong with them and nothing right; yet is that never true in this world, since (always) *it is of the Lord’s mercies that we are not consumed* (Lam. iii. 22)” (Boston).

II. PROCEED FROM THE HAND OF GOD. Neither come by accident or from second causes, but from him “of whom, to whom, and through whom are all things” (Rom. xi. 36; 2 Cor. v. 18; Heb. ii. 10). 1. *True of straight things.* “Every good gift and every perfect is from above” (Jas. i. 17). Saint and sinner alike depend on the providential bounty of God (Ps. cxxxvi. 25), who appointeth to all men the bounds of their habitation (Acts xvii. 26) and measureth out their lots (Isa. xxxiv. 17; Jer. xiii. 25). So elementary is this truth that it needs no demonstration; yet is it so familiar as to be frequently forgotten. 2. *No less correct of crooked things.* These also are from God (2 Kings vi. 33; Amos iii. 6; Micah i. 12). It is he who lays affliction on the loins of men (Ps. lxxvi. 11), distributes sorrows in his anger (Job xxi. 17), shows great and sore troubles (Ps. lxxi. 20), lifts up and casts down (Ps. cii. 10), wounds and heals, kills and makes alive (Deut. xxxii. 39). The Preacher

recognizes God's hand in introducing crooked things into men's lots; in this all should follow his example.

III. DEMAND DIVERSE TREATMENT FROM THE INDIVIDUAL. 1. *Straight things call for cheerfulness.* "In the day of prosperity be joyful," "be in good spirits," be thankfully happy and happily thankful. (1) Gratitude, an element in that treatment God's goodness calls for (Ps. ciii. 1, 2). Every creature of God is good if it be received with thanksgiving (1 Tim. iv. 4). (2) Use, another ingredient in a proper return for God's gifts. These are not to be despised and shunned, but valued and enjoyed. Asceticism, or voluntary abstinence from meats and drinks, as if these were sinful, harmonizes not with the spirit of either the Old (ch. ix. 7) or the New Testament (Col. ii. 20—23) religion. If permissible under the latter as a means of spiritual discipline (1 Cor. ix. 27), or as an expedient for preventing sin in others (Rom. xiv. 21), it should not be forgotten that God "giveth us all things richly to enjoy" (1 Tim. vi. 17). 2. *Crooked things demand consideration.* "In the day of adversity consider:" (1) Whence adversity comes, viz. from God (Lam. iii. 32; Job ii. 10). Hence should it be accepted with submission (1 Sam. iii. 18; Job ii. 10; Ps. xxxix. 9). (2) How adversity comes. Not as a strange thing, i.e. allotted in an exceptional way to the individual (1 Pet. iv. 12), but rather as an experience common among men (1 Cor. x. 13; 1 Pet. v. 9). Not as an isolated thing, unmingled with good or untempered with mercy (Ps. ci. 1). Not as a constant thing, as if life were a perpetual calamity (Job xxii. 18). Not as an arbitrary thing, as if the sovereign Disposer of events acted without reason in sending troubles upon men (Lam. iii. 33; Heb. xii. 10). Certainly not as a malignant thing, as if the Almighty took pleasure in the sufferings and miseries of his creatures (Lam. iii. 33; Heb. xii. 10). (3) Why adversity comes; because of man's sinfulness, though not always in each instance connected with some particular offence. (4) Wherefore adversity comes; to fulfil the Divine purpose concerning man, which is not one, but manifold (Job xxxiii. 29).

IV. COMBINE TO SERVE A LOFTY PURPOSE. "God hath even made the one side by side with the other, to the end that man should not find out anything that shall be after him." The Almighty's design variously explained. 1. *Unlikely interpretations.* (1) That God, willing man to be rid of all things at death instead of punishing him hereafter, puts evil into his existence here, and allows it to alternate with good (Hitzig). This does not harmonize with the Preacher's doctrine of a future judgment (ch. ix. 9; xii. 14), and is ruled out of court by the general scope of the New Testament. (2) That man might find nothing which he, dying, might take with him into the unseen world (Ewald). But this end is secured by death (ch. v. 15), and if more were needed would have been more effectually attained by making man's lot on earth all adversity and no prosperity, rather than a commingling of the two; while if the proposed interpretation explains the presence of evil alongside of good, it leaves unaccounted for the existence of good alongside of evil in man's lot. (3) That man might pass through the whole school of life, so that on departing from this scene nothing might remain outstanding (in arrears) which he had not experienced (Delitzsch). This seems equivalent to saying that God commingles joy and sorrow in man's experience that man might have a taste of both—which sounds like a truism—or that his discipline might be complete by being subjected to both, so that nothing more should be possible to or required by him in a future state to render him responsible—which, though true, indicates a clearness and fullness of theological conception manifestly beyond the Preacher. (4) That no one coming after God by way of review should be able to find anything of blame to cast on his procedure (Mercator, Poole, Fausset); which, though undeniable, is not warranted by a just translation of the Hebrew. 2. *Likely interpretations.* (1) That the alternation of prosperous and adverse dispensations was designed to prevent man from finding out the course of future events; in other words, that man should never be able certainly to predict his own future, or even what should be on the morrow (Zöckler, Hengstenberg), and therefore should be disposed to trust in God and calmly wait the development of events; with which teaching may be compared Christ's about taking no thought for the morrow (Matt. vi. 34), and that of Horace ('Odes,' iii. 29. 29—38).

"God in his wisdom hides from sight,
Veiled in impenetrable night,
The future chance and change;

And smiles when mortals' anxious fears,
Forecasting ills of coming years,
Beyond their limit range."

(Plumptre, *in loco*.)

The continuity of human experience is not so unbroken that mortal sagacity, at its highest, can forecast the incidents of even the nearest day. (2) That no man should be able to tell precisely what might come to pass on earth after he had left it (Plumptre), a thought already expressed (ch. vi. 12), of which the practical outcome is the same as that just stated, viz. that as the Divine Being desired to keep the times and seasons in his own hand, he mingled crooked things and straight in man's experience, that man should not be able to guess with certainty at what was coming, and might accordingly be impelled to lead a life of sobriety and watchfulness (Prov. iv. 23, 25, 26; Matt. xxv. 13; Luke xii. 15, 35—40). (3) That man might not be able by all his cogitations on the present scene to find out the lot either of himself or of mankind generally in a future state (Wright); and unquestionably this is true that without the gospel the whole subject of a future state for man would be, if not an insoluble enigma, at least a darkly veiled mystery. A consideration of man's experiences on earth would so little guide to accurate knowledge of what his experiences beyond the grave should be, that to thoughtful minds they might rather seem to have been constructed for the very purpose of baffling curiosity on that alluring theme.

Learn: 1. That crooked things may sometimes be better than straight. 2. That men should not always ask the crooked things in their lot to be straightened. 3. That straight things alone might often prove hurtful.

Vers. 15—18.—*Nothing in excess; or, a caution against extremes.* I. IN INTERPRETING THE WAYS OF PROVIDENCE. 1. *As to the perishing of a just man in his righteousness.* Because, though it may sometimes happen that a just or good man loses his life in his righteousness, it does not follow (1) that all just or good men must necessarily lose their lives—which, considering the natural infirmity of the human heart, would certainly prove a check to the progress of righteousness. Or (2) that though good men perish in their righteousness, they also perish *because* of their righteousness—which would be asserting that God loved iniquity and hated righteousness, the exact reverse of the truth (Deut. xxxii. 4; Job xxxiv. 10; Ps. xi. 7). Or (3) that therefore being just is not a wise, or doing righteousness a good, thing—which would be constituting temporal success or material prosperity the standard of moral right, and adversity the test of moral wrong. Or (4) that just men should not persevere in their righteousness, even though they should perish temporally, since he that loseth his life for righteousness' sake shall find it unto life eternal (Matt. xvi. 25). Or (5) that the just man may not sometimes be to blame for his own perishing by proceeding to excess in the performance of things in themselves righteous (see below). 2. *As to the prolonging of a wicked man's life in (or in spite of) his evil doing.* From this it must not be inferred either (1) that under the moral government of God wickedness has a greater tendency to prolong life than virtue, because the opposite of this is the case (Ps. xxxiv. 12—14; lv. 23). Or (2) that wickedness is not therefore an evil because it occasionally, or even frequently, appears to be rewarded with long life; because no amount or degree of prosperity can ever render sin the same as holiness, or make it less the abominable thing which God hates. Or (3) that wicked men have the best of life because they do not perish prematurely, but rather often live long and become old and mighty in power (Job xxi. 7); because through their wickedness they are separated even here from him who is the Source of all true felicity (Isa. lix. 2). Or (4) that wicked men will not one day be recompensed for their wickedness, although God may permit them through a long life to sin with impunity; because it is written that "destruction shall be to the workers of iniquity" (Prov. x. 29). In either of these directions it is possible for one, by not observing the limits of just judgment, to go astray in interpreting the ways of God.

II. IN REGULATING THE CONDUCT OF LIFE. 1. *In respect of righteousness.* "Be not righteous overmuch; neither make thyself overwise" (ver. 16). (1) The Preacher cannot be supposed to teach that one may be too holy or too ardent in pursuit of

righteousness. That seems inadmissible in the case of one whose standpoint was that of the Old Testament—that religion signified the worship of a holy God (Lev. xix. 2), and righteousness a keeping of that holy God's commandments. Hence if this righteousness could always receive from man a pure expression, it would be simply inconceivable that it should ever be too much in the estimation of Heaven—though it might be too much for the safety of the individual performing or expressing it, and through exciting the world's hostility might lead to his destruction. But man's expression of righteousness is never absolutely perfect, but always tainted with defect, and often one-sided, if not insincere and formal. Hence (2) the Preacher may have meant it was possible to push to excess the doing of purely external righteousness simply as an *opus operatum*, and, in doing so under the impression that such was the way to happiness and salvation, to exercise wisdom beyond measure; because no amount of such righteousness and wisdom could (in his estimation) conduct a soul to peace and felicity; but rather the more a soul pushed these to excess, the more inwardly torpid, lifeless, benumbed, and disordered would it become, till eventually it should land the soul in spiritual, if not the body also in temporal, ruin. 2. *In respect of wickedness.* "Be not overmuch wicked, neither be thou foolish" (ver. 17). Here, again, it cannot be supposed the Preacher teaches the permissibility of a moderate indulgence in sin, but merely that if excessive righteousness is no sign of superior wisdom or perfect guarantee of attaining to felicity, but rather an evidence of mistaken judgment and a precursor of inward moral and spiritual deterioration, much more is excessive wickedness a proof of absolute and unredeemed folly, and a sure as well as short road to ruin (1 Tim. vi. 9; 2 Pet. ii. 12).

LESSONS. 1. Fear God instead of murmuring at his dark providences. 2. Serve God with intelligent reason and prudence instead of rushing into extravagances either on one side or on another. 3. Perish in righteousness rather than prosper in wickedness.

Vers. 19—22.—*The dangers and defences of a city.* I. A CITY'S DANGERS. 1. *Either external or internal.* Either attacking it from without or assailing it from within. 2. *Either personal or impersonal.* Arising from individuals, as e.g. from embattled hosts marching against the city, or from designing traitors proving unfaithful to the city; or proceeding from material causes, as e.g. from such physical conditions and surroundings as endanger the city's safety or the health of its inhabitants. 3. *Either temporal or spiritual.* Such as threaten its prosperity in trade and commerce, or such as menace its civil order, social well-being, and political stability. 4. *Either few or many.* Either one or two of the above-named perils happening at one time, or all of them together confronting the city.

II. A CITY'S DEFENCES. 1. *The prowess of its soldiers.* The ten mighty men or rulers may be regarded as chiefs or generals (*sallith* being probably equivalent to the Assyrian *sâlat*, which signifies a stadtholder or commander; Schrader, 'Die Keilinschriften und das Alte Testament,' p. 588), or viewed as civil governors like the Roman *decemvirs* (see Adam's 'Roman Antiquities,' p. 180), or perhaps taken simply as persons of wealth and influence, like the ten men of leisure whom the Mishna ('Megillah,' i. 3) declares to have been necessary to constitute a great city with a synagogue. Either way, they may represent the first or outer line of defence to which a city usually resorts in times of danger, viz. that of physical force, expressed for the most part in armies and garrisons. The Preacher says not that such wall of defence is worthless, but merely that there are defences better and more efficient than it. And though battalions and bullets, regiments and fleets, constitute not the highest instruments of safety to which a city or a nation can trust, yet they have their uses in averting, as well as their dangers in inviting, war (Luke xi. 21). 2. *The wisdom of its rulers.* These the wise men are now supposed to be; and the meaning is that a city's safety depends more upon the mental sagacity of those who guide its affairs than upon the extent and depth of its material resources; that "wise statesmen," for instance, "may do more" for it "than able generals" (Plumptre), and skilful inventors than herculean labourers (cf. ch. ix. 16, 18); and if more upon the mental sagacity of its governors, much more upon their moral earnestness. The wisdom to which the Preacher alludes is unquestionably that which fears God, keeps his commandments,

and gives life to all that have it. Hence even more indispensable for a city's safety is it that her dignitaries should be good than that they should be great. 3. *The piety of its people.* This a legitimate deduction from the statement that "*there is not a just man upon the earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not*" (ver. 20). In introducing this sentiment, suggested probably by the utterance of Solomon (2 Kings viii. 46), the Preacher may have wished to call up the thought that once upon a time ten righteous men, could they only have been found (which they were not), would have saved a city (Gen. xviii. 32), and to point to the fact that no such expectation as that of saving a city by means of its righteous men need be cherished now as a reason for resorting to the next best defence—that of moral wisdom instead of brute force. Yet the truth remains that righteousness, holiness, piety, could it only be attained, would be a far more enduring and impregnable wall of protection to a people than either mighty armies or wise statesmen.

LESSONS. 1. Righteousness or wisdom the highest civil good. 2. The permanence of a state determined by the number of its good men. 3. The power of moral goodness in both individuals and empires. 4. The universal corruption of mankind.

Vers. 23—29.—*A great quest, and its sorrowful result.* I. THE GREAT QUEST. 1. *The person of the seeker.* The Preacher (see on ch. i. 1). The frequency with which he draws attention to himself shows that he regarded himself as one possessed of ample and perhaps well-known qualifications for the search upon which he had engaged. 2. *The object of his search.* To be wise—to know and to search out and to seek wisdom and the reason of things; and in particular to know the wickedness of folly, and that foolishness is madness. In other words, he desired to reach that wisdom in its fulness which would enable him to solve the problem of the universe. 3. *The spirit in which he entered on his quest.* (1) Calm resolution. He said to himself, "I will be wise." (2) Genuine humility. He understood that wisdom in its ideal vastness and elevation was beyond his reach. (3) Earnest application. He applied his heart, or turned himself and his heart, to the business he had undertaken. (4) Patient perseverance. His soul kept on seeking, laying one thing to another to find out the account. These qualities should distinguish all seekers after wisdom.

II. THE SORROWFUL FINDING. 1. *Concerning the strange woman.* Not "heathenish folly" (Hengstenberg), but the flesh-and-blood harlot of Proverbs (ii. 16—19; v. 3—13). With respect to her the Preacher calls attention—speaking, no doubt, from personal experience, and recording the results of his own observation—to: (1) Her seductive arts. "Her heart is snares and nets," luring with her false beauty, bewitching voice, and voluptuous person, numerous unthinking and inexperienced persons, chiefly young men devoid of understanding (Prov. vii. 7), into her embrace. (2) Her deceptive gifts. While promising her lovers liberty, she only leads them into slavery—"Her hands are as bands;" and while flattering them with promises of hidden sweets, what she gives them is an experience "more bitter than death," i.e. an inward wretchedness more intolerable to the soul than even darkness and the grave. "Her house is the way to hell, going down to the chambers of death" (Prov. vii. 27). (3) Her powerless charms—in some cases. Fascinating to the natural heart, and especially to sensual dispositions, her attractions have no influence upon pure minds and religious souls. "Whoso pleaseth God shall escape from her;" either never be captivated by her spells, or be recovered from them before it is too late. (4) Her miserable victims. Those she leads off as prey are "sinners," in whose hearts sin rules as a dominating principle; who are carnally minded, and delight to make provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof (Rom. viii. 1; xiii. 14); lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God (2 Tim. iii. 4); foolish and disobedient souls, who serve divers lusts and pleasures (Titus iii. 3). 2. *Concerning womankind.* (1) The Preacher's finding was incorrect if designed as a universal negative, in the sense that, while in a thousand men taken at random one might be found good, in a thousand women similarly taken not one could be found entitled to be so characterized. The best refutation of such woman-hating utterances is to point to "the numerous examples of noble women mentioned in Old Testament Writ, and of the devoted heroines of New Testament days," whose names stand forth conspicuously, side by side with those of men, in the muster-roll of the 'noble army of martyrs' (Wright). (3) 'The

Preacher's finding may have been correct if accepted only as the record of his own individual experience. In this case, either his lot must have fallen in very evil times in respect of moral corruption, rivalling the days that were before the Flood (Gen. vi. 11; vii. 1), or he himself must have mixed with extremely questionable characters and limited his investigations to the lowest strata of society. It is doubtful if in any age, at least since the Flood, the condition of mankind has been so deplorably degenerate as the Preacher's language implies. (3) The Preacher's finding may be endorsed if it only means (as is probably the case) that woman less frequently attains to her ideal than man does to his—which, however, need not argue deeper depravity in woman than in man, but may point either to the loftier character of woman's ideal than of man's, or to the greater difficulties that stand in the way of woman realizing her ideal than hinder man from reaching his. 3. *Concerning the human race.* (1) Their original condition had been one of uprightness. This one of two conclusions to which the Preacher had been conducted, viz. that whatever of evil was now perceptible in man's nature had not proceeded from the hand of God. (2) Their present condition was one of "inventive refined degeneracy" (Delitzsch). A second result to which the Preacher had been led. Man had lapsed from his primitive condition of moral simplicity and had become an ingenious inventor; not always of things indifferent, but frequently of things immoral in themselves, and leading to immorality and sin as their results.

LESSONS. 1. The value of wisdom as a human pursuit. 2. The worth of experience as a teacher. 3. The danger of sensuality. 4. The excellence of piety as a protection against impurity. 5. The inestimable worth of a good woman. 6. The rarity of noble men. 7. The certainty that man is not what God made him.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Var. 1.—Reputation. The connection between the two clauses of this verse is not at first sight apparent. But it may well be intended to draw attention to the fact that it is in the case of the man who has justly gained a good name that the day of death is better than that of birth.

I. THERE IS A SENSE IN WHICH REPUTATION AMONG MEN IS WORTHLESS, AND IN WHICH SOLICITUDE FOR REPUTATION IS FOLLY. If the reality of fact points one way, and the world's opinion points in an opposite direction, that opinion is valueless. It is better to be good than to *seem* and to be deemed good; and it is worse to be bad than unjustly to be reputed bad. Many influences affect the estimation in which a man is held among his fellows. Through the world's injustice and prejudice, a good man may be evil spoken of. On the other hand, a bad man may be reputed better than he is, when he humours the world's caprices, and falls in with the world's tastes and fashions. He who aims at conforming to the popular standard, at winning the world's applause, will scarcely make a straight course through life.

II. YET THERE IS A RIGHTEOUS REPUTATION WHICH OUGHT NOT TO BE DESPISED. Such good qualities and habits as justice, integrity, and truthfulness, as bravery, sympathy, and liberality, must needs, in the course of a lifetime, make some favourable impression upon neighbours, and perhaps upon the public; and in many cases a man distinguished by such virtues will have the credit of being what he is. A good name, when deserved, and when obtained by no mean artifices, is a thing to be desired, though not in the highest degree. It may console amidst trials and difficulties, it is gratifying to friends, and it may serve to rouse the young to emulation. A man who is in good repute possesses and exercises in virtue of that very fact an extended influence for good.

III. IT IS ONLY WHEN LIFE IS COMPLETED THAT A REPUTATION IS FULLY AND FINALLY MADE UP. "Call no man happy before his death" is an ancient adage, not without its justification. There are those who have only become famous in advanced life, and there are those who have enjoyed a temporary celebrity which they have long outlived, and who have died in unnoticed obscurity. It is after a man's career has come to an end that his character and his work are fairly estimated; the career is considered as a whole, and then the judgment is formed accordingly.

IV. THE APPROVAL OF THE DIVINE JUDGE AND AWARDEE IS OF SUPREME CONSE-

QUENCE. A good name amongst one's fellow-creatures, as fallible as one's self, is of small account. Who does not admire the noble assertion of the Apostle Paul, "It is a small thing for me to be judged by man's judgment"? They who are calumniated for their fidelity to truth, who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, who are execrated by the unbelieving and the worldly whose vices and sins they have opposed, shall be recognized and rewarded by him whose judgment is just, and who suffers none of his faithful servants to be for ever unappreciated. But they may wait for appreciation until "the day of death." The clouds of misrepresentation and of malice shall then be rolled away, and they shall shine like stars in the firmament. "Then shall every man have praise of God."—T.

Vers. 2—4.—*A Divine paradox.* To many readers these statements appear startling and incredible. The young are scarcely likely to receive them with favour, and to the pleasure-seeking and the frivolous they are naturally repugnant. Yet they are the embodiment of true wisdom; and are in harmony with the experience of the thoughtful and benevolent.

I. FEASTING, LAUGHTER, AND MIRTH ARE TOO GENERALLY REGARDED BY THE FOOLISH AS THE BEST PORTION AND THE ONLY JOY OF HUMAN LIFE. 1. It is not denied that there is a side of human nature to which merriment and festivity are congenial, or that there are occasions when they may be lawfully, innocently, and suitably indulged in. 2. But these experiences are not to be regarded by reasonableness and immortal beings as the choicest and most desirable experiences of life. 3. If they are unduly prized and sought, they will certainly bring disappointment, and involve regret and distress of mind. 4. Constant indulgence of the kind described will tend to the deterioration of the character, and to unfitness for the serious and weighty business of human existence.

II. INTERCOURSE WITH THE SORROWFUL AND THE BEREAVED YIELDS MORE TRUE PROFIT THAN SELFISH AND FRIVOLOUS INDULGENCE. 1. Such familiarity with the house of mourning reminds of the common lot of men, which is also our own. In a career of amusement and dissipation there is much which is altogether artificial. The gay and dissolute endeavour, and often for a time with success, to lose sight of some of the greatest and most solemn realities of this earthly existence. Pain, weakness, and sorrow come, sooner or later, to every member of the human race, and it is inexcusable folly to ignore that with which every reflective mind must be familiar. 2. The house of mourning is peculiarly fitted to furnish themes of most profitable meditation. The uncertainty of prosperity, the brevity of life, the rapid approach of death, the urgency of sacred duties, the responsibility of enjoying advantages and opportunities only to be used aright during health and activity,—such are some of the lessons which are too often unheeded by the frivolous. Yet not to have learned these lessons is to have lived in vain. 3. The house of mourning is fitted to bring home to the mind the preciousness of true religion. Whilst Christianity is concerned with all the scenes and circumstances of our existence, and is as able to hallow our joys as to relieve our sorrows, it is evident that, inasmuch as it deals with us as immortal beings, it has a special service to render to those who realize that this earthly life is but a portion of our existence, and that it is a discipline and preparation for the life to come. Many have been indebted, under God, to impressions received in times of bereavement for the impulse which has animated them to seek a heavenly portion and inheritance. 4. Familiarity with scenes of sorrow, and with the sources of consolation which religion opens up to the afflicted, tends to promote serenity and purity of disposition. The restlessness and superficiality which are distinctive of the worldly and pleasure-seeking may, through the influences here described, be exchanged for the calm confidence, the acquiescence in the Divine will, the cheerful hope, which are the precious possession of the true children of God, who know whom they have believed, and are persuaded that he is able to keep that which they have committed to him against that day.—T.

Ver. 7.—*The mischief of oppression and bribery.* There is some uncertainty as to the interpretation of this verse: the reference may be to the effect of injustice upon him who inflicts it; it may be to its effect upon him who suffers it. It is usual to regard the observation as descriptive of the result of oppression and bribery in the feel-

ings of irritation and despondency they produce upon the minds of those who are wronged, and upon society generally.

I. JUSTICE IS THE ONLY SOLID FOUNDATION FOR SOCIETY. There is moral law, upon which alone civil law can be wisely and securely based. When those who are in power are guided in their administration of political affairs by a reverent regard for righteousness, tranquillity, and contentment, order and harmony may be expected to prevail.

II. OPPRESSION, EXTORTION, AND VENALITY ON THE PART OF RULERS ARE INCOMPATIBLE WITH JUSTICE AND WITH THE PUBLIC GOOD. Unjust rulers sometimes use the power which they have acquired, or with which they have been entrusted, for selfish ends, and in the pursuit of such ends are unscrupulous as to the means they employ. Such wrong-doing is peculiar to no form of civil government. It is to some extent checked by the prevalence of liberty and of publicity, and yet more by an elevated standard of morality, and by the influence of pure religion. But in the East corruption and bribery have been too general on the part of those in power.

III. THE SPECIAL RESULT OF CORRUPTION AND OPPRESSION IS THE FURTHERANCE AND PREVALENCE OF FOLLY AND UNREASON. To the writer of Ecclesiastes, who regarded wisdom as "the principal thing," it was natural to discern in mischievous principles of government the cause of general unwisdom and foolishness. 1. The governor himself, although he may be credited with craft and cunning, is morally injured and degraded, sinks to a lower level, loses self-respect, and forfeits the esteem of his subjects. 2. The governed are goaded to madness by the impossibility of obtaining their rights, by the curtailment of their liberties, and by the loss of their property. Hence arise murmurings, discontent, and resentment, which may, and often do, lead to conspiracy, insurrection, and revolution.

IV. THE DUTY OF ALL UPRIGHT MEN TO SET THEIR FACES AGAINST SUCH EVIL PRACTICES. A good man must not ask—Can I profit by the prevalence of injustice? Will my party or my friends be strengthened by it? He must, on the contrary, turn away from the question of consequences; he must witness against venality and oppression; he must use all lawful means to expose and to put an end to such practices. And this he is bound to do from the highest motives. Government is of Divine authority, and is to be upon Divine principles. Of God we know that "righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne." They are unworthy to rule who employ their power for base and selfish ends.—T.

Ver. 8.—*The end better than the beginning.* There are many persons, especially among the young and ardent, who adopt and act upon a principle diametrically opposed to this. Every beginning has for them the charm of novelty; when this charm fades, the work, the enterprise, the relationship, have no longer any interest, and they turn away with disgust from the end as from something "weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable." But the language of this verse embodies the conviction of the wise and reflecting observer of human affairs.

I. THE REASON OF THIS PRINCIPLE. The beginning is undertaken with a view to the end, and apart from that it would not be. The end is the completion and justification of the beginning. The time-order of events is the expression of their rational order; thus we speak of means and end. Aristotle commences his great work on 'Ethics' by showing that the end is naturally superior to the means, and that the highest end must be that which is not a means to anything beyond itself.

II. THE APPLICATION OF THIS PRINCIPLE. 1. To human works. It is well that the foundation of a house should be laid, but it is better that the top-stone should be placed with rejoicing. So with seed-time and harvest; with a journey and its destination; with a road and its completion, etc. 2. To human life. The beginning may, in the view of men, be neutral; but, in the view of the religious man, the birth of a child is an occasion for gratitude. Yet, if that progress be made which corresponds with the Divine ideal of humanity, if character be matured, and a good life-work be wrought,—then the day of death, the end, is better than the day of birth, in which this earthly existence commenced. 3. To the Christian calling. The history of the individual Christian is a progressive history; knowledge, virtue, piety, usefulness, are all developed by degrees, and are brought to perfection by the discipline and culture of the Holy Spirit. The end must therefore be better than the beginning, as the fruit excels the

blossoms of the spring. 4. To the Church of Christ. As recorded in the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, the beginning of the Church was beautiful, marked by power and promise. But the kingdom of God, the dispensation of the Spirit, has a purpose—high, holy, and glorious. When ignorance, error, and superstition, vice, crime, and sin, are vanquished by the Divine energy accompanying the Church of the living God—when the end cometh, and the kingdom shall be delivered unto the Father—it will be seen that the end is better than the beginning, that the Church was not born in vain, was not launched in vain upon the stormy waters of time.

III. THE LESSONS OF THIS PRINCIPLE. 1. When at the beginning of a good work, look on to the end, that hope may animate and inspire endeavour. 2. During the course of a good work look behind and before; for it is not possible to judge aright without taking a comprehensive and consistent view of things. We may trace the hand of God, and find reason alike for thanksgiving and for trust. 3. Seek that a Divine unity may characterize your work on earth and your life itself. If the end crown not the beginning, then it were better that the beginning had never been made.—T.

Vers. 8, 9.—*The folly of pride, hastiness, and anger.* The Scriptures are more pronounced and decisive with regard to these dispositions than for the most part are heathen moralists. Yet the student of human character and life is at no loss to adduce facts in abundance to justify the condemnation of habits which philosophy and religion alike condemn.

I. THESE DISPOSITIONS AND HABITS HAVE THEIR SOURCE IN THE CONSTITUTION OF HUMAN NATURE.

II. CIRCUMSTANCES IN HUMAN LIFE OCCASION THEIR EXERCISE AND GROWTH.

III. TO YIELD TO SUCH PASSIONS AND TO ALLOW THEM TO RULE THE LIFE IS THE PART OF FOLLY.

IV. THE SPIRIT AND CONDUCT OF THE DIVINE SAVIOUR EXEMPLIFY THE BEAUTY OF HUMILITY, PATIENCE, AND MEEKNESS.

V. THE SUBJUGATION OF PASSION AND THE IMITATION OF CHRIST CONTRIBUTE TO THE WELFARE OF THE INDIVIDUAL AND OF SOCIETY.

VI. THERE ARE MEANS BY THE CONSTANT AND PRAYERFUL USE OF WHICH EVIL HABITS MAY BE CONQUERED, AND SELF-CONTROL MAY BE ATTAINED.—T.

Ver. 10.—*Laudator temporis acti.* It appears from this passage that a tendency of mind with which we are familiar—a tendency to paint the past in glowing colours—is of ancient date, and indeed it is probably a consequence of human nature itself.

I THE QUESTIONABLE ASSERTION. We often hear it affirmed, as the author of this book had heard it affirmed, that the former days were better than these. There are politicians in whose opinion the country was formerly more happy and prosperous than now; farmers who fancy that crops were larger, and merchants who believe that trade was more profitable, in former days; students who prefer ancient literature to modern; Christian men who place the age of faith and piety in some bygone period of history. It has ever been so, and is likely to be so in the future. Others who will come after us will regard our age as we regard the ages that have passed away.

II. THE GROUND UPON WHICH THE QUESTIONABLE ASSERTION IS MADE. 1. Dissatisfaction with the present. It is in times of pain, loss, adversity, disappointment, that men are most given to extol the past, and to forget its disadvantages as well as the privileges and immunities of the present. 2. The illusiveness of the imagination. The aged are not only conscious of their feebleness and their pains; they recall the days of their youth, and paint the scenes and experiences of bygone times in colours supplied by a fond, deceptive fancy. The imaginative represent to themselves a state of the world, a condition of society, a phase of the Church, which never had real existence. By feigning all prosperity and happiness to have belonged to a past age, they remove their fancies from the range of contradiction. All things to their vision become lustrous and fair with "the light that never was on land or sea."

III. THE UNWISDOM OF INQUIRING FOR AN EXPLANATION OF A BELIEF WHICH IS PROBABLY UNFOUNDED. Experience teaches us that, before asking for the *cause*, it is well to assure ourselves of the *fact*. *Why* a thing is presumes *that* the thing is. Now,

in the case before us, the fact is so questionable, and certainty with regard to it is so difficult, if not unattainable, that it would be a waste of time to enter upon the inquiry here supposed.

APPLICATION. Vain regrets as to the past are as unprofitable as are complaints as to the present. What concerns us is the right use of circumstances appointed for us by a wise Providence. Whether or not the former times were better than these, the times upon which we have fallen are good enough for us to use to our own moral and spiritual improvement, and at the same time they are bad enough to call for all our consecrated powers to do what in us lies—little as that may be—to mend them.—T.

Vers. 13—15.—*The perplexities of life.* The Book of Ecclesiastes raises questions which it very inadequately answers, and problems which it scarcely attempts to solve. Some of the difficulties observable in this world, in human society, and in individual experience appear to be insoluble by reason, though to some extent they may be overcome by faith. And certainly the fuller revelation which we enjoy as Christians is capable of assisting us in our endeavour not to be overborne by the forces of doubt and perplexity of which every thoughtful man is in some measure conscious.

I. A SPECULATIVE DIFFICULTY: THE COEXISTENCE OF CROOKED THINGS WITH STRAIGHT. The philosophical student encounters this difficulty in a more definite form than ordinary thinkers, and is best acquainted with the apparent anomalies of existence. It may suffice to refer to the coexistence of sense and spirit, nature and reason, law and freedom, good and evil, death and immortality.

II. A PRACTICAL DIFFICULTY: THE JUXTAPOSITION AND INTERCHANGE OF PROSPERITY AND ADVERSITY. "God hath even made the one side by side with the other." The inequality of the human lot has, from the time of Job, been the occasion of much questioning, dissatisfaction, and scepticism. Opinions differ as to the effect upon this inequality of the advance of civilization. Riches and poverty, splendour and squalor, refinement and brutishness, exist side by side. And the observation of every one has remarked the startling transitions in the condition and fortunes alike of the wealthy and the poor; these are exalted, and those depressed. At first sight all this seems inconsistent with the sway of a just and benignant Providence.

III. A MORAL DIFFICULTY: THE EVIDENT ABSENCE OF A JUST AND PERFECT RETRIBUTION IN THIS LIFE. The righteous perish, and the wicked live on in their evil-doing, unchecked and unpunished. There are those who would acquiesce in inequality of condition, were such inequality proportioned to disparities of moral character, but who are dismayed by the spectacle of prosperous crime and triumphant vice, side by side with integrity and benevolence doomed to want and suffering.

IV. THE DUTY OF CONSIDERATION AND PATIENCE IN THE PRESENCE OF SUCH PERPLEXING ANOMALIES. The first and most obvious attitude of the wise man, when encountering difficulties such as those described in this passage, is to avoid hasty conclusions and immature, unconsidered, and partial judgments. It is plain that we are confronted with what we cannot comprehend. Our observation is limited; our penetration is at fault; our reason is baffled. We are not, therefore, to shut our eyes to the facts of life, or to deny what our intelligence forces upon us. But we must think, and we must wait.

V. THE PURPOSE OF SUCH DIFFICULTIES, AS FAR AS WE ARE CONCERNED, IS TO TEST AND TO ELICIT FAITH IN GOD. There is sufficient reason for every thoughtful man to believe in the wisdom and righteousness of the eternal Ruler. And the Christian has special grounds for his assurance that all things are ordained by his Father and Redeemer, and that the Judge of all the earth will do right.—T.

Vers. 16, 17.—*Moderation.* This language must be interpreted in accordance with the rules of rhetoric; it is intended to convey a certain impression, to produce a certain effect; and this it does. The Preacher aims at inculcating moderation, at cautioning the reader against what a modern poet has termed "the falsehood of extremes." In interpreting this very effective language we must not analyze it as a scientific statement, but receive the impression which it was designed to convey.

I. HUMAN NATURE IS PRONE TO EXTREMES. In how many instances may it be observed that a person is no sooner convinced that a certain object is desirable, a certain

course is to be approved, than he will hear and think of nothing else! Is liberty good? Then away with all restraints! Is self-denial good? Then away with all pleasures! Is the Bible the best of books? Then let no other volume be opened! Is our own country to be preferred to all beside? Then let no credit be allowed to foreigners for anything they may do!

II. THIS TENDENCY TO EXTREMES IS OWING TO THE DOMINANCE OF FEELING. Calm reason would check such a tendency; but the voice of reason is silenced by passion or prejudice. Impulsive natures are hurried into unreasoning and extravagant opinions and habits of conduct. The momentum of a powerful emotion is very great; it may urge men onwards to an extent unexpected and dangerous. Whilst under the guidance of sober reason, feeling may be the motive power to virtue and usefulness; but when uncontrolled it may hurry into folly and disaster.

III. YIELDING TO THIS TENDENCY OCCASIONS THE LOSS OF SELF-RESPECT AND OF SOCIAL INFLUENCE. The man of extremes must, in his cooler moments of reflection, admit to himself that he has acted the part of an irrational being. And he certainly gains among his acquaintances the reputation of a fanatic; and even when he has sound and sober counsel to give, little heed is taken of his judgment.

IV. MODERATION IS USUALLY THE WISEST AND JUSTEST PRINCIPLE OF HUMAN CONDUCT. A great moralist taught the ancient Greeks that the ethical virtues lie between extremes, and adduced many very striking instances of his law. Bravery lies between foolhardiness and cowardice; liberality between profusion and niggardliness, etc. That a very insufficient theory of morals was provided by this doctrine of "the mean" would universally be admitted. Yet no account of virtue can be satisfactory which does not point out the importance of guarding against those extremes of conduct into which men are liable to be hurried by the gusts of passion that sweep over their nature. Who has not learned by experience that broad, unqualified assertions are usually false, and that violent, one-sided courses of action are in most cases harmful and regrettable? 'There is wisdom in the old adage which boys learn in their Latin grammar, *In medio tutissimus ibis*.—T.

Vers. 20, 29.—*Perfection is not on earth*. It would be a mistake to attribute these statements to anything peculiar in the experience and circumstances of the author of this book. The most attentive and candid observers of human nature will attest the truth of these very decided judgments. Christians are sometimes accused of exaggerating human sinfulness, in order to prepare for the reception of the special doctrines of Christianity; but they are not so accused by observers whose opportunities have been wide and varied, and who have the sagacity to interpret human conduct.

I. THE NATURE OF SIN. It is defection from a Divine standard, departure from the Divine way, abuse of Divine provision, renunciation of Divine purpose.

II. THE UNIVERSALITY OF SIN. This is both the teaching of Scripture and the lesson of all experience in every land and in every age.

III. THE EXCEPTION TO SIN. The Divine Man, Jesus Christ, alone among the sons of men, was faultless and perfect.

IV. THE SPIRITUAL LESSONS TAUGHT BY THE PREVALENCE OF SIN. 1. The duty of humility, contrition, and repentance. 2. The value of the redemption and salvation which in the gospel Divine wisdom and compassion have provided as the one universal remedy for the one universal evil that afflicts mankind.—T.

Vers. 25—28.—*Bad women a curse to society*. It is generally considered that in this language we have the conclusion reached by Solomon, and that his polygamy was largely the explanation of the very unfavourable opinion which he formed of the other sex. A monarch who takes to himself hundreds of wives and concubines is scarcely likely to see much of the best side of woman's nature and life. And if marriage is divinely intended to draw out the unselfish, affectionate, and devoted qualities of feminine nature, such a purpose could not be more effectually frustrated than by an arrangement which assigns to a so-called wife an infinitesimal portion of a husband's time, attention, interest, and love. For this reason it is not fair to take the sweeping statement of this passage as expressing a universal and unquestionable truth. What is said of the bitterness of the wicked woman, and of the mischief she does in society,

remains for ever true; but there are states of society in which good women are as numerous as are good men, and in which their influence is equally beneficial.

I. THE INJURIOUSNESS OF BAD WOMEN EXEMPLIFIES THE PRINCIPLE THAT THE ABUSE AND CORRUPTION OF GOOD THINGS IS OFTEN THE CAUSE OF THE WORST OF ILLS.

II. THE WICKEDNESS OF BAD WOMEN DISPLAYS ITSELF IN THEIR HABIT OF ENSNARING THE FOOLISH; FOR THEY WILL NOT AND CANNOT SIN ALONE.

III. THE PRESENCE OF BAD WOMEN IN SOCIETY IS THE GREAT TEMPTATION TO WHICH MEN ARE LIABLE, AND THE GREAT TEST BY WHICH THEY ARE TRIED.

IV. THE BITTERNESS OF BAD WOMEN MAY BY CONTRAST SUGGEST THE EXCELLENCE OF THE VIRTUOUS AND THE PIOUS, AND MAY PROMPT TO A GRATEFUL RECOGNITION OF THE INDEBTEDNESS OF SOCIETY TO HOLY AND KINDLY FEMININE INFLUENCES.—T.

Ver. 1.—*Reputation*. There is much both of exalted enjoyment and of valuable influence in a man's reputation. It is said of the great explorer and philanthropist, David Livingstone, that he used to live in a village in Africa until his "good name" for benevolence had been established and had gone on before him: following his reputation, he was perfectly safe. A good reputation is—

I. THE AROMA WHICH OUR LIFE SHEDS AROUND US. We are always judging one another; every act of every kind is appraised, though often quite unconsciously, and we stand better or worse in the estimation of our neighbours for all we do and are. Our professions, our principles, our deeds, our words, even our manners and methods,—all these leave impressions on the mind concerning ourselves. What men think of us is the sum-total of these impressions, and constitutes our "name," our reputation. The character of a good man is constantly creating an atmosphere about him in which he will be able to walk freely and happily. It is indeed true that some good men seriously injure their reputation by some follies, or even foibles, which might easily be corrected and which ought to be avoided; but, as a rule, the life of the pure and holy, of the just and kind, is surrounded by a radiance of good estimation, as advantageous to himself as it is valuable to his neighbours.

II. THE BEST LEGACY WE LEAVE BEHIND US. At "the day of one's birth" there is rejoicing, because "a man is born into the world." And what may he not become? what may he not achieve? what may he not enjoy? But that is a question indeed. That infant may become a reprobate, an outcast; he may do incalculable, deplorable mischief in the world; he may grow up to suffer the worst things in body or in mind. None but the Omniscient can tell that. But when a good man dies, having lived an honourable and useful life, and having built up a noble and steadfast character, he has won his victory, he has gained his crown; and he leaves behind him memories, pure and sweet, that will live in many hearts and hallow them, that will shine on many lives and brighten them. At birth there is a possibility of good, at death there is a certainty of blessedness and blessing.

1. Reputation is not the very best thing of all. *Character* stands first. It is of *vital* consequence that we be right in the sight of God, and tried by Divine wisdom. The first and best thing is not to *seem* but to *be* right and wise. But then: 2. Reputation is of very great value. (1) It is worth much to ourselves; for it is an elevated and ennobling joy to be glad in the well-earned esteem of the wise. (2) It is of great value to our kindred and our friends. How dear to us is the good name of our parents, of our children, of our intimate friends! (3) It is a source of much influence for good with our neighbours. How much weightier are the words of the man who has been growing in honour all his days, than are those of either the inexperienced and unknown man, or the man whose reputation has been tarnished!—C.

Vers. 2-6.—*The evil, the unprofitable, and the blessed thing*. I. THE POSITIVELY EVIL THING. "The laughter of fools," or "the song of fools," may be pleasant enough at the moment, but it is evil; for (1) it proceeds from folly, and (2) it tends to folly. Of the many things which are here implicitly condemned, there may be mentioned: 1. The irreverent or the impure jest or song. 2. The immoderate feast—particularly indulgence in the tempting cup. 3. The society of the ungodly, sought in the way of friendship and enjoyment, as distinguished from the way of duty or of benevolence. 4. The voice of flattery.

II. THE COMPARATIVELY UNPROFITABLE THING. Two things are mentioned in Scripture as being lawful, but as being of comparatively slight value—bodily indulgence and bodily exercise (see 1 Cor. vi. 13; 1 Tim. iv. 8). “The house of feasting” (ver. 2) is a right place to be found in, as is also the gymnasium, or the recreation-ground, or the place of entertainment. But it is very easy to think of some place that is worthier. As those that desire to attain to heavenly wisdom, to a Christ-like character, to the approval of God, let us see that we only indulge in the comparatively unprofitable *within the limits that become us*. To go beyond the bound of moderation is to err, and even to sin. Fun may grow into folly, pleasure pass into dissipation, the training of the body become an extravagant athleticism, in the midst of which the culture of the spirit is neglected, and the service of Christ forsaken. It behoves us to “keep under” that which is secondary, to forbid it the first place or the front rank, whether in our esteem or in our practice.

III. THE DISGUISED BLESSING. It is not difficult to reach the heart of these paradoxes (vers. 2—5). There is pain of heart in visiting the house where death has come to the door, as there is in receiving the rebuke of a true friend; but what are the issues of it? What is to be gained thereby? What hidden blessing does it not contain? How true it is that it is

“Better to have a quiet grief
Than a tumultuous joy”!

that the hollow laughter of folly is a very poor and sorry thing indeed compared with the wisdom-laden sorrow, when all things are weighed in the balances. To have a chastened spirit, to have the heart which has been taught of God great spiritual realities, to have had an enlarging and elevating vision of the things which are unseen and eternal, to have been impressed with the transiency of earthly good and with the excellency of “the consolations which are in Christ Jesus,” to be lifted up, if but one degree, toward the spirit and character of the self-sacrificing Lord we serve, to have had some fellowship with the sufferings of Christ,—surely this is incomparably preferable to the most delicious feast or the most hilarious laughter. To go down to the home that is darkened by bereavement or saddened by some crushing disappointment, and to pour upon the troubled hearts there the oil of true and genuine sympathy, to bring such spirits up from the depths of utter hopelessness or overwhelming grief into the light of Divine truth and heavenly promise,—thus “to do good and to communicate” is not only to offer acceptable sacrifice unto God, but it is also to be truly enriched in our own soul.—C.

Ver. 8.—*Patience and pride*. Patience is to be distinguished from a dull indiscriminateness and from insensibility, to which one treatment is much the same as another; it is the calm endurance, the quiet, hopeful waiting on the part of the intelligent and sensitive spirit. Pride is to be distinguished from self-respect; it is an overweening estimate indulged by a man respecting himself—of his power, or of his position, or of his character. Thus understood, these two qualities stand in striking contrast to one another.

I. PATIENCE IS A DIVINELY COMMENDED AND PRIDE A FORBIDDEN THING. *Patience* (Luke xxi. 19; 2 Thess. i. 4; Heb. x. 36; 2 Pet. i. 6; Jas. v. 7, 8, 11; Rev. ii. 2). *Pride* (Ps. ci. 5; cxix. 21; cxxxviii. 6; Prov. vi. 17; Isa. ii. 12; Mark vii. 22; Rom. xii. 3; Jas. iv. 6).

II. PATIENCE IS THE SEAT OF SAFETY, PRIDE THE PLACE OF PERIL. The man that is willing to wait in patience for the good which God will grant him, accepting what he gives him with quiet contentment, is likely to walk in wisdom, and to abide in the fear and favour of the Lord; but the man who over-estimates his strength is standing in a very “slippery place”—he is almost sure to fall. No words of the wise man are more frequently fulfilled than those concerning pride and a haughty spirit (Prov. xvi. 18). The proud heart is the mark for many adversaries.

III. PATIENCE IS A BECOMING GRACE, PRIDE AN UGLY EVIL. Few things are more spiritually beautiful than patience. When under long-continued bodily pain or weakness, or under grievous ill-treatment, or through long years of deferred hope and disappointment, the chastened spirit lives on in cheerful resignation, the Christian

workman toils on in unwavering faith, there is a spectacle which we can well believe that the angels of God look upon with delight. Certainly it is the object of our admiring regard. On the other hand, pride is an offensive thing in the eyes of man, as we know it is in the sight of God (Prov. viii. 13). Whether a man shows himself elated about his personal appearance, or his riches, or his learning, or his strength (of any kind), we begin by being amused and end by being annoyed and repelled; we turn away as from an ugly picture or from an offensive odour.

IV. PATIENCE CONDUCTS INTO, PRIDE EXCLUDES FROM, THE KINGDOM OF GOD. 1. Patient inquiry will bring a man into the sunshine of full discipleship to Jesus Christ, but pride will keep him away, and leave him to be lighted by the poor sparks of his own wisdom. 2. Patient steadfastness in the faith will conduct to the gates of the celestial city. 3. Patient continuance in well-doing will end in the commendation of Christ and in his bountiful reward.—C.

Ver. 10.—*Foolish comparison and complaint.* This querulous comparison, preferring former days to present ones, is unwise, inasmuch as it is—

I. BASED UPON IGNORANCE. We know but little of the actual conditions of things in past times. Chroniclers usually tell little more than what was upon the surface. We probably exaggerate and overlook to a very large extent. The good that is gone from us was probably attended with evils of which we have no idea; while the evils that remain we magnify because we experience them in our own person and suffer from them.

II. MARKED BY FORGETFULNESS. Often, though not always so. Often the change for the worse is not in a man's surroundings, but in himself. Leaving his youth and his prime behind him, he has left his vigour, his buoyancy, his power of mastery and of enjoyment. The "times" are well enough, but he himself is failing, and he sees everything through eyes that are dim with years.

III. INDICATIVE OF A SPIRIT OF DISCONTENT. It is the querulous spirit that thinks ill of his companions and his circumstances. He would come to the same conclusion if these were much better than they are. A sense of our own unworthiness and a consciousness of God's patience with us and goodness toward us, filling our souls with humility and gratitude, would dissipate these clouds and put another song into our mouth.

IV. WANTING IN MANLY RESOLUTENESS. If we are possessed of a right spirit, instead of sitting down and lamenting the inferiority of present things we shall gird ourselves to do what has to be done, to improve that which is capable of reform, to abolish that which should disappear, to plant that which should be thriving.

V. LACKING IN TRUSTFULNESS AND HOPEFULNESS. What if things are not all they should be with us; what if we ourselves are going down the hill and shall soon be at the bottom;—is there not a God above us? and is there not a future before us? Let us look up and let us look on. Above us is a Power that can regenerate and transform; before us is a period, an age, nay, an eternity, wherein all lost joys and honours will be "swallowed up of life."—C.

Vers. 13, 14.—*The irremediable.* Before we apply the main principle of the text, we may gather two lessons by the way.

I. THE WISDOM OF APPROPRIATING—of appropriating to ourselves and enjoying what God gives us without hesitation. In the day of our prosperity let us be joyful. We need not be draping our path with gloomy thoughts; we need not send the skeleton round at the feast; we should, indeed, partake *moderately* of everything, and in everything give thanks, showing *gratitude* to the Divine Giver; and we should also have the open heart which does not fail to show *liberality* to those in need. If our success be hallowed by these three virtues, it will be well with us.

II. THE RIGHTNESS OF RECTIFYING—of making straight all the crooked things which can be straightened. We are not to give up great moral problems as insoluble until we are absolutely convinced that they are beyond our reach. Poverty, ignorance, intemperance, irreligion,—these are very "crooked" things; but God did not make them what they are. Man has done that. His sin is the great and sad perverting force in the world, bending all things out of their course and turning them in wrong directions. And though they may seem to be too rigid and fixed to be amenable to our treatment,

yet, hoping in God and seeking his aid, we must address ourselves courageously and intelligently to these crooked things until they are made straight. There is nothing that so strongly appeals to, and that will so richly reward, our aspiration, our ingenuity, our energy, our patience.

III. THE DUTY OF SUBMITTING. There are some things in regard to which we have to acknowledge that the evil thing is a "work of God," something he has "made crooked." This is to be accepted as the ordering of his holy will, as something that is balanced and overbalanced by the good things which are on the other side. It may be slenderness of means, lowliness of position, feebleness of intelligence, exclusion from society in which we should like to mingle, incapacity to visit scenes we long to look upon, the inaccessibility of a sphere for which we think ourselves peculiarly fitted, the advance of fatal disease, the reduction of resources or the decline of power, the breaking up of the old home and the scattering of near relatives, the loosening of old ties with the formation of new ones, etc. Such things as these are to be calmly and contentedly accepted. 1. To strive against the inevitable or irremediable is (1) to strive against God and be guilty; (2) to court failure and be miserable; (3) to waste energy that might be happily and fruitfully spent in other ways. 2. To submit to the will of God, after considering his work, is (1) to please him; (2) to have the heart filled with pure and elevating contentment; (3) to be free to do a good if not a great work "while it is day."—C.

Vers. 15—22.—*The lower and the higher standard.* The Preacher is not now in his noblest mood; he offers us a morality to which he himself at other times rises superior, and which cannot be pronounced worthy by those who have heard the great Teacher and learnt of him. We will look at—

I. THE LOWER STANDARD HERE HELD UP. 1. *His view of sin.* And here we find three things with which we are dissatisfied. (1) Sin is not represented to us as *in itself* an intolerable thing (ver. 17). We are allowed to think of it as something that would be allowable if indulged within certain limits, and if it did no serious injury to our life or to our health. But we know that, apart from its fatal consequences, all wickedness is "an abominable thing which God hates," an essentially evil thing. (2) The invariable penalty of sin is overlooked. We are not reminded that wickedness *always* makes us suffer, in spirit if not in health, in soul if not in circumstance. (3) We are likened to one another rather than with the Holy One (vers. 20—22). The strain is this: we need not be much troubled by the presence of some sin in our hearts and lives; all men are guilty, and we are only like our fellows; if there be those who are reproaching us, we are censuring them in return; we are standing on the same level, though it may be a common condemnation. 2. *His view of righteousness.* The Preacher sees two unsatisfactory features in righteousness. (1) It does not always prolong life and secure success (ver. 15). (2) It leads the best men into a painful loneliness. "Why shouldest thou be desolate?" (ver. 16, marginal reading); *i.e.* why be so honest and so pure and so true that thou canst not associate with the unscrupulous, whose standard is lower than thine own? Be content with that measure of righteousness which comes up to the common standard. Such is the Preacher's counsel in this mood of his. But we who have learnt of a Greater and Wiser than he, of him who was not only the wisest of men but "the Wisdom of God," cannot be satisfied with this; we aspire to something loftier and worthier; we must rise to—

II. THE HIGHER STANDARD. Taught of Jesus Christ, we: 1. *Have a truer view of sin.* We regard it as a thing which is only and utterly evil, offensive to God, constantly and profoundly injurious to ourselves, to be hated and shunned in every sphere, to be cleansed from heart and life. 2. *Have a truer conception of righteousness.* We look upon it as (1) that which is in itself precious beyond all price; (2) that which allies us to God in nature and character; (3) that which is to be cherished and pursued at all costs whatever; (4) that which makes our present life beautiful and noble, and leads on to far greater excellence and far deeper joy hereafter.—O.

Vers. 23—28.—*Degradation and elevation.* The words of the Preacher painfully remind us of the familiar story of Diogenes and his lantern. Whether we are to ascribe this pitiful conclusion respecting woman to his own infirmity or to the actual

condition of Oriental society, we do not know. But there was, no doubt, so much of realism about the picture that we may learn a very practical lesson therefrom. It is twofold.

I. THE AWFUL POSSIBILITIES OF DEGRADATION. That woman, created by God to be a helpmeet for man, and so admirably fitted, as she is at her best, to comfort his heart and to enrich and bless his life—that woman should be spoken of in such terms as these, is sad and strange indeed. It would be unaccountable but for one thing. The explanation is that man, in his physical strength and in his spiritual weakness, has systematically *degraded* woman; has made a mere tool and instrument of her whom he should have treated as his trusted companion and truest friend. And if you once degrade any being (or any animal) from his or her true and right position, you send that being down an incline, you open the gates to a long and sad descent. You take away self-respect, and in so doing you undermine the foundation of all virtue, of all moral worth. Dishonour any one, man or woman, lad or child, in his (her) own eyes, and you inflict a deadly injury. A very vile woman is probably worse than a very bad man, more inherently foul and more lamentably mischievous; it is the miserable consequence of man's folly in wishing to displace her from the position God meant her to hold, and in making her take a far lower position than she has the faculty to fill. To degrade is to ruin, and to ruin utterly.

II. THE NOBLE POSSIBILITIES OF ELEVATION. How excellent is the impossibility of seriously writing such a sentence as that contained in the twenty-eighth verse, in this age and in this land of ours! Now and here it certainly is not more difficult to find a woman worthy of our admiration than to find such a man. In the Churches of Jesus Christ, in the homes of our country, are women, young and old and in the prime of their powers, whose character is sound to the centre, whose spirit is gracious, whose lives are lovely, whose influence is wholly beneficent, who are the sweetness and strength of the present generation, as they are the hope and promise of the next. And this elevation of woman all comes of treating her as that which God meant her to be—giving to her her rightful position, inviting and enabling her to fill her sphere, to cultivate her powers, to do her work, to take her heritage. 1. It is easy as it is foolish and sinful to degrade; assume the absence of what God has given and deny the opportunity which should be offered, and the work is speedily done. 2. It is quite possible as it is most blessed to elevate; treat men and women, wherever found and at whatever stage in worth or unworthiness they may be taken, as those God meant to be his children, and they will rise to the dignity and partake the inheritance of "the sons and daughters of the living God."—C.

Ver. 1.—*The charm of goodness.* When our author wrote these words he had, for a time at any rate, passed into a purer atmosphere; some gleams of light, if not the full dawn of day, had begun to shine upon him. Up to this he has been analyzing the evil conditions of human life, and has depicted all the moods of depression and sorrow and indignation they excited in him. Now he tells us of some things which he had found good, and which had cheered and strengthened him in his long agony. They were not, indeed, efficient to remove all his distress or to outweigh all the evils he had encountered in his protracted examination of the phenomena of human life; but to a certain extent they had great value and power. The first of these compensations of human misery is the beauty and attractiveness and lasting worth of a good character. The name won by one of honourable and unblemished character, who has striven against vice and followed after virtue, who has been pure and unselfish and zealous in the service of God and man, "is better than precious ointment." It is not unwarrantable thus to expand the sentence; for though the epithet "good" is not in the original, but supplied by our translators (Revised Version), it is undoubtedly understood, and also it is taken for granted that the renown so highly praised is fully deserved by its possessor. "Dear," he says, "to the human senses"—speaking, remember, to an Eastern world—"is the odour of costly unguents, of sweet frankincense and fragrant spikenard; but dearer still, more precious still, an honoured name, whose odour attracts the love, and penetrates and fills for a while the whole heart and memory of our friends" (Bradley). There is in the original a play upon words (*shem*, a name; *shemen*, ointment) which harmonizes with the brightness of the thought, and

gives a touch of gaiety to the sentence so strangely concluded with the reflection that for the owner of the good name the day of his death is better than the day of his birth. An exquisite illustration of the justness of our author's admiration for a good name is to be found in that incident in the Gospels of the deed of devotion to Christ, on the part of the woman who poured upon his head the precious ointment. Her name, Mary of Bethany (John xii. 3), is now known throughout the whole world, and is associated with the ideas of pure affection and generous self-sacrifice. The second part of the verse, which at first sounds so out of harmony with what precedes it, is yet closely connected with it. The good name is thought of as not finally secured until death has removed the possibility of failure and shame. So many begin well and attain high fame in their earlier life which is sadly belied by their conduct and fate in the close. The words recall those of Solon to Croesus, if indeed they are not a reminiscence of them, "Call no man happy until he has closed his life happily" (Herod., i. 32); and are to the same effect as those in ver. 8, "Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof." It is not to be denied that there is, however, more in the words than a prudential warning against prematurely counting upon having secured the "good name" which is better than ointment. They betray an almost heathenish distaste for life, which is utterly out of harmony with the revelation both of the Old Testament and of the New; and are more appropriate in the mouth of one of that Thracian tribe mentioned by Herodotus, who actually celebrated their birth-days as days of sadness, and the day of death as a day of rejoicing, than of one who had any faith in God. The only parallel to them in Scripture is what is said of Judas by our Lord, "It had been good for that man if he had not been born" (Matt. xxvi. 24). Ingenuity may devise explanations of the sentiment which bring it into harmony with religious sentiments. Thus it may be said, at death the box of precious ointment is broken and its odours spread abroad; prejudices that assailed the man of noble character during his lifetime are mitigated, envy and jealousy and detraction are subdued, and his title to fair fame acknowledged on all hands. It may be said life is a state of probation, death the beginning of a higher and happier existence. Life is a struggle, a contest, a voyage, a pilgrimage; and when victory has been won, the goal reached, the reward of labour is attained. We may borrow the words and infuse a brighter significance into them; but no trace of any such inspiring, cheering thoughts are in the page before us. "The angel of death is there; no angel of resurrection sits within the sepulchre."—J. W.

Vers. 2—6.—*Compensations of misery.* Although in the Book of Ecclesiastes there is much that seems to be contradictory of our ordinary judgments of life, much that is at first apparently calculated to prevent our taking an interest in its business and pleasures—which are all asserted to be vanity and vexation of spirit—there are yet to be found in it sober and well-grounded exhortations, which we can only neglect at our peril. Out of his large experience the writer brings some lessons of great value. It is sometimes the case, indeed, that he speaks in such a way that we feel it is reasonable in us to discount his judgment pretty heavily. When he speaks as a sated voluptuary, as one who had tried every kind of sensuous pleasure, who had gratified to the utmost every desire, who had enjoyed all the luxuries which his great wealth could procure, and found all his efforts to secure happiness vain—I say, when he speaks in this way, and asks us to believe that none of these things are worth the pains, we are not inclined to believe him implicitly. We are inclined rather to resent being lectured in such a way by such a man. The satiety, the weariness, the *ennui*, which result from over-indulgence, do not qualify a man for setting up as a moral and spiritual guide; they rather disqualify him for exercising such an office. In answer to the austere and sweeping condemnation which he is inclined to pass upon the sources from which we think may be drawn a reasonable amount of pleasure, we may say, "Oh yes! it is all very well for you to speak in that way. You have worn out your strength and blunted your taste by over-indulgence; and it comes with a bad grace from you to recommend an abstemious and severe mood of life which you have never tried yourself. The exhortations which befit the lips of a John the Baptist, nurtured from early life in the desert, lose their power when spoken by a jaded epicure." The answer would be perfectly just. And if Solomon's reflections were all

of the type described, we should be justified in placing less value upon them than he did. It is true that more than once he speaks with a bitterness and disgust of all the occupations and pleasures of life, which we cannot, *with our experience*, fairly endorse. But, as a rule, his moralizing is not of the ascetic type. He recommends, on the whole, a cheerful and grateful enjoyment of all the innocent pleasures of life, with a constant remembrance that the judgment draws ever nearer and nearer. While he has no hesitation in declaring that no earthly employments or pleasures can completely satisfy the soul and give it a resting-place, he does not, like the ancient hermits, approve of dressing in sackcloth, of feeding on bread and water only, and of retiring altogether from the society of our fellows. His teaching, indeed, contains a great deal more of true Christianity than has often been found in the writings and sermons of professedly Christian moralists and preachers. All the more weight, therefore, is to be attached to his words from this very fact, that he does not pose as an ascetic. We could not listen to him if he did; and accordingly we must be all the more careful not to lessen the value and weight of the words he speaks to which we should attend, by depreciating him as an authority. It is only of some of his judgments that we can say they are such as a healthy mind could scarcely endorse. This, in the passage before us, is certainly not one of them. It certainly runs counter to our ordinary sentiments and practices, like many of the sayings of Christ, but is not on that account to be hastily rejected; we are not justified either in seeking to diminish its weight or explain it away. It is not, indeed, a matter of surprise that the thoughts and feelings of beings under the influence of sinful habits, which enslave both mind and heart, should require to undergo a change before their teaching coincides with the mind of the Holy Spirit. In this section of the book we have teaching very much in the spirit of the New Testament. Compare with the second verse the sentences spoken by Christ: "Woe unto you that are full! for ye shall hunger; woe unto you that laugh now! for ye shall mourn and weep" (Luke vi. 25). And notice that the visits paid to the afflicted to console them, from which the Preacher declares he had gained moral and spiritual benefits, are recommended to us by the apostle as Christian duties (Jas. i. 27). From even the saddest experiences, therefore, a thoughtful mind will derive some gain; some compensations there are to the deepest miseries. The house of mourning is that in which there is sorrow on account of death. According to Jewish customs, the expression of grief for the dead was very much more demonstrative and elaborate than with us. The time of mourning was for seven days (Ecclus. xxii. 10), sometimes in special cases for thirty days (Numb. xx. 29; Deut. xxiv. 8). The presence of sympathizing friends (John xi. 19), of hired mourners and minstrels (Matt. ix. 23; Mark v. 38), the solemn meals of the bread and wine of affliction (Jer. xvi. 7; Hos. ix. 4), made the scene very impressive. Over against the picture he suggests of lamentation and woe, he sets that of a house of feasting, filled with joyous guests, and he asserts that it is better to go to the former than to the latter. He contradicts the more natural and obvious inclination which we all have to joy rather than to sorrow. But a moment's consideration will convince us that he is in the right, whether we choose the better part or not. Joy at the best is harmless—it relieves an overstrain on the mind or spirit; but when it has passed away it leaves no positive gain behind. Sorrow rightly borne is able to draw the thoughts upward, to purify and transform the soul. Its office is like that attributed to tragedy by Aristotle: "to cleanse the mind from evil passions by pity and terror—pity at the sight of another's misfortune, and terror at the resemblance between the sufferer and ourselves" ('Poetics'). Contradictory of ordinary feelings and opinions though this teaching of Solomon's is, there are three ways in which a visit to the house of mourning is better than to the house of feasting.

I. IT AFFORDS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR SHOWING SYMPATHY WITH THE AFFLICTED. Among our best-spent hours are those in which we have sought to lighten and share the burden of the bereaved and distressed. We may not have been able to open sources of consolation which otherwise would have remained hidden and sealed; but the mere expression of our commiseration may be helpful and soothing. Sometimes we may be able to suggest consolatory thoughts, to impart serviceable advice, or to give needful relief. But in all cases we feel that we have received more than we have given—that in seeking to comfort the sorrowful we come into closer communion with that Saviour who came from heaven to earth to bear the burden of sin and suffering,

who was a welcome Guest on occasions of innocent festivity (John ii. 2; Luke vii. 36), but whose presence was still more eagerly desired in the homes of the afflicted (John xi. 3; Mark v. 23).

II. IT ENABLES US TO FORM TRUER ESTIMATES OF LIFE. It gives us a more trustworthy standard of judging the relative importance of those things that engage our attention and employ our faculties. It checks unworthy ambitions, flattering hopes, and sinful desires. We learn to realize that only some of the aims we have cherished have been worthy of us, only some of the pursuits in which we have been engaged are calculated to yield us lasting satisfaction when we come in the light of eternity to review the past of our lives. The sight of blighted hopes admonishes us not to run undue risk of disappointment by neglecting to take into account the transitory and changeful conditions in which we live. The spectacle of great sorrows patiently borne rebukes the fretfulness and impatience which we often manifest under the minor discomforts and troubles which we may be called to endure.

III. IT REMINDS US OF THE POSSIBLE NEARNESS OF OUR OWN END. (Ver. 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.*" Though the brevity of life is a fact with which we are all acquainted from the very first moment when we are able to see and know what is going on about us, it is a fact which it is very difficult for us to realize in our own case. "We think all are mortal but ourselves." No feelings of astonishment are excited in us by the sight of the aged and weakly sinking down into the grave, but we can scarcely believe that we are to follow them. The very aged still lay their plans as though death were far off; the dying can hardly be convinced till perhaps the very last moment that their great change is at hand. But a visit to the house of mourning gives us hard, palpable evidence, which must, though but for an instant, convince us that mortality is a universal law; that in a short time our end will come. The effect of such a thought need not be depressing; it need not poison all our enjoyments and paralyze all our efforts. It should lead us to resolve (1) to make good use of every moment, since life is so brief; and (2) to live as they should do who know that they have to give account of themselves to God. A practical benefit is thus to be drawn from even the saddest experiences, for by them "the heart is made better" (ver. 3). The foolish will seek out something which he calls enjoyment, in order to deliver his mind from gloomy thoughts; but the short-lived distraction of attention which he secures is not to be compared with the calm wisdom which piety can extract even from sorrow (ver. 4). Painful though some of the lessons taught us may be, they wound but to impart a permanent cure; while the mirth which drowns reflection soon passes away, and is succeeded by a deeper gloom (vers. 5, 6). One circumstance renders the teaching of this passage all the more impressible, and that is the absence from it of the ascetic spirit. This perhaps is, you will think, a paradoxical statement, when the whole tone of the utterance is of a sombre, not to say gloomy, character. But you will notice that the author does not lay a ban upon all pleasure; he does not denounce all innocent enjoyments as wicked. He does not say it is sinful to go to the house of feasting, to indulge in laughter, to sing secular songs. There have been and are those who make these sweeping statements. But he says that a wise, serious-minded man will not find these things satisfying all his desires; that he will, on the contrary, often find it greatly for his advantage to familiarize himself with very different scenes and employments. In other words, there are two sides to life—the temporal and the eternal. The soul, like the head of Janus, looks both on the present, with all its varied and transitory events, and on the future, in which there are so many new and solemn experiences in store for us. The epicurean, the worldling, looks to the present alone; the ascetic looks to the future alone. The wise have true appreciation of them both; know what conduct duty prescribes as appropriate in regard to them both. The examples of Christ and his apostles show us that we may partake both in the business and innocent pleasures of life without being untrue to our higher calling. He, though "holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners," wrought with his own hands, and thus sanctified all honest labour; he graced a marriage-feast with his presence, and supplied by a miracle the means of convivial cheerfulness. The sights and sounds of city and country life, the mirth of happy homes, the splendour of palaces, the pageantry of courts, the sports of children, were not frowned upon by him

as in themselves unworthy of attracting the attention of immortal natures; they were employed by him to illustrate eternal truths. And all through the writings and exhortations of his apostles the same spirit is manifest; the same counsel is virtually given to use the present world without abusing it—to receive with thankfulness every good creature of God. And at the same time, no one can deny that great stress is laid by them also upon the things that are spiritual and eternal; greater even than on the others. For we are in greater risk of forgetting the eternal than of neglecting the temporal. Far too often is it true in the poet's words—

"The world is too much with us; late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers."

Therefore it is all the more necessary for startling admonitions like these of Solomon's to be given, which recall us with a jerk to attend to things that concern our higher welfare. The fact that there are dangers against which we must guard, dangers springing not merely from our own sinful perversity, but from the conditions of our lives, the danger especially of being too much taken up with the present, is calculated to arouse us to serious thought and effort. Very much easier would it have been for us if a code of rules for external conduct had been given us, so that at any time we might have made sure about being on the right way; but very much poorer and more barren would the life thus developed have been. We are called, as in this passage before us, to weigh matters carefully; to make our choice of worthy employments; to decide for ourselves when to enjoy that which is earthly and temporal, and when to sacrifice it for the sake of that which is spiritual and eternal. And we may be sure that that goodness which springs from an habitually wise choice is infinitely preferable to the narrow, rigid formalism which results from conformity with a Puritanic rule. It is not a sour, kill-joy spirit that should drive us to prefer the house of mourning to the house of feasting; but the sober, intelligent conviction that at times we may find there help to order our lives aright, and have an opportunity of lightening by our sympathy the heavy burden of sorrow which God may see fit to lay upon our brethren.—J. W.

Vers. 7—10.—*Patience under provocation.* In these words our author seems to commend the virtues of patience and contentment in trying circumstances, by pointing out that certain evils against which we may chafe bring their own punishment, and so in a measure work their own cure, that others spring from or are largely aggravated by faults in our own temperament, and that others exist to a very great extent in our own imagination rather than in actual fact. And accordingly the sequence of thought in the chapter is perfectly clear. We have here, too, some "compensations of misery," as in vers. 2—6. The enumeration of the various kinds of evil that provoke our dissatisfaction supplies us with a convenient division of the passage.

I. EVILS THAT BRING THEIR OWN PUNISHMENT AND WORK THEIR OWN CURE. "Surely oppression maketh a wise man mad; and a gift destroyeth the heart. Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof" (vers. 7, 8a). It is the oppressor and not the oppressed who is driven mad. The unjust use of power demoralizes its possessor, deprives him of his wisdom, and drives him into actions of the grossest folly. The receiver of bribes, *i.e.* the judge who allows gifts to warp his judgments, loses the power of moral discernment, and becomes utterly disqualified for discharging his sacred functions. And this view of the meaning of the words makes them an echo of those passages in the Law of Moses which prescribe the duties of magistrates and rulers. "Thou shalt not wrest judgment; thou shalt not respect persons, neither shalt thou take a gift: for a gift doth blind the eyes of the wise, and pervert the words of the righteous" (Deut. xvi. 19; cf. Exod. xxiii. 8). The firm conviction which any extended experience of life is sure to confirm abundantly, that such moral perverseness as is implied in the exercise of tyranny, in extortion and bribery, brings with it its own punishment, is calculated to inspire patience under the endurance of even very gross wrongs. The tyrant may excite an indignation and detestation that will lead to his own destruction; the clamour against an unjust judge may become so great as to necessitate his removal from office, even if the government that employs him be ordinarily very indifferent to moral considerations. In any case, "the man who can quietly endure oppression is sure to come off best in the end" (cf. Matt. v. 38—41).

II. EVILS THAT SPRING LARGELY FROM OUR OWN TEMPERAMENT. "The patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit. Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry: for anger resteth in the bosom of fools" (vers. 8b, 9). That the disposition here reprobated is a very general and fruitful source of misery cannot be doubted. The proud spirit that refuses to submit to wrongs, either real or fancied, that is on the outlook for offence, that strives to redress on the instant the injury received, is rarely long without cause of irritation. If unprovoked by real and serious evils, it will find abundant material for disquietude in the minor crosses and irritations of daily life. While the patient spirit, that schools itself to submission, and yet waits in hope that in the providence of God the cause of pain and provocation will be removed, enjoys peace even in very trying circumstances. It is not that our author commends insensibility of feeling, and deprecates the sensitiveness of a generous nature, which is swift to resent cruelty and injustice. It is rather the ill-advised and morbid state of mind in which there is an unhealthy sensitiveness to affronts and a fruitless chafing against them that he reproves. That anger is in some circumstances a lawful passion no reasonable person can deny; but the Preacher points out two forms of it that are in themselves evil. The first is when anger is "hasty," not calm and deliberate, as the lawful expression of moral indignation, but the outcome of wounded self-love; and the second when it is detained too long, when it "rests" in the bosom. As a momentary, instinctive feeling excited by the sight of wickedness, it is lawful; but when it has a home in the heart it changes its character, and becomes malignant hatred or settled scornfulness. "Be ye angry, and sin not," says St. Paul; "let not the sun go down upon your wrath" (Eph. iv. 26, 27). "Wherefore, my beloved brethren," says St. James, "let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: for the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God" (i. 19, 20).

III. EVILS THAT ARE LARGELY IMAGINARY. "Say not thou, What is the cause that the former days were better than these? for thou dost not inquire wisely concerning this" (ver. 10). Discontentment with the present time and conditions is reproved in these words. It is often a weakness of age, as Horace has described it—

"Difficilis, querulus, laudator temporis acti
Se puero, censor castigatque minorum."

(*Ars Poet.*, 173, 174.)

But it is not by any means confined to the old. There are many who cast longing glances back upon the past, and think with admiration of the age of heroes or of the age of faith, in comparison with which the present is ignoble and worthless. It would be a somewhat harmless folly if it did not lead, as it generally does, to apathetic discontent with the present and despondency concerning the future. "Every age has its peculiar difficulties, and a man inclined to take a dark view of things will always be able to compare unfavourably the present with the past. But a readiness to make comparisons of that kind is no sign of real wisdom. There is light as well as darkness in every age. The young men that shouted for joy at the rebuilding of the temple acted more wisely than the old men who wept with a loud voice" (Ezra iii. 12, 13). And the question may still be asked—Were the old times really better than the present? Is it not a delusion to imagine they were? Are not we the heirs of the ages, to whom the experience of the past and all its attainments in knowledge and all its bright examples of virtue have descended as an endowment and an inspiration? The disposition, therefore, that makes the best of things as they are, instead of grumbling that they are not better, that bears patiently even with very great annoyances, and that is characterized by self-control, is sure to escape a great deal of the misery which falls to the lot of a passionate, irritable, and discontented man (cf. Ps. xxxvii.).—J. W.

Vers. 11, 12.—*Wisdom and riches.* The precise meaning of ver. 11 is rather difficult to catch. The Hebrew words can be translated either as, "Wisdom is good with an inheritance" (Authorized Version), or, "Wisdom is good as an inheritance" (Revised Version); and it is instructive to notice that the earlier English version has in the margin the translation which the Revisers have put in the text, and that the Revisers have put in the margin the earlier rendering, as possibly correct. Both

companies of translators are equally in doubt in the matter. It is a case, therefore, in which one must use one's individual judgment, and decide as to which rendering is to be preferred from the general sense of the whole passage. Our author, then, is speaking of two things which are profitable in life—"for them that see the sun" (ver. 11)—wisdom and riches; and as he gives the preference to the former in ver. 12—"the excellency of knowledge is that wisdom preserveth the life of him that hath it"—we are inclined to think that that is his view all through. And, therefore, though in themselves the translations given of the first clause in the passage are about equally balanced, this consideration is in our opinion weighty enough to turn the scale in favour of that in the Revised Version. Two things, therefore, there are which in different ways provide means of security against some of the ills of life, which afford some "compensation for the misery" of our condition—wisdom and riches. By wisdom a man may to some extent forecast the future, anticipate the coming storm, and take measures for shielding himself against some or all of the evils it brings in its train. Like the unjust steward who acted "wisely," he can win friends who will receive him in the hour of need. By riches, too, he can stave off many of the hardships which the poor man is compelled to endure; he can secure many benefits which will alleviate the sufferings he cannot avert. But of the two wisdom is the more excellent; "it giveth life" (or "bestoweth life," Revised Version) "to them that have it." "It can quicken a life within; it can give salt and savour to that which wealth may only deaden and make insipid" (Bradley). And surely by "wisdom" here we are not to understand mere prudence, but rather that Heaven-born faculty, that control of man's spirit by a higher power, which leads him to make the fear of God the guide of his conduct. And in order to understand wherein it consists, and what are the benefits it secures, we may identify the quality here praised with "that wisdom that cometh from above," which all through the Word of God is described as the source of all excellence, the fountain of all happiness (Prov. iii. 13-18; iv. 13; viii. 32-36; John vi. 63; xvii. 3; 2 Cor. iii. 6).—J. W.

Vers. 13, 14.—*Resignation to Providence.* Already in the tenth verse the Preacher has counselled his readers not to chafe against the conditions in which they find themselves. "Say not thou, What is the cause that the former days were better than these?" It is part of the true wisdom which he has praised "to consider the work of God," to accept the outward events of life, and believe that, whether they be pleasant or the contrary, they are determined by a will or power which we cannot control or change. It is wise to submit. The crooked we cannot make straight (ch. i. 15); the cross which is laid upon us we cannot shake off, and had best bear without repining (cf. Job viii. 3; xxxiv. 12; Ps. cxlvi. 9). A mingled draught is in the cup of life—prosperity and adversity, the sweet and the bitter. Remember that it is commended to your lips by a higher hand, which it is folly to resist; accept the portion which may be assigned to you. In the time of prosperity be in good spirits (ver. 14), let not forebodings of future evil damp the present enjoyment; in the time of adversity consider that it is God who has appointed the evil day as well as the good. The thought is the same as that in the Book of Job, "What? shall we receive good at the hands of God, and shall we not receive evil?" (ii. 10). The reason why both good and evil are appointed us is given by the Preacher, though his words are somewhat obscure: "God also hath even made the one side by side with the other, to the end that man should not find out anything that shall be after him" (ver. 14b, Revised Version). The obscurity is in the thought rather than in the phrases used. The commonest explanation of the words is that they simply assert that to know the future is forbidden us. But the phrase, "after him," is always used to mean that which follows upon the present world (ch. iii. 22; vi. 12; Job xxi. 21). Hitzig explains the words as implying, "that because God wills it that man shall be rid of all things after his death, he puts evil into the period of his life, and lets it alternate with good, instead of visiting him therewith after his death." This explanation would make the passage equivalent to, *Idcirco ut non inveniat homo post se quidquam, scil. quod non expertus est.* But probably the best explanation of these words is that given by Delitzsch, who accepts this of Hitzig's with some modification: "What is meant is much rather this, that God causes man to experience good and evil, that he may pass through the whole school of life, and when he departs

hence that nothing may be outstanding which he has not experienced." This interpretation of the various events of life, joyous and sombre, as forming a complete disciplinary course, through which it is an advantage for us to pass, is the most worthy of the explanations of the words that they have received. And if we accept it as truly representing the author's thoughts, we may say that our author's researches were not so fruitless as he himself seems sometimes to assert. This recognition of a Divine purpose running through all the events of life is calculated to sanctify our enjoyment of the blessings we receive, and to comfort and sustain us in the day of sorrow and adversity.—J. W.

Vers. 15—18.—*Righteousness and wickedness.* This section is one of the most difficult in the whole Book of Ecclesiastes, though there are no various readings in it to perplex us, and no difficulty in translating it. Neither the Authorized Version nor the Revised Version has alternative renderings of any part of it in the margin. The difficulty lies in the uncertainty in which we are as to the writer's standpoint in making out what form of religious life or what phase of thought or conduct he refers to when he says, "Be not righteous overmuch." It is equally humiliating to attempt to explain his words away—to read into them a higher meaning than they evidently bear, or to confess regretfully that we have here a cynical and low-toned depreciation of that which is in itself holy and good. Both courses have been followed by commentators, and both do dishonour to the sacred text.

I. In the first place, the Preacher states in plain terms THE GREAT AND PERPLEXING PROBLEM WHICH SO OFTEN TROUBLED THE HEBREW MIND—that of the adversity of the righteous and the prosperity of the wicked. In his experience of life, in the days of his vanity, in the course of his troubled pilgrimage, he had seen this sight: "There is a just man that perisheth in his righteousness"—in spite of his righteousness; "and there is a wicked man that longeth his life in his wickedness"—in spite of his wickedness (ver. 15). It is the same problem of which varying solutions are attempted in the Book of Job and in the thirty-seventh and seventy-third psalms. The old theory, that the good find their reward and the wicked their punishment in this life, was not borne out by his experience. He had seen it violated so often that he could not hold it as even an approximate statement of the facts of the case. What, then, is his inference from his own experience? Does he say, "Cleave to righteousness in spite of the misfortunes which often attend it?" or, "Believe that somehow and somewhere the apparent inequalities of the present will ultimately be redressed, and both righteousness and wickedness will meet with the rewards and punishments they merit"? No; whether he might acquiesce in one or other of these inferences or not, we cannot tell. Other thoughts are in his mind. A third inference he draws, which would not naturally have occurred to us, but which is as legitimate as ours.

II. FROM HIS EXPERIENCE HE DEDUCES THE LESSON: "Be not righteous overmuch; neither make thyself overwise: why shouldest thou destroy thyself? Be not overmuch wicked, neither be thou foolish: why shouldest thou die before thy time?" Neither the righteous nor the wicked being able to count upon reward for goodness or punishment for evil in this life as certain, both are exposed to certain risks—the one is tempted to adopt an exaggerated and feverish form of religious life, the other to enter on a course of unbridled wickedness. That there is a tendency to exaggeration in matters of religion is abundantly proved by the history of asceticism, which has made its appearance in every religion, true or spurious. The ascetic is the man who is "righteous overmuch." He denies himself all pleasures through the fear of sin; he separates himself, not merely from vicious indulgences, but from occupations and amusements which he admits are innocent enough and lawful enough for those who have not the end in view he has set before himself. He is not content with the good works commanded by the Law of God; he must have his works of supererogation. The Pharisee in the parable (Luke xviii. 9—14) is a typical person of this class. He claimed merit for going beyond the requirements of the Law. Moses appointed but one fast-day in the year, the great Day of Atonement; he boasted that he fasted twice in the week. The Law commanded only to tithe the fruits of the field and increase of the cattle; but he no doubt tithed mint and cummin, *all* that came into his possession, down to the veriest

trifies. And the aim is in all cases the same—the accumulation of a store of merit which will compel a reward if God is not to show himself unjust; an attempt to force from his hand a benediction which others cannot claim who have not adopted the same course. The folly and impiety of such conduct must be apparent to any well-balanced mind. The blessing of Heaven is not to be extorted by any attempt we may make; it may, so far at any rate as outward appearances go, be bestowed capriciously: “The just man may perish in his righteousness, the wicked man may prolong his life in his wickedness.” On the other hand, the fact that punishment for sin is not inevitably and invariably visited immediately upon the evil-doer is undoubtedly the source of danger to those who are inclined to vice. The fact that justice is slow and lame tempts the sinner to an unbridled course of evil; it removes one great restraint upon his conduct. He trusts to the lightness of his heels to escape from punishment until he runs into the arms of death. Some have been as shocked at the counsel, “Be not overmuch wicked,” as at that “Be not righteous overmuch,” as though the writer allowed that a certain moderate degree of wickedness were permissible. They should, if they are logical, be equally horrified at the admonition of St. James, “Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and *superfluity of naughtiness*” (i. 21). It is in both cases a prohibition of a headlong pursuit of sin, without regard to the fearful consequences it entails. The Preacher has in view the consequences in the present life of being “righteous overmuch.” The result in both instances is pretty much the same. To the one he says, “Why shouldest thou destroy thyself?”—to the other, “Why shouldest thou die before thy time?” Both classes lose the pleasure of living, the bright, innocent joys which spring from a grateful acceptance and temperate use of the blessings which God bestows upon men. The ascetic who makes it his aim to torture himself to the very limit of human endurance, and the debauchee who gives himself up to self-indulgence without restraint, each receive, though in different ways, the penalty due for violating the conditions of life in which God has set us. Another warning is given in the same passage against intellectual errors. “Neither make thyself overwise; neither be thou foolish.” Wisdom, too, has limits within which it should be confined. There is a region of the unknowable into which it is presumptuous for it to attempt to intrude. “Fools rush in where angels fear to tread.”

III. The Preacher, in conclusion, points out that A MIDDLE COURSE IS THAT OF DUTY AND OF SAFETY. There are dangers on the right hand and on the left, of over-rigorous austerity and of undue laxity. But the God-fearing are able to walk in the narrow path, and emerge at last unscathed from all the temptations with which life is surrounded. “It is good that thou shouldest take hold of this; yea, also from that withdraw not thine hand, for he that feareth God shall come forth of them all.” The words “this” and “that” refer to the two different precepts he has given. “Lay thine hand it is good to do so,” he says, “on the one precept, ‘Be not righteous overmuch;’ but do not lose sight of the other, ‘Be not overmuch wicked.’ It is he that feareth God that shall steer his way between both.”

Without, therefore, distorting the words of the Preacher to give them a more spiritual meaning or higher tone than they actually possess, we find in them teaching which is worthy of him and of the Word of God. It is remarkable indeed, how, even in his most desponding moods, the fear of God bulks largely in his thoughts as incumbent on men, and as opening up the path of duty, however much else remains dark and unknown. “In his coldest, grayest hour this sense of the fear of God still smoulders, as it were, within his soul; not, indeed, the quickening love of God, but something that inspires reverence; something that saves him from utter shipwreck amidst the crossing and eddy currents of the sunless sea of hopeless pessimism” (Bradley).—J. W.

Vers. 19—22.—*Wisdom a protection.* The connection between these words and those that precede them seems somewhat loose. But the Preacher has just been speaking of “the fear of God,” and some one of those passages of Scripture, which assert that in it is true wisdom (Prov. i. 7; Ps. cxi. 10; Job xxviii. 28), may have been in his mind. He now speaks of the protection and strength which wisdom gives, and of the sort of conduct becoming those who possess it (ver. 19). “Wisdom strengtheneth the wise man more than ten mighty men which are in the city.” Why *ten* mighty men are spoken of is a question difficult to answer. It may be that “ten” is meant to suggest “a full number” (cf. Gen. xxxi. 7; Job xix. 3), or perhaps we have here an

allusion to some political or other arrangements of the time now unknown to us. But the evident meaning of the verse is that the wisdom that fears God is better than material force, that in it there is a ground of confidence better than weapons of war (cf. Prov. xxiv. 5a, "A wise man is strong"). In the words that follow we have man's fallibility strongly insisted on in words quoted from the prayer of Solomon at the dedication of the temple (1 Kings viii. 46), "For there is not a just man upon earth that doeth good and sinneth not," and the inference seems to be that "the wisest at times commit mistakes, but their wisdom enables them to get the better of their mistakes, and protects them against the evil consequences which happen in such cases to the unwise." This thought leads on to the teaching of vers. 21, 22. The wise man who remembers his own mistakes and offences will judge leniently of others, and not punish them as offenders for their occasional hasty words. Indifference to idle praise or idle blame becomes the possessor of true wisdom. For him, to use St. Paul's words, "It is a very small thing to be judged of man's judgment" (1 Cor. iv. 3). An idle curiosity to know what others think of us or say of us is the source of constant mortification. We expect praise, and forget that others are as frivolous and hasty in their criticism of us as we have been in our criticism of them. The servant who waits on us, and from whom we expect special reverence, would probably, if we could hear him without his knowledge, say much about us that would surprise and mortify us. Let us therefore not be too eager to hear our character analyzed and discussed.

"Where ignorance is bliss,
'Tis folly to be wise."

Some excuse may be found for the motto of the old Scottish family which expresses this indifference to the opinion of others in the most pointed form: "They say. What say they? Let them say."—J. W.

Vers. 23—29.—*Woman*. The limitations of human knowledge are nowhere more plainly indicated than in the opening verse of the present section. The Preacher points out that after his utmost endeavours to obtain wisdom with the view of solving the perplexing questions connected with mankind, their actions and their relation to God, he found all such knowledge to be far beyond mortal ken (Wright). "For that which is," that which exists, the world of things in its essence and with its causes, "is far off," far removed from the sight of man, "and it is deep, deep; who can discover it?" (vers. 23, 24). Essential wisdom appeared to him as to Job (xxviii.), quite out of reach. But all his efforts after it had not been in vain. In the course of his researches he had discovered some truth of great value. Though the problems of the universe proved to be insoluble, some lessons had been learned of practical value in the conduct of life. Some rules for present guidance he had discovered, though much remained hidden from him. So is it in every age. The sagest philosophers, the profoundest thinkers, are baffled in their endeavours to explain the mysteries of life, but are able to lay down rules for present conduct which approve themselves to the consciences of all. And happy is it for us that it should be so; that while clouds hang over many regions into which the intellect of man would fain penetrate, the way of duty is plain for all. One great truth he learned, that wickedness was folly, that foolishness was madness, that men who lived in the pursuit of folly were beside themselves and were mad (ver. 25). This thought is very closely akin to the teaching of the Stoics, that the wickedness of men is a kind of mental aberration, and that knowledge is but another name for righteousness. One great source of wickedness he introduces in ver. 26—the fatal fascination of so many by scheming and voluptuous women. The picture he draws is like those in Prov. ii. and vii., and, but for the more sweeping condemnation in the verses that follow, might be thought to express reprobation of a certain degraded class rather than a cynical estimate of the whole of womankind. One man, he says, he had found among a thousand, one only what a man ought to be; but not one woman among the same number who corresponded to the ideal of womanhood, who reminded him of the innocence and goodness of Eve as God created her (ver. 29). The race, both men and women, had been created upright, but had become almost utterly corrupt by the devices they had invented by which to gratify their inclinations toward evil. What are we to make of his words? Is the case really as bad as he represents it? The

answer to the question is not far to seek. The Preacher is recording his own experience, and if we take his words as a truthful report, we can only say that he was specially unfortunate in his experience. There is no doubt that in some countries and in some ages of the world, corruption is very widespread and deep, and in the land and time in which our author lived matters may have been as bad as he represents them. But the experience of a single life does not afford sufficient ground for broad generalizations concerning human nature. The words may be an expression of that terrible feeling of satiety and loathing which is the curse following upon gross sensuality such as that of the historical Solomon, with his three hundred wives and seven hundred concubines. No sensible person would take the moralizings of the satiated debauchee without very considerable deductions. Those of a chaste, temperate, God-fearing man are much more likely to hit the truth. We may grant that search had been made, and not one woman among the thousand whose dispositions and characters had been passed in review approved herself worthy of praise as like what a true woman should be, and still doubt whether the thousand were fair representatives of their sex. Did he search in the right quarter? or were the women the population of his seraglio? If they were, we cannot wonder that, in an institution which is itself an outrage upon human nature, all its inhabitants were found corrupt. For a very different estimate of the female character as exemplified in some of its representatives, we have only to read the praises of the Shulamite in the Song of Songs, and of the virtuous women described in Prov. v. 18, 19; xxxi. 10—31. And Scripture itself is rich in the histories of good women. There are those of patriarchal times whose tender grace gives such an idyllic charm to so many incidents of that early age. The names of Sarah, Rebekah, and Rachel call up ideas of purity, innocence, piety, and steadfast love, as a rich inheritance they have left to the race. Miriam, Hannah, Ruth, and Esther, too, suggest a world of goodness and holiness which was quite unknown to the experience of the writer of these dark and sombre words in Ecclesiastes. Then in the New Testament we have the luminous figures of the Virgin-mother, the Prophetess Anna, the devout women who ministered to Christ and stood by his cross, and were early in the morning at his sepulchre, and were the first to believe in him as their risen Lord. There are those in the long list recorded in the Epistles of St. Paul, who were zealous fellow-labourers with him in all good works, who, by their deeds of hospitality, their kindly ministrations to the poor and sick and bereaved, reprov'd the wickedness of the world in which they lived, and gave promise of the rich harvest of goodness which would spring from the holy teaching and example of the Redeemer. And in no Christian country have abundant examples been wanting of the pure and devoted love by which mothers and wives and sisters have enriched and blessed the lives of those connected with them, and redeemed their sex from the stigma cast upon it by gross-minded and corrupt men. No persecutions have ever wasted any section of the Christian Church without finding among women as true and steadfast witnesses for the cause of Christ as among men.

"A noble army—men and boys,
The matron and the maid,
Around the Saviour's throne rejoice,
In robes of light array'd.
They climb'd the steep ascent of heaven
Through peril, toil, and pain;
O God, to us may grace be given
To follow in their train!"

J. W.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER VIII.

Vers. 1—9.—Section 5. There is no use in repining or rebelling; *true wisdom counsels obedience to the powers that be, and submission to the dispensations of Providence.* However

oppressive a tyrant may prove sure retribution awaits him.

Vers. 1.—Who is as the wise man? *i.e.* Who is like, equal to, the wise man? The somewhat sudden question occurs naturally after the results of the search for wisdom

mentioned at the end of the last chapter. The thought is not, as in Hos. xiv. 9 and Jer. ix. 12, "Who is wise?" but—No one can be compared with a wise man; he has no compeer. And who [like him] knoweth the interpretation of a thing? Who, so well as the wise man, understands the proper relation of circumstances, sees into human affairs and God's dispensations in the case of nations and individuals? Such a one takes the right view of life. The word *pesher*, "interpretation," occurs (*pesher*) continually in Daniel, and nowhere else, and is Chaldaic. The Vulgate, which connects these two clauses with ch. vii. renders, *Quis cognovit solutionem verbi?* So the Septuagint. The "word" or "saying" may be the question proposed above concerning the happy life, or the proverb that immediately follows. But *dabar* is better rendered "thing," as ch. i. 8; vii. 8. A man's wisdom maketh his face to shine; Septuagint, *φωρεῖ*, "will enlighten, illuminate." The serene light within makes itself visible in the outward expression; the man is contented and cheerful, and shows this in his look and bearing. This is an additional praise of wisdom. Thus Ecclus. xiii. 25, 26, "The heart of man changeth his countenance, whether it be for good or evil. A cheerful countenance is a token of a heart that is in prosperity." Cicero, 'De Orat,' iii. 57, "Omnes enim motus animi suum quemdam a natura habet vultum et sonum et gestum; corpusque totum hominis et ejus omnis vultus omnesque voces, ut nervi in fidibus, ita sonant, ut motu animi quoque sunt pulsæ." And the boldness of his face shall be changed. The word translated "boldness" is *iy*, which means properly "strongth," and is best taken of the coarseness and impudence engendered by ignorance and want of culture. Wisdom, when it fills the heart, changes the countenance to an open genial look, which wins confidence and love. Delitzsch refers to the well-worn lines of Ovid, 'Epist,' ii. 9. 47—

"Adde, quod ingenuas didicisse fideliter artes

Emollit mores, nec sinit esse feros."

The Septuagint, "And a man shameless in countenance will be hated," shows an alternation in the text, and does not agree with the context. Vulgate, *Et potentissimus faciem illius commutabit*, "And the Almighty will change his face," where again the text is not accurately followed.

Ver. 2.—I counsel thee to keep the king's commandment. The pronoun *I* stands in the Hebrew without a verb (the Vulgate, *Ego os regis observo*, is not warranted by the grammar of the clause), and some take it as the answer to the question in ver. 1, "Who

is like the wise man?" I, who am now teaching you. But it is better to regard the pronoun as emphasizing the following rule, supplying some verb (which may possibly have dropped out of the text), as, "Say, advise—I, for my part, whatever others may do or advise, I counsel thee;" the injunction being given in the imperative mood. The Septuagint and Syriac omit the pronoun altogether. The warning implies that the writer was living under kingly, and indeed despotic, government, and it was the part of a wise man to exhibit cheerful obedience. Ben-Sira observes that wise men teach us how to serve great men (Ecclus. viii. 8). Such conduct is not only prudent, but really a religious duty, even as the prophets counsel submission to Assyrian and Chaldean rulers (see Jer. xxvii. 12; xxix. 7; Ezek. xvii. 15). The liege lord, being God's vicegerent, must be revered and obeyed. St. Paul, though he does not quote Ecclesiastes, may have had this passage in mind when he wrote (Rom. xiii. 1), "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," etc.; and (ver. 5), "Ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience' sake." The "king" in the text is understood by some to mean God, but the following clause renders this improbable, and it is wisdom in its political aspect that is here regarded. And that in regard of the oath of God. The *vav* is explicative; "in regard of," or "because of," as ch. iii. 18. "The oath of God" is the oath of allegiance to the king, taken in the name of God, under his invocation (comp. Exod. xxii. 11; 1 Kings ii. 43). So we read (2 Kings xi. 17) of a covenant between king and people, and people and king, in the time of Jehoiada; Nebuchadnezzar made Zedekiah swear by God to be his vassal (2 Chron. xxxvi. 13); and Josephus ('Ant,' xii. 1; xi. 8. 3) relates that Ptolemy Soter, son of Lagus (following herein the example of Darius), exacted an oath from the Jews in Egypt to be true to him and his successors. We know that both Babylonian and Persian monarchs exacted an oath of fealty from conquered nations, making them swear by the gods whom they worshipped, the selection of deities being left to them.

Ver. 3.—Further advice concerning political behaviour. Be not hasty to go out of his (the king's) sight. Do not, from some hasty impulse, or induced by harsh treatment, cast off your allegiance to your liege lord. We have the phrase, "go away," in the sense of quitting of service or desertion of a duty, in Gen. iv. 16; Hos. xi. 2. So St. Peter urges servants to be subject unto their masters, "not only to the good and gentle,

but also to the froward" (1 Pet. ii. 18). Solomon might have given this advice to the Israelites who were ready to follow Jeroboam's lead; though they could have remained loyal to Rehoboam only from high religious motives. But it is better to bear even a heavy yoke than to rebel. The Septuagint has, "Be not hasty; thou shalt go from his presence"—which seems to mean, "Be not impatient, and all will be well." But the authorized rendering is correct (comp. ch. x. 4). We may quote Mendelssohn's comment cited by Chance on Job xxxiv. 16, "This is a great rule in politics, that the people must have no power to pronounce judgment upon the conduct of a king, whether it be good or bad; for the king judges the people, and not the reverse; and if it were not for this rule, the country would never be quiet, and without rebels against the king and his law." **Stand not in an evil thing**; Vulgate, *Neque permanes in opere malo*, "Persist not in an evil affair." But the verb here implies rather the engaging in a matter than continuing an undertaking already begun. The "affair" is conspiracy, insurrection; and Koheleth warns against entering upon and taking part in any such attempt. This seems to be the correct explanation of the clause; but it is, perhaps intentionally, ambiguous, and is capable of other interpretations. Thus Ginsburg, "Do not stand up (in a passion) because of an evil word." Others, "Obey not a sinful command," or "Hesitate not at an evil thing," i.e. if the king orders it. Wordsworth, referring to Ps. i. 1, renders, "Stand not in the way of sinners," which seems to be unsuitable to the context. The Septuagint gives, "Stand not in an evil word" (ἀδύφω, perhaps "matter"). The reason for the injunction follows. **For he doeth whatsoever pleaseth him.** The irresponsible power of a despotic monarch is here signified, though the terms are applicable (as some, indeed, take them as alone appertaining) to God himself (but see Prov. xx. 2). The Septuagint combines with this clause the commencement of the following verse, "For he will do whatever he pleases, even as a king using authority (ἐξουσιάζων)." Some manuscripts add λαλεῖ, "he speaks."

Ver. 4.—Where the word of a king is, there is power. A further confirmation of the last thought. More accurately, "Inasmuch as the word of a king is powerful" (*shilton*, ver. 8). This last word is used in Daniel (iii. 2) for "a lord," or "ruler." The king does as he thinks fit because his mandate is all-powerful, and must be obeyed. And who may say unto him, What doest thou? The same expression is found applied to God (Job ix. 12; Isa. xlv. 9; Wisd. xii. 12). The absolute authority of a despot is

spoken of in the same terms as the irresistible power of Almighty God.

Εἰκὼν δὲ βασιλεὺς ἐστὶν ἐμψυχὸς Θεοῦ.

"God's living image is an earthly king."

Ver. 5.—Whoso keepeth the commandment shall feel no evil thing. This is an encouragement to obedience to royal authority (comp. Prov. xxiv. 21, 22; Rom. xiii. 3). The context plainly shows that it is not God's commandment that is spoken of (though, of course, the maxim would be very true in this case), but the king's. Nor is it necessarily a servile and unreasoning obedience that is enjoined. Koheleth is dealing with generals. Such cases as that of Daniel and the three children, where obedience would have been sinful, are not here taken into consideration. "Shall feel," literally, "shall know," i.e. experience no physical evil. Quiet submission to the powers that be guarantees a peaceful and happy life. Ginsburg and others translate, "knoweth not an evil word," i.e. is saved from abuse and reproach, which seems somewhat meagre, though the Septuagint gives, *Ὁὐ γινώσεται ῥῆμα πονηρὸν*. The Vulgate is better, *Non experietur quidquam mali*. And a wise man's heart discerneth (*knoweth*) both time and judgment. The verb is the same in both clauses, and ought to have been so translated. The "heart" includes the moral as well as the intellectual faculties; and the maxim says that the wise man bears oppression and remains unexcited even in evil days, because he is convinced that there is a time of judgment coming when all will be righted (ch. xii. 14). The certainty of retributive justice is so strong in his mind that he does not resort to rebellion in order to rectify matters, but possesses his soul in patience, leaving the correction of abuses in God's hands. Septuagint, "The wise man's heart knoweth the time of judgment," making a hendiadys of the two terms. The Vulgate has *tempus et responsonem*, "time and answer."

Ver. 6.—Because. This and the three following clauses all begin with *ki*, "since," "for," and the conjunction ought to have been similarly rendered in all the places. Thus here, *For* to every purpose there is time and judgment. Here commences a chain of argument to prove the wisdom of keeping quiet under oppression or evil rulers. Everything has its appointed time of duration, and in due course will be brought to judgment (see ch. iii. 1, 17; xii. 14). Therefore (*for*) the misery of man is great upon him. This is a further reason, but its exact signification is disputed. Literally, *the evil of the man is heavy upon him* (comp. ch. vi. 1). This may mean, as in the Authorized Version,

that the affliction which subjects suffer at the hand of a tyrant becomes insupportable, and calls for and receives God's interposition. Or "the evil" may be the wickedness of the despot, which presses heavily upon him, and under retributive justice will ere long bring him to the ground, and so the oppression will come to an end. This seems to be the most natural interpretation of the passage. The Septuagint, reading differently, has, "For the knowledge of a man is great upon him." Though what this means it is difficult to say.

Ver. 7.—**For he knoweth not that which shall be.** The subject may be man in general, or more probably the evil tyrant. The clause contains a third reason for patience. The despot cannot foresee the future, and goes on blindly filling up the measure of his iniquity, being unable to take any precautions against his inevitable fate (Prov. xxiv. 22). *Quem Deus vult perdere prius dementat.* For who can tell him when it shall be? rather, *how it shall be.* The fourth portion of the argument. The infatuated man knows not the time when the blow will fall, nor, as here, the manner in which the retribution will come, the form which it will take. Septuagint, "For how it shall be, who will tell him?" The Vulgate paraphrases inaccurately, *Quia ignorat præterita, et futura nullo scire potest nuntio*, "Because he knoweth not the past, and the future he can ascertain by no messenger."

Ver. 8.—This verse gives the conclusion of the line of argument which confirms the last clause of ver. 5. There is no man that hath power over the spirit to retain the spirit. If we take "spirit" in the sense of "the breath of life," explaining the clause to mean that the mightiest despot has no power to retain life when his call comes, we have the same thought repeated virtually in the next clause. It is therefore better to take *ruach* in the sense of "wind" (Gen. viii. 1). No one can control the course of the wind or know its way (comp. ch. xi. 5, where the same ambiguity exists; Prov. xxx. 4). Koheleth gives here four impossibilities which point to the conclusion already given. The first is man's inability to check the viewless wind or to know whence it comes or whither it goes (John iii. 8). Equally impotent is the tyrant to influence the drift of events that is bearing him on to his end. God's judgments are often likened to a wind (see Isa. xli. 16; Wisd. iv. 4; v. 23). Neither hath he power in the day of death; rather, *over the day of death.* The second impossibility concerns the averting the hour of death. Whether it comes by sickness, or accident, or design, the despot must succumb; he can neither foresee nor ward it off (1 Sam. xxvi. 10, "The Lord shall smite him; or his day shall come to die; or he shall go down into

battle, and perish;" Ecclus. xiv. 12, "Remember that death will not be long in coming, and that the covenant of the grave is not showed unto thee"). And there is no discharge in that war. The word rendered "discharge" (*mishlachath*) is found elsewhere only in Ps. lxxviii. 49, where it is translated "sending," "mission," or "band." The Septuagint here has ἀποστολή; the Vulgate *Neo sinitur quiescere ingruente bello.* The Authorized Version is doubtless correct, though there is no need to insert the pronoun "that." The severity of the law of military service is considered analogously with the inexorable law of death. The Hebrew enactment (Deut. xx. 5-8) allowed exemption in certain cases; but the Persian rule was inflexibly rigid, permitting no furlough or evasion during an expedition. Thus we read that when Gobazus, the father of three sons, petitioned Darius to leave him one at home, the tyrant replied that he would leave him all three, and had them put to death. Again, Pythius, a Lydian, asking Xerxes to exempt his eldest son from accompanying the army to Greece, was reviled by the monarch in unmeasured terms, and was punished for his presumption by seeing his son slain before his eyes, the body divided into two pieces, and placed on either side of the road by which the army passed, that all might be warned of the fate awaiting any attempt to evade military service (Herod., iv. 84; vii. 38). The passage in the text has a bearing on the authorship and date of our book, if, as seems most probable, the reference is to the cruel discipline of Persia. This is the third impossibility; the fourth follows. Neither shall wickedness deliver those that are given to it; its lord and master. Septuagint, *τὸν παρ' αὐτοῦ*, "its votary." Ginsburg translates *resha* "cunning;" but this seems foreign to the sentiment, which is concerned with the despot's impiety, injustice, and general wickedness, not with the means by which he endeavours to escape the reward of his deeds. The fact is, no evil despot, however reckless and imperious, can go long unpunished. He may say in his heart, "There is no God," or, "God hideth his face, and sees him not," but certain retribution awaits him, and may not be avoided. Says the gnome—

Ἄγει τὸ θεῖον τοὺς κακοὺς πρὸς τὴν δίκην.

"Heaven drives the evil always unto judgment."

Ver. 9.—**All this have I seen** (ch. v. 18; vii. 23); i.e. all that has been mentioned in the preceding eight verses, especially the conviction of retributive justice. He gained this experience by giving his mind to the consideration of men's actions. There is a

time wherein one man ruleth over another to his own hurt. This version is certainly incorrect. A new sentence is not commenced here, but the clause is closely connected with what precedes; and "his own hurt" should be "his [equivocally] hurt." Thus Wright and Volck: "All this have I seen, even by applying my heart to all the work that is done under the sun, at a time when man ruleth over man to his hurt." Most modern commentators consider that the hurt is that of the oppressed subject; but it is possible that the sense is intentionally ambiguous, and the injury may be that which the despot inflicts, and that which he has to suffer. Both these have been signified above. There is no valid reason for making, as Cox does, this last clause commence ver. 10, and rendering, "But there is a time when a man ruleth over men to their hurt."

Vers. 10-15.—Section 6. Koheleth is troubled by apparent anomalies in God's moral government. He notes the *prosperity of the godless and the misery of the righteous*, God's abstention and the seeming impunity of sinners make men incredulous of Providence; but God is just in reward and punishment, as the end will prove. Meantime, returning to his old maxim, he advises men patiently to acquiesce in things as they are, and to make the best of life.

Ver. 10.—And so (וְכֵן); then, in like manner, under the same circumstances (Esth. iv. 16). The writer notes some apparent exceptions to the law of retribution of which he has just been speaking, the double particle at the beginning of the verse implying the connection with the preceding statement. *I saw the wicked buried.* "The wicked" are especially the despots (ver. 9). These are carried to their graves with every outward honour and respect, like the rich man in the parable, who "died, and was buried" (Luke xvi. 22). Such men, if they had received their due reward, far from having a pompous and magnificent funeral (which would befit only a good and honoured life), would have been buried with the burial of an ass (comp. Isa. xiv. 19; Jer. xxii. 19). So far the Authorized Version is undeniably correct. What follows is as certainly inaccurate as it is unintelligible. *Who had come and gone from the place of the holy; literally, and they came, and from the place of the holy they went.* The first verb seems to mean, "they came to their rest," they died a natural death. The words, in themselves ambiguous, are explained by the connection in which they stand (comp. Isa. lvii. 2). Wright renders, "they came into being," and explains it with the

following clause, "they went away from the holy place," as one generation coming and another going, in constant succession. But if, as we suppose, the paragraph applies to the despot, such an interpretation is unsuitable. Cox's idea, that oppressive despots "come again" in the persons of their wicked children, is wholly unsupported by the text. The verse admits and has received a dozen explanations differing more or less from one another. A good deal depends upon the manner in which the succeeding clause is translated, *And they were forgotten in the city where they had so done.* As the particle rendered "so" (*ken*) may also mean "well," "rightly," we get the rendering, "even such as acted justly," and thus introduce a contrast between the fate of the wicked man who is honoured with a sumptuous funeral, and that of the righteous whose name is cast out as pollution and soon forgotten. So Cheyne ('Job and Solomon') gives, "And in accordance with this I have seen ungodly men honoured, and that too in the holy place (the temple, Isa. xviii. 7), but those who had acted rightly had to depart, and were forgotten in the city." Against this interpretation, which has been adopted by many, it may reasonably be urged that in the same verse *ken* would hardly be used in two different senses, and that there is nothing in the text to indicate a change of subject. It seems to me that the whole verse applies to the wicked man. He dies in peace, he leaves the holy place; the evil that he has done is forgotten in the very city where he had so done, i.e. done wickedly. "The place of the holy" is Jerusalem (Isa. xlviii. 2; Matt. xxvii. 53) or the temple (Matt. xxiv. 15). He is removed by death from that spot, the very name of which ought to have cried shame on his crimes and impiety. The expression seems to picture a great procession of priests and Levites accompanying the corpse of the deceased tyrant to the place of burial, while the final clause implies that no long lamentation was made over him, no monument erected to his memory (see the opposite of this in the treatment of Josiah, 2 Chron. xxxv. 24, 25). They who consider "the righteous" to be the subject of the last clauses see in the words, "from the holy place they departed," an intimation that these were excommunicated from the synagogue or templo, or banished from the promised land, on account of their opinions. I would translate the passage thus: *In like manner have I seen the wicked buried, and they came to their rest, and they went from the holy place, and were forgotten in the city where they had so (wickedly) acted.* The versions have followed various readings. Thus the Septuagint: "And then I saw the impious brought unto graves,

and from the holy place; and they departed and were praised in the city, because they had so done;" Vulgate, "I have seen the impious buried, who also, while they still lived, were in the holy place, and were praised in the city as if men of just doings." Commenting on this version, St. Gregory writes, "The very tranquillity of the peace of the Church conceals many under the Christian name who are beset with the plague of their own wickedness. But if a light breath of persecution strikes them, it sweeps them away at once as chaff from the threshing-floor. But some persons wish to bear the mark of Christian calling, because, since the name of Christ has been exalted on high, nearly all persons now look to appear faithful, and from seeing others called thus, they are ashamed not to seem faithful themselves; but they neglect to be that which they boast of being called. For they assume the reality of inward excellence, to adorn their outward appearance; and they who stand before the heavenly Judge, naked from the unbelief of their heart, are clothed, in the sight of men, with a holy profession, at least in words" ('Moral.,' xxv. 26). This is also vanity. The old refrain recurs to the writer as he thinks on the prosperity of the wicked, and the conclusions which infidels draw therefrom. Here is another example of the vanity that prevails in all earthly circumstances.

Ver. 11.—The verse states one of the results of God's forbearance in punishing the evil. **Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily.** The verse begins with *asher*, "because," as in ch. iv. 3; vi. 12, which connects the sentence with the allegation of vanity just preceding, as well as with what follows. *Pithgam*, "sentence," "edict," is a foreign word of Persian origin, found in Esth. i. 20 and in Chaldee portions of Ezra (iv. 17) and Daniel (iv. 14, etc.). God seems to us to delay in punishing the guilty because we behold only one little portion of the course of his providence; could we take a more comprehensive view, anomalies would disappear, and we should see the end of these men (Ps. lxxiii. 17). But a contracted, sceptical view leads to two evils—first, a weakening of faith in God's moral government; and second, a miserable fatalism which denies man's responsibility and saps his energy. Of the former of these results Koheleth here treats. **Therefore the heart of the sons of men.** The heart is named as the seat of thought and the prime mover of action (comp. ch. ix. 3; Esth. vii. 5; Matt. xv. 18, 19). **Is fully set in them to do evil;** literally, *is full in them*; i.e. their heart becomes filled with thoughts which are directed to evil, or full of courage, hence "emboldened" (Revised Version margin) to do evil. Vulgate,

absque timore ullo filii hominum perpetrant mala; Septuagint, "Because there is no contradiction (*ἀντίρροσις*) made on the part of (*ἀπὸ*) those who do evil speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully persuaded (*ἐπιπροφορήθη*) in them to do evil." The long-suffering of God, instead of leading such men to repentance, hardens them in their infidelity (Ps. lxxiii. 11). Primarily, the reference is still to tyrannical despots, who, in their seeming impunity, are emboldened to pursue their evil course. But the statement is true generally. As Cicero says, "Quis ignorat maximam illecebram esse peccandi impunitatis spem?" ('Pro Milone,' xvi.).

Ver. 12.—**Though a sinner do evil a hundred times.** The sentence begins again, as ver. 11, with *asher*, followed by a participle; and the conjunction ought to be rendered "because," the statement made in the former verse being resumed and strengthened. The Vulgate has *attamen*, which our version follows. The Septuagint goes astray, translating, *ὅς ἡμαρτεν*, "He that has sinned has done evil from that time." The sinner is here supposed to have transgressed continually without check or punishment. The expression, "a hundred times," is used indefinitely, as Prov. xvii. 10; Isa. lxx. 20. **And his days be prolonged;** better, *prolongeth his days for it*; i.e. in the practice of evil, with a kind of contentment and satisfaction, the pronoun to be the ethic dative. Contrary to the usual course of temporal retribution, the sinner often lives to old age. The Vulgate has, *Et per patientiam sustentatur*, which signifies that he is kept in life by God's long-suffering. Ginsburg gives, "and is perpetuated," i.e. in his progeny—which is a possible, but not a probable, rendering. **Yet surely I know;** rather, *though I for my part know*. He has seen sinners prosper; this experience has been forced upon him; yet he holds an inward conviction that God's moral government will vindicate itself at some time and in some signal manner. **It shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before him.** This is not really tautological; it is compared to St. Paul's expression (1 Tim. v. 3), "widows that are widows indeed" (*ὄρφανος*), implying that they are, in fact and life, what they profess to be. Delitzsch and Plumptre suggest that in Koheleth's time "God-fearers" had become the name of a religious class, as the *Chasidim*, or "Assideans," in 1 Macc. ii. 42; vii. 13, etc. Certainly a trace of this so-named party is seen in Ps. cxviii. 4; Mal. iii. 16. **When this adjustment of anomalies shall take place,** whether in this life or in another, the writer says not here. In spite of all contrary appearances, he holds firm to his faith that it will be well

with the righteous in the long run. The comfort and peace of a conscience at rest, and the inward feeling that his life was ordered after God's will, would compensate a good man for much outward trouble; and if to this was added the assured hope of another life, it might indeed be said that it was well with him. The Septuagint has, "that they may fear before him," which implies that the mercy and loving-kindness of God, manifested in his care of the righteous, lead to piety and true religion. Cheyne ('Job and Solomon'), combining this verse with the next, produces a sense which is certainly not in the present Hebrew text, "For I know that it ever happens that a sinner does evil for a long time, and yet lives long, whilst he who fears before God is short-lived as a shadow."

Ver. 13.—But it shall not be well with the wicked. If experience seemed often to militate against this assertion, Koheleth's faith prevailed against apparent contradictions. Neither shall he prolong his days, which are as a shadow. Above we read of a wicked man enjoying a long, untroubled life; here the contrary is stated. Such contradictions are seen every day. There are inscrutable reasons for the delay of judgment; but on the whole moral government is vindicated, and even the long life of a sinner is no blessing. The author of the Book of Wisdom writes (iv. 8), "Honourable age is not that which standeth in length of time, nor that which is measured by number of years;" and Isaiah (lxv. 20), "The sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed." Man's life is compared to a shadow because it passes away with the setting sun (see on ch. vi. 12). The Vulgate, in order to obviate the apparent discrepancy between this and the preceding verses, renders the verb in a precatory form: *Non sit bonum impio*, etc., "Let it not be well with the wicked, and let his days not be prolonged; but let them pass away as a shadow who fear not the Lord." This is quite unnecessary; and the words, "as a shadow," according to the accents, belong to what precedes, as in the Authorized Version. Hitzig and others have adopted the Vulgate division, and render, "Like a shadow is he who fears not God." But there is no sufficient reason for disregarding the existing accentuation. Septuagint, "He shall not prolong his days in a shadow (*ἐν σκιά*). Because he feareth not before God. This is the reason, looking to temporal retribution, why the wicked shall not live out half their days (ch. vii. 17; Prov. x. 27; Ps. lv. 23). Koheleth cleaves to the doctrine received from old time, although facts seem often to contradict it.

Ver. 14.—There is a vanity which is done

upon the earth. The vanity is named in what follows, viz. the seeming injustice in the distribution of good and evil. There be just men, unto whom it happeneth according to the work of the wicked (comp. ver. 10; ch. iii. 16). The melancholy fact is noted that the righteous often experience that fate with which the wicked are threatened, which their conduct might be expected to bring upon them. The verb translated "happeneth" (*naga*), with *el*, "to come to," "strike against," is thus used only in later Hebrew, e.g. Esth. ix. 26. According to the work of the righteous. The wicked meet with that outward prosperity and success which were thought to be the special reward of those who served God. The Vulgate is explanatory, "There are just men whom evils befall, as if they did the works of the wicked; and there are wicked men who are as free from care as if they had the deeds of the just." Commenting on Job xxxiv. 10, 11, St. Gregory writes, "It is by no means always the case in this life that God renders to each man according to his work and according to his own ways. For both many who commit unlawful and wicked deeds he prevents of his free grace, and converts to works of holiness; and some who are devoted to good deeds he reproves by means of the scourge, and so afflicts those who please him, as though they were displeasing to him. . . . God doubtless so ordains it of his inestimable mercy, that both scourges should torture the just, lest their doings should elate them, and that the unjust should pass this life at least without punishment, because by their evil doings they are hastening onwards to those torments which are without end. For that the just are sometimes scourged in no way according to their deserts is shown by this history of Job. Elihu, therefore, would speak more truly if he had said that there is not unmercifulness and iniquity in God, even when he seems not to render to men according to their ways. For even that which we do not understand is brought forth from the righteous balance of secret judgment" ('Moral,' xxiv. 44). Koheleth ends by repeating his melancholy refrain, I said that this also (*indeed*) is vanity. This conclusion, however, does not lead to despair or infidelity.

Ver. 15.—Then (*and*) I commended mirth. In face of the anomalies which meet us in our view of life, Koheleth recommends the calm enjoyment of such blessings and comforts as we possess, in exact accordance with what has already been said (ch. ii. 24; iii. 12, 22; v. 18), though the road by which he arrives at the conclusion is not identical in both cases. In the earlier chapters the injunction is based on man's inability to be the master of his own fate; in the present pas-

sage the inscrutable nature of the law that directs God's moral government leads to the advice to make the best of circumstances. In neither instance need we trace veiled Epicureanism. The result obtained is reached by acute observation supplemented by faith in God. **Under the sun.** The phrase occurs twice in this verse and again in ver. 17, and implies that the view taken was limited to man's earthly existence. To eat, and to drink, etc. This is not a commendation of a greedy, voluptuous life, but an injunction thankfully to enjoy the good provided by God without disquieting one's self with the mysteries of Providence. So it was said of Israel in its palmy days (1 Kings iv. 20), "Judah and Israel were many, as the sand which is by the sea in multitude, eating and drinking, and making merry." For that shall abide with him of his labour; rather, *and that this should accompany him in his labour.* The Greek Version regards the verb as indicative, not subjunctive, nor, as others, as jussive: "This shall attend (*συμφορέσθαι*) him in his work." But it seems better to consider Koheleth as saying that the happiest thing for a man is to make the best of what he has, and to take with him in all his work a cheerful and contented heart.

Ver. 16 — ch. ix. 10. — Section 7 (the division in the theme caused by the introduction of a new chapter is misleading). *Man's wisdom is incapable of explaining the course of God's providential government; death awaits all without any exception, whatever be their condition or actions.* These two considerations conduce to the old conclusion, that man had best enjoy life, only being careful to use it energetically and well.

Vers. 16, 17. — No mortal wisdom, combined with the closest observation and thought, can fathom the mysteries of God's moral government.

Ver. 16. — **When I applied mine heart** (ch. i. 13). The answering member of the sentence is in ver. 17, the last clause of the present verse being parenthetical. **To know wisdom.** This was his first study (see on ch. i. 16). He endeavoured to acquire wisdom which might enable him to investigate God's doings. His second study was to see the business that is done upon the earth; i.e. not only to learn what men do in their several stations and callings, but likewise to understand what all this means, what it tends to, its object and result. (For "business," *inyan*, see on ch. i. 13.) The Vulgate here renders it *distentionem*, "distraction," which is like the Septuagint *περίσπασιν*. For also there is that neither day nor night seeth sleep with

his eyes. This is a parenthetical clause expressing either the restless, unrelieved labour that goes on in the world, or the sleepless meditation of one who tries to solve the problem of the order and disorder in men's lives. In the latter case, Koheleth may be giving his own experience. To "see sleep" is to enjoy sleep. The phrase is not found elsewhere in the Old Testament, but commentators quote parallels from classical sources. Thus Terence, 'Heautontim.,' iii. 1. 82—

"Somnum hercle ego hac nocte oculis non vidi meis."

"No sleep mine eyes have seen this livelong night."

Cicero, 'Ad Famil.,' viii. 30, "Fuit mirifica vigilantia, qui toto suo consulatu somnum non vidit." Of course, the expression is hyperbolic. The same idea is found without metaphor in such passages as Ps. cxxxii. 4; Prov. vi. 4.

Ver. 17.—**Then I beheld all the work of God.** This is the apodosis to the first clause of ver. 16. "God's work" is the same as the work that is done under the sun, and means men's actions and the providential ordering thereof. This a man, with his finite understanding, cannot find out, cannot thoroughly comprehend or explain (comp. ch. iii. 11; vii. 23, 24). Because though a man labour to seek it out. The Septuagint has, "Ὅσα ἀμύθηται," "Whatsoever things a man shall labour to seek;" Vulgate, *Quanto plus laboraverit ad quærendum, tanto minus inveniat.* The interpreters waver between "how much so ever," and "wherefore a man labours." The latter seems to be best. Though a wise man think to know it, yet shall he not be able to find it. It is the part of wisdom to determine to know all that can be known; but the resolution is baffled here (comp. ch. vii. 23). The two verses, with their repetitions and tautologous expressions, seem to denote perturbation of mind in the author and his sense of the gravity of his assertions. He is overwhelmed with the thought of the inscrutability of God's judgments, while he is forced to face the facts. An exquisite commentary on this passage is found in Hooker, 'Eccel. Pol.,' i. 2. § 2, quoted by Plumptre; and in Bishop Butler's sermon 'On the Ignorance of Man,' where we read, "From it [the knowledge of our ignorance] we may learn with what temper of mind a man ought to inquire into the subject of religion, namely, with what expectation of finding difficulties, and with a disposition to take up and rest satisfied with any evidence whatever which is real. A man should beforehand expect things mysterious, and such as he will not be able thoroughly to comprehend or get to the bottom of. . . . Our ignorance is the proper answer to many things which are called objections

against religion, particularly to those which arise from the appearance of evil and irregularity in the constitution of nature and the government of the world. . . . Since the constitution of nature and the methods and designs of Providence in the government of the world are above our comprehension, we should acquiesce in and rest satisfied with our ignorance, turn our thoughts from that which is above and beyond us, and apply ourselves to that which is level to our capacities, and which is our real business and concern. . . . Lastly, let us adore that infinite wisdom and power and goodness which is above our comprehension (Eccles. i. 6).

The conclusion is that in all lowliness of mind we set lightly by ourselves; that we form our temper to an implicit submission to the Divine Majesty, beget within ourselves an absolute resignation to all the methods of his providence in his dealings with the children of men; that in the deepest humility of our souls we prostrate ourselves before him, and join in that celestial song, '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?' (Rev. xv. 3, 4)" (comp. Rom. xi. 33).

HOMILETICS.

Ver. 1.—*A wise man's superiority—in what does it consist?* I. IN PENETRATION OF INTELLECT. He knoweth not merely things, but the interpretation thereof. Among the Chaldeans the interpretation of dreams was a special branch of wisdom professed by magicians and astrologers (Dan. ii. 4—13). A wise man—using the term in its widest sense—has clearer insight than ordinary mortals into the essences of things. To him pertains the faculty of searching into and discovering the causes of events (cf. "Naturam cognoscere rerum," Lucretius, iii. 1072). In particular he has insight into: 1. *The secrets of nature.* He is qualified to understand and explain phenomena which to ordinary minds are mysterious and inscrutable. 2. *The events of history.* He is able frequently to trace the under-currents moving society, and bringing about occurrences which to common minds are inexplicable. 3. *The wonders of revelation.* He can discover in sacred Scripture truths veiled to unenlightened eyes. 4. *The mysteries of grace.* Possessed of an unction from the Holy One, he can understand all things (1 John ii. 20, 27).

II. IN ELEVATION OF CHARACTER. "A man's wisdom maketh his face to shine." "It scarcely needs a proof that the countenance or front of the head is regarded in Scripture as the mirror of Divine influences upon the man—of all affections, and of the entire life of soul and spirit." "In the physiognomy is reflected the moral condition of the man" (Delitzsch's 'Bib. Psych.,' p. 301; Clark). "Many a poet, and seer, and martyr, and reformer, and woman of the finest fibre has at times had a face that has looked like porcelain with a light behind it" (Joseph Cook, 'Boston Noonday Lectures,' 2nd series, p. 148). The wise man's face shines because of three things: 1. *The light of truth in his understanding.* The wise man is essentially a child of light. A luminous intellect makes a radiant countenance. 2. *The light of purity in his heart.* There are faces which glow and beam with a soft silver sheen, as if they had shed off all that was gross and material, animal and brutish, and were spiritualized into a fine ethereal essence; because they reflect upon their surface the pure, sweet, chaste, and holy emotions that stir the clear depths of their bosoms within. 3. *The light of life in his conscience.* In the wise man the moral faculty is not dead, torpid, dull, and besotted; but alive, bright, sensitive, and vigorous; and what Cook calls the solar look in a face "arises from the activity of the higher nature when conscience is supreme" ('Boston Noonday Lectures,' 2nd series, p. 149).

III. IN REFINEMENT OF MANNERS. "The hardness," or strength, "of a wise man's face is changed." "The coarse ferocity of ignorance" is in him "transformed by culture" (Plumptre). What Ovid says of human learning—it

"Makes manners gentle, rescues men from strife"—

is true of heavenly wisdom, which is "first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated," etc. (Jas. iii. 17). "Wisdom gives to a man bright eyes, a gentle countenance, a noble expression; it refines and dignifies his external appearance and his demeanour; the hitherto rude external, and the rude regardless, selfish, and bold deportment, are changed into their contraries" (Delitzsch). The change may be: 1. *Gradual*, as all moral transformations are slow, "from stage to stage," "first the blade

and then the ear, and after that the full corn in the ear;" but it must be: 2. *Actual*, otherwise there is no reason to suppose the individual has become possessed of wisdom; and it will eventually be: 3. *Visible* to all, so that all beholding him shall recognize in him the gentleness of one who has studied in wisdom's school. Christ, in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Col. ii. 3), was the highest impersonation the world ever witnessed of true gentleness and refinement.

Vers. 2—6.—"*Honour the king.*" I. THE SUBJECT'S DUTY TOWARDS THE KING.

1. *To keep the king's command.* Unless conscience interposes with a clear and distinct veto, as in the cases of Moses' parents (Heb. xi. 23), Daniel and his companions in Babylon (ch. i. 8; iii. 16—18; vi. 10), and the apostles before the Sanhedrin (Acts iv. 19, 20), it is the duty of all to render obedience to the civil power, kingly or magisterial, even though the doing of this should entail suffering and hardship (Rom. xiii. 1—7; Titus iii. 1; 1 Pet. ii. 13—15). 2. *To abide in the king's service.* The subject should not be hasty "to go out of the king's presence," in the sense of either renouncing allegiance to the king's throne, or deserting the post of duty he has received from the king. The obligation to preserve one's loyalty, however, is not absolute. Times may come when insurrection is a duty, as in the revolution which overthrew Athaliah (2 Chron. xxiii. 15; 2 Kings xi. 16). Nor can it be maintained that statesmen should never desert their sovereigns. When these embark on projects the consciences of their ministers cannot approve, it is incumbent on these ministers to leave them. Only nations should not resort to revolutionary practices without due consideration, and statesmen should not resign their portfolios in a fit of haste. 3. *To preserve the king's favour.* This the subject will usually do, if he "persist not in an evil thing," i.e. if he take no part in conspiracies against the king's power or person; as he certainly will lose the king's favour by acting otherwise.

II. THE GROUNDS ON WHICH THE SUBJECT'S DUTY RESTS. 1. *The sanctions of religion.* These as much bind the subject as if the subject had individually sworn an oath in God's presence. The relationship existing between king and people being of Divine appointment, the subject is practically bound as by a solemn covenant in God's sight to render obedience and loyalty to his sovereign (cf. 2 Chron. xxiii. 16; xxxvi. 13). Nor does religion exempt the subject from such obligation even when the king is unworthy and his rule oppressive (Jer. xxix. 7; Matt. xxii. 21). 2. *The power of the king.* This also a reason why the subject should not raise the standard of rebellion without just cause, or offer unreasonable resistance to the carrying out of royal commands, that the king, as representative of the supreme power of the state, is usually able to enforce obedience and loyalty at least of an external kind. "The king doeth whatsoever pleaseth him," etc. (vers. 3, 4). The language applies to Oriental despots more than to constitutional monarchs. 3. *The safety of the subject.* Under arbitrary rule such as the Preacher alluded to, the way of submission was the way of safety. It might not, indeed, promise much good to the individual quietly to submit to a power he could not resist; but at least it would largely protect him against evil. Ideal rulers should be a fountain of blessing to their loyal as well as a force of repression to their disloyal subjects (Rom. xiii. 3). 4. *The dictates of wisdom.* The subject who might feel impelled to rebellion and disobedience perceives that, as "to every purpose there is a time and judgment" (i.e. a boundary beyond which it cannot pass, and a judicial decision upon its character which it cannot evade), since otherwise man's misery beneath the whips and scorns of time would become intolerable, so the oppression under which he groans will one day exhaust itself, come to an end, and be called up for judgment at the bar of the Supreme, if not in time and on earth, at least at the world's close, and in the unseen; and, perceiving this, the wise subject deems it better to keep the king's commandment, and maintain allegiance to the king's throne, than to enter on the dubious paths of insurrection and revolt.

Learn: 1. The superior honour due from man to him who is the King of kings. 2. The loftier grounds on which the Christian soul's allegiance to God and Jesus Christ is claimed. 3. The blessedness of those who are faithful subjects of the heavenly King. 4. The folly of attempting to elude God's presence, and the danger of persisting in an evil thing. 5. The high argument for patience supplied by the certain prospect of a future judgment.

Vers. 7—9.—*The sorrowful tale of man's misery upon the earth.* I. NO KNOWLEDGE OF THE FUTURE. Neither himself can foresee, nor can any one inform him, either what shall be or how it shall be. Man's acquaintance with the future amounts at best to a "perhaps."

II. NO EXEMPTION FROM DEATH. This great truth stated in a threefold form. 1. *No man can retain his spirit*, or hold it back, when the hour strikes for it to be breathed forth, any more than he can hold back the winds of heaven when the moment has arrived for them to blow. 2. *No man has power over the day of his death*, to defer it, to remove it to a dim and distant future, or to hasten it to bring it near, any more than he has power over the day of his birth. His times both of coming into and of going out from the world are in God's hand. 3. *No man can procure a discharge from the war with the king of terrors*, either for himself or another, any more than a conscript could escape the battle when drawn for service by an Oriental despot. All without exception must go forth to the final conflict (Hab. ix. 27).

III. NO ESCAPE FROM RETRIBUTION. The wicked may hope that in some way or other it may be possible for them to evade the due reward of their transgressions; but such hope is taken from them by the fact that God will one day bring every secret thing into judgment, whether it has been good, or whether it has been evil (ch. xii. 14).

IV. NO IMMUNITY FROM OPPRESSION. Though it cannot be affirmed that all are oppressed—else where were the oppressors?—yet it cannot be guaranteed beforehand that any one will not be oppressed, since "there is a time wherein one man hath power over another to his hurt" (ver. 9).

LESSONS. 1. Leave the future with God, and live in the present. 2. Prepare for that day which will come on all like a thief in the night. 3. So live that the recompense of the future will be that which belongs to righteousness. 4. Avoid being an oppressor, and rather be oppressed.

Ver. 10.—*Before, at, and after death; or, the wicked and the good—a contrast.* I. BEFORE DEATH. In the character of their lives. Each lives and acts in accordance with his character of soul. 1. *The wicked acts wickedly*. Spends his days (1) without religion, having no fear of God before his eyes (Ps. xxxvi. 1; Rom. iii. 18); (2) without morality, taking pleasure in disobedience to God's Law (Eph. ii. 2; v. 6); (3) and without hope (Eph. ii. 12), having no happy outlook beyond the grave. 2. *The righteous acts rightly*. (1) Worshipping in the temple of the holy; (2) learning in the school of the holy; (3) walking in the ways of the holy; and (4) cherishing the hopes of the holy. These different characteristics belong to the wicked and the righteous in all ranks and classes of society.

II. AT DEATH. In the style of their funerals. Both come to the grave, the house appointed for all the living (Job xxx. 23), like Dives and Lazarus (Luke xvi. 22); perhaps after having lived respectively as these did—the wicked clothing themselves in fine linen and faring sumptuously every day; the good lying in rags and sores at the rich man's gate, and feeding on the crumbs from the rich man's table. But from this point their paths and experiences diverge. 1. *The wicked have a burial*. They are borne to the place of sepulture with pomp and pageantry, and in presence of assembled crowds are committed to the dust. Wealth and honour wait upon them to their last resting-places, and do the utmost to provide quiet and peaceful couches for their lifeless corpses. Oftentimes, if not always, is this the fortune of the ungodly who have defied the Almighty, despised religion, insulted morality, and yet increased in riches and grown great in power. 2. *The good simply go away*. They vanish from the scene of their sufferings and labours, no one knows when or how. Whether they have a funeral no one cares. Certainly their departure is not marked by long trains of mourners going about the streets. Their obsequies, conducted by angels, are not observed by the passing crowds of busy men on earth. This also is a frequent lot of good men at death, though it must not be assumed that good men are never carried to their graves amid lamentations and tears (2 Chron. xxiv. 16; Acts viii. 2).

III. AFTER DEATH. In the treatment of their memories. Both pass into the unseen, and have no more knowledge of what transpires on this side the veil. But their lots upon the other side are frequently as different from each other as before. 1. *The wicked are remembered*. Forgotten, it may be, and forsaken by God, but not by men who admired

their splendour, and perhaps envied or feared their greatness when living. 2. *The good are forgotten.* Remembered indeed by God, but not by men, who suffer their names to pass into oblivion; as saith the poet—

“The evil that men do lives after them;
The good is oft interrèd with their bones.”
(‘Julius Cæsar,’ act iii. sc. 2.)

LESSONS. 1. Study to live well by acting well. 2. Seek a lodging for thy soul when it must leave thy body. 3. Commit the care of thy memory to God and good men. 4. Envy neither the present nor the future lot of the wicked.

Vers. 11—13.—*Solemn thoughts for serious moments.* I. A GREAT DISTINCTION IN THE CHARACTERS OF MEN. Between the righteous and the wicked (Mal. iii. 18), the sinner and the saint, the man that fears God and the soul that fears him not. This distinction eclipses all others. Other distinctions affect the externals, this the essentials of man’s being. The fear of God the root of all goodness in the soul (Ps. cxi. 10).

II. A GREAT FACT IN THE DIVINE ADMINISTRATION. That sentence is already pronounced (Ezek. xviii. 4), and will eventually be executed (unless intercepted by grace) on every evil work (Ps. xi. 6; xxxiv. 21; Rom. i. 18; v. 12; vi. 21, 23; Jas. i. 15). A sermon on the certainty of future judgment. The principle of the Divine government is one of moral retribution. To each man according as his work shall be—evil to the evil, good to the good.

III. A GREAT DISPLAY OF DIVINE CLEMENCY. Though pronounced, yet is sentence not executed against every evil work. Sometimes in God’s providence retribution follows swiftly upon the heels of crime. For the most part, however, the infliction of the sentence is deferred—to give the sinner space to repent, to reveal to him the greatness of his guilt, and to melt him by a personal experience of undeserved kindness. “Account the long-suffering of our God salvation” (2 Pet. iii. 15).

IV. A GREAT INSTANCE OF HUMAN IMPIETY. “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.” The abuse of clemency a sadder sign of depravity than the violation of commandment; to trample on God’s mercy a greater wickedness than to break his Law.

V. A GREAT DIVERGENCE IN INDIVIDUAL EXPERIENCE. Between that of the long-lived and deeply-dyed sinner who defies the Divine Law and despises the Divine mercy, and that of the good man and humble who fears God and walks in his commandments and ordinances. The former, in spite of all his shameless audacity and boundless impiety, attains not to real happiness—“it shall not be well with the wicked,” either here or hereafter (Isa. iii. 11). The former, notwithstanding his depressed condition, and perhaps brief life, is possessed of the secret of inward felicity—“it shall be well with them that fear God,” both in this world and the next (Isa. iii. 10; 1 Tim. iv. 8).

Vers. 14, 15.—*A misunderstood providence and a mistaken judgment.* I. THE MISUNDERSTOOD PROVIDENCE. 1. *The providence is undeniable.* “There be righteous men, unto whom it happeneth according to the work of the wicked;” and “there be wicked men, to whom it happeneth according to the work of the righteous.” Of the former, Joseph, David, Job, Asaph, and Jeremiah were examples; as also the apostles and early Christians, the martyrs and confessors of the New Testament Church. Of the latter, Noah’s sons, who, though not themselves righteous, were saved in the ark; Pharaoh’s butler, who, though guilty of having conspired against the king’s life, was nevertheless spared; Haman, who for a time at least flourished, though he was essentially a bad man—besides others—may be cited as examples. 2. *The providence is inevitable.* The constitution of the world being what it is, and the human family interlaced and interdependent as it is, it is impossible but that calamities should sometimes fall upon the righteous, and blessings descend upon the heads of the wicked, and that occasionally even wicked men should be deliberately treated as if they were righteous, and righteous men rewarded as if they were wicked. Good men often suffer the consequences of other people’s evil deeds, and *vice versâ* bad men reap the benefits of other people’s good works. 3. *The providence is mysterious.* That such things should occur in a world presided over by an all-wise and all-powerful as well as holy and just God, who loves righteous-

ness and hates iniquity, is undoubtedly "hard to be understood," and for the full solution of the enigma it is more than likely the clearer light of the future must be awaited. 4. *The providence is symbolic.* At least it has its counterpart in the spiritual world—in the experience of Christ the Righteous One, who was numbered with transgressors (Mark xv. 28), and made sin for us, though he knew no sin (2 Cor. v. 21); and in that of believers, who, though personally sinful and unrighteous, are yet accepted as righteous in God's sight, and treated as such on account of the righteousness of Christ (Rom. iii. 25, 26; 1 Cor. i. 30; 2 Cor. v. 21; Eph. i. 6). May this not in part explain the occurrence of such phenomena in actual life? Nevertheless, it often happens that: 5. *The providence is misunderstood.* Men because of it rush to conclusions that cannot be sustained—as e.g. that there is no such thing as a providential government of the world, that the Supreme Being is indifferent to moral distinctions, that there is no profit in piety, and that no disadvantage follows on the practice of wickedness, and the like.

II. THE MISTAKEN JUDGMENT. 1. *The judgment is wrong.* It may not be wrong to affirm that a man, more especially if good and wise, should eat, drink, and be merry (ch. ix. 7), though such as do so are not always either good or wise (Luke xii. 19); but it certainly is not right to say that a man has nothing better to do under the sun than to eat, drink, and be merry. He who thinks so must have a low conception of both the nature and the destiny of man. 2. *The reason is doubtful.* That mirth will abide with a man in his labour all the days of his life. One fears this cannot be sustained as in perfect accord with experience. Inward happiness or joy in God may abide with a soul through every varying phase of external circumstances; it is not clear that so outward a thing as mirth, hilarity, satisfaction in creature-comforts, will abide with any to the close of life.

Learn: 1. To trust God even in the darkest and most mysterious providences. 2. To rejoice in God rather than in any of his creatures.

Vers. 16, 17.—"*The business that is done upon the earth.*" I. IN ITS RELATION TO GOD. It is his work. 1. *As to its plan.* "He doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth" (Dan. iv. 35). "He worketh all things after the counsel of his will" (Eph. i. 11). 2. *As to its execution.* Not directly, but indirectly—it being in him that men live and move and have their being (Acts xvii. 28). Not so that he is the Author of sin, or that in any way the freedom and efficiency of second causes are taken away; but so that while man freely acts and carries out his purposes, God also as freely acts in and through man and carries out his. 3. *As to its characteristics.* It is unsearchable and past finding out. As God's thoughts are deep, his works are vast and his ways inscrutable (Ps. lxxvii. 19; Rom. xi. 33).

II. IN ITS RELATION TO MAN. It is man's work also, he being the immediate agent engaged in its performance; and as such it is: 1. *Incessant.* It goes on day and night—work, work, work. 2. *Laborious.* So much so that multitudes are able to see sleep with their eyes neither day nor night. 3. *Disappointing.* Man labours on, and not only often makes little of his toil, but never comes to a clear perception of what the garment is he and others are weaving upon the loom of time.

Lessons. 1. The duty of each man performing his appointed task with fidelity, leaving the ultimate issue in the hands of God. 2. The wisdom of recognizing that the business done upon the earth is after all only a means toward an end. 3. The greater propriety of labouring for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life. 4. The limited extent of man's knowledge as to God's plan in the government of the world.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ver. 1.—*The tokens of wisdom.* This book, and those which have affinity with it, both canonical and apocryphal, are in nothing more remarkable than in the stress they lay upon wisdom. This is the quality of the spirit which in its highest manifestation is godliness and piety, which in its ordinary manifestations distinguishes the ruler from the subject, the sage from the fool. The reader of Ecclesiastes cannot fail to admire the

independence of the author of common human standards of well-being, such as wealth, prosperity, and pleasure; wisdom is with him "the principal thing." The signs of true wisdom are graphically portrayed in this verse.

I. WISDOM IMPARTS INSIGHT. Ordinary men are not even, as a rule, observant; but there are men who are observant of what strikes the senses, of the phenomena of nature, of external life, but who go no further. Now, it is characteristic of the wise that they are not satisfied to know what lies upon the surface. The first stage of wisdom is science; the scientific man notes resemblances and differences, antecedents and sequences; he arranges phenomena into classes and species and genera upon the one principle, and into physical causes and effects upon the other. He recognizes similarities and uniformities in nature, and terms these arrangements laws. The second stage of wisdom is philosophy, whose province it is not only to proceed to higher generalizations, but to discover in all the processes of nature and in all the activities of mind the presence and operation of reason. The third stage of wisdom is theology, or religion, *i.e.* the discernment of the ubiquitous presence in the universe of the Eternal Spirit, from whom all individual minds proceed, and whose language, by which he holds communion with those minds, is nature. The scientist, the philosopher, the theologian, are all men who possess wisdom, who are dissatisfied with superficial knowledge, who "know the interpretation of a thing." Their wisdom is limited indeed if they disparage one another's work and service, for the world has need of them all. And there is no occasion why, in a measure, one man should not partake all three characters.

II. WISDOM IMPARTS BRIGHTNESS. The stupid and brutal betray themselves by an expression of stolidity. The cunning and crafty often display their characteristic quality by a keen, designing, "underhand," and sinister glance. But the wise are bright; clearness of perception, width of judgment, decisiveness of purpose, seem written upon the brow, seem to gleam from the steady eye of the wise man. The entrance of a wise man into the council-chamber is like the rising of the sun upon a landscape,—when the mists are cleared away and the dark places are illumined.

III. WISDOM IMPARTS STRENGTH, BOLDNESS, CONFIDENCE. The wise man is prepared for difficulties and dangers, and because he is prepared he is not alarmed. He measures circumstances, and sees how they may be bent to his will, how their threats may be turned into favour. He measures his fellow-men, discerns the strength of the strong, the depth of the thoughtful, the trustworthiness of the firm, the incompetency of the pretender, and the worthlessness of the shifty. He measures himself, and neither exaggerates or underestimates his abilities and his resources. Hence the boldness, the hardness of his face, when he turns to survey his task, to encounter his adversary, to endure his test. His heart is not dismayed, for his trust is ever in his God and Saviour.—T.

Vers. 2—5.—*The ruler and the subject.* It is possible that some persons, living under a form of government very different from that presumed in the admonitions of this passage—under a limited monarchy or a republic instead of under an absolute monarchy of a special theocratic kind—may fancy that these verses have no special significance for them, no applicability to the practical conduct of their actual life. But reflection may show us that this is not so, that there are valuable principles of interest and import for the civil life of all men.

I. CIVIL AUTHORITY IS IN ITSELF OF DIVINE ORIGIN, AND POSSESSES DIVINE SANCTIONS. The king, the king's word, commandment, and pleasure, are all significant of order in society, of that great reality and power in human affairs—the state. "Order is Heaven's first law." Right does not, indeed, grow out of civil authority, but it is its Divine basis. That kingship has often become tyranny, and democracy mob-rule, that every form of government may be abused, is known to every student of history, to every reader of the newspapers. But law in itself is good, and its maintenance is the only security for public liberty. One of the first duties of a religious teacher is to impress upon the people the sacredness of civil authority, to inculcate reverence for law, to encourage to good citizenship. He is not called upon to flatter the great and powerful, to repress discussion, to enjoin servility. But that freedom which is the condition of the true development of national life, and which can only be preserved by reverence for rightful authority, for constitutional government, should be dear to every Christian, and should

be held in honour by every Christian teacher and preacher. "The powers that be are ordained of God."

II. WISE PATRIOTISM LEADS TO CHEERFUL OBEDIENCE AND SUBMISSION TO AUTHORITY. Law for the most part is designed to repress crime, to maintain peace and tranquillity, to afford protection to the honest, industrious, and law-abiding. Therefore to commit wrong of any kind, whether theft, or slander, or violence, is both evil in itself and is transgression of the law. A man who simply contents himself with breaking no civil law may indeed be a villain, for civil law is not all; there is a Divine Law which the civil ruler is not bound to enforce. But the bad citizen cannot be a good Christian; to break the laws of the state is not likely to lead to obedience to the commandments of the King of kings. It is, indeed, not to be expected that a man should approve of every command of the king, of every law which is enforced in his country. But if every man were to refuse to obey every statute of which he disapproved, how could government be carried on? The wonderful word of Christ is decisive, "Render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's." Where no Divine ordinance is violated by conforming to civil law, the duty of the subject, the citizen, is plain; he should obey. He is, of course, at liberty under a constitutional government to use means of an honourable kind to secure a change of law. It is a grand word of the Preacher, "Whoso keepeth the commandment shall know no evil thing."

III. LOYALTY TO EARTHLY, HUMAN AUTHORITY IS SUGGESTIVE OF LOYALTY TO GOD. When submission is enjoined, it is supported by a religious motive—"and that in regard of the oath of God." It is evident that the authority of a parent or a ruler, the subjection of a child or a citizen, are intended to symbolize the even higher facts of the spiritual kingdom—the empire of the "King, eternal, immortal, and invisible," and the loyalty of those who by the new birth have entered "the kingdom of heaven."—T.

Ver. 11.—*A hasty and foolish inference.* In the case of some this conclusion may be reached deliberately, but in that of others the process may be unconscious, or at all events without attentive consideration and reasoned purpose.

I. THE DATA. There is delay in retribution. When we perceive immediate punishment follow upon flagrant sin, we are surprised and startled. We often remark that the course of the wrong-doer who avoids collision with the civil government is a course of uninterrupted prosperity. We see families advanced to honour and wealth who are lacking in moral character. We read of nations persevering for years, and even for centuries, in paths of injustice, rapacity, and violence, and yet growing in power and acquiring renown. And we cannot doubt that many evil deeds wrought in secret remain unpunished. The facts must be admitted. But they are explicable, and may be reconciled with a firm belief in the righteous retribution, the perfect moral government, of God. Stress is to be laid upon the word "speedily." It must be remembered that with God "one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years are as one day."

"Though the mills of God grind slowly, yet they grind exceeding small;
Though with patience he stands waiting, he exactly judgeth all."

Judgment deferred is not judgment abandoned. From the time of Job the facts here referred to have been a perplexity to the observer of human society.

II. THE EBBONEOUS INFERENCE. "The heart of the sons of men is fully set in them [is emboldened] to do evil." The supposition is that sin may be committed with impunity, and the conclusion is that those sins which yield pleasure should be committed, since they will entail upon the sinner no evil consequences. Of course, an upright, conscientious, and godly man does not reason thus. He does what is right from a conviction of the nobility and beauty of goodness, and from a desire to act in conformity with the will of God, and to enjoy the approval of God; he abstains from evil because his conscience condemns it, because it is contrary to the universal order, because it is a grief to his Saviour's heart. But the self-seeking, pleasure-loving, base mind looks only to the consequences of actions, and does what affords pleasure, and evades painful duty. It is such a man who is referred to in this passage, whose heart is emboldened to sin by the foolish persuasion that no penalty will follow,

III. THE PRACTICAL LESSONS. 1. The sinner should reflect upon the facts of the Divine government, and upon the express statements of the revealed Word of God. He may thence learn the certainty of retribution. "The wicked shall not go unpunished;" "The way of transgressors is hard;" "The wages of sin is death." The sentence may not be executed speedily; but it is passed, and it will in God's time be carried out. 2. The godly man should rest assured that, however he may be perplexed by the mysteries of Divine providence, however he may be unable to reconcile what he sees in society with his religious convictions, nevertheless the Lord reigneth, and it shall be well with those who fear, obey, and love him. And he may well think less of the consequences of conduct, and more of those principles by which conduct is governed, of those motives by which action is inspired. Loyalty and gratitude, devotion and sympathetic admiration, may well lead to such a life as shall be its own reward. However it may fare with a man in this life, he chooses the good part who hates that which is evil and loves that which is good, whose convictions are just, and whose life is in harmony with his convictions. For such a man all things work together for good.—T.

Vers. 12—14.—*The certainty of retribution.* Again and again the writer of this remarkable book reverts to the same mysterious and perplexing facts of human society. As soon as men began to observe carefully and to think seriously, they were distressed by the inequality of the human lot, and by the apparent absence of a just arrangement of human affairs. If a family is wisely and righteously ordered, the obedient children are rewarded; whilst the selfish, wilful, rebellious children are chastised. In a well-administered government the law-abiding citizens are regarded and treated with favour, whilst the strong arm of the law is brought down heavily upon the idle and the criminal. Now, if God be the Father and the King of humanity, how is it that the affairs of the world are not so administered that the good are recompensed, and the wicked duly, swiftly, and effectively punished? Can there be a just Ruler who is also omniscient to observe and almighty to carry out his purposes of righteous government? Such are the thoughts which have passed through the minds of reflecting men in every age, and which passed through the mind of the writer of this Book of Ecclesiastes, and which are expressed in this passage.

I. THE PERPLEXING FACTS OF OBSERVATION. These are recorded in the fourteenth verse, and are described as "a vanity which is done upon the earth." 1. The just suffer the inflictions which seem appropriate to the wicked. 2. The wicked reap the prosperity which might be expected to recompense the righteous. These are facts of human life which belong to no age, to no state of society more than to another. Taken by themselves, they do not satisfy the intellect, the conscience, of the inquirer.

II. THE ASSURED CONVICTION OF FAITH. The Preacher, regarding the admitted facts with the eye of faith, comes to a conclusion which is not supported by mere reasoning upon observed facts. For him, and indeed for every truly religious man, there is a test of character which determines the destiny of spiritual beings; the discrimination is made between those who fear God and those who fear him not. Time and earth may not witness the award; but it is the award of the Almighty Judge and Lord. 1. It shall not be well with the wicked, even though he may be permitted to continue and to repeat his offences. 2. On the other hand, it shall be well with them that fear God. Such convictions are implanted by God himself; the righteous Lord has implanted them in the mind of his righteous people, and nothing can shake them, deep-seated as they are in the moral nature, which is the most abiding work of the Creator-Spirit.

III. THE ATTITUDE OF GODLY WISDOM. Those who, in the face of the facts described, nevertheless cherish the convictions approved, may reasonably apply such convictions to the practical control of the moral life. 1. Patience should be cultivated in the presence of perplexing and often distressing anomalies. We must wait in order that we may see the end, which is not yet. 2. Quiet confidence is ever the strength of God's people. They do not lean upon circumstances; they lean upon God, who never changes, and who will not fail those who place their trust in him. 3. Expectation of deliverance and acceptance. God may tarry; but he will surely appear, and will vindicate and save his own. Our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. Much has happened to test our faith, our endurance; but when the trial has been sufficiently prolonged and

severe to answer the purpose of our all-wise Father, it will be brought to an end. "Unto the upright light ariseth out of darkness;" "The Lord is mindful of his own."—T.

Ver. 16.—*Man's busy life.* The Preacher was observant, not only of the phenomena and processes of nature, but also of the incidents and transactions of human life. In fact, man was his chief interest and his chief study. He observed the diligence of the laborious; the incessant activity of the scheming, the restless, the acquisitive. How he would have been affected by the spectacle of modern commercial life—say in London or Paris, New York or Vienna—we can only imagine; but as things were then, he was impressed by the marvellous activity and untiring energy which were displayed by his fellow-men in the various avocations of life.

I. MAN'S OWN NATURE AND CONSTITUTION IS ACTIVE. It would be an absurd misrepresentation of man's being to consider him as capable only of feeling and of knowledge. Intellectual and emotional he is; but, possessed of will, he is enterprising, inquiring, and active. Nature does indeed act upon him; but he reacts upon nature, subdues it to his purposes, and impresses upon it his thoughts.

II. MAN'S CIRCUMSTANCES ARE SUCH AS TO CALL FORTH HIS ACTIVITY. Human nature is endowed with wants, which prove, as a matter of fact, to be the means to his most valuable possessions and his chief enjoyments. His bodily necessities urge him to toil; and their supply and satisfaction, in many cases, absorb almost all his disposable energy. His intellectual aspirations constrain to much endeavour; curiosity and inquiry prompt to efforts considerable in themselves, and lasting all through life. The family and social relations are the motive to many labours. Could one enter a market, an exchange, a port, and could one not merely witness the movements of body and of features which strike every eye, but penetrate the motives and purposes, the hopes and fears, which dwell in secret in the breasts of the busy throng, something might be discerned which would furnish a key to the busy activity of life.

III. BUSINESS ACTIVITY IS ACCOMPANIED WITH MANY PERILS. The labourer, the craftsman, the merchant, the lawyer, all have their various employments and interests, which are in danger of becoming engrossing. Perhaps the main temptation of the very busy is towards worldliness. The active and toiling are prone to lose sight of everything which does not contribute to their prosperity, and especially of the higher relations of their being and their immortal prospects. Young men entering upon professional and commercial life need especially to be warned against worldliness, to be reminded that it is possible to gain the whole world, and yet to lose the soul, the higher and worthier life. A man may become covetous, or at least avaricious; he may lose his sensibilities to what is noblest, purest, and best; he may adopt a lower standard of value, may move upon a lower plane of life.

IV. YET THE LIFE OF CONSTANT ACTIVITY IS DESIGNED BY DIVINE WISDOM TO BE THE MEANS OF SPIRITUAL PROFIT. Like all the appointments of providence, this is disciplinary. Business is not only a temptation, it may be an occasion of progress, a means to moral improvement. A busy man may learn to consecrate his powers to his Creator's service and glory; in the discharge of active duties he may grow in wisdom, in patience, even in self-denial. He may do with his might that which his hand findeth to do, he may redeem the time, he may prepare for the account to be rendered at last of the deeds done in the body.—T.

Ver. 17.—*The impenetrable, inscrutable mystery.* Plain people often think that a wise man is a man who knows, if not all things, yet all things to which he has directed his attention. It does not enter into their mind that wisdom lies largely in the consciousness of the limitation of the human powers. A great thinker has justly and beautifully said that the larger the circle of knowledge, the larger the external circumference which reveals itself to the apprehension. The writer of Ecclesiastes was a wise man, but he confesses himself to have been baffled in his endeavour to find out and master all the work of man, and much more the work of God. In this confession he was not singular. The man who knows a little may be vain of his knowledge; but the man who knows much knows full well how much there is which to him is unknown, and how much more is by him unknowable.

I. THE FACT THAT THE THOUGHTFUL MAN IS DAFFLED IN HIS ENDEAVOUR TO COMPREHEND GOD'S WAYS, AND TO COMPREHEND HUMAN LIFE AND DESTINY.

II. THIS IS JUST WHAT IS TO BE EXPECTED FROM A CONSIDERATION OF (1) man's finite nature, and (2) God's infinite wisdom.

III. THE PROFITABLENESS OF THIS ARRANGEMENT. 1. It tends to raise our thought of God to a juster elevation. 2. It calls forth (1) humility, (2) submission, and (3) faith. 3. It makes the future infinitely interesting and attractive. What we know not here we shall know hereafter. Now we know as in a mirror, dimly; then, face to face.

"Here it is given only to survey
Dawnings of bliss and glimmerings of day;
Heaven's fuller affluence mocks our dazzled sight—
Too swift its radiance and too clear its light."

f.

Ver. 8.—*Death—our power and our powerlessness.* The Preacher brings before us the familiar fact of—

I. OUR POWERLESSNESS IN THE PRESENCE OF DEATH. There are evils from which large resources, or high rank, or exceptional abilities may secure us; but in these death is not included. No man may escape it. Some men have lived so long that "death has seemed to have forgotten them;" but their hour has come at last. Death is a campaign in which there is "no furlough" given. Therefore: 1. Let every man be in readiness for it; let us live "as those who to-day indeed are on the earth, but who to-morrow may be in heaven." Let not death surprise us with some urgent duty undone, the neglect of which will leave our nearest relatives or dearest friends in difficulty or distress. 2. Let us all measure the limit of our life; and let us feel that since so much is to be done by us if we can, for narrower and for wider circles, and since there is but a brief period in which to do it, let us address ourselves seriously, energetically, patiently, devoutly, to the work which the Divine Husbandman has given us to do. But the statement of the Preacher, reminding us of this familiar truth, may suggest to us, by contrast—

II. OUR PROVINCE AND OUR POWER IN THE PROSPECT OF DEATH. Although it is utterly hopeless that we can avert the stroke of the "last enemy," we may do much in regard to it. 1. We can often defer its coming by the wise regulation of our life; we cannot "retain our spirit" when our hour is come, but we may put that hour much further on by prudence and virtue. Folly will ante-date, but wisdom will post-date it. We cannot, indeed, measure Divine favour by the number of our years—there is a Christian reading of the heathen adage, "Whom the gods love die young"—but it is very often true that "with long life" God will "satisfy" the man who "sets his love upon him" (Ps. xci. 14—16). 2. We can gain a spiritual victory over it; we can

" . . . so live, that we may dread
The grave as little as our bed."

We may so abide in Jesus Christ, and so live in the light of his holy truth, that the idea of death, instead of being a terror or even a dark shadow at its close, will be positively welcome to our spirit. 3. We may find a friend in it when it comes; the friend whose kind hand opens for us the door of immortality, and ushers into the life which is free and full and endless.—C.

Vers. 9, 10.—*Sin in power.* Amid the obscurities and uncertainties in which the precise meaning of this verse is lost, we may allow it to speak to us of the truth that when sin is in power it is in all respects an unsatisfactory thing. It is—

I. INJURIOUS TO THE PEOPLE. "A man ruleth over men to their hurt" (Cox). The evils of misrule are obvious, for they have been only too often illustrated; they are these: the infliction of grave injustice; the encouragement of iniquity and discouragement of righteousness; disturbance and unsettlement, and consequent reduction in various spheres of useful industry; decline of activity, morality, worship.

II. HURTFUL TO THE HOLDER HIMSELF. "One man hath power over another to his own hurt" (Revised Version marginal reading). It is certainly and most profoundly

true, whether here stated or not, that the holding of power by a bad man is hurtful to himself. It elevates him in his own eyes when he needs to be humbled therein; it gives him the opportunity of indulgence, and indulgence is certain to feed an evil inclination, or to foster an unholy habit; it makes injurious flattery the probable, and a beneficial remonstrance the unlikely, thing in his experience.

III. OF BRIEF DURATION. If we only wait awhile we shall "see the wicked buried." It is probable enough that sin in power will be guilty of serious excesses, and will therefore bring down upon itself those human resentments or those Divine judgments which end in death. But, apart from this, an evil course must end at death. God has put a limit to our human lives which, though it sometimes takes from the field a brave and powerful champion, on the other hand relieves society of the impure and the unjust. Sin in power is bound fast by the tether which it is quite unable to snap (see Ps. xxxvii. 35, 36).

IV. CONTRACTING GUILT. They "had come and gone from the place of the holy." They had either (1) been professing to administer justice, and had done injustice; or (2) attended the place of privilege, and had despised their opportunity. Either way, they had been "laying up for themselves wrath against the day of wrath."

V. GOING DOWN INTO OBLIVION. The sense *may* be that this happens too often to the righteous; but it is certainly appropriate to the wicked. And is it not more applicable to them? For no man tries to remember them. No one proposes to erect monuments or institute memorials of them. There is a tacit understanding, if nothing more, that their name shall be dropped, that their memory shall perish. The only kind thing that can be done concerning them is to leave their name unspoken.

1. Be content with the exercise of a holy and benignant influence. It is well to be powerful if God wills it. But most men have to live without it, and a human life may be destitute of it, and yet be truly happy, and be of real service to a great many souls.
2. Resolve to leave a holy influence and a fragrant memory behind. We may have to content ourselves with a very simple memorial stone, but if we leave kindly memories and good influences in many hearts, so that in our case "the memory of the just is blessed," we shall not have lived in vain.—C.

Vers. 11—13.—*The perversion of God's patience.* No obscurity hangs over this passage; the evil to which the Preacher refers is clear enough and common enough, while his condemnation of it is distinct and decisive.

I. A PALPABLE FACT IN THE GOVERNMENT OF GOD. The fact is that God often lets sin go unpunished, or, as we should rather say, partly unpunished. The tyrant is not dethroned; the fraudulent dealer is not convicted and sentenced; the murderer is not apprehended; the drunkard and the debauchee are not driven from the society which they disgrace; the hypocrite is not exposed and expelled; the men who fill their purses or satisfy their cravings at the expense of the property or even the character of their neighbours are sometimes allowed to remain in positions of comfort and of honour. And it may be that even their health and their spirits appear untouched by their sins, and even by their vices.

II. ITS MISINTERPRETATION BY MANY. What does it mean that God allows this to happen? The guilty are not slow to convince themselves that it means *safety to themselves*. It is, they think, that God does not concern himself with the small particulars of human life, and will not therefore visit them with his penalties; or it is that God is too "good," too kind, to punish his children for following the bent of their own nature; or it is that the world is not under the government of any righteous Ruler at all, but only subject to certain laws of which they may prudently make use for their ultimate immunity. It is that they may safely go on in their evil course without fear of consequences.

III. THEIR COMPLETE MISTAKE. They argue that because *we* always make penalty follow crime as soon as we can, and because our non-infliction of it argues our intention to condone it altogether, it is the same with God, and that his forbearance to punish is proof that he does not intend to do so. Thus they think that "God is altogether such a one as ourselves." But they are wrong; he "will reprove us and set [our sins] in order before our eyes" (see Ps. l. 21). We always make penalty pursue wrong-doing without any interval, because (1) we are afraid the criminal will escape us, or (2) we

fear that we ourselves may be taken from the scene. But God is not hurried by such considerations as these. The guilty can never get beyond his reach, and he is ever present. Time does not enter into the account of him who is "from everlasting to everlasting." God's long forbearance is, therefore, no proof of Divine indifference or of the absence of a ruling hand from the affairs of men.

IV. ITS TRUE SIGNIFICANCE. What the Divine long-suffering really means is that God is patient with us in the hope that we shall repent and live (see Ezek. xxxiii. 11; Rom. ii. 4; 1 Tim. ii. 4; and especially 2 Pet. iii. 9). The truth is that (1) while men *do often seem to escape* the retribution that is due to them, and while they do in fact enjoy a large measure of Divine forbearance; (2) sin is always suffering, and is on its way to doom. (a) If outward and visible evils are not attending it, inward and spiritual evils are. (b) Sin always *tends toward* misery and shame, and is working it out, as the event will show. Even if it should escape the hundredth time, there is a number that will prove fatal. (3) The righteous man has a distinct and immeasurable advantage. It is "well with them that fear God." (a) Piety and virtue have the promise of the life that now is. Sobriety, chastity, uprightness, diligence, prudence, courtesy, kindness,—these are all making for health and for prosperity, and for the best friendship which earth can offer. (b) They lead up to the gates of the heavenly city.—C.

Ver. 1.—"*Sweetness and light.*" The wisdom which is here spoken of as conferring upon its possessor an incomparable superiority is not mere wealth of intellectual knowledge, or a wide and accurate acquaintance with any department of science or philosophy. It is rather a moral condition, a state of heart and mind with an outward life consonant with it, a temperament and disposition attained by long and careful endeavour. In our modern use of the word, wisdom is equivalent to knowledge, and generally indicates mental endowments and equipment which may or may not enable its possessor to act sensibly in the ordinary affairs of life. We are familiar enough with the phenomena of men of science who in practical matters are as helpless as children, who betray a gross and astounding ignorance of things which lie outside the department of knowledge which they have cultivated, or who make it manifest to all that their knowledge has not had a refining influence upon them, and delivered them from the evil of being biassed by the disturbing influence of prejudices and passions. Such wisdom which we admire and respect, in spite of its unpractical character, is not of the same order with that which the Preacher eulogizes. The wisdom which is so often spoken of in the Hebrew Scriptures, especially in the Proverbs, in this Book of Ecclesiastes, and in Job, is a Divine faculty by which a man is enabled to live a well-ordered life. Its source is in God, but it is not confined to the one nation which he chose, or synonymous with the exceptional revelations made to it. Thus the wisdom of Solomon is declared to have been higher in degree than that attained by any in the neighbouring peoples, but not different in kind (1 Kings iv. 29—31). Then, too, its range is very wide. Nothing is too high, nothing is too low, for wisdom "fitly" to "order." Law and government (Prov. viii. 15, 16), and even the precepts of husbandry (Isa. xxviii. 23—29), are equally her productions with those moral observations which constitute in the main the three books of Scripture to which I have referred. She is the source of skill of every kind, the mistress of the arts, the guardian of the vast and inexhaustible stores garnered by experience, from which men may equip themselves for meeting every emergency of life. The wise man is God-fearing, free from superstition and fanaticism, prudent, shrewd, a good counsellor, a safe guide (*vide* Cheyne, 'Job and Solomon,' pp. 117, *et seq.*). The enthusiastic manner in which the influence of wisdom upon a character is described reminds us of the somewhat similar sentiment expressed by Ovid—

"Addo quod ingenuas didicisse fideliter artes,
Emollit mores neosinit esse feros."

('Epp. ex Ponto,' ii. 9, 47.)

"A man's wisdom maketh his face to shine, and the boldness of his face shall be changed." The words depict very vividly and beautifully the almost transfiguring effect of serene wisdom upon the countenance—how it lights up the face, and gives to

even homely features an exquisite charm. The coarse, sullen, vacant stare of ignorance is transformed by the "sweetness and light" with which the soul is suffused. There is a reference probably to the literal shining of Moses' countenance when he came down from the mount on which he had seen God face to face (Exod. xxxiv. 29). We must all of us have known cases in which true piety and wisdom, such as is learned from Christ, have had this refining and transforming influence; persons of little ordinary education or culture, to whom religion has given really new intellectual power, and whose tranquillity and peace of spirit has given an air of heavenly serenity to their whole bearing and manner. And, indeed, in every case a holy disposition of mind has a refining effect upon those who cherish it. The face is an index to the character, and if the emotions that are expressed upon it are pure and worthy, they cannot fail in time to transform it in some measure—to tone down what may have been its natural harshness, and to banish from it all traces of coarse and sensual passions. An example of religion giving intellectual power, or rather of drawing out the faculties which but for it would have remained unexercised, we may see in the life of John Bunyan. The genius which is so marvellously displayed in his works, and which gives him a high place in the literature of his country, would never have shown itself but for the wonderful change in his life, when, from being a profane, careless, godless fellow, he became a true-hearted servant of Christ.

The abruptness with which this chapter opens may, it has been supposed, have been intended to call the attention of the reader to the hidden significance of the words that are about to be spoken, as our Lord often emphasized his utterances by the saying, "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear." Something there is in what he is about to add to be read between the lines. And the probable explanation of the suggestive question, and the allusion to a wise man's understanding "the interpretation of a thing," is in the fact that the writer veils a protest against despotism in the garb of the maxims of servility (Plumptre).—J. W.

Vers. 2—5.—*Allegiance of subjects.* It is scarcely to be denied that the wisdom which the Preacher exhorts his readers to exemplify in their relations as subjects with their kings, has something very like a servile tone about it. "There is not a trace of the enthusiastic loyalty of a Hebrew to a native sovereign, 'whose power loveth righteousness, who judgeth God's people with righteousness; in whose days the righteous flourish, and abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth' (Ps. lxxii. 7). Nor do we find the freeman's boldness, with which an Elijah could confront an apostate or a tyrant king. That fire is spent! The counsels here, as where he recurs to the same subject in the last five verses of ch. x., are those of submission, forbearance, self-control, prudence in dealing with a power irresistible, overbearing, often oppressive, yet which carries within itself the seeds of decay. Such advice may well have been needed by a generation of Jews, proud, intractable, detesting foreign rule, and groaning under the tyranny of an alien monarch" (Bradley). Loyal obedience to a duly constituted authority is declared to be (1) *a matter of conscience* (ver. 2); (2) *a prudent course* (vers. 3, 4, 5a); because by it we escape the punishment incurred by rebellion, and enjoy some tranquillity even under the worst rule. And as a consolation to those who are indignant at a tyrannous use of power, the reminder is given (5b) that punishment for evil deeds will be meted out in due time by a higher hand than ours.

I. Obedience a MATTER OF CONSCIENCE. (Ver. 2.) "I counsel thee to keep the king's commandment, and that *in regard of the oath of God.*" Though the words "counsel thee" are not in the Hebrew text, no better have been suggested to fill up the gap. But the emphasis which is laid upon the *I* by the omission of the verb may be interpreted to mean that the writer is giving a personal opinion, and not speaking authoritatively on a matter concerning which different men might form very diverse judgments. And we may compare with it St. Paul's manner of speaking, "But to the rest say *I*, not the Lord" (1 Cor. vii. 12, Revised Version), as contrasted with "I command, yet not *I*, but the Lord" (1 Cor. vii. 10). If we interpret the words in this way, a considerable measure of what I have called the servility of their tone is taken away. The writer is giving us prudential counsels, but of course the question still remains open whether there are not in certain emergencies higher considerations than those of prudence. He tells how tranquillity may be preserved even

under the rule of a tyrant; but it is for us to decide whether higher blessings than that of tranquillity are not to be striven for. The great cautiousness with which he speaks is not unreasonable when we remember how ready men are to make use of passages of Scripture to justify even questionable conduct, and how many errors have sprung from an ignorant and self-willed misinterpretation of isolated texts. The advice, then, given is "to keep the king's commandment" out of regard to the oath of allegiance taken to him or imposed by him. No hasty or ill-advised breach of such an oath is justifiable. It would seem that this passage was in St. Paul's mind, though he does not directly quote from it, when he says, "Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience' sake" (Rom. xiii. 5). As is well known, both the words of the Preacher, and the teaching of St. Paul in the thirteenth chapter of Romans, have been taken as laying down the rule of passive obedience for all subjects in all circumstances. However cruel the despot, the duty of subjects to obey him implicitly, and to make no attempt to deprive him of his power, has been held by many to be clearly laid down by the Word of God. And great stress has been laid upon the fact that the ruler of the civilized world, when St. Paul wrote the Epistle to the Romans, was Nero, one of the most infamous and cruel tyrants who ever wore the purple. In our own country during the seventeenth century, when the question of the prerogative of the sovereign and the rights and duties of subjects engaged the attention of all, these portions of Scripture were often interpreted to teach that the king's will was by right, and by the authority of God's Word, above all charters and statutes and acts of parliament, and that no misuse of his power could justify rebellion against him. But those who took up this ground forgot or ignored the fact that kings have duties towards their subjects, that coronation oaths bind them to keep the laws; and that St. Paul, in the very same place in which he commands subjects to obey, describes the kind of rule which has an absolute claim upon their allegiance. "For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. . . . Do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: for he is the minister of God to thee for good . . . a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil." It must surely be evident to all whose minds have not been blinded by a grotesque and monstrous theory, that a ruler who is a terror to good works, who rewards vice and punishes virtue, and uses the sword of justice to enforce his own selfish and cruel purposes, cannot claim from subjects the obedience which the apostle commands them to render to one of the very opposite character. But though passive obedience to tyrannical government cannot be commended on any higher ground than that of prudence, there can be no doubt that in ordinary circumstances the faithfulness of subjects to their rulers is a religious duty. And so we find in many passages of Scripture blame attached to those who thought that rebellion against the authority even of heathen kings, to whom the chosen people might be in subjection, was justifiable (Isa. xxviii. 15; xxx. 1; Ezek. xvii. 15; Jer. xxvii. 12; cf. Matt. xxii. 21).

II. A PRUDENT COURSE. (Vers. 3, 4, 5a.) In these verses the Preacher "seeks to dissuade his readers from casting off their allegiance to the king, or taking part with the enemies of the monarch under any hasty impulse whatever." "Do not lightly forsake the post of duty, join in no conspiracy against the king's throne or life," the words might be paraphrased. His power is absolute; he is above courts of law, and therefore any action against him must be attended with great risk. Of course, as I have said, the course recommended is a prudential one, and there are circumstances in which many will think that the oppressiveness of a tyrannical government has reached a pitch justifying rebellion against it. But those who seek tranquillity will bear a great deal, and not be eager to enter on any such undertaking. In ordinary circumstances, those who obey the king's commandment will experience no evil thing (5a), cases being left out of view in which the king requires obedience to decrees contrary to the Divine laws (Dan. iii., vi.); while the risk of failure in attempts to overthrow his power, and the anarchy and crime that generally attend insurrection against constituted authority, are calculated to make the wise man pause before he resolves to become a rebel. The advice given by the Preacher is so carefully stated, and based on such reasonable grounds, that perhaps one should not term it servile. And this impression is strengthened by a consideration of what is implied rather than expressed in the latter part of ver. 5. There is hope of a beneficial change even for those who submit in silence to the worst evils of despotism. It is to be found in the conviction of there

being a power higher than that of earthly sovereigns, which will in its own time mete out punishment to all transgressors. The wise man's heart "discerneth both time and judgment;" he will wait patiently for the "time and season of judgment which God hath put in his own power" (Lam. iii. 26; ch. iii. 1, 11, 17). Evil-doing cannot escape punishment; however exalted in station the offender may be, the time will come round when his deeds will be weighed in an unerring balance, and receive the chastisement they deserve. His high-handed disregard of equity and mercy may prevail up to a certain point, but retribution will come when the measure of his iniquity has been filled up. And the knowledge that this is so will help to console and strengthen the wise in the dark and evil day.—J. W.

Vers. 6—8.—*The doom of tyrants.* In words which are purposely dark the writer speaks of the fall of unrighteous tyrants. It is with bated breath that he whispers to those who are writhing helplessly under the oppressive rule of cruel despots, that the evil under which they suffer works its own cure in time, and that those who have their own way at present will sooner or later have to succumb to a power greater than their own. It is with considerable difficulty that the drift of the passage is to be made out, but with this clue in our hands it becomes intelligible. In the sixth and seventh verses there are four statements, each introduced by the same conjunction, *כִּי*, "for," or "because," and by retaining it in each case, instead of varying it as is done in our English versions, the sequence of thought becomes clearer. The sense of the verses is as follows: "The heart of the wise man will know the time and judgment, and will keep quiet; for (1) there is a time and a judgment appointed by God in which the wicked ruler will be duly punished (cf. ch. iii. 17); (2) the wickedness of man is heavy upon him, and will entail its own punishment,—the misery caused by a tyrant is a weight which will bring him down at last; (3) no man knows the future, or that which will take place, and therefore no despot is able absolutely to guard himself against the stroke of vengeance; for (4) who can tell him how the vengeance will be brought about? He may look in this direction and in that for the longed-for information, but in vain (cf. Isa. xlvii. 13, etc.). One thing, however, is certain, that whilst the wicked "are drowned in their carousing, they shall be consumed like stubble fully dry" (Nah. i. 10). The inexorable nature of the doom which will fall upon the cruel despot is described in highly vivid language. There are four things which are impossible for him to do. 1. "There is no man that hath power over the spirit to retain the spirit." Life can be shortened or cut off at any moment, but can by no art be prolonged beyond the fixed term. The despot cannot by his power escape the doom of death, any more than can the meanest of his subjects. Or understanding by *רוּחַ* not "the spirit of man," but "the wind," to which Divine judgments are often likened (Isa. xli. 16; lvii. 13; Jer. iv. 11—13; xxii. 22), it is as fruitless to try to keep back the Divine judgments as to prevent the wind from bursting forth. 2. There is no one who has power over the day of death, or is able to avert the arrival of that "king of terrors" (Job xviii. 14); the pestilence walketh forth in darkness, and the sickness wasteth at noonday (Ps. xci. 6). 3. There was no discharge granted from the ranks in the time of war under the vigorous law of Persia, and the Divine law of requital cuts off with equal certainty all hope of escape from the guilty transgressor; and lastly: 4. Wickedness will not deliver its master. When the hour of Divine vengeance strikes, the sinner shall receive the meet reward of his actions. "The wages of sin is death" (Rom. vi. 23) (Wright). By no lavish bribes, by no use of power, by no arts or endeavours, can the evil-doer, however high his rank may be, avert the day of judgment, which may precede, but which, if it does not precede, will certainly coincide with the day of death. And in that time, when he will have to stand before the tribunal of the King of kings, none of his deeds of cruelty and oppression will be passed over. Such is the teaching half concealed beneath the words of the Preacher; but not so veiled as to be hidden from the discernment of a reader made sensitive by the righteous indignation which oppression excites in a healthy mind. His words pass from an apparent servility of tone into a generous anger, and there is a triumphant ring in his voice as he speaks of the immutability of the law or of the will, upon which the moral government of the world is based. But though horror of injustice and hardness of heart is manifest in his words, they are not instinct with any less worthy feeling. He does not justify revenge, or

hint at the advisability of subjects taking the law into their own hands when their patience has been long tried. But he raises the matter to a higher level, and makes faith in God the source of consolation; and in his very words of counsel to subjects adduces considerations which are calculated to weigh with their rulers, and make those of them who are still amenable to reason, pause in a course of oppression and cruelty.—J. W.

Vers. 9, 10.—*Unequal lots.* The enunciation in the preceding verses of a firm conviction in the moral government of the world by God might have been expected to have silenced for ever doubts excited by the inequalities and irregularities so often apparent in human society. The possession of a master-key might have been expected to deliver the wanderer from the mazes of the labyrinth. But so great is the power of the actual, so varying is the strength of faith, that at times belief in a God of infinite wisdom and power and love seems a fallacious theory, contradicted and disproved by the facts of everyday life. And so our author, after bidding his readers to wait patiently for the manifestation of God's justice against evil-doers, gives utterance to the perplexity and distress occasioned by his long delay. He thinks of the successful oppressor, prosperous in life and honoured in burial, and contrasts with him the righteous driven into exile, and dying in obscurity and forgotten by all his fellows. Such seems to be the meaning of these verses, according to the translation given in the Revised Version, "All this have I seen, and applied my heart unto every work under the sun: *there is a time wherein one man hath power over another to his hurt.* And withal I saw the wicked buried, and they came *to the grave*; and they that had done right went away from the holy place, and were forgotten in the city: this also is vanity." It is just the state of matters described in the first part of the parable of the rich man and Lazarus—the one enjoying in this life good things, the other evil—and because the Preacher is not able to draw aside the veil that divides the temporal from the eternal, he cannot be sure that the inequality of the lots of the wicked and the righteous is ever remedied. He describes (1) *the prosperity of the wicked*; and (2) *the adversity of the righteous*.

I. THE PROSPERITY OF THE WICKED. It is still the despot whom he has in his mind's eye. He sees him ruling over others to their hurt, and at last receiving honourable burial, and finding rest in the grave. No insurrection of oppressed and pillaged subjects cuts short his tyrannous rule; he is undisturbed by enemies from without; he escapes the dagger of the assassin, and dies peacefully in his bed. And even then, when the fear he inspired in his lifetime is relaxed, no outbreak of popular indignation interferes with the stately ceremonial with which he is laid in the tomb. "There is not wanting the long procession of the funeral solemnities through the streets of Jerusalem, the crowd of hired mourners, the spices and ointment very precious, wrapping the body; nor yet the costly sepulchre, with its adulatory inscription." He might have been the greatest benefactor his subjects had known, the holiest of his generation, so completely has he received the portion of those who have lived prosperous and honoured lives (cf. 2 Chron. xvi. 14; xxvi. 23; xxviii. 27). The punishment merited by an evil life has not fallen upon him; the Divine Judge has delayed his coming until it is too late, as far as this life is concerned, for justice to be done, and therefore the faith of those who wait patiently upon God is subjected to a severe strain.

II. THE ADVERSITY OF THE RIGHTEOUS. While the wicked flourish in undisturbed peace, the righteous have often to endure hardships. The decree of banishment goes out against them; with slow and lingering steps they are compelled against their will to depart from the place which they love. They must go forth, and only too soon are they forgotten in the city, *i.e.* the holy city; a younger generation knows nothing more of them, and not even a gravestone brings them back to the memory of their people. This also is vanity, like the many others already registered—this, *viz.*, that the wicked while living, and also in their death, possess the sacred soil; while, on the contrary, the upright are constrained to depart from it and are soon forgotten (Delitzsch). It seems a stain upon the Divine righteousness that this should be so; that so long an interval should elapse between the commission of the offence and the dawning of the day of retribution, and that in so many cases it would appear as if

retribution never came. This is calculated to try our faith, and happy are we if the trial strengthens our faith. But one thing must not be left out of account—the Preacher dwells upon it in a subsequent verse—and that is that external circumstances of prosperity or adversity are not of supreme importance; that righteousness even with misfortunes is infinitely preferable to wickedness, whatever measure of external prosperity it may enjoy. Whether happiness or misery in this life be their outward lot, in the end “it shall be well with them that fear God” (ver. 12).—J. W.

Vers. 11—13.—*Retribution certain.* The prosperity of the wicked is not only an evil in itself, but it leads the way to a more deliberate and unrestrained course of sin. The fact that the Divine sentence that condemns evil is not executed speedily, leads many to think that they can sin with impunity. They do not see that the slowness with which the messenger of vengeance often travels gives opportunity for repentance and amendment before the stroke of punishment falls. Men think they are secure, and give themselves fearlessly to the practice of evil. Yet the Preacher could not give up his conviction that punishment of evil was but delayed and not averted. Though he saw the sinner do evil a hundred times and prolong his days, he knew that the righteousness of God, which in the present world seems so often obscured and thwarted, would in the end assert itself (ver. 12). Though the sinner enjoyed prosperity, it was a deceitful calm before the storm; but the righteous who truly feared God had a peace of spirit which no outward misfortunes or persecutions could disturb. “Appearances, the Preacher saw clearly enough, were against him, yet his faith was strong even under all such difficulties, and through it he was victorious” (Wright) (cf. 1 John v. 24). The prosperity of the wicked is, after all, only apparent. It has no sure foundation; can anticipate no long duration. His days may be many in number, but they soon pass away “as a shadow;” and when the last comes, every wish for prolonged life will be in vain. He may be at the very height of enjoyment when the hour strikes for his enforced departure from the world in which he has abused the long-suffering of God; and no prayers or entreaties or struggles will avail to prolong his days. The shadow on the dial cannot be forced to retrace its course, or to journey more slowly. “His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his dust; in that very day his thoughts perish.”—J. W.

Vers. 14, 15.—*One way out of perplexity.* The Preacher has just attained for a moment to higher ground, from which he may get a wider view of life with all its changes and anomalies (vers. 12, 13). His hope revives, his faith comes back. “For a moment he has pierced through the ring which has confined him to the interests of common life, and risen also above his own dark misgivings; and there has flashed across his soul for a moment the certainty that there is a power in the world that ‘makes for righteousness,’ a Divine and supreme law behind all the puzzles and anomalies of life, which will solve them all. He lays his hand on this, but he cannot grasp it” (Bradley). The inequalities in human lots, the just suffering as though they had been wicked, the wicked prospering as though they had been righteous, afflict his heart once more (ver. 13). His recurrence so often to this perplexing phenomenon is almost painful; it reveals a distress so deep that no arguments can diminish it, no exercise of faith can charm it away. Nothing but fresh light upon the mysteries of life and death can give relief, and this is denied him. He is one of those of whom the Saviour spoke (Luke x. 24) who desired to see and hear the things seen and heard by those who were privileged to receive a revelation of God in Christ, but whose longings were doomed never to be satisfied on earth. In the mean time to what conclusion did the Preacher come? To that which he has already expressed four times over (ch. ii. 24; iii. 12, 22; v. 18)—that it is better to enjoy the good things of life than to pine after an impossible ideal; to eat the fruit of one’s toil in spite of all that is calculated to sadden and perplex (ver. 14). Yet we must be fair to him. He does not recommend riot and excess, or a life of mere epicurean enjoyment. There is work to be done in life before enjoyment is won; there is a God from whom the blessings come as a gift, and the remembrance of this fact will prevent mere brutish self-indulgence. The fear of God gives a dignity to his counsel which is wanting in the somewhat similar words of heathen poets, in which we have epicureanism pure and

simple—in the songs of Anacreon and Horace and Omar Khayyam. It would indeed be a mistake to imagine that the advice he gives, however often it is repeated, is the best that can be given, or even the best that he has to give. It prescribes but a temporary relief from sorrow and care and perplexity. And even when he makes the most of the satisfaction gained by “eating and drinking and being merry,” we remember his own words, that “it is better to go to the house of mourning than to the house of feasting” (ch. vii. 2).—J. W.

Vers. 16, 17.—*Vanity of philosophizing.* The endeavour had been in vain to discover the principle according to which it happens that the just sometimes receive the reward of the wicked, and the wicked that of the righteous (ch. viii. 14). Equal failure attends the endeavour to understand the purpose and end of the toil and labour in which men are ceaselessly engaged. That all that was done was “a work of God,” the carrying out of a Divine law, the accomplishment of a Divine plan, he did not doubt (ver. 17); but he was unable to see the connection of the individual parts with the whole—the order and symmetry of events in their course he could not recognize. Two things he had sought to attain: (1) to know wisdom, to understand the essence and causes and objects of things; and (2) to bring this wisdom to bear upon the facts of life, to find in it a clue for the interpretation of that which was perplexing and abnormal. But success in his endeavour was denied him. The toils and cares which fill up laborious days, and drive away sleep from the eyes of the weary, seemed to him to be in many cases utterly fruitless; to be imposed upon men for no end; to have no connection with any higher plan or purpose by which one might suppose the world to be governed. What, then, is his conclusion? It is that the finite cannot comprehend the infinite; that no effort is adequate for the task; that the highest human wisdom is but as folly when it is bent upon forcing a solution of this great problem (ver. 17). “Then I beheld all the work of God, that man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun: because however much a man labour to seek it out, yet he shall not find it; yea, moreover, though a wise man think to know it, yet he shall not be able to find it.” The agnosticism of the writer does not tend to atheism. He does not deny—on the contrary, he affirms—his faith in a great Divine plan to which all the labours of men are related, though what it is and how it is being fulfilled he does not know. The tone in which he records his failure is not without a strain of bitterness; but one would wish to believe that its prevailing note is that of reverent submission to the Almighty, whose ways he could not comprehend, and that the writer’s thoughts would find adequate expression in the devout ejaculation of the apostle, “Oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!” (Rom. xi. 33). The pregnant words of Hooker describe the attitude appropriate for creatures in presence of their Creator: “Dangerous it were for the feeble brain of man to wade far into the doings of the Most High; whom although to know be life, and joy to make mention of his Name; yet our soundest knowledge is to know that we know him not as indeed he is, neither can know him, and our safest eloquence concerning him is our silence, when we confess without confession that his glory is inexplicable, his greatness above our capacity and reach. He is above, and we upon the earth; therefore it behoveth our words to be wary and few” (‘Eccl. Pol.’ i. 2, 3).—J. W.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER IX.

Vers. 1—6.—One fate happens to all, and the dead are cut off from all the feelings and interests of life in the upper world.

Ver. 1.—This continues the subject treated above, confirming the conclusion arrived at in ch. viii. 17, viz. that God’s government of the world is unfathomable. For all this

I considered in my heart even to declare all this; literally, *for all this laid I in my heart, and all this I have been about* (equivalent to *I sought to clear up*). The reference is both to what has been said and to what is coming. The *ki*, “for” (which the Vulgate omits), at the beginning gives the reason for the truth of what is advanced; the writer has omitted no means of arriving at a con-

clusion. One great result of his consideration he proceeds to state. The Septuagint connects this clause closely with the last verse of the preceding chapter, "For I applied all this to my heart, and my heart saw all this." **The righteous, and the wise, and their works, are in the hand of God** (Ps. xxxi. 15; Prov. xxi. 1); *i.e.* in his power, under his direction. Man is not independent. Even the good and wise, who might be supposed to afford the plainest evidence of the favourable side of God's moral government, are subject to the same unsearchable law. The very incomprehensibility of this principle proves that it comes from God, and men may well be content to submit themselves to it, knowing that he is as just as he is almighty. **No man knoweth either love or hatred.** God's favour or displeasure are meant. Vulgate, *Et tamen nescit homo, utrum amore an odio dignus sit.* We cannot judge from the events that befall a man what is the view which God takes of his character. We must not, like Job's friends, decide that a man is a great sinner because calamity falls upon him, nor again suppose that outward prosperity is a proof of a life righteous and well-pleasing to God. Outward circumstances are no criterion of inward disposition or of final judgment. From the troubles or the comforts which we ourselves experience or witness in others we have no right to argue God's favour or displeasure. He disposes matters as seems best to him, and we must not expect to see every one in this world treated according to what we should deem his deserts (comp. Prov. i. 32 with Heb. xii. 6). Delitzsch and others think that the expressions "love" and "hatred" are too general to admit of being interpreted as above, and they determine the sense to be that no one can tell beforehand who will be the objects of his love or hate, or how entirely his feelings may change in regard of persons with whom he is brought in contact. The circumstances which give rise to these sentiments are entirely beyond his control and foresight. This is true enough, but it does not seem to me to be intended. The author is concerned, not with inward sentiments, but with prosperity and adversity considered popularly as indications of God's view of things. It would be but a meagre assertion to state that you cannot know whether you are to love or hate, because God ordains all such contingencies; whereas to warn against hasty and infidel judgments on the ground of our ignorance of God's mysterious ways, is sound and weighty advice, and in due harmony with what follows in the next verses. The interpretation, "No man knows whether he shall meet with the love or hatred of his fellows," has commended itself to some critics, but is as inadmissible as the one just mentioned.

By all that is before them. The Hebrew is simply, "all [lies] before them." All that shall happen, all that shall shape their destiny in the future, is obscure and unknown, and beyond their control. Septuagint, *Tà πάντα πρὸ προσώπου αὐτῶν.* The Vulgate mixes this clause with the following verse, *But all things are kept uncertain for the future.* St. Gregory, "As thou knowest not who are converted from sin to goodness, nor who turn back from goodness to sin; so also thou dost not understand what is doing towards thyself as thy merits deserve. And as thou dost not at all comprehend another's end, so art thou also unable to foresee thine own. For thou knowest now what progress thou hast made thyself, but what I [God] still think of thee in secret thou knowest not. Thou now thinkest on thy deeds of righteousness; but thou knowest not how strictly they are weighed by me. Woe even to the praiseworthy life of men if it be judged without mercy, because when strictly examined it is overwhelmed in the presence of the Judge by the very conduct with which it imagines that it pleases him" ('Moral,' xxix. 34, Oxford transl.).

Ver. 2.—All things come alike to all; literally, *all things [are] like that which [happens] to all persons.* There is no difference in the treatment of persons; all people of every kind meet with circumstances of every kind. Speaking generally, there is no discrimination, apparently, in the distribution of good and evil. Sun and shade, calm and storm, fruitful and unfruitful seasons, joy and sorrow, are dispensed by inscrutable laws. The Septuagint, reading differently, has, "Vanity is in all;" the Syriac unites two readings, "All before him is vanity, all as to all" (Ginsburg). There is one event to the righteous, and to the wicked. All men have the same lot, whether it be death or any other contingency, without regard to their moral condition. The classes into which men are divided must be noted. "Righteous" and "wicked" refer to men in their conduct to others. The good. The Septuagint, Vulgate, and Syriac add, "to the evil," which is said again almost immediately. To the clean, and to the unclean. "The good" and "clean" are those who are not only ceremonially pure, but, as the epithet "good" shows, are morally undefiled. To him that sacrificeth; *i.e.* the man who attends to the externals of religion, offers the obligatory sacrifices, and brings his free-will offerings. The good . . . the sinner; in the widest senses. He that sweareth, as he that feareth an oath. He who takes an oath lightly, carelessly, or falsely (comp. Zech. v. 3), is contrasted with him who regards it as a holy thing, or shrinks in awe from invoking God's Name in such a case. This

last idea is regarded as a late Essenic development (see Josephus, 'Bell. Jud.' ii. 8. 6); though something like it is found in the sermon on the mount, "I say unto you, Swear not at all," etc. (Matt. v. 34—37). Dean Plumptre, however, throws doubt on the above interpretation, owing to the fact that in all the other groups the good side is placed first; and he suggests that "he who sweareth" may be one who does his duty in this particular religiously and well (comp. Deut. vi. 13; Isa. lxx. 16), and "he who fears the oath" is a man whose conscience makes him shrink from the oath of compurgation (Exod. xxii. 10, 11; Numb. v. 19—22), or who is too cowardly to give his testimony in due form. The Vulgate has, *Ut perjurus, ita et ille qui verum dejerat*; and it seems unnecessary to present an entirely new view of the passage in slavish expectation of a concinnity which the author cannot be proved to have ever aimed at. The five contrasted pairs are the righteous and the wicked, the clean and the unclean, the sacrificer and the non-sacrificer, the good and the sinner, the profane swearer and the man who reverences an oath. The last clause is rendered by the Septuagint, "So is he who sweareth (*ὁ δυνύων*) even as he who fears the oath," which is as ambiguous as the original. A cautious Greek gnome says—

"Ὀρκον δὲ φέυγε, καὶ ν δικαίως δυνύης.

"Avoid an oath, though justly you might swear."

Ver. 3.—This is an evil among all things that are done under the sun. The "evil" is explained in the following words, which speak of the common fate. The Vulgate (followed by Ginsburg and others) takes the first words as equivalent to a superlative: *Hoc est pessimum inter omnia*, "This is the greatest evil of all that is done under the sun." But the article would have been used in this case; nor would this accurately express Koheleth's sentiments. He looks upon death only as one of the evils appertaining to men's career on earth—one of the phases of that identity of treatment so certain and so inexplicable, which leads to disastrous results (ch. viii. 11). That there is one event unto all. The "one event," as the end of the verse shows, is death. We have here the old strain repeated which is found in ch. ii. 14—16; iii. 19; v. 15; vi. 12; "Omnes eodem cogimur" (Horace, 'Carm.,' ii. 3. 25). Yea, also the heart of the sons of men is full of evil. In consequence of this indiscriminating destiny men sin recklessly, are encouraged in their wickedness. Madness is in their heart while they live. The "madness" is conduct opposed to the dictates of wisdom and reason, as ch. i. 17; ii. 12. All their life long men follow their own lusts

and passions, and care little for God's will and law, or their own best interests. This is well called "want of reason" (*περιφρέεια*, Septuagint). And after that they go to the dead. The verb is omitted in the Hebrew, being implied by the preposition *ב*, "to;" the omission is very forcible. Delitzsch, Wright, and others render, "after him," i.e. after man's life is ended, which seems rather to say, "after they die, they die." The idea, however, appears to be, both good and evil go to the same place, pass away into nothingness, are known no more in this world. Here at present Koheleth leaves the question of the future life, having already intimated his belief in ch. iii. and viii. 11, etc.

Ver. 4.—For to him that is joined to all the living there is hope. As long as a man lives (is one of living beings) he has some hope, whatever it be. This feeling is inextinguishable even unto the end.

Ἀελπιον οὐδέν· πάντα δ' ἐλπίζειν χρεών.

"Hope springs eternal in the human breast."

Thus Bailey sings, in 'Festus'—

"All

Have hopes, however wretched they may be,
Or blessed. It is hope which lifts the lark
so high,

Hope of a lighter air and bluer sky;

And the poor hack which drops down on the
flints,

Upon whose eye the dust is settling, he

Hopes, but to die. No being exists, of hope,
Of love, void."

This clause gives a reason for the folly of men, mentioned in ver. 3. Whatever be their lot, or their way of life, they see no reason to make any change by reformation or active exertion. They go on hoping, and do nothing. Something may turn up; amid the inexplicable confusion of the ordering of events some happy contingency may arrive. The above is the reading according to the Keri. Thus the Septuagint: "Ὅτι τίς ἔς κοινῶναι;" "For who is he that has fellowship with all the living?" Symmachus has, "For who is he that will always continue to live?" while the Vulgate gives, *Nemo est qui semper vivat*. The Khetib points differently, offering the reading, "For who is excepted?" i.e. from the common lot, the interrogation being closely connected with the preceding verse, or "Who can choose?" i.e. whether he will die or not. The sentence then proceeds, "To all the living there is hope." But the rendering of the Authorized Version has good authority, and affords the better sense. For a living dog is better than a dead lion. The dog in Palestine was not made a pet and companion, as it is among us, but was regarded as a loathsome and despicable object comp. 1 Sam. xvii.

43; 2 Sam. iii. 8); while the lion was considered as the noblest of beasts, the type of power and greatness (comp. Prov. xxx. 30; Isa. xxxi. 4). So the proverbial saying in the text means that the vilest and meanest creature possessed of life is better than the highest and mightiest which has succumbed to death. There is an apparent contradiction between this sentence and such passages as claim a preference for death over life, e.g. ch. iv. 2; vii. 1; but in the latter the writer is viewing life with all its sorrows and bitter experiences, here he regards it as affording the possibility of enjoyment. In the one case he holds death as desirable, because it delivers from further sorrow and puts an end to misery; in the other, he deprecates death as cutting off from pleasure and hope. He may also have in mind that now is the time to do the work which we have to perform: "The night cometh when no man can work;" Ecclus. xvii. 28, "Thanksgiving perisheth from the dead, as from one that is not; the living and sound shall praise the Lord" (comp. Isa. xxxviii. 18, 19).

Ver. 5.—**For the living know that they shall die.** This is added in confirmation of the statement in ver. 4. The living have at least the consciousness that they will soon have to die, and this leads them to work while it is day, to employ their faculties worthily, to make use of opportunities, to enjoy and profit by the present. They have a certain fixed event to which they must look forward; and they have not to stand idle, lamenting their fate, but their duty and their happiness is to accept the inevitable and make the best of it. **But the dead know not anything.** They are cut off from the active, bustling world; their work is done; they have nothing to expect, nothing to labour for. What passes upon earth affects them not; the knowledge of it reaches them no longer. Aristotle's idea was that the dead did know something, in a hazy and indistinct way, of what went on in the upper world, and were in some slight degree influenced thereby, but not to such a degree as to change happiness into misery, or *vice versa* ('Eth. Nicom.', i. 10 and 11). **Neither have they any more a reward; i.e. no fruit for labour done.** There is no question here about future retribution in another world. The gloomy view of the writer at this moment precludes all idea of such an adjustment of anomalies after death. **For the memory of them is forgotten.** They have not even the poor reward of being remembered by loving posterity, which in the mind of an Oriental was an eminent blessing, to be much desired. There is a *paronomasia* in *zeker*, "memory," and *sakar*, "reward," which, as Plumptre suggests,

may be approximately represented in English by the words "reco'd" and "reward."

Ver. 6.—**Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now (long ago) perished.** All the feelings which are exhibited and developed in the life of the upper world are annihilated (comp. ver. 10). Three are selected as the most potent passions, such as by their strength and activity might ideally be supposed to survive even the stroke of death. But all are now at an end. **Neither have they any more a portion for ever in any thing that is done under the sun.** Between the dead and the living an impassable gulf exists. The view of death here given, intensely gloomy and hopeless as it appears to be, is in conformity with other passages of the Old Testament (see Job xiv. 10—14; Ps. vi. 5; xxx. 9; Isa. xxxviii. 10—19; Ecclus. xvii. 27, 28; Bar. iii. 16—19), and that imperfect dispensation. Koheleth and his contemporaries were of those "who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage" (Heb. ii. 15); it was Christ who brightened the dark valley, showing the blessedness of those who die in the Lord, bringing life and immortality to light through the gospel (2 Tim. i. 10). Some expositors have felt the pessimistic utterances of this passage so deeply that they have endeavoured to account for them by introducing an atheistic objector, or an intended opposition between flesh and spirit. But there is not a trace of any two such voices, and the suggestion is quite unnecessary. The writer, while believing in the continued existence of the soul, knows little and has little that is cheering to say about its condition; and what he does say is not inconsistent with a judgment to come, though he has not yet arrived at the enunciation of this great solution. The Vulgate renders the last clause, *Nec habent partem in hoc sæculo et in opere quod sub sole geritur*. But "for ever" is the correct rendering of *לְעוֹלָם*, and Ginsburg concludes that Jerome's translation can be traced to the Hagadistic interpretation of the verse which restricts its scope to the wicked. The author of the Book of Wisdom, writing later, takes a much more hopeful view of death and the departed (see ch. i. 15; ii. 22—24; iii. 1; vi. 18; viii. 17; xv. 3, etc.).

Vers. 7—12.—These verses give the application of the facts just mentioned. The inscrutability of the moral government of the world, the uncertainty of life, the condition of the dead, lead to the conclusion again that one should use one's life to the best advantage; and Koheleth repeats his caution concerning the issues and duration of life.

Ver. 7.—Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy. This is not an injunction to lead a selfish life of Epicurean pleasure; but taking the limited view to which he here confines himself, the Preacher inculcates the practical wisdom of looking at the bright side of things; he says in effect (though he takes care afterwards to correct a wrong impression which might be given), "Let us eat and drink; for to-morrow we die" (1 Cor. xv. 32). We have had the same counsel in ch. ii. 24; iii. 12, 13, 22; v. 18; viii. 15. **Drink thy wine with a merry heart.** Wine was not an accompaniment of meals usually; it was reserved for feasts and solemn occasions. Bread and wine are here regarded as the necessary means of support and comfort (comp. ch. x. 19; Gen. xiv. 18; 1 Sam. xvi. 20, etc.). The moderate use of wine is nowhere forbidden; there is no law in the Old Testament against the use of intoxicating drinks; the employment of such fluids as cordials, exhilarating, strengthening and comforting, is often referred to (comp. Judg. ix. 13; Ps. civ. 15; Prov. xxxi. 6, 7; Eccclus. xxxi. 27, 28). Thus Koheleth's advice, taken even literally, is not contrary to the spirit of his religion. **For God now (long ago) accepteth thy works.** The "works" are not moral or religious doings, in reward of which God gives temporal blessings, which is plainly opposed to Koheleth's chief contention in all this passage. The *works* are the eating and drinking just mentioned. By the constitution of man's nature, and by the ordering of Providence, such capacity of enjoyment is allowable, and there need be no scruple in using it. Such things are God's good gifts, and to be received with reverence and thanksgiving; and he who thus employs them is well-pleasing unto the Lord (ch. ii. 24; viii. 15).

Ver. 8.—Let thy garments be always white. The Preacher brings into prominence certain particulars of enjoyment, more noticeable than mere eating and drinking. White garments in the East (as among ourselves) were symbols of joy and purity. Thus the singers in Solomon's temple were arrayed in white linen (2 Chron. v. 12). Mordecai was thus honoured by King Ahasuerus (Esth. viii. 15), the angels are seen similarly decked (Mark xvi. 5), and the glorified saints are clothed in white (Rev. iii. 4, 5, 18). So in the pseudepigraphal books the same imagery is retained. Those that "have fulfilled the Law of the Lord have received glorious garments, and are clothed in white" (2 Esdr. ii. 39, 40). Among the Romans the same symbolism obtained. Horace ('Sat.,' ii. 2. 60)—

"Illo repotia, natales aliosve dierum
Festos albatu celebrat."

"Though he in whitened toga celebrate
His wedding, birthday, or high festival."

Let thy head lack no ointment. Oil and perfumes were used on festive occasions not only among Eastern nations, but by Greeks and Romans (see on ch. vii. 1). Thus Telemachus is anointed with fragrant oil by the fair Polykaste (Homer, 'Od.,' iii. 466). Sappho complains to Phaon (Ovid, 'Heroid.,' xv. 76)—

"Non Arabo noster rore capillus olet."

"No myrrh of Araby bedews my hair."

Such allusions in Horace are frequent and commonly cited (see 'Carm.,' i. 5. 2; ii. 7. 7, 8; ii. 11. 15, etc.). Thus the double injunction in this verse counsels one to be always happy and cheerful. Gregory Thaumaturgus (cited by Plumptre) represents the passage as the error of "men of vanity;" and other commentators have deemed that it conveyed not the Preacher's own sentiments, but those of an atheist whom he cites. There is, as we have already seen, no need to resort to such an explanation. Doubtless the advice may readily be perverted to evil, and made to sanction sensuality and licentiousness, as we see to have been done in Wisd. ii. 6-9; but Koheleth only urges the moderate use of earthly goods as consecrated by God's gift.

Ver. 9.—Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest; literally, *see life with a wife whom thou lovest*. The article is omitted, as the maxim is to be taken generally. In correction of the outspoken condemnation of women in ch. vii. 26, Koheleth here recognizes the happiness of a home where is found a helpmate beloved and worthy of love (comp. Prov. v. 18, 19; xvii. 22, on which our passage seems to be founded; and Eccclus. xxvi. 13-18). (For the expression, "see life," vide note on ch. ii. 1.) St. Jerome's comment is misleading, "Quæcumque tibi placuerit feminarum ejus gaude complexu." Some critics translate *ishshah* here "woman." Thus Cox: "Enjoy thyself with any woman whom thou lovest;" but the best commentators agree that the married state is meant in the text, not more sensual enjoyment. **All the days of the life of thy vanity;** i.e. throughout the time of thy quickly passing life. This is repeated after the next clause (though there omitted by the Septuagint and Syriac), in order to emphasize the transitoriness of the present and the consequent wisdom of enjoying it while it lasts. So Horace bids man "carpe diem" ('Carm.,' i. 11. 8), "enjoy each atom of the day;" and Martial sings ('Epigr.,' vii. 47. 11)—

"Vivo velut repto fugitivaque gaudia carpe."

"Live thou thy life as stolen, and enjoy
Thy quickly fading pleasures."

Which he (God) hath given thee under the sun. The relative may refer to either the "wife" or "the days of life." The Septuagint and Vulgate take it as belonging to the latter, and this seems most suitable (comp. ch. v. 17). That is thy portion in this life, and in thy labour, etc. Such moderate enjoyment is the recompense allowed by God for the toil which accompanies a properly spent life.

Ner. 10.—**Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might.** In accordance with what has been already said, and to combat the idea that, as man cannot control his fate, he should take no pains to work his work, but fold his hands in resigned inaction, Koheleth urges him not to despair, but to do his part manfully as long as life is given, and with all the energies of his soul carry out the purpose of his being. The Septuagint gives, "All things whatsoever thy hand shall find to do, do it as thy power is (*ὡς ἡ δύναμις σου*);" Vulgate, *Quodcumque facere potest manus tua, instanter operare*. The expression at the commencement may be illustrated by Lev. xii. 8; xxv. 28; Judg. ix. 33, where it implies ability to carry out some intention, and in some passages is thus rendered, "is able," etc. (comp. Prov. iii. 27). It is therefore erroneous to render it in this place, "Whatever by chance cometh to hand;" or "Let might be right." Rather it is a call to work as the prelude and accompaniment of enjoyment, anticipating St. Paul's maxim (2 Thess. iii. 10), "If any would not work, neither should he eat." Ginsburg's interpretation is dishonouring to the Preacher and foreign to his real sentiments, "Have recourse to every source of voluptuous gratification, while thou art in thy strength." The true meaning of the verse is confirmed by such references as John ix. 4, "I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work;" 2 Cor. vi. 2, "Now is the accepted time; now is the day of salvation;" Gal. vi. 10, "As we have opportunity, let us do good unto all men." For there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave. The departed have no more work which they can do, no plans or calculations to make; their knowledge is strictly limited, their wisdom is ended. It needs body and soul to carry on the labours and activities of this world; when these are severed, and can no longer act together, there is a complete alteration in the man's relations and capacities. "The grave," *sheol* (which is found nowhere else in Ecclesiastes), is the place to which go the souls of the dead—a shadowy region. **Whither thou goest; to which all are bound.** It is plain that the writer believes

in the continued existence of the soul, as he differentiates its life in *sheol* from its life on earth, the energies and operations which are carried on in the one case being curtailed or eclipsed in the other. Of any repentance, or purification, or progress, in the unseen world, Koheleth knows and says nothing. He would seem to regard existence there as a sleep or a state of insensibility; at any rate, such is the natural view of the present passage.

Vers. 11, 12.—Section 8. *It is impossible to calculate upon the issues and duration of life.*

Ver. 11.—He reverts to the sentiment of ver. 1, that we cannot calculate on the issues of life. Work as we may and must and ought, the results are uncertain and beyond our control. This he shows by his own personal experience. **I returned, and saw under the sun.** The expression here does not indicate a new departure, but merely a repetition and confirmation of a previous thought—the dependence and conditionality of man. It implies, too, a correction of a possible misunderstanding of the injunction to labour, as if one's own efforts were sure to secure success. **The race is not to the swift.** One is reminded of the fable of the hare and tortoise; but Koheleth's meaning is different. In the instances given he intimates that, though a man is well equipped for his work and uses all possible exertions, he may incur failure. So one may be a fleet runner, and yet, owing to some untoward accident or disturbing circumstance, not come in first. Thus Ahimaaz brought to David tidings of Absalom's defeat before Cushai, who had had the start of him (2 Sam. xviii. 27, 31). There is no occasion to invent an allusion to the foot-race in the formal Greek games. **The battle to the strong.** Victory does not always accrue to mighty men, heroes. As David, himself an instance of the truth of the maxim, says (1 Sam. xvii. 47), "The Lord saveth not with sword and spear; for the battle is the Lord's" (comp. 2 Chron. xx. 15; Ps. xxxiii. 16). Neither yet bread to the wise. Wisdom will not ensure competency. To do this requires other endowments. Many a man of cultivated intellect and of high mental power is left to starve. **Riches to men of understanding.** Aristophanes accounts for the unequal distribution of wealth thus ('Plutus,' 88), the god himself speaking—

"I threatened, when a boy,
On none but just and wise and orderly
My favours to bestow; so Zeus in jealousy
Hath made me blind, that I may none of
these
Distinguish."

Nor yet favour to men of skill. "Skill" here does not mean dexterity in handicrafts or arts, but knowledge generally; and the gnome says that reputation and influence do not necessarily accompany the possession of knowledge and learning; knowledge is not a certain or indispensable means to favour. Says the Greek gnomeist—

Τύχης τὰ θνητῶν πράγματ', οὐκ εὐβουλίας.

"Not prudence rules, but fortune, men's affairs."

But time and chance happeneth to them all. We have had the word *eth*, "time," all through ch. iii. and elsewhere; but *παρ*, rendered "chance," is uncommon, being found only in 1 Kings v. 4 (18, Hebrew). Everything has its proper season appointed by God, and man is powerless to control these arrangements. Our English word "chance" conveys an erroneous impression. What is meant is rather "incident," such as a calamity, disappointment, unforeseen occurrence. All human purposes are liable to be changed or controlled by circumstances beyond man's power, and incapable of explanation. A hand higher than man's disposes events, and success is conditioned by superior laws which work unexpected results.

Ver. 12.—Man also knoweth not his time; Vulgate, *Nescit homo finem suum*, understanding "his time" to mean his death-hour; but it may include any misfortune or accident. The particle *gam*, "also," or "even," belongs to "his time." Not only are results out of man's control (ver. 11), but his life is in higher hands, and he is never sure of a day. As the fishes that are taken in an evil net, etc. The suddenness and unforeseen nature of calamities that befall men are here expressed by two forcible similes (comp. Prov. vii. 23; Ezek. xii. 13; xxxii. 3). Thus Homer ('*Iliad*,' v. 487)—

"Beware lest ye, as in the meshes caught
Of some wide-sweeping net, become the prey
And booty of your foes."

(Derby.)

So are the sons of men snared in an evil time. Men are suddenly overtaken by calamity, which they are totally unable to foresee or provide against. Our Lord says (Luke xxi. 35) that the last day shall come as a snare on all that dwell in the earth (comp. Ezek. vii. 12).

Vers. 13-16.—Section 9. That wisdom, even when it does good service, is not always rewarded, is shown by an example.

Ver. 13.—This wisdom have I seen also under the sun; better, as the Septuagint, *This also I saw to be wisdom under the sun*.

The experience which follows he recognized as an instance of worldly wisdom. To what special event he alludes is quite unknown. Probably the circumstance was familiar to his contemporaries. It is not to be considered as an allegory, though of course it is capable of spiritual application. The event in Bible history most like it is the preservation of Abel-Beth-maachah by the counsel of the wise woman (whose name is forgotten) narrated in 2 Sam. xx. 15-22. And it seemed great unto me; Septuagint, *Kal μεγάλη ἐστὶ πρὸς μέ*, "And it is great before me." To my mind it appeared an important example (comp. *Eth*. x. 3). Some critics who contend for the Solomonic authorship of our book, see here an allegorical reference to the foreseen revolt of Jeroboam, whose insurrection had been opposed by certain wise statesmen, but had been carried out in opposition to their counsel. Wordsworth considers that the apologue may be illustrated by the history of Jerusalem, when great powers were arrayed against it in the time of Isaiah, and the prophet by his prayers and exhortations delivered it (2 Kings xix. 2, 6, 20), but was wholly disregarded afterwards, nay, was put to death by the son of the king whom he saved. But all this is *nil ad rem*. As Plautus says, "*Hæc quidem deliramenta loquitur*."

Ver. 14.—There was a little city. The substantive verb is, as commonly, omitted. Commentators have amused themselves with endeavouring to identify the city here mentioned. Thus some see herein Athens, saved by the counsel of Themistocles, who was afterwards driven from Athens and died in misery (Justin, ii. 12); or Dora, near Mount Carmel, besieged unsuccessfully by Antiochus the Great, B.C. 218, though we know nothing of the circumstances (Polyb., v. 66); but see note on ver. 13. The Septuagint takes the whole paragraph hypothetically, "Suppose there was a little city," etc. Wright well compares the historical allusions to events fresh in the minds of his hearers made by our Lord in his parable of the pounds (Luke xix. 12, 14, 15, 27). So we may regard the present section as a parable founded on some historical fact well known at the time when the book was written. A great king. The term points to some Persian or Assyrian potentate; or it may mean merely a powerful general (see 1 Kings xi. 24; Job xxix. 25). Built great bulwarks against it. The Septuagint has *χαράκας μεγάλους*, "great palisades;" the Vulgate, *Extruxitque munitiones per gyrum*. What are meant are embankments or mounds raised high enough to overtop the walls of the town, and to command the positions of the besieged. For the same purpose wooden towers were also used (see Deut. xx. 20;

2 Sam. xx. 15; 2 Kings xix. 32; Jer. lii. 4). The Vulgate rounds off the account in the text by adding, *et perfecta est obsidio*, "and the beleaguering was completed."

Ver. 15.—Now there was found in it a poor wise man. The verb, regarded as impersonal, may be thus taken. Or we may continue the subject of the preceding verse and consider the king as spoken of: "He came across, met with unexpectedly, a poor man who was wise." So the Septuagint. The word for "poor" in this passage is *miskén*, for which see note on ch. iv. 13. He by his wisdom delivered the city. When the besieged city had neither soldiers nor arms to defend itself against its mighty enemies, the man of poor estate, hitherto unknown or little regarded, came forward, and by wise counsel relieved his countrymen from their perilous situation. How this was done we are left to conjecture. It may have been by some timely concessions or negotiations; or by the surrender of a chief offender as at Abel-Beth-maachah; or by the assassination of a general, as at Bethulia (Jud. xiii. 8); or by the clever application of mechanical arts, as at Syracuse, under the direction of Archimedes (Livy, xxiv. 34; Plutarch, 'Marcell,' xv.—xviii.). Yet no man remembered that same poor man. As soon as the exigence which brought him forward was past, the poor man fell back into his insignificance, and was thought of no more; he gained no personal advantage by his wisdom; his ungrateful countrymen forgot his very existence. Thus Joseph was treated by the chief butler (Gen. xl. 23). Classical readers will think of Coriolanus, Scipio Africanus, Themistocles, Miltiades, who for their services to the state were rewarded with calumny, false accusation, obloquy, and banishment. The author of the Book of Wisdom gives a different and ideal experience. "I," he says, "for the sake of wisdom shall have estimation among the multitude, and honour with the elders, though I be young. . . . By the means of her I shall obtain immortality, and leave behind me an everlasting memorial" (Wisd. viii. 10—13).

Ver. 16.—Then said I, Wisdom is better than strength. The latter part of the verse is not a correction of the former, but the whole comes under the observation introduced by "I said." The story just related leads to this assertion, which reproduces the gnome of ch. vii. 19, wherein it is asserted that wisdom effects more than mere physical strength. There is an interpolation in the Old Latin Version of Wisd. vi. 1 which seems to have been compiled from this passage and Prov. xvi. 13, "Melior est sapientia quam vires, et vir prudens quam fortis." Nevertheless the poor man's wisdom is de-

spised, etc. In the instance above mentioned the poor man's wisdom was not despised, and his words were heard and attended to; but this was an abnormal case, occasioned by the extremity of the peril. Koheleth states the result which usually attends wisdom emanating from a disesteemed source. The experience of Ben-Sira pointed to the same issue (see Eccles. xiii. 22, 23). Horace, 'Epist.' i. 1. 57—

"Est animus tibi, sunt mores et lingua
fidesque,
Sed quadringentis sex septem millia de-
sunt;
Plebs eris."

"In wit, worth, honour, one in vain abounds;
If of the knight's estate he lack ten
pounds,
He's low, quite low!"

(Howes.)

"Is not this the carpenter's Son?" asked the people who were offended at Christ (Mark vi. 2, 3).

Vers. 17, 18.—Section 10. Here follow some proverbial sayings concerning wisdom and its opposite, which draw the moral from the story in the text.

Ver. 17.—The words of wise men are heard in quiet more than the cry of him that ruleth among fools. This verse would be better translated, *Words of the wise in quiet are heard better than the shout of a chief among fools*. The Vulgate takes the tranquillity to appertain to the hearers, thus: *Verba sapientium audiuntur in silentio*; but, as Delitzsch points out, the contrast between "quiet" and "cry" shows that it is the man, and not his auditors, who is quiet. The sentence says that a wise man's words, uttered calmly, deliberately, without pompous declamation or adventitious aids, are of more value than the blustering vociferation of an arch-fool, who seeks to force acceptance for his folly by loudness and swagger (comp. Isa. xxx. 15; and see Isa. xlii. 2 and Matt. xii. 19, passages which speak of the peacefulness, reticence, and unobtrusiveness of true wisdom, as seen in the Son of God). The verse introduces a kind of exception to the general rejection of wisdom mentioned above. Though the multitude turn a deaf ear to a wise man's counsel, yet this tells in the long run, and there are always some teachable persons who sit at his feet and learn from him. "He that ruleth among fools" is not one that governs a silly people, but one who is a prince of fools, who takes the highest place among such.

Ver. 18.—Wisdom is better than weapons of war. Such is the moral which Koheleth desires to draw from the little narrative given above (see vers. 14—16; and ch. vii.

19). Wisdom can do what no material force can effect, and often produces results which all the implements of war could not command. But one sinner destroyeth much good. The happy consequences which the wise man's counsel might accomplish, or has already accomplished, may be overthrown or rendered useless by the villany or perversity of a bad man. The Vulgate, reading differently, has, *Qui in uno peccaverit, multa bona perdet*. But this seems to be

out of keeping with the context. Adam's sin infected the whole race of man; Achan's transgression caused Israel's defeat (Josh. vii. 11, 12); Rehoboam's folly occasioned the great schism (1 Kings xii. 16). The wide-reaching effects of one little error are illustrated by the proverbial saying which every one knows, and which runs in Latin thus: "*Clavus unus perdit equi soleam, solea equum, equus equitem, eques castra, castra rempublicam.*"

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—6.—*All things alike to all.* I. ALL MEN EQUALLY IN THE HANDS OF GOD.

1. *Their persons.* The righteous and the wise (ver. 1), but not less certainly the unrighteous and the foolish. God's breath sustains all; God's providence watches over all; God's power encircles all; God's mercy encompasses all. 2. *Their works.* Their actions, whether good or bad, in the sense explained in the last homily, "are conditioned by God, the Governor of the world and the Former of history" (Delitzsch). 3. *Their experiences.* "All lies before them;" i.e. all possible experiences lie before men; which shall happen to them being reserved by God in his own power.

II. ALL MEN EQUALLY IGNORANT OF THE FUTURE. "No man knoweth either love or hatred," or "whether it be love or hatred, no man knoweth;" which may signify either that no man can tell whether "providences of a happy nature proceeding from the love of God, or of an unhappy nature proceeding from the hatred of God," are to befall him (J. D. Michaelis, Knobel, Hengstenberg, Plumptre); or that no man can predict whether he will love or hate (Hitzig, Ewald, Delitzsch). In either case the meaning is that no man can certainly predict what a day may bring forth. In so far as the future is in God's hand, man can only learn what it contains by waiting the evolution of events; in so far as it is moulded by man's free determinations, no man can predict what these will be until the moment arrives for their formation.

III. ALL MEN EQUALLY SUBJECT TO DEATH. "All things come alike to all: there is one event" (ver. 2). 1. *To the righteous and to the wicked;* i.e. to the inwardly and morally good and to the inwardly and morally evil. 2. *To the clean and to the unclean;* i.e. to the ceremonially pure and to the ceremonially defiled. 3. *To him that sacrificeth and to him that sacrificeth not;* i.e. to him who observes the outward forms of religion and to him who observes them not. 4. *To him that sweareth and to him that feareth an oath;* i.e. to the openly sinful and to the outwardly reverent and devout. "All alike go to the dead" (ver. 3).

IV. ALL MEN EQUALLY DEFILED BY SIN. "The heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live" (ver. 3). From which may be learnt: 1. *That sin is a kind of madness.* This will not be doubted by those who consider that sin is the rebellion of a creature against the Creator, and that sinners generally hope both to escape punishment on account of their sin, and to attain felicity through their sin. 2. *That the seat of this madness is in the soul.* It may affect the whole personality of the man, but the perennial fountain whence it springs is the heart, in its alienation from God. "The carnal mind is enmity against God" (Rom. viii. 7). 3. *That the heart is not merely tainted with this madness, but is full of it.* In other words, it is, in its natural condition, wholly under the power of sin. The total corruption of human nature, besides being taught in Scripture (Gen. vi. 5; viii. 21; Job xv. 14; Ps. xiv. 2, 3; ch. vii. 20; Isa. liii. 6; Matt. xv. 19; Rom. iii. 23; Eph. ii. 1—3), is abundantly confirmed by experience. 4. *That, apart from Divine grace, this madness continues unchanged throughout life.* There is nothing in human nature itself or in its surroundings that has power to subdue and far less to eradicate this madness. A new birth alone can rescue the soul from its dominion (John iii. 3).

V. ALL MEN EQUALLY THE SUBJECTS OF HOPE. 1. *Hope a universal possession.* "To him that is joined to all the living there is hope" (ver. 4); i.e. while man lives he hopes. *Dum spirat, sperat* (Latin proverb). "Hope springs eternal in the human

breast" (Pope). Even the most abject are never, or only seldom, abandoned by this passion. On the contrary, "the miserable hath no other medicine, but only hope" (Shakespeare). When hope expires, life dies. 2. *Hope a potent inspiration.* In ordinary life "we are kept alive by hope" (Rom. viii. 24). The pleasing expectation of future good enables the heart to endure present ills, and nerves the resolution to attempt further efforts. Though sometimes, when ill-grounded, "kings it makes gods, and meaner creatures kings" (Shakespeare), yet when soundly based it

"Like a cordial, innocent though strong,
Man's heart at once inspirits and serenes."

(Young.)

Especially is this the case with that good hope through grace (2 Thess. ii. 16) which pertains to the Christian (Rom. v. 5; 2 Cor. iii. 12; Phil. i. 20; 1 Pet. i. 13).

VI. ALL MEN EQUALLY POSSESSED OF INTELLIGENCE. Not of equal intelligence, but equally intelligent. In particular: 1. *All know themselves to be mortal.* "The living know that they shall die" (ver. 5). They may frequently ignore this fact, and deliberately shut their eyes upon it, but of the fact itself they are not ignorant. 2. *In this knowledge they are superior to the dead,* who "know not anything, neither have they any more a reward, for the memory of them is forgotten;" who in fact, having dropped out of life, have for ever ceased to take an interest in anything that is done under the sun.

Learn: 1. The essential equality of all men. 2. The inherent dignity of life. 3. The value of the present.

Ver. 4.—"*A living dog better than a dead lion.*" I. ANIMATED BEING BETTER THAN INANIMATE. Life a higher product than matter; and a lion without life is only matter. Life added to matter in its meanest forms imparts to it a dignity, worth, and use not possessed by matter in its most magnificent shapes where life is absent. The higher life, the nobler being.

II. COMPLETED BEING BETTER THAN INCOMPLETE. A living dog is a complete organism; a dead lion an organism defective. The living dog possesses all that is necessary to realize the idea of "dog;" the dead lion wants the more important element, life, and retains only the less important, matter. In the living dog are seen the "spirit" and "form" combined; in the dead lion only the "form" without the "spirit." If presently man is complete naturally, he is incomplete spiritually. Hereafter redeemed and renewed, man will be "perfect and entire, wanting nothing."

III. ACTIVE BEING BETTER THAN INACTIVE. The living dog, if not a person, is yet more than a thing. Along with life and an organism, it has powers and functions it can exercise; senses through which it can perceive, a measure of intelligence through which it can understand, at least rudimentary affections it can both feel and express, instincts and impulses by and under which it can act. On the other hand, the dead lion has none of these, however once it may have owned them all. It is now passive, still, inert, powerless—an emblem of the soul dead in sin, as a living dog is of the same soul energized by religion.

IV. SERVICEABLE BEING BETTER THAN UNSERVICEABLE. A living dog of some use, a dead lion of none. The gigantic powers of the forest king are by death reduced to a nullity, and can effect nothing; the feeble capacities of the yelping cur, just because it is alive, can be turned to profitable account. So magnificent powers of body and intellect without spiritual life are comparatively valueless, while smaller abilities, if inspired by grace, may accomplish important designs.

LESSONS. 1. Be thankful for life. 2. Seek that moral and spiritual completeness which is the highest glory of life. 3. Endeavour to turn the powers of life to the best account. 4. Serve him from whom life comes.

Vers. 7—10.—*The picture of an ideal life.* I. A LIFE OF PERENNIAL JOY. The joy should be fourfold. 1. *Material enjoyment.* "Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart" (ver. 7). The permission herein granted to make a pleasurable use of the good things of this world, of its meats and its drinks, has not been revoked by Christianity. Not only did the Son of man by his example (Matt.

xi. 19; Luke vii. 34; John ii. 1—11) show that religion did not require men to be ascetics or monks, Rechabites or Nazarites, but the apostolic writers have made it clear that Christianity is not meats or drinks (Rom. xiv. 17; 1 Tim. iv. 3; Heb. ix. 10), and that while no one has a right to over-indulge himself in either, thereby becoming gluttonous and a wine-bibber, on the other hand no one is warranted in the name of Christianity to impose on believers such ordinances as—"Touch not, taste not, handle not" (Col. ii. 21). 2. *Domestic happiness.* "Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of the life of thy vanity" (ver. 9). Marriage is not only honourable and innocent (Heb. xiii. 4) as being a Divine institution (Matt. xix. 4—6), but is one of the purest sources of felicity open to man on earth, provided it be contracted in the fear of God, and cemented with mutual love. As woman was made for man (1 Cor. xi. 9), to be his helpmeet (Gen. ii. 20), *i.e.* his counterpart and complement, companion and counsellor, equal and friend; so he that findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of the Lord (Prov. xviii. 22)—findeth one in whose love he may indulge himself, in whose sympathy he may refresh himself, in whose grace he may sun himself without fear of sin. The notion that a higher phase of the religious life is attained by celibates than by married persons is against both reason and revelation, and is contradicted by the fruits which in practical experience it usually bears. Neither the Preacher nor the great Teacher grants permission to men to live joyfully with unmarried females or with other people's wives, but only with their own partners; and neither Old Testament nor New favours the idea that men should take as wives any women but those they love, or should treat otherwise than with affection those they marry (Eph. v. 28). 3. *Religious felicity.* Arising from two things. (1) The cultivation of personal purity. "Let thy garments be always white." Though "white garments" were most probably intended by the Preacher to be a symbol of joy and gladness, they may be used as an emblem of purity, since they are so explained in the Talmud and Midrash. (2) The realization of Divine favour. "God now accepteth thy works," or "God hath already accepted thy works." Here again the Preacher's intention was no doubt to say that such enjoyment as he recommended was not discommended, but rather distinctly approved of by God; that God did not reject, but from long ago had accepted, such works as eating and drinking, etc., and had shown his mind concerning them by furnishing in abundance the materials for them. Yet with greater emphasis the Preacher's words will apply to the works of the Christian believer, who with all his activities is accepted in the Beloved (Eph. i. 6), and entitled to derive therefrom an argument, not for sinful indulgence, but for the cultivation of a joyous and holy life.

II. A LIFE OF UNWEARIED ACTIVITY. The work of a good man ought to be: 1. *Deliberately chosen.* Voluntarily undertaken, not reluctantly endured; the work of one whose hands have been stretched out in search of occupation. "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do." 2. *Widely extended.* A good man's labours should not be too restricted either as to number, character, or sphere. "This one thing I do" (Phil. iii. 13) does not signify that never more than one business at a time should engage a good man's attention. The ideal good man should put his hand to every sort of good work that Providence may place in his way (Gal. vi. 9, 10)—at least so far as time and ability allow. 3. *Energetically performed.* Whatsoever the hands of a good man find to do, he should do with his might. Earnestness an indispensable condition of acceptable service. Fitful and intermittent, half-hearted and indifferent, labour especially in good work, to be condemned (1 Cor. xv. 58). 4. *Religiously inspired.* A good man should have sufficient reasons for his constant activity. The argument to which the Preacher alludes, though not the highest, but the lowest, is nevertheless powerful, *viz.* that this life is the only working season a man has. "There is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest" (ver. 10). The inhabitants of the under-world are for ever done with the activities of earth. The good man no more than the wicked can pursue his schemes when he has vanished from this mundane scene. Hence the urgency of working while it is called to-day (John ix. 4). Though the Christian has loftier and clearer conceptions of the after-life of the good than Old Testament saints had, the Preacher's argument is not possessed of less, but rather of more, force as an incitement to Christian work, seeing that the "now" of the present life is the only accepted time, and the only day of salvation (2 Cor. vi. 2).

Learn: 1. The twofold aspect of every true life—as one of receiving and giving, of

enjoying and working. 2. The essential connection between these two departments of life—the joy being a necessary condition as well as natural result of all true work, and the work being a necessary expression and invaluable sustainer of the joy. 3. The true way of redeeming life—to consecrate its days and years to serving the Lord with gladness, or to rejoicing in God and doing his will.

Ver. 10.—*Words to a worker.* I. THE WORKER DESCRIBED: MAN. 1. *Furnished with capacities for work.* With bodily organs and mental endowments, with speech and reason. 2. *Located in a sphere of work.* The world a vast workshop, in which every creature is busily employed—not only the irrational animals, but even things without life. 3. *Appointed to the destiny of work.* As while sinless in Eden man was set to dress the garden and to keep it, and after the Fall beyond its precincts he was commanded to till the ground and to earn his bread through the sweat of his brow, so is he still charged to be a worker, a Christian apostle even saying that “if a man will not work neither shall he eat” (2 Thess. iii. 10). 4. *Impelled by a desire of work.* Under the compulsion of his own nature and of the constitution of the world, man is constrained to go forth in search of work, of labour for his hands, of exercise for his mind, and generally of employment for his manhood.

II. THE WORKER COUNSELLED. 1. *To do the duty that lies nearest.* This the obvious import of the words, “Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it.” To men in earnest about finding their life-work, the duties that lie nearest will commonly be the most urgent; and *vice versa*, the duties that are most urgent will usually be found to lie nearest. Among these will stand out conspicuously (1) the preservation of the body, (2) the cultivation of the mind, (3) the salvation of the soul; while others will assume their places in the order of succession according to their importance. 2. *To do every duty with energy.* “Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might.” Half-hearted labour, besides wasting time, spoils the work and demoralizes the worker. It is due to God, whose servant man is, to the importance of the work in which he is engaged, and to himself as one whose highest interests are involved in all he does, that man should labour with enthusiasm, diligence, and might. 3. *To do each duty from an impulse of individual responsibility.* “Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, that do thou!” As no man can tell what his neighbour’s duty is in every instance, so can no man in any case devolve his duty on another. “To every man his work!” is God’s great labour law. If other workers are unfaithful, be not thou unfaithful. 4. *To do all duties under a sense of the value of time.* Remembering that this life is man’s only opportunity of working, that it is swiftly passing, that death is near, and that there is neither wisdom, knowledge, nor device in the grave whither man goes.

Vers. 11, 12.—*Time and chance for all.* I. AN UNDENIABLE PROPOSITION—that the issues of life are incalculable. This truth set forth in five illustrations. 1. *The race not to the swift.* Sometimes, perhaps often, it is, yet not always or necessarily, so that men can calculate the issue of any contest. Just as swiftness of foot is no guarantee that a runner shall be first at the goal, so in other undertakings the possession of superior ability is no proof that one shall attain pre-eminence above his fellows. 2. *The battle not to the strong.* By many experiences Israel had been taught that “the battle is the Lord’s (1 Sam. xvii. 47), and that there is “no king saved by the multitude of a host” (Ps. xxxiii. 16). Neither Pharaoh (Exod. xiv. 27), nor Zerah the Ethiopian (2 Chron. xiv. 12), nor the Moabites and Ammonites who came against Jehoshaphat (2 Chron. xx. 27), nor Sennacherib (2 Kings xix. 35), were the better for their innumerable armies; and though Napoleon was wont to say that God was always on the side of the strongest battalions, instances can be cited in sufficient numbers to show that it is God who giveth the victory to kings (Ps. cxliv. 10), and that he does not always espouse the side of those who can summon the most warriors into the field. 3. *Bread not to the wise.* Here again the sense is that while capacity and diligence are usually rewarded, yet the exceptions to the rule are so numerous as to prove that it cannot certainly be predicted that a man of sagacity will always be able to secure for himself the means of subsistence. 4. *Riches not to men of understanding.* At least not always. Men of talent, and even of industry, sometimes fail in amassing riches, and when they do succeed, cannot always keep the riches they have amassed,

Nothing commoner than to find poor wise men (ver. 15) and rich fools (Luke xii. 20) Though as a rule the hand of the diligent maketh rich (Prov. x. 4), men of splendid abilities often spend their strength for nought. Riches are no sign of wisdom. 5. *Favour not to men of skill.* Even genius cannot always command the approbation and appreciation it deserves. The world's inventors and discoverers have seldom been rewarded according to their merits. The world has for the most part coolly accepted the productions of their genius, and remanded themselves to oblivion. The fate of the poor wise man after mentioned (ver. 15) has often been experienced.

II. AN INCONTROVERTIBLE ARGUMENT—that death, though certain as to fact, is uncertain as to incidence. 1. *The momentous truth stated.* "Man knoweth not his time," i.e. of his death, which ever falls upon him suddenly, as a thief in the night. Even when death's approach is anticipated, there is no reason to suppose its actual occurrence is not always unexpected. 2. *The simple illustration given.* "As the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare, even so are the sons of men snared in an evil time," viz. that of death, "when it falleth suddenly upon them." 3. *The easy argument applied.* This being so, it is obvious that no one can surely reckon upon the issues that seem naturally to belong to his several qualities or abilities, to his swiftness, or strength, or wisdom, or understanding, or skill. Death may at any moment interpose—as, for instance, before the race is finished and the goal reached, before the battle is concluded, before the wise plan has been matured or carried out; and then, of course, man's expectations are defeated.

LESSONS. 1. Diligence: let every man do his best. 2. Humility: beware of over-confidence. 3. Prudence: neglect not the possibility of failure. 4. Submission: accept with meekness the allotments of Providence.

Vers. 13—18.—*The parable of the little city.* I. THE PARABLE. 1. *The picture delineated.* A little city threatened by a powerful assailant, deserted through fear by the main body of its inhabitants, and occupied by a small garrison of men capable of bearing arms, among them a poor wise man. Advancing against it a mighty monarch, who besieges and storms it with armies and engines, but is ultimately compelled to raise the siege by the skill of the aforesaid wise poor man. 2. *The historical foundation.* Probably (1) the deliverance of Abel-Beth-maachah through the wisdom of a wise woman (2 Sam. xx. 15—22) (Wright); or (2) some event not recorded in history, but well known to the public for whom the Preacher wrote (Graetz); rather than (3) an incident which may have occurred in the siege of Dora by Antiochus the Great, in B.C. 218 (Hitzig), since Josephus ('Ant.,' xiii. 7. 2), who describes this siege, relates nothing corresponding to the Preacher's statements, and certainly does not mention its deliverance by any wise man, either rich or poor. 3. *Some suggestive parallels.* Incidents resembling that to which the Preacher here alludes may have happened often; as e.g. the deliverance of Athens by the counsel of Themistocles (Smith's 'History of Greece,' xix. § 5; Thucydides, i. 74), and of Syracuse by the skill of Archimedes, who for a time at least delayed the capture of the city by the wonderful machines with which he opposed the enemy's attacks (Livy, xxiv. 34), according to some doubtful accounts, setting fire to their ships by means of mirrors. 4. *Spiritual applications.* (1) "The poor man with his delivering wisdom is an image of Israel" (Hengstenberg); on which hypothesis the little city will be the suffering Hebrew nation, and the great king their Persian oppressors. (2) "The beleaguered city is the life of the individual; the great king who lays siege to it is death and the judgment of the Lord" (Wangemann). (3) "The little city is the Church of God; the great king Satan, the prince of hell and darkness; the poor wise man, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Fausset).

II. THE LESSONS OF THE PARABLE. 1. *That wisdom and poverty are frequently allied.* Not always, Solomon being witness (1 Kings iii. 12, 13); but mostly, God seldom bestowing all his gifts upon one individual, but distributing them according to his good pleasure—to one wealth and to another wisdom, dividing to each severally as he will (1 Cor. xii. 11). Nor is it difficult to discern in this marks of special wisdom and goodness. (1) Wisdom is not always conjoining with riches high mental endowments; partly in case of leading to undue exaltation on the part of the recipients, and partly to convince such recipients of the worthlessness of wealth apart from knowledge

secular, and much more religious, and to show observers how hard it is to guide wealth without wisdom, especially the highest. (2) Goodness towards the poor, whose scanty share of this world's goods he not unfrequently compensates with great intellectual capacity, and even with celestial wisdom. Nothing more remarkable than the number of the world's thinkers, philosophers, poets, painters, writers, astronomers, chemists, inventors, and discoverers that have sprung from the poor; while in religion it is everywhere apparent that God hath not chosen the mighty and the noble and the wealthy as such, but rather the poor of this world, rich in faith, to be heirs of the kingdom (1 Cor. i. 26, 27; Jas. ii. 5).

2. *That wisdom is superior to force.* "Wisdom is better than strength," and "wisdom is better than weapons of war." (1) True of merely human wisdom. Illustrations almost numberless might be furnished of the superiority of wisdom to force, in the way both of overcoming force and of effecting what force is unable to accomplish. Had the Preacher lived to-day, he might have penned a brilliant commentary on his own text in both of these respects. The history of modern civilization but another name for the record of man's victories over brute strength and material force through the power of mind; and the all-important moral of its story, that vast as are nature's powers, huge, gigantic, and irresistible as are the forces slumbering everywhere within its bosom, the human intellect can control and combine these, and compel them to subserve its purposes and schemes. (2) True of wisdom spiritual and Divine. Not only is this not destructible by force, else it would have long since been banished from the world, but it can stand up, as through past centuries it has done, against the fiercest assaults, fixed and immovable, smiling defiance on every assailant, feeling inwardly confident that no weapon formed against her shall prosper (Isa. liv. 17), and that even the gates of hell shall not prevail against her (Matt. xvi. 18); yea, anticipating confidently the advent of a time when she should trample this grim adversary of brute force beneath her feet, and even chase it from the field (Isa. xi. 9; lx. 18). And more, she can do what mere force and weapons of war are powerless to accomplish—change hearts of unbelief and sin into hearts of faith and holiness, rein in, hold down, and even crush out impure lusts and fierce passions, tame and sway human wills, and convert children of the devil into sons of God (Job xxviii. 28; Jas. iii. 17).

3. *That wisdom mostly speaks into unwilling ears.* "Nevertheless the poor man's wisdom is despised." Partly because of the world's want of appreciation of the intrinsic excellence of wisdom, the world usually possessing a keener relish and finer instinct for folly; and partly, perhaps chiefly, because of the wise man's poverty. At all events, it has usually been the world's way to treat its wise men with disdain. The picture of wisdom crying aloud in the street into unheeding ears (Prov. i. 20—25) has often been reproduced, as e.g. in the persons of Jehovah's prophets (Lev. xxvi. 43; 2 Chron. xxxvi. 16; Isa. liii. 1; Matt. xxi. 34—36) and of Christ (John v. 40). To this day the world's treatment of Christ is not dissimilar, his words of wisdom being by men for the most part despised, and in particular the special wisdom he displayed in effecting their deliverance from sin and Satan by himself submitting to shame and death, and extending to them the offer of a full and free forgiveness, being frequently regarded with scorn and contempt.

4. *That wisdom is more influential than folly.* "The words of the wise," spoken "in quiet, are more than the cry of him that ruleth among fools," or that is the ringleader among fools, their very prince and chief. This assertion may seem to conflict with that of the preceding verse, but in reality it does not. The noisy demagogue who by sheer vociferation stirs the unthinking populace may appear to be more influential than the quietly speaking man of wisdom, but in the long run it is the latter that prevails. After all, it is ideas that move the world, in science, in philosophy, in religion, and these have their birth in meditative souls rather than in fiery spirits, and diffuse themselves, not amid the tempests of passion, but through the medium of calm and earnest speech. Remarkably was this exemplified in Christ—read in connection Col. ii. 3; John vii. 37; Isa. xlii. 3; and to this day the most powerful force operating in and on society is not that of eloquence, or of intellect, or of learning, all confessedly influential, but of goodness, which works silently and often out of sight like leaven. 5. *That wisdom is commonly repaid with ingratitude.* "No man remembered that same poor man." The Preacher says it with a touch of sadness, as if after all it was a strange and almost a new thing beneath the sun—which it is not. Whether the wise woman who saved the city Abel was remembered by her citizens is

not recorded; but history reports that Themistocles, who delivered Athens from the Persians, was afterwards ostracized by his countrymen. Alas! ingratitude has never been an uncommon sin among men. Pharaoh's butler has had many a successor (Gen. xl. 23). The world has never been guilty of overlauding its benefactors or overloading them with gratitude. Rather the poet accurately likens Time to a sturdy beggar with a wallet on his back—

“Wherein he doth put alms for oblivion,
A great-sized monster of ingritudes.”

And goes on to add—

“Those scraps are good deeds past, which are devoured
As fast as they are made, forgot as soon
As done,” etc.

(‘Troilus and Cressida,’ act iii. sc. 3.)

Nor is it merely the world of which such ingratitude can be predicted, but the Church also has been too often guilty of forgetting him to whom she owes her deliverance. How many of his words, for instance, are not heard by those who profess to have been redeemed and saved by him—words of counsel for the path of duty, words of comfort for the day of trial, words of caution for the hour of danger! And yet the remembrance of these would be the highest tribute of gratitude they could offer their Divine Redeemer.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—3.—*The antidote to despondency.* It was said by a famous man of the world, “Life is a comedy to those who think, a tragedy to those who feel.” The epigram is more sparkling than true; reflecting men in every age have been oppressed by the solemnity of life's facts, and the insolubility of life's problems. Some men are roused to inquiry and are beset by perplexities when trouble and adversity befall themselves; and others experience doubts and distress at the contemplation of the broad and obvious facts of human life as it unfolds before their observation. Few men who both think and feel have escaped the probation of doubt; most have striven, and many have striven in vain, to vindicate eternal Providence, and justify the ways of God to men.

I. THE FACT THAT IN THIS EARTHLY STATE THERE IS AN ABSENCE OF COMPLETE RETRIBUTION. “All things come alike to all;” “There is one event unto all.” The righteous, the good, and the wise do not seem to meet with more prosperity and greater happiness than the wicked and the foolish. The man who offers due religious observance, and who reveres his oath, is subject to misfortune and calamity equally with the negligent, the impious, the false swearer. No thunderbolt of vengeance smites the sinner, no miraculous protection is round about the upright and obedient. Nay, the righteous is sometimes cut off in the prime of his manhood; the sinner's days are sometimes lengthened, and he dies in a delusive peace.

II. THE DIFFICULTY, DOUBT, AND PERPLEXITY OCCASIONED BY THE OBSERVATION OF THIS FACT. The writer of Ecclesiastes laid to heart and explored the mysteries of Providence; and in this he was not peculiar. Every observant and thoughtful person is sometimes compelled to ask himself whether or not there is a meaning in the events of life, and, if there be a meaning, what it is. Can our reason reconcile these events, as a whole, with belief in the existence, in the government, of a God at once almighty and benevolent? Are there considerations which can pacify the perturbed breast? Beneath the laws of nature is there a Divine heart? or is man alone sensitive to the inequalities of human fate, to the moral contradictions which seem to thrust themselves upon the attention?

III. THE TRUE SOLUTION OF THESE DOUBTS TO BE FOUND IN THE CONVICTION THAT ALL ARE IN THE HAND OF GOD. It is to be observed that faith in God can do what the human understanding cannot effect. Men and their affairs are not in the hand of chance or in the hand of fate, but in the hand of God. And by God is meant not merely the supreme Power of the universe, but the personal Power which is characterized

ly the attributes Holy Scripture assigns to the Eternal. Wisdom, righteousness, and benevolence belong to God. And by benevolence we are not to understand an intention to secure the enjoyment of men, to ward off from them every pain, all weakness, want, and woe. The purpose of the Divine mind is far higher than this—even the promotion of men's spiritual well-being, the discipline of human character, and especially the perfecting of obedience and submission. Sorrow and disappointment *may* be, and in the case of the pious *will* be, the means of bringing men into harmony with the will and character of God himself.—T.

Vers. 4—6.—*Life and death.* No thoughtful reader can take these remarks upon the living and the dead as complete and satisfactory in themselves. The writer of this book, as we know from other passages, never intended them so to be taken. They are singularly partial; yet when they are seen to be so, they are also singularly just. Just one aspect of life and of mortality is here presented, and it is an aspect which a wise and reflecting reader will see to be of great importance. Life is a fragment, it is an opportunity, it is a probation. Death is an end, that is, an end of this brief existence, and of what especially belongs to it. If we thought of life and death only under these aspects, we should err; but we should err if we neglected to take these aspects into consideration.

I. THE LOSSES OF THE DEAD. 1. They part with opportunities of *knowledge* which they enjoyed on earth. 2. They part with *passions* which they experienced whilst in the bodily life. 3. They part with *possessions* which they acquired in this world. 4. They are soon *forgotten*; for those who remember them themselves depart, and a faint memory or utter forgetfulness must follow. Death is a great change, and they who undergo it leave much behind, even though they may gain immeasurably more than they lose.

II. THE PREROGATIVES OF THE LIVING. 1. They have knowledge. This is doubtless very limited, but it is very precious. Compared with the knowledge which awaits the Christian in the future state, that which is within our reach now and here is as what is seen dimly in a mirror. Yet how can men be too grateful for the faculty in virtue of which they can acquaint themselves with truth of the highest importance and value? Knowledge of self, and knowledge of the great Author of our being and salvation, is within our reach. We know the limitation of our period of earthly education and probation; we know the means by which that period may be made the occasion of our spiritual good. 2. With all the living there is hope. Time is before them with its golden opportunities; eternity, time's harvest, is before them with all its priceless recompense. Even if the past has been neglected or abused, there is the possibility that the future may be turned to good account. For the dead we know that this earthly life has nothing in store. But who can limit the possibilities which stretch before the living, the progress which may be made, the blessing that may be won?

APPLICATION. It is well to begin with the view of life and death which is presented in this passage; but it would not be well to pause here. It is true that there is loss in death; but the Christian does not forget the assertion of the apostle that "to die is gain." And whilst there are privileges and prerogatives special to this earthly life, still it is to the disciple of Christ only the introduction and preparation for a life which is life indeed—life glorious, imperishable, and Divine.—T.

Vers. 7—9.—*The joy of human life.* Optimists and pessimists are both wrong, for they both proceed upon the radically false principle that life is to be valued according to the preponderance of pleasure over pain; the optimist asserting and the pessimist denying such preponderance. It is a base theory of life which represents it as to be prized as an opportunity of enjoyment. And the hedonism which is common to optimist and to pessimist is the delusive basis upon which their visionary fabrics are reared. Pleasure is neither the proper standard nor the proper motive of right conduct. Yet, as the text points out, enjoyment is a real factor in human life, not to be depreciated and despised, though not to be exaggerated and overvalued.

1. ENJOYMENT IS A DIVINELY APPOINTED ELEMENT IN OUR HUMAN EXISTENCE. Man's bodily and mental constitution, taken in connection with the circumstances of the human lot, are a sufficient proof of this. We drink by turns the sweet and the

bitter cup; and the one is as real as the other, although individuals partake of the two in different proportions.

II. MANY PROVISIONS ARE MADE FOR HUMAN ENJOYMENT. Several are alluded to in this passage, more especially (1) the satisfaction of natural appetite; (2) the pleasures of society and festivity; (3) the happiness of the married state, when the Divine idea concerning it is realized. These are doubtless mentioned as specimens of the whole.

III. THE RELATION OF ENJOYMENT TO LABOUR. The Preacher clearly saw that those who toil are those who enjoy. It is by work that most men must win the means of bodily and physical enjoyment; and the very labour becomes a means of blessing, and sweetens the daily meals. Nay, "the labour we delight in physics pain." The primeval curse was by God's mercy transformed into a blessing.

IV. THE PARTIAL AND DISAPPOINTING VIEW OF HUMAN LIFE WHICH CONSIDERS ONLY ITS ENJOYMENTS. 1. Pain, suffering, and distress are as real as happiness, and must come, sooner or later, to all whose life is prolonged. 2. Neither pleasure nor pain is of value apart from the moral discipline both may aid in promoting, apart from the moral progress, the moral aim, towards which both may lead. 3. It is, therefore, the part of the wise to use the good things of this life as not abusing them; to be ready to part with them at the call of Heaven, and to turn them to golden profit, so that occasion may never arise to remember them with regret and remorse.—T.

Ver. 10.—*Diligence.* The prospect of death may add a certain zest to life's enjoyments, but we are reminded in this passage that it is just and wise to allow it to influence the performance of life's practical duties.

I. RELIGION HAS REGARD TO MAN'S PRACTICAL NATURE. The hand is the instrument of work, and is accordingly used as the symbol of our active nature. What we *do* is of supreme importance, both by reason of its cause and origin in our character, and by reason of its effect upon ourselves and upon the world. Religion involves contemplation and emotion, and expresses itself in prayer and praise; but without action all is in vain.

II. RELIGION FURNISHES THE LAW TO MAN'S PRACTICAL NATURE. We are expected to put up the prayer, "What wilt thou have me to do?" In response to this prayer, precept and admonition are given; and so the "hand findeth" its work. 1. True religion prescribes the *quality* of our work—that actions should be just and wise, kind and compassionate. 2. And the *measure* of our work. "With thy might" is the Divine law. This is opposed to languor, indolence, depression, weariness. He who considers the diligence and assiduity with which the powers of evil are ever working in human society will understand the importance of this urgent admonition.

III. RELIGION SUPPLIES THE MOTIVES TO DILIGENCE IN THE EMPLOYMENT OF THE PRACTICAL NATURE. 1. There is the very general motive suggested in the context, that what is to be done for the world's good must be done during this present brief and fleeting life. There is doubtless service of such a nature that, if it be not done here and now, can never be rendered at all. 2. Christianity presents a motive of pre-eminent power in the example of the Lord Jesus Christ, who came to work the work of him who sent him, who went about doing good, who found it his food to do his Father's will, whose aim it was to finish the work given him to do. 3. Christianity enforces this motive by one deeper still; the Christian is inspired with the desire to live unto the Lord who lived and died for him. Grateful love, enkindled by the Divine sacrifice, expresses itself by consecrated zeal.

APPLICATION. Let the hand first be stretched out that it may grasp the hand of the Saviour, God; and then let it be employed in the service of him who proves himself first the Deliverer, and then the Lord and Helper of all those who seek him.—T.

Vers. 10, 11.—*The powerlessness of man.* The reflections contained in these verses are not peculiar to the religious. No observer of human life can fail to observe how constantly all human calculations are falsified and all human hopes disappointed. And the language of the Preacher has naturally become proverbial, and is upon the lips even of those for whom it has no spiritual significance or suggestion. Yet it is the devout and pious mind which turns such reflections to profitable uses.

I. HUMAN EXPECTATION. It is natural to look for the success and prosperity of

those who are highly endowed, and who have employed and developed their native gifts. Life is a race, and we expect the swift to obtain the prize; it is a battle, and we look for victory to the strong. We think of wealth and prosperity as the guerdon due to skill and prudence; we can hardly do otherwise. When the seed is sown, we anticipate the harvest. There are qualities adapted to secure success, and observation shows us that our expectations are justified in very many cases, though not in all. When we behold a young man begin life with every advantage of health, ability, fortune, and social recommendations, we forecast for such a one a career of advancement and a position of distinction and eminence. Yet how often does such an expectation prove vain!

II. HUMAN DISAPPOINTMENT. Human endeavour is crossed and human hope is crushed. The swift runner drops upon the course, and the bold warrior is smitten upon the battle-field. As the fishes are caught in the net, and the birds in the snare, so are the young, the ardent, the gifted, and the brave cut short in the career of buoyant effort and brilliant hope. All our projects may prove futile, and all our predictions may be falsified. The ways of Providence are inscrutable to our vision. We are helpless in the hands of God, whose thoughts are not as our thoughts. "Man also knoweth not his time." Attention is called to the suddenness with which our aims may be frustrated, our anticipations clouded, and our efforts defeated. And the observation of every experienced mind confirms the warning of the text. It is often when the sun is brightest that the cloud sweeps across its disc, when the sea is calmest that the storm arises in which the barque is foundered.

III. THE RELIGIOUS LESSONS TAUGHT BY THESE OVERTURNINGS OF HUMAN ANTICIPATIONS. 1. They rebuke human pride and self-confidence. It is natural for the young, the vigorous, the prosperous, to glory in their gifts, and to indulge bright hopes of the future, based upon their consciousness of power. Yet we have this lesson which the strong and fortunate will do well to lay to heart, "Let not the strong man glory in his strength," etc. 2. They check worldliness of spirit. We are all prone to attach importance to what is seen and temporal, and to allow our heart's affections to entwine around what is fair and bright, winsome and hopeful. God would teach us the supreme importance of those qualities which are imparted by his own blessed Spirit, and which endure unto everlasting life. 3. They lead the soul to seek a higher and more enduring satisfaction than earthly prosperity can impart. When riches take to themselves wings and fly away, this may enhance the value of the true, the unsearchable riches. When a fair, bright youth is plucked like a rosebud from the stem, and beauty withers, this may lead our thoughts and our hearts' desires away from this transitory scene to that region into which sorrow and death can never enter, and where God wipes away every tear.—T.

Vers. 13—18.—*The praise of wisdom.* It has been remarked that, whilst the leading idea of religion in the earliest stage of Israel's history was the Law, this idea took at a later period the form of *wisdom*. It is not well to discriminate too carefully between that wisdom which is shown in great works and that which is synonymous with piety. All light is from God, and there is no holier prayer than that in his light we may see light. It is a commonplace remark that men may be clever and yet not good; but every reflecting mind discovers in a character so described a lack of harmony. The philosopher, the sage, the leader in learning or science, should, beyond all men, be religious. "An undevout astronomer is mad." No more melancholy and pitiable spectacle is to be seen on earth than the able man whose self-confidence and vanity have led him into atheism. In considering the case of the truly wise man, it is well to regard him as displaying wisdom not only upon the lower but upon the higher plane.

I. WISDOM MAY BE ASSOCIATED WITH LOWLY STATION. Solomon was an example of an illustrious and splendid king who was famed for wisdom. But the instance of the text is striking; poverty and obscurity are not necessarily inconsistent with unusual insight, ability, and skill.

II. WISDOM MAY ACCOMPLISH GREAT WORKS WITH SMALL MEANS. A mighty king with a numerous and formidable army besieges a small city. How shall the besieged offer resistance to the foe? The inhabitants are few, feeble, ill-armed, half-starved;

and their case seems hopeless. But a citizen hitherto unknown, with no apparent resources, arises to lead the dispirited and helpless defenders. Whether by some marvellous device, or by the magnetic power of his presence and spirit, he accomplishes a task which seemed impossible—vanquishes the besiegers and raises the siege. Such things have been, and they are a rebuke to our worldly calculations, and an inspiration to courage and to faith.

III. WISDOM MAY NEVERTHELESS IN PUBLIC BE OVERLOOKED AND DESPISED. "No man remembered that same poor man." How often does it happen that the real originator, the prime mover, gains no credit for the enterprise which he conceived, and for whose success he prepared the way; whilst praise is given to some person of social or political eminence who joined the movement when its success was assured! It is "the way of the world."

IV. YET WISDOM, UNHONOURED IN PUBLIC, MAY BE ACKNOWLEDGED IN SECRET AND IN QUIETNESS. Those who look below the surface and are not dazzled by external splendour, those who listen, not merely to the earthquake, the thunder, and the tempest, but to the "still, small voice," discover the truly wise, and, in their heart of hearts, render to them sincere honour. Much more he who seeth in secret recognizes the services of his lowly, unnoticed servants who use their gifts for his glory, and work in obscurity to promote his kingdom, by whose toil and prayer cities are sanctified and saved.

V. THUS WISDOM IS SEEN TO BE THE BEST OF ALL POSSESSIONS AND QUALITIES. There is greatness which consists in outward splendour, and this may awe the vulgar, may dazzle the imagination of the unthinking. But in the sight of God and of just men, true greatness is that of the spirit; and the truly wise shine with a lustre which poverty and obscurity cannot hide, and which the lapse of ages cannot dim.—I.

Ver. 4.—*Life is everything.* In a world like ours, where appearance goes so far and counts for so much, there is much in *form*. There is much in *machinery*, in organization; when this is perfected, power is powerful indeed. There is much in original *capacity*—in that invisible, immeasurable germ out of which may grow great things in the future. But it is hardly too much to say that everything is in *life*. Where that is absent, nothing of any kind will avail; where that is present, all things are possible. It is better to have life even in the humblest form than to have the most perfect apparatus or the most exquisite form without it. A living dog, with its power of motion and enjoyment, is better than a dead lion, for which there is nothing but unconsciousness and corruption. Of the many illustrations of this principle, we may take the following:—

I. AN EARNEST STUDENT IS BETTER THAN A DEAD WEIGHT OF LEARNING. A man whose mind is nothing more than a storehouse of learning, who does not communicate anything to his fellows, who does not act upon them, who is no source of wisdom or of worth, is of very little account indeed; he has not what he has (see Matt. xxv. 29). But the earnest student, though he be but a youth or even a child, who is bent on acquiring in order that he may impart, in whom are the living springs of an honourable aspiration, is a great treasure, from whom society may look for many things.

II. AN AWAKENED CONSCIENCE IS BETTER THAN UNCONSECRATED GENIUS. Unconsecrated power may be enlisted on the side of peace and virtue. But it is a mere accident if it be so. It is quite as likely that it will be devoted to strife, and will espouse the cause of moral wrong; the history of our race has had too many painful proofs of this likelihood. But where there is an awakened conscience, and, consequently, a devotion to duty, there is ensured the faithful service of God, and an endeavour, more or less successful, to do good to the world.

III. ONE LIVING SOUL IS BETTER THAN A STAGNANT CHURCH. A Christian Church may be formed after the apostolic model, and its constitution may be irreproachably scriptural, but it may fall into spiritual apathy, and care for nothing but its own edification. A single human soul, with an ear sensitive to "the still sad music of humanity," with a heart to feel the weight of "the burden of the Lord," with courage to attempt great things for Christ and for men, with the faith that "removes mountains," may be of far more value to the world than such an apathetic and inactive Church. Similarly, we may say that—

IV. ONE LIVING CHURCH IS BETTER THAN A LARGE COMMUNITY THAT HAS LOST ITS SPIRITUAL ENERGY.—C.

Ver. 10.—*The day of opportunity.* There is great force in the Preacher's words, demanding present diligence and energy in view of future silence and inaction. It may be well to consider—

I. THE TRUTH LEFT UNSTATED. There is no work in the grave; but what is there beyond it? We who have sat at the feet of Jesus Christ know well that the hour is coming in which all who are in their graves shall hear his voice, etc. (John v. 28, 29). The rest which remaineth for the people of God is not the rest of unconsciousness or repose, but of untiring *activity*; of *knowledge* that will be far removed from the dim visions of the present (see 1 Cor. xiii. 12); of *wisdom* far surpassing the sagacity to which we now attain. In that heavenly country we hope to address ourselves to nobler tasks, to work with enlarged and liberated faculties, to accomplish far greater things, to be “ministers of his that do his pleasure” in ways and spheres that are far beyond us now. But what we have first to face, and have all to face, is—

II. AN ON-COMING EXPERIENCE. “The grave, whither thou goest.” Our life is, as we say, a journey from the cradle to the grave. Death is a goal which: 1. Is absolutely inevitable. We may elude many evils, but that we must all encounter. 2. We may reach soon and suddenly. It may be the very next turn of the road which will bring us to it. No man can tell what mortal blow may not be struck on the morrow, what fatal disease may not discover itself before the year is out. 3. Will certainly appear before we are expecting it. So swiftly does our life pass—so far as our consciousness is concerned—with all its pressure of business and all its growing and gathering excitements, and so pertinacious is our belief that, however it may be with others, we ourselves have some life left in us still, and some work to do yet, that when death comes to us it will surprise us. What, then, is—

III. THE CONCLUSION OF THE WISE? It is this: To do heartily and well all that lies within our power. The Master himself felt this (John ix. 4). He knew that there was glorious “work” for him in the long future, even as there had been for his Father in the long past (John v. 17). But he knew also that between the hour of that utterance and the hour of his death on the cross there was that work to be done *which could only be done then and there*. So he girded himself to do all that had to be done, and to bear all that had to be borne, in that short and solemn interval. We should feel and act likewise. We look for a very blessed and noble sphere of heavenly activity; but between this present and that future there is work to be done which is now within our compass, but will soon be without it. There is: 1. Good work to be done in the direction of self-culture, of gaining dominion over self, in casting out evil from our own soul and our own life. 2. Good service to be rendered to our kindred, to our friends, to our neighbours, whom we can touch and bless now but who will soon pass beyond our reach. 3. A good contribution, real and valuable, if not prominent, towards the establishment of the kingdom of Jesus Christ upon the earth. All, therefore, that our “hand findeth to do” because our heart is willing to do it, let us do with our might, lest we leave undone that which no future time and no other sphere will give us the opportunity to attempt.—C.

Vers. 11, 12.—*Prosperity—the rule and the exception.* We shall find our way to the true lessons of this passage if we consider—

I. THE RULE UNDER GOD'S RIGHTEOUS GOVERNMENT. The Preacher either did not intend his words to be taken as expressing the general rule prevailing everywhere, or else he wrote these words in one of those depressed and doubtful moods which are frequently reflected in his treatise. Certainly the rule, under the wise and righteous government of God, is that the man who labours hard and patiently to win his goal succeeds in gaining it. It is right that he should. It is right that the race should be to the swift, for swiftness is the result of patient practice and of temperate behaviour. It is right that the battle should be to the strong, for strength is the consequence of discipline and virtue. It is right that bread and riches and the favour of the strong should fall to wisdom and to skill. And so, in truth, they do. Where the natural order of things is not positively subverted by the folly and the guilt of men, it is the case that human

industry, resting on human virtue as its base, conducts to competence, to honour, to success. It does, indeed, happen that the crown is placed on the brow of roguery and violence; yet is it not the less true that wisdom and integrity constitute the well-worn and open road to present and temporal well-being.

II. THE OBVIOUS AND SERIOUS EXCEPTION. No doubt it is frequently found that "the race is *not* to the swift," etc. No doubt piety, purity, and fidelity are often left behind, and do not win the battle in the world's campaign. This is due to one of two very different and, indeed, opposite causes. It may be due to: 1. Man's interfering wrong. The human oppressor comes down upon the industrious and the frugal citizen, and sweeps off the fruit of his toil and patience. The scheming intriguer steps in, and carries off the prize which is due to the laborious and persevering worker. The seducer lays his nets and ensnares his victim. There is, indeed, a lamentable frequency in human history with which the good and true, the wise and faithful, fall short of the honourable end they seek. 2. God's intervening wisdom. It may often happen that God sees that human strength or wisdom has outlived its modesty, its beauty, and its worth, and that it needs to be checked and broken. So he sends defeat where victory has been assured, poverty where wealth has been confidently reckoned upon, discomfiture and rejection where men have been holding out their hand for favour and reward. What, then, are—

III. THE PRACTICAL CONCLUSIONS? 1. *Do not count too confidently on outward good.* Work for it faithfully, hope for it with a well-moderated expectation, but do not set your heart upon it as an indispensable blessing. Be prepared to do without it. Have those inner, deeper, diviner resources which will fill the heart with grace and the life with an admirable contentment, even if the goal is not gained and the prize is not secured. Be supplied with those treasures which the thief cannot steal, and which will leave the soul rich though the bank be broken and the purse be emptied. 2. *Guard carefully against the worst evils.* Be so fortified with Divine truth and sacred principles within, and secure so much of God's favour and protection from above, that no snares of sin will be able to mislead and to betray—that the feet will never be found entangled in the nets of the enemy. 3. *Anticipate the Divine discipline.* Live in such *conscious* and in such *acknowledged* dependence upon God for every stroke that is struck, for all strength and wisdom that are gained, for all bounties and all honours that are reaped, that there will be no need for the intervening hand of heaven to break your schemes or to remove your treasures.—C.

Vers. 13—18.—*Wisdom and strength.* The picture which is here drawn is both picture and parable; it portrays a constantly recurring scene in human history. It speaks to us of—

I. THE RANGE OF WISDOM. Wisdom is a word that covers many things; its import varies much. It includes: 1. Knowledge; familiarity with the objects and the laws of nature, and with the ways and the history of mankind. 2. Keeness of intellect; that quickness of perception and subtlety of understanding which sees through the devices of other men, and keeps a watchful eye upon all that is passing, always ready to take advantage of another's mistake. 3. Sagacity; that nobler quality which forecasts the future; which weighs well many considerations of various kinds; which baffles the designs of the wicked; which defeats the machinations and the measures of the strong (vers. 14, 15); which is worth far more than much enginery (ver. 18); which builds up great institutions; which goes forth on hazardous and yet admirable enterprises. 4. Wisdom itself; that which is more properly considered and called such, viz. the discernment of the *true end*, with the adoption of the *best means* of attaining it; and this applied not merely to the particulars of human life, but to human life itself; the determination to seek that good thing, as our true heritage, which is in harmony with the will of God, and to seek it in the divinely appointed way. To us who live in this Christian era, and to whom Jesus Christ is himself "the Wisdom of God," this is found in seeking and finding, in trusting and following, in loving and serving *him*.

II. ITS FAILURE TO BE APPRECIATED. "No man remembered that same poor man." Wisdom in each one of its particular spheres is valuable; in the larger and higher spheres it is of very great account, being far more effective than any quantity of mere

material force or of worldly wealth; in the highest sphere of all it is simply invaluable. But it is liable to be disregarded, especially if it be found in the person of poverty and obscurity. 1. It is often forgotten, and thus overlooked (text). 2. It is either rejected or visited with contumely in the person of its author. "Is not this the carpenter's Son?" it is asked. "And they were offended in him," it is added. Many a man, with much learning in his head, much shrewdness in his speech, much weight in his counsel, much wisdom in his soul, walks, unrecognized and unhonoured, along some very lowly path of life.

III. ITS REWARD. 1. It is often heeded when mere noise and station are disregarded. "The words of the wise are listened to with more pleasure than the loud behests of a foolish ruler (ver. 17)" (Cox). And it is a satisfaction to the wise that they do often prevail in their quietness and their obscurity when the clamorous and the consequential are dismissed as they deserve to be. 2. The time will come when they who speak the truth will gain the ear of the world; there are generations to come, and we may leave our reputation to them, as many of the wisest and worthiest of our race have done. 3. To be useful is a better reward than to be applauded or to be enriched; how much better to have "delivered the city" than to have been honoured by it! 4. Our record is on high.—C.

Ver. 18.—*The destructiveness of one evil life.* How much of destruction may flow from one single life may be seen if we look at the subject—

I. NEGATIVELY. We may judge of the magnitude of the evil by considering: 1. How one evil life may hinder the work of God; e.g. Achan, Sanballat, Herod, Nero. Who shall say how much of Christian influence has been arrested by one grossly inconsistent member of a Church, or by one arch-persecutor of the gospel of Christ? 2. How much a man may fail to do by refusing to spend his powers in the service of God. To a man with large means, great resources, brilliant capacities, almost anything is open in the direction of holy usefulness, of widespread and far-descending influence. All this is lost, and in a sense destroyed, by a selfish and guilty withholding of it all from the service of God and man.

II. POSITIVELY. We may estimate the serious and lamentable mischief of an evil life if we think that a godless man may be injuring his neighbours: 1. By weakening or undermining their faith; causing them to lose their hold on Divine truth, and thus sinking into the miseries of doubt or into the darkness and despair of utter unbelief. 2. By undoing the integrity of the upright; leading them into the fatal morass of an immoral life. 3. By cooling, or even killing, the consecration of the zealous; causing them to slacken their speed or even to leave the field of noble service. One man, by his own evil example, by his words of folly and falsity, by his deeds of wrong, may enfeeble many minds, may despoil many hearts, may misguide many souls, may blight and darken many lives.—C.

Vers. 1-6.—*Inexorable destiny.* The teaching in this section of the book is very similar to that in ch. vi. 10-12. The Preacher lays stress upon the powerlessness and short-sightedness of man with regard to the future. A higher power controls all the events of human life, and fixes the conditions in which each individual is to live—conditions which powerfully affect his character and destiny. Such a thought has been to many a source of consolation and strength. "My times," said the psalmist, "are in thy hand" (Ps. xxxi. 15). "Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things," said Jesus (Matt. vi. 32), when he counselled his disciples against undue anxiety for the future. But no such comfort is drawn by the Preacher from the consideration that "the righteous, and the wise, and their works, are in the hand of God" (ver. 1). It suggests to him rather an iron destiny, a cage against the bars of which the soul may beat its wings in vain, than a gracious Providence. The loss of freedom implied in it afflicts him—the thought that not even the feelings and emotions of the heart are under man's control. They are excited by persons and things with whom or with which he is brought in contact. A slight change of circumstances would make his love hatred, and his hatred love; and these circumstances he cannot change or modify. Events of all kinds are before us, and God arranges what is to happen to us. "Whether it be love or hatred, man knoweth it not; all is before

them" (ver. 13, Revised Version). "The river of life, along which his course lies, is wrapped in mist. Man's destiny is wholly dark, and is out of his own control. But it is not man's ignorance that cuts him to the heart; it is that the injustice of earthly tribunals seems to have its counterpart in a higher region. No goodness, no righteousness, will avail against the persistent injustice of the laws by which the world seems ruled. What a half-blaspheinous indictment, what passionate recalcitration against the God whose fear is in his mouth, is embodied in the cold and calm despair of the words which follow in the next verse (ver. 2)!" (Bradley). He names five classes of persons, embracing all the various types of righteousness and wickedness, and affirms that one event comes to them all, that no discrimination on the part of the Divine Ruler between them appears in their earthly lot. The first group is perhaps that of those whose conduct towards their neighbours is righteous or wicked; the second that of those who are pure or impure in heart; the third that of the religious and the irreligious; the fourth perhaps that of those whose characters are in all these relations good or evil; the fifth that of the profane swearer and the man who reverences the solemn oath (Isa. lxxv. 16). "There is no mark at all of a moral government in this world. The providence of God is as indiscriminating as the falling tree, or the hungry tiger, or the desolating famine. If the fittest survive for a time, that fitness has nothing in common with goodness or righteousness." And one of the evil consequences of this state of matters is, as already referred to in ch. viii. 11, that those evilly disposed are subject to less restraint than they would be if Divine Providence in all cases meted out reward and punishment immediately to the righteous and the wicked. "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" (ver. 3). The gloomy thoughts concerning death and the world beyond it which filled his mind, made the "one event" that comes to all seem all the more unjust. For some, doubtless, it is a deliverance from misery, but to others it is an escape from merited punishment. Even life with all its inequalities and wrongs is better than death, and yet the righteous are swept away from the earth indiscriminately with the wicked.

"Streams will not turn aside
The just man not t' entomb,
Nor lightnings go aside
To give his virtues room;

Nor is that wind less rough which blows a good man's barge."

That a strong faith in Divine Providence in spite of all outward appearances, and a firm grasp of the truth of immortality, were denied to the Preacher, need not surprise us, when we remember that the confidence we have in God's fatherly love, and in the eternal happiness of those who are faithful to him, is derived from the teaching of Christ, and his triumphant resurrection from the dead. The Preacher had not the consolations which the gospel affords us. To him the world beyond the grave was dreary and uncertain. He was one of those "who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage" (Heb. ii. 15). The meanest form of life was superior to the condition of even the noblest who had passed within the grim portals of the grave. The living dog, loathed and despised, feeding on the refuse of the streets, was better than the dead lion (ver. 4). Hope survives while life remains, even though it may be illusive; but with death all possible amelioration of one's lot is cut off. The bitterness of the thought is displayed in the touch of sarcasm which marks his words. "For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not anything, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten" (ver. 5). The very consciousness of the coming doom gives a distinction to the living which is denied to the dead. The very memory of those who have passed away soon perishes. Others take their place, and carry on the business of the world. A new generation springs up, with interests and concerns and passions with which the dead have nothing to do. The strongest passions of love, hatred, and envy are quenched by the cold hand of death (ver. 6), and those who may in life have been bosom friends, or mortal enemies, or jealous rivals, lie side by side in the grave, in silence and oblivion. Nothing that is done in the earth concerns them any more (cf. Isa. xxxviii. 9—20). The view here given us of the state of the dead is gloomy in the extreme. The darkness is more

intense and palpable than that with which the same subject is invested in the Book of Job, and even in some of the psalms. But we must remember that though the world beyond the grave is represented by him as dim and shadowy, he affirms at the same time that "God will bring every secret thing into judgment" in "his own time and season." "Consequently, the dead, even though regarded by him as existing in a semi-conscious state in Hades, are supposed to be still in existence, and destined at some future period to be awakened out of this dreary slumber, and rewarded according to the merit or demerit of their actions on earth. He does not, it is true, speak of this awakening out of sleep, still less does he allude to the resurrection of the body. His book is mainly occupied with the search after man's highest good on earth, and it is only incidentally that he refers at all to the state of the dead" (Wright). The doctrine of a future judgment, in which every man will appear and receive the reward or punishment due to him, is repeatedly dwelt upon by our author; and this of itself implies a conscious existence after death in the case of all. So far, however, as this life is concerned, the grave puts a period to all activity, extinguishes all the passions which animate the children of men. They pass into another state of existence, and have no further concern with that which is done here on earth.—J. W.

Vers. 7—10.—*Enjoyment of the present.* No one who is at all familiar with the Preacher's thoughts can be surprised with the advice here given, following so closely as it does upon the gloomy reflections on death to which he has just given expression. He for the sixth time urges upon his hearers or readers the practical wisdom of enjoying the present, of cheerfully accepting the boons which God puts within our reach, and the mere thought that he is the Giver, will of itself rebuke all vicious indulgence. He permits enjoyment; nay, it is by his appointment that the means for it exist. "Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works" (ver. 7). That is, God approves of these works—a cheerful, thankful enjoyment of food and drink. The white garment symbolical of a glad heart, the perfume sprinkled upon the head, are not to be slighted as frivolous or as inappropriate for those who are so soon to pass from life unto death (ver. 8). Asceticism, self-imposed scruples, half-bearded participations in the good things that lawfully fall to us, mean loss of the present, and are not in themselves a preparation for the future. The ascetic may have his heart set upon the very pleasures he denies himself, may value them more highly, than he who takes them as they come, and exhausts them of all the satisfaction they contain. The happiness, too, which marriage yields is commended by him. He speaks elsewhere of the wretchedness and shame into which sensuality leads, and of the hateful types of womanhood with which it brings the sensualist into contact (ch. ii. 8; vii. 26); but here he alludes to the calm peacefulness of a happy home, which, though it cannot remove the sense of the vanity and transitoriness of life, at least makes it endurable (Plumptre). A happy life, a useful life, a life filled by a wholesome activity, may be lived by all or by most, and the fact that the end is near, the grave in which there is neither "work, nor device, nor wisdom," should be a stimulus to such activity (ver. 10). Honest, earnest labour, together with whatever enjoyments God's providence brings within our reach, and not an indifference to all sublunary concerns because of their transitoriness, is asserted to be our bounden duty. Had he recommended mere sensuous indulgence, we should turn from him contemptuously. Had he recommended an ascetic severity, we might have felt that only some could follow his advice. But as it is, his ideal is within the reach of us all, and is worthy of us all. And those who speak censoriously of the conclusion he reaches and expresses in these words, would find it a very hard task to frame a higher ideal of life. Zealous performance of practical duties, a reasonable and whole-hearted enjoyment of all innocent pleasures, and mindfulness of judgment to come, are commended to us by the Preacher, and only a stupid fanatic could object to the counsel he gives.—J. W.

Vers. 11, 12.—*Time and chance.* In the preceding passage our author has exhorted the timid and slothful to bestir themselves and put forth all their powers, since death is ever at hand, and when it comes a period will be put to all endeavours; the wisdom that guides, the hand that executes, will be silent and still in the grave. He now exhorts the wise and strong not to be too confident about success in life, to be prepared

for possible failure and disappointment. So full and varied is his experience of life that he has useful counsels for all classes of men. Some need the spur and others the curb. Some would from timidity hang back and lose the chances of usefulness which life gives; others are so self-confident and sanguine that they need to be warned of the dangers and difficulties which their wisdom and skill may not succeed in overcoming. Plans may be skilfully constructed and every effort made to carry them into effect, but some unforeseen cause may defeat them, some circumstance which could not have been provided against, may bring about failure. The Preacher records the observations he had made of instances of failure to secure success in life, and gives an explanation of how it is that the strenuous efforts of men are so often baffled.

I. THE PHENOMENA OBSERVED. (Ver. 11.) Five instances of failure are enumerated: the swift defeated in the race, the strong in battle, the wise unable to make a livelihood, the prudent remaining in poverty, the gifted in obscurity. In none of the cases is the fault to be traced to the want of faculties or abilities of the kind needed to secure the end in view, or to a half-hearted use of them. The runner endowed with swiftness might reasonably be expected to be first in at the goal, the strong to be victorious in fight, the wise and prudent to be successful in acquiring and amassing riches, the clever to attain to reputation and influence. It is taken for granted, too, that there is no omission of effort; for if there were, the cause of failure would easily be discovered. But the phenomena being noted as extraordinary and perplexing, we are to understand that in none of the cases observed is there anything of the kind. And it is implied that while those who fulfil all the conditions of success sometimes fail, those who do not sometimes succeed. The phenomena referred to are familiar to us all. We have known many who have begun life with the fairest promise, and who have apparently, without any fault of their own, failed to make their mark. The impression they have made upon us has convinced us that they have ability enough to win the prizes in life; but somehow or other they fail, and remain in obscurity. And, at the same time, others whose abilities are in our opinion of a commonplace order come to the front, and succeed in gaining and keeping a foremost place.

II. THE EXPLANATION OF THE MATTER. (Ver. 11b.) "Time and chance happeneth to them all." There need to be favourable circumstances as well as the possession and use of the requisite faculties, if success is to be won. The time must be propitious, and give opportunities for the exercise of gifts and abilities. "There are favourable and unfavourable 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 favourable 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" (Wardlaw). At first sight it might seem as if the explanation given of the reason why the race is not always to the swift, or the battle to the strong, were based on a denial of the Divine providence, and unworthy of a place in the Word of God. But this opinion is considerably modified, if not contradicted, if we find a reference, as we may fairly do, in the word "time" to the statements in ch. iii., that there are "times and seasons," for all things are appointed by God himself. And so far from the conclusion here announced by our author being a solitary utterance, out of harmony with the general teaching of Scripture, we may find many parallels to it; e.g. "The Lord saveth not with sword and spear: for the battle is the Lord's, and he will give you into our hands" (1 Sam. xvii. 47). "Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the Name of the Lord our God" (Ps. xx. 7). "There is no king saved by the multitude of an host: a mighty man is not delivered by much strength" (Ps. xxxiii. 16). Probably the unfavourable impression of which I have spoken arises from the ideas suggested by the word "chance" in our English Version, which does not convey exactly the meaning of the Hebrew *pega'*. It is a word only found twice in Scripture, here and in 1 Kings v. 4, and means a *stroke*. The general idea is that of adversity or disappointment inflicted by a higher power, and not merely that of something accidental or fortuitous interfering with

human plans. "Chance," therefore, must here refer to the great variety of circumstances over which we have no control, but by which our schemes and endeavours are affected, which may take away success from the deserving, and in all cases render it extremely difficult to calculate beforehand the probabilities of success in an undertaking. The final result, whatever we may do, is conditioned by God. Though our author does not here use these terms, yet we cannot doubt that they express his meaning. He does not say that life is a lottery, in which the swift and the slow, the strong and the weak, the wise and the simple, the industrious and the lazy, have equal chances of drawing prizes. He knew, as we all know, that success is won in most cases by those who are best qualified in ability and character for securing it; that the race is generally to the swift, and the battle to the strong. It is the exception to the rule that excites his astonishment, and leads him to the conclusion that mere human skill and power are not sufficient of themselves to carry the day. Failure and disappointment may at any moment and in any case overtake man, and these from causes which no wisdom could have foreseen or exertion have averted. Such a consideration is calculated to humble human pride, and create in the heart feelings of reverent submission to the great Disposer of events. "So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy" (Rom. ix. 16). This thought of the limitation of man in his efforts, in spite of all his gifts and abilities, is expressed again with still greater emphasis in ver. 12. The time when life must close is a secret hidden from each of us, and we may be arrested in the mid-course of our endeavours just when our labours are about to be crowned with success. It may come upon us so unexpectedly as to take us as fishes are taken in a net or birds in a snare. This may be the event that snatches the prize from the runner, the victory from the strong (2 Chron. xviii. 33, 34). The arrow shot at random may strike down the brave soldier who has successfully borne the brunt of battle, and lay his pride in the dust. To those whose whole interests are centred in the business and pleasures of the world, the sudden summons of death comes in an evil time (Luke xii. 19, 20); but those who are wise are not taken by surprise—"they understand and consider their latter end."—J. W.

Vers. 13—16.—*An apologue.* The truth of the aphorism, that "the battle is not to the strong . . . nor yet favour to men of skill" (ver. 11), is illustrated by the Preacher in a striking little story or apologue, taken doubtless from the history of some campaign familiar to his readers. It represents in a vivid manner the power of wisdom, and also the ungrateful treatment which the possessor of it frequently receives from those who have found him a deliverer in time of danger. A little city, with few in it to defend it, is besieged by a great king. The place is surrounded by his army, and round about it great mounds are erected from which missiles are hurled into it. All hope seems to be gone; no material forces which the besieged can muster for their defence are at all adequate to repel the assailants. When suddenly some poor man, whose name was perhaps known to few in the city, delivers it by his wisdom. The great king and his army are compelled to retire baffled from before the walls of the city, which probably when they first beheld them moved them to scornful laughter by their apparent insignificance and weakness. The picture is not overdrawn; history affords many parallel instances. The defence of Syracuse against the Romans by Archimedes the mathematician (Livy, xxiv. 34), of Londonderry against James II. by Walker, and in later times of Antwerp by Carnot (Alison, 'Europe,' lxxxvii.), show how inferior material is to moral force. This is the bright side of the picture. "Wisdom is better than strength" (ver. 16); "wisdom is better than weapons of war" (ver. 18). The dark side is that it is often rewarded by the basest ingratitude. It was the wisdom of a poor man that delivered the city in which he dwelt; but when the danger was past he sank again into obscurity. No one thought of him as he deserved to be thought of. The public attention was caught by some new figure, and the saviour of the city remained as poor and unnoticed as he had been before the great crisis in which his wisdom had been of such great service. Had he been high-born and rich, his great services would have been acknowledged in some notable manner; but the meanness of his surroundings obscured his merit in the eyes of the thoughtless multitude. It was this vulgar failing which prompted some to despise wisdom itself incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth, and to ask scornfully, "Is not this the carpenter?" (Mark vi. 2, 3). Wisdom

is unassuming, calm, and deliberate (cf. Isa. xlii. 2; Matt. xii. 19), yet full of strength and resources, and the pity is that it should so often lose its reward, and the public attention be caught by the blustering cry of fools (ver. 17). It is, indeed, often a better defence than weapons of war; and therefore it is sad that it should sometimes be nullified by folly, that one perverse blunderer should sometimes be able through carelessness or passion to destroy all the defences that wisdom has carefully erected.—J. W.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER X.

Vers. 1—3.—Section 11. *A little folly mars the effect of wisdom*, and is sure to make itself conspicuous.

Ver. 1.—*Dead flies* cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savour. This is a metaphorical confirmation of the truth enunciated at the end of the last chapter, "One sinner destroyeth much good." It is like the apostle's warning to his converts, "A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump" (1 Cor. v. 6). The Hebrew expression is literally, "flies of death," which may mean either "dead flies," as in our version and the Vulgate (*muscæ morientes*), or "deadly, poisonous flies," as in the Septuagint (*μύϊαι θανατούσας*). The latter rendering seems preferable, if we regard the use of similar compound phrases, e.g. "instruments of death" (Ps. vii. 14 [13]); "snares of death" (Ps. xviii. 5); and in New Testament Greek, ἡ πλὴρὴ τοῦ θανάτου, "the death-stroke" (Rev. xiii. 3, 12). The flies meant are such as are poisonous in their bite, or carry infection with them. Such insects corrupt anything which they touch—food, ointment, whether they perish where they alight or not. They, as the Hebrew says, *make to stink, make to ferment, the oil of the perfumer*. The singular verb is here used with the plural subject to express the unity of the individuals, "flies" forming one complete idea. The Septuagint rendering omits one of the verbs: *Σαπριοὶς σκευασίαν ἐλαίου ἡδύσματος*, "Corrupt a preparation of sweet ointment." The point, of course, is the comparative insignificance of the cause which spoils a costly substance compounded with care and skill. Thus little faults mar great characters and reputations. "A good name is better than precious ointment" (ch. vii. 1), but a good name is ruined by follies, and then it stinks in men's nostrils. The term, "ointment of the apothecary," is used by Moses (Exod. xxx. 25, etc.) in describing the holy chrism which was reserved for special occasions. So doth a little folly him that is in reputation for wisdom and honour. The meaning of the Authorized Version is tolerably correct, but the actual rendering will hardly stand, and one wants some verb

to govern "him that," etc. The other versions vary. Septuagint, "A little wisdom is more precious (*τιμιον*) than great glory of folly;" Vulgate, "More precious are wisdom and glory than small and short-lived folly;" Jerome, "Precious above wisdom and glory is a little folly." This last interpretation proceeds upon the idea that such "folly" is at any rate free from pride, and has few glaring faults. "Dulce est desipere in loco," says Horace (*Carm.*, iv. 12. 28). But the original is best translated thus: "More weighty than wisdom, than honour, is a little folly." It is a painful fact that a little folly, one foolish act, one silly peculiarity of manner or disposition, will suffice to impair the real value of a man's wisdom and the estimation in which he was held. The little element of foolishness, like the little insect in the ointment, obscures the real excellence of the man, and deprives him of the honour that is really his due. And in religion we know that one fault unchecked, one secret sin cherished, poisons the whole character, makes a man lose the grace of God. (For the same effect from another cause, see Ezek. iii. 20; xxxiii. 13.) Jerome sees in the "dead flies" wicked thoughts put into the Christian's mind by Beelzebub, "the lord of flies."

Vers. 2, 3.—A tetrastich contrasting wisdom and folly.

Ver. 2.—*A wise man's heart is at his right hand; but a fool's heart is at his left*. There is here no reference to the classical use of right and left, as ominous of success and disaster, which is never found in the Old Testament. The right hand is the place of honour, the left of inferiority, as a matter of fact, not of superstition and luck. The symbolism is intimated in Christ's account of the judgment (Matt. xxv. 31, etc.). But in the present passage we should best paraphrase—The wise man's heart, his understanding and sentiments, lead him to what is right and proper and straightforward; the fool's heart leads him astray, in the wrong direction. The former is active and skilful, the latter is slow and awkward. One, we may say, has no left hand, the other has no right. To be at the right hand is to be ready to help and guard.

"The Lord is at thy right hand," to protect thee, says the psalmist (Ps. cx. 5). The wise man's mind shows him how to escape dangers and direct his course safely; the fool's mind helps him not to any good purpose, causes him to err and miss his best object.

Ver. 3.—Yea, also, when he that is a fool walketh by the way. As soon as ever he sets his foot outside the house, and mixes with other men, he exhibits his folly. If he remained at home he might keep his real ineptitude concealed; but such persons as he are unconscious of their inanity, and take no pains to hide it; they go where, they act as, their foolish heart prompts them. There is no metaphor here, nor any reference to the fool being put in the right path and perversely turning away. It is simply, as the Septuagint renders, *Kal γε ἐν ὁδῷ ὅταν ἄφρων πορεύηται*. His wisdom (Hebrew, heart) faileth him. Ginsburg and others render, "He lacketh his mind," want of heart being continually taken in the Book of Proverbs as equivalent to deficiency of understanding (Prov. vi. 32; vii. 7, etc.). But Delitzsch and Wright consider the order of the words and the suffix to be against this view, and they translate as the Authorized Version, i.e. his understanding is at fault. And he saith to every one that he is a fool. The sentence is ambiguous, and capable of two interpretations. The Vulgate has, *Cum ipse insipiens sit, omnes stultos aestimat*. Jerome quotes Symmachus as rendering, "He suspects all men that they are fools." According to this view, the fool in his conceit thinks that every one he meets is a fool, says this in his mind, like the sluggard in Prov. xxvi. 16, "Who is wiser in his own conceit than ten men that can render a reason." Another explanation, more closely in accordance with the foregoing clauses, takes the pronoun in "he is a fool" to refer to the man himself, *se esse stultum* (comp. Ps. ix. 21 [20], "Let the nations know themselves to be but men"). As soon as he goes abroad, his words and actions display his real character; he betrays himself; he says virtually to all with whom he has to do, "I am a fool" (comp. Prov. xiii. 16; xviii. 2). It is hard to say to which interpretation the Septuagint inclines, giving, *Kal ἡ λογίζεται πάντα ἀφροσύνη ἐστίν*, "And all that he will think is folly."

Vers. 4—7.—Section 12. Illustration of the conduct of wisdom under capricious rulers, or when fools are exalted to high stations.

Ver. 4.—If the spirit of the ruler rise up against thee. "Spirit" (*ruach*) is here equivalent to "anger," as Judg. viii. 3; Prov. xxix. 11. The idea seems to be that a statesman or councillor gives wise advice to

a monarch, which the latter takes in bad part, and shows strong resentment against the person who offered it. Now, when a man knows himself to be in the right, and yet finds his counsel rejected, perhaps with scorn and reproach added, he is naturally prone to feel sore, and to show by some overt act his sense of the ill treatment which he has received. But what says wisdom? Leave not thy place (*makom*); i.e. position, post, office. Do not hastily resign the situation at court to which you have been appointed. Some, not so suitably, take the expression, "leave thy place," figuratively, as equivalent to "give way to anger, renounce the temper which becomes you, lose your self-possession." But Wright, from the analogous use of *matstsale* and *maamad* in Isa. xxii. 19, confirms the interpretation which we have adopted. Compare the advice in ch. viii. 3, where, however, the idea is rather of open rebellion than of a resentment which shows itself by withdrawal. Origen ('De Princip.,' iii. 2) explained "the spirit of the ruler" to be the evil spirit; and Gregory, commenting on this passage, writes ('Moral,' iii. 43), "As though he had said in plain words, 'If thou perceivest the spirit of the tempter to prevail against thee in aught, quit not the lowliness of penitence;' and that it was the abasement of penitence that he called 'our place,' he shows by the words that follow, 'for healing [Vulgate] pacifieth great offences.' For what else is the humility of mourning, save the remedy of sin?" (Oxford transl.). For yielding pacifieth great offences. *Marpe*, "yielding," is rendered "healing" by the versions. Thus *ἰαμα* (Septuagint); *curatio* (Vulgate). But this translation is not so suitable as that of Symmachus, *σωφροσύνη*, "moderation." The word is used in the sense of "gentleness," "meekness," in Prov. xiv. 30; xv. 4; and the gnome expresses the truth that a calm, conciliating spirit, not prone to take offence, but patient under trying circumstances, obviates great sins. The sins are those of the subject. This quiet resignation saves him from conspiracy, rebellion, treason, etc., into which his untempered resentment might hurry him. We may compare Prov. xv. 1 and xxv. 15; and Horace, 'Carm.,' iii. 3, "Justum et tenacem propositi virum," etc.

"The man whose soul is firm and strong,
Bows not to any tyrant's frown,
And on the rabble's clamorous throng
In proud disdain looks coldly down."

(Stanley.)

They who regard the "offences" as those of the ruler explain them to mean oppression and injustice; but it seems plain from the run of the sentence that the minister, not

the monarch, is primarily in the mind of the writer, though, of course, it is quite true that the submission of the former might save the ruler from the commission of some wrong.

Ver. 5.—Kohelaheth gives his personal experience of apparent confusion in the ordering of state affairs. **There is an evil which I have seen under the sun.** Power gets into the hands of an unwise man, and then errors are committed and injustice reigns. **As an error which proceedeth from the ruler.** The π here is *caph veritatis*, which denotes not comparison, but resemblance, the idealization of the individual, the harmony of the particular with the general idea. The evil which he noticed appeared to be (he does not affirm that it is) a mistake caused by the ruler; it so presented itself to his mind. The caution observed in the statement may be owing partly to the tacit feeling that such blots occasioned difficulties in the view taken of the moral government of the world. He does not intend to refer to God under the appellation "Ruler." The Septuagint renders, $\Omega\varsigma \alpha\kappa\omicron\upsilon\sigma\iota\omicron\upsilon\alpha\iota \xi\epsilon\eta\lambda\theta\epsilon\nu$, "As if it came involuntarily;" Vulgate, to much the same effect, *Quasi per errorem egrediens*. The idea here is either that the evil is one not produced by any intentional action of the ruler, but resulting from human imperfection, or that what appears to be a mistake is not so really. But these interpretations are unsuitable. Those who adhere to the Solomonic authorship of our book see here a prophetic intimation of the evil of Jeroboam's rule, which evil proceeded from the sins of Solomon himself and his son Rehoboam. (So Wordsworth, Motais, etc.)

Ver. 6.—**Folly is set in great dignity, and the rich sit in low place.** This is an instance of the error intimated in the preceding verse. A tyrannical ruler exalts incompetent persons, unworthy favourites, to "great heights" ($\epsilon\nu \psi\psi\epsilon\iota \mu\epsilon\gamma\acute{\alpha}\lambda\omicron\iota\varsigma$, Septuagint), as it is literally—puts them into eminent positions. "Folly" is abstract for concrete, "fools." **And the rich sit in low place.** "The rich" (*ashirim*) are not simply those who have wealth, however obtained, but men of noble birth; $\alpha\rho\chi\alpha\iota\sigma\tau\omicron\lambda\omicron\upsilon\tau\omicron\iota$, as Plumptre appositely notes, persons of ancestral wealth, who from natural position might be looked upon as rulers of men. Such men would seek eminent stations, not from base motives of gain, but from an honourable ambition; and yet they are often slighted by unworthy princes and kept in low estate (comp. 1 Sam. ii. 7, 8; Prov. xix. 10; Eccles. xi. 5, 6). The experience mentioned in this and the following verses could scarcely have been Solomon's, though it has been always common enough in the East, where the most startling changes have been made, the lowest

persons have been suddenly raised to eminence, mistresses and favourites loaded with dignities, and oppression of the rich has been systematically pursued.

Ver. 7.—**I have seen servants upon horses.** A further description of the effect of the tyrant's perversion of equity. Such an allusion could not have been made in Solomon's reign, when the importation of horses was quite a new thing (1 Kings x. 28). Later, to ride upon horses was a distinction of the nobility (Jer. xvii. 25). Thus Amaziah's corpse was brought on horses to be buried in the city of David (2 Chron. xxv. 28); Mordecai was honoured by being taken round the city on the king's own steed (Esth. vi. 8, etc.). **Princes walking as servants upon the earth.** "Princes" (*sarim*); i.e. masters, lords. Some take the expressions here as figurative, equivalent to "those who are worthy to be princes," and "those who are fit only to be slaves;" but the literal is the true interpretation. Commentators quote what Justin (xli. 3) says of the Parthians, "*Hoc denique discrimen inter servos liberosque, quod servi pedibus, liberi non nisi equis incedunt.*" Ginsburg notes that early travellers in the East record the fact that Europeans were not allowed by the Turks to ride upon horses, but were compelled either to use asses or walk on foot. In some places the privilege of riding upon horseback was permitted to the consuls of the great powers—an honour denied to all strangers of lower degree. Among the Greeks and Romans the possession of a horse with its war-trappings implied a certain amount of wealth and distinction. St. Gregory, treating of this passage ('Moral,' xxxi. 43), says, "By the name *horse* is understood temporal dignity, as Solomon witnesses. . . . For every one who sins is the servant of sin, and servants are upon horses, when sinners are elated with the dignities of the present life. But princes walk as servants, when no honour exalts many who are full of the dignity of virtues, but when the greatest misfortune here presses them down, as though unworthy."

Vers. 8—11.—Section 13. *Various proverbs expressing the benefit of prudence and caution, and the danger of folly.* The connection with what has preceded is not closely marked, but is probably to be found in the bearing of the maxims on the conduct of the wise man who has incurred the resentment of a ruler, and might be inclined to disaffection and revolt. They are intentionally obscure and capable of a double sense—a necessary precaution if the writer lived under Persian despots.

Ver. 8.—**He that diggeth a pit shall fall into it.** This proverb occurs in Prov. xxvi. 27, and, as expressive of the retribution that awaits evil-doers, finds parallels in Ps. vii. 15, 16; ix. 15; x. 2; Eccles. xxvii. 25, 26. The “pit” (*gummatz, ἀράχ λεγόμενον*) is such a one as was made to capture wild animals, and the maker of it is supposed to approach it incautiously, and to fall into it. But the scope of our passage is rather to speak of what may possibly occur than to insist on the Nemesis that inevitably overtakes transgressors. Its object is to inspire caution in the prosecution of dangerous undertakings, whether the enterprise be the overthrow of a tyrant, or any other action of importance, or whether, as some suppose, the arraignment of the providential ordering of events is intended, in which case there would be the danger of blasphemy and impatience. **And whoso breaketh a hedge, a serpent shall bite him.** The futures throughout vers. 8 and 9 are not intended to express certainty, as if the results mentioned were inevitable, but rather possibility, and might be rendered, with Delitzsch, “may fall,” “may bite,” etc. The “hedge” is rather a wall (Prov. xxiv. 31), in the crevices of which poisonous snakes have made their abode, which are disturbed by its demolition (comp. Amos v. 19). *Nachash*, here used, is the generic name of any serpent. The majority of the snakes found in Palestine are harmless; but there are some which are very deadly, especially the cobra and those which belong to the viper family. There is no allusion here to the illegal removal of landmarks, a proceeding which might be supposed to provoke retribution; the hedge or wall is one which the demolisher is justified in removing, only in doing so he must look out for certain contingencies, and guard against them. Metaphorically, the pulling down a wall may refer to the removal of evil institutions in a state, which involves the reformer in many difficulties and perils.

Ver. 9.—**Whoso removeth stones shall be hurt therewith.** It is natural to consider this clause as suggested by the breaking of a wall in the preceding verse; but as this would occasion a jejune repetition, it is better to take it of the work of the quarryman, as in 1 Kings v. 17, where the same verb is used. The dangers to which such labourers are exposed are well known. Here, again, but unsuccessfully, some have seen a reference to the removal of landmarks, comparing 2 Kings iv. 4, where the word is translated “set aside.” As before said, the paragraph does not speak of retribution, but advises caution, enforcing the lesson by certain homely allusions to the accidents that may occur in customary occupations. **He that cleaveth wood shall be endangered thereby.**

Cutting up logs of wood, a man may hurt himself with axe or saw, or be injured by splinters, etc. If we take the idea to be the felling of trees, there is the danger of being crushed in their fall, or, according to the tenor of Deut. xix. 5, of being killed inadvertently by a neighbour's axe. Vulgate. *Qui scindit ligna vulnerabitur ab eis*, which is more definite than the general term “endangered;” but the Septuagint has, *κινδυνεύσει ἐν αὐτοῖς*, as in the Authorized Version. Plumptre sees here, again, an intimation of the danger of attacking time-honoured institutions, even when decaying and corrupt.

Ver. 10.—**If the iron be blunt, and he do not whet the edge.** The illustration at the end of the last verse is continued. The “iron” is the axe used in cutting wood; if this be blunted by the work to which it is put, and he, the labourer, has not sharpened the edge (Hebrew, *the face*, as in Ezek. xxi. 1), what is the consequence? How is he to carry on his work? **Then must he put to more strength.** He must put more force in his blows, he must make up for the want of edge by added power and weight. This is the simplest explanation of the passage, which contains many linguistic difficulties. These may be seen discussed at length in the commentaries of Delitzsch, Wright, Nowack, etc. The translation of Ginsburg is not commendable, “If the axe be blunt, and he (the tyrant's opponent) do not sharpen it beforehand (*phanim*, taken as an adverb of time), he (the tyrant) shall only increase the army.” The Septuagint is obscure, *Ἐὰν ἐκπῆσῃ τὸ σιδήριον, καὶ αὐτὸς πρόσωπον ἐτάραξε καὶ δυνάμεις δυναμώσει*, “If the axe should fall, then he troubles his face, and he shall strengthen his forces (? double his strength);” Vulgate, *Si retusum fuerit ferrum, et hoc non ut prius, sed hebetatum fuerit, multo labore exacuatur*, “If the iron shall be blunted, and it be not as before, but have become dull, it shall be sharpened with much labour.” But wisdom is profitable to direct; rather, the advantage of setting right is (on the side of) wisdom. Wisdom teaches how to conduct matters to a successful termination; for instance, it prompts the worker to sharpen his tool instead of trying to accomplish his task by an exertion of mere brute strength. The gnome applies to all the instances which have been mentioned above. Wisdom alone enables a man to meet and overcome the dangers and difficulties which beset his social, common, and political life. If we apply the whole sentence to the case of disaffection with the government or open rebellion, the caution given would signify—See that your means are adequate to the end, that your resources are sufficient to conduct your enterprise to success. Septua-

gint Vatican, *Kal nep̄lσ̄eia τῷ ἀνδρὶ οὐ σοφία*, "And the advantage to man is not wisdom." But manuscripts A and O read, *Kal nep̄lσ̄eia τοῦ ἀνδρὸς σοφία*: Vulgate, *Post industriam sequetur sapientia*, "After industry shall follow wisdom."

Ver. 11.—The last proverb of this little series shows the necessity of seizing the right opportunity. Surely the serpent will bite without enchantment. The Authorized Version is not quite correct. The particle *en*, with which the verse begins, is here conditional, and the rendering should be, *If the serpent bite*, etc.; the apodosis comes in the next clause. The idea is taken up from ver. 8. If one handles a serpent without due precaution or without knowing the secret of charming it, one will suffer for it. The taming and charming of poisonous snakes is still, as heretofore, practised in Egypt and the East. What the secret of this power is has not been accurately determined; whether it belongs especially to persons of a certain idiosyncrasy, whether it is connected with certain words or intonations of the voice or musical sounds, we do not know. Of the existence of the power from remote antiquity there can be no question. Allusions to it in Scripture are common enough (see Exod. vii. 11; Ps. lviii. 5; Jer. viii. 17; Eccles. xii. 13). If a serpent before it is charmed is dangerous, what then? The Authorized Version affords no sensible apodosis: And a babbler is no better. The words rendered "babbler" (*baal hallashon*) are literally "master of the tongue," and by them is meant the *ἐρασιδός*, "the serpent-charmer." The clause should run, *Then there is no use in the charmer*. If the man is bitten before he has time to use his charm, it is no profit to him that he has the secret, it is too late to employ it when the mischief is done. This is to shut the stable door after the steed is stolen. The maxim enforces the warning against being too late; the greatest skill is useless unless applied at the right moment. The Septuagint translates virtually as above, "If a serpent bites when not charmed (*ἐν οὐ ψευδισμῷ*), then there is no advantage to the charmer (*τῷ ἐνδόνῳ*)."
The Vulgate departs from the context, rendering, *Si mordet serpens in silentio* (i.e. probably "uncharmed"), *nihil eo minus habet qui occulte detrahit*. "He is nothing better who slanders secretly," which St. Jerome thus explains: the serpent and the slanderer are alike, for as the serpent stealthily infuses its poison, so the secret slanderer pours his venom into another's breast.

Vers. 12—15.—Section 14. The mention of "the master of the tongue" in ver. 11 leads the author to introduce some maxims

concerned with the contrast between the words and acts of the wise, and the worthless prating and useless labours of the fool.

Ver. 12.—The words of a wise man's mouth are gracious; literally, *are grace* (*χάρις*, Septuagint); i.e. they not only are pleasing in form and manner, but they conciliate favour, produce approbation and good will, convince and, what is more, persuade. So of our blessed Lord it was said, "All bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words (*τοῖς λόγοις τῆς χάριτος*) which proceeded out of his mouth" (Luke iv. 22; comp. Ps. xlv. 2). In distinction from the unready man, who, like the snake-charmer in the preceding verse, suffers by reason of his untimely silence, the wise man uses his speech opportunely and to good purpose. (A different result is given in ch. ix. 11.) But the lips of a fool will swallow up himself. This is a stronger expression than "ruin" or "destroy." Speaking without due forethought, he compromises himself, says what he has shamefully to withdraw, and brings punishment on his own head (comp. Prov. x. 8, 21; xviii. 7).

Ῥῆμα παρὰ καιρὸν βίβλην ἀνατρέπει βίον.

"Untimely speech has ruined many a life."

Ver. 13.—The beginning of the words of his mouth is foolishness. A confirmation of the last clause of the preceding verse. The fool speaks according to his nature. "As saith the proverb of the ancients, Out of the wicked cometh forth wickedness" (1 Sam. xxiv. 13; comp. Prov. xv. 2; Isa. xxxii. 6). As soon as he opens his mouth he utters folly, unwisdom, silliness. But he does not stop there. The end of his talk is mischievous madness. By the time he has finished, he has committed himself to statements that are worse than silly, that are presumptuous, frenzied, indicative of mental and moral depravity. Intemperate language about the secrets of God's providence and the moral government of the world may be intended. Some think that the writer is still alluding to dangerous talk concerning a tyrannical ruler, seditious proposals, secret conspiracies, etc. The text itself does not confirm such notion with any certainty.

Ver. 14.—A fool also is full of words. The word for "fool" here is *sakal*, which implies a dense, confused thinker. Above the word was *kesil*, which denotes rather the self-confidence of the dull and stupid man. Moreover the fool multiplieth words. He not only speaks foolishly, but he says too much (comp. ch. v. 2). It is not mere loquacity that is here predicated of the fool, though that is one of his characteristics, but, as the rest of the verse shows, the prating of things about which he knows nothing. Ho

talks as though he knew everything and there were no limitation to human cognition. A man cannot tell what shall be. And yet, or although, no man can really predict the future. The fool speaks confidently of such things, and thereby proves his imbecility. Instead of "what shall be," the Septuagint has, *Τὸ γινώσκον καὶ τὸ ἐσθύνον*, "What has been and what shall be;" the Vulgate, *Quid ante se fuerit*, "What has been before him." This reading was introduced probably to obviate a seeming tautology in the following clause, *And what shall be after him, who can tell!* But this clause has a different signification from the former, and presents a closer definition. The future intended may be the result of the fool's inconsiderate language, which may have fatal and lasting consequences; or it may refer to the visitation of his sins upon his children, in accordance with the denunciation of Deut. v. 9; xxix. 20—22; or it may include the life beyond the grave. The uncertainty of the future is a constant theme; see ch. iii. 22; vi. 11, 12; vii. 14; viii. 17; and compare Christ's parable of the rich fool (Luke xii. 16—20), and St. James's warning in his Epistle (iv. 13—16).

Ver. 15.—The labour of the foolish wearieth every one of them, because he knoweth not how to go to the city. A transition from plural to singular is here made. *The work of fools wearieth him that knoweth not*, etc. "Fools' work" signifies, perhaps, the vain speculations about Providence which Koheleth constantly condemns; or at any rate, all vain and objectless toil and trouble. Not to know the way to the city is probably a proverbial saying expressive of gross ignorance concerning the most obvious matters. How should one, who fails in the knowledge open to all experience, be able to investigate and give an opinion about abstruse questions (comp. Isa. xxxv. 8)? For the last clause other interpretations have been proposed, such as, the fool knows not how to transact public business (which is introducing a modern idea); the oppressed peasant knows not the way to the town where he might obtain redress; he is so foolish that he does not understand where he may find patrons whom he may bribe to plead his cause; he is an Essene, who avoids cities; he cannot make his way to the new Jerusalem, the city of God. But these artificial explanations are to be rejected, while the simple interpretation given above is plainly consistent with the context. The lesson is not to meddle with things too high, especially when you are ignorant of the commonest matters. A little wisdom would prevent endless and useless trouble.

Vers. 16—20.—Section 15. Koheleth re-

turns to the theme mentioned in vers. 4—7, and speaks of *folly in one who holds the position of king, and the need of wisdom and prudence in the subjects of an unworthy ruler.*

Ver. 16.—Woe to thee, O land, when thy king is a child! "Child" is *naar*, which term included any age up to manhood. Some interpret the word here, as *παῖς* in Greek, in the sense of "slave," contrasting it with "the son of nobles" in the following verse. But it can hardly signify more than servitor, attendant; and in ver. 7 the antithesis to "prince" is *ebed*, not *naar*. The child in the present case is a youthful, inexperienced ruler, who does not realize his responsibilities, and is the tool of evil advisers. What particular instance, if any, Koheleth had in view it is impossible to say. Of course, many expositors see a reference to Rehoboam, whom, at forty years of age, his own son Abijah calls *naar* (2 Chron. xiii. 7), and who was certainly childish in his conduct (1 Kings xii. 1—14). Hitzig connects the passage with the reign of Ptolemy Epiphanes, who was but five years old at the death of his father, B.C. 205, the reins of government being assumed by Agathocles and his sister Agathoclea, who occasioned serious disasters to the land. To support this opinion, the date of our book has to be considerably reduced (see Introduction). It is best to take the gnome as a general expression, like that in Isa. iii. 12, "As for my people, children are their oppressors, and women rule over them." Thy princes eat in the morning. Eating here implies feasting and banqueting, beginning the day with sensual enjoyment instead of such honest work as attending to state matters, administering justice, etc., as becomes good rulers. None but profligates would thus spend the early morning. "These are not drunken, as ye suppose; seeing it is but the third hour of the day," says St. Peter, repudiating the charge of intoxication (Acts ii. 15). "Woe unto them," cries Isaiah (v. 11), "that rise up early in the morning, that they may follow strong drink!" Even the heathen censured such debauchery. Cicero thus abuses Antonius: "At quam multos dies in ea villa turpissime es perbaccatus. Ab hora tertia bibebatur, ludabatur, vomebatur" ('Philipp.' ii. 41). Curtius (v. 7. 2) reprehends "de die convivia inire." The Greeks had a proverb to denote abnormal sensuality, *Ἀφ' ἡμέρας πίνειν*.

Ver. 17.—Blessed art thou, O land, when thy king is the son of nobles! *cujus rex nobilis est* (Vulgate); *οὗτος ἐλευθέρων*, "son of free men" (Septuagint). Some would regard "son of nobles" as a periphrasis expressive of character, equivalent to the

Latin *generosus*, as "son of strength," equivalent to "strong man;" "son of wickedness," equivalent to "wicked man;" but the phrase may well be taken literally. Koheleth (ver. 7) has expressed his disgust at the exaltation of unworthy slaves to high positions; he here intimates his adherence to the idea that those who descend from noble ancestors, and have been educated in the higher ranks of society, are more likely to prove a blessing to their land than upstarts who have been placed by caprice or favoritism in situations of trust and eminence. Of course, it is not universally true that men of high birth make good rulers; but proverbs of general tenor must not be pressed in particulars, and the author must be understood to affirm that the fact of having distinguished ancestors is an incentive to right action, stirs a worthy emulation in a man, gives him a motive which is wanting in the low-born parvenu. The feeling, *noblesse oblige*, has preserved many from baseness (comp. John viii. 39). Thy princes eat in due season; not like those mentioned in ver. 16, but *in tempore*, πρὸς καιρόν, at the right time, the "season" which appertains to all mundane things (ch. iii. 1—8). For strength, and not for drunkenness. The preposition α here is taken as expressing the object—they eat, to gain strength, not to indulge sensuality; but it is more in accordance with usage to translate "in, or with, manly strength," i.e. as man's strength demands, and not degenerating into a carouse. If it is thought incongruous, as Ginsburg deems, to say, "princes eat for drunkenness," we may take drunkenness as denoting excess of any kind. The word in the form here used occurs nowhere else. The Septuagint, regarding rather the consequences of intoxication than the actual word in the text, renders, καὶ οὐκ αἰσχυνθήσονται, "And they shall not be ashamed." Thus, too, St. Jerome, *Et non in confusione*. St. Augustine ('Do Civit.,' xvii. 20) deduces from this passage that there are two kingdoms—that of Christ and that of the devil, and he explains the allegory at some length, going into details which are of homiletic utility. Another interpretation is given by St. Jerome, quoted at length by Corn. à Lapide, in his copious commentary.

Ver. 18.—By much slothfulness the building decayeth. The subject is still the state. Under the image of a house which falls into ruin for lack of needful repairs, is signified the decay that surely overtakes a kingdom whose rulers are given up to indolence and debauchery, and neglect to attend to the affairs which require prompt care (comp. Amos ix. 11). Such were they whom Amos (vi. 6) denounced, "That drink wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with the chief

ointments; but they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph." "Much slothfulness" is expressed in the original by a dual form, which gives an intensive signification. Ewald and Ginsburg take it as referring to the "two idle hands;" but the intensification of the dual is not unprecedented (see Delitzsch, *in loc.*). The rest of this clause is more accurately rendered, *the rafters sink*, i.e. the timber framework, whether of roof or wall, gives way. This may possibly not be noticed at once, but it makes itself known unmistakably ere long. And through idleness of the hands the house droppeth through; rather, *the house leaketh*, the roof lets in the rain. Septuagint, Ἐν ἀργίᾳ χειρῶν σκᾶται ἡ οἰκία, "Through laziness of hands the house will drip." The very imperfect construction of the flat roofs of Eastern houses demanded continual attention. Such common and annoying occurrences as a leaky roof are mentioned in the Book of Proverbs (see xix. 13; xxvii. 15). Plautus, 'Mostell.,' i. 2. 28—

"Ventat imber, lavit parietes; perpluunt
Tigna; putrefacit aër operam fabri."

"The rain comes down, and washes all the walls,
The roof is leaky, and the weather rough.
Loosens the architect's most skilful work."

Ver. 19.—A feast is made for laughter, and wine maketh merry. Here is a cause of the decay spoken of above. The rulers spend in revelry and debauchery the time and energy which they ought to give to affairs of state. More literally, *for merriment they make bread, and wine [that] cheereth life*; i.e. they use God's good gifts of bread and wine as means of intemperance and thoughtless pleasure. So a psalmist speaks of wine as making glad the heart of man (Ps. civ. 15); and Ben-Sira says, "Wine is as good as life to a man, if it be drunk moderately: what life is there to a man that is without wine? for it was created to make men glad. Wine measurably drunk and in season bringeth gladness of the heart, and cheerfulness of the mind" (Ecclesi. xxxi. [xxxiv.] 27, 28). But money answereth all things; i.e. grants all that such persons want. It requires money to provide rich food and costly wines; this they possess, and they are thus able to indulge their appetites to the utmost. It concerns them not how such resources are obtained—won by extortion from a starving people, exacted in exorbitant taxation, pillaged by unscrupulous instruments; they want gold to expend on their lusts, and they get it somehow, and with it all that in their view makes life worth living. Commentators cite Horace, 'Ep.,' i. 6. 36, "Sollicit uxorem," etc.

"For why—a portioned wife, fair fame, and friends,
 Beauty and birth on sovereign Wealth attends.
 Blest is her votary throned his bags among!
 Persuasion's self sits perched upon his tongue;
 Love beams in every feature of his face,
 And every gesture beams celestial grace."
 (Howes.)

Corn. & Lapide appositely quotes—

"... quidquid nummis præsentibus opta,
 Et veniet; clausum possidet arca Jovem."

"If thou hast gold, then wish for anything,
 And it will surely come; the money-box
 Hath in it a most potent deity."

Pineda, followed by Motais, suggests that this verse may be taken in a good sense. He would make ver. 18 correspond to ver. 16, characterizing the government of debauchees, and ver. 19 correspond to ver. 17, representing the rule of temperate princes where all is peace and prosperity. But there is nothing grammatical to indicate this arrangement; and the explanation given above is doubtless correct. The Septuagint Version is not faithful to our present text, though it is followed virtually by the Syriac: *Eis gélasta poiouσιν áρτον, καὶ óλινον καὶ éλαιον τοῦ εὐφρανθήναι (ζῶντας, καὶ τοῦ ἀργυρίου ταπεινώσει ἐπακούσεται τὰ πάντα*, "For gladness they make bread and wine and oil, that the living may rejoice, and to money all things will humble themselves, will obey" (doubly translating the word).

Ver. 20.—Curse not the king, no not in thy thought. Under the above-mentioned circumstances, a man might be tempted to abuse and curse these ill-conditioned rulers. Koheleth warns against this error; it is dangerous to give way to it (comp. Exod. xxii. 28). In ch. viii. 2 the motive for submission to the king is placed on religious grounds; in the present passage the ground is prudence, regard for personal safety, which might be compromised by plain speaking, especially when one has to do with such depraved and unscrupulous persons. We may compare David's generous conduct to his cruel persecutor Saul, whom he spared because he was the Lord's anointed (1 Sam. xxiv. 6, 10; xxvi. 9, etc.; 2 Sam. i. 14). *Maddu*, "thought," "consciousness," is rare, and is supposed to belong to late Hebrew (see 2 Chron. i. 10, 11, 12; Dan. i. 4, 17). The Septuagint translates it *συνελεύσεις*: Vulgate, *cogitatio*. To encourage such thoughts in the mind is to run the risk of openly expressing them at

some unguarded moment; for "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." Curse not the rich in thy bedchamber. In ability to injure, the rich stand in the same category as the king. You are not safe *ἐν ταμείοις κοιτώνων σου*, "in your very bedchamber," where, if anywhere, you would fancy yourself free from espionage. But "walls have ears," says the proverb (comp. Hab. ii. 11; Luke xix. 40); and the King of Syria is warned, "Elisha, the prophet that is in Israel, telleth the King of Israel the words thou speakest in thy bedchamber" (2 Kings vi. 12). "That which ye have spoken in the ear in closets (*ἐν τοῖς ταμείοις*) shall be proclaimed upon the housetops" (Luke xii. 3). For a bird of the air shall carry the voice. A proverbial saying, common to all languages, and not to be referred especially to the story of the cranes of Ibycus (see Erasmus, 'Adag.,' s.v. "Ultio malefacti") or to the employment of carrier pigeons. We say of secret information, "a little bird told me." Plumptre quotes Aristophanes, 'Aves,' 575—

Οὐδέ τις οἶδεν τὸν θησαυρὸν τὸν ἐμὸν πλὴν εἴ τις ἄρ' ὄρνις.

"No one knows of my treasure, save, it may be, a bird."

On which the Scholiast notes, "There is a proverb extant, 'No one observes me but the passing bird'" (comp. Erasmus, 'Adag.,' s.v. "Occulta"). In Koheleth's day informers evidently plied their trade industriously, and here meet, not only with notice, but ironically with reprobation. On the general sentiment of the verse, we may quote Juvenal, 'Sat.,' ix. 102, "O Corydon, Corydon," thus versified in Ginsburg's commentary—

"And dost thou seriously believe, fond swain,
 The actions of the great unknown remain?
 Poor Corydon! even beasts would silence break,

And stocks and stones, if servants did not speak.

Bolt every door, stop every cranny tight,
 Close every window, put out every light;
 Let not a whisper reach the listening ear,
 No noise, no motion; let no soul be near;
 Yet all that passed at the cock's second crow,

The neighbouring vintner shall, ere day-break, know."

That which hath wings (compare Latin *ales*); the possessor (*baal*) of a pair of wings, a periphrasis for "a bird," as in Prov. i. 17. We had "master of the tongue," ver. 11; so in Dan. viii. 6, 20, "having horns," is "master (*baal*) of horns."

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—7, 12—15.—*The dispraise of folly.* I. FOLLY MARS THE FINEST REPUTATION. As one sinner destroyeth much good (ch. ix. 18), and flies of death, or poisonous flies, cause the ointment of the perfumer to send forth a stinking savour, so doth a little folly outweigh wisdom and honour. 1. *It mars their beauty.* As the poisonous flies so affect the perfumer's ointment that it begins to ferment and lose its fragrance, a little folly mixed up with a great deal of wisdom and honour impairs these in such a fashion and to such an extent, that they cease to attract the good opinion of beholders, and the person possessed of them is rather known as a fool than esteemed as a wise man. 2. *It destroys their value.* As the dealer in ointments cannot sell his corrupted pigment, so neither can the man whose wisdom and honour are tainted with folly any longer wield that power for good he might otherwise have done. The influence exerted by his wisdom and honour is directly counteracted and frequently overbalanced by the influence of his folly.

II. FOLLY CONSTITUTES AN UNSAFE GUIDE. "The wise man's heart is at his right hand; but a fool's heart at his left." This has been thought to mean: 1. *The fool's heart is in the wrong place*, in contrast to the wise man's, which is always in the right place (Hengstenberg). This sentiment is true. The fool's heart is not directed towards those objects upon which its affections ought to be set, while the wise man's is. This enough to make folly an unsafe conductor. 2. *The fool's heart never acts at the right time*, while the wise man's does (Ginsburg), because the wise man's heart is always at his right hand, his acting hand, his working hand; while the fool's is always at the left hand, the wrong hand, the hand with which a person usually finds it difficult to act. This a second reason why no man should accept folly as a leader. It can never seize the opportunity, never strike while the iron is hot, never do anything at the proper moment or in an efficient manner. 3. *The fool's heart is always unlucky in its auguries*, whereas the wise man's heart is always lucky (Plumptre). If this were the correct interpretation—which we think it is not—it would state what would not be surprising, were it true, that the fool's forecasts were usually falsified, and would present another argument for not committing one's self to the directorship of folly. 4. *The fool's heart always leads in the wrong direction*, as distinguished from the right direction in which the wise man's heart ever goes. This, undoubtedly, is true. The fool is a person wholly destitute of that wisdom which is profitable to direct (ver. 10), and without which no man can walk safely (Prov. iii. 23). A final consideration against enrolling beneath the banner of folly.

III. FOLLY INVARIABLY BETRAYS ITS OWN STUPIDITY. "Yea also, when the fool walketh by the way, his understanding faileth him, and he saith to every one *that he is a fool.*" As it is certain that no man can conceal his true character for ever, or even for long, so likewise is it certain that a zany, a buffoon, a fool, will discover his sooner than most people. He will proclaim himself to be a fool: 1. *By his irrational behaviour.* His understanding will fail him at critical times and on important subjects. He will reveal his ignorance, want of sense, lack of principle, emptiness of grace. 2. *In the most public manner.* As he walks by the way. As not being in the least degree ashamed of his folly, perhaps hardly conscious he is making such an exhibition of himself. 3. *To the most unlimited extent.* He will make himself known, not to his friends in private, but to his neighbours in the street, and not to one or two merely of these, but to every one he meets.

IV. FOLLY FREQUENTLY ASORIBES ITS OWN CHARACTER TO OTHERS. The fool saith of every one he meets, "He is a fool," i.e. the individual whom he meets is (Vulgate, Luther, Plumptre). Though this translation is doubtful, it supplies a true thought; that as insane people often count all but themselves insane, so fools—intellectual, moral, and religious—not infrequently regard themselves as the only truly wise persons, and look upon the rest of mankind as fools.

V. FOLLY IS OFTEN GUILTY OF GREAT RASHNESS. "If the spirit of the ruler rise up against thee, leave not thy place; for yielding allayeth great offences" (ver. 4). The folly here alluded to consists in three things. 1. *In flaming up into indignation at an unmerited accusation.* Charges of such sort were to be expected by one who served an

Oriental despot, and are not uncommon in ordinary life in the experience of subordinates who serve choleric masters. "The spurns that patient merit of the unworthy takes" are no doubt hard to bear; but it is not a sign of wisdom to fume against them, and fret one's self into anger. 2. *In hastily retiring from the post of duty.* As a statesman might resign his seals of office on being reprimanded by his sovereign, or a workman lay down his tools on being challenged by his master, or a domestic servant throw up her situation on being found fault with by her mistress. 3. *In failing to see the better way of meekness and submission.* The advantages of gently and patiently bearing false accusations or unjust ebullitions of temper against one are obvious. Such yielding (1) usually has the effect of softening the anger and checking the railing of the accuser (Prov. xv. 1); (2) puts an end to further offences on the part of the irate superior, whether ruler or master, who, were his rage to be increased by resistance, might proceed to greater manifestations of his temper; and (3) prevents the offended himself from rushing into more serious transgressions, as he might do were he to give way in turn to his angry passions.

VI. FOLLY SOMETIMES ATTAINS TO UNDESERVED HONOUR. "There is an evil which I have seen under the sun . . . folly set in great dignity, and the rich in low place . . . servants upon horses, and princes walking as servants upon the earth" (vers. 5—7). 1. *The commonness of this phenomenon.* "The eunuch Bagoas long all-powerful at the Persian court" (Delitzsch), Louis XI. exalting the base-born to places of honour, and Edward II., James I. of England or Henry III. of France, lavishing dignities on their minions, may be cited as examples. Nothing more frequent in everyday life than to see persons of small capacity and little worth promoted over the heads of their superiors in talent and goodness. 2. *The cause of this phenomenon.* In one sense the wisdom of God, the chief Ruler of men and things (Hengstenberg), but in another sense, and that the one here intended, the arbitrary power of men "dressed in a little brief authority." 3. *The evil of this phenomenon.* It discourages merit, and inflates folly with pride; rewards incapacity, and despises real ability; places influence in wrong hands, and weakens the power of good men to benefit their age.

VII. FOLLY SELDOM KNOWS WHEN TO HOLD ITS TONGUE. "The lips of a fool will swallow up himself," etc. (vers. 12—14). 1. *The wise man's words are few, the fool's endless.* The former is "swift to hear, but slow to speak" (Jas. i. 19); the latter hears nothing, learns less, and chatters incessantly. The former is known by his silence (Prov. xvii. 28; xxix. 11); the latter, by the multitude of his words (ver. 3). 2. *The wise man's words are gracious, the fool's ruinous.* The lips of the wise are a tree of life (Prov. xi. 30; xv. 4), and disperse knowledge amongst their fellows (Prov. xv. 7), whilst they preserve themselves (Prov. xiv. 3); but a fool's mouth is his own destruction (Prov. xvii. 7), and the complete beggarment of all that listen to him (Prov. xiv. 23; xvii. 7). 3. *The wise man's words improve as they proceed, the fool's deteriorate as they flow.* The former carry with them the ripe fruits of thought and experience, growing richer and weightier as they move slowly on; the latter progress from bad to worse, beginning with foolishness and ending with mischievous madness.

VIII. FOLLY IS FREQUENTLY UNABLE TO DO THE SIMPLEST THINGS. "The labour of fools wearieth every one of them, for he knoweth not how to go to the city" (ver. 15). 1. *The fool's ignorance is dense.* So simple a matter as finding his way along a country road to the city is beyond his comprehension. Plumptre cites in illustration the proverbs, "None but a fool is lost on a straight road," and "The 'why' is plain as way to parish church." 2. *The fool's presumption is immense.* He who cannot do so small a matter as find his way to the city proposes to "enlighten the world and make it happy" through his words or his works. So people who know nothing about a subject often imagine themselves qualified to teach it to others, and persons of no capacity put themselves forward to attempt undertakings of greatest difficulty. 3. *The fool's labour is vast.* Having neither knowledge nor ability, he labours with "great travail" to expound what he does not understand, and perform what he has neither brains nor hands to execute.

LESSONS. 1. Forsake the foolish and live (Prov. ix. 6). 2. Get wisdom; get understanding (Prov. iv. 5).

Vers. 8—11.—*Gnomic wisdom; or, a string of double-edged proverbs.* I. DIGGING

PITS AND FALLING INTO THEM. "He that diggeth a pit shall [or, 'may'] fall into it" (ver. 8). An old proverb, borrowed from Solomon (Prov. xxvi. 27), who in turn may have learnt it from David (Ps. vii. 15; ix. 15; lvii. 6), it may point to one or other of two thoughts. 1. *The necessity of exercising caution in all works of danger.* One who hollows out a trench or pit for the purpose of snaring wild animals—a perfectly legitimate design—may, either by standing too near the edge and causing the treacherous earth to give way, or by stumbling on it in the dark at an unexpected moment, fall in, in which case he will suffer not for having done wrong, but merely for having failed to act with circumspection and prudence (Prov. xiv. 15; xxii. 3; xxvii. 12). 2. *The possibility of evil-doers overreaching themselves.* In this case the pit is supposed to be dug for a wicked purpose, as e.g. to ensnare another to his ruin. In this sense the proverb has found expression in almost all literatures. Shakespeare speaks of the engineer being "hoist with his own petard." Haman was hanged upon the gallows he had built for Mordecai (Esth. vii. 10). "Plots and conspiracies are often as fatal to the conspirators as to the intended victims" (Plumptre).

II. BROKEN HEDGES AND BITING SERPENTS. "Whoso breaketh through a fence, a serpent shall bite him" (ver. 8). The hedge, or rather fence, or stone wall, was a customary haunt of serpents; so that one engaged in breaking down such a structure had need to beware of being bitten by the reptiles infesting it. Hence a variety of lessons according as the words are viewed. 1. *An admonition to workers.* To go cautiously about their employments, if these are dangerous, as a person would who had to pull down or break through an old wall in which serpents were lodged. Many accidents occur, inflicting damage on the workers, for want of a little foresight. 2. *A warning to transgressors.* That Nemesis may overtake them in the very act of their evil-doing. If they break through a neighbour's fence to steal his fruit, or pull down his wall so as to injure his property, they need not be surprised if they are caught in the act. Wickedness has a habit of avenging itself, sometimes with great rapidity and with terrible severity, on those who perpetrate it. This is true of all breaking down of those fences or laws with which God has girt man. Every violation of law—physical, intellectual, moral, social, religious—is visited with its own particular biting serpent of penalty. 3. *A caution to reformers.* If they will set themselves to pull down the old walls of decayed and worthless institutions, or to break through the fences of time-honoured customs, they must prepare themselves for being bitten by the serpents in the crannies—for encountering the opposition, criticism, hate, and often persecution of those who have vested interests in the abuses proposed to be rectified or swept away. Reformers should count the cost before beginning their work of reformation.

III. HEWING OR REMOVING STONES AND HURTING ONE'S SELF. "Whoso heweth out [or, 'moveth'] stones shall be hurt therewith" (ver. 9). Again of double import, teaching: 1. *The duty of guarding one's self against the perils that may attend a perfectly legitimate occupation.* Viewed in this light, the stone-moving may simply mean the pulling down of a wall, which, if it be carelessly performed, may fall and inflict a hurt upon the worker; and the stone-hewing may refer to the work of quarrying, which may be attended with great risk from the flying about of chips. 2. *The inevitable recompense of all wrong-doing.* If the stone-moving alludes to the removing of a neighbour's landmark, then the proverb stands as a reminder of the curse pronounced against that ancient sin (Deut. xix. 14; xxvii. 17). The use of landmarks, at least as then employed, has ceased; but the distinction between "mine" and "thine" remains; and every invasion of another's rights is a wickedness which in course of providence will receive its just recompense of reward (Exod. xx. 15).

IV. CLEAVING LOGS AND CUTTING FINGERS. "He that cleaveth wood is endangered thereby" (ver. 9). The three thoughts already mentioned are again repeated. 1. *The need of caution.* Wood-splitting being a dangerous occupation. 2. *The certainty of retribution.* The cutting down of trees, especially fruit trees, being regarded as an act of wrongful oppression, and as such forbidden by the Law, even in a siege (Deut. xx. 19, 20), the hurt that might come to one in wood-cutting (Deut. xix. 5) may be viewed as suggestive of the penalty of disobedience. 3. *The peril of reform.* The cutting down of trees is, in this instance, taken as symbolic of the hewing down of decayed institutions.

V. BLUNT TOOLS AND HEAVY BLOWS. "If the iron be blunt, and one do not whet the edge, then must he put to more strength: but wisdom is profitable to direct" (ver. 10). The lessons are two. 1. *Every work has its own appropriate tools.* Wood-cutting requires axes, and not merely blunt pieces of iron; pit-digging demands spades; stone-hewing chisels. Each occupation has its own implement. This the dictate of common sense. 2. *Every tool should be kept in a fit condition for its work.* This the teaching of wisdom. A woodman with a blunt axe must strike oftener and heavier than he would need to do were his axe sharp. So the man who enters on any task without the requisite sharpness of intelligence and sagacity will find his work proportionately hindered.

VI. BITING SERPENTS AND TARDY CHARMERS. "If the serpent bite before it is charmed, then is there no advantage in the charmer;" or, "Surely the serpent will bite without, or where there is no, enchantment" (ver. 11); which again offers two thoughts. 1. *That the serpent of temptation will do its deadly work unless timely repressed.* This may be done by resisting its first approaches, if they cannot be eluded altogether (Jas. iv. 7), by crushing down the rising inclination within one to yield, by diligently considering the sinfulness of that to which one is solicited (Gen. xxxix. 9), by calling in the help of God against the adversary (Eph. vi. 10—18). 2. *That if once the serpent of temptation has done its deadly work there is no use whatever of resorting to such means of repression.* Such means are then too late. To employ them then is much the same thing as to shut the stable door when the steed has been stolen.

Vers. 8—11.—*Good thoughts for bad times; or, words from the wise.* **I. THE NECESSITY OF CAUTION.** Especially in difficult and dangerous works. He who digs a pit must be on his guard against falling into it; he who pulls down a stone wall must look out for serpents; he who hews stones or removes them must be careful not to hurt himself in the process; he who cleaves or splits timber must see that he is not endangered thereby. "The prudent man looketh well to his going."

II. THE RECOMPENSE OF WRONG-DOING. 1. *Springing out of the wrong act.* As when one, having dug a pit to ensnare another, falls into it himself. 2. *Suddenly smiting the transgressor.* As when a serpent bites him who pulls down a wall. 3. *Swiftly following on the heels of crime.* As when one who, hewing stones, injures himself with the chips, or, removing a neighbour's landmark, is punished for his offence. 4. *Certainly overtaking the evil-doer.* As when one cutting wood strikes himself with the axe.

III. THE PERIL OF REFORM. The propriety of counting the cost before entering on the arduous career of a reformer. Illustrated by the two proverbs about breaking through fences and cutting down trees. Men are not to be deterred from attempting reforms because of difficulties and dangers; only they should not be surprised when these are experienced.

IV. THE SELECTION OF INSTRUMENTS. Many enterprises fail because the proper instruments have not been selected; or, if selected, have not been managed with wisdom. The man who intends to cut down a tree must first have an axe and then keep it sharp.

V. THE CHOICE OF TIMES. Many good undertakings fail because not begun at the right time. Many dangers might be avoided were precautions against them not adopted too late. To every work there is a time. Strike while the iron is hot. Beware of being too late.

Vers. 16—20.—*The picture of a happy land.* **I. A NOBLE KING.** 1. *Of royal blood.* "Happy art thou, O land, when thy king is the son of nobles"—like Horace's "Mænas atavis editæ regibus," descended from a long line of crowned heads. If countries are to have kings, then decidedly the scion of kingly (more especially if also honourable and good) ancestors is better than the upstart who was yesterday a gentleman of the pavement, but is to-day the occupant of a throne (ch. iv. 14). 2. *Of mature manhood.* "Woe to thee, O land, when thy king is a child." The experiment of boy-kings has seldom proved successful. Witness the case of Joash (2 Chron. xxiv. 1), who made a tolerable sovereign only so long as Jehoiada lived. When the king is a minor there is too much scope for ambition on the part of the regent and of the nobles, who would like to be regents or even kings. 3. *Of princely*

intellect. The man who is to rule others should be every inch a king, not in bodily appearance only, but in mental capacity as well. No greater calamity can befall a country than to have its throne filled by a fool or an intellectual baby. In this sense, to be ruled by a "child" is surely the last indignity that can be offered to reasoning and reasonable men. 4. *Of large experience.* Unlike a child, or a boy, or a youth, whose knowledge of men and things must at the best be limited, the ideal sovereign should be one whose accumulated stores of wisdom, gathered in many ways and from many lands, may be used for promoting the welfare of his people.

II. A TEMPERATE ARISTOCRACY. 1. *Dissipation, shameful in all, is specially so in princes. Noblesse oblige.* The higher one's rank, the more incumbent on one is virtue. Hence for princes to eat in the morning, or to be addicted to gluttony and other bodily gratifications, to be so intent upon them as not merely to sit up late indulging them, but to rise up early for the purpose of renewing them, is to degrade their dignity, and trail their honour in the mire, besides shaming virtue and outraging decency. 2. *Moderation, dutiful in all, is specially promotive of health.* Those who live to eat and drink seldom live so long as they might, but by indulgence, setting up disease in their bodies, often shorten their days and die before their time. Those who eat and drink to live, and therefore eat in due season and in due measure, which is what is meant by temperance, take the best means of maintaining themselves in health and strength.

III. A VIRTUOUS PEOPLE. 1. *Industrious.* "By slothfulness the roof sinketh in; and through idleness of the hands the house leaketh" (ver. 18). What is true of a material edifice is also true of the body politic. As the timbers or rafters of a private dwelling will decay unless watched over and from time to time repaired by its inmate, so the fabric of the state will go to ruin unless it be surveyed by vigilant eyes and upheld by untiring hands. 2. *Joyous.* Not only is there nothing sinful in feasting and wine-drinking when these are kept in virtuous moderation, but the absence of gladness from the face of any people is a bad omen. Gloom on the countenance and wretchedness in the heart mean that social disorder and perhaps revolution are at hand. Everything that contributes to the happiness and contentment of a people is a distinct contribution to the stability of a state. 3. *Moneyed.* A people without money or money's worth is a people on the verge of starvation; and no state can stand long whose population consists of paupers. Money there must be, or its equivalent in material goods, and this not concentrated in a few hands, but distributed as widely as possible. The main problem of statesmen should be to secure a population, not only industrious and happy, but well paid, and therefore well fed, well clothed, and well housed. 4. *Loyal.* A people given to treasonable practices cannot be either prosperous or happy. Hence the Preacher dissuades all good subjects from cursing the king even in their thoughts. The impossibility of escaping detection under the all-pervading espionage of an Oriental despotism rendered it unsafe in the times of the Preacher; but, even in times when the liberty of the subject is respected, it is not always prudent to be hatching conspiracies against the crown, however secret these may be; and certainly it is not conducive to the welfare of a people that such should be common in the land. 5. *Law-abiding.* As little given to curse the rich as to plot against the king. Not communistic, socialistic, or revolutionary in the bad sense of these expressions; since a people may be all of these in a good sense without losing its character for virtue.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1, 3.—*Folly self-betrayed.* To the writer of this book it seemed that the great antithesis of human life, of human society, was pointed out by the distinction between wisdom and folly. As by wisdom he meant not merely speculative knowledge or profound statescraft, but, much rather, reflective habits, deliberate judgment, and decisive action, in the practical affairs of life; so by folly he intended exactly the opposite of such character and mental habits. A certain contemptuous and weary abhorrence of the foolish breathes through his language. His remarks are full of sagacity and justice.

I. FOLLY MAY FOR A TIME BE CONCEALED. A grave countenance, a staid demeanour, a reticent habit, may convey the impression of wisdom which does not exist. Men are disposed to take a favourable view of those occupying high station, and even of those possessing great estates. The casual acquaintances of men who are slow and serious in speech, or are exalted in rank, often credit them with wisdom, when there has been no proof of its existence.

II. FOLLY WILL CERTAINLY, SOONER OR LATER, BE REVEALED BY CIRCUMSTANCES. A little folly is the ill savour that vitiates the perfume. The understanding of the fool faileth him while he walketh by the way. The test is sure to be applied which will prove whether the coin is genuine or counterfeit. The hollow reputation must collapse. A critical time comes when counsel has to be given, when action has to be taken, and at such a time the folly of the pompous and pretentious fool is made manifest to all. Sounding phraseology may impose upon men for a season; but there are occasions when something more than words is needed, and such occasions reveal the emptiness and vanity of the foolish. Pedantry is not learning, profession is not religion, pretence is not reality; neither can the show be, for any length of time, taken for the substance.

III. FOLLY, THUS EXPOSED, DESTROYS A MAN'S REPUTATION AND INFLUENCE. The revulsion is sudden and complete, and may even go to unreasonable lengths. It is presumed that, because the highest expectations have been disappointed, not even the slightest respect or confidence is justifiable. A little folly outweighs wisdom and honour.

APPLICATION. The chief lesson of this passage is the value of sincerity, thoroughness, and genuineness of character. It is not every man who has the knowledge, the natural insight, the large experience of life, which go to make up wisdom. But no man need pretend to be what he is not; no man need proclaim himself a sage or a mentor; no man need claim for himself the deferential regard and homage of others. He who will order his way by such light as he can gain by reflection, by the study of the Scriptures, and by prayer, will not go far astray. Sincerity and modesty may not gain a temporary reputation for profundity of wisdom; but they will not expose their possessor to the humiliation and shame of him who, professing himself to be wise, becomes manifest to all men as a fool.—T.

Ver. 4.—*A pacifying spirit.* The circumstances which suggested this admonition were special; we seem to be introduced to the court of a powerful and arbitrary Oriental sovereign. The caprice and injustice of the monarch arouses the indignation of the courtier, who is ready to rise in resentment and anger. But the counsel is given, "Leave not thy place." Resentment fans the flame of wrath; submission assuages it. "Yielding allayeth great offences." Now, the circumstances apply only to a few, but the principle which they suggest is of wide and general application. A submissive and pacificatory spirit promotes harmony.

I. MEN MUST EXPECT TO ENCOUNTER ANGER AND ARROGANCE FROM THEIR FELLOW-MEN. Those who occupy positions of authority expect deference from their inferiors. Birth, rank, station, are apt to foster an arbitrary habit in their possessors. And whilst there are many and beautiful exceptions to this rule, especially owing to the influence of Christ's example and spirit, it is not to be questioned that arrogance is the special fault of the officially great.

II. ANGER AND ARROGANCE NATURALLY AROUSE RESENTMENT. We are so constituted that, apart from the controlling and restraining influence of reason and religious principles, we return blow for blow. Anger enkindles anger, as flint and steel enkindle fire. Hence words are spoken which may never be forgotten, and may ever be regretted; estrangements take place which may lead to bitter feuds; blows may follow, or duels, or war.

III. THE WISDOM AND THE DUTY OF SELF-CONTROL. The common proverb is, "It takes two to make a quarrel." Because offence is given, offence need not be taken; because injury and insult are inflicted, it does not of necessity follow that they should be avenged. Several motives concur to restrain resentment. 1. Self-respect. The man who loses temper and self-command, upon subsequent reflection, feels himself so much less a man; he despises himself. 2. Prudence. This is the motive specially relied upon in this passage. In dealing with "the ruler," whose spirit rises up

against him, the courtier is reminded of the ruler's power, and is admonished not to provoke him to the exercise of that power, for in that case disfavour may lead to disgrace and degradation. 3. Religious principle. This is the motive which, in the case of the Christian, is most powerful. The example of the patient and meek Redeemer, who reviled not again, and who besought mercy for his murderers, is never absent from the mind of those who trust and love him. His love constrains, his precept controls, his example impels. And thus forbearance and forgiveness characterize Christ's disciples, in those circumstances in which otherwise resentment and revenge might animate the heart.

IV. THE PACIFYING POWER OF PATIENT SUBMISSION. "Yielding pacifieth [allayeth] great offences." It is not required that the injured party should approve the action of his injurer; or affirmed that no opportunity may occur of just and dignified rebuke. But silence, quietness of spirit, and control of natural impulse, will in many cases produce a good result. He who bears wrong patiently is the stronger and better for the discipline; and his demeanour may melt the wrong-doer to contrition, and will at all events lead him to reflection. Thus the threatened conflict may be avoided; a lesson may be administered to the hasty and arrogant, and the best interests of society may be promoted. Thus the Word of God is honoured, and witness is given to the power which Christ possesses to subdue and govern the unruly nature of man.—T.

Vers. 5—7.—*Social paradoxes.* The evil which the writer of Ecclesiastes here condemns is one of which the history of every nation affords many examples. Princes' favourites have too often been chosen from amongst the worthless herd who seek their own elevation and advantage by ministering to the vices of the young, profligate, and powerful. How many a reign has been marred by this mischief! How many a king has been misled, to his own and his country's harm, by the folly of choosing companions and counsellors not for wisdom, sincerity, and patriotism, but because those chosen are of congenial tastes and habits, or are flatterers and parasites!

I. THE ELEVATION OF FOOLISH FAVOURITES TO POWER IS INJURIOUS TO THOSE SO PROMOTED. Men who might have been respectable and useful in a lowly station are corrupted and morally debased by their elevation to posts of undeserved dignity and emolument. Their heads are turned by the giddy height to which they are raised.

II. THE ELEVATION OF FOOLISH FAVOURITES TO POWER IS INJURIOUS TO THE PRINCES WHOM THEY PROFESS TO SERVE. What kings and rulers need is to be told the truth. It is important that they should know the actual state and needs of the nation. And it is important that any weakness or wrong bias, natural or acquired, should be corrected. But the fools who are set in high places make it their one great rule of conduct never to utter unpalatable truth. They assume the faultlessness of their master; they paint the condition of his subjects in glowing colours, and give the ruler all the credit for national prosperity. Their insincerity and flattery are morally injurious to the prince, who by the companionship of the wise might have been morally benefited.

III. THE ELEVATION OF FOOLISH FAVOURITES TO POWER IS INJURIOUS TO THE COMMUNITY. The example of injustice thus presented is discouraging to the upright and depressing to the reflecting. The throne becomes unpopular, and the people generally are demoralized. The evil is no doubt greater in despotic than in constitutional states, for these latter afford fewer opportunities for rapacity and oppression. Yet nothing more injuriously affects the community generally than the spectacle of a court which prefers folly to wisdom, fashion to experience, vice to virtue, frivolity to piety.—T.

Vers. 8, 9.—*The rebound of evil.* Under these picturesque and impressive figures of speech, the Preacher appears to set forth the important moral lesson, that they who work harm and wrong to their fellow-men shall not themselves escape with impunity.

I. THE SIGNS AND THE SIN OF MALICE. The case is one of intentional, deliberate malevolence, working itself out in acts of mischief and wrong. Such a spirit so expressing itself may be characterized (1) as a perversion of natural sentiment; (2) as a wrong to our social nature, and a violation of the conditions of our social life; and (3) as in flagrant contradiction to the commands of God, and the precepts of our gracious and compassionate Saviour.

II. THE RETRIBUTION OF MALICE. The proverbial language of the text is paralleled by somewhat similar apophthegms in various languages, as, for example, in the Oriental proverb, "Curses, like chickens, come home to roost." 1. Such retribution is often wrought by the ordinary operation of natural laws. The story of the pirate-robber who was wrecked upon the crags of Aberbrothock, from which he himself had cut off the warning bell, is an instance familiar to our minds from childhood. 2. Retribution is sometimes effected by the action of the laws enforced in all civilized communities. The *lex talionis*, "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth," may be taken as an example of a principle the applications of which are discernible in all the various states of society existing among men. 3. Those who escape the penalties of nature and the indignation of their fellow-men cannot escape the righteous judgment of God; they shall not go unpunished.—T.

Ver. 10.—*Force and wisdom.* The homely adage in the first part of this verse prepares for the broad general statement by which it is followed.

I. IN MECHANICAL UNDERTAKINGS THE SUPERIORITY OF SKILL TO BRUTE FORCE IS MOST APPARENT. This is obvious in the superiority of the workmanship of the civilized and cultured to that of the barbarian.

II. WISDOM HAS A VAST ADVANTAGE IN THE ORDINARY AFFAIRS OF HUMAN LIFE. The old fairy stories usually represented the muscular giant as a simpleton easily outwitted by the youth or the dwarf; the lesson being that mere strength avails but little for those ends which men most seek and prize. It is wisdom which is profitable to direct—a truth which applies not merely to mechanics, but to the various arts which men cultivate. What vocation is there in which thought, investigation, the adaptation of means to ends, a calm deliberate judgment, are not serviceable? It is the wise who reap the harvest of life, who sway the realm of humanity.

III. WISDOM IS PRE-EMINENTLY OF SERVICE IN ALL TRUE RELIGIOUS LIFE AND ENTERPRISE. It is true that human wisdom is depreciated in some passages of Holy Writ. But careful attention will show that it is only the lower type of wisdom, which inspiration disparages. They who have only "the wisdom of this world," who are "wise in their own conceit," are indeed condemned. But, on the other hand, they are approved who receive the wisdom of God in Christ, and who are wise unto salvation. It is the enlightening influence of God's Holy Spirit that leads to an appreciation of the gospel itself, and that directs those whose endeavour and aim it is to bring their fellow-men into the enjoyment of those blessings which that gospel secures.—T.

Vers. 11—15.—*The obtrusiveness and the condemnation of folly.* Although some of the language employed in this passage is unquestionably obscure, the general tenor of it is clear enough. The contrast which is drawn between wisdom and folly is what we meet with, under other forms, in other portions of the book, and the exposure and censure of the thoughts and the ways of the fool are fitted to warn the young against forsaking the rough but safe paths of true wisdom.

I. FOLLY IS SHOWN IN THE UNNECESSARY MULTIPLICATION OF WORDS. Fools speak when there is no occasion, when they have nothing to say, or when they have already said all that was needful.

II. FOLLY REVEALS ITSELF, THOUGH WITHOUT PROVOCATION. It cannot be concealed; it is obtrusive and glaring. The fool is his own enemy: "his lips will swallow up himself."

III. FOLLY IS DISPLAYED IN DOGMATIC UTTERANCES UPON MATTERS WHICH ARE BEYOND HUMAN KNOWLEDGE. There are many subjects upon which modesty and reticence are required by wisdom. Especially is this the case with regard to the future. But it is presumed in this passage that the fool will not restrain himself from pronouncing upon what is beyond human knowledge or human prescience.

IV. FOLLY IS WEARISOME TO THOSE WHO WITNESS THE WORKS AND WHO LISTEN TO THE WORDS BY WHICH IT REVEALS ITSELF.

V. FOLLY IS MANIFESTED IN INCOMPETENCY FOR THE MANAGEMENT OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS. The fool "knoweth not how to go to the city," i.e. how to transact public business, and to give advice regarding civic action.

VI. FOLLY IS SURE TO ISSUE IN MISCHIEF AND DISASTER. It is sometimes repre-

sented that fools can do no harm ; that real mischief is wrought by malice, by criminal designs and actions. But a careful inquiry into the facts would show that very much of the evil that afflicts society is brought to pass by mere folly. The Hebrews and the Greeks were agreed in representing wisdom as a cardinal virtue. It is men's duty to cultivate wisdom. If they neglect to do so, it matters not that they have no criminal intentions ; the absence of wisdom must needs lead to conduct which will involve themselves and others in much suffering, and even in terrible calamities.—T.

Vers. 16, 17.—*Statesmanship.* It is sometimes assumed that moral qualities are unimportant in relation to political affairs. If a king be brave in his warlike expeditions, splendid in his court, and affable in his demeanour ; if a statesman be sagacious in counsel and determined in action, it is too generally assumed that nothing further is wanting to secure national greatness and prosperity. The writer of Ecclesiastes looked far deeper, and saw the necessity of a self-denying and laborious character in order to true kingly and statesmanlike service.

I. INCOMPETENCE AND SELF-INDULGENCE IN THOSE WHO OCCUPY HIGH PLACES ARE A CURSE TO A NATION. Men who are flung into power by the wave of royal favouritism, or by popular caprice and applause, are apt to use their exalted station as a means to personal enjoyment and to the gratification of vanity. Statesmen who pass their time in luxury and social ostentation will certainly neglect the public interests. They account their power and rank as their possession, and not as a sacred trust. Their example tends to debase the national morals, and to lower the standard of public life. They surround themselves with flatterers, and they neglect their proper duty, until they awake to find their country plunged into calamity or threatened with enslavement.

II. SELF-DENIAL, EXPERIENCE, AND DILIGENCE ARE QUALITIES WHICH ENSURE TRUE STATESMANSHIP. In despotic governments it is obvious that the national prosperity depends very largely upon the patriotism and justice, the assiduity and unwearied devotion to duty, of those in high station. The conditions of national life under a constitutional government are different. Yet there is no political community in which unselfishness, temperance, and diligent application to the public service are not valuable qualities on the part of those who deliberate and decide upon great public questions, and of those who administer a nation's affairs.

APPLICATION. In modern states, where the representative principle so largely obtains, great power is placed in the hands of the citizens and subjects. With them accordingly rests much of the responsibility for the righteous government and the true prosperity of the nation. It behoves Christian men to beware of being misled by party spirit, and so of overlooking the grave moral faults of those who solicit their confidence. It is in the power of the people to raise to positions of eminence and authority men whose aim is not personal aggrandizement and enjoyment, but the public good. If this power be wisely and firmly exercised, vice and crime will be repressed, order and liberty will be maintained, and the nation will maintain a high position and exercise a noble influence among the nations of the earth. Then the spectator will be inspired to utter the exclamation, "Happy art thou, O land!"—T.

Ver. 18.—*The curse of sloth.* Religious teachers are sometimes unwilling to touch upon common faults, such as are noticeable by every observer as prevailing too generally in the everyday life of their fellow-men. The Scriptures give no countenance to such negligence, but, on the contrary, deal faithfully with those errors and evil habits which are alien from the Christian character, and which are injurious to human society. Slothfulness was peculiarly hateful to the writer of this book, who inculcated diligence as a religious duty, and exhibited in homely but effective ways the results of its prevalence.

I. TEMPTATIONS TO SLOTH ARE MANY. Work must be done, some will admit ; but it may be left to others, or it may be put off to a more convenient season. Work need not be done, others will declare ; much may be left undone which some people think of importance, but which is not really so. Upon the plea of ill health, or mental inability, or preoccupation, multitudes, in this world where there is so much to be done, sink into slothful, indolent habits and a useless life.

II. THE FOLLY OF SLOTH IS EASILY MADE EVIDENT. 1. The slothful man is his own enemy. Had he exerted himself and exercised his powers, he would have grown an abler and a better man. Who does not know persons with undeniable gifts who have "wrapped their talent in a napkin," and who have morally deteriorated, until they have become worthless members of society? 2. The slothful man wrongs society. Every man is born into this world to do a work for the general good. To live in idleness and comfort upon the produce of others' toil is to inflict a positive injury. Others have to labour in order that the idle may be fed. Work is left undone for which the indolent possess, it may be, some peculiar gift. For the life of the slothful the world is none the better.

III. THE SIN OF SLOTH IS CONDEMNED BY THE WORD OF GOD. The Book of Proverbs contains some very striking reflections and statements upon this point. And for the Christian it is enough to consider the example of the Lord Jesus, who with all his consecrated energy devoted himself to his Father's will and work. How alien from the Master's spirit is the habit of the indolent! We cannot lose sight of the fact that, in the last judgment, the "wicked and slothful servant" must hear words of condemnation.

IV. PRESERVATIVES FROM SLOTH MAY BE FOUND IN THE PROVISIONS OF GOD'S GRACE. 1. Prayer prompts to watchfulness and toil. 2. Attention to the counsels and admonitions of God's Word cannot fail to be serviceable in delivering us from temptations to slothfulness. 3. Meditation upon the example of our Saviour and Lord will stimulate to diligence and zeal. They who by the indwelling of his Spirit are one with him will share his devotion to the Father's will, his consecration to the welfare of mankind.—T.

Ver. 1.—*The dead fly in the ointment.* "So doth a little folly outweigh wisdom and honour" (Revised Version). It is a fact well worth a wise man's thought; that the presence of even a very little evil is found to be enough to counterbalance or undo much that is good. We find this in circumstance, in action, in character. Our everyday life supplies many illustrations.

I. THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF A MAN. Not without reason does the moralist speak of the "one crumpled leaf" spoiling the worth of the "bed of roses." Ahab still makes himself miserable because he cannot have Naboth's vineyard in addition to all his property. It is not only true that "*some* murmur when their sky is clear" if one "small speck of dark appear" in their heavens; it is true that *very many* do. If we are depending on our surroundings for our satisfaction, we shall give one more illustration of "the dead fly in the ointment."

II. HUMAN ADVOCACY. A man may present an important case to his audience; he may have made diligent and ample preparation; he may deliver his address with much logical force, with much felicity of style, with much animation of spirit; and yet he may fail to convince, and he may lose his cause through one mistake. He may make use of one offensive expression, or he may produce one palpably weak argument, on which his opponents fasten; then all the good gained by his persuasiveness is lost by the harm done by his simple indiscretion. Much wisdom is outweighed by a little folly.

III. HUMAN CHARACTER, AND THE INFLUENCE IT EXERTS. We are always acting upon our kindred and our neighbours by our character, and by the conduct of which it is the source. And, as a rule, the good and wise man is thus helping to make others good and wise; but there may be the "dead fly in the ointment" here. Truthfulness, righteousness, purity, kindness,—these qualities are calculated to tell powerfully upon those who daily witness them; but if there be in the midst of these an admixture of severity, or of exaggeration, or of parsimoniousness, or of sarcasm, much if not most of the good influence may be lost; the virtues and the graces are forgotten, while the one blemish is remembered. The same thing, in much the same way, applies to—

IV. HUMAN REPUTATION. A man may be building up a most honourable reputation through many years of toilsome and virtuous life; he may succeed in winning the regard of his fellow-citizens, and then by one serious indiscretion—pecuniary, social, domestic, political, ecclesiastical—he may have to step down from his high position. It may not be a crime or a sin, but a serious mistake, an act in which he was very

ill advised, a proceeding in which his judgment was sadly at fault—but it is enough; it upsets the fabric which had been laboriously constructed, and but little honour will be accorded to him.

1. In our judgment of others we should distinguish between the superficial and the essential, between the exceptional and the common. 2. We should refuse to allow the one insignificant evil to disturb the harmony of our spirit, to spoil the brightness and excellency of our life. 3. We are bound to be devoutly careful lest we permit our influence over others to be materially weakened by a blemish in our character or an indiscretion in our conduct.—C.

Ver. 8 (former part).—*Sin suicidal*. “He that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul” (Prov. viii. 36); he that seeks to do injury to others brings trouble upon himself; with the measure and after the manner with which he deals will he himself be dealt with. Evil intents, as also good ones, recoil upon their author—in the one case in penalty, and in the other in blessing. As we observe, we see that—

I. EVIL BEGETS EVIL AFTER ITS OWN KIND. 1. *Violence begets violence*. “They that take the sword perish with the sword;” not, of course, with absolute and unflinching regularity, but generally; so commonly that the professional warrior and, still more, the uncontrollably passionate man may expect to come to a violent end. But, apart from fatal consequences, it is a constantly recurring fact that men give back blow for blow, litigation for litigation, hard measure for hard measure. 2. *Cunning begets cunning*. The crafty man is the likeliest of all to be caught with guile. Men have a peculiar pleasure and take especial pride in outwitting the neighbour who is trying to take advantage of them. So that he who is always laying traps for his fellows is in greatest danger of being himself entrapped. 3. *Contempt begets aversion*. There are those who from the pedestal of (often imaginary) superiority look down upon their companions with supercilious disregard; their attitude is one of haughtiness, their language and conduct that of condescension. These proud ones suffer as they deserve; they pay an appropriate penalty; their neighbours resent their assumption; they pass them by with aversion; they speak of them with condemnation; they leave them to loneliness and friendlessness. 4. *Slander begets reproach*. Men that are unscrupulously complaining of others, hastily or ill-naturedly ascribing to them mistakes or misdeeds, are the men whose own shortcoming is quickly detected and unsparingly condemned (see Matt. vii. 1, 2). Thus sin (or folly) smites itself; it thinks to injure others, but it finds in the end that the stone which it threw up into the air comes down upon its own head. On the other hand, we see—

II. GOOD BEGETS GOOD AFTER ITS KIND. 1. The man of peace is permitted to dwell in peace. 2. Frankness, sincerity, are met with reciprocated open-mindedness and honesty. 3. Honour rendered to worth and to our common manhood creates respect, and calls forth the best that is in men. 4. Generosity in judgment receives in return a kind and brotherly estimate of its own actions and character. While he that digs a pit for others falls into it himself, he that raises a ladder for others' elevation himself rises upon its rungs.—C.

Ver. 8 (latter part).—*The broken hedge*. There are many fences which we have constructed, or which the Lord of our life has erected, and we discover that if we break them we shall find ourselves attacked and bitten by the serpent which is within or upon the other side.

I. THE HEDGE OF SOCIAL REQUIREMENTS. There are certain understood enactments of society which must be regarded by us. They may have no claim to be moral laws; they may not have any place in the statutes of the land; still they are obligatory upon us. If we are so self-willed or self-sufficient, if we are so ignorant or so careless, as to violate these, we must pay the appropriate penalty of general disregard. Even though we be free from all vice and all crime, we shall be numbered among transgressors of the unwritten law of society, and our position will be lowered, our influence will be lessened, our reputation will be reduced, our usefulness will be impaired.

II. THE HEDGE OF HUMAN LAW. Human law requires of us that we shall pay the debts we owe, that we shall make our contribution to the protection of the society of which we are members, that we shall respect the rights of our neighbours. Breaking

this hedge, we pay the penalty which the law inflicts; this "serpent" may be only a small fine, or it may be loss of liberty or even life.

III. THE HEDGE OF DIVINE LIMITATION. God has set a limit to our faculties, and thus to our enjoyment, our activity, our achievement; and if we heedlessly or ambitiously pass this limit, we are bitten and we suffer. If we break the hedge of: 1. *Physical appropriation*, or exercise, we suffer in bodily sickness, in nervous prostration, in premature decline. 2. *Mental activity*. If we think, study, strive, labour on at our desk, beyond the limit of our powers, we pay the penalty in irritability, in softening of the brain, in insanity. 3. *Spiritual faculty*. If we attempt to enter regions that are beyond our God-given powers, we end either in a scepticism which robs us of our highest heritage, or in a mysticism which fascinates and misleads us.

IV. THE HEDGE OF CONSCIENCE. Conscience commands us, with imperative voice, to keep well within the line of purity, of sobriety, of truthfulness, of reverence. If we go beyond that line, we suffer. We suffer: 1. The condemnation of God. 2. The disapproval of the wise and good. 3. The reproach of our own soul. 4. The loss of self-respect and the consequent enfeeblement of our character; and of all losses this is, perhaps, the worst, for it is one of a series of downward steps at the foot of which is death.

1. *Be right at heart* with God; you will then have within you a force of spiritual rectitude which will keep you in the path of wisdom and virtue. 2. *Be vigilant*; ever watching character and conduct, so that you are not betrayed unawares into error and transgression. 3. *Be docile*; always ready to receive the counsel and heed the warning of true and faithful friends. 4. *Seek* daily the guidance and guardianship of God.—C.

Vers. 9 (latter part), 10.—*Good workmanship—ourselves and our tools*. This much-debated passage may suggest to us some lessons which may not have been in the mind of the Preacher, but which are appropriate to our time and our circumstances. The question of how much work a man can do is one that depends on two things—on his own strength and skill, and on the quality of the tools he is using. A weak and untried man with poor tools will not do half as much as a strong experienced man with good ones in his hand.

I. THE FIELD OF WORK. This is very broad; it includes not only: 1. All manual labour, to which the passage more immediately applies; but: 2. All business transactions, all household activities, all matters of government in which men are often "the tools" with which work is done. And it includes that to which our attention may be especially directed: 3. All Christian work. This is a great field of its own, with a vast amount of work demanding to be done. Here is work (1) of vast magnitude; (2) of great delicacy; (3) of extreme difficulty, for it means nothing less than that change of condition which results from a change of heart and life. In view of this particular field we regard—

II. THE CONDITIONS OF GOOD WORKMANSHIP. And these are: 1. *Good tools*. Of these tools are: (1) Divine truth; and to be really good for the great purpose we have at heart we need to hold and to utter this truth in (a) its integrity, not presenting or exaggerating one or two aspects only, but offering it in its fulness and symmetry; (b) its purity, uncorrupted by the imaginations and accretions of our own mind; (c) its adaptation to the special spiritual needs of those to whom we minister. (2) *An elastic organization*; not such as will not admit of suiting the necessities of men as they arise, but one that is flexible, and that will lend itself to the ever-varying conditions, spiritual and temporal, in which men are found, and in which they have to be helped and healed. 2. *Good workmen*. Those that have: (1) *Wisdom* "profitable to direct," that have tools, skill, discretion, a sound judgment, a comprehensive view. (2) *Strength*; those who can use bad tools if good ones are not at hand, who can work on with sustained energy, who can "bear the burden and heat of the day," who can stand criticism and censoriousness, who will not be daunted by apparent failure or by occasional desertion, who can wait "with long patience" for the day of harvest.

1. Seek to be supplied with the most perfect tools in Christian work; for not only will good tools do much more work than poor ones, but bad tools will result in mischief

to the workman. "He that cleaveth . . . is endangered." Half-truths, or truth unbalanced by its complement, or a badly constructed organization, may do real and serious harm to those who preach the one or work through the other. 2. Put your whole strength—physical, mental, spiritual—into the work of the Lord. With the very best tools we can wield, we shall wish we had done more than we shall have accomplished, when our last blow has been struck for the Master and for mankind.—C.

Vers. 17, 18.—*Ruin—its forms and its sources.* A material "ruin" may be a very picturesque and even pleasant sight, when that which has answered its end loses its form and does well to disappear. But otherwise a ruin is a pitiable spectacle.

I. THREE FORMS OF RUIN. 1. *Health.* When a man should be in his prime, with all his physical and mental forces at their best; when he should be able to work effectively and continuously, and should be the stay of his home and a strength to his Church and to his friends; and when, instead of this, he is worn, feeble, incapable, obviously declining, and clearly drawing towards the end,—we have a melancholy ruin. 2. *Circumstance.* The once wealthy merchant, or the once powerful family, or the once strong and influential state, is brought down to poverty, helplessness, and general disregard; this also is a pitiful sight. But the worst of all is that which relates to: 3. *Character.* When a man once upright, pure, godly, respecting himself and living in the enjoyment of general esteem, is brought down to moral ruin and becomes a human wreck, then we see the saddest sight beneath the sun. What was once the fairest and noblest thing in the world—a sound, strong, beautiful human character—has lost all its excellency and become foul and ugly. How does this happen? Here are—

II. TWO SOURCES OF RUIN. 1. *Self-indulgence.* To "eat for strength and not for revelry" (drunkenness) is the right and the becoming thing; "to eat (feast) in the morning," when the precious hours should be given to duty,—this is a shameful and a fatal thing. Self-indulgence, which constantly tends to become greater and grosser, leads down fast to feebleness, to poverty, to demoralization, to shame, to death. 2. *Idleness, or carelessness.* (1) The man who does not think it worth his while to study the laws of health, and to take pains to keep them, need not wonder if he becomes weak and sickly, if his life is threatened. (2) The man who pursues his pleasure when he should be doing his work will certainly find his business "decaying," his credit failing, his prospects of success "dropping through." So also the housewife, the student, the minister, the secretary, the statesman. (3) The man who treats his own spirit as something of secondary importance, who does not read that he may be enlightened, who does not worship that he may be edified, who does not pray that he may be guarded and sustained, who does not seek the companionship of the good and fellowship with Christ, who leaves his spiritual nature at the mercy of all the adverse forces that are circling round him and acting on him, may expect that his soul will be impaired, that his character will decay, that the most precious "house" which man can build will fall, and great and sad will be the fall of it (Matt. vii. 27).—C.

Ver. 1.—*Dead flies.* Among the Jews oil rendered fragrant by being mixed with precious drugs was used for many different purposes. With it priests and kings were anointed when they entered upon their offices; guests at the tables of the rich were treated to it as a luxury. It was used medicinally for outward application to the bodies of the sick, and with it corpses and the clothes in which they were wrapped were besprinkled before burial. Very great care was needed in the preparation of the material used for such special purposes. Elaborately confected as the ointment was, it was easily spoiled and rendered worthless. It was, accordingly, necessary not only to take great pains in making it, but also in preserving it from contamination when made. If the vase or bottle in which it was put were accidentally or carelessly left open, its contents might soon be destroyed. A dead fly would soon corrupt the ointment, and turn it into a pestilent odour. So, says the Preacher, a noble and attractive character may be corrupted and destroyed by a little folly—an insignificant-looking fault or weakness may outweigh great gifts and attainments. It is not a case of the unthinking multitude taking advantage of a foible, or inconsistency, or little slip, to depreciate the

character of one raised far above them in wisdom and honour, in order to bring it down to their level; of envy leading to an unjust and ungrateful sentence being pronounced upon an almost faultless character. But the warning is that deterioration may really set in, the precious ointment be actually changed into a disgusting odour, the wisdom and honour be outweighed by the little folly ("outweigh," Revised Version). The same teaching is given in the New Testament. In 1 Corinthians St. Paul warns his readers that their toleration of a heinous sin in one of their members was poisoning the whole spiritual life of the Church (ch. v.). The fervour of their religious emotions, the hatred of sin and love of holiness which had led them to separate themselves from heathen society, the aspirations and endeavours after purity and righteousness which naturally follow upon an intelligent and earnest acceptance of Christian truth, were all being undermined by their omission of the duty that lay upon them, that of isolating the gross offender, and of expelling him from their community if he gave no signs of penitence and amendment. They might themselves be orthodox in belief and unblamable in conduct, but this sin would soon, if unchecked, lower the whole tone of the community, and nullify all the good that had been attained to. "Know ye not," he said, "that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?" It was impossible to allow the fault to remain and to keep the evil influence it exerted within bounds; it would spread like infection, and be persistent until it had corrupted the whole community. And what is true of a society is true of an individual. The fault which shows itself in a character is not like a stain or flaw in a marble statue, which is confined to one spot, and is no worse after the lapse of years, but like a sore in a living body, which weakens and may destroy the whole organism. One cause why the evil influence spreads is that we are not on our guard against it, and it may grow to almost ungovernable strength before we are really convinced that there is any danger. We can recognize at once great errors and heinous vices, and the alarm and disgust they excite, prepare us to resist them; but little follies and weaknesses often fill us with an amused contempt for them, which blinds us to their great power for evil. The dead body of the fly in the vase of ointment is so insignificant a source of corruption, that it surprises us to discover that the fermentation it has produced has tainted the whole mass. Weight for weight, there is an enormous disproportion between the precious fluid and the wretched little object which has corrupted it; yet there is no ignoring of the fact that the mischief has been done. In like manner does a little folly outweigh wisdom and honour; an uncorrected fault spreads its influence throughout a whole character and life. How often has the lesson been brought home to us, both in our reading of histories and biographies and in our own experience, of the widespread mischief done by a small foible or weakness!—

"The little rift within the lute
That by-and-by will make the music mute."

So numerous are the sources from which danger arises, that a long list might be made of the little sins by which the characters of many good men and women are often marred—indolence, selfishness, love of ease, procrastination, indecision, rudeness, irritability, over-sensitiveness to praise or blame, vanity, boastfulness, talkativeness, love of gossip, undue laxity, undue severity, want of self-control over appetites and passions, obstinacy, parsimony. Such are some of the follies which outweigh wisdom and honour—which stamp the character of a man as unworthy of that respect which his gifts and graces would otherwise have secured for him. Numerous though these follies are, they may be reduced to two great classes—*faults of weakness* and *faults of strength*.

I. FAULTS OF WEAKNESS. This class is that of those which are largely negative, and consist principally in omission to give a definite and worthy direction to the nature; e.g. want of self-control, love of ease, indolence, procrastination, indecision, selfishness, heartlessness. That these are faults which create widespread mischief, and excite a general contempt for the characters of those in whom they appear, will scarcely be denied by any, and illustrations of them are only too abundant. Want of self-control over appetites and passions led David into the foulest crimes, which, though sincerely and passionately repented of, were most terribly avenged, and have for ever left a stain upon his name. Love of ease is the only fault which is implied in the description of

the rich man in the parable (Luke xvi. 19), a desire to be comfortable and avoid all that was disagreeable, but it led him to such callous indifference to the miseries of his fellows as disqualified him for happiness in the world to come. A similar fault stained the character of that young ruler who came running to Christ and asked, "Good Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" From his youth up he had obeyed the commandments, and his ingenuous, sweet character and disposition attracted the love of the Saviour. But his love of the world made him unwilling to practise the self-denial needed to make him perfect. He went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions (Mark x. 17—22). His cowardice that led him to make "the great refusal" was the dead fly that corrupted the precious ointment. A very striking illustration of the deterioration of a character through the sin of weakness and indecision is to be found in the life of Eli. He was a man possessed of many beautiful qualities of mind and spirit—gentle, unselfish, devoid of envy or jealousy, devout and humble; but was "a wavering, feeble, powerless man, with excellent intentions but an utter want of will." His parental indulgence led him to exercise no restraint over his children, and the consequence was that when they grew up their conduct was grossly scandalous and depraved. His authority and power as a ruler were not used to check the evils which in his heart he loathed, and so his folly outweighed all the wisdom and honour he possessed. His good qualities have not preserved his memory from contempt. For contempt is the feeling instinctively excited in those who witness moral weakness and indecision. This is the sting of the rebuke addressed to the Church of Laodicea, "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth" (Rev. iii. 15, 16). In Dante's description of the lower world special infamy is attached to this class of offenders—that of those who have never really lived, who have never awakened to take any part either in good or evil, to care for anything but themselves. They are unfit for heaven, and hell scorns to receive them. "This miserable mode the dreary souls of those sustain who lived without blame and without praise. They were mixed with that catiff choir of angels, who were not rebellious nor were faithful to God, but were for themselves. Heaven chased them forth to keep his beauty from impair; and the deep hell receives them not, for the wicked would have some glory over them. They are unknown to fame. Mercy and judgment disdain them. Let us not speak of them, but look and pass."

II. FAULTS OF STRENGTH. This class includes those faults which are of a positive character, and consist largely in an abuse of qualities which might have been virtues. For these are not open vices by which characters otherwise good are depraved, but insignificant, unsuspected sources of danger. The very strength of character by which men and women are distinguished may lead, by over-emphasis, into very offensive deterioration. Thus firmness may degenerate into obstinacy, frugality into parsimony, liberality into extravagance, light-heartedness into frivolity, candour into rudeness, and so on. And these are faults which disgust and repel, and cause us to overlook even very great merits in a character; and not only so, but, if unchecked, gradually nullify those merits. We may find in the character of Christ all the virtues which go to make up holiness so admirably balanced that no one is over-prominent, and, therefore, no one pushed to that excess which so often mars human excellence. Over against the sterner and more masculine qualities of mind and spirit we find those that are gracious and tender, and both within such limits as render his a faultless and perfect example of goodness. His tender compassion for the sinful did not lead him to condone their faults or to lower the standard of holiness for their sake. His righteous indignation against sin did not show itself in impatience, censoriousness, or irritability, as he met it from day to day. "His tender tone was the keen edge of his reproofs, and his unquestionable love infused solemnity into every warning."

Two practical lessons may be drawn from our text. The *first* is that all human excellence is exposed to risk. It is not sufficient to have attained to a certain measure of righteousness; there needs also to be care against declining from it. The ointment carefully distilled must be guarded against corruption. And the *second* is that the danger often springs from insignificant and unsuspected quarters. The dead fly, carried by some stray breeze into the unguarded vial, is the centre of a fermentation which in a very short time will destroy the value of all its contents.—J. W.

Vers. 2—15.—From the second verse of this chapter to the fifteenth we have a series of proverbs loosely strung together, but all bearing upon *the wholesome influence of wisdom and the baneful effects of folly* in the varying circumstances of daily life. It would be waste of ingenuity to try to show any logical connection between the proverbs that are thus crowded together in a small space. And we must content ourselves with a few elucidatory remarks upon them in the order in which they come.

I. A DOUBLE PROVERB ON THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN WISDOM AND FOLLY. (Vers. 2, 3.) "The wise man's heart is at his right hand; but a fool's at his left;" better, "inclines towards his right, towards his left." The heart of the wise man leads him in the proper direction, that of the fool leads him astray. It would be absurd to speak of their hearts as differently situated. The ζ is that of direction; and that which is at the right hand means the duty and work which belong to us, that at the left what concerns us less. The wise man recognizes the path of duty, the fool wanders aimlessly away from it. Others give a slightly different turn to the thought. "The one with his heart, *i.e.* his mind, ready, at his right side, as he walks along the track that images human life, ready to sustain and guide him; the other, the fool with his wits at the left side, not available when needed to lean upon" (Bradley). The fool proclaims his folly to all (ver. 3); every step he takes reveals his deficiency, but, so far from being ashamed of himself, he displays his absurdity as though it were something to be proud of.

II. WISDOM A PROTECTION IN TRYING CIRCUMSTANCES. (Vers. 4—7.) The first picture (ver. 4) is that of the court of a despotic king, where an official has either deservedly or undeservedly incurred the anger of the sovereign ("spirit" equivalent to "anger," as in Judg. viii. 3; Prov. xxix. 11). The natural feeling of indignation or resentment would prompt such a one to throw up the office entrusted to him, and by so doing probably draw down on himself a still greater storm of anger. The wise courtier will yield to the blast and not answer wrath with wrath, and either pacify the anger he has deservedly incurred, or, if he be innocent, by his patience under injury, avoid giving real cause for offence. We must remember that it is of an Eastern court our author is speaking, in which the Divine right of kings, and the duty of passive obedience on the part of subjects, are doctrines which it would be thought impious to deny. Similar advice is given in Prov. xv. 1. It is not to be supposed, however, that the Preacher regarded all existing governments as commanding respect, and taught only servile maxims. In vers. 5—7 he speaks of grievous inequalities in the state; faults of rulers, the frequent exaltation of the base and the depression of the worthy. His words are studiously cautious, but yet they describe the evil in sufficiently clear terms. It may often be prudent to bow to the wrath of rulers, but rulers are not always in the right. One class of evils he had seen arising from "something like an error" (so cautious is he of speaking evil of dignities), which proceedeth from the ruler—the selection of unworthy men for high positions in the state. "Folly is set in great dignity, and the rich sit in low place." By the rich he means the nobles—those endowed with ample inheritances received from a line of ancestors who have had the leisure, and opportunities and means for training themselves for serving the state, and from whom a wise king would naturally choose counsellors and magistrates. But in Oriental courts, where "the eunuch and the barber held the reins of power," men of no reputation or character had a chance of promotion. And even in Western courts and more modern times the same kind of evils has been only too common, as the history of the reigns of Edward II. and James I. of England, and of Louis XI. and Henry III. of France, abundantly proves. The reason for making favourites of low-born and unprincipled adventurers is not far to seek; they have ever been ready tools for accomplishing the designs of unscrupulous princes, for doing services from which men who valued their station and reputation in society would shrink. "Regibus multi," says Grotius, "suspecti qui excellunt sive sapientia sive nobilitate aut opibus." Even the Preacher's self-control is insufficient to suppress the indignation and contempt which any generous mind must feel at such a state of matters, and he concentrates his scorn in the stinging sentence, "I have seen servants upon horses, and princes walking as servants upon the earth" (ver. 7). Among the Persians only those of noble birth were permitted to ride on horseback. Thus one of the circumstances of the special honour bestowed on Mordecai was his riding on horseback through the streets of the city (Esth. v. 8, 9). But this distinction the Preacher had seen set aside; his eyes had been offended by the spectacle of princes walking on

foot like common people, and slaves mounted on horses and clothed with authority (Prov. xix. 10).

III. WISDOM SHOWN IN PROVIDING AGAINST POSSIBLE DANGERS. (Vers. 8, 9.) We need spend no time in the fruitless endeavour to connect vers. 8—11 with those that have gone before. The writer seems to consider wisdom in another of its aspects. He has just spoken of it as prompting one who is under its influence to be patient and resigned in the presence of irradicable evils; he now speaks of it as giving foresight and caution in the accomplishment of difficult and perhaps even dangerous tasks. He mentions four undertakings in which there may be danger to life or limb. He that digs a pit may accidentally fall into it; he that removes a crumbling wall may be bitten by a serpent that has sheltered itself in one of its crannies; the quarryman may be crushed by one of the stones he has dislodged; and the woodcutter may maim himself with his own axe. Whether underneath this imagery he refers to the risks attending all attempts to disturb the existing order of things and to overthrow the powers that be, one cannot say. "The sum of these four classes is certainly not merely that he who undertakes a dangerous matter exposes himself to danger; the author means to say in this series of proverbs which treat of the distinction between wisdom and folly, that the wise man is everywhere conscious of his danger, and guards against it. . . . Wisdom has just this value in providing against the manifold dangers and difficulties which every undertaking brings with it" (Delitzsch).

IV. THE WISDOM OF ADAPTING MEANS TO ENDS. (Ver. 10.) Such, we think, is the general meaning of the words, which are perhaps more difficult to interpret than any others in the whole Book of Ecclesiastes. "If the iron be blunt," if it will not readily lend itself to the work of felling a tree, more strength must be put forth, the stroke must be heavier to penetrate the wood. If there be little sagacity and preparation before entering on an enterprise, greater force will be needed to carry it out. The foresight which leads to sharpening the axe will make the labour in which it is used much easier. "But wisdom is profitable to direct" (ver. 10b); it suggests means serviceable for the end in view. It will save a useless expenditure of time and strength.

V. THE FOLLY OF TAKING PRECAUTIONS AFTER THE EVIL HAS BEEN DONE. (Ver. 11.) "If the serpent bite before it be charmed, then is there no advantage in the charmer" (Revised Version). The picture is that of a serpent biting before the charmer has had time to make use of his skill in charming; and the point of the aphorism is that no skill or wisdom is of any avail if made use of too late. "It is too late to lock the stable door when the steed is stolen" (Wright).

VI. WISDOM AND FOLLY IN HUMAN SPEECH. The winning character of the wise man's words, the mischievous and tedious prating of fools (vers. 12—15). The tongue has just been spoken of (ver. 11) as the instrument used by the charmer for taming serpents, and there follows in these verses a reference to wisdom and folly displayed in the words of the wise man and of the fool. "The words of the wise man are gracious" (cf. Luke iv. 22), they win favour for him; both the subject-matter and the manner of his speech gain for him the good will of those that hear him. The words of the fool are self-destructive; they ruin any chance he had of influencing those who were prepared to be persuaded by him, whom he meets for the first time, and who were therefore not biased against him by previous knowledge of his fatuity. He goes from bad to worse (ver. 13). "The words point with a profound insight into human nature to the progress from bad to worse in one who has the gift of speech without discretion. He begins with what is simply folly, unwise but harmless, but *vires acquirit eundo*, he is borne along on the swelling floods of his own declamatory fluency, and ends in what is 'mischievous madness'" (Plumptre). Especially is this the case when his talk is on subjects as to which even the wisest are forced to confess their ignorance (ver. 14). He speaks voluminously, as though he knew all things past and to come, as though all the mysteries of life and death were an open book to him. And he wearies out every one who hears him or has to do with him. His crass ignorance in all matters of common life forbids any trust being placed in his speculations and vaticinations as to things that are more recondite. The well-known beaten road that leads to the city (ver. 15) he does not know. What kind of a guide would he be in less-frequented paths?

In these various ways, therefore, the contrast is drawn between wisdom which leads men in the right way, which directs their course through the difficulties and dangers

that often beset them, and enables them to make the best use of their resources, and that folly which, if it is the ruling element in a character, no art or skill can conceal, which so often renders those in whom it appears both mischievous and offensive to all who have anything to do with them.—J. W.

Vers. 16—20.—*Duties of rulers and subjects.* Some of the evils of life arise from errors and follies which may be corrected by diligence and prudence, and among them are the caprices of unworthy princes, the vices of courtiers, and the disloyalty of subjects. Both kings and those over whom they rule have duties towards each other, the violation of which bring many mischiefs; both need to have before their minds the ideal of righteousness belonging to their respective stations.

I. THE EVILS OF MISGOVERNMENT. The land is miserable whose king is a child in years or in heedlessness, whose princes begin the days with revels instead of attending to the management of affairs of state and the administration of justice. The incapacity of the prince leads to the appointment of unworthy ministers, and prevents a proper check being put upon their profligacy and neglect. The result is soon seen in the disorders of the state. "Through the slothfulness of rulers," he goes on to hint, "the fabric of thy state decays; the neglected roof lets the water through. And meantime there is high revelry within the palace walls; and gold and silver supply all their needs" (vers. 18, 19). Illustrations of such an unhappy state of matters recur only too readily to the student of history. "We may see it exemplified in the condition, shall we say, of some native state within our Indian frontier? or some Eastern empire tottering to its fall nearer home? or a European monarchy at the close of the last century, with luxury and state in the palace, and a hungry people outside its door, and the shadow of the guillotine, and head-crowned pikes and September massacres in the background?" (Bradley).

II. THE BLESSINGS OF A WELL-ORDERED GOVERNMENT. That land is happy, governed by a king of undisputed title (ver. 17), who sets an example of integrity, and not by some upstart adventurer. He derives his title from his noble descent, but he may establish his power on a firmer foundation if the excellences of his ancestors are reproduced in him; he will secure a large measure of prosperity for his people if he choose for his officers men of simple tastes, who think more of discharging their duties than of self-indulgence.

III. THE DUTY OF LOYALTY ON THE PART OF SUBJECTS. (Ver. 20.) Even if the sovereign is personally unworthy of respect, the office he holds should be honoured; he is still the servant of God, even if he is grossly neglectful of his duties. There is a worse evil than misgovernment, and that is anarchy. "Curse not the king"—he may not deserve it; there may be reasons of state to explain what seems to be capricious or unjust in his conduct; yield him reverence for conscience' sake, because it is right to do so. And even if he be in the wrong, it is prudent to abstain from words of blame, since he has the power to punish those that speak against him, and may hear in unexpected ways what has been said about him in secrecy. Such counsels are of a kindred character with those which the apostles have given (Rom. xiii. 1—7; 1 Pet. ii. 13—17). At first it might seem as if they commended the cultivation of a slavish spirit on the part of subjects towards their rulers, and it is well known that many have deduced from them the preposterous doctrine of "passive obedience." But it must be kept in mind that while these portions of Scripture prescribe the duties of subjects, they prescribe also the duties of kings; and that it is no slavish doctrine to hold that those who rule in equity have an absolute right to the devotion and loyalty of their subjects. When they depart from equity their claim to implicit obedience is proportionately diminished. The prudential maxim of ver. 20 warns men to count the cost before they assail the power of even a bad king—to beware of provoking his wrath by heedless conduct—but does not command passive obedience to him. Misgovernment may reach such a pitch as to make it a duty for subjects to brave the wrath of kings, and to attempt to put a check upon their folly. We have not here a mean-spirited and time-serving piece of advice, suitable only for those who languish under the tyranny of Eastern despots, but a warning against rashness which is not inapplicable to the most public-spirited citizen of the freest state. The examples of Isaiah under Ahaz, of Jeremiah under Zedekiah, and of St. Paul under Nero, show that it is possible to have a love of righteousness and hatred of iniquity, and yet not be wanting in respect to a bad king.—J. W.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XI.

Approaching the end of his treatise, Koheleth, in view of apparent anomalies in God's moral government, and the difficulties that meet man in his social and political relations, proceeds to give his remedies for this state of things. These remedies are (1) beneficence and active life (vers. 1—6); (2) joyful light-heartedness (vers. 7—9); (3) piety (ver. 10—ch. xii. 7).

Vers. 1—6.—Section 16. Leaving alone unanswerable questions, man's duty and happiness are found in activity, especially in doing all the good in his power, for he knows not how soon he himself may stand in need of help. This is the first remedy for the perplexities of life. The wise man will not charge himself with results.

Ver. 1.—Cast thy bread upon the waters. The old interpretation of this passage, which found in it a reference to the practice in Egypt of sowing seed during the inundation of the Nile, is not admissible. The verb *shalach* is not used in the sense of sowing or scattering seed; it means "to cast or send forth." Two chief explanations have been given. (1) As to sow on the water is equivalent to taking thankless toil (compare the Greek proverb, *Σπείρειν ἐπὶ πόντῳ*), the *gnomo* may be an injunction to do good without hope of return, like the evangelical precept (Matt. v. 44—46; Luke vi. 32—35). (2) It is a commercial maxim, urging men to make ventures in trade, that they may receive a good return for their expenditure. In this case the casting seed upon the waters is a metaphorical expression for sending merchandise across the sea to distant lands. This view is supposed to be confirmed by the statement concerning the good woman in Prov. xxxi. 14, "She is like the merchants' ships; she bringeth her bread from far;" and the words of Ps. cvii. 23, "They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters." But one sees no reason why Koheleth should suddenly turn to commerce and the trade of a maritime city. Such considerations have no reference to the context, nor to the general design of the book. Nothing leads to them, nothing comes of them. On the other hand, if we take the verse as urging active beneficence as the safest and best proceeding under men's present circumstances, we have a maxim in due accordance with the spirit of the rest of the work, and one which conduces

to the conclusion reached at the end. So we adopt the first of the two explanations mentioned above. The bread in the East is made in the form of thin cakes, which would float for a time if thrown into a stream; and if it be objected that no one would be guilty of such an irrational action as flinging bread into the water, it may be answered that this is just the point aimed at. Do your kindnesses, exert yourself, in the most unlikely quarters, not thinking of gratitude or return, but only of duty. And yet surely a recompense will be made in some form or other. Thou shalt find it after many days. This is not to be the motive of our acts, but it will in the course of time be the result; and this thought may be an encouragement. In the Chaldee Version of parts of Ecclesiasticus there is extant a maxim identical with our verse, "Strew thy bread on the water and on the land, and thou shalt find it at the end of days" (Dukes, 'Rabb. Blumenl.,' p. 73). Parallels have been found in many quarters. Thus the Turk says, "Do good, throw it into the water; if the fish does not know it, God does." Herzfeld quotes Goethe—

"Was willst du untersuchen,
Wohin die Milde fliesst!
Ins Wasser wirf deine Kuchen;
Wer weiss wer sie genießt?"

"Wouldst thou too narrowly inquire
Whether thy kindness goes!
Thy cake upon the water cast;
Whom it may feed who knows?"

Voltaire paraphrases the passage in his 'Précis de l'Ecclesiaste'—

"Répandez vos bienfaits avec magnificence,
Même aux moins vertueux ne les refusez pas.
Ne vous informez pas de leur reconnaissance;
Il est grand, il est beau de faire des ingrats."

Ver. 2.—Give a portion to seven, and also to eight. This further explains, without any metaphor, the injunction of beneficence in ver. 1. Give portions of thy "bread" to any number of those who need. Delitzsch and others who interpret the passage of maritime enterprise would see in it a recommendation (like the proceeding of Jacob, Gen. xxxii. 16, etc.) not to risk all at once, to divide one's ventures into various ships. But the expression in the text is merely a mode of enjoining unlimited benevolence. The numbers are purposely indefinite. Instances of this form of speech are common enough (see Prov. vi 16; xxx. 7—9, etc.; Amos i. 3.

etc.; Micah v. 5; Eccles. xxiii. 16; xxvi. 5, 28). Wordsworth notes that the word for "portion" (*chelek*) is that used specially for the portion of the Levites (Numb. xviii. 20); and in accordance with his view of the date of the book, finds here an injunction not to confine one's offerings to the Levites of Judah, but to extend them to the refugees who come from Israel. **For thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth.** A time may come when you yourself may need help; the power of giving may no longer be yours; therefore make friends now who may be your comfort in distress. So the Lord urges, "Make to yourselves friends by means of the mammon of unrighteousness" (Luke xvi. 9). It seems a low motive on which to base charitable actions; but men act on such secondary motives every day, and the moralist cannot ignore them. In the Book of Proverbs secondary and worldly motives are largely urged as useful in the conduct of life (see the Introduction to Proverbs, pp. viii., ix.). St. Paul reminds us that we some day may need a brother's help (Gal. vi. 1). The Fathers have spiritualized the passage, so as to make it of Christian application, far away indeed from Koheleth's thought. Thus St. Gregory: "By the number *seven* is understood the whole of this temporal condition . . . this is shown more plainly when the number *eight* is mentioned after it. For when another number besides follows after seven, it is set forth by this very addition, that this temporal state is brought to an end and closed by eternity. . . . For by the number *seven* Solomon expressed the present time, which is passed by periods of seven days. But by the number *eight* he designated eternal life, which the Lord made known to us by his resurrection. For he rose in truth on the Lord's day, which, as following the seventh day, *i.e.* the sabbath, is found to be the eighth from the creation. But it is well said, 'Give portions,' etc. As if it were plainly said, 'So dispense temporal goods, as not to forget to desire those that are eternal. For thou oughtest to provide for the future by well-doing, who knowest not what tribulation succeeds from the future judgment'" ('Moral,' xxxv. 17, Oxford transl.).

Ver. 3.—**If the clouds be full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth.** This verse is closely connected with the preceding paragraph. The misfortune there intimated may fall at any moment; this is as certain as the laws of nature, unforeseen, uncontrollable. When the clouds are overcharged with moisture, they deliver their burden upon the earth, according to laws which man cannot alter; these are of irresistible necessity, and must be expected and

endured. **And if the tree fall toward the south, etc.; or, it may be, in the south;** *i.e.* let it fall where it will; the particular position is of no importance. When the tempest overthrows it, it lies where it has fallen. When the evil day comes, we must bend to the blow, we are powerless to avert it; the future can be neither calculated nor controlled. The next verse tells how the wise man acts under such circumstances. Christian commentators have argued from this clause concerning the unchangeable state of the departed—that there is no repentance in the grave; that what death leaves them judgment shall find them. Of course, no such thought was in Koheleth's mind; nor do we think that the inspiring Spirit intended such meaning to be wrung from the passage. Indeed, it may be said that, as it stands, the clause does not bear this interpretation. The fallen or felled tree is not at once fit for the master's use; it has to be exposed to atmospheric influences, seasoned, tried. It is not left in the place where it lay, nor in the condition in which it was; so that, if we reason from this analogy, we must conceive that there is some ripening, purifying process in the intermediate state. St. Gregory speaks thus: "For when, at the moment of the falling of the human being, either the Holy Spirit or the evil spirit receives the soul departed from the chambers of the flesh, he will keep it with him for ever without change, so that neither, once exalted, shall it be precipitated into woe, nor, once plunged into eternal woes, any further arise to take the means of escape" ('Moral,' viii. 30).

Ver. 4.—**He that observeth the wind shall not sow.** The fact of the uncertainty and immutability of the future ought not to make us supine or to crush out all diligence and activity. He who wants to anticipate results, to foresee and provide against all contingencies, to be his own providence, is like a farmer who is always looking to wind and weather, and misses the time for sowing in this needless caution. The quarter from which the wind blows regulates the downfall of rain (comp. Prov. xxv. 23). In Palestine the west and north-west winds usually brought rain. **He that regardeth the clouds shall not reap.** For the purpose of softening the ground to receive the seed, rain was advantageous; but storms in harvest, of course, were pernicious (see 1 Sam. xii. 17, etc.; Prov. xxvi. 1); and he who was anxiously fearing every indication of such weather, and altering his plans at every phase of the sky, might easily put off reaping his fields till either the crops were spoiled or the rainy season had set in. A familiar proverb says, "A watched pot never boils." Some risks must always be run if

we are to do our work in the world; we cannot make a certainty of anything; probability in the guide of life. We cannot secure ourselves from failure; we can but do our best, and uncertainty of result must not paralyze exertion. "It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that hath mercy" (Rom. ix. 16). St. Gregory deduces a lesson from this verse: "He calls the unclean spirit *wind*, but men who are subjected to him *clouds*; whom he impels backwards and forwards, hither and thither, as often as his temptations alternate in their hearts from the blasts of suggestions. He therefore who observes the wind does not sow, since he who dreads coming temptations does not direct his heart to doing good. And he who regards the clouds does not reap, since he who trembles from the dread of human fickleness deprives himself of the recompense of an eternal reward" ('Moral,' xxvii. 14).

Ver. 5.—As thou knowest not what is the way of the spirit. In this verse are presented one or two examples of man's ignorance of natural facts and processes as analogous to the mysteries of God's moral government. The word translated "spirit" (*ruach*) may mean also "wind," and is so taken here by many commentators (see ch. i. 6; viii. 8; and comp. John iii. 8). In this view there would be two instances given, viz. the wind and the embryo. Certainly the mention of the wind seems to come naturally after what has preceded; and man's ignorance of its way, and powerlessness to control it, are emblematic of his attitude towards Divine providence. The versions, however, seem to support the rendering of the Authorized Version. Thus the Septuagint (which connects the clause with ver. 4), *ἐν οἷς* ("among whom," i.e. those who watch the weather), "There is none that knoweth what is the way of the spirit (τοῦ πνεύματος);" Vulgate, *Quomodo ignoras quæ sit via spiritus*. If we take this view, we have only one idea in the verse, and that is the infusion of the breath of life in the embryo, and its growth in its mother's womb. Nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child. Our version, by its insertions, has made two facts out of the statement in the Hebrew, which is literally, *how the bones (are) in the womb of a pregnant woman*. Septuagint, "As (*ὡς*) bones are in the womb," etc.; Vulgate, *Et qua ratione compingantur ossa in ventre prægnantis*. "And in what way the bones are framed in the womb of the pregnant." The formation and quickening of the fœtus were always regarded as mysterious and inscrutable (comp. Job x. 8, 9; Ps. cxxxix. 15; Wisd. vii. 1, etc.). Wright compares M. Aurelius, x. 26, "The first principles of life are extremely slender and

mysterious; and yet nature works them up into a strange increase of bulk, diversity, and proportion." Controversies concerning the origin of the soul have been rife from early times, some holding what is called Traducianism, i.e. that soul and body are both derived by propagation from earthly parents; others supporting Creationism, i.e. that the soul, created specially by God, is infused into the child before birth. St. Augustine confesses ('Op. Imperf.' iv. 104) that he is unable to determine the truth of either opinion. And, indeed, this is one of those secret things which Holy Scripture has not decided for us, and about which no authoritative sentence has been given. The term "bones" is used for the whole conformation of the body (comp. Prov. xv. 30; xvi. 24); *meleah*, "pregnant," means literally, "full," and is used like the Latin *plena* here and nowhere else in the Old Testament, though common in later Hebrew. Thus Ovid, 'Metam,' x. 469—

"Plena patris thalamis excedit, et impia
diro
Semina fert utero."

And 'Fast,' iv. 633—

"Nunc gravidum pecus est; gravidæ sunt
semine terræ.
Telluri plenæ victima plena datur."

Even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all. Equally mysterious in its general scope and in its details is the working of God's providence. And as everything lies in God's hands, it must needs be secret and beyond human ken. This is why to "the works of God" (ch. vii. 13) is added, "who maketh all." The God of nature is Lord of the future (comp. Amos iii. 6; Eccles. xviii. 6); man must not disquiet himself about this.

Ver. 6.—In the morning sow thy seed. Do not let your ignorance of the future and the inscrutability of God's dealings lead you to indolence and apathy; do your appointed work; be active and diligent in your calling. The labour of the farmer is taken as a type of business generally, and was especially appropriate to the class of persons whom Koheleth is instructing. The injunction occurs naturally after ver. 4. And in the evening withhold not thine hand. Labour on untiredly from morn till evening. It is not an advice to rest during midday, as that was too hot a time to work (Stuart), but a call to spend the entire day in active employment, the two extremities being mentioned in order to include the whole. Work undertaken in a right spirit is a blessing, not a curse, shuts out many temptations, encourages many virtues. Some see here a

special reference to the maxim at the beginning of the chapter, as though the author meant, "Exercise thy charity at all times, early and late," the metaphor being similar to that in 2 Cor. ix. 6, "He which soweth sparingly," etc. Others find a figure of the ages of man in the "morning and evening," thus, "From earliest youth practise piety and purity, and continue such conduct to its close." This leads naturally to the subject of the following section; but it may be doubted whether this thought was in the author's mind. It seems best to take the paragraph merely as commending activity, whether in business or in benevolence, without anxious regard to results which are in higher hands. "Withhold not thy hand," i.e. from sowing; *Μὴ ἀφέτω ἡ χεὶρ σου* (Septuagint). For thou knowest not whether shall prosper, which of the two sowings, either this or that, the morning or evening sowing. It is a chance, and a man must risk something; if one fails, the other may succeed. Or whether they both shall be alike good. The uncertainty rouses to exertion; labour may at any rate secure half the crop, or even give a double produce, if both sowings succeed. So in religion and morality, the good seed sown early and late may bear fruit early or late, or may have blessed results all along. The Vulgate is less correct, *Et si utrumque simul, melius erit*, "And if both together, it will be better."

Vers. 7-9.—Section 17. *The second remedy for the perplexities of the present life is cheerfulness*—the spirit that enjoys the present, with a chastened regard to the future.

Ver. 7.—*Truly the light is sweet*. The verse begins with the copula *vaz*, "and," which here notes merely transition, as ch. iii. 16; xii. 9. Do not be perplexed, or despondent, or paralyzed in your work, by the difficulties that meet you. Confront them with a cheerful mien, and enjoy life while it lasts. "The light" may be taken literally, or as equivalent to life. The very light, with all that it unfolds, all that it beautifies, all that it quickens, is a pleasure; life is worth living, and affords high and merited enjoyment to the faithful worker. The commentators quote parallels. Thus Euripides, 'Iph. in Aul.' 1219—

*Μὴ μ' ἀπολέσῃς ἔωρον· ἥδῃ γὰρ τὸ φῶς
Λύσσειν, τὰ δ' ὑπὸ γῆνι μὴ μ' ἰδεῖν ἀναγκάσῃς.*

"O slay me not untimely; for to see
The light is sweet; and force me not to
view
The secrets of the nether world."

Plumptre cites Theognis—

*Κέλσεται ὅστε λίθος·
Ἄφθογγος, λελύω δ' ἐρατὶ φῶς ἡελίοιο.*

"Then shall I lie, as voiceless as a stone,
And see no more the loved light of the
sun."

A pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold
the sun. To behold the sun is to enjoy
life; for light, which is life, is derived from
the sun. Virgil speaks of "caeli spirabile
lumen" ('Æn.' iii. 600). Thus Homer,
'Od.,' xx. 207—

*Εἴ που ἔτι ζῶει καὶ ὁρᾷ φῶς ἡελίοιο·
Εἰ δ' ἤδη τέθηκε καὶ εἰν Ἀΐδαο δόμοισιν.*

"If still he live and see the sun's fair light,
Or dead, be dwelling in the realms of
Hades."

Ver. 8.—But if a man live many years,
and rejoice in them all. The conjunction *καὶ*
at the commencement of the verse is causal
rather than adversative, and should be rendered
"for." The insertion of "and" before
"rejoice" mars the sentence. The apodosis
begins with "rejoice," and the translation
is, *For if a man live many years, he ought to
rejoice in them all*. Koheleth has said (ver.
7) that life is sweet and precious; now he
adds that it is therefore man's duty to enjoy
it; God has ordained that he should do so,
whether his days on earth be many or few.
Yet let him remember the days of darkness.
The apodosis is continued, and the clause
should run, *And remember*, etc. "The days
of darkness" do not mean times of calamity
as contrasted with the light of prosperity,
as though the writer were bidding one to be
mindful of the prospect of disastrous change
in the midst of happiness; nor, again, the
period of old age distinguished from the
glowing light of youth (Virgil, 'Æneid,' i.
590, 591). The days of darkness signify
the life in Hades, far from the light of the
sun, gloomy, uncheered. The thought of
this state should not make us hopeless and
reckless, like the sensualists whose creed is
to "eat and drink, for to-morrow we die"
(1 Cor. xv. 32; Wisd. ii. 1, etc.), but rouse
us to make the best of life, to be contented
and cheerful, doing our daily duties with
the consciousness that this is our day of
labour and joy, and that "the night cometh
when no man can work" (John ix. 4). Wisely
says Ben-Sira, "Whatsoever thou takest in
hand, remember the end, and thou shalt
never do amiss" (Ecclus. vii. 36). We are
reminded of the Egyptian custom, mentioned
by Herodotus (ii. 78), of carrying a figure of
a corpse among the guests at a banquet, not
in order to damp pleasure, but to give a
zest to the enjoyment of the present and to

keep it under proper control. "Look on this!" it was cried; "drink, and enjoy thyself; for when thou diest thou shalt be such." The Roman poet has many a passage like this, though, of course, of lower tendency. Thus Horace, 'Carm.,' ii. 3—

"Preserve, O my Dellius, whatever thy fortunes,
A mind undisturbed, 'midst life's changes
and ills;
Not cast down by its sorrows, nor too much
elated
If sudden good fortune thy cup over-
fills," etc.

(Stanley.)

(See also 'Carm.,' i. 4.) For they shall be many; rather, *that they shall be many*. This is one of the things to remember. The time in Sheol will be long. How to be passed—when, if ever, to end—he says not; he looks forward to a dreary protracted period, when joy shall be unattainable, and therefore he bids men to use the present, which is all they can claim. All that cometh is vanity. All that comes after this life is ended, the great future, is nothingness; shadow, not substance; a state from which is absent all that made life, and over which we have no control. Koheleth had passed the sentence of vanity on all the pursuits of the living man; now he gives the same verdict upon the unknown condition of the departed soul (comp. ch. ix. 5). Till the gospel had brought life and immortality to light, the view of the future was dark and gloomy. So we read in Job (x. 21, 22), "I go whence I shall not return, even to the land of darkness and of the shadow of death; a land of thick darkness, as darkness itself; a land of the shadow of death, without any order, and where the light is as darkness." The Vulgate gives quite a different turn to the clause, rendering, *Meminisse debet tenebrosi temporis, et dierum multorum; qui cum venerint, vanitatis arguerunt præterita*, "He ought to remember . . . the many days; and when these have come, things passed shall be charged with vanity"—which implies, in accordance with an hagadic interpretation of the passage, that the sinner shall suffer for his transgressions, and shall then learn to acknowledge his folly in the past. It is unnecessary to say that the present text is at variance with this rendering.

Ver. 9.—Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth. Koheleth continues to inculcate the duty of rational enjoyment. "In youth" is during youth; not in the exercise of, or by reason of, thy fresh, unimpaired powers. The author urges his hearers to begin betimes to enjoy the blessings with which God surrounds them. Youth is the season of innocent, unalloyed pleasure; then, if ever,

casting aside all tormenting anxiety concerning an unknown future, one may, as it is called, enjoy life. Let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth. Let the lightness of thy heart show itself in thy bearing and manner, even as it is said in Proverbs (xv. 13), "A merry heart maketh a cheerful countenance." Walk in the ways of thine heart (comp. Isa. lvii. 17). Where the impulses and thoughts of thy heart lead thee. The wording looks as if the personal identity, the "I," and the thought were distinct. We have a similar severance in ch. vii. 25, only there the personality directs the thought, not the thought the "I." And in the sight of thine eyes. Follow after that on which thy eyes fix their regard (ch. ii. 10); for, as Job says (xxxii. 7), "The heart walketh after the eyes." The Septuagint, in deference to the supposed requirements of strict morality, has (at least according to the text of some manuscripts) modified the received reading, translating the passage thus: *Kai περιπατεί εν ὁδοῖς καρδίας σου ἡμῶν καὶ μὴ ἐν ὁράσει ὀφθαλμῶν σου*, "And walk in the ways of thine heart blameless, and not in the sight of thine eyes." But *μὴ* is omitted by A, C, S². Others besides the Seventy have felt doubts about the bearing of the passage, as though it recommended either unbridled licence in youth, or at any rate an unhalloved epicureanism. To counteract the supposed evil teaching, some have credited Koheleth with stern irony. He is not recommending pleasure, say they, but warning against it. "Go on your way," he cries, "do as you list, sow your wild oats, live dis-solutely, but remember that retribution will some day overtake you." But the counsel is seriously intended, and is quite consistent with many other passages which teach the duty of enjoying life as man's lot and part (see ch. ii. 24; iii. 12, 13, 22; v. 18; viii. 15, etc.). The seeming opposition between the recommendation here and in Numb. xv. 39 is easily reconciled. The injunction in the Pentateuch, which was connected with a ceremonial observance, ran thus: "Remember all the commandments of the Lord, and do them; and that ye go not about after your own heart, and your own eyes, after which ye used to go a-whoring." Here unlawful pleasures, contrary to the commandments, are forbidden; Ecclesiastes urges the pursuit of innocent pleasures, such as will stand scrutiny. Hoclemann, quoted by Wright, observes that this verse is the origin of a famous student-song of Germany, a stanza or two of which we may cite—

"Gaudeamus igitur, juvenes dum sumus;
Post exactam juventutem, post molestant
senectutem,
Nos habebit humus. . . .

"Vita nostra brevis est, brevi finietur,
Venit mors velociter, rapit nos atrociter,
Nemini parceretur."

It is not epicureanism, even in a modified form, that is here encouraged. For moderate and lawful pleasure Kokoeth has always uttered his sanction, but the pleasure is to be such as God allows. This is to be accepted with all gratitude in the present, as the future is wholly beyond our ken and our control; it is all that is placed in our power, and it is enough to make life more than endurable. And then to temper unmixed joy, to prove that he is not recommending mere sensuality, to correct any wrong impression which the previous utterances may have conveyed, the writer adds another thought, a sombre reflection which shows the religious conclusion to which he is working up. **But know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment (*mishpat*).** It has been doubted what is meant by "judgment," whether present or future, men's or God's. It has been taken to mean—God will make thy excesses prove scourges, by bringing on thee sickness, poverty, a miserable old age; or these distresses come as the natural consequences of youthful sins; or obloquy shall follow thee, and thou shalt meet with deserved censure from thy fellow-men. But every one must feel that the solemn ending of this paragraph points to something more grave and important than any such results as those mentioned above, something that is concerned with that indefinable future which is ever looming in the dim horizon. Nothing satisfies the expected conclusion but a reference to the eternal judgment in the world beyond the grave. Shadowy and incomplete as was Kokoeth's view of this great assize, his sense of God's justice in the face of the anomalies of human life was so strong that he can unhesitatingly appeal to the conviction of a coming inquisition, as a motive for the guidance of action and conduct. That in other passages he constantly apprehends earthly retribution, as the Pentateuch taught, and as his countrymen had learned to expect (see ch. ii. 26; iii. 17; vii. 17, 18), is no argument that he is not here rising to a higher view. Rather, the fact that the doctrine of temporal reward and punishment is found by experience to fail in many cases (comp. ch. viii. 14) has forced him to state his conclusion that this life is not the end of everything, and that there is another existence in which actions shall be tried, justice done, retribution awarded. The statement is brief, for he knew nothing more than the fact, and could add nothing to it. His conception of the soul's condition in Sheol (see ch. ix. 5, 6, 10) seems to point to some other state or period for this final judg-

ment; but whether a resurrection is to precede this awful trial is left in uncertainty here, as elsewhere in the Old Testament. Cheyne and some other critics consider this last clause to be an interpolation, because it appears to militate against previous utterances; but this argument is unreasonable, as the paragraph comes in quite naturally as the needed conclusion, and without it the section would halt and be incomplete. A similar allusion is contained in the epilogue (ch. xii. 14). A corrector, who desired to remove all seeming contradictions and discrepancies from the work, would not have been satisfied with inserting this gloss, but would have displayed his remedial measures in other places. Of this proceeding, however, no traces are discernible by an unprejudiced eye.

Ver. 10—ch. xii. 7.—Section 18. *The third remedy is piety*, and this ought to be practised from one's earliest days; life should be so guided as not to offend the laws of the Creator and Judge, and virtue should not be postponed till the failure of faculties makes pleasure unattainable, and death closes the scene. The last days of the old man are beautifully described under certain images, metaphors, and analogies.

Ver. 10.—Therefore remove sorrow from thy heart. The writer reiterates his advice concerning cheerfulness, and then proceeds to inculcate early piety. *Kaas*, rendered "sorrow," has been variously understood. The Septuagint has *θυμὸν*, the Vulgate *iram*; so the margin of the Authorized Version gives "anger," and that of the Revised Version "vexation," or "provocation." Wordsworth adopts this last meaning (referring to 1 Kings xv. 30; xxi. 22; 2 Kings xxiii. 26, etc., where, however, the signification is modified by the connection in which the word stands), and paraphrases, "Take heed lest you provoke God by the thoughts of your heart." Jerome affirms that in the term "anger" all perturbations of the mind are included—which seems rather forced. The word is better rendered, low spirits, moroseness, discontent. These feelings are to be put away from the mind by a deliberate act. **Put away evil from thy flesh.** Many commentators consider that the evil here named is physical, not moral, the author enjoining his young disciple to take proper care of his body, not to weaken it on the one hand by asceticism, nor on the other by indulgence in youthful lusts. In this case the two clauses would urge the removal of what respectively affects the mind and body, the inner and outer man. But the ancient versions are unanimous in regarding the "evil" spoken of as moral. Thus the Septu-

against gives *πορνεία*, "wickedness;" the Vulgate, *malitiam*. Similarly the Syriac and Targum. And according to our interpretation of the passage, such is the meaning here. It is a call to early piety and virtue, like that of St. Paul (2 Cor. vii. 1), "Having these promises, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." Do not, says Koheleth, defile thy body by carnal sins (1 Cor. vi. 18), which bring decay and sickness, and arouse the wrath of God against thee. For childhood and youth are vanity. This time of youth soon passes away; the capacity for enjoyment is soon circumscribed; therefore use thy opportunities aright, remembering the end. The word for "youth" (*shacharuth*) occurs nowhere else in the Old Testament, and is probably connected with *shachon*, "black," used of hair in Lev. xiii. 31. Hence it means the time of black hair, in contradistinction to the time when the hair has become grey. The explanation which

refers it to the time of dawn (Ps. cx. 3) seems to be erroneous, as it would then be identical with "childhood." The Septuagint renders it *ἀνοία*, "folly;" the Vulgate, *voluptas*, "pleasure;" the Syriac, "and not knowledge;" but the word cannot be rightly thus translated. The two terms are childhood and manhood, the period during which the capacity for pleasure is fresh and strong. Its vanity is soon brought home; it is evanescent; it brings punishment. Thus Bailey, 'Festus'—

"I cast mine eyes around, and feel
There is a blessing wanting;
Too soon our hearts the truth reveal,
That joy is disenchanting."

And again—

"When amid the world's delights,
How warm soe'er we feel a moment among
them—
We find ourselves, when the hot blast hath
blown,
Prostrate, and weak, and wretched."

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—6.—*Bread upon the waters; or, rules and reasons for practising beneficence.*

I. RULES. Beneficence should be practised: 1. *Without doubt as to its result.* One's charity should be performed in a spirit of fearless confidence, even though the recipients of it should appear altogether unworthy, and our procedure as hopeless and thankless an operation as "casting one's bread upon the waters" (ver. 1), or "sowing the sea" (Theognis). 2. *Without limit as to its distribution.* "Give a portion to seven, yea even unto eight" (ver. 2); that is, "Give to him that asketh, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away" (Matt. v. 42). Social economics may, but the sermon on the mount does not, condemn indiscriminate or promiscuous giving. One's bread should be cast upon the waters in the sense that it should be bestowed upon the multitudes, or carried far and wide rather than restricted to a narrow circle. 3. *Without anxiety as to its seasonableness.* As "he that observeth the wind will not sow, and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap" (ver. 4), so he who is always apprehensive lest his deeds of kindness should be ill-timed is not likely to practise much beneficence. The farmer who should spend his days in watching the weather to select just the right moment to plough and sow, or reap and garner, would never get the one operation or the other performed; and little charity would be witnessed were men never to give until they were quite sure they had hit upon the right time to give, and never to do an act of kindness until they were certain the proper objects to receive it had been found. 4. *Without intermission as to its time.* "In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand" (ver. 6). Who would practise beneficence as it should be practised must be as constantly employed therein as the husbandman is in his agricultural operations. Philanthropy is a sacred art, which can only be acquired by pains and patience. Intermittent goodness, charity performed by fits and starts, occasional benevolence, never comes to much, and never does much for either the giver or receiver. Charity to be efficient must be a perennial fountain and a running stream (1 Cor. xiii. 8). The charitable man must be always giving, like God, who maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good, etc. (Matt. v. 45), and who giveth unto all liberally (Jas. i. 5).

II. REASONS. Beneficence should be practised for the following reasons: 1. *It is certain in the end to be recompensed.* (Ver. 1.) The kindly disposed individual, who fearlessly casts his bread upon the waters by doing good to the unkind and the unthankful (Matt. v. 45; Luke vi. 35), may have a long time to wait for a return

from his venture in practical philanthropy; but eventually that return will come, here on earth, in the inward satisfaction that springs from doing good, perhaps in the gratitude (or, it may be, the temporal and spiritual elevation) of those who experience his kindness, hereafter in the welcome and the glory Christ has promised to such as are mindful of his needy brethren on earth (Matt. xxv. 40). 2. *No one can predict how soon himself may become an object of charity.* As surely as the clouds when full of rain will empty themselves upon the earth, and a tree will lie exactly in the place where it falls (ver. 3), so surely will seasons of calamity; when they come, descend on rich and poor alike; yea, perhaps strike the wealthy, the great, and the good with strokes which the indigent, the obscure, and the wicked may escape. Hence the bare consideration of this fact, that bad times may come—not only depriving one of the ability to practise beneficence, but rendering one a fit subject for the same (the latter of these being most likely the Preacher's thought)—should induce one to be charitable while he may and can. This may seem a low, selfish, and unworthy ground on which to recommend the practice of philanthropy; but does its meaning not substantially amount to this, that men should give to others because, were bad times to strip them of their wealth, and plunge them into poverty, they would wish others to give to them? And how much is this below the standard of the golden rule (Matt. vii. 12)? 3. *No amount of forethought will discover a better time for practising beneficence than the present.* As no one knows the way of the wind (John iii. 8), or the secrets of embryology (Ps. cxxxix. 15)—in both of which departments of nature, notwithstanding the discoveries of modern science, much ignorance prevails—so can no one predict what kind of future will emerge from the womb of the present (Prov. xxvii. 1; Zeph. ii. 2), or what shall be the course of providence on the morrow. Hence to defer exercising charity till one has fathomed the unfathomable is more than merely to waste one's time; it is to miss a certain opportunity for one that may never arrive. As to-day only is ours, we should never cast it away for a doubtful to-morrow, but

"Act in the living present,
Heart within and God o'erhead."

(Longfellow.)

4. *The issues of beneficence, in the recipients thereof, are uncertain.* That an act of charity, or deed of kindness, whensoever done, will prosper without fail in the experience of the doer thereof, has been declared (ver. 1); that it will turn out equally well in the experience of him to whom it is done is not so inevitable. Yet from this problematical character of all human philanthropy as to results should be drawn an argument, not for doing nothing, but for doing more. An atrabilious soul will conclude that, because he is not sure whether his charity may not injure rather than benefit the recipient, he should hold his hand; a hopeful and happy Christian will feel impelled to more assiduous benevolence by reflecting that he can never tell when his kindly deeds will bear fruit in the temporal, perhaps also spiritual, salvation of the poor and needy. "The seed sown in the morning of life may bear its harvest at once, or not till the evening of age. The man may reap at one and the same time the fruits of his earlier and later sowing, and may find that both are alike good" (Plumptre).

LESSONS. 1. "As therefore ye have opportunity, do good unto all men" (Gal. vi. 10). 2. Weary not in well-doing (Gal. vi. 9). 3. Take no thought for to-morrow (Matt. vi. 34). 4. Cultivate a hopeful view of life (Prov. x. 28).

Vers. 1—6.—*Conditions of success in business.* I. THE MEASURES TO BE ADOPTED. 1. *Enterprises not free from hazard.* "Cast thy bread upon the waters," meaning, "launch out upon the sea of business speculation." The man who would succeed must be prepared to venture somewhat. A judicious quantity of courage seems indispensable to getting on. The timid merchant is as little likely to prosper as the shrinking lover. 2. *Prudence in dividing risks.* "Divide the portion into seven, yea, eight parts," which again signifies that one should never put all his eggs into one basket, commit all his goods to one caravan, place all his cargo in one ship, invest all his capital in one undertaking, or generally venture all on one card. 3. *Confidence in going forward.* The agriculturist who is always watching the weather—"observing the wind and regarding the clouds" (ver. 4)—will make but a poor farmer; and he who is constantly

taking fright at the fluctuations of the market will prove only an indifferent merchant. In business, as in love and war, the man who hesitates is lost. 4. *Diligence and constancy in labour.* The person who aims at success in business must be a hard and incessant, not a fitful and intermittent, worker. If a farmer, he must sow betimes in the morning, and pause not until hindered by the shades of night. If a merchant, he must trade both early and late. If an artisan, he must toil week in and week out. It is "the hand of the diligent" that "maketh rich" (Prov. x. 4).

II. THE MOTIVES TO BE CHERISHED. 1. *The expectation of a future reward.* "Thou shalt find it [thy bread] after many days." Such enterprises, though attended with risk, will not all fail, but will generally prove successful—not immediately, perhaps, but after an interval of waiting, as the ships of a foreign merchant require months, or even years, before they return with the desired profits. 2. *The anticipation of impending calamity.* As no man can foresee the future, the prudent merchant lays his account with one or more of his ventures coming to grief. Hence, in the customary phrase, he "divides the risk," and does not hazard all in one expedition. 3. *The consciousness of inability to forecast the future.* Just because of this—illustrated in vers. 3 and 5—the man who aspires to prosper in his undertakings dismisses all over-anxious care, and instead of waiting for opportunities and markets, makes them. 4. *The hope of ultimately succeeding.* Though he may often fail, he expects he will not always fail; hence he redoubles his energy and diligence. "In the morning he sows his seed, and in the evening withholds not his hand," believing that in the end his labours will be crowned with success.

Learn: 1. That business is not incompatible with piety. 2. That piety need be no hindrance to business. 3. That each may be helpful to the other. 4. That both should be, and are, a source of blessing to the world.

Vers. 7, 8.—*Carpe diem : memento mori ; or, here and hereafter contrasted.* I. HERE, A SCENE OF LIGHT; HEREAFTER, A PLACE OF DARKNESS. Under the Old Testament the abode of departed spirits was usually conceived of as a realm from which the light of day was excluded, or only dimly admitted (Job x. 21, 22).

II. HERE, A GARDEN OF DELIGHT; HEREAFTER, A WILDERNESS OF VANITY. Life beneath the sun, even to the most miserable, has pleasures which are wanting to the bodiless inhabitants of the underworld (ch. ix. 10).

III. HERE, A PERIOD OF FEW DAYS; HEREAFTER, A TERM OF MANY. At the longest, man's duration upon earth is short (Job xiv. 1; Ps. xxxix. 5); in comparison, his continuance in the narrow house, or in the unseen world, will be long.

LESSONS. 1. Enjoy life heartily, as a good gift of God. 2. Use life wisely, in preparation for the world to come.

Vers. 9, 10.—*Advice to a young man or woman.* I. A GRAND PERMISSION—to enjoy life. "Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth," etc. 1. *Not a sanction to self-indulgence.* The Preacher does not teach that a young man (or, indeed, any man) is at liberty to "make provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof" (Rom. xiii. 14); to have asserted or suggested that a youth was permitted by religion to follow his inclinations wherever they might lead, to plunge into sensuality, to sow his wild oats (as the phrase is), would have been to contradict the Law of God as given by Moses (Numb. xv. 39). 2. *Not a protest (ironical) against asceticism.* The Preacher does not say that God will judge men if they despise his gifts and refuse to enjoy them. Doubtless, in so far as asceticism springs from a contemptuous disregard of God's providential mercies, it is sinful; but this is hardly the case the Preacher has in view. 3. *But a warrant for reasonable pleasure.* The young man or maiden is informed that he or she may enjoy the morning of life to the utmost of his or her bount, "walking in the ways of his or her heart, and in the sight of his or her eyes," provided always such pleasures as are sinful are eschewed. Moreover, the Preacher's language appears to hint that such enjoyment as is here allowed is both appropriate to the season, the days of youth, and demanded by the nature of youth, being the legitimate gratification of the heart and eyes.

II. A SOLEMN WARNING—the certainty of judgment. "But know thou that for all these things," etc. The judgment of which the Preacher speaks is: 1. *Future.* The

great assize will be held, not on earth, but in the unseen world; not in time, but in eternity. That the Preacher had no clear perception of either the time, place, or nature of this judgment, is probably correct, but that he alluded to a dread tribunal in the great hereafter seems a legitimate conclusion from the circumstance that he elsewhere (ch. viii. 14) adverts to the fact that in this life men are not always requited either for their righteousness or for their wickedness. What was comparatively dark to the Preacher is to us clearly illumined, viz. that after death is the judgment (Heb. ix. 27). 2. *Divine*. The Judge will not be man, but God (ch. iii. 17; Ps. lxii. 12; Isa. xxx. 18). This fully discovered in the New Testament, which states that God shall judge men by Jesus Christ (Acts xvii. 31; Rom. ii. 16; 2 Tim. iv. 1). 3. *Individual*. The judgment will be passed, not upon mankind in the mass, or upon men in groups, but upon men as individuals (2 Cor. v. 10). 4. *Certain*. As the Preacher himself was not dubious, so would he have the young to know that the future judgment will be a momentous reality (Heb. xii. 23; 2 Pet. ii. 9).

III. AN URGENT DUTY—to banish sorrow and evil. 1. *To remove sorrow from the heart*. Either (1) the sorrow of vexation, in which case the counsel is to avoid cherishing a peevish, morose, or discontented spirit, such as arises from looking at the dark side of things, and to cultivate a cheerful disposition—a state of mind which accepts whatever lot falls to it in providence (Phil. iv. 11). Or (2) that which causes sorrow to the heart, viz. sin; in which case, again, the exhortation is to abstain from all ungodliness, the real root of heart-bitterness (Deut. xxix. 18; Prov. i. 31; Gal. vi. 8), and to follow holiness, which alone contains the secret of happiness (Ps. cvi. 3; Isa. xlviii. 18). 2. *To put away evil from the flesh*. Doubtless (1) physical evil, pain, suffering, affliction, whether occasioned by the self-inflicted tortures of asceticism or by the accidentally incurred strokes of disease—a clear injunction to promote the body's comfort and health. But also (2) everything that may induce suffering or evil in the flesh; hence once more sin which, apart altogether from those wickednesses which are against the body (1 Cor. vi. 18), has a tendency to engender disease and accelerate death.

IV. A SERIOUS REASON—the vanity of boyhood and manhood. 1. *Both are transient*. Youth and the prime of life will not last, but will pass away. Hence they should be kept as joyous and pure as possible. Only one thing more unfortunate for the after-development of the soul than a sunless youth, namely, a sinful youth. If the opening years of man's pilgrimage on the earth should be radiant with happiness, much more should they be glorified with holiness. 2. *Both are inexperienced*. Hence their fervid impulses should be moderated and restrained by the solemn considerations that spring from the brevity of life and the certainty of a future judgment.

Learn: 1. That youth should be happy and serious. 2. That man's existence has a future and a present. 3. That privilege and responsibility ever go together.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1, 2.—*Works of charity*. There can be little doubt that these admonitions apply to the deeds of compassion and beneficence which are the proper fruits of true religion. Especially in some conditions of society almsgiving is expedient and beneficial. In times of famine, in cases of affliction and sudden calamity, it is a duty to supply the need of the poor and hungry. At the same time, the indiscriminate bestowal of what is called charity unquestionably does more harm than good, especially in a state of society in which few need suffer want who are diligent, frugal, temperate, and self-denying. But there are many other ways in which benevolence may express itself beside almsgiving. The Christian is called upon to care both for the bodies and for the souls of his fellow-men—to give the bread of knowledge as well as the bread that perisheth, and to provide a spiritual portion for the enrichment and consolation of the destitute.

I. THE NATURAL EMOTION OF BENEVOLENCE IS RECOGNIZED AND HALLOWED BY TRUE RELIGION. It may be maintained with confidence that sympathy is as natural to man as selfishness, although the love of self is too often allowed by our sinful nature to overcome the love of others. But when Christ takes possession, by his Spirit, of a

man's inner nature, then the benevolence which may have been dormant is aroused, and new direction is given to it, and new power to persevere and to succeed in the attainment of its object.

II. RELIGION PROMPTS TO A PRACTICAL EXPRESSION OF BENEVOLENT FEELING. Too often sympathy is a sentimental luxury, leading to no effort, no self-denial. The poet justly denounces those who,

“Nursed in mealy-mouthed philanthropies,
Divorce the feeling from her mate—the deed.”

But the spirit of the Saviour urges to Christ-like endeavour, and sustains the worker for men's bodily, social, and spiritual good. The bread must be cast, the portion must be given.

III. BENEVOLENCE MEETS IN ITS EXERCISE WITH MANY DISCOURAGEMENTS. The bread is cast upon the waters. This implies that in many cases we must expect to lose sight of the results of our work; that we must be prepared for disappointment; that, at all events, we must fulfil our service for God and man in faith, and rather from conviction and principle than from any hope of apparent and immediate success.

IV. A PROMISE IS GIVEN WHICH IS INTENDED TO URGE TO PERSEVERANCE. What is, as it were, committed to the deep shall be found after the lapse of days. The waters do not destroy, they fertilize and fructify, the seed. Thus “they who sow in tears shall reap in joy.” In how many ways this promise is fulfilled the history of the Christian Church, and even the experience of every individual worker for God, abundantly show. In places and at times altogether unexpected and unlikely, there come to light evidences that the work has been cared for, watched over, and prospered by God himself. He does not suffer the efforts of his faithful servants to come to nought. The good they aim at, and much which never occurred to them to anticipate, is effected in God's time by the marvellous operation of his providence and his Spirit. “Be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.”—T.

Ver. 1.—*Encouragement to Christian toilers.* The lesson of this verse, if the figure be dropped, may be expressed thus: Act upon principles and not upon likelihoods.

I. A SIMILITUDE. The good we give to men when we preach and teach Divine truth, when we exercise Christian influence, is seed—fruit-bearing seed. It is a blessed, but a sacred and serious, occupation to sow the seed of spiritual life.

II. A DIRECTION. Christian sowers! cast your bread even upon the waters. 1. Even upon an unkindly soil. 2. Even in an unpromising season. 3. Liberally, though at the cost of self-sacrifice. 4. Constantly, even though it seems that the sowing has been long carried on in vain. 5. Bravely and hopefully, although the calculating, short-sighted world deride your efforts.

III. A PROMISE. After lapse of days you shall find the bread you have dispersed. 1. What is cast abroad is not destroyed. 2. Neither is it lost sight of. 3. It shall, perhaps after many days, be found again. It may be in time; it shall be in eternity. Then “he that soweth and he that reapeth shall rejoice together.”—T.

Vers. 4, 6.—*Fulfil duty and disregard consequences.* These statements and admonitions respect both natural and spiritual toil. The husbandman who labours in the fields, and the pastor and the missionary who seek a harvest of souls, alike need such counsel. The natural and the supernatural alike are under the control and government of God; and they who would labour to good purpose in God's universe must have regard to Divine principles, and must confide in Divine faithfulness and goodness.

I. THE DUTY OF DILIGENCE. Good results do not come by chance; and although the blessing and the glory are alike God's, he honours men by permitting them to be his fellow-workers. There is no reason to expect reaping unless sowing has preceded; “What a man soweth that shall he also reap.” Toil—thoughtful, patient, persevering toil—such is the condition of every harvest worth the ingathering.

II. DISSUASIVES FROM DILIGENCE. If the husbandman occupy himself in studying the weather, and in imagining and anticipating adverse seasons, the operations of

agriculture will come to a standstill. There are possibilities and contingencies before every one of us, the consideration and exaggeration of which may well paralyze the powers, hinder effective labour, and cloud the prospect of the future, so as to prevent a proper use of present opportunities. This is a temptation which besets some temperaments more than others, from which, however, few are altogether free. If the Christian labourer fixes his attention upon the difficulties of his task, upon the obduracy or ignorance of the natures with which he has to deal, upon the slenderness of his resources, upon the failures of many of his companions and colleagues, leaving out of sight all counteracting influences, the likelihood is that his powers will be crippled, that his work will stand still, and that his whole life will be clouded by disappointment. The field looks barren, the weeds grow apace, the enemy is sowing tares, the showers of blessing are withheld: what, then, is the use of sowing the gospel seed? Such are the reflections and the questionings which take possession of many minds, to their discouragement and enfeeblement and distress.

III. INDUCEMENTS TO DILIGENCE. It is not questioned that the work is arduous, that the difficulties are real, that the foes are many and powerful, that circumstances may be adverse, that the prospect (to the eye of mere human reason) may be sombre. But even granting all this, the Christian labourer has ample grounds for earnest and persevering effort. Of these, two come before us as we read these verses. 1. Our own ignorance of results. We have not to do with the consequences, and we certainly cannot foresee them. Certain it is that amazing blessings have sometimes rested upon toil in most unpromising conditions, in places and among people that have almost stricken the heart of the observer with despair. "Thou knowest not whether shall prosper, this or that." "With God nothing is impossible." 2. The express command of our Divine Lord. Results we cannot foresee. But direct commands we can understand and obey. "In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand." Such is the voice, the behest, of him who has a right to order our actions—to control and inspire our life. Whilst we have this commission to execute, we are not at liberty to waste our time and cripple our activities by moodily questioning what is likely to follow from our efforts. Surely the Christian may have faith to leave this in the hand of God!—T.

Vers. 7, 8.—*Light and darkness.* The alternation of day and night is not only contributive to human convenience, it is symbolical of human experience.

I. THERE IS APPOINTED FOR MEN THE LIGHT OF YOUTH, HEALTH, AND PROSPERITY. He who rises betimes, and, turning to the east, watches for the sunrise, and then beholds the glorious orb of day rise from the plain or from the sea, and flood hill and valley, corn-field and pasture, with the radiant splendour of the morning, can enter into the language of the preacher, "Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun." And if then he looks into the face of a companion, a noble and generous youth, unstained by sin, undimmed by care, untouched by disease, he can well understand what is meant by the morning of life, the lustre of youth, and can thank God that such a period, and such strength, joy, and hope, have been appointed as a part of human experience. In youth and bounding health and high spirits, how fresh and winsome is the present! how alluring the future! Who would wish to cast a shadow upon the brightness which God himself has created?

II. THERE IS APPOINTED FOR MEN THE DARKNESS OF AGE, INFIRMITY, ADVERSITY, AND DEATH. The same individual whom we have regarded in the prime of his powers and the beauty of his joy will, if his life be prolonged, pass through quite other experiences. Clouds will gather about his head, the storm will smite him, the dark midnight will shroud him. There is no discharge in that war—no exemption from the common lot. He may lose his health, his powers of body or of mind, his property, his friends. He must walk through the valley of death-shade. In some form or other trouble and sorrow must be his portion.

III. THE DUTY AND THE WISDOM OF REMEMBERING THE APPROACH OF THE TIME OF DARKNESS. It may be objected that it will be time enough to think of the afflictions of life when they are actually present, and that it is a pity to cloud the sunny present by gloomy forebodings. Those who know the young and prosperous are, however, well aware that their natural tendency is altogether to ignore the likelihood of a great

change in circumstances and experience. And to remember the providential appointment that our life cannot be eternal sunshine is, in many respects, a most desirable and profitable exercise. Thus shall we learn to place a due value, and no more than a due value, upon the pleasures, the diversions, the congenial pursuits of youth and prosperity. And, what is still better, thus may we be led to seek a deeper and surer foundation for our life—to acquire spiritual treasures, of which we cannot be deprived by lapse of time or change of circumstances. And thus shall we, by God's mercy, find that the darkness through which we needs must walk is but for a season, and that through it the people of God shall pass into the blessed sunshine of eternal day.—T.

Vers. 9, 10.—*In joy remember judgment!* There is certainly no asceticism in the teaching of this book. On the other hand, there is no commendation of worldliness and voluptuousness. Human nature is prone to extremes; and even religious teachers are not always successful in avoiding them. But we seem in this passage to listen to teaching which at once recognizes the claims of human nature and of the earthly life, and yet solemnly maintains the subordination of all our pleasures and occupations to the service of our Master, and to our preparation for the great account.

I. THE DIVINE PROVISION OF LIFE'S JOYS. If this language be not the language of irony—and it seems better to take it as sober serious truth,—then we are taught that the delights of this earthly existence, however they are capable of abuse, are in themselves not evil, but proofs of the Creator's benevolence, to be accepted with devout thanksgiving. In dealing with the young it is especially important to avoid warring with their innocent pleasures. These may sometimes seem to us trivial and unprofitable; but a juster view of human nature will convince us that they are wisely appointed to fulfil a certain place and office in human life.

II. THE DIVINE APPOINTMENT OF FUTURE JUDGMENT. Conscience suggests that we are responsible beings, and that retribution is a reality. What conscience suggests revelation certifies. The Bible lays the greatest stress upon individual accountability. We are taught in the text that we are not only responsible for the work we do in life, but for the pleasures we pursue. Certainly it is of the greatest advantage that men should recollect in the days of happiness the assurances of Scripture, that God shall ere long bring them into judgment. Such recollection will check any inclination to unlawful enjoyments, and will prevent undue absorption in enjoyments which are in themselves lawful, but to which a disproportionate value may be attached. There is a sense in which, as we are here reminded, "youth and the prime of life are vanity." They will prove to be so to those who imagine that they will last, to those who pride themselves in them and boast of them, to those who use them only as the opportunity of personal pleasure, to those who forget their Creator, neglect his Law, and despise his Gospel.

III. THE POSSIBILITY OF ACCEPTING GOD'S GIFTS AND OF USING THEM UNDER A SENSE OF RESPONSIBILITY, AND WITH A VIEW TO THE GREAT ACCOUNT. If every blessing in this life be taken as coming directly from the great Giver's hand, as a token of his favour, and as the result of the mediation of his blessed Son, then may the very enjoyments of this life become to Christians the occasion of present grace and the earnest of fulness of joy.—T.

Vers. 1—4, 6.—*Incentives to Christian work.* These are not the words of some very young man who has much fervour and little experience; they are those of one who has known the disappointment and disenchantment of life. They come, therefore, with the greater force to us. We gather from them—

I. THAT IT IS WELL WORTH WHILE TO SPEND OUR WHOLE STRENGTH IN LOVING SERVICE. "Cast thy bread upon the waters"—scatter the precious bread-corn, drop it into the flood; that is not the act of a fool, but of a wise man. "Give a portion to seven;" ay, go further than even that in your liberality—spend your whole strength in that which is good and beneficent, lavish your resources, let there be a generous overflow rather than a cool calculation in your service; and this whether you are acting as a citizen, as a neighbour, or as a member of the Church of Christ.

II. THAT, IF WE ARE WISE, WE SHALL LET OUR VERY IGNORANCE STIMULATE US TO EXERTION. Is it worth while to sow when we cannot be sure that we shall ever

reap? since we do not know what evil may come in a week or a day, had we not better turn the seed of the sower into bread for the eater? No; let our ignorance concerning the future be rather an incentive to activity. Say not, "I do not know what changes may come upon the earth; how little my labours may prove to be profitable; who will appreciate my devotion, and who will be unresponsive and ungrateful; therefore I shall suspend my exertions." Say rather, "I cannot tell what is coming; how soon I may be rewarded; how short may be the term of my life and of my opportunity here; I must therefore lose no time and waste no strength; I must do whole-heartedly all that is in my power. Because I cannot tell which of my words will fall like water on the rock, and which like seed upon the fertile soil, whether the morning or the evening labours will be rewarded, therefore I will do my best; perhaps this present effort I am now making may be the very one which has in it the seed of a glorious harvest." Thus our very ignorance may stimulate us to holy and fruitful action.

III. THAT WE SHOULD NOT ALLOW OURSELVES TO BE DISTURBED BY THE UNSYMPATHETIC FORCES ROUND US. If the clouds are full of rain, they will empty themselves on the earth without any regard to our necessity for fine weather; the tree will fall this way or that, according to the wind, whomsoever or whatsoever it will crush by its weight. The forces of nature are quite unsympathetic. Feebleness may incapacitate or death may take away our most efficient fellow-labourer; the changes that affect our human lives may reduce our means or remove our agents, or even close our agencies; but we must not be daunted, nor must we stay our hand on this account. The full *mind*, like the full cloud, must pour itself forth, and may do so in words and ways we do not like; the man, like the tree, must take the line toward which he strongly inclines, and this may be one that traverses our tastes and wishes. Never mind! We are not to let our good work for Christ be arrested by such incidental difficulty as that. We are to "quit us like men, and be strong," and we are to triumph over such hindrances as these.

IV. THAT WE ARE NOT TO BE IN ANY HURRY FOR THE HARVEST. The seed we cast "shall be found after many days." The husbandman hath "long patience," waiting for the fruits of the earth. The history of the noblest men is one long sermon on the blessedness of patience. It says to the Christian pilgrim and workman, "Work and wait; work diligently, intelligently, devoutly, then wait prayerfully and hopefully. Be not surprised, much less distracted, because the harvest is still far in the future; in due season you will reap, if you faint not."—C.

Ver. 4.—*The true workman.* The idea of the text is that something must be endured, and something must be dared, if we mean to achieve anything of any account. If a man wants to sow, he must not mind being assailed by the wind while he is at work; or if he wants to reap, he must not stay indoors because it threatens to rain. We must be ready to endure, we must be prepared to run risks, if we have any thought of taking rank among the successful workers of our time. God does not give his bounties to those who will only walk the road when it is perfectly smooth and sheltered; nor does he permit us to win triumphs if our heart misgives us at the sight of difficulty or danger. Success is for those, and those only, who can brave wind and rain in the open field of labour, in the wide spheres of usefulness.

I. THE FACT, AS OUR EXPERIENCE TESTIFIES. Everything that is done which is really worth doing is wrought with trouble, with some measure of difficulty and of risk, with the possibility or likelihood of failure, with struggle and some degree of disappointment—e.g. the little child in learning to walk and to talk; the boy in mastering his lesson or even his game, or in finding and taking his place in the schoolroom and the playground; the student in acquiring his knowledge, and in facing and passing his examination; the tradesman and merchant in making their purchases and investing their money; the author in writing and printing his book; the statesman in planning and submitting his measure, etc. In all these, and in all such cases, we have to contend with adverse "winds" that blow upon us; we have to "put our foot down" firmly on the ground; we have to run the risk of unpleasant "rains," of falling and of failure. It is the constant condition of human endeavour.

II. THE BENEFICENT RESULT. This is not to be regretted; on the contrary, we may be thankful for it. It develops human character; it calls forth and strengthens all that

is best within us. 1. It nourishes *fortitude*—a commendable capacity to endure; a readiness to accept, unmoved and untroubled at heart, whatever may befall us. 2. It creates and sustains *courage*—a deliberate determination to face the evil that may possibly await us. 3. It contributes to true *manliness*—the power to do and to endure anything and everything as God may will, as man may want. We pity those whose field of work, whose path of life, is unvisited by adverse winds and unpleasant rains. If they do grow up into strong and brave souls, it will be in spite of the absence of those circumstances which are most helpful in the formation of character. We have no condolence for those who have to face the strong wind and the rain; we congratulate them that they are placed where the noblest characters are shaped.

III. ITS LESSON FOR THE CHRISTIAN WORKER. Too often the workman in the Master's vineyard is inclined to lay down his weapon when the clouds gather in the heavens. But to act thus is not worthy of him. Not thus did he who "bore such contradiction of sinners against himself." Not thus have the worthiest of his disciples done—they who have done the most, and have left behind them the most fragrant memories. Not thus will they have acted who receive the gladdening commendation of their Lord "in the day of his appearing." Not thus shall we finish the work our Father has given us to do. Let the strong winds of even an unkindly criticism blow, let the dark cloud of possible failure show itself in the horizon, we will not be daunted; we will go forth to sow the good seed of the kingdom, to reap its precious harvest.—C.

Vers. 7, 8.—*The shadow of the tomb.* Let a man rejoice, says the Preacher, in his long bright days of prosperity; but let him remember that the time is drawing on when he will sleep his long sleep beneath the ground; and many as his days have been when the light of the sun was sweet to his eyes, very many more will be the days of darkness which will follow. It is open to us all to indulge in some—

I. SENTIMENTAL SADNESS, IN VIEW OF THIS LONG FUTURE. We may stroll in the churchyard, and as we read the names and ages of men who lived for thirty or forty years, but who have been in their graves for, it may be, two hundred years, we may think how small was the measure of the light on which they looked compared with that of the darkness in which they have been sleeping. And as we yield to these thoughts we feel the vanity of human affairs. Thus the shadow of the tomb falls upon and darkens the brightness of our life. It seems to us a poor thing for a man to come out of the infinite darkness behind; to walk in the sunshine for a few swiftly passing, soon-departed decades, and then go out into the immeasurable darkness on the other side. There is, however—

II. A CORRECTING THOUGHT. Why should the excellency of human life be spoiled to us by the reflection that it is limited, bound by a line which is not far off us? If it be so that there is nothing but darkness beyond, if it be true that what we see comprises all that is to be seen, then let us, for that very reason, make the most of all that we hold. If the worth of our existence is confined to the present, let us compress into the present time all the action and all the enjoyment which it will hold. Shall we not say—

"I will drink
Life to the lees. . . . Life piled on life
Were all too little, and of one to me
Little remains: but every hour is saved
From that eternal silence?"

III. THE CHRISTIAN ASPECT OF THE SUBJECT. We know that this life will soon be over, *may* reach its terminus any day, and *must* come to its conclusion before many years have gone. What shall we be concerned about in this? 1. Not the hour or act of dying. Common human fortitude will carry us through that experience, as it has done in countless millions of cases already; much more will Christian faith and hope. 2. Not the silence and darkness of the grave. What does it signify to us that our mortal body will lie long in the grave, when we are hoping to be "clothed upon with our house which is from heaven"? 3. The long future of heavenly life. Not the many days of darkness, but the long, the everlasting day of glory is before us who believe in Christ, and who hope to dwell with him for ever. For that endless day of

blissedness the life we are now living is not only the preliminary but the preparation. Therefore let every day, every hour, be sacred; be so spent in faith, in love, in holy labour, in ennobling joy, that the future will be but the continuance of the present—the continuance, but also the enlargement, the glorification. Thus shall there not fall upon the life that now is the shadow of the tomb; there shall shine upon it some beams from the glory that is beyond.—C.

Vers. 9, 10.—*Human joy and Divine judgment.* That these words are not to be taken ironically is probable, if not certain, when we consider how frequently the Preacher had given substantially the same counsel before (see ch. ii. 24; iii. 12, 22; v. 18; viii. 15; ix. 9). Moreover, we obtain an excellent meaning by taking them in their natural sense. We may indeed ask for—

I. THE NECESSITY FOR SUCH COUNSEL. It may be said—What need is there for offering such an exhortation? Young manhood is certain to take all the indulgence which is good for it, without any man's bidding; the danger is not on the side of defect, but of excess. That certainly is so generally. But there is the *religious devotee*, who thinks he is pleasing God by abstaining from all bodily comforts, and enduring all physical sufferings. There is also the *ascetic moralist*, who thinks that he is conforming to the highest standard of ethics when he practises a rigorous abstinence, and goes through life denying himself the delights to which outward nature and inward instincts invite him. There is also the *man of prudent policy*, who thinks that in a state of society such as that in which the Preacher lived and wrote, where there is no security for life or property, it is better not to enter into new relationships or to embark in great enterprises; let life be cut down to its smallest limits. Hence the necessity for such a cheery invitation as that in the text. But we must mark—

II. THE EXTENT TO WHICH IT GOES. Clearly the words must not be taken in their widest possible sense. That would be not liberty, but licence; that would not encourage enjoyment, but sanction vice. The Preacher would have the young man, who is full of strength, energy, hope, affection, have the full heritage which the Father of spirits and Author of this world intended and provided for him. Let him give play to all the sound impulses of his nature; let him taste the exquisite enjoyment of a pure affection and of happy friendship; let him be an eager and earnest competitor in the contest of strength, of skill, of the studio, of the mart, of the council, of the senate; let him throw his full energies into the activities, recreations, ambitions, aspirations, of his time; let him play his part as his heart inclines and as his capacities enable him. But let him not cross the line which divides virtue from vice, wisdom from folly, conscientiousness from unscrupulousness. For there has to be taken into account—

III. ONE POWERFULLY RESTRAINING THOUGHT. God will bring him into judgment. And God's judgment is threefold. 1. He judges us every moment, deciding whether our thought, our feeling, our action, is right or wrong; and he is thus continually approving or disapproving, and is constantly pleased or displeased. Surely this is not a Divine judgment to be disregarded. 2. He causes an evil habit to be visited, sooner or later, with the penalty which appropriately follows it—sickness, feebleness, poverty, mental incapacity, human condemnation, ruin, death, as the case may be. 3. He reserves the day of trial and of account for the hour when life is over.—C.

Ver. 10.—*The vanity and glory of youth.* (See homily on ch. xii. 1.)—C.

Vers. 1—6.—*Provision for the future.* Fruitless though many of the quests had been on which the Preacher had set out, lost though he had often been in the mazes of barren and withering speculation, something he did succeed in gaining, which he now places on record among the concluding sentences of his book. Though truth in its fulness is out of man's reach, the path of duty is plain; essential wisdom may never be discovered, but some practical lessons for the guidance of life, which after all are what most we need, are to be won from the search. Perhaps to many minds these may seem commonplace. It may be thought that after all the bustle of the enterprise, after all the zeal and energy expended in carrying it through, the gain is small. Surely some new thing of greater value might have been brought out of the far-off region of philosophy and speculation than the counsels given here to be beneficent and active, since a time may come

when we shall need the help of others, and the harvest may far exceed all our expectations. But from the very nature of the case such murmurings are unreasonable. No new thing can be brought to light in the moral world. Conscience proclaims the same duties age after age; and all that is left to him who would advance the cause of righteousness is to give clearer utterance to the voice of God in the heart, to show the imperative claims of duty, and in some instances to suggest new and weighty motives for obedience to them. None need, therefore, scorn the simple terms in which the Preacher sums up the practical lessons he would have us lay to heart. There is nothing novel or wonderful in what he says, but probably those epithets would be fairly applicable to the change that would be produced in our lives if we obeyed his counsels. There is a close connection between verse and verse in this section (vers. 1—6), but a formal division of it into logical parts is impracticable. The Hebrew or Oriental mind had a different mode of ratiocination from ours. We may, however, note the stages in the current of thought.

I. In vers. 1, 2a THE PRACTICE OF BENEVOLENCE TOWARD OTHERS is commended to us—a benevolence that is generous and profuse. “Cast thy bread,” he says, “upon the waters.” “Do not be afraid of showing kindness, even where thou seest no prospect of result or return; let the flat cake of bread, the type of food to the hungry, aid to the needy, float down the stream of life. Thou wilt find one day that thou hast hit the mark, won some grateful heart” (Bradley). His words remind us of the counsel in the Gospels “to do good, hoping for nothing again, even to the unthankful and the evil” (Matt. v. 44—46; Luke vi. 32—35).

“Répandez vos bienfaits avec magnificence,
Même aux moins vertueux ne les refusez pas.”
(Voltaire, ‘Précis de l’Ecclesiaste.’)

Let many experience your beneficence, says the Preacher; confine it not within narrow limits. He speaks of seven or eight, according to the Hebrew manner of indicating an indefinite but large number (Micah v. 5). His specification is not to be taken literally, any more than our Lord’s “seventy times seven” as indicating the literal number of times we are to forgive (Matt. xviii. 22).

II. A MOTIVE TO BENEVOLENCE is laid down in ver. 2b. “For thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth.” In the time of prosperity remember that a day of calamity and suffering may come, when the succour of the friends you have made may be of great service. Bad as men are, there are numerous instances of a grateful love recompensing benefits received long ago, which perhaps even the benefactor has long forgotten. “Peradventure for the good man some would even dare to die.” No one can tell what vicissitudes of fortune are in store for him; and therefore it is prudent to make some provision in the present against a day of adversity. The same teaching is found in the parable of the unjust steward (Luke xvi. 1—9). Those who spend some of their wealth in doing deeds of kindness and mercy (Luke xiv. 12—14) are described as laying up treasure in bags that wax not old, as providing for themselves friends who will, when this life is over, welcome them into everlasting habitations. To some this may seem but a sordid motive to benevolence; it may seem to turn that virtue into a kind of refined selfishness. But, after all, there is nothing unworthy in the motive. “Self-love is implanted in man’s nature, and men who themselves affect to despise such a motive are often themselves, with all their professed loftiness of aim, actuated by no higher objects than those of pleasure, fame, or advancement” (Wright).

III. OUR IGNORANCE OF THE FUTURE FORBIDS OUR KNOWING WHAT EVIL WILL COME UPON THE EARTH. (Ver. 2b.) The world is governed by uniform laws; both good and evil are subject to them. As it is an invariable law of nature that at a certain point the clouds that are filled with rain begin to discharge their load upon the earth, and no human power can seal them up, and as it is an invincible law that the forest tree must fall before the blast, when the force with which it resists the fury of the wind is insufficient to save it from overthrow, so the future is shaped by laws which man cannot control, and it is a mark of prudence to be prepared for any contingencies. The tempest which deluges the earth with rain, and levels the monarchs of the forest with the ground, can neither be foreseen nor averted by man; neither can the future, whether it be charged

with prosperity or adversity. The interpretation of ver. 3 as teaching that the fate of man is for ever fixed at death is utterly indefensible; there is nothing whatever in the text to indicate that the writer had any such thought in his mind. And one may say, in passing, that the teaching in question can have very little foundation, when it is principally, if not altogether, founded upon a misinterpretation of this passage. Why the advocates of the doctrine, which in itself is repulsive to our ideas of reasonableness and justice, should make so much of an obscure metaphor in the Book of Ecclesiastes, and shut their eyes to the historical statement in 1 Pet. iii. 18-20, which is decisive upon the point in question, is difficult to understand. No outcry about the obscurity of the latter passage can annul the plain statement of fact in it, viz. that Christ after his death went and preached the gospel to the spirits of those who were overtaken by the flood in the days of Noah. Uncertainty as to the future should not, however, lead to present inactivity (ver. 5). We are not to allow "taking thought for the morrow" (Matt. vi. 25) to hinder our doing good to-day; that would be as absurd as the conduct of the farmer if he were to put off from day to day the sowing or reaping of his fields because of wind or rain, until the time for sowing or for reaping had passed away. Some risk we must run in our undertakings; and if some opportunities come to us without any seeking or effort on our part, we can make others for ourselves by the exercise of our good sense, energy, or tact. "The conditions of success cannot be reckoned on beforehand; the future belongs to God, the all-conditioning" (Delitzsch). This is the idea contained in ver. 5. Two examples are given of processes of nature which are familiar to us all, but the ways and working of which are hidden from our knowledge; they are the course of the wind (not the "spirit," as in the Authorized Version), which "bloweth where it listeth" (John iii. 8), and the formation of the babe "in the womb of her who is with child." These secrets being in nature, it is not wonderful that the methods of the Divine government cannot be searched out by human wisdom or ingenuity, that the ways of God should be inscrutable and past finding out. "Even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all."

IV. THE CALL TO BENEFICENT ACTIVITY IS REPEATED. (Ver. 6.) "Since the future rests in the power of One who arranges all things, but who does not act arbitrarily, and since a finite being cannot unravel the secrets of the Infinite, man should act faithfully and fulfil energetically his appointed task" (Wright). The teaching is the same as in ch. ix. 10, "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might;" "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" (ver. 6). "In the morning of life be active; slumber not through its decline. Use well the gifts of youth; use, too, the special gifts of age. Thou knowest not which shall bear good fruit; it may be both." As men sow, they reap; the greater their exertions, the wider the area they cultivate, the richer usually is their harvest. The whole precept, says Plumptre, "is a call to activity in good, not unlike that of him who said, 'I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is called to-day: the night cometh, when no man can work' (John ix. 4); who taught men to labour in the vineyard, even though they were not called to begin their work till the eleventh hour, when it was toward evening, and the day far spent (Matt. xx. 1-16)."—J. W.

Vers. 7, 8.—*Enjoyment of the present.* The cloud of pessimism rises from the Preacher's mind as he thinks of the happiness which a well-ordered life may after all yield. God has placed some pleasures within our reach, and if we do not by our wilfulness defeat his purpose, we may enjoy much innocent peace and happiness. And this assertion, coming so closely as it does upon the admonition to be diligent in carrying out the business that we have to do, implies that it is the well-earned reward of the worker, and not the ease and luxury of the idle sensualist, that wins the word of approval. "This joy of life, based upon fidelity to one's vocation, and sanctified by the fear of God, is the truest and highest enjoyment here below" (Delitzsch). Only those have a right to enjoy life who are zealous in the discharge of the duties that belong to their lot. The order of thought is the same as in Rom. xii. 11, 12, "In diligence not slothful . . . rejoicing in hope." The Revised Version (in ver. 8) brings out the full meaning more clearly than the Authorized Version: "Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun. Yea, if a man live many

years, let him rejoice in them all; but let him remember the days of darkness, for they shall be many. All that cometh is vanity." The light here praised is the light of life; the existence passed in the world on which the sun shines, as contrasted with the darkness of the grave, the unseen world, which to the mind of the Preacher, unilluminated by the full revelation in Christ, seemed a region of shadows, dreary and insubstantial. To our thoughts such a view of the world beyond the grave, if world it could be called, in which all was dark and without any order (Job x. 21, 22), would seem calculated to rob the present of all delights. But evidently our author did not regard it as necessarily doing so. Neither did those ancient Egyptians, who had the representation of a corpse in its ceremonies at their banquets. To grosser minds among them the sight probably suggested the thought, "Let us eat and drink; for to-morrow we die." But doubtless to graver minds it suggested something nobler—that pleasure, chastened and restrained by wise foresight, is pure and more lasting than any other. So, too, the enjoyment of life commended by the Preacher is not found by him incompatible with a contemplation of death. He does not say, "Let the young and thoughtless have out their time of frivolity and short-lived mirth; the sad thoughts by which the closing years of life are naturally darkened will only come to them too soon." He rather would have men to rejoice in all the years of their life, though they be many. "Days of evil may come; clouds may, during long hours of sorrow, obscure the glory of the sun; but even if a man live many days, he should endeavour to rejoice in them all: and all the more so, if a long night of darkness awaits him at the close of his earthly career" (Wright). By the days of darkness, which are many, he evidently means the condition after death; for he distinctly differentiates them from the days of life, in all of which there should be joy, in spite of passing trials and distresses. For all men days of darkness are in store; let all, therefore, make the most of the present, and by a wise guidance of their conduct, by a beneficent activity, let them acquire the right and the ability to enjoy the innocent joys with which God has been pleased to bless and enrich our lives, seeing that "all that cometh" after life is vanity. It is true that to us the world beyond the grave appears in a different light. We believe in the everlasting felicity of the righteous in the "many mansions" which remain for those who have during this life been faithful to God, and have qualified themselves for higher service and more perfect enjoyment of him in the world to come. But this belief need not, should not, lead us to despise the bounties we have in this world from the hand of God. A devout and grateful acceptance and use of all the blessings he has bestowed upon us, a joy in living and seeing the light of the sun, should be much easier to us if we are conscious of reconciliation to God, and regard death as the entrance to a higher life.—J. W.

Ver. 9—ch. xii. 7.—*Youth and age.* The greater part of the Book of Ecclesiastes is of a sombre character. It records the experiences of one who sought on all sides and with passionate eagerness for that which would satisfy the higher wants of his nature—the hunger and thirst of the soul—but who sought in vain. Ordinary coarse, sensual pleasures soon lost their charm for him; for he deliberately tried—a dangerous experiment—to see if in self-indulgence any real satisfaction could be found. From this failure he turned to a more promising quarter. He sought in "culture," the pursuit of beauty and magnificence in art, the pathway to the highest good, on the discovery of which his soul was set. He used his great wealth to procure all that could minister to a refined taste. He built palaces, planted vineyards and gardens and orchards; he filled his palaces with all that was beautiful and costly, and cultivated every pleasure which is within the reach of man. "Whatsoever mine eyes desired," he says, "I kept not from them, I withheld not my heart from any joy. . . . Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on all the labour that I had laboured to do; and, behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun." From this he turned to the joys and employments of an intellectual life—acquired knowledge and wisdom, studied the works of nature, analyzed human character in all its phases, and applied himself to the solution of all those great problems connected with the moral government of the world and the destiny of the soul of man. Here he was baffled. The discoveries he made were, he found, useless for curing any of the evils of life, and at every point he met with mysteries which he could not solve, and his sense of failure and defeat convinced him that though "wisdom excelleth folly, as far as light

excelleth darkness," it does not satisfy the soul. "What, then, is the result of his inquiries, of his pain and labour in searching after the highest good? Do his withering speculations leave anything untouched which may reasonably be the object of our pursuit, and which may afford us the satisfaction for which he sought in vain in so many quarters? Does he decide that life is, after all, worth living, or is his conclusion that it is not? In the closing sections of his book some answer is given to these questions; something positive comes as a pleasing relief from all the negations with which he had shut up one after another of the paths by which men had sought and still seek to attain to lasting happiness. Two conclusions might have been drawn from the experience through which he had passed. "Since the employments and enjoyments of life are insufficient to give satisfaction to the soul's craving, why engage in them, why not turn away from them in contempt, and fix the thoughts solely on a life to come?" an ascetic might ask. "Since life is so transitory, pleasure so fleeting, why not seize upon every pleasure, and banish every care as far as possible?" an Epicurean might ask. "Let us eat and drink; for to-morrow we die." Neither of these courses finds any favour in the mature judgment of Solomon, or of the writer who draws his teaching from the experience of the Jewish king. "Rejoice," he says, rebuking the ascetic; "know thou that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment," he adds, for the confusion of the Epicurean. He speaks with the authority of one who had fully considered the problems of life, and with the solemnity of one whose earthly career was hastening to its close; and he addresses himself to the young, as more likely to profit by his experience than those over whom habits of life and thought have more power. But of course all, both young and old, men and women, can learn from him if they will, according to the gospel precept, "become as little children," and listen with reverence and simplicity. The counsel which the Preacher has to give is bold and startling. "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." What does he mean? Are his words ironical, or spoken in sober earnest? A very long time ago they caused some perplexity to translators and commentators. In the earliest translation of this book into another language, that into Greek, this passage was considerably modified and toned down. The translator put in the word "blameless" after "walk," and the word "not" into the next part of the sentence. "Walk *blameless* in the ways of thine heart, and *not* after the sight of thine eyes." But any such tampering with the text was not only profane, but also senseless, for it simply destroyed the whole meaning of the passage. But granting that we have in our English a fair reproduction of the original, can there be any mistake about the interpretation of it? Is it possible that it may mean, "Rejoice if you will, follow your desires, have your fling, go forth on the voyage of life, 'youth at the prow, and pleasure at the helm,' but know that the end of it all are the penal flames"? Some have thought that that is the meaning of the words. But a little consideration of them, and comparison of them with other passages in the book, will show us that it cannot be. Our author on several occasions, after showing us the vanity of earthly pursuits, falls back on the fact that there are many alleviations of our lot in life, which it is true wisdom to make use of—many flowers of pleasure on the side of the hard road which one may innocently pluck. Thus he says (ch. ii. 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 labour. This also I saw that it was from the hand of God." And again (ch. ix. 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 garments be always white; and let thy head lack no ointment. Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of thy vanity . . . for that is thy portion in this life." And the same lesson he repeats there, but in a tone of deeper solemnity, balancing and steadying the inclination to pleasure, which in few of us needs to be stimulated, with the thought that for every one of our actions we shall have to give an account at the judgment-seat of God. Surely this thought is a sufficient corrective to the abuse of the teaching which a perverse mind might make, and a proof that the enjoyments spoken of are such as do not degrade the soul. A gloomy asceticism which would unlawfully diminish human happiness is forbidden; a thankful acceptance of all the blessings God gives us, and a constant remembrance of our responsibility to

him, is commended to us. With all the repugnance of a healthy mind, our author recoils from that narrow and self-righteous fanaticism which has done so much to deepen the gloom of life, and to turn religion into an oppressive yoke. He does not, however, go to the other extreme; but while he bids the young to enjoy the morning of life, he at the same time admonishes them in all things to have the fear of God before their eyes. Youth and manhood are vanity; their joys are fleeting, and will soon be past. Must we, therefore, neglect them, and indulge in equally vain and fleeting regrets? No; but rather put away all morose repining, and spare ourselves all unnecessary pain, and cultivate a cheerful contentedness with our lot. If the morning will soon be past, let us enjoy its light while it lasts, mindful of him who is the Giver of every good and perfect gift. The thought of him will not dull any innocent happiness, for he has made us capable of joy, and given us occasions of experiencing it. That no fears need be felt about the application of this teaching to actual life is abundantly proved by the words that follow, in the solemn and stately passage with which the twelfth chapter opens. The idea all through is that piety should be bound up with the whole life—with the buoyancy and gaiety of youth, as well as with the decaying hopes and failing strength of age. That religion is not merely a consolation to which we may betake when all other things fail, but all through the food by which the soul is nourished. The fact is put very strongly. If in youth God is not remembered, it will be difficult in age, when the faculties begin to lose their vigour, to think of him for the first time, and consecrate one's self to him. The mere accumulation of the weaknesses, both physical and mental, which attend the close of life will absorb the attention and crowd out other thoughts. "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." And then he goes on to draw a picture, full of pathos and solemnity, of the gradual dissolution of human life with the advance of age, of the decay and death into which the strongest fall, even if they endure for many years. One cannot make out all the successive images with equal clearness, but the evident purpose of the whole passage is clear enough. In the evil days the light of the sun, moon, and stars is darkened, and the sky is time after time overcast with returning clouds. The light of youth has fled, and with it the self-confidence and strength by which the life was sustained. Like some household in Egypt when the plague of darkness came down upon it and put an end to all tasks and pleasures, and filled every heart with a paralyzing terror, so is the state of man "perplexed with fear of change." "The keepers of the house tremble, the strong men bow themselves, the terrified servants cease their labour, none look out of the windows, the street doors are shut, the sound of human bustle and activity dies away, the shrill cry of the storm-bird is heard without, and all the daughters of music are hushed and silent." And then, in language still more enigmatical, other of the humiliating characteristics of old age are set forth—its timidity and irresolution, the blanched hair, the failing appetite. These signs accumulate rapidly; for man goes to his long, his eternal home, and the procession of mourners is already moving along the street. "Remember," he says, "thy Creator ere the day of death; ere the silver cord be loosened which lets fall and shivers the golden bowl that feeds with oil the flame of life; ere the pitcher be shattered by the spring, and the fountain of life can no longer be replenished; ere the wheel set up with care to draw up from the depths of earth the cool waters give way and fall itself into the well. Therefore remember thy God, and prepare while here to meet him, before that the dust shall return upon the earth dust as it was; for the spirit shall then return to God who gave it." "It was a gift from him, that spirit. To him it will return. More he says not. Its absorption, the re-entering of the human unit into the eternal and unknown Spirit, would be a thought, it would seem, alien to a Hebrew. But we must not press his words too far. As just now he spoke of a judgment, but gave us no picture of the sheep on the right hand and the goats on the left, so here he has no more to say, no clear and dogmatic assertion of a conscious and separate future life. '*Into thy hands I commend my spirit*,' said the trustful psalmist. 'Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit,' said he who bowed his head upon the cross, who tasted death for our sakes. Our Preacher leaves the spirit with its God—that is all, and that is much. 'God will call us to judgment,' he has said, and now he adds, 'The body moulders, the spirit passes back to the God who gave it'" (Bradley). Many are the reasons which might be adduced to give weight to the

admonition, "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth. The uncertainty of life, *e.g.*, renders it unwise in any who begin to realize their responsibilities, and to act for themselves, to postpone self-consecration to God. If not done now, when the affections are fresh, when habits are beginning to form, there is risk of its not being done at all. Certainly it is more difficult to make a change, and to enter upon the higher life when the heart is taken up with a love of other things, when the attention and interest are absorbed in other cares. Then, too, love of our Creator and service of him are due from us in the best of our days, in the time of our strength and energy, and not merely when we are weary and worn out with following our own devices, and are anxious merely to escape utter ruin and overthrow. True it is that the repentant prodigal is welcomed when he returns to his Father's house; the worker beginning even at the eleventh hour receives his wages as though he had been the whole day in the vineyard. But their sense of gratitude, wonder, and awe at the love which has overlooked their faults and shortcomings is the source of a joy far inferior to that of those who have never wandered, who have served faithfully with all the strength and all the day, upon whom the sunshine of God's favour has ever rested. Another and final reason why it is wise to remember our Creator in the days of youth is that this is the secret of a happy life. The happiness which is disturbed by remembrance of God is not worth the name. That alone gives satisfaction—the satisfaction after which the Preacher sought so long and in so many quarters—which springs from communion with God. It alone is intense, it alone is lasting. Arising as it does from the relations of the spirit of man with him who created it, it is raised above all the accidents of time and change. The sooner, therefore, that we begin this life of holy communion and service, the longer period of happiness shall we know, the surer will be our ground of confidence for the future, when the day comes for leaving the world. "Over against the melancholy circumstances of decay and decline, as the end of life draws on, will be set the bright memories of the past, the consciousness of present help, and the hope of a joyous immortality. "Vanity of vanities; all is vanity!" was the sentence of one whose wisdom sprang only from his experience of an earthly life, and upon whose mind the burden lay of human sorrows and cares. But "a greater than Solomon," One whose wisdom is Divine, whose power to remove every burden is daily seen, has an infinitely more hopeful message for us. "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. . . . I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also."—J. W.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XII.

Ver. 1.—The division into chapters is unfortunate here, as this verse is closely connected with ver. 10 of the preceding chapter. **Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth.** Set God always before thine eyes from thy earliest days; think who made thee, and what thou wast made for, not for self-pleasing only, not to gratify thy passions which now are strong, but that thou mightest use thy powers and energy in accordance with the laws of thy being as a creature of God's hands, responsible to him for the use of the faculties and capacities with which he has endowed thee. The word for "Creator" is the participle of the verb *bara*, which is that used in Gen. i. 1, etc., describing God's work. It is plural in form, like *Elohim*, the plural being that of majesty or excellence (comp. Job xxxv. 10; Isa liv. 5). It is used here as an appellation

of God, because the young have to bethink themselves that all they are and all they have come from God. Such plurals are supposed by some to be divinely intended to adumbrate the doctrine of the Holy Trinity—a dark saying containing a mystery which future revelation should explain. "He that made thee" is a common phrase in Ecclesiasticus (see iv. 6; vii. 30; xxxix. 5). It is to be noted that Grätz reads "cistern" or "fountain" in place of "Creator," and explains this term to mean "wife," as in Prov. v. 15—18. But the alteration has nothing to support it, and is most unnecessary, though Cheyne seems inclined to adopt it ('Job and Solomon,' *in loc.*). While the evil days come not; *i.e.* before they come. "Days of evil;" *ai hēmerai tēs katanias* (Septuagint) (Matt. vi. 34); *tempus afflictionis* (Vulgate). The phrase refers to the grievances and inconveniences of old age, which are further and graphically de-

scribed in the following verses, though whether the expressions therein used regard literal anatomical facts, or are allegorical representations of the gradual decay of the faculties, has been greatly disputed. Probably both opinions contain a partial truth, as will be noted in our Exposition. Ginsburg considers that the allusion is not to the ills that in the course of time all flesh is heir to, but rather to that premature decay and suffering occasioned by the unrestrained gratification of sensual passions, such as Cicero intimates ('De Senect.', ix. 29), "*Libidinosæ et intemperans adolescentia effatum corpus tradit senectuti*." There is nothing specially in the text to support this view, and it is most reasonable to see here generally a figurative description of decay, whatever may be the cause. I have no pleasure in them. Ere the time comes when a man shall say, "I have no pleasure in life." Thus the aged Barzillai asks, "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?" (2 Sam. xix. 35).

Ver. 2.—From this verse onwards there is great diversity of interpretation. While some think that the approach of death is represented under the image of a storm, others deem that what is here intended is first the debility of old age, and then, at ver. 6, death itself, which two stages are described under various metaphors and figures. While the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars, be not darkened. Under these figures the evil days spoken of above, the advent and infirmities of old age, are represented. It would be endless and unprofitable to recount the explanations of the terms used in the following verses. Every commentator, ancient and modern, has exerted his ingenuity to force the poet's language into the shape which he has imagined for it. But, as we said above, there are at least two distinct lines of interpretation which have found favour with the great majority of expositors. One of these regards the imagery as applicable to the effects of a heavy storm upon a house and its inmates, explaining every detail under this notion; the other regards the terms used as referring to the man himself, adumbrating the gradual decay of old age, the various members and powers that are affected being represented under tropes and images. Both interpretations are beset with difficulties, and are only with some straining and accommodation forced into a consistent harmony. But the latter seems to us to present fewer perplexities than the other, and we have adopted it here. At the same time, we think it expedient to give the other view, together with our own, as there is much to

be said in its favour, and many great writers have declared themselves on its side. Wright supposes (and makes a good case for his theory) that Koheleth is referring especially to the closing days of winter, which in Palestine are very fatal to old people. The seven last days, indeed, are noted even now as the most sickly and dangerous of all the year. The approach of this period casts a dark shadow upon all the inhabitants of the house. The theory is partly borne out by the text, but, like the other solutions, does not wholly correspond to the wording. In the present verse the approach of old age, the winter of life, is likened to the rainy season in Palestine, when the sun is obscured by clouds, and the light of heaven darkened by the withdrawal of that luminary, and neither moon nor stars appear. And the clouds return after the rain; i.e. one storm succeeds another (Job xxxvii. 6). The imagery is intended to represent the abiding and increasing inconveniences of old age. Not like the spring-time of life and season, when sunshine and storm are interchanged, winter and old age have no vicissitudes, one dreary character invests them both. The darkening of the light is a common metaphor for sorrow and sadness (see Job xxx. 26; xxxiii. 28, 30; Ezek. xxxii. 7, 8; Amos viii. 9). The symbolism of the details in this verse has been thus elucidated: The diurnal light appertain to the soul, the nocturnal to the body; the sun is the Divine light which illumines the soul, the moon and the stars are the body and the senses which receive their radiance from the soul's effulgence. These are all affected by the invasion of old age. Some consider that this verse depicts the changes which pass over the higher and more spiritual part of man's nature, while the succeeding imagery refers to the breaking-up of the corporeal frame. We should say rather that ver. 2 conveys a general impression, and that this is then elaborated into particulars. According to the interpretation mentioned above, a gathering tempest is here depicted, the details of which are worked out in the following verses.

Ver. 3.—The gradual decay which creeps over the body, the habitation of the spirit, is depicted under the figure of a house and its parts (comp. Job iv. 19; 2 Cor. v. 1; 2 Pet. i. 13, 14). In the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble; i.e. this is the case when, etc. The hands and arms are appropriately called the keepers of the house, for with them (as Volok quotes from Galen) man ὀπλίζει καὶ φρουρεῖ τὸ σῶμα παντοῶς ("arms and guards his body in various ways"). The shaking and palsy of old men's limbs are thus graphically described. This would be one of the first symptoms discerned by an observer. Taking the alternative in-

torpretation, we should see in these "keepers" the menservants who keep watch before the house. These menials are appalled by the approach of the tempest, and quake. And the strong men shall bow themselves. The "men of power" are the legs, or the bones generally, which in the young are "as pillars of marble" (Cant. v. 15), but in the old become feeble, slack, and bent. Delitzsch quotes 3 Macc. iv. 5, where we read of a multitude of old men being driven mercilessly, "stooping from age, and dragging their feet heavily along." In this clause it is this stooping and bending of the body that is noticed, when men are no longer upright in stature, "swifter than eagles," "stronger than lions" (2 Sam. i. 23; 1 Chron. xii. 8), fit for war and active employment. It is therefore less appropriate to see in the "keepers" the legs, and in the "strong men" the arms. Otherwise, the latter are the masters, the wealthy and noble, in contradistinction to the menials before mentioned: both lords and servants are equally terrified at the approach of the tempest, or, as Wright would say, at the touch of the sickly season (see on ver. 2). And the grinders cease because they are few. The word for "grinders" is feminine (*αἱ ἀλθρουσαι*, "the grinding-women," Septuagint), doubtless because grinding was especially women's business (Matt. xxiv. 41). By them are meant the teeth, as we speak of *molars*, though, of course, the term here applies to all the teeth; so the Greeks used the term *μύλαι* for the *dentes molares*. These, becoming few in number and no longer continuous, cannot perform their office. Otherwise, the grinding-women leave their work or pause in their labours at the approach of the storm, though one does not quite see why they should be fewer than usual, unless the sickly season has prostrated most of their companions, or that many are too frightened to ply their task. Having, therefore, harder work than usual, they stop at times to recruit themselves. But the analogy rather breaks down here; one would be inclined to suppose that their decreased numbers would make them apply themselves more assiduously to their necessary occupation. As the "keepers" in the former part of the verse were slaves, so these grinders are slaves, such occupation being the lowest form of service (see Exod. xi. 5; Judg. xvi. 21; Job xxxi. 10). Those that look out of the windows be darkened. These are the eyes that look forth from the cavities in which they are sunk; they are regarded as the windows of the bodily structure, the eyelashes or eyelids possibly being deemed the lattice of the same. Plumptre cites Cicero, 'De Nat. Deor.,' ii. 140: "Sensus interpretes ac nuntii rerum, in capite, tam-

quam in arce, mirifice ad usus necessarios et facti et collocati sunt. Nam oculi, tamquam speculatores, altissimum locum obtinent; ex quo plurima conspiciunt, fungantur suo munere." The dimness in the eye and the failing in the powers of sight are well expressed by the terms of the text. It is noted of Moses, as something altogether abnormal, that at a hundred and twenty years of age "his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated" (Deut. xxxiv. 7). Taking the alternative interpretation, we must regard those that look out of the windows as the ladies of the house, who have no menial work to do, and employ their time in gazing idly from the lattices (comp. Judg. v. 28; 2 Sam. vi. 16; Prov. vii. 6). These "are darkened," they are terror-stricken, their faces gather blackness (Joel ii. 6), or they retire into corners in terror of the storm. These women are parallel to "the strong men" mentioned above; so that the weather affects all of every class—menservants and maidservants, lords and ladies.

Ver. 4.—The doors shall be shut in the streets. Hitherto the symbolism has been comparatively easy to interpret. With this verse inextricable difficulties seem to arise. Of course, in one view it is natural that in the bitter weather, or on the appearance of a tempest, the doors towards the street should be closed, and none should leave the house. But what are meant by the doors in the metaphorical house, the body of the aged man? Jewish expositors understood them to be the pores, or excretive apertures of the body, which lose their activity in old age—which seems an unseemly allusion. Plumptre will have them to be the organs which carry on the processes of sensation and nutrition from the beginning to the end; but it seems a forced metaphor to call these "double-doors." More natural is it to see in the word, with its dual form, the mouth closed by the two lips. So a psalmist speaks of the mouth, the door of the lips (Ps. cxli. 3; comp. Micah vii. 5). As it is only the external door of a house that could be employed in this metaphor, the addition, "in [or, 'towards'] the streets," is accounted for. When the sound of the grinding is low. The sound of the grinding or the mill is weak and low when the teeth have ceased to masticate, and, instead of the crunching and grinding of food, nothing is heard but a munching and sucking. The falling in of the mouth over the toothless gums is represented as the closing of doors. To take the words in their literal sense is to make the author repeat himself, reiterating what he is supposed to have said before in speaking of the grinding-women—all labour is lessened or stopped. The sound of grinding betokened cheerfulness and prosperity; its

cessation would be an ominous sign (see Jer. xxv. 10; Rev. xviii. 22). Another interpretation considers this clause to express the imperfect vocal utterance of the old man; but it is hardly likely that the author would call speech "the voice of the grinding," or of the mill, as a metaphor for "mouth." And he shall rise up at the voice of the bird. This is a very difficult sentence, and has been very variously explained. It is usually taken to mean that the old man sleeps lightly and awakes (for "rises up" may mean no more than that) at the chirrup of a bird. The objection to this interpretation is that it destroys the figurative character of the description, introducing suddenly the personal subject. Of course, it has another signification in the picture of the terror-stricken household; and many interpreters who thus explain the allegory translate the clause differently. Thus Ginsburg renders, "The swallow rises to shriek," referring to the habits of that bird in stormy weather. But there are grammatical objections to this translation, as there are against another suggestion, "The bird (of ill omen) raises its voice." We need not do more than refer to the mystical elucidation which detects here a reference to the resurrection, the voice of the bird being the archangel's trumpet which calls the dead from their graves. Retaining the allegory, we must translate the clause, "He [or, 'it,' i.e. the voice] rises to the bird's voice;" the old man's voice becomes a "childish treble," like the piping of a little bird. The relaxation of the muscles of the larynx and other vocal organs occasions a great difference in the pitch or power of tone (compare what Hezekiah says, Isa. xxxviii. 14, "Like a crane or a swallow so did I chatter," though there it is the low murmur of sorrow and complaint that is meant). And all the daughters of music shall be brought low. "The daughters of song" are the organs of speech, which are now humbled and fail, so that the man cannot sing a note. Some think that the ears are meant, as St. Jerome writes, *Et obsurdescunt omnes filix carminis*, which may have some such notion. Others arrive at a similar signification from manipulation of the verb, thus eliciting the sense—The sounds of singing-women or song-birds are dulled and lowered, are only heard as a faint, unmeaning murmur. This exposition rather contradicts what had preceded, viz. that the old man is awoke by the chirrup of a sparrow; for his ears must be very sensitive to be thus easily affected; unless, indeed, the "voice of the bird" is merely a note of time, equivalent to early cock-crowing. We must not omit Wright's explanation, though it does not commend itself to our mind. He

makes a new stanza begin here: "When one rises at the voice of the bird," and sees here a description of the approach of spring, as if the poet said, "When the young and lusty are enjoying the return of genial weather, and the concert of birds with which no musician can compete, the aged, sick in their chambers, are beset with fears and are sinking fast." We fail altogether to read this meaning in our text, wherein we recognize only a symbolical representation of the old man's vocal powers. It is obvious to cite Juvenal's minute and painful description of old age in 'Sat.,' x. 200, etc., and Shakespeare's lines in 'As You Like It' (act ii. sc. 7), where the reference to the voice is very striking—

"His big, manly voice,

Turning again toward childish treble, pipes
And whistles in his sound."

Cox paraphrases, "The song-birds drop silently into their nests," alarmed at the tempest.

Ver. 5.—Also when they shall be afraid of that which is high. There is no "when" in the original, which runs, "Also, or yea, they fear on high." "They" are old men, or, like the French *on*, "people" indefinitely; and the clause says that they find difficulty in mounting an ascent, as the Vulgate renders, *Excelsa quoque timebant*. Shortness of breath, asthmatic tendencies, failure of muscular power, make such an exertion arduous and burdensome, just as in the previous verse a similar cause rendered singing impossible. The description is now arriving at the last stage, and allegorizing the closing scene. The steep ascent is the *via dolorosa*, the painful process of dying, from which the natural man shrinks; for as the gnome says—

Τὸν ζῆν γὰρ οὐδέτις ὡς δ' ἡγηδάσκων ἐρᾷ.

"None dotes on life more than the aged man."

The old man is going on the appointed road, and fears shall be in the way; or, *all sorts of fears* (plural of intensity) *are in the path*; as in his infirm condition he can walk nowhere without danger of meeting with some accident, so analogously, as he contemplates his end and the road he has to travel, "fearfulness and trembling come upon him, and horror overwhelms him" (Ps. lv. 5). Plumptre sees in these clauses a further adumbration of the inconveniences of old age, how that the decrepit man makes mountains of mole-hills, is full of imaginary terrors, always forecasting sad events, and so on; but this does not carry on the picture to the end which the poet has now in view, and seems tame and commonplace. The supporters of the storm-theory explain the

passage as denoting the fears of the people at what is coming from on high—the gathering tempest, these fears extending to those on the highway,—which is feeble. **And the almond tree shall flourish; or, it is in blossom.** The old man is thus figured from the observed aspect of this tree. It blossoms in winter upon a leafless stem, and its flowers, at first of a pale pink colour, turn to a snowy whiteness as they fall from the branches. The tree thus becomes a fit type of the arid, torpid-looking old man with his white hair. So Wright quotes Virgil, ‘Æneid,’ v. 416—

“Temporibus geminis canebat sparsa senectus;”

though there the idea is rather of mingled black and grey hair than of a head of snowy whiteness. Caution Tristram (‘Nat. Hist. of the Bible,’ p. 332), referring to the usual version of this clause, adds, “But the better interpretation seems to be, that as the almond blossom ushers in the spring, so do the signs referred to in the context indicate the *hastening* (*shaked*, ‘almond,’ meaning also ‘hasten’) of old age and death.” Plumptre adopts the notion that the name of the tree is derived from a stem meaning “to watch,” and that thus it may be called the *early-waking tree* (see Jer. i. 11), the enigmatic phrase describing the wakefulness that often attends old age. But this seems a refinement by no means justified by the use of the word. Others find in the verb the signification “to disdain, loathe,” and explain that the old man has lost his taste for almond nuts, which seems to be an unnecessary observation after the previous allusions to his toothless condition, the cracking and eating of such things requiring the grinders to be in perfect order. The versions are unanimous in translating the clause as the Authorized Version. Thus the Septuagint, ἀρθοῦ τὸ ἀμυγδαλόν: Vulgate, *forebit amygdalus*. (So Venet. and the Syriac.) Wright takes this clause and the next to indicate the opening of spring, when nature reawakens from its winter sleep, and the dying man can no longer respond to the call or enjoy the happy season. The expositors who adhere to the notion of the storm would translate, “the almond shall be rejected,” alluding to fear taking away appetite; but the rendering is faulty. **And the grasshopper shall be a burden.** *Chagab*, rendered “grasshopper” here and Lev. xi. 22; Numb. xiii. 33, etc., is rightly translated “locust” in 2 Chron. vii. 13. It is one of the smaller species of the insect, as is implied by its use in Isa. xl. 22, where from the height of heaven the inhabitants of earth are regarded as *chagabim*. The clause is usually explained to mean that the very lightest burden is troublesome to old age, or that the hopping and chirping of

these insects annoy the querulous senior. But who does not see the incongruity of expressing the disinclination for labour and exertion by the figure of finding a grasshopper too heavy to carry? Who would think of carrying a grasshopper? Plumptre, who discovers Greek allusions in the most unlikely places, sees here an intimation of the writer’s acquaintance with the Athenians’ custom of wearing a golden grasshopper on their heads as a token that they were *autochthones*, “sprung from the soil.” Few will be disposed to concur with this opinion. Ginsburg and others consider that Koheleth is regarding the locust as an article of food, which it was and still is in the East (Lev. xi. 21, 22; Matt. iii. 4). In some places it is esteemed a great delicacy, and is cooked and prepared in a variety of ways. So here the writer is supposed to mean that dainties shall tempt in vain; even the much-esteemed locust shall be loathed. But we cannot imagine this article of food, which indeed was neither general nor at all seasons procurable, being singled out as an appetizing esculent. The solution of the enigma must be sought elsewhere. The Septuagint gives, καὶ παχυνθήσῃ ἡ ἀκρίς: the Vulgate, *impinguabitur locusta*, “the locust grows fat.” Founded on this rendering is the opinion which considers that under this figure is depicted the corpulence or dropsical swelling that sometimes accompanies advanced life. But this morbid and abnormal condition could not be introduced into a typical description of the usual accompaniments of age, even if the verb could be rightly translated as the Greek and Latin versions give it, which is more than doubtful. Delitzsch, after some Jewish interpreters, considers that under the term “locust” is meant the *coxa*, the loins or hips, or *caput femoris*, which is thus named “because it includes in itself the mechanism which the two-membered foot for springing, placed at an acute angle, presents in the locust.” The poet is thought to allude to the loss of elasticity in the hips and the inability to bear any weight. We cannot agree to the propriety of this artificial explanation, which seems to have been invented to account for the expressions in the text, rather than to be founded on fact. But though we reject this elucidation of the figure, we think Delitzsch and some others are right in taking the verb in the sense of “to move heavily,” “to crawl along.” “The locust crawls,” i.e. the old man drags his limbs heavily and painfully along, like the locust just hatched in early spring, and as yet not furnished with wings, which makes its way clumsily and slowly. The analogy derives another feature from the fact, well attested, that the appearance of the locust was synchronous with the days considered

most fatal to old people, namely, the seven at the end of January and the beginning of February. So we now have the figure of the old man with his snow-white hair, panting and gasping, creeping painfully to his grave. One more *trait* is added. And desire shall fail. The word rendered "desire" (ἡ κάρη) is found nowhere else in the Old Testament, and its meaning is disputed. The Authorized Version has adopted the rendering of some of the Jewish commentators (and that of Venet., ἡ ὄρεσις), but, according to Delitzsch, the feminine form of the noun precludes the notion of an abstract quality, and the etymology on which it rests is doubtful. Nor would it be likely that, having employed symbolism hitherto throughout his description, the writer would suddenly drop metaphor and speak in unfigurative language. We are, therefore, driven to rely for its meaning on the old versions, which would convey the traditional idea. The Septuagint gives, ἡ κάρη, and so the Vulgate, *capparis*, by which is designated the caper tree or berry, probably the same as the hyssop, which is found throughout the East, and was extensively used as a provocative of appetite, a stimulant and restorative. Accordingly, the writer is thought here to be intimating that even stimulants, such as the caper, affect the old man no longer, cannot give zest to or make him enjoy his food. Here, again, the figurative is dropped, and a literal, unvarnished fact is stated, which mars the perfection of the picture. But the verb here used (*parar*) is capable of another signification, and is often found in the unmetaphorical sense of "breaking" or "bursting;" so the clause will run, "and the caper berry bursts." Septuagint, καὶ διασκεδασθῇ ἡ κάρη: Vulgate, *dissipabitur capparis*. The fruit of this plant, when overripe, bursts open and falls off—a fit image of the dissolution of the aged frame, now ripe for the tomb, and showing evident tokens of decay. By this interpretation the symbolism is maintained, which perhaps is further illustrated by the fact that the fruit hangs down and droops from the end of long stalks, as the man bows his head and stoops his back to meet the coming death. Because (καὶ) man goeth to his long home. This and the following clause are parenthetical, ver. 6 resuming the allegory. It is as though Koheleth said—Such is the way, such are the symptoms, when decay and death are approaching; all these things happen, all these signs meet the eye, at such a period. "His long home;" εἰς οἶκον αἰώνιον αὐτοῦ (Septuagint), "to the house of his eternity," "his everlasting habitation," i.e. the grave, or Hades. There is a similar expression in Tobit iii. 6, εἰς τὸν αἰώνιον τόπον, which in the Hebrew editions of that book is given as, "Gather me to my fathers, to the

house appointed for all living," with which Canon Churton (*in loc.*) compares Job x. 21; xxx. 23. So Ps. xlix. 11 (according to many versions), "their graves are their houses for ever." The σκευαὶ αἰώνιοι of Luke xvi. 9 are a periphrasis for life in heaven. Diodorus Siculus notes that the Egyptians used the terms αἰθίοι οἶκοι and ἡ αἰώνιος οἰκῆσις of Hades (i. 51; i. 93). The expression, "domus eterna," appears at Rome on tombs, as Plumptre observes, both in Christian and non-Christian inscriptions; and the Assyrians name the world or state beyond the grave "the house of eternity" ('Records of the Past,' i. 143). From the expression in the text nothing can be deduced concerning Koheleth's eschatological views. He is speaking here merely phenomenally. Men live their little span upon the earth, and then go to what in comparison of this is an eternity. Much of the difficulty about αἰώνιος, etc., would be obviated if critics would remember that the meaning of such words is conditioned by the context, that e.g. "everlasting" applied to a mountain and to God cannot be understood in the same sense. And the mourners go about the streets. This can hardly mean that the usual funeral rites have begun; for the death is not conceived as having already taken place; this is reserved for ver. 7. Nor can it, therefore, refer to the relations and friends who are sorrowing for the departed. The persons spoken of must be the mourners who are hired to play and sing at funerals (see 2 Sam. iii. 31; Jer. ix. 17; xxxiv. 5; Matt. ix. 23). These were getting ready to ply their trade, expecting hourly the old man's death. So the Romans had their *præfixæ*, and persons "qui conducti plorant in funere" (Horace, 'Ars Poet.' 431).

Ver. 6.—Or ever; i.e. before, ere (*ad asher lo*). The words recall us to vers. 1 and 2, bidding the youth make the best use of his time ere old age cuts him off. In the present paragraph the final dissolution is described under two figures. The silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken. This is evidently one figure, which would be made plainer by reading "and," instead of "or," the idea being that the lamp is shattered by the snapping of the cord that suspended it from the roof. But there are some difficulties in the closer explanation of the allegory. The "bowl" (*gullah*) is the reservoir of oil in a lamp (see Zech. iv. 3, 4), which supplies nourishment to the flame; when this is broken or damaged so as to be useless, the light, of course, is extinguished. The Septuagint calls it τὸ ἀνθέμιον τοῦ χυρσίον: the Vulgate, *villa aurea*, "the golden fillet," or "flower ornament" on a column, which quite sinks the notion of a light being quenched. The "cord" is that

by which the lamp is hung in a tent or a room. But of what in man are these symbols? Many fanciful interpretations have been given. The "silver cord" is the spine, the nerves generally, the tongue; the "golden bowl" is the head, the membrane of the brain, the stomach. But these anatomical details are not to be adopted; they have little to recommend them, and are incongruous with the rest of the parable. The general break-up of life is here delineated, not the progress of destruction in certain organs or parts of the human frame. The cord is what we should call the thread of life, on which hangs the body lit by the animating soul; when the connection between these is severed, the latter perishes, like a fallen lamp lying crushed on the ground. In this our view the cord is the living power which keeps the corporeal substance from falling to ruin; the bowl is the body itself thus upheld. The mention of gold and silver is introduced to denote the preciousness of man's life and nature. But the analogy must not be pressed in all possible details. It is like the parables, where, if defined and examined too closely, incongruities appear. We should be inclined to make more of the lamp and the light and the oil, which are barely inferred in the passage, and endeavour to explain what these images import. Koheleth is satisfied with the general figure which adumbrates the dissolution of the material fabric by the withdrawal of the principle of life. What is the immediate cause of this dissolution, injury, paralysis, etc., is not handled; only the rupture is noticed and its fatal result. Another image to the same effect, though pointing to a different process, is added. Or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or (*and*) the wheel broken at (*in*) the cistern. The picture here is a deep well or cistern with an apparatus for drawing water; this apparatus consists of a wheel or windlass with a rope upon it, to which is attached a bucket; the wheel fails, falls into the well, the bucket is dashed to pieces, and no water can be drawn. It is best to regard the two clauses as intended to convey one idea, as the two at the beginning of the verse were found to do. Some commentators, not so suitably, distinguish between the two, making the former clause say that the pitcher is broken on its road to or from the spring, and the latter that the draw-wheel gives way. The imagery points to one notion which would be weakened by being divided into two. The motion of the bucket, the winding up and down, by which water is drawn from the well, is an emblem of the movements of the heart, the organs of respiration, etc. When these cease to act, life is extinct. The fraction of the cord and the

demolition of the bowl denoted the separation of soul and body; the breaking of the pitcher and the destruction of the wheel signify the overthrow of the bodily organs by which vital motion is diffused and maintained, and the man lives. The expressions in the text remind one of the term, "earthen vessel," applied by St. Paul (2 Cor. iv. 7) to the human body; and "the fountain of life," "the water of life," so often mentioned in Holy Scripture as typical of the grace of God and the blessedness of life with him (see Ps. xxxvi. 9; Prov. xiii. 14; John iv. 10, 14; Rev. xxi. 6).

Ver. 7.—Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was; rather, *and the dust return*, etc.—the sentence begun above being still carried on to the end of the verse. Here we are told what becomes of the complex man at death, and are thus led to the explanation of the allegorical language used throughout. Without metaphor now it is stated that the material body, when life is extinct, returns to that matter out of which it was originally made (Gen. ii. 7; iii. 19; comp. Job xxxiv. 15; Ps. civ. 29). So Siracides calls man "dust and ashes," and asserts that all things that are of the earth turn to the earth again (Eccles. x. 9; xl. 11). Soph., 'Electra,' 1158—

Ἀντὶ φιλτάτης
Μορφῆς σποδὸν τε καὶ σκιὰν ἀνοφελῆ.

"Instead of thy dear form,
Mere dust and idle shadow."

Corn. à Lapide quotes a remarkable parallel given by Plutarch ('Apol. ad Apollon.,' 110) from Epicharmus, "Life is compounded and broken up, and again goes whence it came; earth indeed to earth, and the spirit to upper regions." And the spirit shall return unto God who gave it; or, *for the spirit*—the clause being no longer subjunctive, but speaking indicatively of fact. In the first clause the preposition "to" is *ἐν*, in the second *ἐκ*, as if to mark the distinction between the downward and the upward way. The writer now rises superior to the doubts expressed in ch. iii. 21 (where see note), "Who knoweth the spirit of man, whether it goeth upward," etc.? It is not that he contradicts himself in the two passages, as some suppose, and have hence regarded ver. 7 as an interpolation; but that after all discussion, after expressing the course of his perplexities, and the various phases of his thought, he comes to the conclusion that there is a future for the individual soul, and that it shall be brought into immediate connection with a personal God. There is here no thought of its being absorbed in the *anima mundi*, in accordance with the heathen view, which, if it believed

diply in an immortality, denied the personality of the soul (see Eurip., 'Suppl.,' 529—534; Lucret., ii. 998, *sqq.*; iii. 455, *sqq.*). Nor have we any opinion given concerning the adverse doctrines of creationism and traducianism, though the terms used are most consistent with the former. God breathed into man's nostrils the breath of life; when this departs, he who gave receives it; God "gathereth in" man's breath (Ps. civ. 29). The clause, taken in this restricted sense, would say nothing about the soul, the personal "I;" it would merely indicate the destination of the vital breath; and many critics are content to see nothing more in the words. But surely this would be a feeble conclusion of the author's wanderings; rather the sentence signifies that death, releasing the spirit, or soul, from the earthly tabernacle, places it in the more immediate presence of God, there, as the Targum paraphrases the passage, returning to stand in judgment before its Creator.

Ver. 8.—It has been much questioned whether this verse is the conclusion of the treatise or the commencement of the epilogue. For the latter conclusion it is contended that it is only natural that the beginning of the final summing-up should start with the same words as the opening of the book (ch. i. 2); and that thus the conjunction "and," with which ver. 9 begins, is readily explained. But the treatise is more artistically completed by regarding this solemn utterance as the conclusion of the whole, ending with the same burden with which it began—the nothingness of earthly things. Koheleth has laboured to show this, he has pursued the thought from beginning to end, through all circumstances and conditions, and he can only re-echo his melancholy refrain. **Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher.** He does not follow the destiny of the immortal spirit; it is not his purpose to do so; his theme is the fragility of mortal things, their unsatisfying nature, the impossibility of their securing man's happiness: so his voyage lands him at the point whence he set forth, though he has learned and taught faith in the interval. If all is vanity, there is behind and above all a God of inflexible justice, who must do right, and to whom we may safely trust our cares and perplexities. *Koheleth*, "Preacher," here has the article, *the Koheleth*, as if some special reference was made to the meaning of the name—he who has been debating, or haranguing, or gathering together, utters finally his careful verdict. This is the sentence of the ideal Solomon, who has given his experiences in the preceding pages.

Vers. 9-14.—THE EPILOGUE. This contains some observations commendatory of

the author, explaining his standpoint and the object of the book, the great conclusion to which it leads.

Vers. 9-11.—Koheleth as teacher of wisdom.

Ver. 9.—And moreover; וְעוֹד; καὶ περὶ ἄλλου (Septuagint); rather, with the following *et, besides that*. The Preacher was wise. If we render "because the Preacher was wise," we are making an unnecessary statement, as the whole book has demonstrated this fact, which goes without saying. What the writer here asserts is that Koheleth did not merely possess wisdom, but had made good use of it for the instruction of others. The author throws aside his disguise, and speaks of his object in composing the book, with a glance at the historical Solomon whom he had personated. That he uses the third person in relation to himself is nothing uncommon in historical memoirs, etc. Thus Daniel writes; and St. John, Thucydides, Xenophon, Caesar, mask their personality by dropping their identity with the author (comp. also ch. i. 2; vii. 27). The attestation that follows is compared with that at the end of St. John's Gospel (xxi. 24), and is plainly intended to confirm the authority of the writer, and to enforce on the hearer the conviction that, though Solomon himself did not compose the work, it has every claim to receive attention, and possesses intrinsic value. He still taught the people knowledge. As well as being esteemed one of the company of sages, he further (*od*) took pains to instruct his contemporaries (*τὸν ἀνθρώπον*, Septuagint), to apply his wisdom to educational purposes. **Yea, he gave good heed; literally, he weighed** (like our word "ponder"); only thus used in this passage. It denotes the careful examination of every fact and argument before it was presented to the public. Sought out, and set in order many proverbs. There is no copula in the original; the weighing and the investigation issued in the composition of "proverbs," which term includes not only the wit and wisdom of past ages in the form of pithy sayings and apophthegms, but also parables, truths in metaphorical guise, riddles, instructions, allegories, etc., all those forms which are found in the canonical Book of Proverbs. The same word (*mishe*) is used here as in the title of that book. Koheleth, however, is not necessarily referring to that work (or to 1 Kings iv. 29, etc.), or implying that he himself wrote it; he is only putting forth his claim to attention by showing his patient assiduity in the pursuit of wisdom, and how that he adopted a particular method of teaching. For the idea contained in the verb *taqan*, "to place or make straight" (ch. i. 15 vii. 13), applied to

literary composition, Delitzsch compares the German word for "author" (*Schriftsteller*). The notion of the *maschal* being similitude, comparison, the writer's pondering and searching were needed to discover hidden analogies, and, by means of the known and familiar, to lead up to the more obscure and abstruse. The Septuagint has a curious and somewhat unintelligible rendering, *καὶ οὗς ἐξηκινύσεται κόσμιον παραβολῶν*, "And the ear will trace out the order of parables," which Schleusner translates, "elegantos parabolas."

Ver. 10.—The Preacher sought to find out acceptable words; literally, *words of delight*; *λόγους θελήματος* (Septuagint); *verba utilia* (Vulgate); so Aquila, *λόγους χρείας*. The word *chephets*, "pleasure," occurs in ch. v. 4; xii. 1. Thus we have "stones of pleasure" (Isa. liv. 12). He added the grace of refined diction to the solid sense of his utterances. Plumptre reminds us of the "gracious words" (*λόγους τῆς χάριτος*, Luke iv. 22) which proceeded from the mouth of him who, being the Incarnate Wisdom of God, was indeed greater than Solomon. On the necessity of a work being attractive as well as conforming to literary rules, Horace long ago wrote ('*Ars Poet.*' 99)—

"Non satis est pulchra esse poemata; dulcia
sunto,
Et quocunque volent animum auditoris
agunto."

"'Tis not enough that poems faultless be,
And fair; let them be tender too, and draw

The hearer by the cord of sympathy."

St. Augustine is copious on this subject in his treatise, 'De Doctr. Christ.'; thus (iv. 26): "Proinde illa tria, ut intelligant qui audiunt, ut delectentur, ut obediunt, etiam in hoc genere agendum est, ubi tenet delectatio principatum. . . . Sed quis movetur, si nescit quod dicitur? Aut quis tenetur ut audiat, si non delectatur?" And that which was written was upright, even words of truth. The Authorized Version, with its interpolations, does not accurately convey the sense of the original. The sentence is to be regarded as containing phrases in apposition to the "acceptable words" of the first clause; thus: "Koheth sought to discover words of pleasure, and a writing in sincerity, words of truth." The Septuagint has, *καὶ γεγραμμένον εὐθύτητος*, "a writing of uprightness;" Vulgate, *et conscripsit sermones reclusissimos*. The meaning is that what he wrote had two characteristics—it was sincere, that which he really thought and believed, and it was true objectively. If any reader was disposed to cavil, and to depreciate the worth

of the treatise because it was not the genuine work of the celebrated Solomon, the writer claims attention to his production on the ground of its intrinsic qualities, as inspired by the same wisdom which animated his great predecessor.

Ver. 11.—The words of the wise are as goads. The connection of this verse with the preceding is maintained by the fact that the "acceptable words," etc., are words of the wise, emanate from the same persons. Herewith he proceeds to characterize them, with especial reference to his own work. The goad was a rod with an iron spike, or sharpened at the end, used in driving oxen (see Judg. iii. 31; 1 Sam. xiii. 21; Eccclus. xxxviii. 25; Acts ix. 5). Words of wisdom are called goads because they rouse to exertion, promote reflection and action, restrain from error, impel to right; if they hurt and sting, the pain which they inflict is healthful, for good and not for evil. And as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies. The proposition "by" is an interpolation, and the sentence should run: *And like nails fastened [are] the, etc.—masmeroth*, "nails," as in Isa. xli. 7. There is much difficulty in explaining the next words, *רִשְׁפָּה בַּלְּבָבָה* (*baale asuppoth*). We have had similar expressions applied to possessors in ch. x. 11, "lord of the tongue," and "lord of wings" (ch. x. 20); and analogy might lead us to apply the phrase here to persons, and not things; but in Isa. xli. 15 we find a threshing-instrument termed "lord of teeth;" and in 2 Sam. v. 20 a town is called Baal-Perazim, "Lord of breaches;" so we must be guided by other considerations in our exposition. The Septuagint, taking the whole sentence together, and regarding *baale* as a preposition, renders, "As nails firmly planted, (*ὡς παρὰ τῶν συνθεμάτων ἐδόθησαν ἐκ ποιμένος ἑνός*) which from the collections were given from one shepherd." Schleusner takes *ὡς παρὰ τῶν συνθεμάτων* to mean, "li quibus munus datum erat collectionem faciendi," i.e. the author, of collections. The Vulgate has, *Verba . . . quæ per magistrorum consilium data sunt a pastore uno*. The "masters of assemblies" can only be the chiefs of some learned conclaves, like the great synagogue supposed to exist in the time of Ezra and later. The clause would then assert that these pundits are like fastened nails, which seems rather unmeaning. One might say that their uttered sentiments became fixed in the mind as nails firmly driven in, but one could not properly say this of the men themselves. A late editor, Gietmann, suggests that "lords of collection" may mean "brave men, heroes, gathered in line of battle," serried ranks, just as in Prov. xxii. 20 the term *shalishim*, chariot-fighters, chieftains,

is applied to choice proverbs. Thus he would say that the words of the wise are as goads because they stimulate the intellect, as nails because they readily find entrance, and like men in battle array when they are reduced to writing and marshalled in a book. This is certainly ingenious, but somewhat too artificial to be regarded as the genuine intention of the writer. It seems best to take the word translated "assemblies" as denoting collections, not of people, but of proverbs; and the compound phrase would thus mean proverbs of an excellent character, the best of their sort gathered together in writing. Such words are well compared to nails; they are no longer floating loosely about, they are fixed in the memory, they secure other knowledge, and, though they are separate utterances, they have a certain unity and purpose. Nails are often used proverbially as emblems of what is fixed and unalterable. Thus *Æschyl.*, 'Suppl.' 944—

Τῶν δ' ἐφ' ἡλῶται τοῦτ'
Γόμφος διαμπαῖς, ὥς μένειν ἀρρότους.

"Through them a nail is firmly fixed, that they
May rest immovable."

Cicero, 'Verr.' ii. 5. 21, "Ut hoc beneficium, quemadmodum dicitur, trabali clavo figeret;" i.e. to make it sure and steadfast (comp. Horace, 'Carm.' i. 35. 17, *et seq.*). Which are given from one shepherd. All these words of the wise, collections, etc., proceed from one source, or are set forth by one authority. Who is, this shepherd? Some say that he is the *archisynagogus*, the president of the assemblies of wise men, to whose authority all these public utterances are subjected. But we do not know that such supervision existed or was exercised at the time when Koheleth wrote; and, as we saw above, there is probably no reference to any such assemblies in the passage. The "one shepherd" is doubtless Jehovah, who is called the Shepherd of Israel, who feeds his people like a flock, etc. (see Gen. xlviii. 15; xlix. 24; Ps. xliii. 1; lxxx. 1, etc.). The appellation is here used as connoins with the thought of the ox-goad, intimating that God watches and leads his people like a tender shepherd and a skillful farmer. This is an important claim to inspiration. All these varied utterances, whatever form they take, whether his own or his predecessor's, are outcomes of wisdom, and proceed from him who is only wise, Almighty God. It is no disparagement of this work to imply that it is not the production of the true Solomon; Koheleth is ready to avow himself the writer, and yet claims a hearing as being equally moved by heavenly influence. It is like St. Paul's

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assertion (1 Cor. vii. 40), "I think that I also have the Spirit of God."

Vers. 12.—14.—The author warns against profitless study, and gives the final conclusion to which the whole discussion leads.

Ver. 12.—And further, by these, my son, be admonished; rather, and what is more than these, be warned. Besides all that has been said, take this additional and important caution, viz. what follows. The clause, however, has been differently interpreted, as if it said, "Do not attempt to go beyond the words of the sages mentioned above;" or, "Be content with my counsels; they will suffice for your instruction." This seems to be the meaning of the Authorized Version. The personal address, "my son," so usual in the Book of Proverbs, is used by Koheleth in this place alone. It does not necessarily imply relationship (as if the pseudo-Solomon was appealing to Rehoboam), but rather the condition of pupil and learner, sitting at the feet of his teacher and friend. Of making many books there is no end. This could not be said in the time of the historical Solomon, even if we reckon his own voluminous works (1 Kings iv. 32, 33); for we know of no other writers of that date, and it is tolerably certain that none existed in Palestine. But we need not suppose that Koheleth is referring to extraneous heathen productions, of which, in our view, there is no evidence that he possessed any special knowledge. Doubtless many thinkers in his time had treated of the problems discussed in his volume in a far different manner from that herein employed, and it seemed good to utter a warning against the unprofitable reading of such productions. Juvenal speaks of the insatiable passion for writing in his day ('Sat.' vii. 51)—

"Tenet insanabile multos
Scribendi cacœthes et ægro in corde senescit;"

which Dryden renders—

"The charms of poetry our souls bewitch;
The curse of writing is an endless itch."

As in taking food it is not the quantity which a man eats, but what he digests and assimilates, that nourishes him, so in reading, the rule, *Non multa, sed multum*, must be observed; the gorging the literary appetite on food wholesome or not impedes the healthy mental process, and produces no intellectual growth or strength. The obvious lesson drawn by spiritual writers is that Christians should make God's Word their chief study, "turning away from the profane babblings and oppositions of the knowledge which is falsely so called" (1 Tim. vi. 20). For as St. Augustine says

X

('De Doctr. Christ.'). "Whereas in Holy Scripture you will find everything which has been profitably said elsewhere, to a far greater extent you will therein find what has been nowhere else enunciated, but which has been taught solely by the marvellous sublimity and the equally marvellous humility of the Word of God." Much study is a weariness of the flesh. The two clauses in the latter part of the verse are co-ordinate. Thus the Septuagint, *Τοῦ ποιῆσαι βιβλία πολλά οὐκ ἔστι περασμός, καὶ μελέτη πολλὰ κόπῳσις* ("weariness") *σαρκός*. The word for "study" (*lahag*) is not found elsewhere in the Old Testament, nor in the Talmud, but the above meaning is sustained by its connection with an Arabic word signifying "to be eager for." The Vulgate (like the Septuagint) renders it *meditatio*. You may weary your brain, exhaust your strength, by protracted study or meditation on many books, but you will not necessarily thereby gain any insight into the problems of the universe or guidance for daily life. Marcus Aurelius dissuades from much reading: "Would you examine your whole composition?" he says; "pray, then let your library alone; what need you puzzle your thoughts and over-grasp yourself?" Again, "As for books, never be over-eager about them; such a fondness for reading will be apt to perplex your mind, and make you die displeased" ('Medit.', ii. 2, 3, Collier). So Ben-Sira affirms, "The finding out of parables is a wearisome labour of the mind" (Ecclus. xiii. 26).

Ver. 13.—The teaching of the whole book is now gathered up in two weighty sentences. Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter. The Revised Version gives, *This is the end of the matter; all hath been heard*. The Septuagint has, *Τέλος λόγου, τὸ πᾶν ἤκουε*, "The end of the matter, the sum, hear thou;" Vulgate, *Finem loquendi pariter omnes audiamus*. Another rendering is suggested, "The conclusion of the matter is this, that [God] taketh knowledge of all things;" literally, "everything is heard." Perhaps the passage is best translated, *The end of the matter, when all is heard, is this*. The first word of this verse, *soph*, "end," is printed in the Hebrew text in large characters, in order to draw attention to the importance of what is coming. And its significance is rightly estimated. These two verses guard against

very possible misconception, and give the author's real and mature conclusion. When this is received, all that need be said has been uttered. **Fear God** (*ha-Elohim*), and **keep his commandments**. This injunction is the practical result of the whole discussion. Amid the difficulties of the moral government of the world, amid the complications of society, varying and opposing interests and claims, one duty remained plain and unchanging—the duty of piety and obedience. For this is the whole duty of man. The Hebrew is literally, "This is every man," which is explained to mean, "This is every man's duty." Septuagint, *Ὅτι τοῦτο πᾶς ὁ ἄνθρωπος*: Vulgate, *Hoc est enim omnis homo*. For this man was made and placed in the world; this is his real object, the chief good which he has to seek, and which alone will secure contentment and happiness. The obligation is put in the most general terms as applicable to the whole human family; for God is not the God of the Jews only, but of Gentiles also (Rom. iii. 29).

Ver. 14.—The great duty just named is here grounded upon the solemn truth of a future judgment. **For God shall bring every work into judgment**. It will then be seen whether this obligation has been attended to or not. The judgment has already been mentioned (ch. xi. 9); it is here more emphatically set forth as a certain fact and a strong motive power. The old theory of earthly retribution had been shown to break down under the experience of practical life; the anomalies which perplexed men's minds could only be solved and remedied by a future judgment under the eye of the omniscient and unerring God. **With every secret thing**. The Syriac adds, "and manifest thing." The Septuagint renders, "with everything that has been overlooked"—a very terrible, but true, thought. The doctrine that the most secret things shall be revealed in the *dies iræ* is often brought forward in the New Testament, which makes plain the personal nature of this final investigation, which the earlier Scriptures invest with a more general character (see Rom. ii. 16; xiv. 12; 1 Cor. iv. 5). So this wonderful book closes with the enunciation of a truth found nowhere else so clearly defined in the Old Testament, and thus opens the way to the clearer light shed upon the awful future by the revelation of the gospel.

HOMILETICS.

Ver. 1.—"Remember thy Creator." I. REMEMBER: WHOM? "Thy Creator." The language implies: 1. *That man has a Creator*. It would certainly be strange if he had not, seeing that all things else have. And that Creator is not himself, since he

is at best a dependent creature (Gen. iii. 19); or an inferior divinity, since there is none such (2 Sam. vii. 22; Isa. xlv. 6); but (1) *God*, the one living and true God (1 Thess. i. 9), the Almighty Maker of the universe (Gen. i. 1; Exod. xx. 11; Ps. cxxiv. 8; Isa. xl. 28; Jer. x. 16), and therefore of man (Gen. i. 26; Deut. iv. 32; Ps. c. 3; Acts xvii. 25, 26, 28); and (2) *Jesus Christ*, the Image of the invisible God (2 Cor. iv. 4; Col. i. 15), and the unbeginning Word of God (John i. 1), by whom all things were made (John i. 3), whether they be things in heaven or on earth, visible or invisible (Col. i. 16), and therefore from whom man derives his being. 2. *That man originally knows God*. That even in his fallen condition he is not entirely destitute of a knowledge of God—not, perhaps, a knowledge clear and full, but still real and true—appears to be the teaching of Scripture (Rom. i. 21, 28) as well as of experience, no man ever requiring to argue himself into a belief in God's existence, though many try to reason themselves out of it. 3. *That man may forget God*. Moses was afraid lest Israel should be guilty of so doing (Deut. vi. 12), in which case they would be no better than the heathen peoples around them (Ps. ix. 17). Practically this is the world's sin to-day (1 John iv. 8), and the sin against which Christians have to guard (Heb. iii. 12). It is specially the sin against which young persons should be warned, that of allowing the thought of God to slip out of their minds.

II. REMEMBER: HOW? 1. *By thinking of his Person*. A characteristic of the wicked is that God is not in all their thoughts (Ps. x. 4); whereas a good man remembers God upon his bed, and meditates upon him in the night watches (Ps. lx. 3). 2. *By reflecting on his character*. The Creator being neither an abstract conception nor an inanimate force, but a living and personal Intelligence, he is also possessed of attributes, the sum of which compose his character or name; and one who would properly remember him must frequently permit his thoughts to dwell on these (Ps. xx. 7), as David (Ps. lx. 3) and Asaph (Ps. lxxvii. 3) did—on his holiness, his loving-kindness, his faithfulness, his truth, his wisdom, his justice, all of which have been revealed in Jesus Christ, and so made much more easily the subjects of study. 3. *By acknowledging his goodness*. God's bounties in providence and mercies in grace must be equally recalled and thankfully retained before the mind, as David aptly said to himself (Ps. ciii. 1, 2) and protested before God (Ps. xlii. 6). One who simply accepts God's daily benefits as the lower animals do, for consumption but not for consideration, is guilty of forgetting God; who knows about, but never pauses to thank God for his unspeakable grace in Christ, comes far short of what is meant by remembering his Creator. 4. *By meditating in his Word*. Those who lovingly remember God will not forget that he has written to them in the Scriptures words of grace and truth, and will, like the good man of the Hebrew Psalter (i. 2), meditate therein day and night. Where God's Law, with its wise and holy precepts, is counted as a strange thing (Hos. viii. 12), no further proof is needed that God himself is forgotten. The surest evidence that "no man remembered the poor wise man" was found in this, that his wisdom was despised, and his words were not heard (ch. ix. 16). 5. *By keeping his commandments*. As Joseph's recollection of Jehovah helped him to resist temptation and avoid sin (Gen. xxxix. 9), so a sincere and loving remembrance of God will show itself in doing those things that are pleasing in his sight. When Christ asked his disciples to remember him, he meant them to do so, not simply by thinking of and speaking about him, or even by celebrating in his honour a memorial feast (Luke xxii. 19), but also by doing whatsoever he had commanded them (John xv. 14).

III. REMEMBER: WHEN? "In the days of thy youth." 1. *Not then only*. The remembrance of God is a duty which extends along the whole course of life. No age can be exempted from it, as none is unsuitable for it. The notion that religion, while proper enough for childhood or youth, is neither demanded by nor becoming in manhood, is a delusion. The heart-worship and life-service of God and Jesus Christ are incumbent upon, needed by, and honourable to, old as well as young. 2. *But then firstly*. The reasons will be furnished below; meantime it may be noticed that Scripture writers may be said to be unanimous in recommending early piety; in teaching that youth, above all other periods, is the season for seeking God. Moses (Deut. xxxi. 13), David (Ps. xxxiv. 11), Solomon (Prov. iii. 1, 2), and Jesus (Matt. vi. 33) combine to set forth the advantage as well as duty of giving one's early years to God and religion.

IV. REMEMBER: WHY? 1. *Why remember one's Creator?* (1) Because he is infinitely worthy of being remembered. (2) Because he is entitled to be remembered on the simple ground of being Creator. (3) Because without this remembrance of him both happiness is impossible here and salvation hereafter. (4) Because the human heart is prone to forget him, and remember only either his creatures or his comforts. 2. *Why remember him in the way above specified?* (1) Because any remembrance short of that is incomplete, insincere, formal, external, and therefore essentially worthless. (2) Because the above is the sort of remembrance that is demanded by Scripture. (3) Because only such remembrance is worthy of being presented to God. 3. *Why remember him in youth?* (1) Because youth, as the first portion of a man's life, is due to God. (2) Because youth, as the formative period of life, is the most important time for acquiring religious habits (Prov. xxii. 6). (3) Because youth, as the happiest season in life, is the time in which God can most easily be remembered. Then "the evil days" of business and worry, of temptation and sin, of affliction and sorrow, of disease and decay, have not come; and the soul, besides being comparatively disengaged, is also in a mood for yielding to devout and holy impressions. (4) Because if God is not remembered in youth he is apt to be forgotten in age.

Learn: 1. The real essence of religion—fellowship with God. 2. The dignity of man—that he is capable of such fellowship. 3. The responsibility of youth—for shaping all one's after-life. 4. The evanescence of earthly joys—all doomed to be eclipsed by the darkness of evil days.

Vers. 2-8.—*The last scene of all; or, "man goeth to his long home."* I. THE APPROACH OF DEATH. 1. *The decay of man's higher faculties.* "Or ever the sun, and the light, and the moon, and the stars be darkened, and the clouds return after the rain" (ver. 2). Accepting the guidance of the best interpreters (Delitzsch, Plumptre—for other interpretations consult the Exposition), we may see: (1) In the sun an emblem of man's spirit, elsewhere compared to the lamp of Jehovah (Prov. xx. 27), and described by Christ as "the light that is in thee" (Matt. vi. 23), and in its light a symbol of the spirit's activity of apprehension—thought, memory, imagination, etc. (2) In the moon a figure for the animal soul, "by means of which the spirit becomes the principle of the life of the body (Gen. ii. 7)," and which as the weaker vessel (it, according to Hebrew ideas, being regarded as female, while the spirit is male) is comforted by the spirit (Ps. xlii. 6). (3) In the stars an allegorical representation of the five senses, by which the soul has cognizance of the outer world, and the light of which is dim and feeble in comparison with that of the soul and spirit, or of the reason and intelligence of man. (4) In the clouds that return after the rain, a materialized picture of those calamities and misfortunes, sicknesses and sorrows, "which disturb the power of thought, obscure the consciousness, and darken the mind," and which, though leaving man for a while, return again after a season "without permitting him long to experience health" (Delitzsch). 2. *The failure of man's bodily powers.* Picturing man's corporeal frame as a house, the Preacher depicts its ruinous condition as old age approaches. (1) The keepers of the house tremble. The aged person's arms, "which bring to the house (of the body) whatever is suitable for it, and keep away from it whatever threatens to do it injury," now, touched with infirmity, shake, "so that they are able neither to grasp securely, to hold fast and use, nor actively to keep back and forcibly avert evil" (Delitzsch). (2) The strong men bow themselves. The legs, in young men like marble pillars (Cant. x. 16), are in aged persons loose, feeble, and inclined to stoop. (3) The grinders, or the grinding-women, cease. That these are the molars, or teeth, which perform the work of mastication, is apparent; so is the reason why they are not now at work, viz. because in aged persons they are few. (4) Those that look out of the windows are darkened. The eyes, called by Cicero "the windows of the mind" ('Tusc.,' i. 20), become dim, and as a consequence the soul's eyes, which look through the body's eyes, lose their power of perception. (5) The doors are shut in the street. These are probably the lips, which in old age are usually closed and drawn, because the teeth have disappeared. (6) The sound of the grinding is low. The noise made by an old man in mastication is that of a low munching, he being unable any more to crack, crunch, or break his food. (7) One rises up at the sound of a bird. So timid and nervous, and so light a sleeper,

is the old man, that if even a bird chirps he awakes, and, being put off his rest, is obliged to rise. (8) The daughters of music are brought low. Not so much the old man's powers of singing are diminished, his once strong and manly treble having become so feeble and low as to be scarcely audible (Isa. xxxviii. 14), as the old man, like Barzillai (2 Sam. xix. 35), has now no longer an ear for the voice of singing-men and singing-women, so that to him as a consequence "the daughters of song" must lower their voices, i.e. must retire so as no longer to disturb him, now so feeble as to be "terrified by the twittering of a little bird." (9) That which is high causes fear (ver. 5). To the old man "even a little hillock appears like a high mountain; and if he has to go a journey he meets something that terrifies him" (Targum, 'Midrash'). Decrepit old men "do not venture out, for to them a damp road appears like a very morass, a gravelly path as full of neck-breaking hillocks, an undulating path as fearfully steep and precipitous, that which is not shaded as oppressively hot and exhausting" (Delitzsch). (10) The almond tree blossoms. An emblem of the winter of age, with its silvery white hair. (11) The grasshopper is a burden, or the grasshopper drags itself along. Either so small a thing as the chirping of a grasshopper annoys the old man (Zöckler)—the obvious sense of the former clause; or the middle of the body, which in an old man resembles a grasshopper, drags itself along with difficulty (Delitzsch). (12) The caper-berry fails. The appetite, which this particular condiment is supposed to stimulate, ceases; the stomach can no more by means of it be roused from its dormant and phlegmatic condition. So low and feeble is he that "no quinine or phosphorus can help him now" (Plumptre).

II. THE DISSOLUTION OF THE SOUL AND BODY. 1. *The loosening of the silver cord, and the breaking of the golden bowl.* (1) The figure. A golden bowl or lamp suspended from the roof of a house or tent by a silver cord, through the sudden snapping of which it, the golden bowl or lamp, is precipitated to the ground, thus extinguishing its light. (2) The interpretation. If the silver cord be "the soul directing and bearing the body as living," the lamp or the golden bowl will be "the body animated by the soul and dependent on it" (Delitzsch); or, if the golden bowl be "life as manifested through the body," then the silver cord will be "that on which the continuance of life depends" (Plumptre); or, again, if the silver cord be the spinal marrow, then the golden bowl will be the brain to which the spinal marrow stands related as silver to gold (Fausset). 2. *The breaking of the pitcher at the fountain, and of the wheel at the cistern.* (1) The image. That of a pitcher, which is used for letting down by a rope or chain into a well or fountain, becoming shattered at the fountain's side through the sudden breaking down of the wheel during the process of drawing water. (2) The significance. The action of the lungs and the heart, the one of which, like a pitcher or bucket, draws in the air-current which sustains life, and the other of which pumps up the blood into the lungs; or the wheel and the pitcher may be the breathing apparatus, and the pitcher at the fountain the heart which raises the blood (Delitzsch).

III. THE DESTINATION OF THE SEVERED PARTS. 1. *Of the body.* "The dust returns to the earth as it was" (ver. 7). As the body came forth from the soil, so to the soil it reverts (Gen. iii. 19). 2. *Of the soul.* "The spirit returns unto God who gave it." Whatever may have been the Preacher's opinion at an earlier period (ch. iii. 21), he was now decided as to three things: (1) that man had, or was, a spirit, as distinguished from a body; (2) that this spirit, as to origin, proceeded from God (Gen. ii. 7; Job xxxii. 8); and (3) that on separating from the body it did not cease to be, but ascended to him from whom it came—not to be reabsorbed into the Divine essence, as if it had originally emanated therefrom, but to preserve in God's presence an independent existence, as the Targum translates, "The spirit will return to stand in judgment before God who gave it to thee."

IV. THE LAST TRIBUTE OF AFFECTION. "The mourners go about the streets" (ver. 5). 1. *Sorrowing for the departed.* Probably the Preacher describes either the professional mourners who go about the streets, in anticipation of the dying man's departure, ready to offer their services the moment he expires (Delitzsch), or the actual procession of such mourners following the dead man's funeral to its place of sepulture (Plumptre). Still, it is permissible to think of the deceased's relatives, who, like Abraham mourning for Sarah (Gen. xxiii. 2), and Martha and Mary for Lazarus

(John xi. 31), give expression to their sadness by going about the streets in the garb of sorrow. 2. *Exciting the sympathy of the living.* This is one reason why private griefs are paraded in public. The heart in times of weakness, such as those occasioned by bereavement, instinctively craves the compassion of others, to whom, accordingly, it appeals by the visible cerements of woe.

Learn: 1. The mercy of God as seen in the gradual approach of death. 2. The wisdom of improving the seasons of youth and manhood. 3. The solemn mystery of death. 4. The duty of preparing for a life beyond the grave. 5. The lawfulness of Christian mourning.

Vers. 9, 10.—*A model preacher.* I. A WISE MAN. 1. *Possessed of secular knowledge.* Gathered as precious spoil from all departments of human learning and experience. As much of this sort of wisdom as possible; the more of it the better. All knowledge can be rendered subservient to the preacher's art, and may be utilized by him for the instruction of his hearers. 2. *Endowed with heavenly wisdom.* If that, much more this, is indispensable to an ideal preacher. The wisdom that cometh from above as much superior to that which springeth from below as heaven is higher than earth, and eternity longer than time. A preacher without the former wisdom may be rude; without the latter he must be ineffective.

II. A DILIGENT STUDENT. Like Koheleth, he must ponder, seek out, and set in order the truth he desires to communicate to others; like Timothy, he must give attendance to reading (1 Tim. iv. 13). In particular, he should be a student: 1. *Of the sacred Scriptures.* These divinely inspired writings, being the principal source of heavenly wisdom accessible to man (2 Tim. iii. 16), should be the preacher's *vade mecum*, or constant companion. 2. *Of human nature.* Having to deal directly with this, in the way of bringing to bear upon it the teachings of Scripture, he ought to acquaint himself accurately with it, by a close and patient study of it in himself and others. Much of a preacher's efficiency is derived from his knowledge of the audience to which he speaks. 3. *Of the material creation.* Like Job (xxxvii. 14), David (Ps. viii. 3; cxliii. 5), and Koheleth (ch. vii. 13), he should consider the works of God. Besides having much to tell him of God's glory (Ps. viii. 1; Rom. i. 20), the physical universe can impart to him valuable counsel of a moral kind concerning man and his duties (Job xii. 7; Prov. vi. 6; Matt. v. 26).

III. A SKILFUL TEACHER. As Koheleth taught the people knowledge, as Ezra caused the people to understand the reading (Neh. viii. 8), as Christ according to his Word taught such as listened to him (Mark x. 1), as the apostles taught the things of the Lord to their hearers (Acts iv. 2; xi. 26; xviii. 25), so must a model preacher be an instructor (1 Tim. iii. 2; iv. 11; vi. 2; 2 Tim. ii. 2). To be thus successfully, in addition to the wisdom and study above described, he will need four kinds of words. 1. *Words of truth.* These must constitute the burden of his discourse, whether oral or written. What he publishes to others must be objectively true, and no mere guess-work or speculation. Such a word of truth was the Law of God in the Hebrew Scriptures (Ps. cxix. 43), and is the gospel or the doctrine of Christ in the New Testament (Eph. i. 13; Col. i. 5; 2 Tim. ii. 15; Jas. i. 18). 2. *Words of uprightness.* Whether he writes or speaks, he must do so sincerely, with perfect integrity of heart, "not handling the Word of God deceitfully" (2 Cor. iv. 2), but teaching out of honest personal conviction, saying, "We believe, therefore do we speak" (2 Cor. iv. 13). 3. *Words of delight.* Selected and intended, not to gratify the hearer's corrupt inclinations and perverted tastes, or minister to that love of novelty and sensation which is the peculiar characteristic of itching ears (2 Tim. iv. 3), but to set forth the truth in such a way as to win for it entrance into the hearer's heart and mind. For this purpose the preacher's words should be such as to interest and sway the listener, arresting his attention, exciting his imagination, instructing his understanding, moving his affections, quickening his conscience, and impelling his will. Dulness, darkness, dryness, deadness, are inexcusable faults in a preacher.

Vers. 11, 12.—*Reading, writing, speaking.* I. "READING MAKES A FULL MAN." 1. *Pushed to excess,* it becomes hurtful to the body. "Much study is a weariness to the flesh," and as a consequence, reflexively, injurious to the mind. 2. *Pursued in*

moderation, it first enlightens the understanding, next quickens the whole spiritual nature, and finally tends to stimulate the health of the body. "A man's wisdom maketh his face to shine" (ch. viii. 1).

II. "WRITING MAKES A CORRECT MAN." If professional authorship in the Preacher's day was a nuisance, much more is it so in ours. Yet in book-writing lie advantages as well as disadvantages. If, on the one hand, the multiplication of books often signifies nothing more than an accumulation of literary rubbish, and a terrible infliction to those who must read them, on the other hand it secures the preservation and distribution of much valuable knowledge; while if the knowledge is not valuable, the formal deposition of it in a book, which may be quietly consigned to a library, secures that it shall not roam at large, to the disquieting of peace-loving minds. But, apart from the multiplication of volumes, the habit of setting down one's thoughts in writing is attended by distinct advantages. It promotes: 1. *Clearness of thought*. One who intends to write, more especially for the information of his fellows, must know what he purposes to say. The effort of putting one's ideas on paper imparts to them a definiteness of outline they might not otherwise possess. 2. *Order in arrangement*. No writer will, voluntarily, fling his thoughts together into a confused heap, but will strive to render them as lucid and luminous as possible. If for no other reason than this, the practice of preparing for public speech by means of writing is to be commended. 3. *Brevity in expression*. If brevity is the soul of wit, and loquacity the garment of dulness, then the sure way of attaining to the former, and avoiding the latter, is to write.

III. "SPEAKING MAKES A READY MAN." "The words of the wise are as goads, and as nails." Though designed to apply to the wise man's "written words," the clause may be accepted as correct also with reference to his "spoken words." Like the former, the latter are as goads and nails. 1. *They stimulate*. The words of a practised speaker, always supposing him to be a wise man, incite the minds and quicken the hearts of his hearer. The true preacher should be progressive, not only in his own discovery of truth, but in conducting his hearers into fresh fields of instruction, leading them out into "regions beyond," causing them to "forget the things that are behind, and reach forward unto those things that are before," persuading them to "leave the first principles of Christ, and to go on unto perfection." 2. *They abide*. They lodge themselves in the understanding and affections so firmly that they cannot be removed. Facility in arousing and fixing conviction can only be attained by diligent and wise cultivation of the art of speech.

Vers. 13, 14.—"*The conclusion of the whole matter; or, the whole duty of man.*" I. THE ESSENCE OF IT. 1. *The fear of God*. Not servile or guilty, but (1) reverential, such as the Divine greatness and glory are fitted to inspire (Deut. xxviii. 58; Ps. lxxxix. 7; Matt. x. 28; Heb. xii. 28); (2) filial, such as a child might cherish towards a parent (Ps. xxxiv. 11; Heb. xii. 9). 2. *The service of God*. Not that merely of external worship (Deut. vi. 11; Ps. xcvi. 9; Heb. x. 25), but that of inward devotion (John iv. 24), which expresses itself in the homage of the heart and life, or in the keeping of God's commandments—in particular of the three named by the Preacher, charity, industry, hilarity (Cox).

II. THE REASON OF IT. The certainty of judgment. 1. *By God*. He is the Judge of all the earth (Gen. xviii. 25); the Judge of all (Heb. xii. 23), who will yet judge the world in righteousness (Acts xvii. 31). 2. *In the future*. Not merely here upon the earth, but also hereafter in the world to come (Dan. vii. 10; Matt. xi. 22; xvi. 27; 1 Cor. iv. 5; 2 Tim. iv. 1). 3. *Of works*. Not of nations or communities, but of individuals (Mark viii. 38; Rom. ii. 5, 6); not of open actions merely, but of secret things as well (Luke xii. 2; Rom. ii. 16; 1 Cor. iii. 13; iv. 5); not of good deeds only, but also of evil (2 Cor. v. 10; 2 Pet. ii. 9).

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ver. 1.—*Youthful religion*. The Preacher spoke from a heart taught by long experience. Himself advanced in years, having enjoyed and suffered much, having

long observed the growth of human character under diverse principles and influences, he was able to offer to the young counsel based upon extensive knowledge and deliberate reflection.

I. THE DESCRIPTION HERE GIVEN OF THE RELIGIOUS LIFE. Amplifying this terse and impressive language, we may hear the wise man addressing the youthful, and saying, "Remember that thou hast a Creator; that thy Creator ever remembers thee; that he not only deserves, but desires, thy remembrance; that his character should be remembered with reverence, his bounty with gratitude, his Law with obedience and submission, his love with faith and gladness, his promises with prayerfulness and with hope."

II. THE PERIOD HERE RECOMMENDED FOR THE RELIGIOUS LIFE. Religion is indeed adapted to the whole of our existence; and what applies to every age of life, applies with especial force to childhood and youth. 1. Youth has peculiar susceptibilities of feeling, and religion appeals to them. 2. Youth has especially opportunities of acquiring knowledge and undergoing discipline, and religion helps us to use them. 3. Youth has abounding energy, and religion assists us to employ this energy aright. 4. Youth is a time of great and varied temptations, and religion will enable us to overcome them. 5. Youth is introductory to manhood and to age; religion helps us so to live when young that we may be the better fitted for the subsequent stages of life's journey. 6. Youth may be all of life appointed for us; in that case, religion can halloo those few years which constitute the earthly training and probation.

III. THE SPECIAL REASONS FOR ATTENDING TO THIS ADMONITION. 1. It is a tendency of human nature to be so absorbed in what is present to the senses as to overlook unseen and eternal realities. 2. Our own age is peculiarly tempted to forget God, by reason of the prevalence of atheism, agnosticism, and positivism. 3. Youth is especially in danger of forgetting the Divine Creator, because the opening intelligence is naturally interested in the world of outward things, which presents so much to excite attention and to engage inquiry.

IV. THE ADDITIONAL FORCE WHICH CHRISTIANITY IMPARTS TO THIS ADMONITION. The figure of our blessed Lord himself appears to the imagination, and we seem to hear his winning but authoritative voice pleading with the young, and employing the very language of the text. He who said, "Suffer the little children to come unto me," he who, beholding the young inquirer, loved him, draws near to every youthful nature, and commands and beseeches that reverent attention, that willing faith, that affectionate attachment, which shall lead to a life of piety, and to an immortality of blessedness.—T.

Vers. 2—7.—*Old age and death.* By a natural transition, a striking antithesis, youth suggests to the mind of the Preacher the condition and the solemn lessons of old age. How appropriately does a treatise, dealing so fully with the occupations, the illusions, the trials, and the moral significance of human life, draw to a close by referring expressly to the earlier and the later periods by which that life is bounded!

I. THE BODILY SYMPTOMS OF AGE. These are, indeed, familiar to every observer, and are described with a picturesqueness and poetical beauty which must appeal to every reader of this passage. It is enough to remark that the decay of bodily power, and the gradual enfeeblement of the several senses, are among the usual accompaniments of advancing years.

II. THE MENTAL SYMPTOMS OF AGE. Reference is naturally made especially to the effect of bodily enfeeblement and infirmity upon the human emotions. 1. The emotions of desire and aspiration are dulled. 2. The emotions of apprehension, self-distrust, and fear increase.

III. THE NATURAL TERMINATION OF OLD AGE. There is no doubt that there are old persons of a sanguine temperament who seem unable to realize the fact that they are approaching the end of their earthly course. Yet it does not admit of doubt that the several indications of senility described in these verses are reminders of the end, are premonitions of the dissolution of the body, and of the entering upon a new and altogether different state of being.

IV. THE OPPORTUNITIES AND SERVICES OF AGE. 1. There is scope for the exercise of patience under growing infirmities. 2. There is a call to the acquisition and display

of that wisdom which the experience of long years is particularly fitted to cultivate. 3. The aged are especially bound to offer to the young an example of cheerful obedience, and to encourage them to a life of piety and usefulness.

V. THE CONSOLATIONS OF AGE. Cicero, in a well-known treatise of great beauty, has set forth the peculiar advantages and pleasures which belong to the latest stage of human life. The Christian is at liberty to comfort himself by meditating upon such natural blessings as “accompany old age,” but he has far fuller and richer sources of consolation open to him. 1. There is the happy retrospect of a life filled with instances of God’s compassion, forbearance, and loving-kindness. 2. And there is the bright anticipation of eternal blessedness. This is his peculiar prerogative. As the outer man perisheth, the inner man is renewed day by day. The earthly tent is gradually but surely taken down, and this process suggests that he should look forward with calm confidence and hope to his speedy occupation of the “house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.”—T.

Vers. 9—11.—*The religious thinker and teacher.* The author of this book was himself a profound thinker and an earnest teacher, and it is evident that his great aim was to use his gifts of observation, meditation, and discourse for the enlightenment and the spiritual profit of all whom his words might reach. Taught in the quiet of his heart by the Spirit of the Eternal, he laboured, by the presentation of truth and the inculcation of piety, to promote the religious life among his fellow-men. His aim as he himself conceived it, his methods as practised by him in his literary productions, are deserving of the attentive consideration and the diligent imitation of those who are called upon to use thought and speech for the spiritual good of their fellow-creatures. Words are the utterance of the convictions and the desires of the inner nature, and when spoken deliberately and in public they involve a peculiar responsibility.

I. THE WORDS OF THE RELIGIOUS TEACHER SHOULD BE THE EXPRESSION OF WISDOM. They should not be thrown off carelessly, but should be the fruit of deep study and meditation. For the most part, they should embody either original thought, or thought which the teacher should have assimilated and made part of his own nature, and tested in his own individual experience. They should be the utterance of knowledge rather than of opinion; and they should be set forth in the order which comes from reflection, and not in an incoherent, desultory, and unconnected form.

II. THE WORDS OF THE RELIGIOUS TEACHER SHOULD BE WORDS OF UPRIGHTNESS. In order to this they must be the utterance of sincere conviction; they must harmonize with moral intuitions; they must be such as consequently appeal to the same conscience in the hearer or reader, which approves them in the speaker or writer. Crafty arguments, specious and sophistical appeals, sentimental absurdities, do not fulfil these conditions, and for them there is no place in the Christian preacher’s discourses, in the volumes of the Christian author.

III. THE WORDS OF THE RELIGIOUS TEACHER SHOULD BE WORDS OF PERSUASIVENESS. The author of Ecclesiastes commends “proverbs” and “words of delight.” Harshness, coldness, contemptuousness, severity, are unbecoming to the expositor of a religion of compassion and love. A winning manner, a sympathizing spirit, language and illustrations adapted to the intelligence, the habits, the circumstances of auditors, go far to open up a way to their hearts. No doubt there is a side of danger to this requirement; the pleasing word may be the substitute for the truth instead of its vehicle, and the preacher may simply be as one that playeth upon a very pleasant instrument. But the example of our Lord Jesus, “the great Teacher,” abundantly shows how winning, gracious, condescending, and touching language is divinely adapted to reach the hearts of men.

IV. THE WORDS OF THE RELIGIOUS TEACHER SHOULD BE CONVINCING AND EFFECTIVE. The goads that pierce, the nails that penetrate and bind, are images of the language of him who beateth not the air. Let the aim be kept steadily before the eye, and the mark will not be missed. Let the blow be delivered strongly and decisively, and the work will be well done. The understanding has to be convinced, the conscience awakened, the heart touched, the evil passions stilled, the endeavour and determination aroused; and the Word is, by the accompanying energy of the Spirit of God, able to effect all this. “Who is sufficient for these things?”

V. THE WORDS OF THE RELIGIOUS TEACHER MAY BE THE MEANS OF RELIGIOUS, SPIRITUAL, IMPERISHABLE BLESSING. If his word be the Word of God, who commissions and strengthens every faithful herald and ambassador, then he may comfort himself with the promise, "My Word shall not return unto me void; it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it."—T.

Ver. 12.—*The scholar's sorrow.* In these closing paragraphs of his treatise the writer reveals his own feelings, and draws upon his own experience. It is interesting to observe how largely study was pursued and literature cultivated at the remote period when this book was written; and it is obvious to remark how far more strikingly these reflections apply to an age like our own, and to a state of society such as that in which we live. The diffusion of education tends to the multiplication of books and to the increase of the learned professions; whilst growing civilization fosters the habit of introspection, and consequently of that melancholy whose earlier and simpler symptoms are observable in the language of this touching passage.

I. STUDY AND LITERATURE ARE A NECESSITY OF EDUCATED HUMAN NATURE. As soon as men begin to reflect, they begin to embody their reflections in a literary form, whether of poetry or of prose. A native impulse to verbal expression of thought and feeling, or the desire of sympathy and applause, or the calculating regard for maintenance, leads to the devotion of ever-growing bodies of men to the literary life. Literature is an unmistakable "note" of human culture.

II. STUDY AND LITERATURE ARE, BROADLY SPEAKING, PROMOTIVE OF THE GENERAL GOOD. The few toil that the many may profit. Knowledge, thought, art, right feeling, liberty, and peace, are all indebted to the great thinkers and authors whose names are held in honour among men. Doubtless there are those who misuse their gifts, who by their writings pander to vice, incite to crime, and encourage irreligion. But the bulk of literature, proceeding from the better class of minds, is rather contributive to the furtherance of goodness and of the best interests of men. Books are among the greatest of human blessings.

III. STUDY AND LITERATURE HAVE BEEN CONSECRATED TO THE SERVICE OF RELIGION. We have but to refer to the Hebrew Scriptures themselves in proof of this. There is nothing more marvellous in history than the production of the Books of Moses, the Psalms, and the prophetic writings, at the epochs from which they date. Lawgivers, seers, psalmists, and sages live yet in their peerless writings; some of them inimitable in literary form, all of them instinct with moral power. The New Testament furnishes a yet more marvellous illustration of the place which literature holds in the religious life of humanity. Men have sneered at the supposition that a book revelation could be possible; but their sneers are answered by the facts. Whatever view we take of inspiration, we are constrained to allow for human gifts of authorship. To make up the sacred volume there are "many books," and every one of them is the fruit of "much study."

IV. STUDY AND LITERATURE ARE CULTIVATED AT THE EXPENSE OF THE EXHAUSTION AND SORROW OF THE PRODUCER AND STUDENT. 1. There is weariness of the flesh arising from the close connection between body and mind. The brain, being the central physical organ of language, is, in a sense, the instrument of thought; and, consequently, brain-weariness, nerve-exhaustion, are familiar symptoms among the ardent students to whom we are all indebted for the discovery, the formulation, and the communication of truth and knowledge. 2. But there is a mental sorrow and distress which deeper thinkers cannot always escape, and by which some among them are oppressed. The vast range of what in itself can be known is such as to strike the mind with dismay. Science, history, philosophy, etc., have made progress so marvellous, that no single finite mind can embrace, in the course of a life of study, however assiduous, more than a minute department, so as to know all of it that may be known; and a highly educated man is content "to know something of everything, and everything of something." 3. Then beyond the realm accessible to human inquiry lies the vaster realm of what cannot be known—what is altogether outside our ken. 4. It must be borne in mind, further, that, whilst man's intellect is limited, his spiritual yearnings are insatiable; no bounds can be set to his aspirations; his nature is akin to that of God himself. Thus it is that sorrow often shades the scholar's brow, and

that to the weariness of the flesh there is added the sadness of the spirit, that finds, in the memorable language of Pascal, the larger the circle of the known, the vaster is the circumference of the unknown that stretches beyond.—T.

Vers. 13, 14.—*Religion, righteousness, and retribution.* After all the questionings and discussions, the doubts and perplexities, the counsels and precepts, of this treatise, the author winds up by restating the first, the most elementary, and the most important, principles of true religion. There are, he felt, in this world many things which we cannot fathom, many things which we cannot reconcile with our convictions and hopes; but there are some things concerning which we have no doubts, and these are the things which most nearly concern us personally and practically. Thoughtful men may weary and distress themselves with pondering the great problems of existence; but, after all, they, in common with the plainest and most illiterate, must come back to the essentials of the religious life.

I. THE GREAT SPRING AND CENTRE OF RELIGION. This is the fear of God, reverence for the Divine character and attributes, the habit of mind which views everything in relation to him who is eternally holy, wise, just, and good. This Book of Ecclesiastes is, upon this point, at one with the whole of the Bible and with all deeply based religion. We cannot begin with man; we must find an all-sufficient foundation for the religious life in God himself, his nature, and his Law.

II. THE GREAT EXPRESSION OF RELIGION. This is obedience to the Divine commands. Our convictions and emotions find their scope when directed towards a holy and merciful God; our will must bend to the moral authority of the eternal Lord. Feelings and professions are in vain unless they are supported by corresponding actions. It is true that mere external compliance is valueless; acts must be the manifestation of spiritual loyalty and love. But, on the other hand, sentiment that evaporates in words, that does not issue in deeds, is disregarded in the court of heaven. Where God is honoured, and his will is cheerfully performed, there the whole duty of the Christian man is fulfilled. It is the work of the mediation of the Divine Saviour, of the operations of the Divine Spirit, to bring about such a religious and moral life.

III. THE GREAT TEST OF RELIGION. For this we are bidden to look forward to the future. Many things, which are significant as to the religious state of a man, are now hidden. They must be brought to light; secret deeds, alike of holiness and of iniquity, must be made manifest before the throne of judgment. Here, in this world, where men judge by appearances, the wicked sometimes get credit for goodness which does not really belong to them, and the good are often maligned and misunderstood. But, in the general judgment hereafter, the secrets of all hearts shall be revealed, and men shall be judged, not according to what they seem to be, but according to what they actually are. With this solemn warning the Preacher closes his book. And there is no person, in whatsoever state of life, to whom this warning does not apply. Well will it be for us if this earthly life be passed under the perpetual influence of this expectation; if the prospect of the future judgment inspire us to watchfulness, to diligence, and to prayer.—T.

Ver. 1 (with ch. xi. 10, latter part).—*The vanity and glory of youth.* I. THE VANITY OF YOUTH. There is an aspect in which it is true that "childhood and youth are vanity." 1. Its thoughts are very simple; they are upon the surface, and there is no depth of truth or wisdom in them. 2. Its judgments are very mixed with error; it has to unlearn a great deal of what it learns; the young will have to find, later on, that the men of whom and the things of which they have made up their minds are different from what they think now; their after-days will bring with them much disillusion, if not serious disappointment. Much that they see is magnified to their view, and the colours, as they see them to-day, will look otherwise to-morrow. 3. Itself is constantly disappearing. Few things are more constantly disturbing, if not distressing, us than the rapid passage of childhood and youth. Sometimes the young life is taken away altogether—the flower is nipped in the bud. But where life is spared, the peculiar beauty of childhood or of youth—its simplicity, its trustfulness, its docility, its eagerness, its ardour of affection, its unreserved delight—this is perpetually passing

and "fading into the light of common day." Yet is there—and it is the truer and deeper thought—

II. THE GLORY OF YOUTH. Whatever may be said of youth in the way of qualification, there is one thing that may be said for it which greatly exalts it—it *may be wise with a profound and heavenly wisdom*, for it may be spent in the fear and in the love of God (see Prov. i. 7; Job xxviii. 28). To "remember its Creator," and to order its life according to that remembrance, is the height and the depth of human wisdom. Knowledge, learning, cunning, brilliancy, genius itself, is not so desirable nor so admirable a thing as is this holy and heavenly wisdom. To know God (Jer. ix. 24), to reverence him in the innermost soul, to love him with all the heart (Mark xii. 33), to be obedient to his commandments, to be patiently and cheerfully submissive to his will, to be honouring and serving him continually, to be attaining to his own likeness in spirit and character,—surely this is the glory of the highest created intelligence of the noblest rank in heaven, and surely this is the glory of our human nature in all its ranks. It is the glory of our manhood, and it is the glory of youth. Far more than any order of strength (Prov. xx. 29), or than any kind of beauty (2 Sam. xiv. 25), or than any measure of acquisition, does the abiding and practical remembrance of its Creator and Saviour glorify our youth. That makes it pure, worthy, admirable, inherently excellent, full of hope and promise. We may add, for it belongs to the text as well as to the subject—

III. THE WISDOM OF YOUTH. "While the evil days come not," etc. Let the young live before God while they are young; for: 1. It is a poor and sorry thing to offer to God, to a Divine Redeemer, the dregs of our days. To him who gave himself for us it becomes us to give, not our wasted and worn-out, but our best, our freest and freshest, our purest and strongest self. 2. To leave the consecration of ourselves to Christ to the time when faculty has faded, when the power of discernment and appreciation has declined, when sensitiveness has been dulled with long disuse, when the heavenly voices fall with less charm and interest on the ear of the soul,—this is a most perilous thing. To hearken and to heed, to recognize and to obey, in the days of youth is the one wise thing.—C.

Vers. 5—7.—*Death, its meaning and its moral.* Whatever be the true interpretation of the three preceding verses, there is no doubt at all as to the Preacher's meaning in the text; he has death in his view, and he suggests to us—

I. ITS CERTAINTY. Childhood *must* pass into youth, and youth into prime, and prime into old age—into the days which are bereaved of pleasure (ver. 1); and old age *must* end in death. Of all the *tableaux* which human life presents to us, the last one is that of "the mourners going about the streets." Other evils may be shunned by sedulous care and unusual sagacity, but death is the evil which no man may avoid.

II. ITS MEANING. What does death mean when it comes? 1. It means a *shock* to those that are left behind. The mourners in the street express in their way the sadness which is afflicting the hearts of those who weep within the walls. Here and there a death occurs which disturbs no peace and troubles no heart. But almost always it comes with a shock and an inward inexpressible pain to those who are bereaved. Even in old age the hearts of near kindred and dear friends are troubled with a keen and real distress. 2. It means *separation*. Man "goes to his long home." They who are left go to their darkened home, and he who is taken goes to his long home, to dwell apart and alone, to revisit no more the familiar places, and look no more into the faces of his friends. They and he henceforth must dwell apart; the grave is always a very long distance from the old home. 3. It means *loss*. The loss of the *beautiful* or the *useful*, or of both together. "Our life may have been like a golden lamp suspended by silver chains, fit for the palace of a king, and may have shed a welcome and a cheerful light on every side; but even the durable costly chain will be snapt at last, and the beautiful 'bowl be broken.' Our life may have been like 'the bucket' dropped by village maidens into the village fountain, or like the 'wheel' by which water is drawn from the village well,—it may have conveyed a vital refreshment to many lips; but the day must come when the bucket will be shattered on the marble edge of the fountain, and the timeworn wheel drop into the well" (Cox). The most beautiful life vanishes from our sight; the most useful life is taken away. 4. It means *dissolution*. "The dust

shall return to the earth as it was." Our body, however fair and strong it may be, however trained, clothed, adorned, admired, must return to "dust and ashes," must be resolved into the elements from which it was constructed. 5. It means *departure*. "The spirit shall return unto God who gave it." This is by far the most solemn view of death. At death we "return to God" (see Ps. xc. 3). Not, indeed, that we are ever far from him (see Acts xvii. 27; Ps. cxxxix. 3—5). We stand and live in his very near presence. Yet does there come an hour—the hour of death—when we shall consciously stand before our Divine Judge, and when we shall learn from him "our high estate" or our lasting doom (2 Cor. v. 10). Death means departure *from* the sphere of the visible and tangible *into* the close and conscious presence of the eternal God.

III. ITS MORAL. The one great lesson which stands out from this eloquent description is this: *Be the servant of God always*; take care to know him and to serve him at the end, by learning of him at the beginning, and serving him throughout your life. Remember your Creator in youth, and he will acknowledge you when old age is lost in death, and death has introduced you to the judgment-scene. Happy is that human soul that has drawn into itself Divine truth with its earliest intelligence, and that has ordered its life by the Divine will from first to last; for then shall the end of earth be full of peace and hope, and the beginning of eternity be full of joy and of glory.—C.

Vers. 9—12.—*The function of the teacher.* 1. The wise man, because he is wise (ver. 9), *teaches*. There is no better, no other thing that he can do, both for his own sake and for the sake of his fellow-men. To know and not to speak is a sin and a cruelty, when men are "perishing for lack of knowledge." To know and to speak is an elevated joy and a sacred duty; we cannot but speak the things we have learned of God, the truth as it is in Jesus. 2. The wise man also takes what measures he can to *perpetuate* the truth he knows; he wants to preserve it, to hand it down to another time; he therefore "writes down the words with truth and uprightness" (ver. 10); or, if he cannot do this, he labours to put his thought into those parabolic or proverbial forms which will not only be preserved in the memory of those to whom he utters them, but can be readily repeated, and will become embedded in the traditions and, ultimately, into the literature of his country (ver. 9). 3. The wise man *restrains* his literary ardour within due bounds (ver. 12). Otherwise he not only causes a drug in the market, but seriously injures his own health. He knows it is better to do a little and do that thoroughly, than to do much and do it hastily and imperfectly. But what is the teacher's function, his sacred duty, as related to the people of his charge or his acquaintance?

I. TO SEARCH DILIGENTLY FOR THE TRUTH. It is for him "to ponder and seek out," or to "compose with care and thought" (Cox's transl.). Divine truth, in its various aspects and applications, is manifold and profound; it demands our most patient study, our most reverent inquiry; we should gain help from all possible sources, more particularly should we seek it from the Spirit and from the Word of God.

II. TO INTEREST AND TO CONSOLE. The Preacher sought to find out "acceptable" or "comfortable" words—"words of delight" (literally). This is not the main duty of the teacher, but it is one to which he should seriously address himself. 1. A teacher may be speaking in the highest strain, and may be uttering the deepest wisdom, but if his words are unintelligible and, therefore, unacceptable, he will make no way and do no good. We must speak in the language of those whom we address. Our thoughts may be far higher than theirs, but our language must be on their level—at any rate, on the level of their understanding. 2. The teacher will do wisely to spend much time and strength in *consoling*; for in this world of trouble and sorrow no words are more often or more urgently needed than "comfortable words."

III. TO RETAIN. "The words of the 'masters of assemblies' are like stakes (nails) which the shepherds drive into the ground when they pitch their tents;" i.e. they are *instruments of fastening* or of securing; they act as things which keep the cords in their place, and keep the roof over the head of the traveller. It is one function of the Christian teacher—and a most valuable one—so to speak that men shall retain their hold on the great verities of the faith, on the true and real Fatherhood of God, on the atonement of Jesus Christ, on the openness of the kingdom of heaven to every seeking

soul, on the blessedness of self-forgotten love, on the offer of eternal life to all who believe, etc.

IV. To *INSPIRE*. At other times the Preacher's words are "as goads" that urge the cattle to other fields. To comfort and to secure is much, but it is not all that they who speak for Christ have to do. They have to illumine and to enlarge men's views, to shed fresh light on the sacred page, to invite those that hear them to accompany them to fields of thought hitherto untrodden, to induce them to think and study for themselves, to unveil the beauties and glories of the wisdom "that remains to be revealed," to inspire them with a yearning desire and with a full purpose of heart to enter upon works of helpfulness and usefulness; he has to "provoke them to love and to good works."—C.

Vers. 13, 14.—*Divine requirement and human response*. What is the conclusion of this inquiry? what result may be gained from these inconsistencies of thought and variations of feeling? Deeper down than anything else is the fact that there are—

1. TWO GREAT DIVINE REQUIREMENTS. God demands of us: 1. *Reverence*. We are to "fear God." That is certain. But let us not mistake this "fear" for a very different thing with which it may be confounded. It is not a servile dread, such as that which is entertained by ignorant devotees of their deities. Only too often worship rises no higher than that; it is an abject dread of the malignant spiritual power. This is both a falsity and an injury. It is founded on a complete misconception of the Divine, and it reacts most hurtfully upon the mind of the worshipper, demoralizing and degrading. What God asks of us is a well-grounded, holy reverence; the honour which weakness pays to power, which he who receives everything pays to him who gives everything, which intelligence pays to wisdom, which a moral and spiritual nature pays to rectitude, to goodness, to love, to absolute and unspotted worth. 2. *Obedience*. We must "keep his commandments;" i.e. not only (1) abstain from those particular transgressions which he has forbidden, and (2) practise those virtues which he has positively enjoined; but also (3) carefully study his holy will in regard to all things, and strive earnestly and patiently to do it. This will embrace, not only all outward actions observable by man, but all the inward thoughts of the mind, and all the hidden feelings and purposes of the soul. It includes the bringing of everything of every kind for which we are personally responsible "into obedience to the will of Christ." It requires of us rectitude in every relation that we sustain to others, as well as in all that we owe to ourselves. The text suggests—

II. THE TWO GREAT REASONS FOR OUR RESPONSE. One is that such reverent obedience is: 1. *Our supreme obligation*. "This is the whole duty of man," or, rather, "This it behoveth all men to do." This is what all men are in sacred duty bound to do. There is no other obligation which is not slight and small in comparison with this. The child owes much to his father, the pupil to his teacher, the beneficiary to his benefactor, the one who has been rescued to his deliverer; but not one of these obligations, nor all added together, expresses anything that approaches the indebtedness under which we rest to God. To him from whom we came, and "in whom we live and move and have our being," who is the one ultimate Source of all our blessings and of all our powers, who has poured out upon us an immeasurable wealth of pure and patient love; to the gracious Father of our spirit; to the gracious Lord of our life; to the holy and the benignant One,—to him it does indeed *become* all men to render a reverent obedience. The other reason why we should respond is found in: 2. *Our supreme wisdom*. "For God will bring," etc. God is now bringing all that we are and do under his own Divine judgment, and is now approving or disapproving. He is also so governing the world that our thoughts and actions are practically judged, and either rewarded or punished, before we pass the border-line of death. But while this is true, and while there is much more of truth in it than is often supposed, yet much is left to the future in this great matter of judgment. There are "secret things" to be exposed; there are undiscovered crimes to be made known; there are iniquities that have escaped even the eye of the perpetrators, who "knew not what they did," to be revealed. There is a great account to be settled. And because it is true that "we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, that every one of us may receive the things done in his body," because "God will judge the secrets of all hearts,"

because sin in every shape moves toward exposure and penalty, while righteousness in all its forms travels toward its recognition and reward, therefore let the spirit be reverent in presence of its Maker, let the life be filled with purity and worth, with integrity and goodness, let man be the dutiful child of his Father who is in heaven.—C.

Vers. 8—12.—*The epilogue.* The sentence, "Vanity of vanities; all is vanity!" with which the Book of Ecclesiastes opened, is found here at its close. And doubtless to many it will seem disappointing that it should follow so hard upon the expression of belief in immortality. Surely we might say that the nobler view of life reached by the Preacher should have precluded his return to the pessimistic opinions and feelings which we can scarcely avoid associating with the words, "Vanity of vanities; all is vanity!" But on second thoughts the words are not contradictory of the hope for the future which ver. 7 expresses. The fact that Christians can use the words as descriptive of the worthlessness of things that are seen and temporal, as compared with those that are unseen and eternal, forbids our concluding that they are necessarily the utterance of a despairing pessimism. A great deal depends upon the tone in which the words are uttered; and the pious tone of the writer's mind, as revealed in the concluding passages of his book, would incline us to believe that the sentence, "all is vanity," is equivalent to that in the Gospel, "What shall it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" No one can deny that the 'De Imitatione Christi' is a noble expression of certain aspects of Christian teaching with regard to life. And yet in the very first chapter of it we have these words of Solomon's quoted and expanded. "Vanity of vanities, and all is vanity beside loving God and serving him alone. . . . It is vanity, therefore, to seek after riches which must perish, and to trust in them. It is vanity also to lay one's self out for honours, and to raise one's self to a high station. It is vanity to follow the desires of the flesh, and to covet that for which we must afterwards be grievously punished. It is vanity to wish for long life, and to take little care of leading a good life. It is vanity to mind only this present life, and not to look forward to those things which are to come. It is vanity to love that which passes with all speed, and not to hasten thither where everlasting joy abides." In the opinion of many eminent critics the eighth verse contains the concluding words of the Preacher, and those which follow are an epilogue, consisting of a "commendatory attestation" (vers. 9—12), and a summary of the teaching of the book (vers. 13, 14), which justifies its place in the sacred canon. On the whole, this seems to be the most reasonable explanation of the passage. It seems more likely that the glowing eulogy upon the author was written by some one else than that it came from his own pen; and a somewhat analogous postscript is found in another book of Holy Scripture, the Gospel of St. John (xxi. 24). Those who collected the Jewish Scriptures into one, and drew the line between canonical and non-canonical literature, may have considered it advisable to append this paragraph as a testimony in favour of a book which contained so much that was perplexing, and to give a summary (in vers. 13, 14) of what seemed to them its general teaching. The Preacher, they say, was gifted with wisdom over and above his fellows, and taught the people knowledge; and for this pondered and investigated and set in order many proverbs or parables (ver. 9). Like the scribe, "who had been made a disciple to the kingdom of heaven," "he brought forth out of his treasure things new and old" (Matt. xiii. 52). Knowledge of the wisdom of the past, ability to recognize in it what was most valuable, and to cast it into new forms and zeal in the discharge of his sacred office, were all found in him. He sought to attract men to wisdom by displaying it in its gracious aspect (cf. Luko iv. 22), and to influence them by the sincerity of his purpose, and by the actual truth he brought to light (ver. 10). "He aimed to speak at once *words that would please* and *words which were true*—words which would be at once *goods* to the intellect, and yet *stakes* that would uphold and stay the soul of man, both coming alike from one shepherd" (ver. 11, Bradley). Some of his sayings were calculated to stimulate men into fresh fields of thought and new paths of duty, others to confirm them in the possession of truths of eternal value and significance. Like the apostle, he was anxious that his readers should no longer be like "children tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, in craftiness, after the wiles of error" (Eph. iv. 14); but should "prove all things, and hold fast that which is good" (1 Thess.

v. 21). How much better to study in the school of such a teacher than to weary and perplex one's self with "science falsely so called;" than to be versed in multitudinous literature, which dissipates mental energy, and in which the soul can find no sure resting-place (ver. 12)! All who set themselves, or who have been called, to be teachers of men, may find in the example of the Preacher guidance as to the motives and aims which will alone give them success in their work.—J. W.

Vers. 13, 14.—*The last word.* In the passage with which the Book of Ecclesiastes concludes, the clue is found which leads the speaker out of the labyrinth of scepticism in which for a time he had gone astray. He at last emerges from the dark forest in which he had long wandered, and finds himself under the stars of heaven, and sees in the eastern sky the promise of the coming day. It is true that from time to time in his earlier meditations he had retained, even if it were with but a faltering grasp, the truth which he now announces confidently and triumphantly. "It had mitigated his pessimism and hallowed his eudæmonism" (ch. vii. 18; viii. 12; xi. 9). And it must be taken as cancelling much of what he had said about the vanity of human life. Over against his sombre thoughts about one fate awaiting both the righteous and the wicked, the wise and the foolish (ch. ix. 2), and the levelling power of death, that makes no distinction between man and the brute (ch. iii. 18—22), and shakes one's faith in the dignity and worth of our nature, is set his final verdict. God does distinguish, not only between men and the brutes, but between good men and bad. The efforts we make to obey him, or the indifference towards the claims of righteousness we may have manifested, are not fruitless; they result in the formation of a character that merits and will receive his favour, or of one that will draw down his displeasure. The nearness of God to the individual soul is the great truth upon which our author rests at last, and in his statement of it we have a positive advance upon previous revelations, and an anticipation of the fuller light of the New Testament teaching. God, he would have us believe, does not deal with men as nations or classes, but as individuals. He treats them, whatever may have been their surroundings or national connections, as personally accountable for the disposition and character they have cultivated. His judgment of them lies in the future, and all, without distinction of persons, will be subject to it. In these points, therefore, the writer of the Book of Ecclesiastes transcends the teaching of the Old Testament, and approximates to that of Christ and the apostles. The present life, with all its inequalities, the adversity which often besets the righteous, and the prosperity which the wicked often enjoy, is not the whole of existence, but there is a world to come in which the righteous will openly receive the Divine favour, and the wicked the due reward of their deeds. The blessings which were promised to the nation that was faithful to the Divine Law will be enjoyed by each individual who has had the fear of God before his eyes. Judgment will go by character, and not by outward name or profession (Matt. vii. 21—23; Rev. xx. 12). We have, therefore, here a great exhortation founded on truths which cannot be shaken, and calculated to guide each one who obeys it to that goal of happiness which all desire to reach. "Fear God, and keep his commandments." Both the inward disposition and the outward conduct are covered by the exhortation.

I. In the first place, then, **THE PRINCIPLE BY WHICH WE SHOULD BE GOVERNED IS THE "FEAR OF GOD."** This is the root from which the goodly leaves and choice fruit of a religious life will spring. If the word "fear" had been used in this passage only, and we had not been at liberty to understand it in any other than its ordinary sense, one would be forced to admit that such a low motive could not be the mainspring of a vigorous and healthy religious life. But all through the Scriptures the phrase, "fear of God," is used as synonymous with a genuine, heartfelt service of him, and as rather indicating a careful observance of the obligations we as creatures owe to him, than a mere dread of his anger at disobedience. It is not to be denied that fear, in the ordinary sense of the word, is reasonably a motive by which sin may be restrained, but it is no stimulus to that kind of service which we owe to God. "I thank God, and with joy I mention it," says Sir Thomas Browne, "I was never afraid of hell, nor ever grew pale at the description of that place. I have so fixed my contemplations on heaven, that I have almost forgot the idea of hell; and am afraid rather to lose the joys of one than endure the misery of the other. To be deprived of them is a perfect hell, and needs

methinks no addition to complete our afflictions. That terrible term hath never detained me from sin, nor do I owe any good action to the name thereof. I fear God, yet am not afraid of him; his mercies make me ashamed of my sins, before his judgments afraid thereof. These are the forced and secondary methods of his wisdom, which he useth but as the last remedy, and upon provocation—a course rather to deter the wicked than incite the virtuous to his worship. I can hardly think there was ever any scared into heaven: they go the fairest way to heaven that would serve God without a hell. Other mercenaries, that crouch unto him in fear of hell, though they term themselves the servants, are indeed but the slaves, of the Almighty" ('Rel. Med.,' i. 52). Plainly, therefore, when the fear of God is made equivalent to true religion, it must include many other feelings than that dread which sinners experience at the thought of the laws they have broken, and which may consist with hatred of God and of righteousness. It must be a summary of all the emotions which belong to a religious life—reverence at the thought of God's infinite majesty, holiness, and justice, gratitude for his loving-kindness and tender mercy, confidence in his wisdom, power, and faithfulness, submission to his will, and delight in communion with him. If fear is to be taken as a prominent emotion in such a life, we are not to understand by it the terror of a slave, who would willingly, if he could, break away from his owner, but the loving reverence of a child, who is anxious to avoid everything that would grieve his father's heart. The one kind of fear is the mark of an imperfect obedience (1 John iv. 18); the other is the proof of a disposition which calls forth God's favour and blessing (Ps. ciii. 13).

II. In the second place, THE CONDUCT WE SHOULD MANIFEST IS DESCRIBED: "KEEP HIS COMMANDMENTS." This is the outward manifestation of the disposition of the heart, and supplies a test by which the genuineness of a religious profession may be tried. These two elements are needed to constitute holiness—a God-fearing spirit and a blameless life. If either be wanting the nature is out of balance, and very grave defects will soon appear, by which all of positive good that has been attained will be either overshadowed or nullified. If there be not devotion of the heart to God, no zeal and fidelity in discharging the ordinary duties of life will make up for the loss. The reverence due to him as our Creator—gratitude for his benefits, penitent confession of sins and shortcomings, and faith in his mercy—cannot be wilfully omitted by us without a deprivation of our whole character. And, on the other side, an acknowledgment of him that does not lead us to "keep his commandments" is equally fatal (Matt. vii. 21—23; Luke xiii. 25—27).

The Preacher appends two weighty considerations to induce us to attend to his exhortation to "fear God, and keep his commandments." The *first* is that this is the *source of true happiness*. So would we interpret his words, "For this is the whole of man." The word "duty" is suggested by our translators to complete the sense, but it is not comprehensive enough. "To fear God and keep his commandments is not only the whole duty, but the whole honour and interest and happiness of man" (Wardlaw). The quest with which the book has been largely concerned is that for happiness, for the *summum bonum*, in which alone the soul can find satisfaction, and here it comes to an end. The discovery is made of that which has been so long and so painfully sought after. In a pious and holy life and conversation rest is found; all else is but vanity and vexation of spirit. The *second* motive to obedience is the *certainly of a future judgment* (ver. 14). "For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil." Nothing will be omitted or forgotten. The Judge will be One who is absolutely just and wise, who will be free from all partiality; and his sentence will be final. If, therefore, we have no such regard for our own happiness in the present life as would move us to secure it by love and service of God, we may still find a check upon self-will and self-indulgence in the thought that we shall have to give an account of our thoughts, words, and deeds to One from whose sentence there is no appeal.—J. W.

HOMILETICAL INDEX

TO

ECCLESIASTES; OR, THE PREACHER.

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