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NEW

TRANSLATION AND EXPOSITION

OF THE

BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES:

WITH

Critical Notes on the Hebrew Text.

BY

BENJAMIN WEISS,

MISSIONARY TO THE JEWS, ALGIERS, AUTHOR OF "A CHRISTIAN JEW ON THE
OLD TESTAMENT SCRIPTURES," AND ALSO OF A "NEW TRANSLATION
AND EXPOSITION OF THE PSALMS."

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PREFATORY NOTE.

THE Author of this Volume expresses the hope, that the literary imperfections which mark it, will be leniently regarded by his Readers. He is assured that they will be disposed to do so, if they remember his limited residence in Scotland, and the obstacles to literary work inseparable from his position as a Missionary in Algiers. For the annexed list of Errata he craves indulgence. He flatters himself that they would not have crept into his work, had he been able, personally, to superintend it, as it passed from the hands of the Printer.

ERRATA.

- Page 28, line 15, *read* "sorrowful days and sleepless nights."
,, 79, ,, 10, *read* "appointed," *instead of* "approved."
,, 90, ,, 19, *read* "mire," *instead of* "mine."
,, 199, note, line 4, *for* "strangers," *read* "stronger."
,, 216, line 10, *for* "he knows not," *read* "we know not."
,, 218, ,, 23, *read* "as," *instead of* "until."
,, 229, ,, 13, *read* "did only visit," *instead of* "was only visited."
,, 230, note, line 1, *for* "Some," *read* "So we."
,, 238, line 3 *from bottom*, *delete* "be,"—*the correction is important.*
,, 322, note, line 8, *read* "if they shall lay hold," &c.

INTRODUCTION.

CHRISTIAN READER: The portion of the Holy Scriptures, the translation and exposition of which form the substance of this volume, has come down to us accompanied by manifold and highly important recommendations.

1st. We are informed in sacred history that the royal author of Ecclesiastes received in his youth the following promise from the God of Israel: "Behold, I have done according to thy words [or "wish"]: Behold, I have given thee [or "will give thee"] a wise and understanding heart, so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee." (1 Kings iii. 12).

2d. Its illustrious author is known to us as the sacred penman of that admirable and matchless work styled, "The Proverbs of Solomon,"—a work which must be acknowledged (even by those who deny inspiration) to have no rival in the world of letters, whether ancient or modern, whether it be regarded as a whole, or in relation to the single doctrines which it teaches, and the counsels it offers to fallen man. Where is the human production that can boast of a single chapter containing an equally valuable amount of truth as is contained in any chapter of Solomon's Proverbs? Where else can we find such a fountain of wisdom? Where is there another such precious reservoir of doctrine and counsel? In what country lived another teacher of

morals like the author of the Book of Proverbs? Where exists such a second armoury of mighty weapons against Satan and sin? and where such an antidote against the dangerous influences of a wicked and seducing world? In that Book of Proverbs alone, we find morals and religion taught with the tongue of angels, warnings and admonitions against sin and iniquity by self-speaking figures and demonstrative examples, which pour wisdom and instruction in large streams into the heart of the simple, and efficaciously recommend the love and fear of God to young and old. The same truly great man is the author of the Book of Ecclesiastes.

3d. Solomon, though he was the son of the devoted and godly Psalmist David, though the wisest of men, though the most prosperous and magnificent of kings, though the builder of the first temple dedicated unto Jehovah in Jerusalem,—yet fell from the heights of the skies, as it were into the deepest depth of forgetfulness, backsliding, sensuality, and open sin; yea, into the miry pit of idolatry and rebellion against the Most High God, the source of all his wisdom and glory. Is this deplorable event in Solomon's life to be regarded as a recommendation to the work in question? Certainly it is. When we consider that it bears the marks of being the last work that issued from the pen of that extraordinary personage—that it must have been composed at the close of his earthly career, when he was really converted, and completely restored to the favour of the God of his father, who again used him as an inspired instrument in His hand for conveying celestial truth unto generations to come—when we remember that when Solomon composed this marvellous Book he looked back with the utmost horror to the idols of his youth—and the brilliancy and splendour of his past life were about to be extinguished and covered

by the dark clouds of death and the grave ; we are constrained to conclude that the fact of its being the last production of a great man, a great king, a great favourite of God, a great backslider, a great sinner, and lastly, a great *penitent*, invests it with special importance and interest.

Solomon, who when yet a tender babe received the tokens of Jehovah's love, when the prophet conveyed unto him the name "Jedidiah"—the beloved of God—Solomon, who by Divine authority was preferred to all his older brothers, and chosen as the crown-prince in David's family, made the successor of that devoted, victorious and mighty king of Israel—Solomon, who was appointed to build a temple unto the Lord of Hosts, as a dwelling-place for His glory—Solomon, whose glorious throne, prosperity and peace, wisdom and splendour, were promoted and established by God according to His repeated promises made through the prophets unto his father David, and twice to himself directly—Solomon, who in answer to his devout and earnest prayers at the dedication of the Temple, received again the testimony of the Lord's approbation, when His glory descended in a cloud of fire and filled the splendid house which he had built—Solomon, whose wisdom and magnificence provoked the astonishment of distant nations, and attracted the attention and admiration of mighty and illustrious princes in distant lands—Solomon, whose immense riches and great power put him in possession of everything that was then rare, splendid, beautiful, delightful, glorious and admirable ;—even that brilliant star of the human race, when he had mounted to the highest pinnacle of happiness and pleasure, grandeur and power, possible for a mortal prince, was lost in the clouds of vanity, by the excessive love of transitory and decaying pleasures, and by devotion to ignoble pursuits. His great soul and

once devoted heart were ensnared and conquered by idolatrous and wicked women; and thus entirely estranged from God, he plunged himself into the rapid and turbid stream of foolishness and worldly absurdity.

Like the reappearance of the radiant sun in a smiling azure sky, after many dark and cloudy days, and heavy showers, so, in the Book of Ecclesiastes, we see once more the great Solomon, the matchless teacher of morals, reappear, to teach us divine wisdom and truth, after having slumbered for many years in the enervating bosom of worldly pleasures. Once more we see the magnificent King of Israel, the great author of the Book of Proverbs, employing his pen and consecrating his powers to the composition of his last work, which contains a retrospective view, and an impartial judgment, of his vast experience, during a long, prosperous and eventful life.

With a mind full of elevated thoughts regarding a world to come and its mysteries,—with a great soul looking forward into a bright region where the flowers of real glory never wither, and where all the beauties and magnificence of this material world appear like pale shadows of a past dream,—with a shaken and age-worn body, which indicates the rapid process of decay,—with dim and feeble eyes, to which every thing material now appears in quite another light from what it appeared at the age of vigour and youthful imagination,—Solomon considers the past, and judges, and anxiously looks forward towards eternity. Gold and silver have now become unto him useless dross; precious stones and pearls have lost their value; richly decorated palaces, blooming flower-gardens, all verdure, brilliancy, and gay colour, seem now as if enveloped in the shadows of death. Delicious fruits and dainty

meats, and kingly beverage, flatter no more the dry palate. Women, in the prime of beauty, who once ravished his eyes and enchanted his heart and soul, have been stripped of all attraction, and appear now to him like fading and decaying lilies and roses. The world, with its seducing vanities, is now gone, for ever gone, with all its pleasures and delights. Eternity now stands waiting without, and the cold arm of death knocks slowly, but continually, at the door. The weak and trembling old man responds, "Behold, I am preparing, wait but a little while until I make up the sum of my account, and see how I stand with my God: wait a while until I see if, and how, I am prepared to meet my Creator and Benefactor; wait a moment, until I set my house in order, and leave a few words expressive of my *present* feelings and sentiments for generations to come; and then I shall be ready to follow thee with my shattered body into the dreary regions of thy dark dominions, and my soul shall wing her flight towards heaven, to appear before the tribunal of the Ancient of Days." Ah, reader! is there yet another work produced by the pen of mortal that can be possessed of similar attractions? Is there a Book in existence that can command more interest? Come, then, inquisitive soul, and let us see and hear attentively what that great and experienced Solomon says now—how he now judges in the midst of new circumstances—how he now considers the past—how he prepares for the future—and what is the lesson which he gives us concerning things of this world, or concerning our never-dying souls and the world to come!*

* We did not enter here into a description and analysis of the special characteristics of the Book of Ecclesiastes, and of the different subjects it treats (as might certainly have been expected in an Introduction), because we perceive that the

There are, however, several topics of considerable importance, which require our attention, before we enter the rich and goodly heritage bequeathed unto us by the wisest of men, and these topics are the following :

1st, Almost all the different Books composing that invaluable treasure that we call the Holy Bible, have been more or less exposed to the violent attacks of the determined and deadly enemies of Revelation, as well as to mistranslation, false interpretation, and injudicious application on the part of their ignorant and sometimes most daring friends. But the Book of Ecclesiastes, in particular, was and is a ready prey to violence and error, ignorance and doubt. The infidel and worldling stretch forth their sacrilegious hands, and triumphantly (but falsely) pretend to have detected and grasped at a substantial cloak sufficient to cover all sensuality, scepticism, and brutal propensities. Mistaken friends (though sometimes very lovely and zealous men) in their turn have often, influenced by imaginary difficulties, or seeming contradictions, wrested and perverted some of the sublimest passages of this peculiar Book, and squeezed them into the narrow limits of their own hypotheses, and made them involve, confirm, and attest doctrines and counsels, of which the royal author perhaps never dreamed, far less inculcated and advocated in this work. Directing our eyes to Him who alone can afford aid and grant strength to the weak and weary, wisdom to the simple, and understanding to those that seek knowledge, we undertook the translation and exposition of this seemingly obscurest portion of the Holy Scriptures, in order to disarm both classes above mentioned. A

first eleven verses of this Book were intended and set apart by the author as a general Introduction to the whole work ; we shall thus have to treat there what we omitted here.

scrupulous translation, a thorough critical examination, and a careful, impartial exposition, may, we trust, serve these purposes. It will shew to the sceptic and carnally-minded man that this imagined cloak was but a reflection of his own wickedness, a dream of his corrupt imagination, a torn and rotten tent which will never protect him from the fiery storm and thunderbolts of a terrible judgment to come. It will show him that Solomon, in this noble work, instead of tolerating, abhors and condemns scepticism, infidelity, sensuality, and carnal-mindedness, in most vigorous, expressive, and irresistible terms, and by sound arguments deduced from daily practice and his own experience. It may also, by the blessing of the God of truth, indicate the errors and subvert the misinterpretations which have defaced some of the most important passages, and which originated either in the mistranslation of the text, or in misapprehension of the scope of the book. As the passages most exposed to the above described abuses form always a conspicuous part of the respective chapters in which they occur, and where they shall be treated at large, we therefore thought it proper to refrain from advancing here some instances in illustration of our remarks.

2d. Towards the end of the last century, there was a wild plant introduced into Protestant Germany, which by this time has already sent forth its branches, not only into all the countries of continental Europe, but also to Great Britain, and even America. This monstrous plant is the daring abuse of the liberty gained by the glorious and dearly bought work of Reformation; and its bitter branches are a certain class of Biblical critics, who spend uselessly and destroy willingly a great portion of their time and energy (which otherwise might be employed, if not advantageously, at least harmlessly) in speculations

about the authenticity of the names of sacred authors, unto whom the respective books of the Holy Scriptures are assigned. To achieve this toilsome, useless, daring, and dangerous work, they do spread—(as did the Jews of old, over all Egypt, to seek useless straw for their bricks)—over all the sacred books in search of words which (their dictionary says) do belong to the Chaldee dialect, and if they think to have found some, they presume to prove by their discovery, that such a book does not belong to the alleged authors, but must have been composed after the Babylonish captivity, when the Jews brought these Chaldaisms with them to Jerusalem. This outrage knows no limits, but goes so far as to dispute the authorship of the Book of Jeremiah, which, as it includes a Chaldee verse (chapter x. verse 11), must not, according to these critics, belong to that Prophet, but must have been composed by some other person after the Babylonian captivity.

Now, according to the false argument of the above-mentioned scholars, it follows that before the Babylonish captivity, no Hebrew understood a word or a phrase of Chaldee, nor a heathen or a Chaldean a word of Hebrew. In 2 Kings xviii. 26, we read that Eliakim, Shebna, and Joah (princes of Israel), said to Rab-shakeh (captain of the Babylonian army), “Speak, we pray thee, to thy servants in the SYRIAN LANGUAGE [which is almost the same with the Chaldee] for we understand it: and talk not with us in the HEBREW LANGUAGE, in the hearing of the people that are on the wall.” Here we see clearly and distinctly that not only did the learned Jews and their princes understand the Chaldee language in the days of Hezekiah, but that even a heathen chief spoke the Hebrew with great purity and eloquence! Those, then, are greatly in error who maintain that if a Chaldee word or phrase be found in the

writings of a Prophet, they must be flung away into the Babylonish captivity!

The Prophet Jeremiah, in the above-mentioned chapter, draws a most painful contrast between the great Jehovah, the Creator of the universe, the God of the Hebrews, and the dumb idols of the heathen, manufactured of wood and stone. He therefore exclaims in the 11th verse, "Thus shall ye say unto them [viz., the servants of the living God, should thus say to the Babylonish idolaters who threatened them, and blasphemed their God], The gods that have not made the heavens and the earth, shall perish from the earth, and from under these heavens." This verse possesses peculiar vigour and great beauty in the Chaldee language, which the Prophet has used, in order to serve as a defiance in the mouth of the Hebrew against the Chaldee blaspheming idolater. Do not they, therefore, precipitately conclude—when an author used some Chaldee words for special purposes—who ascribe the authorship to another, and fling the latter beyond centuries! What would we say to a German critic, who, ignorant of the English language beyond his dictionary, would conclude that the English poets and authors are not the creators of their own works, but must have taken them from some ancient Roman manuscripts, because they used many words of pure Latin! Such are exactly the foolish conclusions of many of the above-mentioned critics, who try to bereave the sacred writers of works of which the Holy Spirit made them authors.

The Book of Ecclesiastes has been most fiercely attacked by the above-mentioned torturers of sacred writ. They have maintained that (according to their Lexicon) they discovered in that book many passportless Chaldaisms, and therefore they have denied its Solomonic authorship, and transported it

beyond the Babylonish captivity. Some of its friends, deprecating such a treatment of the work, have admitted that there are some vagabond Babylonianisms in the book. Some of these advocates said that Solomon might have learned from his foreign wives to adopt these strangers into his Hebrew family. Others said, that owing to Solomon's commercial relations with other nations, some merchants might have smuggled in these contraband words, and in some way or other (possibly by contagion) they cleaved by and by to Solomon's tongue. Strange, very strange it is, that not one of these friends should have suggested the idea that Solomon was wise and rich enough to have employed regular teachers by whom he might have acquired some foreign languages, which were indispensable for him in his vast enterprises with other nations, rather than suppose that he learned languages from heathen women and merchants! But we would also ask these critics, What language did Solomon employ in courting these female teachers, or in obtaining them from their parents? Or what language did he use with the foreign merchants, before they taught him theirs? Will they perhaps maintain that these heathen ladies and commercial men spoke Hebrew! Why not, then, give credit to Solomon that he knew their languages even before he had anything to do with them? Or might not David have spent a few talents of the hundreds of thousands which he possessed, in paying teachers to instruct the crown prince in some languages spoken by the neighbouring nations?

With regard to the original disturbers of the Holy Scriptures, who maintain that they find in the Book of Ecclesiastes many words, and even phrases, which are strangers to the Hebrew language, we beg to assure our readers that they are mistaken, and

that in the whole book in question there are only two words which cannot be traced now to Hebrew origin. First, the word שִׂדָּחַ (Sidah) used to signify "princess," which is of Arabic origin (see chap. ii. 8); and, second, the word פִּתְגָּם "Pithgum" (see Ecc. viii. 11), which is a most powerful and comprehensive term, and denotes "irrevocable royal decree, sentence or verdict of a judge, decision of a wise man, clear and distinct information" about anything, &c.* This word having no such rich substitute in the Hebrew language, might have been adopted at a far earlier period than that of Solomon.† Besides these two, there is not another word in the whole book that could not be traced to a Hebrew root.‡ The style of Ecclesiastes is distinctly and generally the same as that of the Proverbs of the same author. The new idiomatic graces, and elegant and tasteful combination of words which we find in this book, show the extraordinary creative power of that sublime writer. The peculiar character of this philosophical, and, at the same time, theological work, comprised in such a small space, demanded a new creation of compounds and abbreviation of words, above any other book of the Holy Scriptures. Many examples of this kind are to be

* See the different significations of this word in Dan. iii. 16; iv. 14, or 17; Ezra iv. 17; v. 7; vi. 11; and Esther i. 20, &c., though the force is always the same.

† As the word, "Pithgum," can no more be traced to the Chaldee than to the Hebrew origin, we are inclined to think that it may be an ancient Egyptian term whence both Jews and Babylonians took it. Gesenius thinks to find some similies to it in the Persic, but these are not conclusive.

‡ The word מִסְכֵּן (miskein) which occurs twice in chap. ix. verses 15, 16, and which signifies "poor, needy, or indigent," though it has the same signification in Arabic, can perfectly be traced to the Hebrew root סָכַן (Sakan) and was used already by Moses (Deut. viii. 9) though in another form (sub. fem.) and there it signifies "in poverty."

seen in the Proverbs also, though not so numerous, and, perhaps, not so masterly, which is quite natural; but the language and style are the same in both books.

Moreover, there are twelve verses in the Book of Ecclesiastes, containing statements which can refer to none but to the great and wise Solomon, the son of David, the King of Israel, who reigned at Jerusalem, who excelled all kings before and after him in wisdom, in riches, in power, and in glory, who having enjoyed profound peace during a long and prosperous reign, was alone able to make all the observations, experiences, and conclusions enumerated in this book. No other man, no other king, could ever, with honesty, or even common sense, assume the language used in the above-mentioned twelve verses; nor would such an one have escaped the censure and ridicule of the Hebrew nation; nor would ever such a work, under a false name, and under false pretensions, have been admitted into the canon of the Holy Scriptures by Ezra and his friends.

Though, we sincerely trust, after all that has been above advanced, that our readers will be perfectly convinced how unjust the attacks, how untenable the conclusions, and how false the arguments of the above critics are, and though we must confess that the necessity of defending the authority of the mighty word of inspiration against attacks so unreasonable, and arguments so absurd, pains us, still as we are thus far on the subject, we shall make one final and conclusive remark. According to the arguments of the above new school, every book of the Holy Scriptures which includes some Chaldee words must have been composed after the Babylonish captivity, when the Jews brought these words with them, or, in other terms, when the purity of the

Hebrew language was lost. Well, could rationalistic critics answer us, Why there are no Chaldaisms to be found in the Books of Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, which were surely composed after the Babylonish captivity? Let them explain unto us this anomaly. Would they not perhaps, to be consistent, ascribe the Book of Malachi to Solomon, because there is not a single word of Chaldee in it, and then, as a restitution, give the Book of Ecclesiastes to Malachi? Perhaps, also, they might give the Book of Jeremiah to the Prophet Zechariah, and, to indemnify the former, give him that of the latter. Such is the gravity of the destructive German theology, such the confusion and absurdity of her *rationalistic* critics; but such, alas, is the tendency of many young men in our days, that they grasp at anything new, no matter be it wind, pins, madness, thorns, fire, poison, if it is but *new*.

The fact is, that whatever influence the Babylonish captivity had upon the Hebrew language, it could not (if it did at all) influence but the lowest and illiterate class of people. Nehemiah wrote his historical book after the captivity in as pure and neat Hebrew as ever it could have been done in any previous century. Daniel and Ezra had the Hebrew as pure and vigorous as it ever could exist. If the two latter introduced Chaldee chapters into their respective books, it was, because they wished to represent the interesting transactions, letters, dreams, and interpretations, in the very language in which they originated, and were transacted; but not because their Hebrew was in the least impaired, as those chapters which they wrote in Hebrew are as pure as the Books of Moses. Finally, in the last chapter of Nehemiah, verse 24, we see the indignation which that noble prince showed against such Israelites, who, by their unlawfully intermixed mar-

riages with idolatrous women of the neighbouring nations, had also caused their children to mix up their Hebrew language with words and phrases belonging to those of their mothers. It is evident that even in the days of Malachi, the Hebrew was yet understood and spoken in its purity by the whole people of Israel. Had it been otherwise, then, he would surely have written his small but most important book in the then popular language. It must have been at a far later period, when many Jews, who remained for centuries in Babylon, came back to Judea with their mixed and corrupted language,—at a time when there were no more prophets, no more sacred writers, and when the nation was deep sunk in misery and oppression, that the language was neglected, and the Chaldee idiom crept in. But during the short captivity of seventy years, when the captives had the Lord's promise by Jeremiah, that they shall soon return to Jerusalem, they certainly kept up, and watched carefully over their language, upon which they always looked with holy veneration.

3d. We come now to the third and last observation, which we think indispensable, before we enter upon the translation and exposition of the Book before us, and this observation shall be about the name or title which this Book obtained in the Hebrew text. The name, then, by which Solomon titled this Book, or rather, the name under which he designates himself as its author, is, in the Hebrew, קהלת (Koheleth). This word was rendered by the Septuagint Εκκλησιαστής (Ecclesiastes), and which word in the Greek signifies either “the gatherer of an assembly,” or “a speaker in an assembly.” Hence the English version renders it “the Preacher,” and so Luther “der Prediger,” (*i.e.*, “the Preacher”). Commentators and others go a wide step farther, in

maintaining that the Hebrew word (*Koheleth*) signifies either "the gatherer of an assembly" or "a preacher to a gathered assembly." But it is a matter of no small importance that we should decide about the character and full meaning of the mystical or metaphorical name under which Solomon chose to be presented in this Book, and if the Jews of the Septuagint misunderstood it (as they often did other words), must we follow them?

In the word *Koheleth*, even if we take it in its widest sense, there is no authority for the rendering given in the English version. The word can be derived from no other verb than קָהַל (Kahal), "to assemble or to call an assembly." From this is formed the mas. noun קָהָל (Kahal), and the fem. קְהֵלָה (Kehilah), both signifying "an assembly" of men, and in the plur. form מִקְהֵלִים (Makheilim) mas., and מִקְהֵלוֹת (Makheiloth) fem., both signifying "assemblies." Very often this noun appears in connection with other nouns, as קְהַל-יְהוָה (Kehal-Jehovah), "the assembly of the Lord," and קְהַל-עַמִּים (Kehal-amim), "the assembly of nations," &c. But how we can find in this word the least indication of "a preacher, or preaching, or speaking," is a mystery which neither we nor those who attach this meaning to it will ever be able to solve. Even were there the least shadow of *preaching* in the verb *Kahal*, then a *preacher* would be called either קוֹהֵל (Koheil) or מִקְהֵל (Makhil), but not קוֹהֵלֶת (Koheleth), which word ending in ת fem., would thus signify "a female preacher." But seeing that there is not the least indication in the word of "preaching," then *Koheleth* can signify nothing else than "a female gatherer," or in German "Die Sammlerin," (Collectress). It now remains for us to investigate, 1st, The reason why the *gatherer* is feminine? 2d, What

the gathering signifies,—if the gathering of an assembly, or something else; and, 3d, How and why Solomon chose to head this book with such a title? Our humble opinion is, that a deep sense is hid under this metaphorical name *Koheleth*, by which peculiar term Solomon wished to appear as the author of this book, and the following is, we think, the right import and explication of the word *Koheleth*.

In the Book of Proverbs, Solomon appears not only as one who teaches wisdom, but as one in whom wisdom dwelt, and who had a divine authority to teach, rebuke, and admonish, in the name of wisdom. The introduction to that Book reads, “The Proverbs of Solomon, the son of David, King of Israel.” In the description of the contents and purposes to be attained by that work, we read, “To know wisdom and instruction; to receive the words of understanding; to receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, and judgment, and equity; to give subtilty to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion. . . . To understand a proverb and its interpretation, the words of the wise and their dark sayings.” With verse 8, these instructions begin, “My son, hear the instructions of thy father, and forsake not the teachings of thy mother,” &c. Having warned the young to guard against the seductions of the wicked, Solomon, in verse 20, introduces wisdom personified, saying, “Wisdom crieth without, she uttereth her voice in the streets,” &c. From the character of the speech which personified, Wisdom then delivers, it is evident that by *Wisdom* the law of God and His commandments, the teachings of the Prophets, and Solomon’s own Proverbs (in which the former were excellently and beautifully enveloped) are to be understood. As these doctrines were taught by teachers in the Synagogues,

and even in the open streets (according to ancient eastern custom), and also by parents to their children, therefore is personified *Wisdom* represented as "crying and uttering her voice in the streets." This is clear from the second chapter, which begins, "My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee. . . . (verse 9). Then shalt thou understand righteousness, and judgment, and equity, and every good path. For wisdom will enter into thine heart, and knowledge will be pleasant unto thy soul." The fourth chapter of Proverbs is wholly occupied with instructions and advices, deduced from a very rich and comprehensive model of religious education which the devoted David imparted to his tender but highly promising son, Solomon. In the fifth chapter the well-instructed Solomon appears again as a teacher in his turn, saying, "My son, attend unto my wisdom, and bow thine ear to my understanding," &c. In chaps. viii. and ix., *Wisdom* is again personified and represented as if erecting her pulpits in the open streets, and highways, lifting her sweet, and at the same time sonorous voice, to collect around her the children of men. When, as it were, her audience is fully gathered, she delivers her mighty, instructive, impressive, and fascinating lecture unto them, which should serve them as irresistible weapons against the seductions of Satan and sin, against wicked men and wicked women. Now mark, dear reader, that under all the above diverse figures, Solomon, and Solomon alone, is the real speaker.

Let us now try to reduce the preceding observations, and we think we shall have the following conclusions. 1st, That, in the Book of Proverbs, Solomon endeavoured to envelope the teachings of Divine wisdom in the Word of God, in short, pure, elegant, and comprehensive verses of parables and

proverbs, for the special benefit of the young in Israel, that they might learn them by heart, and use them as weapons against all the dangerous influences to which young people are exposed at the age of the development of their passions. 2d, That, from the tenderness, simplicity, and familiarity of the language which the author uses, and from the polished, yet homely, figures which he employs, we must conclude that these Proverbs were the first collection and first-fruits of Solomon's productions, composed at the early and most happy period of his life. When the Lord, according to His promise, filled his heart with heavenly wisdom, that tender, noble, elevated, elegant, and inspired prince devoted a portion of his precious time to the composition of a course of moral and religious instructions for his youthful subjects. It is therefore that, as we go along in that Book of Proverbs, we see chapter after chapter increasing as well in gravity of matter as in sentiment and beauty of language—a fact which shews at the same time that that work was not composed all at once, but during a considerable period of his early life. 3dly and lastly, We observe, that Solomon, conscious of the vast power of inspired wisdom filling his mind and soul, hesitated not to identify himself with wisdom, and with the great cause she pleads among the sons of men in the name of her God. Hence, while he personifies wisdom, and makes her lift up her voice and preach morals in the open streets, he, at the same time, speaks in her name, recommending *his* doctrines, inviting men to listen to *his* counsel, to observe *his* commandments, &c. All this is, as if Solomon had said: "Hear and obey all that by the power of the wisdom of God, I am enabled to teach you in His name—in the name and on the authority of His revealed wisdom." Hence, when he personifies wisdom and

makes her speak, he, at the same time, attributes these speeches and these counsels to himself, for it was in fact himself who spoke by the wisdom dwelling in him.

With all the preceding observations we now return to our *Koheleth*. There exists a vast difference between the latter work and that of the Proverbs. The one was composed in his early life, and the other at the close of his life. The one speaks most from *theory*, the other all from practice and facts. In the one Solomon appeared as a teacher of the young in the name of Wisdom, showing them what Wisdom forbids and what she commands, what conduct she condemns, and what conduct she approves ; but in the other work he appears as an old, experienced, and inspired man, to teach young and old, not merely theoretical doctrines suggested by wisdom, but also the results of long and elaborate experiments made by himself or acquired from an active and exact observation, made during a long period, full of events, changes, and discoveries. What Solomon in the Proverbs recommended or condemned, by saying, "Thus says Wisdom," he is now able to recommend or condemn by saying, "Behold, all this have I personally examined and tried by wisdom, and found some things deceiving, dangerous, and ruinous, which had well-nigh destroyed me for ever, and therefore I tell you in the name of *experienced wisdom*, flee such things ; other things have I tried again and again, and found them good, pleasing, and solid, and therefore I recommend them strongly, as the only things which can make mortals happy in time and eternity." Seeing, thus, that this Book contains the facts and results obtained by *experimental wisdom*, Solomon therefore called it *Koheleth* or "the Gatherer," viz., *personified wisdom*—by the agency of inspired Solomon

—gathers and assembles facts and results from the personal experience, or from exact observations made by that author during all the days of his life, and reduces them to rules, judgments, warnings, and counsels for and to others. The title *Koheleth* thus retains its true and only signification, which is: “The Gatherer,” or, “The Assembler,”—not of *congregations*, but of *facts*, observations, results, decisions, and counsels.* The word *Koheleth* is fem., because Wisdom is fem. in the Hebrew language, and it is she that is presented as the *Gatherer* of these facts. Solomon also passes by that name, and says, “I, *Koheleth*, was King over Israel,” &c., because, in fact, it is himself who gathers the contents of this Book though he does it in Wisdom’s name; as likewise in Proverbs, where he makes Wisdom speak and preach in the streets, and then he calls the very same sermon, “my words,” “my doctrine,” “my commandment.”

According to the above explanation of the meaning of the word *Koheleth*, we can easily understand why it is sometimes preceded by a mas. verb, as אָמַר קֹהֵלֶת (Amar *Koheleth*—chap. i. 2, &c.) because the personified Wisdom speaks by Solomon; and

* Should one object that we never find *Kahal* refer to gathering things or facts, but always refers to assembled persons; to this we answer 1st, It was nowhere used in a metaphorical sense, because there was no occasion for it, and *no occasion* can form no objection. 2. אָסַף (Asaph) and קָבַץ (Kavatz) which are the Hebrew verbs for gathering *things* are also used often, especially in figurative language, to denote the “gathering of men,” and why should not *Kahal* be metaphorically used for *gathering facts*? Is not the figure pure, simple, and striking? 3d. In this book Wisdom gathers also many persons, and presents them as subjects on whom experiments were taken and observations made. There could, therefore, no better nor more proper name than *Koheleth* be found, to represent Solomon gathering facts and results, and reducing them to doctrine, in the name of Wisdom.

sometimes that verb is fem., as אִמְרָה קֹהֵלֶת (Amrah Koheleth—chap. vii. 27*), because the *Gatherer* is Wisdom, and is fem. in the Hebrew language. This anomaly can by no means be explained according to the versions that render Koheleth by “the Preacher;” for, even if the word should bear some thing of preaching (which is not the case) why should it then end in a ה fem.? and why should it have sometimes a mas. and sometimes a fem. verb?

Seeing that, according to our explanation of the title of this book, the word *Koheleth* assumes such a comprehensive and extraordinary meaning, that we are not able to find for it a proper and sufficiently expressive substitute in the English language, we are therefore constrained to leave the word as it is, viz., *Koheleth*, wherever we meet it in the Hebrew text. The reader will remember that in it personified Wisdom is represented as gathering facts (by Solomon and from his life and experience), observations, results, and giving them as illustrations and examples unto the children of men. We are also obliged to leave as the title of the Book its old name *Ecclesiastes*, not that there is even a shadow of identity between that word and *Koheleth*, but because *Ecclesiastes* is the only name by which this Book is known to the Christian world.

* We think that in chapter xi. verse 8, where the Hebrew reads אִמְרָה הַקֹּהֵלֶת (Amar Hakoheleth) that the ה was, by the mistake of a transcriber of an ancient MS., removed from the verb and attached to the noun; and that originally it must have been *Amrah Koheleth*, as in the above passage.



THE
BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES.

(CHAPTER I. VERS. 1—3).

1. THE WORDS OF KOHELETH, THE SON OF DAVID,
KING OF JERUSALEM.
2. Vanity of vanities ! saith Koheleth,
Vanity of vanities ! All is vanity !
3. What advantage hath man of all his labour,
That he thus toileth under the sun ?*

MAN has two eyes, and two ears, and beholds every subject with both eyes, and hears every sound with both ears, still he sees but *one* in the object he

* The Noun יִתְרוֹן (Yithron), as well as יֵתֶר (Yether), both derived from the verb יָתַר (Yathar), have extensive significations. "The rest," or "the remainder," as in Judges vii. 6 ; Joel i. 4 ; so in Hiph. as הוֹתִיר הַבָּרָד (Hothir habarad) "the hail had left." (Exod. x. 15.) Besides these, it has diverse other significations, as, "excellence, preference, profit, overplus, advantage," &c. (See Gen. xlix. 3 ; Exod. x. 5, &c.) In this Book the word occurs several times, under different significations, and the best adapted one must be chosen according to the different contexts. In this verse we preferred to render it "advantage," rather than "profit," as in the English version ; though neither the one nor the other is comprehensive enough to constitute an equivalent to the Hebrew noun, which evidently denotes "a lasting and solid advantage," and not

beholds, and hears but *one* sound in every one that strikes both his ears; and why? because it is the rational organ, the mind, that must decide the character of the objects we see, and of the sound we hear (with irrational organs); and the mind is but *one*. In other words, the perception of the eyes and ears being quicker than the decision of the mind (subject to hesitation), which, being but *one*, can only judge and decide about one subject at a time, though coming from two organs. Therefore, it is, that though we see originally every object double, as we hear originally every sound double, still, as these rough perceptions and impressions must first be communicated (by the appropriate nerves) to the mind, in order to judge and decide about the characters of the objects of vision or sound, they there unite into *one*, the mind being *one*. The double organs thus united, render the power of vision and of sound doubly stronger than if they were single ones. Also, if the one is injured by accident, the other serves alone the same purpose. But we would be sadly confounded were not the mind to gather and unite the double vision, and the double sound into one. Such, then, is the wonderful harmony and reciprocal sympathy between the members and organs of our physical structure, governed by a rational

the timely and passing *profit*. We thought, therefore, that "advantage," represents more strongly the real meaning of the word.

עֲמָל (amal) is another noun of different and comprehensive signification, though it always preserves the principal idea of something "toilsome, troublesome, afflictive, wearisome," &c. In our verse it appears in both forms noun and verb, but can scarcely be rendered alike in both cases. Our verse, if paraphrased, would read somewhat as follows: "What lasting, worthy, or solid advantage can mortal man derive from all toilsome works and transactions, that he thus continually wearieeth, troubleth, and molesteth himself under the sun, during the days of his short existence?"

mind, that the instruments of sight and hearing, the nerves which communicate these productions to the mind, and the latter which decides about their character, and which impresses that decision upon us, all work in beautiful harmony, and serve one great purpose.

Man, though he consists of two different substances, of spirit and of matter—of soul and of body—still was created and sent into this world for *one* great purpose only, which is, to glorify his God and Creator during his short stay on earth. Man, being in his soul related to heaven, and in his body to the earth, hence the one original purpose of his divine mission necessarily divides into two branches, but which should nevertheless unite again into one. As lord over the material creation around him, whether animate or inanimate, his mission is to explore, invent, compose, ameliorate, use, enjoy, and beautify nature, by the instrumentality of his bodily organs, by which he is related to material nature. (See Gen. i. 26—28). In this his terrestrial employment, he is aided and directed by his soul, which gives him wisdom and superiority over all inferior creatures under his dominion.* The soul, therefore, claims the fruits of man's different labours, that she might unite them into one, for the promotion of *one* purpose of their united mission, which is, to glorify God. Thus, though it may seem that soul and body serve different purposes, still they were originally intended to serve both the one and same purpose, by reciprocally aiding each other (in the manner that the eyes and ears serve the mind, and

* "But there is a spirit in man (viz., a never-dying soul), and it is the soul (or breath) of the Almighty (viz., the soul, or spirit, which the Almighty breathed into man at his creation) that giveth them understanding." (Job. xxxii. 8.) This is the literal translation of that important passage, and its real sense.

the latter the former in turn) and by employing their united energies to glorify the Creator of souls, who is likewise the Creator of the material universe, and of the human body.

That the first man, Adam, was originally fitted to direct both these activities into one channel, and to perform nothing with his body but in the service of his soul, and for the promotion of their united mission, and exclusively so, we are assured in the inspired word of God, and we can have no more doubt about that, than about the fact of the present entire unfitness of fallen and corrupted man to serve these purposes by nature. The descendant of fallen man is entirely enslaved and absorbed by nature, which is the will of the flesh, and as his mind cannot bear two subjects at once—cannot hear two claims at once—cannot serve two purposes, or two masters at once, he utterly abandons the spiritual claims and services of his soul, and casts himself, soul and body, into the arms of material nature. Having once shaken off the just and repeated claims of the soul, man establishes a workshop on his own account, on his own responsibility, and for his own interests. Indeed, some of fallen man's works, exploits, discoveries, compositions, and inventions, are very excellent, and admirably well adapted to show man's origin and his high destinies, yea, and even to promote the glory of the God of nature (though fallen man intends it not, and therefore no thanks to him for it). But there are numerous other works, plans, toils, inventions, labours, and troubles, in which fallen man is madly engaged, and which suck up all his energy and strength, but which are "Vanity of vanities," and which will never produce any fruit, either for the honour of God, for man's own soul, or even for his body, or for nature, or for his fellow-men at large.

The forgetfulness and degeneracy of mortal man being so deplorably great, but the mercy and free grace of his Creator being still infinitely greater, the Lord opposed a revealed religion to revolted nature, and between them a sharp and continual contest is carried on. Nature claims man as her property, because of his body, which is dust and ashes like her; Revelation claims man as heaven's property, because of his never-dying soul, which is a spirit, and belongs to heaven, whence she came. Nature, considering man as her slave (or rather fallen man making himself willingly a slave of nature) claims all the works of man achieved by the instrumentality of his physical organs, and is never satisfied until, when exhausted by age and toil, he restores unto her the outworn and useless instruments, which are delivered to decay in the dust. But Revelation, which claims man's soul for heaven, denies likewise the claims of nature, declaring them as false and rebellious. Revelation reminds man that nature also belongs unto God; that man was sent for a short time into her regions, not to be her slave, but her master, her governor: that he should improve and rule all hers within his reach; not for himself, not for her, but for the promotion of the glory of Him unto whom they both belong. Hence Revelation maintains that all man's works and achievements, whether physical or mental, should be in the service of, and in preparation for, heaven, whither he must soon return.

Depraved and corrupted as man is by nature, he is always inclined to yield unto her flattering invitations and deceitful promises. He easily, yea, willingly forgets that he is but a pilgrim on earth, and that the short time of his sojourn here will soon disappear, and vanish like a shadow; and therefore begins to establish himself, as if in his real home, as if in

his everlasting property. He begins to form vast plans and projects, and in the whirl of forgetfulness, he studies and seeks nothing else but how he might best satisfy the desires of his flesh. He is planting, building, eating, drinking, sleeping, rising and toiling again, and nights, and days, and months, and years, and periods roll on over his head like the fierce volumes of mighty waterfalls ; but, alas ! he perceives it not. All at a sudden, death comes in through the breaches of his old and shattered tabernacle, and grasps him into its cold arms, and in a moment he is a corpse, delivered to the dust for decay. Where is now nature with her flattering promises ? What becomes now of man's labour and toil ? What of his plantations and buildings ? What of his sleepless days ? What of his sorrowful nights ? Yea, and what, alas ! becomes of his immortal soul ? Revelation tells us in the name of God, who cannot lie, that such a soul is lost, for ever lost, and that she must then undergo her deserved punishment, and suffer throughout an endless eternity. Ah, unhappy soul ! Oh, beguiled and unfortunate responsible agent ! Is it for that terrible time that thou delayest thy preparations for thy long journey heavenward ? Dost thou still refuse to abandon this world, and her destructive vanities, till thou shalt see thyself abandoned by her ? Wilt thou make no preparations for heaven until thou be deprived by death of all thine earthly idols and vain pleasures ? Ah, believe me, believe heaven's revelation, that then it will be too late—then there will be no remedy for thee—then thy eternal doom will be sealed, and thou art for ever lost, irretrievably lost, without a shadow of hope.

But the child of the world, and the slave of nature, will perhaps say, "Seeing that the Lord created us material bodies, possessed of different organs,

senses, passions, and appetites, and with those He deputed us into a world filled with all sorts of provision for the very things we need, surely He must have intended them for our use and enjoyment." To this, not we, but Revelation answers: "As far as your bodies of flesh are concerned, He certainly prepared, provided, and allowed you to use and enjoy the things of this world. But He gave you also immaterial and immortal souls, for the spiritual nourishment of which He has surely made still richer provision than for your perishing bodies, and what do you for and with them? Why is it then that you are never so anxious to find out the purpose for which that heavenly and intelligent being was confided unto you, and how to nourish and cherish it, and prepare it for heaven, as you are anxiously watching over the privileges of your mortal bodies, and nourish and fatten them for the worms of the grave?" To explain the above argument more fully, let us take one instance of terrestrial economy as an illustration of man's relation and duty to his heavenly King and Master. [Our readers, we may assure, that in lengthening these outposts of our Commentary, we are far from straying from the point, nay, we are paving the way and opening a wide door for entering into the rich, instructive, and highly interesting portion of holy writ, with a perfect knowledge of the moral history of the inspired author, and of the state of his mind at the period of its composition.]

Suppose, now, that a great king planted a colony on a distant island of the vast ocean, and sent out governors to rule and improve it, and gave them orders to remain and pursue their labours there until he be pleased to send for them and discharge them by appointed successors. The duty thus imposed on these governors is, to remember always

who is the real owner of that island, and what is his wish and order. During the time of their temporary stay, they must endeavour to introduce every possible improvement for the honour and satisfaction of their master the king. Having studied and found out the best way how to respond to the purposes, and plans, and wishes of their monarch, it is their duty also to send information from time to time, acquainting their master with all their proceedings, and with the progress they have made. All this does not presume in the least that these governors should not at the same time use the fruits and enjoy the produce of the place of their appointment. On the contrary, the more the island is improved, the more the produce of her soil is increased, the more the king will be pleased to hear that his governors are now well provided, and in the full enjoyment (with moderation) of the fruits of their labour. Only that the governors must still remember that the improved soil, the increase thereof, and their enjoyments all come from and belong to the king.

Let us now suppose that these governors, as soon as they reached and took possession of that island, forgot altogether their duty, banished the very name of their king from their thoughts, set madly to work and build castles and fortifications, cultivate and enrich the soil, and fill their garners with all sorts of provision. They then sit down to eat and drink and rejoice, and, in their violent and rebellious intoxication, they flatter themselves that the island shall now remain their own and everlasting possession. The offended and exasperated king sends soon a mighty expedition with instruments of war and destruction against these wicked rebels. Their castles are destroyed and their fortifications laid in ruins. Their treasures and stores are confiscated,

and they, fettered in iron, are condemned to perpetual imprisonment in a place of darkness and misery. Let us now define the reason of their severe punishments. Was it because they improved and cultivated the soil of the island? No! for this very purpose they were sent there. Was it because they used and enjoyed the produce of the soil? No! for the king did by no means intend to starve them there, but, on the contrary, that they should enjoy its fruits, and be fit for the accomplishment of their duties. The sole reason for their punishment was their rebellion. They forgot whose property the island was, and that they were but servants in it, and thus they laid violent hands on the property of their king. Had these daring fools faithfully managed their affairs, and loyally performed in the service of their king, and to his honour, that which they wickedly did for themselves, then the time would surely have come when the magnanimous monarch would have rewarded them richly, and bestowed on them perpetual honours for them and their descendants after them, far above the value of the whole produce of the island; for it was more the honour than the profit in which the king interested himself. Now that these wretches wished to bereave their master of his honour and authority, what have they gained? They have brought perpetual misery and shame upon themselves and upon their children. All their labour they spent in vain, and their improvements are looked upon with abhorrence. Their habitations are delivered to the devouring flames, and their treasures are execrated as accursed things. Now it is that every morsel of bread they ate is counted a crime, for they used it not for the purpose of being fitted to serve the master to whom it belonged, but to gather strength against him, and for the purpose of enabling them to carry out their plans as robbers and traitors.

But the above parable is only a faint shadow and worthless figure when we put it near the reality—when we compare it with the relation between God and man. The great King of Glory, the Creator of the whole Universe, called everything into existence for the honour of His name. The vast globe which we inhabit is but a small point in the map of His numberless dominions, and none of these serves any other purpose than to make known His sovereign and Almighty power and majesty among the intelligent creatures of His hand. Man was sent into this world as the deputy-governor of the earth to improve and cultivate it. He therefore furnished man with a body of flesh, by which he should be fitted to rule material beings, in which he should be related unto them, for which he should take interest in the production of nature, promote their existence and increase, and use and enjoy them in moderation, and with thanksgiving. But man was always to remember that he was put here only for a short time, for a certain purpose—only as a servant of the great Proprietor and King, unto whom belong his labour and its produce, his soul and his body. Whether man eats or drinks, he should remember the Giver of all things, and render thanks unto Him. Whether man plants or builds, he should remember in whose property he is, and if these additions and labours can please or displease his heavenly Master, who will soon call him home and require an account of all his works. Here we may also remark how immense the difference is between the figure and the reality. While it may happen that rebellious governors of earthly kings escape punishment, either by the death or by the loss of power of their aggrieved master, this can never be the case with the omnipotent King of kings, who lives for ever. An earthly king may also palliate a false explanation of his governor, and be deceived by his flattery and feigned loyalty; not

so the great King of heaven, who knows the heart and tries the reins of men, and sees even his innermost thoughts afar off.

Now, alas! man in general is but a rebellious governor. He builds, plants, improves, and all in the vain and impious thought that he is in his own property, and does all for himself. He eats, drinks, and enjoys everything, and lays his plans for days to come, without thinking for a moment about the Almighty and Omniscient Proprietor of the universe, the jealous King whose eyes are like the flames of fire, whose property he unworthily devours, and who will soon order him to leave here his cloak of flesh, and appear before his awful tribunal. Yea, man forgets that he must soon appear in judgment about things which need no more inquiry, no more witnesses, for which there are no excuses; for they are all well known, marked, and sealed along with the terrible sentence of eternal condemnation. The first governor, Adam, was severely punished, was driven out of Paradise, and brought death upon himself and his descendants, for having broken one commandment, eaten one forbidden fruit. But his successors are perfect rebels and traitors by nature. They break not one rule only of their King, but all. They abandon the very name of their Heavenly Master, and in the pride of their heart they say, "There is no God, the earth is our acquired and everlasting possession." Ask these rebels, Who was its original founder and proprietor? Who is it that put you into it? They have no answer, they refuse to seek one, they are satisfied the earth is theirs. Death comes at last, and tells them in short but effectual words that they were mistaken—then there is no time to think. Blessed be our Father in heaven, there exist authentic and irrevocable documents—He gave us a Revelation. The great Proprietor of the universe

sent repeatedly his lawyers (the prophets) into this world to plead his rights, and to show unto revolted man whence he came, who he was, and what will become of him should he persist in his rebellion. By these means many of His straying subjects repented themselves, acknowledged the authority of their heavenly Master, returned to loyalty and obedience, confessed to be but pilgrims and strangers in Jehovah's possessions, and therefore whether they builded, planted, or improved, they did so in their Master's name ; and for all they enjoyed of temporal benefits, they rendered thanks to the owner and giver of all things, and for his loving-kindness to the sons of men. But oh, how few in number are those who are perfectly loyal and scrupulously faithful? Even among those who with their lips readily proclaim that the earth and the fulness thereof belong unto the Lord, how few are those among them that do not *practically* proclaim themselves masters and owners! O lamentable truth! O painful fact! Even among good and God-fearing men we find such as grasp at, what they think to be, *little things* for themselves, and cherish privately the false idea, that because of its smallness the Master will not detect it—will not regard it—will leave it in their possession without protestation—without punishment! O dreadful sacrilege! committed even by those who confess to belong, soul and body, with works, plans, and thoughts, unto the Lord. Even these leave too often a *small corner in Jehovah's vineyard for themselves*; build little closets besides Jehovah's sanctuary for *themselves*; take small portions (alas, often, also very large ones) of the Lord's glory and honour unto *themselves*; appropriate a few hours (sometimes days) for *themselves*—exclusively for *themselves*—hence, for the world, for the flesh, for Satan. Even these men are often so blind as to think that God

would not regard it because of its insignificance and uselessness unto Him; forgetting that it is He who is holy and jealous, who watches every grain of corn in the field, and by whom every grain of sand on the sea-shore is numbered. Yea, alas, they forget that though the Lord of Hosts is immensely rich—though adored and praised by innumerable companies of angels in heaven—though infinitely munificent and benevolent, still He carefully guards every thing for Himself; not for its value (seeing no created thing can be of any value to Him, who made everything of nothing), but for His honour and glory, of which He is jealous, and of which He gives none to others, and on which no living creature dare intrude without exposing himself to everlasting destruction.

Let us glance at Solomon's conduct and experience during the time of his administrations as a governor in a part of God's possessions, and inquire how he came at last to the conclusion, that man's labours and toils under the sun were mere vanities.

Solomon, in his age, may be considered to have been the chief governor on earth. He was then the wisest, the richest, the mightiest, and most illustrious monarch of all those of other nations that then peopled the globe. In his early days he received an appropriate education from Nathan the prophet, as well as from his pious and devoted father, David, who (with the exception of one act of forgetfulness) served God with his whole heart, and walked in all His ways. Thus prepared, he was well fitted to fulfil all his duties, and accomplish all the purposes for which the Heavenly King chose to place him over Israel, His chosen people, in Jerusalem, His selected city. Conscious of his greatness, power, wisdom, nobility, and station, and knowing also that it was his destiny to render many and important

services to the God of his father,—the first work which he undertook soon after his accession to the throne, was, to build that magnificent sanctuary, wherein the Lord of the whole earth should be worshipped and adored. This surely was not a vain work, nor was it the undertaking of a perfidious governor in prospect of rebellion against his king. No! it was a pious and most noble work. It was not a work for man (properly considering it), but for the service of the Creator of man. It was a work recommended, yea, commanded, by the King of kings, by Moses and by the prophets. For the accomplishment of this noble work, the youthful governor of Jerusalem was richly rewarded by his heavenly Master. The Lord applauded his devotion and loyal activity. Solomon's fervent prayers at the dedication of the Temple, were solemnly answered by fire descending from heaven upon the altar; and he received additional promises from the Most High God, of peace, wisdom, riches, and honour, above that of all other princes of the earth.

Encouraged and invigorated by the brilliant success of his first undertaking, and by the promises received from the God of Israel, Solomon began to employ his vast talents for the accomplishment of another work still more noble, more important, and more lasting than even the magnificent Temple he had built. David, his father, provided for Israel a precious treasure of celestial songs of adoration and praise to the Lord of glory; and Solomon, by inspiration, composed for his people an invaluable, exhaustless, and comprehensive code of morals. This sublime and matchless work, called "The Proverbs of Solomon," is well adapted, and quite sufficient, to regulate the life and conduct of man—to render his short sojourn on earth sweet and pleasant, even in the midst of all the toils, fatigues, trials, and

sufferings, changes, and bereavements to which he may be exposed, and to prepare him for eternal rest in heaven.* Here is another *work* which, though accomplished by the instrumentality of a mortal man, cannot be counted among those *labours and toils*, which Solomon called afterwards, *vanity*, because it was a noble inspired work, in the service of God—exclusively so—for the good of souls, and for the promotion of the glory of their Creator.

Solomon constructed also a very rich and stupendous palace for himself; and filled it with the most splendid furnitures of cedar, of silk, of gold and silver, and precious stones, and in it he placed a magnificent royal throne, most splendidly decorated. Even this work, though excessive and extravagant as it may appear at the first sight, still we are very far from including among the “Vanity of vanities,” of which Solomon afterwards so bitterly

* Though it is our private opinion that the composition of the “Song of songs” took place also at that happiest period of Solomon’s life, when the Temple was finished and dedicated unto the Lord of Hosts—when burnt-offerings and thank-offerings were brought on the new altar—when the glory of the Lord filled the sanctuary, and His Spirit of the highest joy, and serene felicity, filled, and animated, and elevated the soul of the youthful royal poet—when God’s relation to His ancient Church seemed to have been brought nearer and closer than ever it was before—when Jehovah (as He, in that truly sublime and inspired song, is presented as the loving and cherishing Bridegroom of His Church, the now splendidly attired Bride in the holy ornaments of her new Temple) seemed to be united as it were to His chosen and adopted people, and royal priesthood, by new ties of promises, by new bands of Divine love, and by new reciprocal engagements to faithfulness, and everlasting attachments to each other, still we could not introduce the subject here. To ascertain with precision the time and chief object of the composition of that Song, without entering into a criticism about the general character of it, would be a great pity and neglect. To do so, would have greatly interrupted the thread of the subject under our immediate consideration. We were thus constrained to leave that interesting subject for another opportunity, if it please Him who numbers our days.

repented. Considering his station of life, established by the Lord Himself, and the promises which he received from God, and which included the highest possible enjoyments of earthly riches and splendour, we see clearly his indisputable right to such a palace. Yea, we see from sacred history that it was the express promise and will of God to make Solomon shine forth above *all* his fellow-men and princes around him, even with respect to the extraordinary enjoyment of earthly wealth and splendour.

Moreover, the faithful God of Israel fulfilled literally all His promises made unto David concerning this his Son, and which He repeated twice unto Solomon himself. His superhuman wisdom spread, like the radiant rays of an eastern sun, over all distant regions and countries of the earth. His riches, power, splendour, peace, and glory, were proverbially known among mighty nations. Powerful and illustrious princes sought eagerly his favour, and acknowledged willingly his superiority, by the rich and costly presents which they either sent to him, through their ambassadors, or brought along with them, when they came from their respective capitals to Jerusalem, to behold and admire, the wisdom, the magnificence, and majesty which the Lord of Heaven bestowed on that favoured king.

Having reached that highest pinnacle of prosperity and glory, O what a precious opportunity had Solomon then afforded unto him for continuing to render in turn his homage and services unto God, who elevated him to that height! How much reason had that mortal to remember, that all this earthly splendour was but a faint and imperfect picture of that unspeakable glory which is prepared for the faithful servants of God in the region of eternal bliss! He should have reflected that all things present shall soon vanish like smoke, and, therefore,

he should have collected all his vast resources, and applied all his energy for, and in the service of, that faithful God, who already so richly rewarded his past obedience, and who showed him such unmistakeable tokens of His divine favour and love. Ah! at this stage corrupted nature interfered, pride mingled, flesh prevailed, forgetfulness began to build its nest in the large heart of that wise and great man; ungratefulness fixed likewise her execrable abode there, and, alas! Satan triumphed. That once so wise, so prudent, so mighty, so pious, so devoted governor of Jerusalem, abandoned, by degrees, the former loyalty to his Divine Master, neglected the important duties of his high charge, and soon we shall see him labour in a workshop of his own, and madly searching to find in vain and foolish subjects, that which no mortal will ever find, for it is not in them.

The lamentable change that took place in Solomon's heart, seems to have taken its usual and regular course, as is in general the case with those men who, trained away by earthly riches and prosperity, stray on the mountains of vanity, and fail to implore early, and seek daily, Jehovah's grace to preserve them from utter destruction. As usual with backsliding mortals, Solomon's fall likewise must have been gradual. With every step he made forward in terrestrial glory and prosperity, he made a retrograde step in his spiritual greatness and piety. Instead of looking always back as far as to the tent of his grandfather, Jesse, from which the Lord lifted up his family until He made him reach the loftiest rank of glory to which a mortal can mount; instead of searching carefully the reason thereof, saying, "What does God mean by all that?" or, as his father, David, once said, "Who am I, O, Lord God? and what is my house, that Thou hast brought

me hitherto?" (2 Sam. vii. 18). "Surely He must have some important work for me to execute for the promotion of His honour on earth, for which purpose He invested me, a poor mortal, with such immense riches and power. Now, I must try all in my power to serve him faithfully. Now, I shall seek the best way in which to employ those talents which were deposited with me for the execution of His divine will. Now, I shall endeavour, by the aid of God, to make myself worthy of the greater riches and honours in the place of eternal felicity, where the crown never fades, where honours never wither, and where happiness never ends."—We say, that instead of thinking, resolving, and acting in such a manner as would have been worthy of him, Solomon grasped greedily at the highest degree of riches and power, and prosperity, and honour for himself—exclusively for himself—hence there was an insatiable hunger and thirst for still more generated in his heart, and satisfaction fled. This is generally the case with all our fellow-mortals, and was not new with Solomon. As long as man considers himself as unworthy of anything, acknowledges with heart and soul (not with the lips only) that all he possesses belongs unto God, who lent it unto him for a short time, then man will find pleasure and real satisfaction in every thing. But as soon as man begins to revolt, and to think himself independent proprietor of the least thing, he will find satisfaction in nothing—for flesh and blood (unguided and unrestrained by the Spirit of God), can never be satisfied, like the grave that will never say "Enough."

That great giant now straying in the wilderness of pride, fell suddenly into the mire of error. He began to think that he had done already quite enough for his God, and for his soul, and for huma-

nity, in having built such a splendid temple unto the Lord, wherein Israel his people should praise and adore Him—in having offered unto Him many thousands of sacrifices, and in having given unto Israel the precious and instructive book of Proverbs, to regulate their conduct, to teach them how to live soberly and happily. Now he thought himself an exception to humanity, a favoured being who had more claims to every thing than any other mortal. Thinking himself master of this world, he endeavoured to be put in the possession of every thing terrestrial in its highest possible perfection. Finding soon that there was no perfection in matter whether animate or inanimate, and that hence no satisfaction is to be found by mortals in material creatures, (unless traced and found at the source, and through the first cause), he then thought that a prodigious multiplication of the numbers and quantity of everything might supply the individual deficiency of every desired object. Having found neither perfection nor real satisfaction in numbers and quantity of imperfect creatures, he then began to philosophize and to employ diligently his already perverted skill in search for the reasons of his sore disappointments. He thus plunged himself into a labyrinth of false notions, erroneous reasonings, and melancholy dreams, which soon produced in him a perfect dissatisfaction and terror of everything, whether really and generally bad or whether innocent when not abused.

The above described moral metamorphosis of the wisest of men will be more vividly represented by drawing a comparison between the Solomon of the Proverbs, and the man (the same Solomon) straying among the mountains of vanity. The Solomon of the Proverbs, when speaking about the transient worldly riches, and the folly of those who are led astray by them, says, "Blessed is the man who

found wisdom. . . . For her merchandise is better than the merchandise of silver, and her gain than the finest gold. . . . Length of days is in her right hand, and in her left riches and honour." (Prov. iii. 13—16). "Receive my instruction, and not silver; and knowledge, rather than choice gold. For wisdom is better than rubies; and all pleasant things are not to be compared to it." (viii. 10, 11.) "Riches profit not in the day of wrath; but righteousness delivereth from death." (xi. 4.) "He that trusteth in his riches shall fall; but the righteous shall flourish like a branch." (xi. 28.) "Wealth gotten by vanity shall diminish; but he that gathereth it by labour shall have increase." (xiii. 11). "A good name is rather to be chosen than riches, and favour is better than silver and gold. The rich and poor meet together: the Lord is the maker of them all." (xxii. 1, 2.) "Labour not to be rich . . . for they (thy riches) will make themselves wings like the eagle, and like the fowl of heaven." (xxiii. 4, 5). "Better is the poor that walketh in his uprightness, than he that is perverse in his ways, though he be rich. . . . He that hasteth to become rich hath an evil eye, and considereth not that poverty shall come upon him." (xxviii. 6, 22). Finally: "Two things have I required of thee, deny me them not before I die: Remove far from me vanity and false things; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food when I need it, lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God falsely." (xxx. 7, 9*).

Such were the noble sentiments of the pious and de-

* This last passage, quoted from the Proverbs, is exceedingly interesting, and it seems evident that it was penned by the old, and already penitent author, after the lamentable experience he had of the dangerous snares of riches. For though (as we

voted Solomon of the Proverbs, regarding the perishing and ensnaring riches of this world, when compared with the real and everlasting riches of Jehovah's wisdom, and the invaluable treasures laid up for us in the inspired word of his Revelation.

Now this was the very man, whom earthly and perishing riches have led astray into the wilds of pride, forgetfulness, sin, and rebellion. The same man abandoned the wisdom and the fear of God, and delivered himself into the arms of his enormous treasures, by which he endeavoured to procure for himself perfect honour, solid satisfaction, and lasting happiness. It was by the aid of Mammon that he was led away after the building of the holy temple, to neglect the services of the King of kings, and to employ (or rather to destroy) all his precious time in the building of castles and fortifications, palaces and harems, in planting vineyards, forests, and fruit-gardens without number, in introducing many tens of thousands of draught and riding horses and as many chariots, brought from Egypt into Judea,

stated already above), it is out of all question that the greatest part, at least of the Proverbs, was composed by the author in his young and happy years, still it is likewise evident that a portion unpublished during the lifetime of Solomon, was afterwards found in manuscript, and added to the book. So it is distinctly stated, at the beginning of chap. xxv., that all the following chapters were found, arranged, and added to the Book of Proverbs by the men (scribes) of the King Hezekiah. It is to these chapters that the above passage belongs, and was evidently composed by Solomon in his last days. With reference to himself, this prayer unto God to give him neither poverty nor riches, can mean nothing else than to enable him by his Spirit, to be entirely indifferent to his riches and preserved from their former bad influences upon him, and to preserve him likewise from poverty in his old age, which might have occurred by an enemy conquering him and plunging him into misery. But with reference to his fellow-men, for whom he principally wrote these warnings, this prayer is a most important one, and should be a favourite with those who seek to lay up treasure in heaven.

against the law of God, (see Deut. xvii. 16), in filling Bashan's and Sharon's verdant vallies with numberless herds and flocks, to supply his luxurious and extravagant table, which (according to 1 Kings v. 2, 3), probably outrivalled that of the Roman emperors. In order to keep that vast machinery in constant motion, without exhausting the treasuries, fleets and expeditions were needed to be kept likewise in constant motion, to and from Tarshish, to and from Ophir; and thus the wheels of the monstrous mill were kept turning. These violent proceedings of backsliding Solomon may not appear so fearfully extravagant to the eye of a worldling who would compare him to a Roman Cæsar, or with some modern European despot. A corrupted aristocratic statesman may even say: "I do not see Solomon's crime in having endeavoured to improve his country to such a high degree, or in having established and kept up a court according to his rank." But the spiritually-minded child of God who appreciates the sublime sentiments expressed in the above quoted passages of the Proverbs, must see how by them Solomon condemned his own future conduct. As to his improving his country, instead of that he plunged it into the utmost misery. He deprived himself, as well as his subjects, of the Almighty protection, and of the favour of the living God, putting himself and them under the rotten and filthy covering of Mammon and its deceitful promises. But we need not enlarge on this argument, for in the book before us we shall hear Solomon's own opinion about his conduct, when once he awoke out of his long slumber of vain pride and moral intoxication—let him therefore speak for himself.

Only one other comparison between the Solomon of the Proverbs and the Solomon in the midst of the vanities of this world. The Solomon of the Pro-

verbs, when speaking of the different dangers to which a man may be exposed when he abuses his natural and lawful relation to the other sex, says, "Discretion shall preserve thee, understanding shall keep thee. . . . To deliver thee from the strange woman, even from the stranger that flattereth with her words. . . . None that come unto her return again, neither will they reach the path of life." (Pro. ii. 11, 16, 19.) "For the lips of a strange woman drop as an honey-comb, and her mouth is smoother than oil, but her end is bitter like worm-wood, sharp like a two-edged sword. . . . Let thy fountain be blessed, and rejoice with the wife of thy youth." (v. 3, 4, 18.) "A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband : but she that bringeth dishonour is a rottenness in his bones." (xii. 4.) "Every wise woman buildeth her house ; but the foolish plucketh it down with her hand." (xiv. 1.) "Whoso findeth a (good) wife, findeth a good thing, and he obtaineth favour from the Lord." (xix. 14.) "It is better to dwell in the wilderness than with a contentious and angry woman." (xxi. 19.) "The mouth of a strange woman is a deep pit : he that is abhorred of the Lord shall fall therein." (xxii. 14 —see also in the last chap. of that Book, from verse 10 to end)

The above quotations we have chosen out of the numerous passages in which Solomon instructs and warns regarding man's relation to woman—a relation which, if formed according to the law of God, brings the sweetest blessings in earthly life, but if abused, brings with it the worst of curses and most destructive consequences. It is true, indeed, that some of the above passages refer to crimes of which Solomon cannot (directly) be accused in his violent conduct. Others seem to have been composed by him after his deplorable experience, and when his con-

science was re-awakened. But, alas ! who can read those passages without being horror-struck at the idea that the very same inspired author of these important truths fell into the very snares against which he so earnestly and repeatedly warned his fellow-men ! The great, wise, and mighty King Solomon was carried into captivity by the pride of his heart, and in that state of mental confusion, avowed himself (by his acts) the slave of the lowest sensuality. The unheard-of number of women with whom he colonized his harems, shew us how he sold his noble heart to the will of the flesh. The fact that a great (or, the greatest) number of these women were daughters of strangers from these idolatrous nations—intermarriages with whom were strictly and repeatedly prohibited in the law of God—shows us how he entirely withdrew his soul from obedience to the God of his fathers, and how he presumed to be his own independent master. Oh ! but what is all that in comparison with the horrid and gloomy results to which it led ! The aged wanderer yielded at last to his hundreds of idolatrous and enticing serpents, to build temples unto their dumb idols ! to build altars, and sacrifice unto strange gods of wood and stone, in the midst of Jerusalem, the holy city of the great God of Jacob ! thus rivalling the only adorable majesty of heaven—the great King of Zion ! O, how did Satan completely master that great and wise man ! O, how did he succeed in forcing that great architect and builder of Jehovah's temple to grind in his mill, and to cast away with violent hands his wisdom, his glory, his riches, and his strength, into the dark bosom of the bottomless pit ! Ah, yes, it was in that miserable condition that the above quoted verse was perfectly applicable to Solomon, "The mouth of a strange woman is a deep pit : he that is abhorred of the

Lord shall fall therein" (Pro. xxii. 14—compare in this book, chap. viii. 2, 6).

How long that straying hero continued wading in the boundless ocean of miry conduct—how long that vanity-drunk philosopher continued to stagger and totter in the midst of the dissipating turmoil of the never-satisfying earthly pleasures, and how long he remained the fettered slave in the dark prison of Satan and sin, is a point which we cannot exactly determine. But from different events recorded in sacred history, from Solomon's own confession in the book before us, and from reasoning from and judging by facts of daily occurrence, we think we must come to the following conclusions.

1st. Solomon's fall could by no means have taken place all at once. It must have assumed a very slow course and progress, degree by degree, and step by step. Sometimes it must even have progressed so slow that he could discover neither ungodliness nor danger in his actions. At last only he saw that it had accumulated to a fearful height of corruption and revolt. Hence, we must conclude, that the whole fermenting process must have swallowed a great number of years.

2d. From several passages in this book, we learn that, even during that lamentable period, neither Solomon's conscience nor his wisdom were entirely drowned, but that their repeated admonitions were misapplied, violated, and repressed.

In the midst of unbounded opulence and power, the man who said, "Who can eat, or who can indulge more than I?" the same man said in his heart, "Who else shall build as many palaces, plant as many vineyards and gardens, possess as many chariots and horses, take and keep as many wives and their servants, than the richest and wisest monarch in the world?" These puerile propensities,

these worldly pleasures and appetites, he could soon provide for by the aid of his enormous riches, but in none of these follies could he find the satisfaction that he had promised himself when procuring them. On the contrary, as soon as the first drug was swallowed, the appetite was increased a hundred-fold in vigour, and the desire for worldly vanities became vehement and irresistible. Thus disappointed, he entered on an earnest examination for the reason of his failure. Conscience told him that, because he forsook God, the author and source of all good things, of all real pleasures and solid satisfaction, therefore he will find neither pleasure nor satisfaction in anything. Wisdom declared that the reason lies in his own imperfection, as well as in the imperfection and nothingness of every material and decaying object. But Solomon had already too far gone to abandon all at once the entire fabric of his monstrous composition. He therefore determined not to obey, but to oppose conscience and wisdom. He returned to his work with renewed vigour, and thought to outwit wisdom and suffocate conscience with the rags of vanity. By augmenting the number of his desired objects, he fancied to press out of them the real and lasting satisfaction which he longed after. One hundred, or double that number, of additional wives and concubines, and as many servants, were soon gathered; some more palaces, castles, and fortifications, were built; more vineyards and pleasure gardens were planted; a great number of additional luxuries were ordered and obtained for the table; more chariots and horses were procured; more bands of music formed. Now shall perfect pleasure fill the atmosphere around him, and solid satisfaction overflows his heart, and divide into streams in all his veins.

3d. In the book before us there are several pas-

sages (in first and second chapters) which clearly indicate that, when Solomon had remained for some time in the above described depth of confusion and misery, and still found no satisfaction, no desire calmed and no wish completely fulfilled, he was led astray in his religious sentiments. Guided now as he was by a false philosophy, he found fault with Providence. His false theory was, that whilst man was created with many desires and wishes there was nothing perfect provided for him, by which he might satisfy them solidly and lastingly. Whilst in this state of mind he could not love God, he became a melancholy misanthrope. He began to hate his own life no less than the foolish works of his hands, which occupied him for many years. But, as the case is with all men of that stamp, Solomon continued to live in splendour, according to his habits and means, to partake of everything rich and pleasant, to join merriment and jollity, and dance to the world's wild music; and though he now neither sought nor expected to find in these things the objects he once searched after, still it served as a distraction or destruction of time.

4th. The above described state of things having continued for many years, and Solomon having attained an old age in the midst of such a tumultuous and worldly life, he by degrees lost all fear and love of God, and the subject of his holy religion became at last totally estranged from, and extinguished in, his mind. It was in that state of moral deadness that his idolatrous wives prevailed with him not only to allow them to remain attached to their idols, but even to build temples and sacrifice unto their strange abominations of wood and stone. "And it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods," &c., &c., (1 Kings xi. 4—8.)

5th. From several passages, and especially from the last chapter of Ecclesiastes (verses 1—7), we are led to conclude, that Solomon's final awakening and deep repentance took place at that age when the structure of his body and its different functions began to exhibit the usual symptoms of decline and decay ; or, in Solomon's own words, when the days arrived regarding which he said, "I have no pleasure in them." His violent passions began then to abate and slumber. The pencil of his gay imagination ceased to paint earthly pictures with such fascinating beauty as before. The dim eyes ceased to exhibit to his mind the ravishing objects of fleshly lusts in such vivid and imposing colours as they did in the days of his vigour. The digestive organs became lazy and slow in their action, and the palate began to call tasteless and bitter the very dainties which for many years it applauded as the most tasteful, and as the sweetest of the sweet. The coinciding vibrations of musical instruments ceased to strike in their accustomed sweet harmony on the enfeebled and withered organs of his ears. Ah, it was then—when these antagonists of the soul began to slumber, that reason awoke in all its vigour—it was when the advocates of sin and vanity became dead that *conscience* revived full of argument and severe admonition. It was then that Solomon began to reflect on the past, to consider the present, and to think seriously on the future.

In the silent watches of the night ; in the magnificent royal palace of Jerusalem ; under a splendid pavilion decorated with the richest silk and gold embroidered curtains of the finest production of Tarshish and Tyre ; in a cedar bed overlaid with Ophir's gold, and sumptuously furnished with all commodities for easy repose, lay the once so wise, so mighty, so elevated, so pious, and so happy,—but

now so deep-sunk, so age-worn, so gloomy, so life-tired, and so confounded monarch Solomon, King of Israel. He lay down in order to repose, and closed his eyes preparing to sleep, but conscience came and opposed, and protested, saying, "O aged and dying man! Behold thy feeble body with its declining organs doomed to decay in the dust, and thou shalt see that a long and gloomy night approaches in which thine earthly frame shall lie down not to rise again, and sleep not to awake again until the blast of the last trumpet for universal judgment! Now it is high time for thee to examine thyself—high time to remember that very soon thou must meet that gracious, but at the same time zealous and terrible God who surrounded and covered thee with so numerous blessings, with so varied bounties, but whom thou hast so shamefully neglected, forgotten and provoked. O make thyself ready to appear before the bar of the Most High, whose services, fear and love and talents, thou has buried under the rubbish of vain and perishing pleasures of a passing and deceiving world. Is there now time for thee to sleep or repose?"

Unable to resist any longer the pleas and admonitions of his conscience, too tired of the vanities of this world, and too much convinced of the folly and hollowness of his past behaviour, Solomon at last resolved to pass in review all the bygone days of his earthly life, to examine carefully all the different events and actions which they witnessed, to compare them with each other, to value them separately, and judge. He now brought to vivid recollection that brilliant and happy period when he was employed in the building of Jehovah's temple, and the sweet hours he then spent in silent and soul-elevating communion with his Most High God. He well remembered that mysterious joy which he experienced at the time of the dedication of the house of God,

when after he had offered that excellent and ever-memorable prayer, the fire from heaven descended upon the altar, and the glory of the Lord filled the sanctuary. Finally, he recalled the time when the Lord appeared unto him in a dream by night, and told him that his prayers were heard and accepted on his own behalf as on that of his people, and accompanied this with the most cheering and glorious promises—yea he seemed yet to feel somewhat of the celestial joy and peace that pass all understanding, all expression, all definition, and which filled his heart and soul on that highly solemn occasion. All this he now contrasted with the miserable days and nights, weeks, months, and years, which he spent afterwards in the service of the now-dying flesh, in the service of a deceiving world, in the slavish service of Satan and sin. We may paint to our imaginations some faint pictures of the mental anguish, and of the fearful agony which that conscience-stricken sinner must then have experienced and felt; but owing to our different circumstances and stations, and times, and even *dispensations*, we cannot presume to be able to form an exact idea of what Solomon must have felt when his truly lamentable situation was plainly before his eyes—when he began to see, feel, and fear his approaching death and following judgments. It was then that he had recourse to repentance, sighs, tears, and prayers and supplications, and real and entire returning unto God. It was then that he resolved to make a public confession of his errors and sins, and to warn others from falling into the same pit.*

Solomon, therefore, first introduces himself in this book to the religious world under the metaphorical name *Koheleth*, which means, “the gatherer,” viz., the man who gathered facts, events, results, and

* Several commentators take the same view.

conclusions from personal experience. This word is also feminine in the Hebrew; for, as in the Proverbs, so here Solomon speaks by, and in the name of *Wisdom* (which Noun is feminine in the Heb.) In order not to mistake the person intended under this name he proceeds, saying, "the son of David, King of Israel." He then casts a final glance around him, and beholds with shame, confusion, pain, and terror all the vain and decaying works, which for so many years absorbed all his attention, exhausted all his energy, and estranged him from the God of his fathers. In that excited and overwhelmed condition of mind, he exclaimed, "Vanity of vanities! saith *Koheleth*, vanity of vanities, all is vanity." The very strong and extraordinary manner of expression by which Solomon thus opens his discourse without previous explanation or reference to any subject, shows that his mind was pre-occupied with something painful. His heart must have been filled with grief and trouble, and his soul sore wounded by the serious contemplation of something grievous, of something wrong and irreparable, some evils produced by false actions, some frustrated expectations—things which proved not only foolish and injurious in the highest degree, but even "vanity of vanities"—a complication of failure, loss, disappointment, danger, and misery, even in time, and what in Eternity!

The third verse is evidently intended to offer some preliminary explanation to the second, though it seems, at the same time, to augment and strengthen the argument—Why are all worldly things vanity of vanities?—Why have all my plans been frustrated?—Why am I so sore disappointed in all my actions? because "What advantage hath man (what can he derive? what can he expect?) of all his labour, that he thus toileth under the sun?" What harvest can the

man expect who sows chaff? What satisfaction can one find in feeding on the wind? Why then does he so madly toil in the mountains of vanity? Why seeking all his days what he will never find?

Be it now observed that the word עֲמָלוֹ (amalo) which we rendered "his labour," is peculiarly emphatic. It does not refer to those labours assigned unto man by God when He said, "With the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat bread," far less does it mean good works in the service of God, and his soul, or even such works as are necessary for his comfort and that of his family. No! by "his labour," *man's own* vain and irksome toils are designated, which *he brings upon himself* out of some foolish ambitious plans, or in order to satisfy the will of his flesh, and to answer his selfish purposes. So likewise does the word יִתְרוֹן (yithron), which we rendered "advantage," not refer to that profit of *daily bread* which man gains by the labour appointed for him by Providence; for this is what Solomon himself recommends afterwards as honest and happy. But the "advantage" here refers to a real and solid advantage which should make man happy in time, and go along with him into another world. Such an advantage alone would be worthy of man's hard toils during his whole life, even were it as long as that of Methuselah. But what shadow even of such a solid and lasting advantage has man of all *his* labours? of labours of *his own* invention, of troubles of *his own* production, that he thus hardly, thus unwearyingly, yea, thus madly toils under the sun? Such vain troubles which man takes to himself, which God neither commanded nor recommended, shall disappoint him at last. Of all these afflictive labours and plans man shall derive no advantage even in this world "under the sun;" for they shall all prove "vanity of vanities," while man will have

to answer in another world for the time he has spent in them and lost by them.*

4. One generation passeth away,
 And another generation cometh:
 But the earth abideth for ever.

Here Solomon considers the successive shiftings of the human family; the fact that one generation is swept away by death to make room for another generation coming in its place, as an irrevocable proof, that all labours and toils of ambitious man on earth, and his continual search for earthly riches, are vanity of vanities. In verse 3 the argument was, that things which produce no lasting or solid advantage to man are nothing else but vanity. In verse 4 it is proved that earthly possessions can afford no lasting advantage to mortal man, because his death is certain, and when it comes he must leave everything. The last clause of this verse reads, "But the earth abideth for ever." The real sense, however, of this phrase seems to us to be, "while the earth remaineth for ever the same." After that a generation of men have been actively toiling, building, planting, gathering all the days of their lives, under the common hardships, dangers, and vicissitudes to which men are generally exposed, then they all return to their native dust, naked as they came hither. The earth, which swallowed up all their labours, time, energy, and strength, devours

* Before we proceed any further, we beg the reader to keep in mind what we already stated in our Introduction to this Book, viz., that the first eleven verses thereof are properly Solomon's Introduction to the whole work. Now we have to add, that the seven verses that are now to follow are the *explanation* of verses 2 and 3, and show how man has no advantage of all *his own* toils, and that therefore they are "Vanity of vanities."

likewise the very instruments (the human bodies) of her labourers, without changing herself in the least, either in her value to God or to the souls of her labourers. She remains the same in her magnitude, in her place, in her appearance, and in her character (as to herself, or to the generations gone). No gratitude whatever is shown by her to her faithful children, when their toils are once finished, and their instruments have become weary and useless, though she knows well how to flatter her still vigorous and active children, in order to persuade them to stretch all their muscles, and spend all their strength in her monstrous fabric. Now, after thousands of years, she still stands in her original place, ready with a wide mouth to swallow the labours, energy, and bodies of hundreds of succeeding generations, without reflecting back even the shadow of lustre upon the millions, whose works and instruments are buried in her bosom. True, that the presently living labourers in the mountains of vanity, admire even the vestiges and ruins of the work of their decayed predecessors; but what does this argue more than a general infatuation? What advantage does this bring to either the mouldering bones, or the departed souls of those who once wearied their instruments (bodies) at these heaps of stones? Does not the earth remain for ever the same?

O what a lesson this single fact suggests to us! We should daily keep in mind that we are but pilgrims and sojourners on earth. We should always put the following questions unto ourselves: "Whence is it that we come? For what purpose are we sent here? Whither is it that we must soon go? What are the works and labours intended for us, and assigned to us by our Creator? Which of our works can bring us a lasting advantage, which we may carry with us hence? Which works will be fit to

promote the glory of our God, the welfare of our souls, and that of our fellow-men? What are the monuments that are best to leave for generations to come, that will show them a good example, and encourage them to employ their time, energy, means, and the strength of their bodies in the service of their God, who will faithfully reward them in their immortal souls, and not to waste them in the vain service of ungrateful and perfidious earth?"

O thou poor and hard labouring man, who art called upon by Providence to gain honestly thy daily bread, though with the sweat of thy brow! Remember that this span of our earthly lives will soon change into an eternal existence in the regions of spirits. Eat thy hard-earned bread with thankfulness, and with a cheerful soul, for the purpose of being able to serve thy God on earth with thy soul and body, which are His. Consider that the hour is at hand, when thy labours and toils shall be at an end, and thou shalt enter a bright sphere of eternal rest and unfading glory. O thou rich man! Has the Lord bestowed upon thee earthly treasures—does Providence pour wealth and plenty into thy stores; remember thou that thy body must soon retire to the same place as that of the poor and hard labouring man—that these talents must consequently have been given thee for a better purpose, than to bury them in the earth. Remember that thou art made by Providence the steward of a portion of thy Master's treasures, to use them in His service for the benefit of thine own soul, as well as for those of thy fellow-pilgrims. Remember that these treasures are the *travelling expenses* of those who have to traverse this dreary vale on their journey to the heavenly Zion; and, if Providence has chosen thee as the treasurer, be faithful and exact, for soon thou shalt be removed from thy post, thine office be given to thy successor, and thou

be called upon to give an account of thy proceedings. If at thy departure hence, thou dividest the remainder of thy trust between thy children and relations, prepare them before God and man, to employ thy Master's property exclusively in His service, and according to His directions. If thou shalt prove thus faithful in the management of earthly talents, the treasures of heaven shall be opened unto thee, and throughout eternity thou shalt enjoy the confidence and favour of the Lord, thy heavenly King and thy God.

But O, thou blinded and avaricious worshipper of Mammon! Thou unfaithful treasurer who wickedly and rebelliously wrestest unto thyself the property of thy God! Thou who, in the pride of thy deceived heart, sayest with Nebuchadnezzar, "Is not this the great Babylon that I have built . . . by the might of my power?" Thou who sayest, "These are my own treasures, my own property, I shall use them according to my desire, in the exclusive service of my flesh, for the satisfaction of my wishes." O thou deceived soul! look for one moment around thee and see how many Mammon-worshippers are daily torn away from their idols, and delivered into the arms of death and decay. Consider that yet a while, and thine eyes shall see no beauty, thine heart feel no satisfaction, and thy soul no pleasure in the pieces of dumb matter in which thou gloriest at present. Remember how thou and all that thou callest now *thine own* shall soon be divided—viz., thy body to the worms of the grave, thy riches remain on earth the property of Him unto whom all things created belong, and thy soul return unto Him who gave it unto thee. O selfish and misguided man! It is thy soul, and she alone, that will remain of *thee*, of thy desires, riches, and all, and she alone is to be responsible for all. Are you then honest

or wise enough to acknowledge the real owners of things belonging unto thy fellow-mortals, and which can be required of thee through an earthly judge, to escape whom thou hast thousand means, and art neither honest nor wise enough to acknowledge the owner of thy life and all, unto whom thou must soon restore every thing, and whose judgment and punishment thou canst never avoid? Soon thou (that is thy soul) shall be accused and convinced of robbery before the great and holy judge of the whole earth, and condemned to eternal misery, while the objects robbed by thee shall remain still untouched in the possession of Him who called everything into existence. There is, therefore, no advantage for thee even to imagine that thou canst rob God and possess anything earthly exclusively for thyself. O, consider this while it is yet time, and hasten to free thyself from that fearful sacrilege. Make all haste to deliver thyself, soul and body, and possessions, in the hands of thy provoked Master. Honour Jehovah, O thou immortal soul! with thy body and substance, which are his. Count all earthly things as they really are, "Vanity of vanities," and begin thy journey heavenwards, by the high road of Revelation. Thou shalt then be really rich, and thy treasures *thine*, and thou shalt fear no storm, no change, no robber, no thief, no moth, no death, and no grave, and no judgment, for thy righteousness (received by grace) shall go before thee, and the glory of thy God shall gather in thy soul unto eternal happiness.

In the following verses Solomon proceeds to give some examples illustrative of the sameness of the earth, and of the continuance of a regular revolution in the systematic bodies of the universe in general, as of the unchanging activity of some bodies attached to our globe in particular. These he contrasts with the above-mentioned unsteady and shifting human

family, one generation being taken away and another coming to be swept away in the same manner.

5. The sun also riseth ;
 The sun also goeth down ;
 But he hasteneth* to his place ;
 There he shineth again.

The sun, like man, has his rising and setting time. But there had never yet occurred the least weariness in the sun, by which he should have retarded his appearance in the morning after he had set on the previous evening. No! with the same majestic and regular steps by which he traverses our hemisphere during our day, he eagerly and unchangeably pursues his course through the other hemisphere during the night, and hastes, as with a panting desire to return to his starting-point, and after a night's absence there we find him in the morning as bright, as vigorous, and as glorious as ever. So David in the 19th Psalm says, "and he (the sun), as a bridegroom goeth forth from his chamber; he rejoices like a giant in running his course. From the end of the heavens is his going forth, and his circuits unto the ends of them; and nothing is hid from his flame." Both these passages describe the phenomena of nature in the sweet simplicity of Scripture language, which, not intended to teach us philosophy, speaks of things as they appear to the naked eye of the simple observer.

* שָׁאָף (Shaaph) originally "to draw," as air by the weary one; signifies figuratively a panting desire for anything, an ardent wish, &c. In our verse it might also be rendered "he panteth for his place," expressive of the apparent eagerness with which the sun seems inspired for returning at the exact time and in regular order to his place of rising. We considered, however, the word "hasteneth" to be, if not more expressive, at least more suitable to the phrase, while a *panting haste* must be understood as the meaning of the Hebrew text.

Both passages speak of the constancy, faithfulness, and durability with which that brilliant luminary continues his insurpassable services to our globe and its inhabitants, in shedding streams of splendour and fertility on and around them.

In our verse Solomon intends to shew, that while the sun was, is, and will always continue to be the same in his nature, glory, and course, whilst he will always continue to go down and disappear in the evenings, and with the same certainty and regularity re-appear and brilliantly shine every morning, the generations of men, however they might have shone and dazzled during the day of their earthly existence, the night of death comes, eclipses, and covers them, never to re-appear upon the stage of life, nor ever to interfere again in sublunary transactions, "for there is hope of a tree, if it be cut down, that it will sprout again, and that the tender branch thereof will not cease. . . . But man dieth and wasteth away; yea, man giveth up the ghost, and where is he then? Yea, man lieth down and riseth no more," &c. (Job xiv. 7, 10, 12.) How foolish and how vain are therefore man's unsatiable desires, and his laborious searches for earthly treasures and possessions, which, having accumulated, he must abruptly leave, never to return to them again!

6 Going towards the south,
Then turning round towards the north,*
Around around veereth the wind,
And for his circuits the wind returns again.

Here the inspired author refers to an element in

* Some commentators divide this verse, transferring the one-half of it to verse 5, and arguing that it also does refer to the course of the sun—that whilst verse 5 referred to its daily course, this clause, "Going towards the north, then turning

nature, which, though often changing stations and courses, is still more constant, more certain, more durable than mortal man. The wind on the eastern shores of the Mediterranean blows for a certain season of the year from north to south, then it changeth its course, and a southerly wind takes its place, blowing for several months towards the north. Such is the appearance of its course as if engaged to run to a certain point of the globe to make some turns, to return again with the same velocity and manner to its original starting-point, and be ready to enter upon a new course or circuit at the hour appointed. It has never yet seemed that the wind should have remained out a whole year—never has the wind yet lost himself in some pathless desert, or in some of the vast regions of the trackless ocean. He always re-appears again in usual time to enter his new courses in the same manner as he did the

round towards the south," referred to the sun's annual course through the signs of the zodiac. But, ingenious as this invention seems to be, neither the textual construction of the whole passage, nor indeed Solomon's astronomical views (as far as developed in the same) can admit of such an arrangement. The difficulty which commentators found here was, to explain what Solomon meant in saying that the wind is going towards the south and turning to *north*, seeing that the only constant wind which prevails within the tropical regions (trade wind) moves regularly from *east* to west round the globe. But we need not transport Solomon beyond the Mediterranean, nor force him to speak of any other winds than those which periodically prevail on her shores. All over Egypt and part of Palestine (though irregular in the latter country sometimes, because interrupted by the mountains in the interior) the *northerly* wind prevails regularly during the greater portion of the year, and is then discharged by a southerly wind which likewise continues for several months (though sometimes with more irregularity than the former.) To this system of winds Solomon must refer in our verse, describing things as they appear to the simple observer. "Going towards the south," viz., the northerly wind, which breathes towards the south, as if marching on and then at once "turning round towards the north," &c.

former, and to accomplish them without weariness or delay. Not so the generations of men, who are always swept away by death in the very midst of their course, and once removed they never re-appear.

7. All the rivers run into the sea,
Yet the sea doth not overflow :
Unto the place whence the rivers flow,
Thither they return to flow again.

Another instance illustrative of the continual, unvariable, and unwearying activity of an element in nature. Since the creation, the busy streams continue to pay their tribute to the mighty ocean, the vast reservoir of that liquid element, and yet the ocean is never so full as to refuse to receive the volumes of the streams any longer. The reason of this phenomenon is the fact, that while the ocean receives the enormous quantity of waters from the rivers, as much water is evaporated from it again by the action of the sun. These are raised by the air, carried in clouds, and poured out on the dry and thirsty regions of the continent, to promote the beneficent rounds of operation in the economy of vegetation, &c. The superfluous waters of the rain then enter into the pores of mountains, the fissures and crevices of rocks, and having filtrated and traversed through innumerable dark veins, they unite their forces at some convenient places, emerge from their confinement, set themselves at liberty, and with a murmuring noise pursue their journey homewards. Springs of water, originated in the same manner, or produced by the direct infiltration of the waters of the ocean and seas, through mysterious tubes and canals, occasioned by the pressure of more elevated

columns of water, all dispersed brethren of the same liquid origin, unite as soon as they see light, and hasten with an irresistible force by a path more or less direct, more or less disputed, into the bosom of their mother ocean, whence they were snatched into captivity. Thus there exists an unceasing and weariless activity in that dumb element, which is continually pouring into the ocean by the streams, and as continually sent into the streams by the ocean. Though some of these waters are (like man) taken away from the mass and buried in the dark caves of the earth, still they soon re-appear, and joyfully hasten to return to the place of their nativity. But man, when once cut off by death and buried in the earth, never returns to live and move again in the region of his former activity.

8. All the labouring objects (or, active things)

No man is able to recount ;

Never would the eye be satisfied with seeing them,

Nor the ear filled with hearing of them.

In the three preceding verses, Solomon referred us to three different objects in nature—viz., the sun, wind, and water, drawing a contrast between their continual and uninterrupted activity since time immemorial, and the short existence of man, who is suddenly cut off by death, to live and act no longer. In the verse before us, Solomon tells us that he could take no more instances of continually active bodies in nature, because these were so numerous, that no man could recount them ; yea, no eye would ever be satisfied, and say, “ I see no more ” (as one satisfied with meat, would say, “ I can eat no more, ”) nor would ever the ear be filled with hearing of them, so as to say, “ I hear of no other such like subjects

that exist in active nature." It is as if Solomon had said, "I must stop now from taking any more instances from nature to prove my argument, for these are so various and so numerous, that no man can recount them. Even were I able to recount them, the eye of man (directed to contemplate them) would never cease to discover new ones, and the ear would never cease hearing of some equally active things in nature, which, like the sun, wind, and streams, continue also their unwearied and unchangeable course, ever since their creation, and shall continue the same to the end of the world—while mortal man, after his short dream of existence, is delivered to the silent grave, from whence his voice is never heard again. [This is, in our humble opinion, the real import of this verse, and such is the true connection of the whole passage, which, along with the three following verses, forms the sacred author's introduction to the Book of Ecclesiastes. The eleven first verses must thus correspond together in a straight line of argument and thought. We press this fact the more upon the mind of our readers (and sure we are, we cannot do it too often), because there are many passages in this Book which were distorted and disparaged by individuals who, not having found out their real *connection* with their contexts, have consequently failed to see their right meaning. The case of the eleven first verses of this Book, which, according to the common translations and expositions, are bereaved of any connection, and some of these verses have consequently neither meaning nor connection whatever, is, we think, a sufficient proof of what we stated above].

In the two following verses, Solomon continues to show (not by referring any more to particulars, but to nature in general) the unalterable and unweari-

able course of inanimate nature, in contrast to the short human activity, which is entirely cut off by death.

9. All that hath been, shall continue to be ;
 All that hath been done, shall likewise continue
 to be done :
 So that there is nothing new under the sun.
10. Is there any thing whereof one should say,
 Behold, this is new ?
 It hath already existed,
 In ages that were before us.

Having indicated in verse 8 that he would refer us to no more particulars, because of the vastness of their number, Solomon proceeds in verse 9 to show that the order and course of nature in general, was and is always unchangeably the same. The sun continues to rise in the morning and set in the evening. The wind continues its whirling travels in the proper seasons. The rivers continue to precipitate themselves into the ocean, and to receive their new supplies from the same sources. Not only these, but innumerable objects in nature like unto them, continue the same in their native functions, courses, and activity from the very beginning of their existence, and shall so continue unto the end, without the least change of locality or operation, for, in them, "there is nothing new under the sun"—they have never changed, and shall never change. In verse 10 Solomon indicates with regard to things or systems in nature newly discovered—things or systems, regarding which, the individual, who had the honour of discovering them, may in his first astonishment exclaim "Behold this is a new thing," that still the fact is the thing or the system, in itself, and in its existence, is not new at all, though the discovery of it be new.

Now it must be understood that in this statement Solomon does not refer to the applications and uses which we make of our different discoveries, but to the objects, orders, existences, and powers newly discovered, which are only new to man who was formerly ignorant of them, but in reality are old in their existence, as old as the whole material system of the universe. For instance, man discovered the rotation of our globe, magnetic power, electricity, steam-power, &c., and from these discoveries he forms many new plans, makes many applications, and derives enormous services. Now all these systems and powers are no more new than the continent of America, which we call "the new world," because men were ignorant of its existence, until towards the end of the 15th century when Columbus discovered it. If that discoverer, in the heat of joy, should have exclaimed, "Behold, a new world," he would only have been correct in as far as regards men, who were hitherto ignorant of its existence, but as regards its real existence, it is surely not "new under the sun," but as old as the continent of Europe. So regarding the discoveries above mentioned, we cannot say that these newly discovered systems and powers are *new*, (though the applications of them in man's service are necessarily new) for they existed in the same character, and pursued the same unchangeable courses since the great system of the universe was established.

Having so powerfully established his argument as to the antiquity, unchangeableness, and continual activity of the individual bodies and elements in inanimate nature, Solomon returns in the following verse to mortal man. There he endeavours to give the last touch to the above drawn contrast, to strengthen his general argument, by showing that the shiftings of generations (by deaths and births)

are not to be considered as a continuation of the existence of the self-same object, inasmuch as every passing generation is at once removed and forgotten, and its successor is not at all better.

11. There is no memorial of the former (generations).
 Nor will there be any memorial of the future (generations).
 Among those (generations) who shall come after them.

This verse stands in close connection with verse 4, where it was stated that whilst the generations of men shift continually (by deaths and births) one after another, the earth and her system, and the order of the bodies and elements attached to her, abide for ever the same. Solomon, in the six intermediate verses, endeavoured to shew, by instances referred to, how the system, order, and cause of inanimate nature continue to be the same, without the least change or intermission. In this verse the author returns to his subject introduced in verse 4, and strengthens his argument and contrast drawn between unchangeable nature and shifting humanity, by shewing the fact, that the existence of departed generations is entirely blotted out from the memory of generations that succeed them.*

* Now, be it observed, that translators and expositors in general changed the "generations" of our verse into inanimate "things," rendering the verse, "There is no remembrance of former *things*," &c. Into this grave error they fell, because they overlooked the strict connection that exists between the first *eleven verses* of this Book, which form its introduction. Had they seen this, they would have easily perceived that Solomon needed not repeat the word "generations" in verse 11, as it refers to the "generations" in verse 4. This will be seen still clearer, when we couple these two verses together, and read, "One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh. There is no memorial (left) of

From all that has been stated above, it is now, we presume, clear enough, even beyond doubt or dispute, that Solomon, in referring us to the continual existence and activity of the sun, wind, and rivers, intends to draw a contrast between these and mortal man, whose existence and activity on earth are confined to a few years, after which he vanishes away like smoke. This contrast begins to be drawn in verse 4, where, after stating that generation after generation is swept away, he immediately adds: "But the earth abideth for ever." Having produced some examples of the continuance and unchangeable-

the former, nor will there be any memorial of the future," &c. To repeat here the word "generation," would have been a useless repetition; for the argument of verse 4 was only strengthened by the instances he referred to in the six intermediate verses to prove that the "earth abideth for ever the same." We cannot leave this subject without expressing our astonishment, how so many learned men could overlook such a simple fact, and commit such a grave error as to think for one moment that this verse could refer to inanimate "things" of nature! Had this been the case, then Solomon would have directly and forcibly contradicted all his arguments contained in the six foregoing verses, in which he all along endeavours to shew that all *things* inanimate in nature always continue the same, unchangeably and unweariedly in their existence as well as in their order, and that there was nothing new in them under the sun! How, then, could he possibly say in verse 11 that there exists no "memorial of former things?" seeing that they exist from antiquity, and shall never change in form, system, nature, or course! Moreover, had Solomon here intended "things," and not "generations" of men, he would surely have used the proper word לְרֵאשֹׁנוֹת (Larishonoth), with a final ת, to designate the *neuter* of "things," (as Isa. xlvi. 3, "I have declared the former things," &c.), and not put in the masculine ם as לְרֵאשֹׁנוֹיִם (Larishonim) in our verse. Likewise the word לְאֶחְזִינִיִּם (Laachronim) in our verse, would surely have been לְאֶחְזִינֹת (Laachronoth), had it referred to "things." The Septuagint version alone has put it right.

ness of several inanimate objects, either immediately attached to the earth, or only belonging to its system, he returns in verse 11 to the generations of men, showing how they completely and eternally disappear, without leaving any mark or monument of their former existence, as (in general) their very remembrance is lost on earth among their succeeding generations.

But let it be observed that such a contrast can only be established, when we consider man in his moral capacity as a responsible agent. In this capacity alone, there exists no connection whatever between man and man, far less between generation and generation; one man not being responsible for the other, a brother not being able to redeem his brother, nor a father to pay the ransom for the soul of his child. In any other view of the subject, the above contrast would not stand; for as the sun continues to rise and set, so man (in his species) continues to be born and die—as the wind continues to blow, so man continues to exist and to move—as the rivers continue flowing into the sea, and the sea is never full, nor the rivers ever exhausted, so likewise continues man to be delivered to the grave, and the grave says never, “I am overfull,” nor is the race of men ever exhausted. Thus we see clearly that when Solomon draws the contrast between the short existence of man and the continuance of the sameness of the earth, and of the elements either attached to it, or accompanying it, this contrast must refer to man in his spiritual capacity, in which every man stands independent of his neighbour, predecessor, or successor—as a responsible agent for and in himself, living (in a spiritual sense) for himself, to answer in and by himself, the purpose for which his Creator sent him into this world.

If we, therefore, take the sum and substance of the first eleven verses of this book, which we call the Introduction, we find the sense of it as if the author had uttered the following words : “ O man ! immortal in thy soul, which belongs to heaven, but mortal and perishing in thy body, which belongs to the earth ; what advantage dost thou expect to derive from the vanities of this world ? Remember that thy real existence and home are in the heavens above, and that thine earthly existence is only like a vain dream, out of which thou shalt soon be roused. Consider that while this earth shall ever continue to exist and stand as it now does—whilst the sun shall continue to rise and set, the wind to blow from north and south, and the rivers to pour their mighty volumes into the vast deep, thou man, in thine earthly existence, shalt be here no more. Thy soul shall return to her native place, and thy body decay in the dust. Thy name shall not even be mentioned among the living, and the place where thou movest now shall recognise thee no more. What, therefore, can be thy expected advantage, for which thou loadest thus upon thyself troubles and wearisome toils in search of earthly treasures and pleasures of the flesh ? What would remain of thee, even shouldst thou succeed in accumulating all the dusty riches of the globe ? Will these procure for thee a lengthened existence even like that of a small rivulet originating between mountains, and ever rejoicing in its undisturbed course ? No ! thou must soon die, and leave unto the earth thy perishing body, and all *material* things which thou didst gather for thy immaterial soul ; thou must return to heaven, and give an account of thy actions here below ; and thou, O man ! thou shalt visit this earth no more in a state in which the vanities of

this world could either concern thee in any way or afford thee the least pleasure."

The above sentiments are not only the contents of the first eleven verses which form the Introduction to this book, but they are also the short *outlines* which indicate in a few words the whole subjects that are treated at large in the twelve following chapters. Having laid such a broad foundation in the comprehensive and most important Introduction, Solomon proceeds now to illustrate these sentiments by giving us the particulars of his own experience and minute observations. He therefore again introduces himself under the metaphorical name of *Koheleth*, as the following experiments and the resulting conclusions were made by the aid of *Wisdom* in whose name the author teaches us the following divine lessons.

12. I *Koheleth*, was King over Israel,
In Jerusalem.

The reason why Solomon says here, "I was King," and not "am King," will be obvious enough when we consider again that in the assumed name of *Koheleth* he intends to personify *Wisdom*, which is to speak in, and by himself, and to gather principles and conclusions, doctrines and counsels from his own experience. He thus indicates that all his vast experiments, from which facts are to be taken and considered, and conclusions to be made, were accomplished and gathered during the period when he *was* already King of Israel, and during his long, prosperous and eventful reign. Thus it should be anticipated that all the experiments recorded in this Book were undertaken and accomplished by him without hindrance or delay.

13. And I applied my heart to search and to explore
by wisdom,
Concerning all things that are done under the
heavens ;
It is the sore occupation which God hath
appointed for the sons of Adam,
That they should be chastised thereby.*
14. I have thus considered all the works that are done
under the sun ;
And, behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit.
15. The crooked thing he† cannot make straight,
And the defective thing he cannot arrange.

In passing through this marvellous composition of Solomon, we must constantly keep in mind the principal plan of the author, which evidently is, to appear *first* in every argument in the capacity of a *moral philosopher*, who argues from facts and experience, independently of religion, revelation, and the heavenly *future* of immortal souls. When the vanity and nothingness of this world and her false flatteries are first exposed by facts from personal experience, and when the wise man then refers us to revealed religion, to God, and to the future of souls, he always does so in obvious and strong terms. He always introduces religion as the last support of his philosophical arguments, in order to show that without *it*,

* “Chastised thereby.” In the common version לְעִנְיָתָא (Laanoth) is rendered, “to be exercised.” But this word can never signify “exercise,” but alway denotes, “to be chastised, afflicted, humbled,” &c. See Gen. xv. 13; xvi. 6, 9; xxxi. 50; xxxiv. 2; Exod. i. 2, 12; Deut. viii. 3, &c., &c.

† “He”—*man*, unto whom God hath appointed a sore occupation, cannot make straight that which is crooked. The word יִרְכַּל (Yuchal) twice repeated in this verse, must refer to “man,” “he cannot” make straight, not to things; for in that case it would have been תִּרְכַּל (Thuchal). See also chap. vii., verse 13, of this Book.

without God, and without future and eternal prospects, mortal man, with all his high qualities, deep thoughts, great wisdom, and with all his numerous works, achievements, pleasures, and enjoyments, is after all but a melancholy apparition of vanity of vanities.

Like an experienced and able temperance preacher in the midst of an intoxicated, bewildered, and staggering mob, generally finds it unsuitable and useless to begin his arguments from revealed religion (which would be "casting pearls before swine"), while the thoughts of his drunken audience are entirely directed towards the liquor shop, where their next supplies are to be got. The said preacher will therefore open his argument by showing them calmly and effectively the physical danger to which they expose themselves by their intemperance. He will try to persuade them of the fact, that the very drug they swallow with the mistaken intention to cheer their spirits and to do good to their bodies, would gradually enervate them, unfit them for their daily employments, knock down their spirits and destroy their bodies. He will then touch the cord of economy, in shewing them how this mania of intemperance empties their pockets, wastes their means, hinders them in their industry, clothes them in rags, and brings poverty, misery, and disorder into their habitations. At this stage of his sermon he will likely touch the cord of honour, proving unto them that by this their miserable conduct they deprive themselves of the claim to be received with consideration in any honest and sober society, and that at the same time they pour shame and confusion upon their relations and friends, upon their families and upon humanity at large. Having succeeded thus far in fixing the attention of his forgetful and degraded audience, he may then begin to introduce

religion. He may then gradually show them that besides all other losses which they will unavoidably sustain in this world, were they to persevere in their madness, they also put at stake the salvation of their immortal souls, for no drunkard shall see the kingdom of heaven. Such is exactly the plan which the royal author pursues in this book. He first tries to expose unto fallen and carnally minded man the madness and vanity of the fortune and pleasure-hunting mortals. Then he leads them on gradually to consider the real and everlasting fortunes—the unspeakable pleasures promised in the word of God unto the good and faithful, in a world without end.*

* Should one say that the above comparison is too strong, then we would call his attention, for a moment, to the family-relation of the common ruinous consequences that exists between the drunkard, and covetous, and pleasure-hunting man. If it be argued that a man intoxicated by liquor is more abominable than a man intoxicated by and drowned in the foolish vanities of this deceiving world; this we admit, not in a religious, but in a secular point of view. But should one maintain that, even in a religious point of view, the liquor-prey, who is *incapable* of caring for his soul, is more to be *blamed* than the *prey* of vanishing desires, and perishing worldly pleasures, who *will* not care for his soul—this we absolutely deny. The sober man who abandons religion, God and soul, and plunges himself willingly into the whirl of this world and its foolish vanities, is even far more blameable than he who cannot care for his soul because the liquor deprived him of his senses. When both victims have reached the climax of their respective intoxications, the sober debauched child of the world is no more fit for any good work than the drunkard wallowing in the mire. Do we consider the gloomy consequences of both intoxications, we shall find them at least as numerous and as fatal with the fortune and pleasure hunter as with the most abandoned drunkard. Disappointment and poverty (probably more men are impoverished through violent speculations, and extravagant pleasures, than there are original poor), exhaustion of strength, derangement of mind, dishonesty and crime, punishment and shame, suicide and murder, untimely death, and certain hell—all these abominations are trained after the sober child of the world and of Satan, in comparatively greater numbers and with the same certainty, as they are after the abandoned drunkard. If it be still objected that we combine here the covetous with the licentious man, let them then be separa-

Let us suppose for a moment, that our experienced and inspired *Koheleth* came to visit a great European fair, where an immense crowd of worldly mortals are gathered from all regions and countries with their tents and waggons, herds and flocks, grain and vegetables, meal and tallow, furs and clothes, gold and silver vessels and ornaments, pearls and jewels, stuffs and furnitures, machineries and all sorts of toys, exhibitions, theatres, and public houses. Rich and poor, young and old, men and women, all are busily employed, all talk energetically, and all are absorbed in their various affairs. There the farmer endeavours to sell at a high price the productions of his soil, but to hire at a very cheap rate his farm-servants. The manufacturer seeks to set off at the highest prices his fabrics, and to buy at a very low price the raw materials. The architect speculates how to make a double gain off one building, the one out of the proprietor's pocket, the other out of the mason's strength. There a large detachment of mortals surround a band of musicians; they eat and drink, swear and scorn, dance and roar. In yonder corner, a gang of gambling and juggling swindlers is surrounded by the hundreds of their victims, some of whom already creep away slowly with empty pockets and confounded faces. In other obscure lurking places, a duped multitude surround the tables and cards of old, experienced, and eloquent fortune-tellers; whilst other degraded beings take advantage of the busy character of the day, and feed themselves on the pockets and purses of the inattentive and negligent. Every mind is drowned,

tely considered, and we still maintain that, according to the records of crime in any country, the above argument will fit each one of them as well as the drunkard; for the latter is decidedly a son of the former, though some falsely maintain the contrary.

every thought buried, either in the foolish vanities or in the wicked abominations of this world. Every tongue is in constant motion like the wings of a wind-mill in a windy day, using all possible eloquence, false assertions, and forswearings, only to gain the desired point. The whole spectacle collectively resembles the aspect of an enormous bee-hive invading and attacking a rich flower garden, all buzzing and humming with fury and haste over their prey, and minding nothing but their honey-project. No thought of death, no care for the future, no remorse of sin, no fear of hell, no remembrance of God, and no provision for eternity, as if they were destined to remain as long on earth as the latter shall exist, to live and move as long as the sun shall continue to shine, to eat, drink, and be active, as long as the wind shall continue to blow, and to gather riches and enjoy pleasures, as long as the rivers shall continue to flow into the bosom of their mother sea.

Suppose, again, that in the midst of the above forgetful, worldly-minded, wicked, and abandoned crowd Solomon erects a platform, mounts it, and then exclaims in a loud voice, "Vanity of vanities, says *Koheleth*, vanity of vanities! all is vanity!" The multitude being attracted by that strange sounding proclamation, the preacher begins to explain what these words signify. He tells them that the immense crowd of mortals now gathered at this fair, as well as all their fellow-men living with them in the same generation, shall soon, very soon be swept away by death; as were all generations that preceded them. That consequently they can derive no lasting advantage whatever of all the toils, labours, and troubles which they bring upon themselves in search of riches and pleasures—that even in a worldly point of view, their tumultuous and wicked pleasures, their violent and outrageous behaviour was vain,

foolish, and destructive. That whilst the earth, her system, her order, and the activity of the elements and bodies attached to it, or belonging to its system, shall continue unchangeably the same, the present generation of men must go hence to return no more, even their very remembrance shall be blotted out from the minds of the generation that shall come after them. That all this showed to demonstration that man must have been created for some other purpose, and sent for a time into this world on some graver mission than for gathering on that fair, for burying themselves in such a tumult of nothingness, and for committing violence, crimes, and abominations of all sorts and character.*

In order to secure better the undivided attention of the vast and already interested audience, he tells them next that the man about to address them was no less a personage than the great, aged, and wise king Solomon, the highly experienced monarch of Israel, the governor of Jerusalem. He then informs them that he applied his heart to search and explore

* The above figure of making *wisdom* mount a platform and address gathered crowds in the open streets and in market places, seems to have been a favourite one with Solomon, and which we therefore imitated. Thus we find often such figures used by Solomon in his Proverbs, especially in chap. viii. where we read: "Doth not wisdom cry, and understanding put forth her voice? She standeth on the top of high places. . . . She crieth at the gates. . . . at the coming in at the doors: Unto you, O men, I call; and my voice is to the sons of men. O, ye simple, understand wisdom. . . . Hear, for I will speak of excellent things. . . . Receive my instructions and not silver, and knowledge rather than choice gold. . . . The fear of the Lord is to hate evil, pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the proud mouth I do hate. Counsel is mine, and sound wisdom. I am understanding, I have strength. . . . Hear instruction and be wise, and refuse it not. . . . For whoso findeth me findeth life, and shall obtain favour from the Lord. But he that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul, all they that hate me love death," &c.

by wisdom concerning all things that are done under the heavens." The expression, "I applied my heart," implies the ardent devotion with which he set about this work, to consider all the busy employments, plans, and machinations of mortal man, to find out the source and cause of it, and to be enabled to judge of its value.

As to the *source* and cause of man's fruitless toils and labours, Solomon declares it to be, "the sore occupation which God hath approved for the sons of Adam that they should be chastised thereby," (or "afflicted or humbled thereby"). The explanation of this statement is very simple and obvious. Adam, the common father of mankind, was originally placed in Paradise, where every temporal necessity was richly provided for him, and where he had to care for nothing, to provide nothing; for he wanted nothing. Free from all hard labour (his having been the pleasant occupation of attending to Eden's flowers and fruit trees) he could apply and exercise all his energy in studying and searching how he could best glorify and adore his holy Creator and beneficent Master. His happiness was then uninterrupted, and his occupation pleasant and advantageous. But, beguiled by Satan, he wished to become wise like God, at no less a price than by breaking his commandment. He ate of the forbidden fruit, by which act his eyes were opened to see good and evil,* and his lusts and fleshly desires were stimulated and enflamed for the world and its foolish vanities. The world-wise Adam was then sentenced by the righteous and provoked God to the death of his body.

* We gave our humble opinion about the nature of that "knowledge of good and evil," acquired by Adam when he ate of the "tree of knowledge," in our small work entitled "A Christian Jew on the Old Testament Scriptures," pp. 9—14; but the subject is a very obscure and difficult one.

He was driven out of Paradise, and condemned to seek his bread, and only find it by the sweat of his brow, in the dust of the earth whose pleasures he desired, whose fruits he esteemed more than the commandment of his God, and with whose dust, therefore, he must mingle in life and in death.

This is the "sore occupation" which God hath appointed to the sons (or children) of Adam, that they should be chastised thereby, for the folly of their father which they inherit by nature. This is the *source*, and the sole cause of the busy and abominable fair described above. This is the original reason why natural man, once lost from the highway of real happiness, and condemned to seek his daily bread by labour and fatigue, now plunges himself, thought, mind, and soul, into the foolish vanities of time, covers himself with the dust of the ground, and finds his element in tumult and outrage. Thus intoxicated man stops his ears with the fading flowers of a deceiving world, and will not hear of God, of eternity, or of the salvation of his soul. In short, the fallen human family, driven out of Paradise because of original sin and its fatal consequences, were put, as it were, into a small and shattered vessel, which, pushed by the wrath of provoked Omnipotence, was driven into the midst of a roaring and foaming ocean. There confounded humanity was left to struggle against the enraged elements, and to reach their native shore by their own power, by their own wisdom, which their rebellious father thought to acquire by breaking the commandment of his God in eating of the forbidden fruit.

Again, Solomon finds the unhappy and deceived mortals struggling and roaring with all their might, on board their wreck, which is agitated by a violent tempest, among the mighty breakers of the deep Destruction threatens them every moment, but so

blind are the multitude as not to see any danger at all. The more these beguiled victims of Satan labour and struggle, the farther they are removed from their native shore, the more imminent is their perdition. Solomon, anxious to save them, hastes by to tell them that the very God who pushed them into that misery in His wrath and righteous indignation, has likewise, in His abundant mercy, sent experienced pilots (the Prophets) unto them, with a well-regulated compass (Revelation) and a mighty captain (Messiah) to guide and save them. But first of all he must convince them of the danger of which they, by nature, have no conception. Solomon therefore tells them first of all that all their own struggles, toils, and endeavours to find out their native shore was vanity of vanities, and that their position was so cruel that, with all their works and plans, they must soon perish for ever. He informs them at the same time that he found himself once in quite the same dangerous situation, struggled and laboured like them, formed useless plans and inventions like them. But that he found out at last that he would certainly have perished without ever reaching dry land, had he not availed himself of the pilots, compass, and captain, who were sent by the merciful God to save drowning humanity, and that now he sailed safe and secure towards his native shore in the life-boat of faith. Thus he begins to give them the details of his own history, of his own experience, and of the conclusions he was able to make. The most important of his statements is, that after much search and study he found out that the *source* and origin of man's useless toils and troubles, and vain struggles, lay in nothing else but in the fruits of original sin, by which men became even so stupified as not to see the danger that surrounds them. Man not having been pleased with his happy, holy, and heavenly

appointed occupation in Paradise, the Lord drove them out of it; and to chastise (or humble, or afflict) them, He gave them this "sore occupation," to seek for themselves, but find nothing, to gather and have nothing, to labour and have no advantage of it. In the midst of this "sore occupation," humanity went astray in the wilderness of forgetfulness and the most inexplicable indifference.

Having informed them of the source and origin of their "sore occupation," he proceeds in verse 14 to state something about the value of it: "I have considered all the works that are done under the sun, and, behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit." One reason for that conclusion was already given in verse 3, *i.e.*, "What advantage hath man of all his labours that he thus toileth under the sun?" What can be more vain? What can be more vexatious to the spirit of a thinking man, than to know that all his sore labours, toils, and troubles, shall dissolve in nothing, absolutely nothing? How grievous for man to think that even ere the least of his plans can reach maturity, he may be torn away by death never to return again to finish his undertaken work? Even if the one or the other of man's toy works are accomplished during his life, can he, or how long will he, enjoy it undisturbed by death? And what is that enjoyment of mortals, but mere vanity? Ah! how many thousands of mortals are carried off every year, every month, every week, and even every day, in the very midst of their pleasant dreams, gigantic plans, mighty undertakings, and vast expectations? How many mortals lay foundations to new and comfortable dwellings, and do not live to see them rise one yard above ground? How many have the satisfaction to see even the windows put into their spacious and magnificent new palaces, but are stopped there (by death) from enjoying in them one day, or repose

in them one night? Those who do, how long do they continue to reap the fruits of their long labours? Vain man! excited by airy imaginations, stimulated by a cheating shadow of hope, heated by his mental and physical labours of vanity, forgets altogether who he is, what is his real destination, what is soon to become of him, and whither he is soon to go. He labours and toils, perspires and exhausts his strength, and sinks down with fatigue. He eats to gather new vigour for pursuing his work. He sleeps that his reposed body may be fit to continue its labour in the early morn. But man usually forgets that his is a "sore occupation," the consequence of his sin and rebellion against God, and that death will soon prove it unto him when torn away from all his accumulated vanities, and delivered to the dust.

But the reason for Solomon's statement in verse 14 was not only anticipated in verse 3, but is also accompanied by another reason in verse 15: "The crooked thing he cannot make straight, and the defective thing he cannot arrange." When worldly men find out that, after having exhausted all their energy, means, and strength, in endeavouring to make straight something crooked lying in their way, or to arrange some defective things which cause them loss or bring danger, the crooked was made still more crooked than it was before, and the defective thing had become entirely useless or unmanageable, then these worldly men talk of some thing that they call *fate* or even *fatality*. Such men usually choose to forget that they are the children of fallen Adam, and that consequently *disappointment* was with them a *fam'ly disease*, which they must carry along with them to the very grave, unless they apply in time to the great Physician

who alone can cure it. They forget that the earthly existence of a fallen being can be nothing else but one continued "sore occupation," made so by the curse of God, which corrupted nature inherits and merits. They forget that fallen man is (in a certain sense) entirely deranged in his wishes, thoughts, plans, and expectations, in many of which he must find himself often enough foiled (like his father in Paradise), because his actions are too often against the irresistible will of Him who holds the reins of Providence in His almighty arm. Lastly, they forget the necessary existence (in consequence of sin) of disparity between flesh and flesh, between one fallen man and the other. Being both corrupted by nature, and every one in his turn a slave of his senses and fleshly lusts (in which they are again differently influenced and governed according to their different constitutions and tempers) they can never act in perfect concert, never agree in all things, never be satisfied with each other's dispositions, nor with their stations, never bear alike the same burden (without compulsion) and never unite their thoughts and actions; unless united and subdued to one obedience, by the one spirit of the one God; and after having delivered themselves entirely along with their wishes and actions into the hands of their Creator. This is the source and origin of all disappointment and grief, and this the reason why sinful and spiritually deranged man cannot make straight that which is crooked (to such a fallen being as he is), nor arrange and put in order the defective and disordered by his character and nature.

Such is then Solomon's inspired judgment about man's physical labours and toils and plans and expectations, that they are vanity of vanities, without a shadow of perfection, without any real satisfaction,

without solidity, and without lasting advantage. The reason of all this is, because of man's disobedience, —because by nature he refuses to occupy himself with what is holy, solid, sound, certain, heavenly, and everlasting, therefore God delivered him into the tumult of a "sore occupation," without any advantage, that he might be afflicted, humbled, and chastised thereby. In the following verses Solomon turns to the worldly philosopher, and shows from his own experience that his *mental labours* were no less a "sore occupation" (without religion) than the vanities above described.

16. I communed with mine own heart, saying,
Behold, I have magnified and increased wisdom,
Above all that have been before me over Jerusalem ;
Yea, my heart experienced much wisdom and know-
ledge.
17. But when I applied my heart to examine wisdom,
And to examine foolishness and ignorance,
Then I perceived that this too was vexation of spirit :
18. For in much wisdom there is much grief ;
And he that increaseth knowledge increaseth pain.

The prophet Jeremiah says, in the name of God :
"Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory
in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in
his strength, let not the rich man glory in his riches ;
but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he is
well instructed to know me, that I the Lord do exer-
cise loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness
on earth : for in these do I delight, saith the Lord."
(Jer. ix. 22, 23.) Here we have introduced to us
two wise men of very different characters. The
first is a *worldly philosopher*, boasting to the clouds
in his own wisdom, and in the acquisition of secular

science. The second is a pious and devoted theologian, or say, a well-instructed and experienced Christian, glorying in the knowledge and wisdom of God, in the loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness which the great and holy Jehovah, his God and Creator, does exercise on earth. Unto the former, the Lord of Hosts himself says, "Let him not glory in his wisdom" (without giving any reason). The latter is invited and encouraged to glory in his acquired knowledge of God and His righteousness. But here follows the reason, which consists in God's approbation, "for in these I do delight, saith the Lord." That is as if the Lord had said, "As I do delight in the exercise of loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness on earth, so likewise do I delight in those men who give themselves to the study, and glory in the acquired knowledge of my ways and dealings with my creatures on earth." At the same time, it is clear and evident, that this statement of the Lord also implies that *He takes no delight in the wisdom of this world*, and therefore it is that the world-wise man has nothing to glory in.

In the three last verses of our chapter, Solomon makes his appearance in the cloak of a worldly philosopher. He tells us that when he went astray from God and His wisdom, he attempted to glory in the wisdom of this world; but that he found out his mistake at last. "I communed with mine own heart,"—that is as if he said, "my heart was lifted up with pride,"—"saying, Behold I have magnified (or, enlarged, or brought into great reputation) and increased wisdom, above all that have been before me in Jerusalem." This signifies as much as if he said, "Have I not great reason to boast and glory? Am I not the greatest philosopher of mine age? Have

I not studied and acquired languages and grammars, arithmetic and mathematics, geography and astronomy, &c., &c.? Have I not done much for the propagation of science in teaching it to others? Have I not made many experiments and new discoveries? Have I not practised it, and pursued it in a manner and measure above all those who preceded me in the government of Jerusalem?"

That the wisdom and knowledge of which Solomon speaks in this passage, and in which he attempted to boast and glory, refers to *worldly wisdom* and to sinful pride, is made evident by the contents of the next chapter. These two chapters contain a systematic confession, in which the once prodigal, but now repenting and converted Solomon, tells us how degree by degree he abandoned God and religion, and sought pleasure, satisfaction, and glory in anything worldly which he could achieve or even imagine. Thus we see that his next step (as recorded in the first verses of the following chap.) was to deliver himself into the arms of jollity and wild pleasures, as eating, drinking, and dancing, &c. Seeing that these would not answer his object, he proceeded to plunge himself into a strange mixture of tumults and worldly plans of folly, as building, planting, and continually speculating, and mixing all these with dissipating pleasures and enjoyments of this world. All these vain speculations continued until he found out at last that, apart from God, his revelation, religion, divine wisdom and spiritual enjoyments, he could find satisfaction in nothing, and glory in nothing, for out of God all was vanity and vexation of spirit.

But Solomon was not left long to repose on the false couch of vain glory in worldly wisdom, as he tells us in verses 17 and 18, "But when I applied

my heart to examine wisdom,"—this is, when he set about to search and define the value and advantage of worldly wisdom, "and to examine foolishness and ignorance," *i.e.* to find out the difference between wisdom and folly—not in themselves (for he states, chap. ii. verse 13, that the difference between them is like that between light and darkness), but in the respective *individuals* who possess them—and to see how much worldly wisdom can make happy the man who cultivates it, and how much ignorance makes unhappy the man to whom it cleaves. "Then I perceived that this too was vexation of spirit." He found out that all the worldly wisdom which a mortal can accumulate was not only very far from affording him reason to glory in, far from opening unto him a source of real happiness, or lasting advantage above the ignorant man, but that, on the contrary, it opened a new source of vexation to his spirit. This seemingly strange conclusion is followed by the explanation of verse 18, "For in much wisdom there is much grief; and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth pain or affliction."

Here the proud infidel, but decorated and far-famed worldly philosopher, will probably stop, gaze with astonishment, and even be indignant at such a positive and flat conclusion. What! Shall one dare to tell him that he, being an infidel, had to glory in nothing, and that all his wisdom and knowledge does not bring him one step farther, and can afford him no other advantage above the ignorant man than that of grief and pain! Ah! that is too hard! We will cease to think so when we examine the real moral condition of the infidel philosopher, and listen to the testimonies of those who have declared the wisdom and knowledge he possesses has ever been a source of grief and pain unto him.

(CHAPTER II. VERS. 1, 2.)

1. I then said in mine heart, Come now,
I shall cover thee with mirth,*
That thou mayest enjoy pleasure ;
But, behold this also is vanity.
2. Of laughter, I said, it is madness ;
And of mirth, What doth it produce ?

In the foregoing chap. Solomon informed us how he failed in two experiments of his, to find out the desired results. The first was one of observation and theory, *i.e.*, an examination of the occupation, works, and toils of mankind in general, in order to see if they can afford any real satisfaction or solid pleasure to those engaged in them. This he found to be a mere vanity, a "sore occupation," the consequence of man's sin and degeneracy, without any fruits, without pleasure, and without any real advantage. The second experiment was a *practical* one, *i.e.*, he devoted himself to the study of science, of worldly wisdom, he practised it himself and taught it to others. But when he entered this literary garden, with the expectation of plucking some fine flowers of his cultivation, behold, they are all withered. When he trusted to find in his accumulated science a source of glory and honour, he found it to be a source of grief and vexation of spirit. Too far gone in his straying excursion,

* "Cover thee." We take this to be the signification of אַנְשַׁח (Anaschah), as it is in Isa. xv. 7, "The covering which is spread over all nations (see also Isa. xxviii. 20.) We cannot understand how the translators made out, "I will prove thee," for neither in noun nor in verb the word can ever signify "to prove." נֶסֶח (Nessech), sub. is "a cover," a thing spread over another—hence, figuratively, "a libation," because it is diffused and spread over the altar. In verb. נָסַח (Nassach), "to spread over," hence it may also be rendered in our verse, "I will spread thee over," which is the same.

already far remote from God and religion, he then, instead of returning, made at once a gigantic forward step towards vanity and ruin. The wise man who once gloried in the God of his fathers, who found the greatest satisfaction and delight in the religious rites of Jehovah's sanctuary, who realised the purest and highest joy in his silent meditations on the brilliant promises which he received from the great God of Israel,—this very man informs us how that, in a comparatively short time, he found himself in a pathless desert of vanity, plunged himself into the midst of a vortex of confusion, and struggled with all his might, even against his common sense. Yea, alas, that great man tried repeatedly to intoxicate his pleading conscience, to stop his ears with the rags of worldly vanities, in order not to hear the pleas and remonstrances of his injured soul, and thus to bury his rich and varied talents in a depth of mine from which they should never re-appear.

The backsliding and erring king made diligent search on the mountains of vanity in order to find some compensation for the heavy losses he sustained by abandoning God and religion and the delights of the Lord's sanctuary. Among the ruins of a deceiving world he sought for some favourite object, worthy of bestowing on it his time and labour, on which he could for ever concentrate his affection, in which he could glory, and in which he should find substantial and lasting pleasures. The wisdom of God which once he cherished and cultivated, as well as his conscience, declared loudly unto him that out of the eternal God no mortal will ever find an earthly object worthy of concentrating on it his affection, or capable of affording him lasting pleasure or real satisfaction. But the world-wise man would not hear, would not believe, unless he tried the truth

of their arguments by repeated experiment. Two experiments were now made at a great cost of time, meditation, and labour, but they failed to realize his expectations. Disappointed in his plans, and conquered by his conscience, which now triumphantly showed him how vain he was—not humbled by that lesson, but rather exasperated—he now resolved on a most fatal step, which was to check his conscience, by violence, to suffocate the increased clamours of his suffering and offended soul, and to extinguish at once the last spark of celestial light that yet remained in him from the days of his true greatness and real happiness.

“I then said in mine heart, Come now, I shall cover thee with mirth, that thou mayest enjoy pleasures.” In other words that is to say: “Come now, O thou poor and troubled Solomon, who art continually persecuted by a restless and cruel conscience; come, for I have found out a remedy by which to cure thee of that plague. I shall cover thee with mirth against the arrows of that relentless enemy. I shall protect thee against that irreconcilable persecutor, by putting a strong *partition wall* between you both. That *wall* shall consist of feasting and jollity, of merriment and gay pleasures, of singing and dancing, drinking and laughing. Thus shall the voice of that tormentor be heard no more—that devouring and plaguing worm be driven away out of thy mind—and thou then shalt enjoy pleasures undisturbed and unmolested.” The arrangements and means for that *partition wall* were instantly procured, and Solomon was ready for action. Riches and ruling power soon prepared the ingredients of the prescribed medicine (or rather poison) for the cure (or murder) of the voice of conscience, and the morally dangerously ill monarch began to swallow the drug in rather large quantities. The wisest of men then

delivered himself prisoner to his own unfortunate inventions, and at once precipitated himself into the rapid current of violent merriment, and dissipating pleasures of every sort and colour. Many days and nights, weeks and months, and even years, must have been destroyed in that lamentable manner, and conscience might have been silenced, by no means killed, in the midst of that wild turmoil of even unnatural indulgence.

Nevertheless, it was utterly impossible for such a vast mind, for such a large heart, for such a personage as Solomon, to remain very long bewildered in such a manner as to unfit him for serious reflection. The same violent means which he employed to relax his mind, and drive asunder remorse, brought on many sleepless and restless nights, and forced him to consider carefully his behaviour, and reflect earnestly on his present condition. Again he saw his great and dangerous mistake—again he found out that his new plan was not only vain, but most degrading and most perilous. After mature consideration he was brought to the conclusion that forced pleasures, mechanical laughter, artificial joy, and manufactured satisfaction, were pure madness, real insanity. He therefore exclaimed regarding the whole of his new system of folly, “What doth it produce?”—as if he said—“What shall be the end of that wretched business? What will it, what can it produce but mischief? Shall I become a regular drunkard, and thus slowly destroy myself soul and body at once? Shall I sacrifice my various talents, my noble mind, and my vast knowledge, on the altar of such a miserable idol like this? No! this is not yet a right or prosperous plan, I must seek out another.”* Solomon having once lost the highway

* There is a very interesting tale told about an Austrian prince, who lay encamped with his army in the neighbour-

of salvation, and having advanced far into a track-

hood of a small village in Upper Hungary, and who was sorely pressed by the Turks, whose hordes were at no great distance. Care and fear having deprived him of repose, he rose from his couch of affliction, and, accompanied by his aide-de-camp, took a walk through the village, as it was a clear and starry night. There they saw a ragged beggar sleeping soundly, and snoring loudly on a little dirty straw on the roadside. "Beggar," said the prince (his aide-de-camp having roused the man by his stick) "how is it that thou, wretch, sleepest so sweet and sound, while a great prince like me am deprived of a moment's rest?"—"Why, sir! go to yon public house, ask the host for a large glass of the strong brandy that Beggar Ch. usually drinks, swallow that, turn to your tent, and you shall sleep as sound as I did ere you disturbed me." This done, the prince returned to his bed, and slept alarmingly sound to a late hour next morning. But he awoke along with a severe headache, a disagreeable bitterness in his mouth and stomach, a shivering through the whole of his body, and a returning of all his cares, fears, and melancholy thoughts, with increased violence. Instantly he returned to his beggar, to see if the latter suffers like himself after the drug. Not at all—the beggar, on his straw bundle, is as gay and happy as a bird, and repeats with energy a cheerful song. "Tell me now the reason of this strange disparity," said the prince. "Why I am so downcast, and thou so cheerful after the same drug?" "Ah! certainly," said the beggar, "You must have neglected to repeat the operation as soon as you rose from your bed—a thing that I do always." The prince took the hint, swallowed another cup, slept again for twelve hours, but rose far worse and more miserable than he did after the first experiment. When again returning to his beggar doctor, the prince said, "Tell me, beggar, what is the reason that the same drug produces opposite effects in us; for though it operates well with me at first, it leaves very bad consequences behind it?" "Pardon, sir," says the beggar, "it was quite the same with me, *when a wealthy man*, and when, by some incidents, I began to use this infallible cure; but be you once *reduced to my present condition*, and have it repeated as often as I did, then it will certainly produce the same effects on your constitution as it does on mine." Somewhat bewildered at this curious statement, the prince asked his beggarly adviser once more, "And, pray, how long must this medicine continue to be used until it should effect the perfect cure?" "Until you die, sir, and your cares and troubles are for ever gone," replied the beggar easily, but quite earnestly. Shocked at this horrid declaration, the prince vividly exclaimed, "Then, I choose rather to die a sorrowful, and sleepless, but sober prince, than a cheerful, sound-sleeping,

less desert, instead of returning straight backward, when convinced of his critical position, speculated to find out some nearer path, or rather sought to establish himself where he was, at some green spot; and in so doing went from bad to worse. He now searched new plans, and the following passage describes some new experiments on a far larger scale than any of those he had made before.

3. I searched out* in mine heart, † to cherish my
flesh with wine :

Mine heart being still guided with wisdom ;—

Also to embrace folly until I might see

Which of them was best for the children of men,

To be practised by them, under the heavens, all
the days of their lives.

but drunken beggar.” Was not this the very case with Solomon in the above passage? Does not the above anecdote contain a beneficial lesson for thousands of wealthy and intellectual men, who, beguiled by Satan, torture the days of their existence, and drown their energy, and waste their fortunes by poisoning and enervating liquors, and by the deceiving and vanishing pleasures of this world?

* **הִרְיִיתִי** (Tarty) “I searched out,” the verb **הָרַיַר** (Tur) signifying, “to spy out, to search out,” &c. Here it describes the firm resolution come to by Solomon after a long search about new plans, and new experiments, and the manner to carry them into practice.

† “To cherish my flesh (or my body) with wine.” This is the literal translation, and we consider it to be the right and true sense of the phrase. The rendering in the common version, “to give myself unto wine,” is a far-fetched suggestion, and an erroneous paraphrase. **מִשַּׁחַךְ** (Mashach) signifies originally “To draw,” in any manner, and by any means—hence also to draw one out (to persuade him to come out) by attraction, or allurements, as Judges iv. 6, 7. It means also “to cherish,” as to cherish good habits, fine arts, or to cherish wisdom. Thus it should be rendered in Job xxviii. **וּמִשַּׁחַךְ רִבְבֵי רִבְבֵי מִפְּנִינִים** (Umeshech chochmah mipninim) “and the cherishing of wisdom above rubies.” The *wine*, in our verse, stands figuratively for fat things, and dainty meats. “To cherish my flesh with wine,” means, therefore, “to allure and cherish the

This awful resolution of the wandering and staggering hero of old was an exceedingly comprehensive and complicated one. It was his last, greatest, and longest (as to the time it needed for its accomplishment) and also the most violent experiment, which he made among the heaps of worldly vanities, when he sought for solid pleasure and lasting advantage out of God, far from His temple, and independent of religion. In this one experiment, all the former three (which proved failures when practised separately) were now included, and practised collectively. First of all, Solomon examined carefully the works, labours, and operations of the human family, and found them all to be "vanity of vanities." He next examined, tried, and practised worldly wisdom by itself, and found it to be a source of grief and vexation of spirit. He then undertook and accomplished a course of jollity and merriment by itself, and found it to be madness and degradation. Now, he resolved to take these three courses unitedly, to make a summary experiment with them all, and to see how they would act in concert?—how in union they would influence his mind—what effects they would produce on him together?—and also to see and judge which of them was the more preferable?

"I searched out in my heart to cherish my flesh with wine," that is to say, that after much search and thought about a new course of experiments, he resolved upon that first of all, to continue to cherish or indulge his flesh (or body), by feeding it with the choicest meats and drinks, and with the gayest pleasures of high life (of which *wine* is an ample figure)—"mine heart being still guided by wisdom," *i.e.*

body, by feeding it richly with royal dainties, not to let it want anything, but supply it with all that is good and tasteful.

not as formerly when he tried mirth and merriment by itself, and abandoned entirely the study and practice of science all the time, and delivered himself altogether into the bosom of wild pleasures and tumultuous merriment. But now he would study and practise science, and cultivate it, even when indulging in all the pleasures and gratifications of the flesh. "Also to embrace folly," viz., that neither the study of worldly wisdom, nor the indulgence in worldly pleasures, should interfere with his practising "folly," in the shape of building and planting, &c. — a thing which he found out to be *folly* and vanity, when considered by itself. The whole of this monstrous fabric should continue its course, "until I might see which of them was best for the children of men, to be practised by them under the heavens all the days of their lives." Now follows an awful catalogue of the different materials employed for the building of that Babylon of confusion and folly.

4. I then enlarged my operations ;
I built me houses ; I planted me vineyards ;
5. I made me gardens, and orchards,
And planted in them fruit-trees of every kind ;
6. I made me pools of water,
To water therewith a growing plantation of trees ;
7. I purchased men-servants and maid-servants,
Had also servants born in my house ;
I had also great possessions of herds and flocks,
Above all that were before me in Jerusalem ;
8. I gathered me also silver and gold,
And precious treasures, from kings and their
countries ;
I procured me men-singers and women-singers ;
Also the delight of men, a princess and
princesses.*

* The two last words of this verse שִׁדָּה וְשִׁדּוֹת (Shidah, Ve-Shidoth) have baffled the skill and speculations of ancient and

9. Thus I became great, and increased
Above any who had been before me in Jerusalem :
My wisdom also remained with me.
10. And whatsoever mine eyes desired I refused
them not ;
I restrained not my heart from any pleasure ;
For my heart rejoiced in all my labour :
And this was my (only) portion of all my toils.

modern translators and lexicographers. Some wished it to mean, "musical instruments," because it comes after the singers. This opinion was embraced by the English translators, Luther, and the French version, &c. But there is not even the shadow of a letter in these words to make of it a "musical instrument," and the mere suggestion, because it follows "singers," is futile. The LXX., and after it Parkhurst, and others, renders it "male and female cup-bearers," on no better ground than the former. Other inventions, as "captives, cups, chariots," &c., have all the same value as the former. The fact is, that we shall seek in vain the root of these words in the Hebrew or Chaldee languages, while they certainly are *Arabs*. سيدة (Sydah), in Arabic, means, "Lady, princess," or "mistress," while in the plural it is

سيدات (Sydath). The Rabbies, who put the *punctuation* to the Hebrew text, not knowing the meaning of these words, put the · on the right head of the ש, while it should be שָׁדָה וְשִׁדּוֹת (Sydah, Ve-Sydoth). The singular *Sydah* is exactly like in the Arabic, but the plural is here made after the Hebrew form, by a ה (o), while in the Arabic it is made by ا (aliff), the ה conjunctive being the same in both languages.

Gesenius well remarks, that had Solomon omitted his *Harems* in the above list, the whole would be incomplete. There may be many reasons assigned why Solomon chose to mention that most painful subject (as his passion, and the many idolatrous wives contributed most to estrange him from God, and nearly ruined him for ever) under Arabic names. "A princess and princesses," or "a lady and ladies," is evidently intended to hint at the awful numbers of the same—not only *one*, but *many*. Likely, Pharaoh's daughter was the chief queen, the others subordinates, and the concubines, serving the queen as *ladies' maids*, at the same time were included in the *servants* of verse 7.

11. But when I looked on all the works of my hands,
And on the labour I spent to accomplish them,
Behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit,
And there is no advantage under the sun.

Here, Christian reader, we have an enormous catalogue of immense materials, articles, and objects, operations and compositions, invented, collected, and executed by the wisest and richest of mortals, in an experiment undertaken and accomplished on the largest possible scale. Here we have before us a most striking picture, representing in vivid colours Satan, the prince of this world, with all his stores and magazines. They are apparently brilliant, but in reality vanishing play-works of decaying dust. With these childish toys he attracts, entices, and deceives fallen man, whom he draws far away from God and eternity, and then drags him mercilessly and cruelly into the bottomless pit of everlasting ruin. An exact balance is here suspended before our eyes. On the one scale we behold all the riches, pleasures, and enjoyments of every sort and colour which this world can exhibit to attract human fancy; magnificent palaces replenished with the richest ornaments, with furnitures of cedar and precious metals, with curtains, pavilions, and tapestry of the finest silks and gold embroideries; splendid flower gardens, groves and orchards, verdant and flourishing woods, with delightful walking galleries, all provided with rivulets and pools of circulating and refreshing waters; enormous flocks and herds feeding in the rich valleys of Sharon and Bashan; crowds of men and maid-servants, busily employed in the palaces and courts, stalls and stablings, vineyards and green-gardens, kitchens and dining-halls, preparing everything for comfort and pleasure which

human desire and fancy can invent ; sublime bands of music, of singers and songstresses, to please the ear, cheer the heart, stimulate the palate, provoke dancing and merriment, adorn and enliven the balls and parties, and to keep open the eyes of the host and his august guests during the silent and dreary watches of the night ; storehouses and cellars of wines, filled to the doors with all sorts of provisions and plenty for time to come ; large and strong treasures, filled with a vast accumulation of silver and gold, precious stones, and the choicest treasures of kings and of their different countries ; a very numerous Harem-family, containing a thousand of chosen beauties from among the fair daughters of Jerusalem and from distant lands ; in short, all that the human eye can wish and the heart desire, all lies upon the one scale of the balance. On the other scale we see nothing more but *common sense*, not even a word of religion, not an iota of revelation (as Solomon ceased to be a religious man long before the time of making this experiment). The simple and sincere judgment, pronounced by the very man who put these things into the scales of the balance, must surely be decisive. The judge was by no means prepossessed with any prejudice ; on the contrary, he was animated with a hot desire to weigh and taste these things, and embrace the one or the other. But behold now, the overloaded scale was found wanting. *Common sense* alone lifted its rival scale into the air, and exposed its hollowness. The ever partial judge was forced by equity to pronounce a verdict of condemnation on the enormously heaped but deceiving scale. Yea, the judge tells us that though during the time of gathering and heaping up the vast materials, he was carried astray by their false brilliancy and attraction, still when he

got them all on the one scale, and put *common sense* on the other, he found the former to be madness and vanity, deception and vexation of spirit, without any real satisfaction, and without any lasting advantage to their beguiled worshippers.

Such was the verdict of *common sense* against perishing pleasures and worldly vanities ; but revelation speaks in the following manner : “ If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, along with the lust thereof ; but he that doth the will of God abideth for ever.” (1 John ii. 15—17).

Now you ensnared, misguided, and blinded victim of this world, consider for a moment your mad career and your certain destruction. Behold in the above mirror, your labours of vanity, your useless, destructive, and violent behaviour, and hear your just condemnation according to either of the above verdicts. Listen one instant to the calm, lovely, and devoted and experienced Apostle John, and to his judgment about this deceiving world and its foolish vanities, and then look for another moment upon and into yourself, and then tell me what is your condition, and what will be your end? Ah! but you are an infidel, you do not believe in revelation. Or you say, perhaps, in your own ironical manner, that John was too severe in his judgment, or that he could not have been a competent judge in those matters, because he was poor, and consequently could not try and know the sweet and attractive objects of this world. Well then, turn to the rich and mighty Solomon, and hear and examine his above-made confession and pronounced judgment

regarding an experiment which he made at a time when completely estranged from God and religion—even as you are now. O, see then and hear how *he* condemns you and your labours of vanity, and your mad and wild behaviour, and your indulgence in vanishing pleasures and bewildering merriments, and all that according to the judgment of *common sense*, and not according to revealed religion as by John!

We have now seen how Solomon invented, undertook, and accomplished the greatest of his experiments; also, how he considered and examined it at last, and what judgment he pronounced against it. But this *threefold* and complicated experiment was intended to serve at the same time another and most important object. As stated in verse 3, Solomon was to try worldly wisdom, worldly pleasures, and worldly works together, to see them acting in union, and then to judge which of them was best, or the more profitable for the practice of mortal man during his short sojourn on earth. In verse 9 Solomon told us, that his plan was most faithfully executed. In the midst of the tumult of building and planting, of eating and drinking, and merriment and pleasure hunting of every sort and character, he says, “my wisdom also remained with me”—that is to say, that not only had he set apart certain hours for cultivating science, but his wisdom also assisted him in all his plans and vast undertakings. Having thus examined the three occupations together, and beside each other, and having come to the conclusion that even all collectively could afford no solid satisfaction, no durable pleasure, and no lasting advantage, he now proceeds to shew us which of them, singly considered, was still the more preferable in itself.

12. I then turned myself to consider wisdom

And to consider madness and folly;

For who is the man that can compete with the King

In the things which he hath already accomplished?

The last portion of this verse is of a very difficult and critical construction in the Hebrew text. But the context makes it evident that the latter part of the verse is intended as an explanation of the former. When Solomon tells us that he returned to the subject with a view to examine madness and folly beside wisdom, and to see which of them was preferable for man to practise, he then gives us the reason why he was so anxious to make that examination. This reason he gives in the latter part of this verse, *i.e.*, because he thought that there would scarcely be found another man like him, even in succeeding generations, in whom so much wisdom and knowledge, so much mental and ruling power, so much riches and prosperity, should be connected, as to enable him "to compete" with (or come up to, or rival) the King (*i.e.*, Solomon) in congregating another such army of the above described vanities, in order to renew the experiment and judge for himself. Seeing, therefore, that he was the first, and probably the last man, of conceiving the plan and executing it on such a vast scale, he thought it his duty to examine the subject in every point possible, and to leave his calm and decided judgment about it to posterity. Having, therefore, examined and judged the three "sore occupations" of man together, *i.e.*, the folly of building and planting and toiling, &c., the madness of wild pleasure and forced merriment, and the painful and hollow study of worldly wisdom, he now tells us his opinion about the preference of even worldly wisdom to folly.

13. Then I perceived that wisdom excelleth folly
As much as light excelleth darkness.
14. The wise man hath his eyes in his head ;
But the fool walketh in darkness :
Yet I know that one event shall happen to both
of them.

A dying man still urging the physician to give him medicine, though there cannot be the least doubt entertained as to his approaching death, may still put the physician to some trouble in making him search and speculate about the composition of this last drug, and about its ingredients, and which of them might be preferable, though the one could not kill the man twice, nor the other preserve him from the approaching death. This is exactly what Solomon found out in searching the difference between worldly wisdom and folly, and which of them was preferable to the other with regard to the practice of them by mortal man. Folly does not kill the fool twice, nor does worldly wisdom redeem the mortal philosopher from perishing along with the fool. Worldly wisdom, the cultivation of science, is decidedly preferable to folly in itself—it is a fine mixture, well adapted to cheer and refresh a sound and strong man (a religious man, unto whom death is a triumph), and even to assist him and help him on in his journey heavenward ; but to a perishing infidel the drug of world's wisdom only augments the horror of the certain approaching death, after which he is delivered to the same dust with the fool, and his soul is not a bit the better off in eternity. The largest proprietor of worldly wisdom examined carefully his possessions, and calculated their value, which he found to be a source of grief and pain unto him, instead of being a source of boasting and glorying in as he first expected. He tried and examined folly separately, and thought he was no fool by nature :

he soon made one of himself artificially, by the influence of wine, laughter, merriment, and all sorts of wild pleasure; but this he found out to be madness, degradation, and destruction. Again he wisely coupled them together, arranged them in order beside each other, adding to them the folly of building and planting, of gathering riches and of collecting every object of pleasure and gaiety; and in all these practices he behaved wisely, according to the statutes of worldly wisdom, which he still cherished and practised. He made himself acquainted with every fine art, and applied prudence and skill in the accomplishment of his buildings and plantations. He also applied his wisdom as laws and rules for moderation in the use of pleasures and fleshly lusts, in order to avoid making again a complete fool of himself as he did when he abandoned wisdom entirely and practised folly by itself. Now, when he comes to compare wisdom and folly, he concludes that there really existed a great difference between them, even like that between darkness and light. "For the wise man hath his eyes in his head," *i.e.* even in managing his worldly affairs he possesses prudence and calculation—in building and planting he displays skill and taste, yea, even in running after pleasures, and indulging in the lusts of his eyes and flesh, he is guided by wisdom to keep in certain bounds, to preserve his honour from shame, and his body from untimely destruction. "But the fool walketh in darkness," in any enterprise he breaks his neck at the first pit he meets with, and pits of miry clay he finds at every step, and in every hunted-for article of this deceiving world.

But the question was not only which of these objects was intrinsically preferable, but it was also which of these was the most recommendable to, and the most advantageous employment for, mortal

man during his short residence on earth? Such a question is (according to the example of the dying, above referred to) like the problem, What medicine is best adapted for an evidently dying and expiring man to restore him to life and health, and to prolong his earthly existence? Could therefore Solomon recommend worldly wisdom, even with all its worldly advantages over folly, as such? No! certainly not! for with all its preference to folly, it does not, it cannot, nor ever will afford the least advantage to its possessors, when the certain and common *event*, death, shall come and carry them off along with the fool, and drag them to their native dust. Need we now say that when we consider the infidel philosopher in and beyond the grave, that not only we cannot put the fool and idiot beneath him, but we must place them far, far above him? Where is the fool, the ignorant, the idiot, and even the most abandoned drunkard that expires in the mire, whom we could place as low (according to the authority of the holy Scriptures) as any of the philosophising infidels and outrageous blasphemers, as the vile and venomous Voltaire, and hundreds of the like satanic vipers, who not only destroyed their own souls, but led astray, poisoned, and destroyed their thousands, and left behind their execrable names and devilish doctrines as a pest to posterity? Would it not have been far better for them, and happier with them, if they had been born bewildered idiots, or if they had not been born at all, or if they had remained in complete ignorance, when it is most certain that it should fare better with the inhabitants of Sodom and Gommorah in the last day of judgment than with them?

But let us even suppose that Solomon in the above passage did not intend to carry the comparison of worldly wisdom and folly far, far beyond the grave;

but that having stated already that during active life worldly wisdom was nothing else but a source of grief and affliction unto its infidel possessors, he now proceeds to declare that at the hour of death, worldly wisdom was of no advantage, does not afford a moment's consolation, not a moment's prolongation of life above that of the fool, when the *common event* reaches him. What a *sore occupation!* What a useless drug?—feed a dying man with a few lessons on the solar system—tell him that the academy of . . . has discovered a new planet, or that Mr . . . has discovered a new law of electricity! He is dying, he is entering a journey to a place where science is no more science—where things are not guessed at, but clearly seen—where the question is no more if the man speculated or knew something about the fixed law by which the universe is governed, but if he knew, feared, loved, and served the Creator and Governor of the universe! What then in the world can be commendable in a dead object, which does neither profit in life, nor bring the least advantage at the hour of death?

In the following passage we shall see that not only Solomon could not recommend worldly wisdom, but that he himself was reduced to a state of despondency, when he considered that with all his wisdom that profited him nothing in time, he will at last be carried off along with the fool, without the least distinction.

15. Then I thus reasoned within my heart :
 As it happeneth to the fool, so shall it happen to me !
 And to what purpose am I then more wise !
 I therefore said in my heart that this also is vanity.
16. For there will be no perpetual memorial
 Of the wise man more than of the fool ;

Seeing that all the past shall in future days be forgotten.

O how shall the wise man die like the fool !

17. I therefore hated this life ;

For grievous became unto me the work

That is carried on under the sun :

For all is vanity and vexation of spirit.

O what a horrid picture have we here again exhibited before our eyes of the mental agonies of a poor soul estranged from her God, and stripped of religious consolation ! What an awful accumulation of melancholy and bitterness, of grief and fear, of torturing thoughts and devouring speculations, do we discover here in the inner chamber of mortal royalty ! In the most hidden corner of cedar palaces, filled, surrounded, and covered with all the magnificence and splendour for which this world can afford materials, invention, and skill—O what gloom is there ! O what misery ! O let ungodly and wicked men no more try to deceive us by the flashing outward appearance of their condition, of their prosperity, of their earthly pleasures, and pretended satisfaction and felicity, for they are the most miserable of living beings, the most deplorable of mortals.

In Solomon, and in his confession contained in the chapter before us, we have the plainest and most complete history of human life, of the progress of sin, of the pleas and claims of the flesh, of the judgment of common sense, and of the remonstrances of soul and conscience. But in it we have also the doors of the most magnificent palaces thrown wide open, and the very hearts of its gold and silver covered inmates unfolded and exposed to our inspection. Where and who is the man now living on our globe that is, in a circle of like circumstances, so richly provided with all materials necessary for making such vast and

complicated experiments upon the world and its foolishness, as was that wisest and richest of men, that most powerful, and ingenious of monarchs, during his long, peaceful, and prosperous reign? What more will ever a mortal man—what more will ever the greatest of kings be able to employ in search of solid happiness and lasting satisfaction than Solomon did, and completely failed? He, in the pride of his heart, abandoned God and religion for *a time* (as every backslider pretends to do, only for a certain time, when afterwards he will return to his duty). therefore it was that the richest of blessings, the sweetest of pleasures, the surest of gains, the happiest of lives, the everlasting and most precious comforts and delights of religion abandoned him. In vain sought he among the ragged and perishing treasures of time, and among the withered leaves of world's wisdom, a competent recompense for what he so wantonly lost. Gold and silver ornaments, and the costliest and most brilliant of jewels, said, "We cannot compete, either in value or in brilliancy with the glorious, invaluable, and everlasting treasures of heaven." Palaces and gardens, groves and vineyards, said: "We cannot supply the loss of Paradise, the serene and eternal abode of saints in unshadowed light." Worldly wisdom said: "Do not glory in me, O mortal man; for it was human ignorance that gave me birth, my best flowers are mere suggestions, and my whole existence vanishes like smoke before the real wisdom of God which thou hast abandoned." All earthly pleasures and enjoyments collectively said, "We are not worth one moment's delight which the children of God enjoy in the regions of bliss." Then there came, as it were, a mighty voice calling from heaven, "The wise men are ashamed, they are dismayed and confounded. Behold, they have rejected the word of

the Lord, and what wisdom remaineth unto them?" (Jer. viii. 9).

It is no matter of surprise that the overwhelmed man was then driven to despair, so much so as to exclaim in a violent fit of agony, that he hates, that he abhors life; "I therefore hated this life; for grievous became unto me the work that is carried on under the sun, for all is vanity and vexation of spirit." At the time when Solomon reached that terrible depth of despair, there must not have remained in him even the smallest spark of that celestial light which once animated and brightened his soul. He had delivered himself soul and body unto the prince of this world, when he invented and accomplished his last and vast experiment in the regions of the power of darkness; he therefore could now find no comfort among the wilds of despondency.

If there remain yet a shadow of argument in favour of life without God, in the midst of world's vanities, it is brought forward in the following verses by the desponding man; it is exposed and condemned by sound reason and common sense.

18. I also hated all my works

Wherewith I troubled myself under the sun;

Because I must leave them to the man

That shall come after me.

19. And who knoweth whether he will be wise or
foolish?

Yet shall he rule over all my works

Which I obtained by my toil and by my wisdom

Under the sun. This also is vanity.

The only consolation which now apparently remained to that grievously disappointed and desponding man, unto whom his own life became a burden, and his many and laborious works an abomination,

naturally was, that he had a successor to his throne as well as to all his possessions. This is usually the favourite argument of worldly men, who are madly engaged in accumulating riches, and allow themselves no repose, even to grey-headed days, yea, even unto the last day of their existence. Ask these old labourers of vanity why they are so busy, seeing they have already enough, even should they attain the age of an antediluvian? Then they will answer you that they have gotten heirs, or an heir, unto whom they wished to leave all their possessions, that they might enjoy them after their own departure hence. Ah true! this is a laudable and lawful resolution and action in *godly parents*, who, during their own lives, sought first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and unto whom all these things (earthly riches) were given by the beneficent hand of their heavenly Father, without burying themselves in the mountains of vanity in search of Mammon, and without neglecting the service of God. Such a suggestion is very just in men, who, while gathering the rich bounties of Providence, honoured God with their substance, and with the first fruits of their increase—who blessed and adored the giver of all things, and applied a portion of their riches for the promotion of his glory. After having thus faithfully and justly behaved in the management of the talents confided unto them by the Lord of the whole earth, and when they are at last called upon to leave the scenes of this earthly life, and to lay down their office below, then they leave the remainder of heaven's depositions to the charge and stewardship of their pious children, whom they brought up in the fear and knowledge of God. This they do with the strictest orders and recommendations, that they (the heirs) should keep, use, and distribute these treasures of their heavenly master faithfully and

righteously, in order that they might be in turn more richly blessed than their parents—that they might enjoy Jehovah's approbation while on earth, and make themselves worthy of heavenly and everlasting treasures, and of a crown of glory when they too shall depart hence for a better world. Such is a blessed possession, such is a glorious inheritance. Where such a testament is made by godly parents unto pious children, we may be certain to behold the farewell-taking parents filled with heavenly joy and satisfaction at the last hour of their earthly pilgrimage, at the last hand-shaking with their surviving and godly offspring. Under the guardian care and guidance of the Lord of Hosts, they leave their successors in easy worldly circumstances, provided with temporal good and plenty, but also in a prosperous and promising spiritual condition. So they have every reason to hope to meet soon again in the spheres of unspeakable glory, unmingled happiness, and everlasting joy.

Such was the case with the happy saint David, when on his death-bed he left his crown and enormous treasures in the hands and to the charge of his then hopeful, pious, and devoted son Solomon. What pen—what power of eloquence, can describe the holy delight which animated the fainting breast of the dying Psalmist, when he addressed his illustrious crown prince and heir in the following words: “Now, my son, the Lord be with thee; and prosper thee, and build the house of the Lord thy God, as He hath said of thee. Only the Lord give thee wisdom and understanding, and give thee charge concerning Israel, that thou mayest keep the law of the Lord thy God. Then shalt thou prosper if thou takest heed to fulfil the statutes and judgments with which the Lord charged Moses concerning Israel.
. . . Now, behold, even in my poverty (*i.e.* hav-

ing been once but a poor shepherd at Bethlehem), I have prepared for the house of the Lord an hundred thousand talents of gold, and thousand thousand talents of silver, and of brass and iron without weight, . . . and thou mayest add thereto." (1 Chron. xxii. 11—14.) Again, "And thou, Solomon, my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart, and with a willing mind: for the Lord searches all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts: if thou seek him he will be found of thee, but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever." (xxviii. 9.) Again, "And David blessed the Lord before the whole congregation; and David said, Blessed be thou, Jehovah God of Israel, our Father for ever and ever. Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the victory, and the majesty, for all that is in the heavens and on the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and thou art exalted as Head above all, . . . for all things come of thee, and we received from thine hand what we have given thee again; for we are strangers before thee, and sojourners, as were all our fathers. . . . O Lord our God, all this store that we have prepared to build an house for thine holy name, cometh of thine hand, and is all thine own. . . . And David said to all the congregation, Now bless the Lord your God. And all the congregation blessed the Lord God of their fathers," &c. (xxix. 10—20.)

Such is the testament, such the confession, such the gratitude, and such the last happy hours of a man who lived an holy life, who served God with all his heart and soul, and also with all the temporal treasures which he put into his hands. Such is the blessed and happy state in which a child of God, and a faithful steward in his master's property, leaves the talents confided unto him, in the hands of

his successor; and such are the strict conditions under which alone he transfers his office unto his offspring. True, it is not every godly father who like David has to charge his son with the building of a temple unto God in Jerusalem. But there is even now a spiritual temple, a building in which every child of God is employed as a mason, and which needs no less temporal means than the building of Solomon's temple. Therefore, every rich departing Christian has to make a testament like that of David, and to charge his successor to employ Jehovah's talents in the spiritual building of His temple, for the glory of His name. Such David-like men will experience satisfaction and joy during all the days of their life. But the elevation of soul, the pure delight, and serene peace, which accompany their last hours, when preparing to lay down their pilgrim staves, and leave them along with their terrestrial charges in the hands of their godly offspring, while they part to seek eternal repose in the celestial mansions of light, and in the bosom of their Heavenly Father, all this passes understanding, and any attempted description by mortal man.

Let us now return to the busy, grey-headed, fortune-hunting worldling, and consider his gloomy condition when on his death-bed—surrounded by a number of ungodly and wicked young sinners, a set of hungry and ravenous wolves, who wait eagerly for the moment when their unworthy progenitor would shut for ever his covetous eyes; and when they might fall over his laboriously accumulated bundles, like a swarm of hungry bees over a plateful of honey. O unfortunate and miserable being, whose life, spent in vain idols, has vanished like smoke, and now he has reached the end of a *short nothing*, and stands at the door of an awful *everything* unprepared! He was continually busy gathering, and

could never find satisfaction in what he already possessed. He had, but sought more; and the more he found, the less he was satisfied; hence he sees now the vanity and nothingness of his *sore occupation*. Even in the days of his vigour, a moment's calm reflection on the nature of his earthly treasures, and on his approaching death, was enough to fill him with bitterness, to make him abhor his own life, and to consider it as an oppressing burden. How, then, is it possible for such a wretched man to find the least pleasure in the fact of leaving all his toils and labours in the hands of a number of monsters of immorality and extravagance? How can he dismiss the awful thought that he is leaving to his degenerate and godless children a drug which, though he used it in small dozes and with moderation, proved after all to have operated like poison upon and devoured his days and his energy? Can he expect anything else, but that his carnally minded children, who will likely turn out far worse than himself, having spent no labours in gathering these riches, would swallow them violently, and without measure, to their utter destruction? Such a miserable man leaves to his children the plan and materials for the erection of another tower of Babel. His testament reads: "Go to, my children, and build yourselves a city, and a tower, whose top should reach unto Heaven; and make yourselves a *great name*, lest ye be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth." Ah! but as soon as this ungodly architect shuts his eyes, is put in the grave, and covered with dust, instantly his young vipers of heirs divide their tongues, and spread abroad along with their father's materials—the one to drunkenness—the other to the vilest of wickedness and extravagance—the third to debauchery and lewdness—the fourth is carried by an express train to a distant country, there to find

means how to dissipate the mammon of unrighteousness, and procures for himself the same destruction abroad as his fellow-heirs do at home. Such a prospect of matters can hardly afford any pleasure to a dying Esau, who sold his own birthright for a pot of pottage, and having been disgusted with life himself, leaves now the wages of iniquity, the thick remainder of the pot of poison, unto his miserable descendants.

When Solomon came so far down in his terrible fall as to hate life, and to consider it an unsupportable burden, and to be utterly disgusted with all his riches, possessions, and works, with the gathering of which he lost his precious time, and the spiritual comforts of his soul, there remained unto him only one consideration, which apparently should have afforded him some comfort. This was that his throne, crown, and enormous riches will remain in the possession of his son and successor. Ah! it was here that he felt a pointed dagger in his breast, a piercing thorn in his flesh, and a fire burning in his soul. This was the proper occasion for him to recall to mind the happy scene which he once witnessed at the death-bed of his devoted father David. Now he fully considered that his pious and happy father left all his riches unto a son who received a careful and scrupulous instruction from the prophet Nathan—a son who grew up in a sacred tabernacle, among prayers, psalms, and sweet songs and melodies—a son trained in the fear, knowledge, and love of God—a son whom his dying father warned and exhorted on his death-bed, in words no less solemn and powerful than these: “And thou Solomon, my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve Him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind, for the Lord searches all the hearts and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts: if thou seek Him He

will be found of thee, but if thou forsake Him He will cast thee off for ever"—a son unto whom God Himself appeared saying, "Ask what I shall give thee?"—a son who was pious enough to ask the Lord for nothing else than for *wisdom*, in order that he be fitted for his sacred duties as the King over Jehovah's chosen people—a son unto whom God answered: "Because this was in thine heart, and thou hast not asked riches, wealth, or honour, nor the life of thine enemies, nor long life, but hast asked wisdom and knowledge for thyself, that thou mayest judge my people over whom I made thee king: Wisdom and knowledge is granted unto thee; and I will give thee riches, and wealth, and honour, such as none of the kings have had that have been before thee, neither shall there any after thee have the like." (2 Chron. i. 7—12.) We say that when desolated, fallen, and despairing, Solomon recalled all that to mind, and considered that even such a son as he was, of such a rare and holy man as was David his father, and that after all he fell into an horrid depth of corruption and misery, how! O how! could he find pleasure in the idea of leaving everything to his son? Could he forget for one moment that he himself, with all his extraordinary qualities, was ensnared and taken by the very riches which his pious father left unto him, though with the strictest orders and warnings to use them in the service of God? Could he forget that in spite of his education, wisdom, and knowledge of God, that in spite of his father's solemn and awful testament, and in spite of having been honoured twice with the Lord's visit in visions, still he rebelled and sinned against his father's God, against the God of his precious promises, in consequence of which he was now reduced to the utmost mental misery, not only to be disgusted with all his riches and possessions, but even to abhor

his life? How then, we ask, could such a man find any pleasure or the shadow of satisfaction in the idea that fallen, degenerated, and despairing Solomon would leave all his riches, possessions, throne, and crown, to the charge of no less corrupted and degenerated Rehoboam, the son of an idolatrous Amoritish woman? (2 Chron. xii. 13.) How could he confide in a son who was brought up in the bosom of a vitiated, ungodly, luxurious, and extravagant court, where he saw nothing but the greatest enormities of immorality and vice? Was not this enough to break Solomon's heart, and to give him the last and most cruel stroke, which he so justly deserved?

It was for the above reason, therefore, that Solomon could find no comfort in the idea of leaving all to his son. Thus he began to hate all his works, riches, and possessions, with which, being disgusted himself, he was now to leave them in the hands and power of his successor, of whom he was not sure if he would prove a wise man or a fool. The latter was the more probable; for if the highly promising and extraordinary son of devoted David made a fool of himself, what could be expected of such a man's son? If Nathan's disciple abandoned God and religion, and sought destruction for himself among the foolish vanities of this world, what was reasonably to be expected of the son and disciple of Naamah the Amonitess? Alas! those fears and forebodings of Solomon were too literally realized. When that young and degenerated despot was lifted to the clouds of vain pride by the riches left unto him by his departed father—when he rejected the good counsels of the old and wise men, and followed those of his young companions in iniquity, then David's dynasty lost for ever the reign over the ten tribes of Israel,

and even the kingdom of Judea entered into a system of slow decay.

20. I then resolved in mine heart
To abandon all hope with respect to all the works
In which I had laboured under the sun.
21. For even the man whose works are executed
In wisdom, and in knowledge, and with skill ;
Yet unto a man that hath not laboured therein
Must he give it as his portion !
This is also vanity, and a great vexation.
22. What else remaineth now unto man
For all his labours, and for the vexation of his heart,
That he thus toileth under the sun ?
23. Surely all his days are sorrowful,
And his occupation grievous ;
Even in the night his heart hath no rest.
This is therefore also vanity.

We have now before us the sum and substance of all the various experiments which Solomon invented and accomplished at great spiritual peril, and their results : both of which he now found to be vanity of vanities and vexation of spirit. He was at great pains, trouble, expense, and anxiety in constructing an air balloon, as it were, in which he expected to mount above the common lot of humanity, and to breathe the air of pleasure and satisfaction, and enjoyment in higher spheres, which no common mortal can reach. But no sooner had he begun his rapid ascent than his balloon burst in several places, the storm tossed violently the injured machine, Solomon lost his balance, fell out of the car, and broke his legs on landing in a deep ravine, at a great distance from his native desires and expectations. In his great distress and sore disappointment he sought consolation in the idea of leaving

the wisely-constructed and very costly, though now wrecked balloon, to his heir and successor. But he soon discovered the great danger to which that hollow inheritance would expose his crown prince, should he—who possessed far less wisdom and skill than his unfortunate father—attempt to reconstruct and refit the broken instrument for another experiment, which would probably end in the breaking of his neck in addition to his father's legs.

Having thus finished his perfect search through all the corners, and through all the different substances of this world and her vanities—having thoroughly pondered man's relation to her, in all his various circumstances, and possibly different conditions, and still found no pleasure, no real satisfaction, and no prospect of happiness, either for himself, or for his descendants after him, or for his fellow men, he therefore pronounced at last his severe but just sentence of condemnation, without any extenuating circumstances, upon all that is material and perishing, and in all its various relations to mortal man. He therefore became wearied of life, which had no more charms, no more promises for him, and consequently he became disgusted with all his riches, and possessions, and laborious works, in all of which he saw but vanity, deceit, and vexation of spirit. At last he exclaimed, "What else remaineth now unto man, for all his labours and for all the vexations of his heart, that he thus toileth under the sun?" as if he had said, "Is there anything that I neglected in the course of my investigations, wherefore I failed to find the expected fruits of satisfaction and pleasure? Is there any living man who can reasonably imagine to find more among the deceitful vanities of this world than I did? If not, why then do they continue to plague themselves with an experiment so entirely exhausted? Why

does not man in general hate and abandon everything as I do now? Why is not every man so disgusted with life as I am? Are not all his days full of sorrow, and all his occupations accompanied with grief? Do his eyes repose by day, or does his heart find rest by night? Is not all this vanity and madness? How long shall mortal man continue to deceive himself? How long shall he grasp at the foul air of worldly pleasures? How long shall he continue in the whirl of misery and vexation of spirit?" Here we see an individual who, having ruined his constitution, not by the moderate use, but by the abuse of the creatures of God, given unto man to enjoy them with moderation and thanksgiving. Here we see a man who swallowed too much at once of a fat dish, by which he brought on himself derangement, disease, and sufferings. Now he not only condemns and abhors every thing, but also every man, and even those who use that dangerous dish moderately, and in a manner that will certainly do them good instead of harm. But it is usually the case with such disappointed men that when in the course of time their first impression of horror and disgust is past, they see clearly that it was the *abuse* and not the *use* of those things which caused them sufferings. So Solomon, when he awoke out of his wandering dream, when he soberly looked back to his extravagant and sinful career, he also moderated his opinion (as we shall see in the following chapters), and he himself recommends highly the moderate use of all the gifts of God, and the enjoyment of them by all men, in moderation, with thankfulness, contentedness, and satisfaction.

The end of the last century and the beginning of the present proved very productive of a mass of *little Solomons*, in the shape of discontented poets, defeated warriors, and murmuring and blaspheming

philosophers, which spread like a pest over the surface of civilized Europe. We call them *little Solomons*, though their *littleness* beside that really great man was manifested in every respect, while their assimilation unto him was only in the following point. Having like Solomon undertaken different experiments (though on a very small scale) upon the world and its foolish vanities, for the satisfaction of their selfish and wicked ambition, and vile lusts of their flesh, and having found themselves sooner or later sadly and sorely disappointed in all their expectations, they became misanthropes of the first order, and with an air of pedantic authority violently demanded their sober and regulated fellowmen to follow their examples, and to become misanthropes like themselves. These little beings, with comparatively but small brains and very limited means, were furnished with one or another valuable talent, which, if directed into a right channel and wisely employed, would in proper time have procured for them a peaceful and honourable existence. But no, they ventured to violate the laws of nature, and boundaries of Providence, in the vain hope to screen themselves under the protection of their little knowledge and reputation. Some of them ventured to lift themselves in rapid flights in a sphere very high above their station, where they naturally met with a numbing cold, and fell down like icicles into the melting snow. Others plunged themselves into a depth of sin and base degradation, where they broke their limbs among the rocks of public opinion, and general condemnation. Thus disappointed, wounded, and sadly discouraged, they began to hate and condemn, not their excesses, lawlessness, imprudence, presumptions, and shameful behaviour, but everything created—the world at large, the human family in general. Yea, they even ventured to attack

Providence and its omniscient arrangements, as if heaven was obliged to make other arrangements and rules for deceived and wicked monsters, who refuse to submit themselves and be guided, but wish to submit and guide others!—men who are not contented with the common lot and portion of humanity, but madly endeavour to lift themselves above the heads of greater men than they are—men who break all boundaries of decency, morality, and equity, and still expect and demand to remain unmolested, uncriticised, and uncondemned by their calm and sober fellowmen—men who search among the rubbish of a vain world for things which Providence either never intended man to find, or even strictly prohibited him the use thereof. These perverted beings condemned loudly the imperfection of men and objects, while they themselves and their vile conduct presented an awful picture of enormity, outrage, and imperfection. These little fishes ventured to jump out of their liquid element when in pursuit of flies, and thus they have either cast themselves into the outspread net of the fisherman, or were picked up into the long beaks of birds of prey. When taken by their own follies, they murmured against Providence and blasphemed God, and tried to persuade their fellow fish—who were still in the full enjoyment of their liberty—to despair, to hate life, to abhor everything around them, and to blaspheme Providence as they did. They forgot all the time that Providence has richly provided for them in their native element, and never advised them to jump out of it in search of dainties, and thus to fall into the power of their enemies. They forgot that their fellow fish might behave wiser than they did, and thus remain quiet, happy, and undisturbed in the spacious bosom of the crystal deep, where their Creator placed them, and prepared abundance for

them, and therefore may never have reason to murmur, to blaspheme, or despair of life.

Solomon, as he paints himself in the above made confession regarding the desperate condition into which he sunk during the days of his moral darkness, deserves, in one point of view, to be crowned king and captain of the just-described disappointed and murmuring sect. But, in more than one point, he entirely condemns them, and disavows any common act, station, or opinion with them. His desires and aspirations were as vast as his resources—his ambition as high as his station could suggest it to be—his acts, speculations, and achievements were as enormous as his wisdom could invent and his treasures afford; consequently, his disappointment and grief at his having failed to find his aim were, proportionally, great and violent. Here lies also the vast difference between the great Solomon and the little and puny imitators. The former's disappointment was not that of not being able to find or reach the objects of his desire and ambition, but in not having found the expected results, the satisfaction, the pleasure, and the solid advantage which he thought would emanate from those desired objects when once procured and enjoyed. But the latter were and are, and will likely always be, disappointed at the very first stage of their ambition, in not being able to procure for themselves the objects of their violent passions and wicked propensities, and thus have the mortification of not being able to try and taste them for good or bad. In this point of view the disappointed Solomon had decidedly more reason for murmuring (in a worldly sense) than his bewildered little subordinates. He laboured much, tried much, spent much, lost much—therefore he was grieved much. He was wearied of life only when he saw the miserable position into which he

plunged himself by his unhappy exchange of the immortal and heavenly things with the deceiving and vanishing things of this world. He called upon his fellow-mortals to hate and abhor along with him things which he scrupulously and repeatedly tried and found out to be nought and vanity. But the above little misanthropes do hate, or rather pretend to hate, life and worldly things, without having ever known the least about eternal life and its imperishable treasures. They recommend to their fellow-men to hate and condemn what they themselves have never tried, never tasted, merely because they were disappointed in trying to procure it, and which, had they succeeded in finding, they would certainly have died with another opinion. This is something like as if a thief would curse and condemn the use and users of money, because, when he stretched forth his hand to steal a great sum out of his neighbour's box, he received a violent blow, and his hand was broken—therefore should no man use his own and honestly gained money!

But, great as is the material contrast between Solomon (even during his days of moral darkness) and the above originally low characters, there is still greater difference between them, when we descend to the results of the contrasts; or, in other words, when we consider their respective ends, their moral condition, and the state of mind they were in respectively at the hour of death. In order to illustrate this, and to shew that even the vast difference between their worldly circumstances reflected much upon their ultimate ends, the reader, we trust, will bear with us when we introduce the following parable:—

There were two individuals, one immensely rich and wise, the other poor but fanciful. Both were born and bred in a cold northern clime, but were

both of vigorous constitutions, and easily endured the rigour of their native country. Both read and heard spoken of a hot and beautiful country, where a brilliant summer never ends, where roses and lilies spontaneously grow, and appear at every season of the year in their gorgeous attire, where the orange and citron ever blossom, and where the poorest of men feed on fresh figs and delicious Banana fruit. Both take a feverish fancy for that region of delight; both begin to hate their native country and blaspheme its cold climate, and both resolve to emigrate as soon as possible.

The rich man makes short work in the execution of his conceived plan. He leaves his estates to farmers, takes a great sum of money along with him, embarks on board of a fine and swift steamer, and, after a pleasant voyage of a few weeks, reaches the shore of his desire. Arrived there, he soon buys a magnificent villa, with splendid accommodation, with a great and beautiful garden annexed to it, containing all the various and luxurious fruit trees of the country, and all the different flowers clad in splendour and beauty even far above his own imagination. He provides for every comfort in the richest style there to be got, and settles down with the full prospect to verify his delightful dream, and to reap rich fruits of his happy change.

However he soon begins to feel and regret that the scorching heat becomes almost insupportable, and to enjoy the country scenery of orange groves and native flowers impossible; for he does not show his face in the street without procuring violent headache, and fever into the bargain. The intensity of the heat gradually increases, and mars visibly his constitution; he loses his appetite, and becomes daily more feeble. One day he takes a fancy for a plateful of fresh figs just plucked in his garden by

his servants. He swallows a great quantity of them, and moistened them with a few glasses of fresh water. His stomach is deranged, he falls into a dangerous illness, and after a few days he sees himself surrounded by a set of hungry physicians, and with a dozen of bottles containing bitter and abominable drugs. Typhus fever then hastens to pay its polite visit to the illustrious stranger. He is profusely bled, and, in addition, he is beset with a score of sucking and black little companions who seem delighted with the blood of a northern clime, and stick to him faithfully until he becomes quite exhausted and faint. Having yet a good quantity of his native marrow in his bones, he slowly recovers from the first and severe shock, but is not left long to his thoughts before he is visited by another disagreeable native called yellow fever. His medical friends, attracted by the payment of the first bills, call again without much delay, and very kindly comfort the stranger in assuring him that if once cured from this second and furious disease, he shall become quite acclimatised, and need fear no other attack of the sort. After a double illness of several months' duration, he at last rises a perfect skeleton, with the exception of his slender and yellowish skin, which still envelopes his bones. Bereaved of his flesh and fat, he does not now feel so much the scorching heat. He begins now to enjoy the country scene; he spends several hours a-day in hunting. But exposing himself much to the burning sun, he is attacked with a bad ophthalmia. His medical men called by, soon order a biting and smarting solution to be poured six times a-day into his sore eyes. A blistering plaster is put to his neck—a green rag is hung over his face. He is now put into a dark room, and ordered and warned not to move from his bed, nor venture to get

out a moment from that sultry and almost pestilential prison, if he wished to preserve his eyes, to see again the light of the day. There he remains for weeks a prisoner in darkness and gloom, without even getting a mouthful of fresh air, of which he had plenty in his native country, but none there, even were he to offer all his riches for it.

In this miserable and lamentable condition he begins to be wearied of life. He begins to abhor and blaspheme oranges and fresh figs, and the cruel climate in which they grow. As often as he remembers how happy, how strong, and how fresh he was in his native country, where he all the days of his life moved on vigorously like a fish in his element, he curses the very day in which he began to hatch the unfortunate idea of leaving his native shore, in order to seek at a high price a hot and agonizing death in a distant and parched land. Now he firmly resolves that as soon as he gets a little better and a vessel be found in the harbour for his native shores, to quit instantly that slow-devouring fire. This executed, he returns to his country, and kisses the very dust of its shore on his arrival. Here he finds again all his friends, and the possessions of his father, and here he spends the remainder of his life in tranquillity, contentedness, health, and happiness.

But the other emigrant fares far worse. Being poor, he is obliged to sell every piece of furniture, and also the only small but comfortable cottage of his inheritance. Going to a hot climate, he also sells every article of warm dress, only to gather enough of means for the expense of travelling and establishing himself in the land of beauty. He already curses and abuses his native country, not only because that its climate was so cold, but because it did not furnish him with better means for getting rid of it. Not having enough to pay his passage in

a steamer, he embarks on board of an old, small, heavy-laden merchant sailing vessel. Immediately after leaving his native shore, a thick mist envelopes him in utter darkness, as if to indicate the gloomy end of his enterprise. Next day the vessel encounters a heavy and violent gale, which tears to rags its canvas, and breaks its masts into pieces, and every moment threatens to bury it in the angry deep. The fanciful emigrant lies half-dead with sea-sickness, and scarcely knows anything of what was going on. After several days of storms and gales, the desponding captain declares to his agonized and bewildered passengers the dangerous and cruel position in which they are—that having neither masts nor rudder, they were entirely left to the wrath of the foaming waves, which mercilessly toss the half-wrecked vessel in the midst of a dreadfully troubled ocean. Still there remained as much fancy in the imagination of our miserable emigrant as to soothe away all his fears—still he lived in the vain hope that a favourable wind may rise and drive the wingless machine to the shores of the orange country. After another night of agony and indescribable sufferings, the vessel's doom is at last decided. It is cast with great violence among rocks, and is shattered to pieces, and disappears. But our emigrant having had yet as much strength left as to lay hold on a piece of the wreck, by the means of which he is happily, though in a state of utter insensibility, driven upon a rock near a shore, there he is picked up by some merciful fishermen, who take him into a warm room, strip him of his bathing apparel, and rub him earnestly with all their might until they restore him to animation.

Awakening in the midst of that hot operation, our emigrant was quite sure he must be now in his desired warm country, where one feels so hot though

quite undressed. But to his greatest amazement he soon learns from his benefactors that instead of being now in the country of oranges and fresh figs, he was on shore of his own native land, only a few miles distant from the port where he embarked some days ago. Struck with horror at his discovered misfortune, stripped of all his luggage, and not having even one warm dress left to protect him, as before, against the extreme cold of his old native country; having nowhere to lay down his drowsy head, as the only cottage which his parents left him he had sold unto a man better pleased with the arrangement of Providence, and with his native clime, than he was, he now grows violent, cruel, unreasonable, and unjust. He abhors now his cold native land more than before, because he feels now the cold more offensive than ever, having no garment to counteract it. But he now curses likewise and abuses the orange country, once so fine and fascinating to him, because of the disappointment and misery it brought upon him without having even seen it, or tasted one of its fresh figs. He is now an outrageous misanthrope, and curses, mocks, and condemns every man (no matter to what country he belongs, cold or hot) because they do not abhor their lives and their native countries as he does his. He calls now bitter sweet and sweet bitter, bad good and good bad, and his life is one of misery and discontent. He is aggrieved, agonized, and irritated at every thing, in all circumstances, without a shadow of remedy. He swears and curses, and pours his gall of bitterness against a Providence whose rules and orders he trampled under foot. At last he expires in a most degraded state of mind, with the foam of blasphemy on his withered lips, and the hell-fire already burning in his heart and soul. Thus he ends, and parts and perishes miserably with his unaccomplished de-

sires and ambition, and outrageous lusts. He condemned things not because he examined them and found them to be vanity, but because he could not reach them. The hot country of oranges he will now find in the shape of a lake of fire and torment, prepared for Satan and for all the partners in his rebellion.

The above parable being so clear and conspicuous that the reader cannot fail to see the application of it to both parties at whom it aims, we therefore leave now the miserable, blasphemous, and infatuated sect who expire in their sins, and turn to Solomon. He was born and educated at Jerusalem, under the cold but wholesome, under the seeming rigorous, but really salubrious climate of the law of Moses, under which his father David flourished, lived prosperously, and died happy and joyfully. Left peaceful King on the throne of Israel, and possessed of enormous riches, he took a fancy to emigrate into the hot regions of jollity and merriment, of flourishing pleasures and sweet vanities of a deceiving world. His vast resources hastened the accomplishment of his plans, and at once he abandoned religion, God and his temple, and his father's celestial psalms, and off he went to the hot clime of enervating pleasures and dissipating joy. Exactly as the above parable presents the sufferings of the rich man in a temporal and physical figure, so found Solomon himself spiritually. Miserable, abandoned, exhausted, dangerously ill, nearly suffocated by the scorching heat of wine and all sorts of wild pleasure, his spiritual sight nearly for ever gone, and thus ordered by his cruel and selfish physician (the master of this world) to remain confined in sultry darkness, lest he see light, and repent, and be healed, and reject his poisonous drugs. In this state of great wretchedness and tremendous sufferings he began to hate his

life, and to be disgusted with everything around him. But there remained with him still wisdom enough to come to a quiet resolution, to abandon for ever all the vanities that ensnared and nearly for ever destroyed him, to return instantly to his native country, to kiss the very dust of its shores, to enter again Jehovah's temple with joy, to sing there his father's psalms with sweet melodies, to spend the rest of his life in the possessions of his godly predecessor, and to die in the bosom of his father's religion. That he faithfully and promptly executed this happy resolution we shall see from the following portion of this chapter and throughout the whole book.

24. It is not good* for a man that he should eat and drink,
And show his soul happy amidst his labour ;

* Indeed, it needs not very much knowledge of the Hebrew text to see that the phrase $\text{אין טוב באדם שׁיֵאכַל שׁיִשְׂתַּבַּח}$ (ain tov baadam sheyochal) can mean nothing else but, "It is not good for man that he should eat," &c. The import of this verse being, that it was absurd, not right, not good for a man to feast himself, and falsely pretend that his soul was quite satisfied and happy : for *satisfaction and happiness* was the pure *gift of God*, which man cannot take to himself at his own pleasure—as Solomon tried it on the largest scale, and completely failed. Translators were led astray by verses 12 and 22 of chap. iii., and verse 18 of chap. v., where Solomon says that it *was good* for man to eat and drink, and to see pleasure in the labour of his hands ; but there he distinctly says *when God gives and grants it*, while here he speaks of the absurdity of man who thinks to *procure* it for himself.

But the verses referred to are of quite another construction from our verse. In chap. iii. 12 there are the particles of restriction and limitation. כִּי אִם (ki, im) "than, that," *i.e.* nothing is better for man *than that* he should, &c. The same in verse 22 of the same chapter we have מֵאֲשֶׁר (measher), "than, that." But this is not the case in our verse, which has quite another meaning, and which to render (as all translators did, except the LXX.) "There is nothing better for man than to eat," &c., is a perversion of the meaning, and violation of the text. But of course the ignorance of the meaning led them to the violation of the text. While in these verses it is said that it *was good* for man to enjoy with satisfaction, thanksgiving, and

- For this I have likewise experienced,
That it cometh from the hand of God ;
25. For who can eat, and who can indulge more than I ?*
26. For unto the man that was good in His sight,
He gave wisdom, and knowledge, and joy :
But unto the sinner He gave an occupation
To gather and to accumulate, in order
That it be given to one that is good before God.
This also is vanity and vexation of spirit.

These three verses indicate the point at which Solomon's awakening out of his long dream took place. He found out at last the mysterious reason of his sore disappointments, and humbly acknowledges that because he had forsaken God, the Giver of all things, therefore he could find pleasure and satisfaction in nothing. Hence, he reasonably concludes that it was not good for man that he should

contentedness those blessings which *God gives him* for the purpose of enjoying them, in our verse it is said that it was *not good* for man (for sinful man) to deliver himself to feasting and merriment, and falsely pretend that he is happy, while it is God alone that can make him happy, and not he himself. This difference we also find clearly expressed in our verse by the word וְהִרְאָה (*veherah*), which implies "a false pretension ; a false show" of happiness by man himself without deriving it from its only source, from God. But in the other verses it is either וְרָאָה (*veraah*) "and he sees," "and he finds," *i.e.* in reality ; or it is וְלִירוֹת (*veliroth*) "and to see, and to experience, and to find," *i.e.* whom *God allows* to find happiness, pleasure, and satisfaction (see chap. iii. 13 ; v. 18, 19.)

* "And who can indulge," חֹשֶׁשׁ (*chush*) usually signifies either "to hasten," or "to be in a precipitous pursuance of some thing," (as Ps. xxii. 20 ; lxx. 6 ; 1 Sam. xx. 38 ; Ps. cxix. 60 ; Is. v. 19.) Thus it signifies likewise any hurrying employment, any busy indulgence. In our verse therefore it must mean, "Who can eat," *i.e.* who can procure so many dainties, "and who can indulge (so quickly, so easily, in every pleasure) more than I?" and still I found no happiness, no satisfaction, because I sought it out of God, I would procure it myself, while this no man can find unless granted to him by the Father of Providence.

speculate and seek more than God gave him. It is not good for man to seek or vainly pretend to have found satisfaction, pleasure, and happiness, where and when God has not appointed it. It is not good, and of no avail, for man to paint for himself joy in a sphere where the Lord of Providence appointed grief and vexation: for there is no peace, saith the Lord, to the wicked. It is not good for man that he should eat and drink and shew his soul happy amidst his labours (or, and pretend that his soul was happy and contented in all his labours.) And why? “For this I have likewise experienced (or found out) that it cometh from the hand of God.” During his wandering amidst the wilds of this world, and in all his numerous and accurate experiments, he saw clearly that sinful man cannot make himself happy, either by eating and drinking or by any other indulgences in worldly pleasures, for happiness and pleasure are the gifts of God, like all other things, and when He denies them, no mortal efforts will procure them; when he appoints *grief*, no riches, no merriments, no artificial joy, no pretended felicity, will be able to remove it. To prove this, Solomon adds, “For who can eat and who can indulge more than I?”—as if he said—“If I, with all my riches, with all my speculations, with all my endeavours, found but disappointment and despondency, instead of the solid pleasures, the lasting advantages, and the real satisfactions which I sought, who then is the man that can compete with me, and employ better and more means to find better results? Why then should any man still deceive himself in seeking happiness far away from God and religion—away from the only fountain wherein it can be found?”

The last verse, if rightly understood, is very important, and exceedingly touching. It refers primarily to Solomon himself, and states the reason of

his moral misery, and of the great change that has taken place in and with him from the time that he went astray. "For unto the man that was good in His sight, He gave wisdom, and knowledge, and joy;" *i.e.*, unto the devoted and pious Solomon, who built His temple, and began to serve Him with a pure heart, the Lord granted wisdom, and knowledge, and joy. This we see in the words which the Lord addressed unto him at the altar in Gibeon: "Wisdom and knowledge is granted unto thee, and I will give thee riches, and wealth, and honour, such as none of the kings have had that have been before thee, neither shall there any after thee have the like." (2 Chron. i. xii.) "But unto the sinner," *i.e.*, unto the backsliding, degenerated, and worldly Solomon, "He gave an occupation to gather and to accumulate (not for his enjoyment or happiness, but) that it should be given to one that is good before God," *i.e.*, unto whom God shall please to give it. Solomon foresaw that the same God who first gave him these enormous riches, and ultimately prevented him from enjoying them, when he lived in sin, and made himself unworthy of Heaven's rich benefits, will not allow either to any of his descendants to enjoy them, unless they be acceptable in His sight; and this hope he could not reasonably cherish of his crown-prince Rehoboam, for reasons stated above. So it really came to pass, that Solomon left all his riches and possessions in the hands of that arrogant and foolish prince, and when the latter proved a wicked and godless man, the Lord sent Sheshak, the king of Egypt, upon Jerusalem, and that conqueror carried off all the immense riches which Solomon had accumulated, but of which the Lord allowed him to derive neither pleasure nor satisfaction, nor any lasting advantage, because of his sins. It is from this lamentable fact of Solo-

mon's sad experience that he was enabled to conclude that all speculations, desires, wishes, and contrivances of the ungodly man, are all mere vanity and vexation of spirit, for if man's actions are not sanctified and confirmed by the *Amen* of God, He will pervert all his plans, and cause him to find grief and sorrow and disappointment in everything.

Thus ends the second chapter of Solomon's Confession, with a statement of the reasons of his failure. Henceforth he gives us sound doctrine, godly advice, and earnest warnings. Though he again alludes sometimes to his sad experience in the past, still it is in quite a different character from that recorded in the two first chapters. From the matter of the following chapter we shall see it still clearer that the three last verses of chapter second indicate the time and point of Solomon's final conversion unto God, and his return from darkness to light, after having seen the fatal consequences of his apostacy, and after having felt the dreadful weight of the almighty and severely punishing arm of a provoked God.

(CHAPTER III. VERS. 1—9.)

1. For all things there is a *certain* season,
And a *fixed* time for every purpose under the Heavens.
2. There is a time to be born (or to bear), and a time to die :
A time to plant, and a time to root up what is planted.
3. A time to kill, and a time to heal :
A time to break down, and a time to build up :
4. A time to weep, and a time to laugh :
A time to lament, and a time to dance :

5. A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones.
A time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing :
6. A time to seek, and a time to lose :
A time to seek, and a time to cast away :
7. A time to rend, and a time to sew :
A time to keep silence, and a time to speak :
8. A time to love, and a time to hate :
A time for war, and a time for peace.
9. What advantage, then, hath the labourer,
From all that wherein he toileth ?

Human passions are like fertilizing rains, like a stream of fresh water to man's physical and moral existence. Without them, humanity would present as barren and stupid an aspect as would the continental parts of our globe were they bereaved of rain, streams, and lakes. A man without love, without taste, without affection, and without any aspiration whatever, would be like a wax figure, a rolling stone, or like a good piece of ground without a drop of water, which will never produce either wild or cultivated flowers. The springs of human passions are as rich and sure, their process as well regulated, and their influences as various, as those of the rains and streams in the economy of inanimate nature, and their influences upon the vegetable world. As the disposition and construction of the dry land, with its mountains and valleys, well adapt it for attracting the rain, and affording channels to the streams, so is the organisation of the human body well adapted to produce, to lodge, and to influence the passions. As the falling rain and flowing streams act reciprocally on the mountains and valleys in fertilizing them, and covering them with rich verdure, so do the passions reciprocally affect and influence the very organization which produces

and harbours them. As power was given to intelligent man to exact different tributes of the mightiest streams, by forcing large sheets of their powerful and restless liquid to travel through the artificial channels which he cuts for them in his lands, to fertilize his gardens and fields, to drive the wheels and machineries of his mills, and to carry on their shoulders the burdens he pleases to load them with ; so may the stream of passions be made subservient to rational man, and be entirely bound to his will and command. But as the great stream of water is subject to overflowings and inundations beyond the control of man, and therefore man is obliged to make a strong barrier at the outlet of the great stream into his artificial channels, and which, if neglected, the mighty element may rise in rebellion one day or another, overflow with relentless fury the banks of the channel, and carry destruction and desolation into his fields, gardens, and establishments, and even endanger his life if he does not save himself in time by flying from his rebellious and pursuing slave ; so it is exactly the same with the stream of human passions, if man does cut an inroad into his heart to serve his own plans and purposes, but forgets or neglects to make a strong barrier to that channel, in order to prevent a destructive inundation.

Such was the deplorable experience of the wise King Solomon. His physical organization seems to have been prepared by nature as a great reservoir of strong and various human passions. His vast intellectual powers set these in full activity in gathering materials, in influencing the organic functions, in converting even mere imaginary visions into real plans and systems. That wild stream he allowed to enter his heart by the channels of imagination, desire, ambition, and fancy, in order to fertilize it,

and to drive the wheels and machinery of the enormous plans of his invention. But, depending on his wisdom and self-sufficiency, he neglected to put barriers to the headstream, or to elevate the banks of the channels leading its forces into his heart and thus to secure himself against a rapid and violent inundation. The sad consequences retarded not in their appearance. The stream of passions nourished by the rains of fancy, desire, and invention, swelled to a fearful height; it knew no boundaries, no bed, and no barrier. It inundated his heart with resistless violence. It took him by surprise, and cast him into confusion, and the sage was carried into captivity by his imagined captive. Floating along the furious stream, the bewildered man began to reflect, and soon discovered, that the disguised enemy whom he allowed to enter freely the doors of his heart as a faithful friend and auxiliary had now completely mastered him, and was carrying him triumphantly to everlasting destruction. In the first agonies produced by the conviction of his danger, in the suddenly bewildered state of his despairing soul, Solomon passed at once a severe and summary sentence of condemnation on the stream of human passions and on their productions in general. He then made no distinction between one who plunges himself willingly and purposely into that powerful stream, and one who uses its naturally refreshing and fertilizing influences, in measure and moderation. He made no difference then between one who secures himself against ruin in fortifying his heart and soul against a rapid inundation, and one who carelessly abandons himself to the strong current. In short he made no distinction between one who applies the different passions for the good of his soul, as loving God with all his heart, seeking and finding pleasure in His service, in His religion, in His justice, right

ousness, and loving kindness, and employing all his desires in doing good, and a man who devotes all his passions for the service of his flesh, who loves the world and its vanities, and hates and abandons religion and God and the salvation of his own soul. Thus he, in his first confusion, considered it as the fatality and general lot of man to be carried away by the flattering, deceiving, and kidnapping tide of his passions. At the same time he piteously stretched forth his hands, and looked eagerly for some projecting branch, for some elevated piece of ground or rock to lay hold on and have a moment's breathing time. Such the merciful Father in heaven allowed to the despairing man. In this horrible situation he discovered the projecting branch of sound reason, on which he laid hold and kept himself fast, until the flood had passed away, when he found himself on dry land again.

Having recovered and reposed himself after his deadly struggle, he began to reflect calmly on his past sufferings and on the causes of it. He found that he was equally culpable when in the days of his vigour he allowed the stream of passions its full course into his heart without guarding himself against an inundation, as he was culpable and unjust when, in consequence of his own fault, he was carried by it into confusion and misery, so he passed a harsh sentence of condemnation on everything, and considered man as born for confusion, as if confusion was the appointed destiny of man to lead him to destruction. He now clearly saw that there is a sure balance (reason) given unto man, by which he should weigh every passion before he resolves to act upon, or be actuated by it—that before mortal and responsible man resolves to undertake anything, he must first consider and calculate his time, his means, his strength, and his objects, as well as the exigencies

of the sons of passions and their production—that he must likewise consider if time needs, if religion allows it, if Providence approves it, or if they condemn it. The result of these contemplations was, that every thing and every action has its *proper, fixed, and appointed time, purpose, and order*. Out of time, every action is absurdity; out of purpose it is vanity; and out of order it is destruction. God has therefore given reason and a revelation unto fallen man, by which he might be able to weigh and judge every thing, before he allows any thing to influence him, and bind his affection. As there is a time for man to eat and drink (when his stomach is empty and demands food), and a time to abstain from eating and drinking (when his stomach is full), and as when he changes that order he disorganizes his physical constitution, and endangers his life, so it is exactly with his mental faculties and with his passions, which he must feed and employ in *order*, for fixed and useful *purposes*, and with exact calculation of time, circumstances, and usefulness; but if he neglects that order he exposes himself to confusion, danger, and destruction.

“For all things there is a certain season, and a fixed time for every purpose under the Heavens.” The great God, who founded the earth by wisdom, and established the Heavens by understanding, has also appointed different orders, seasons, and times, for everything, and for every operation under Heaven, in the departments which He appointed and assigned for the labour and operation of man during his short stay on earth. If man labours and operates in season, according to the order and will of Providence, he will prosper, and the works of his hands will flourish before his eyes. But if man resolves to work against Providence, to form orders of his own, to appoint seasons of his own imagination,

and to force matters against time and purpose, he will find himself disappointed. His labours will be lost in a chaos of disorder and confusion, and his plans and purposes will melt away like snow exposed to the rays of the sun.

“There is a time to be born (or ‘to bear children’), and a time to die.” This seems to be the foundation on which the different subjects introduced in the succeeding verses are to be established,—*i.e.*, as the appointed and fixed time of birth and death are entirely beyond the control of mortals to change them a single moment, so the season and order appointed by Providence for men’s operations must be exactly and minutely observed, or nothing will prosper. “A time to plant, and a time to root up what was planted.” In the order of nature there is a certain season of the year appointed for planting; out of it plants will take no root, but wither and die. So there are certain circumstances when the best plants must be rooted out, either after having served their purpose and time, and can no more bear fruits, or if the soil in which they have been planted proves unfavourable, and they must be transplanted into a better soil, &c. But if one either plants or plucks up out of season, out of order, and without reason, he is a destroyer of nature as of his own time. “A time to kill,” invaders, criminals, murderers, “and a time to heal,” either peaceful and innocent men when wounded, or even wounded evil-doers when submissive and penitent. “A time to break down and a time to build up.” There was once a proper time to deliver the splendid city of Moscow to flames and ruin (by the very hands that built it up before and afterwards), when the deliverance of a whole empire from an invading army depended on it;* as

*We give no opinion whether that miserable slavish empire would have been worse or better under the invader’s sway,

there was a time to rebuild it when the desolation had served its intended purpose, and the invader was no more to fear. There are many other circumstances which call upon alternately to build and break down, and all must be in proper time and order; out of it, the builder and the breaker-down are destroyers, and destroyers are mad sinners. "A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to lament, and a time to dance." The same David who once rejoiced and danced before the ark of God, when he brought it from Kirjath-jearim to Zion, lamented and mourned when he followed it out of Jerusalem under the insurrection of Absalom. To have changed the order, and mourned at the former occasion, and rejoiced and danced at the latter, would not have been courage but madness.

In all the above instances, as in those contained in the following verses unto verse 8 inclusive, Solomon as well teaches others as he establishes a mighty argument against his own past behaviour. In the days of his moral darkness he did everything out of time and out of purpose. He was constantly employed in building and planting, in setting up and breaking down without purpose, without necessity, and to no advantage, but because his reasonless fancy would have it so, and because he wanted to destroy his precious time in useless activity. He likewise delivered himself to forced joy, artificial merriment, and to singing and dancing at times, when he should rather have seriously thought of his condition, and mourned and lamented over it. It was also, therefore, that he found himself disappointed and deceived in all his undertakings; for

but we refer simply to the fact that the destruction of the invading French army under Napoleon, and the deliverance of Russia, was chiefly achieved by the ruin of Moscow, which was prevented from serving as winter quarters to the enemy.

as he laboured forcibly against time and against the order and will of Providence, so the more mighty will of God, and His fixed orders, worked against him and his plans, and brought upon him disorder and confusion, when he imagined to find order and happiness.

Having established the above line of man's activity and employment, and shewn that in every case these must be in conformity with the fixed time and order appointed by Providence, and that out of time man will no more prosper in his undertakings than if he would be born out of the time appointed by the Creator, or if he wished to live when the God of our souls saith "die,"—he then puts the question contained in verse 9, "What advantage, then, hath the labourer from all that wherein he toileth?" That is to say, seeing that man hath nothing in his power, nothing at his command, but is bound by order and to order to the fixed appointments of Heaven, what advantage then can he expect of his forced plans, and of his painful toils in searching to find what God will not give? Seeing that man's building and planting, love and hatred, joy and lamentation, war and peace, and every act and every movement depend entirely on the will and irresistible order of Heaven, as that of his birth and death, why then does man impose labours and troubles on himself in pursuing his ambitious plans and his vain inventions?

10. I have considered the occupation which God hath appointed

For the sons of Adam, that they might be chastised thereby.

11. He hath ordained* everything beautifully in its season,

* עָשָׂה (Asah), has many different significations, as, "To make; to work; to prepare; to perform; to produce; to

But He also put confusion* into their hearts,
 In order that man should not find out the work
 Which God performed from beginning to end.

Verse 10 is only a resumption of the statement made already by Solomon in verse 13 of the first chapter. There he positively declared that all that is performed under Heaven by man's labours belonged to the "sore occupation" which God has appointed for the (fallen) sons of Adam, in order that they might be chastised thereby, for their fathers' as for their own sins and rebellion. (See exposition there.) Here this statement is renewed and accompanied by a reason and explanation, suggested and called for by the argument advanced in the first nine verses of our chapter. When Solomon had once established

dress" (as a sacrifice), &c. But it also often signifies "to ordain," or "to appoint," as 1 Sam. xii. 6; 1 Kings xii. 31—32; Isai. xxxvii. 26, &c. In this sense the word is used *twice* in one verse; for even the phrase which we rendered "the *work* which God *performed*," means likewise those works which He *ordained* to be *performed* by man under His providence, and of which He approves. (See exposition.)

* עָלַם (Alam), means primarily, "To hide; to conceal;" as a noun, "a secret; a hidden thing." (Lev. iv. 13; v. 2; Num. v. 13.) Hence it is often employed to denote infinite time, eternity, as being a secret thing concealed from man. Only very rarely it is used to signify "the world," in the sense in which we take this expression. In our verse the word decidedly preserves its primary meaning, signifying that God had put "the mystery," or "the secret," into the heart of men, viz., He concealed from them His *time* and *order* with respect to the things which He ordained to be done by man, or not to be done by him; so that man is entirely confounded, not knowing which work God would approve of. But the child of God, who undertakes nothing but for the promotion of God's glory, is always sure to prosper. Parkhurst renders the word by, "obscurity," and reads the phrase "He hath even put obscurity in the midst of them." But we must say that neither "confusion," nor "obscurity," renders the whole force of the word in Hebrew, but "confusion" we think to be the expression nearest to it—man is confused by the mystery which hovers about the orders of God.

the fact that Providence had appointed certain times and fixed seasons for every thing and purpose, for every action and performance of man—that only such of man's labours as disagree with the appointed times and orders of Providence would meet with Heaven's approval and prosper, while all his other toils, which he loads upon himself out of time and order, would bring him confusion and disappointment—then the important question suggested itself, Is it then that man can precisely know and understand the orders and appointments of Heaven, and thus regulate all his actions and works accordingly, and undertake nothing against Providence, and not spend his time and labour in vain? The answer to this question must be a certain negative. No! man, fallen and sinful man, for the most part acts in complete darkness, not knowing whether his plans and operations are according to Heaven's appointed time, and hence will prosper, or if they are against the fixed order, and his labours therefore will all be in vain. Here, then, comes another question, *i.e.*, Why is it thus that man must remain so ignorant about Heaven's orders and appointments, and be obliged to labour in complete darkness? The answer is, that because man would be wise like God, by breaking his commandments and orders, therefore this confusion came upon him, to seek after things which he will never find. It is because man abused the light which God had bestowed on his soul when He made him after His own image, and wanted to know what is good and evil, therefore the Lord *left him* to obscurity and confusion, that sinful man might see, that after all the wisdom he acquired by eating of the forbidden fruit, he is still more in darkness, and calls evil what is good, and good what is evil.

To make clearer the above most important argument, we must consider that the very nature of fallen,

sinful, and perverted man, and of the justice and equity of an holy, righteous, and provoked God, absolutely demanded it that man (in general, and by nature) should remain ignorant about the orders, seasons, and appointments of Heaven, that thus the Lord might, even in this world, execute judgment and justice on the wicked and ungodly, and reward the good and righteous. Thus we hear Solomon say, in the last verse of the foregoing chapter, that unto the man that is good in the sight of God He gives wisdom (to know what to undertake and do and prosper), and understanding, and joy; but unto the sinner, He gives an occupation to gather and accumulate, not to enjoy it himself, but that it should be given unto him that is good before God. Now, in order to execute this purpose, the righteous Judge needed to hang a vail over man's eyes (or rather, to *leave* the vail hanging; for man put it over his own eyes by sin) that he should not discover His plans and appointments; for what wicked man would labour and toil, and build and plant, and gather, if he knew beforehand that, according to Heaven's irresistible order, he is neither to enjoy nor possess it, nor will his heirs have it? Or, would rebellious and blaspheming Pharaoh ever have moved a step towards the Red Sea had he known that the plan of Omnipotence was, to bring him and his army into the mighty deep? Had all the plans, orders, and appointments of Heaven been revealed unto fallen mankind at large, could the wonders of God have been manifested at all times to His children as they were? Would Amalek have sought his own destruction? Would not Sihon and Og have rather buried themselves among their mountains before they went forth to meet the army of Israel? Would Philistia, Moab, Midian, and Ammon have undertaken the dangerous employment to scourge Israel

for their sins, and to have their armies destroyed in turn when Israel repented? Would bloody Abimelech have appeared before the fortress of Thebez to have his head broken by a millstone for the blood of his brothers which he had shed? Would wicked Saul have persecuted David, or so occasioned the composition of so many celestial songs of that sweet Psalmist (Psalms composed during his persecution), or would he have appeared on Gilboa to be destroyed by the sword of the Philistines, had he known Heaven's everlasting plans regarding David, and regarding his own irretrievable doom? Would ever wicked Absalom have undertaken his rebellion, or appeared in the forest of Gilead to pay his rebellion and abomination committed by him, with a violent death? Would Sennacherib have appeared with his mighty army before Jerusalem's walls if he had known what the angel of the Lord was about to do? Had the princes of this world known the plans and orders of the Most High regarding the work of salvation for His children, they surely would not have pierced the Prince of Glory, and where would be, and when would have come, our salvation? Or how would the wicked, backsliding, and rebellious nation have filled up the measure of their iniquity? Or how would all the wonderful and glorious plans of God have been accomplished in their destruction and dispersion, as it was? O who can number the great events, horrid wars, and mighty revolutions, in which, and by which, the enemies of God were to be destroyed, and His children either chastised and admonished, or saved and richly rewarded, and the glory of God promoted, and His cause advanced, and which could not have taken place had His plans and orders been known to the parties concerned? How many countries would have remained uncultivated by their wicked

inhabitants, had they known that they laboured for others? How many houses would remain unbuilt, vineyards unplanted, riches ungathered, if their wicked proprietors should know that they are labouring for others? O where would have been the glorious Reformation and its celestial fruits had the beast of Rome known how many horns an obscure monk in one of his monasteries would ultimately break down from his guilty, bloody, perfidious, and sacrilegious head? One may say, "God might have brought about all things by other means." No doubt of that; but the *other means* needed no less the ignorance of the parties concerned than those means which have actually been employed.

It is thus evident that in the Lord's dispensations and dealings with a guilty, sinful, and rebellious world, it is an inevitable condition that man should not know the plans and orders of the Most High. The wicked, therefore, have a "sore occupation" in labouring and gathering for the enjoyment of others, and for their own destruction; whilst the good and obedient are guided in all their ways by the invisible hand of God, and by his wisdom, that they might undertake nothing but for the good of their souls and for the promotion of Jehovah's honour. This is what Solomon said, that when he considered again the "sore occupation" which God appointed as a chastisement for the wicked and hardened and rebellious sons of Adam, he found that God has ordained everything beautiful in its season. Every thing and every act of man is marvellously arranged to promote the punishment of the wicked, the recompense and prosperity of the righteous, and the glory of the Lord in both. For the execution of this purpose, the Lord "put confusion and obscurity into the hearts of men, that they should not be able to find out the work which God performed from be-

ginning to end." The plans which He laid down, the purposes which He has in view, the times which He appointed for the prosperity of one thing, for the confusion and desolation of another, the order which He gave that one should labour all his days in vain and gather for others, and another should prosper in all his ways, all these are hidden mysteries which are kept in Jehovah's sanctuary hid from created beings. Man is thus labouring in obscurity and ignorance, and is a mere instrument in the hand of God. The one is labouring and busily gathering all the days of his life for others, or even for his own destruction, according to his merits; and the other prospers in all his ways, finds wealth, happiness, peace, and joy in all his works, when he is found good before the Lord.*

* We can entertain no doubt that had the illustrious couple of Spanish tyrants, Philip and Isabella, known that the greatest portion of the vast and fertile America would ultimately become an English colony, and still later, an independent, flourishing, and happy Protestant country, they would have picked out the eyes of poor Columbus, and rather allowed him to perish in a dungeon than have furnished him with vessels and means to find out that enemy of Rome and friend of liberty. Would the French have prepared so nicely Canada for Britain? Would the Portuguese and others have done so much to prepare the Indies for England? No more would they have left to Britain such fat morsels, than the Amorites would have left to Israel the gorgeous palm trees of Jericho, and the splendid and fertile valley of Bashan, without cutting down the former, and sowing salt on the latter, had they known their irretrievable doom, and the irrevocable orders of Omnipotence. Ah! that happy Britain knew but a little more than it does for what purpose the Creator of the universe caused other and mightier nations to plant, build, gather, and prepare for her, then would we poor missionaries of hers probably not be so despised, and chased, and persecuted by Rome's viper brood; thousands of souls might be saved; liberty blossom; and Britain established for ever as the crown of nations. The Lord's ways are marvellous and mysterious; but the children of God should lose no time in searching out His purposes, times, and orders, in prayer and supplication.

12. I am convinced that nothing is better in them (in
man's occupations),
Than that one should rejoice, and do good in his life.
13. Every man also that can eat and drink,
And enjoy the benefits of all his labours,
This is the gift of God.

Seeing that man is entirely and absolutely a passive instrument in the hands of God, even as regards his earthly occupations—seeing that he can do nothing *of himself* and prosper, if it be not according to the Lord's fixed time, purpose, and order; and seeing that in that respect man is so obscured and confused that he cannot find out the ordinances of God when he wishes to find them, the best of all occupations therefore must be for man "to rejoice," or to be happy and contented with everything that Providence appointed for him, whatever be his station and circumstances; for to seek forcibly a better lot, by his own invention and sore toils, is in vain. Man must also have before his eyes that he is kept here for some purpose or other, of "doing good," let him, therefore, seek to accomplish the will and purposes of God, and thus the Lord will in turn give him wisdom, and prosper the works of his hands. For man to do good is always in right time and season, and according to the will of God, and can, therefore, never fail to produce rich fruits. But whilst Solomon advises the poor to be contented and to do as much good as they can, he tells also the wealthy not to consider their riches and their enjoyments as the fruits of their own wisdom and labour, but as a special gift of God, whom it pleased in His sovereign will to give them more than to others that labour more than they. If then the poor should be contented, and do good, what is the duty of the rich?

14. I am convinced that whatsoever God ordaineth,
That shall continue to be for ever ;
To it nothing can be added, and from it nothing taken.
This God hath so ordained, that men should fear him.
15. That which hath been is even now ;
And that which shall be hath already been :
And God requireth that which is pursued after.

These two verses contain the conclusion and confirmation of the whole argument advanced in the foregoing part of this chapter, *i.e.*, that God fixed times and seasons for every human action under Heaven ; that in the proper season or order these actions are beautiful and prosperous, but out of it they are a miserable and destructive confusion, and that God, for mysterious purposes, put (or left) the confusion in fallen man's heart, that he should not find out the orders and ways of Heaven. In verse 14, Solomon puts the summary seal to the fact of the unchangeableness and stability of the orders and arrangements of the great Jehovah, saying that they remain for ever inviolable by mortal man, who can neither take from them nor add to them the least thing. The reason why God has thus bound man to His irresistible and mysterious will and order, is, "that man should fear Him." If man were sure before he undertakes to plant a vineyard, that he will long enjoy its fruits—before he builds an house, that he will inhabit it many days in happiness—and before he goes to war that he will certainly carry the victory over his enemies,—then man would think himself quite independent, and forget God. But now that he is obliged to do everything in obscurity and uncertainty as to its issue, he fears God, and is led to call and supplicate His aid and blessing at every step he makes. Even before he undertakes anything, he will think much if it can be in right time, according to the will of God, which he

may so far see if the glory of God could be in any way promoted by it; if any good can come out of it for his own soul or those of his fellow-men. So do likewise this obscurity and confusion of man put fear and trembling into the hearts of the wicked, not knowing how and when and in what manner misfortune and destruction might overtake them.

Verse 15 is a resumption of the statement made in the first chapter, verse 9, *i.e.*, that there was nothing new under the sun—that everything created, every material agent, and even every intellectual will, is the same as it was, in its essence, properties, action, and manifestations. Though intellectual power may often manifest itself under different colours, different characters, pursuits, and passions, still it is the same nature, the same inviolable order, and all subject to the same Providence. The same statement is repeated in verse 15, and Solomon adds to it, “And God requires (or ‘seeks,’ or ‘demands’) that which is pursued after,”—that is to say—that as nothing can be changed by man after the arrangements and fixed orders of God, so nothing can be acquired by man unless the Lord wills it. If man does build, plant, cultivate, invent, establish, or destroy, and succeed in accomplishing his plans, it is God who allowed or even required these things to be done. If it be a man who is found good in the sight of God, then he will prosper and enjoy his accomplished works, to which the Lord gave his approbation in allowing him to finish it. If it be a wicked man, then the Lord allowed him to accomplish these works for others unto whom the Lord shall be pleased to give them. But at all events the Lord must have required these works to be accomplished, or if not, He would certainly have found a thousand ways to hinder them at their very outset. The same is the case with two parties going to war, which is always by the order of Heaven

either for the punishment of one or even of both parties. The consequences of this horrid occupation of mortals will always shew what the Lord meant by it, and why He allowed it. Though some of these terrific orders of Heaven, that nation shall destroy nation, are for the most part entirely mysterious and obscure at the time they take place, still after many days men learn what God meant in having ordained such struggles, and how they were to serve His plans and purposes. Such were the mysteries of the horrid destruction of Jerusalem, of the invasion and devastation of Europe by the Asiatic savages, of the destruction of the Roman empire, of the thirty years' religious wars, and many great events of the like character. All these, though they seemed invented, *pursued*, and accomplished by man, were *ordered and required* by the Lord of Hosts. Though these convulsions were dreadful, dark, and impenetrable at the time they occurred, still after many days the horizon of mystery cleared up, the clouds of obscurity were driven asunder by the mighty, extraordinary consequences, and men saw, and see, and will do so, in still future days, that the Almighty God was in the midst of these storms and whirls and convulsions, and destructions and changes—that it was the thundering voice of His order that made the world tremble—that man was the mere unconscious agent, and all served His eternal orders and plans.

16. When after all I beheld under the sun,
That in the place of judgment there is wickedness ;
And in the place of justice there is iniquity :
17. Then said I in my heart,
God shall judge the righteous and the wicked :
For there is a time for every purpose,
And for every action THERE. . . . *

* שָׁם (Sham) "There." The position of this word at the

In the foregoing part of this chapter the most important fact of the all-ruling and all-ordaining Providence of God in the affairs and actions of man under the sun, was treated, proved, and established. Now Solomon turns to the common and most perplexing question, which is, If God does so strictly watch, and regulate, and determine all actions of man, why does He allow so much wickedness to exist in the places where judgment and justice should be exercised and dispensed by man towards man? Why does He allow the righteous and the innocent to be persecuted and their right perverted, even by those very individuals who are (in Providence) placed on the chair of justice? The answer is, that though the Almighty God orders everything, and appoints times and seasons for every purpose under Heaven—though he often overturns the counsels and operations of the wicked, and causes even the wrath of man to serve His purposes, and to further His own plans—though He often enough confounds the wicked persecutors, and makes them fall into the very pit which they prepared for the righteous, still He leaves the passing of the chief judgment over the heads of the wicked rebels for another time in another world, where they shall reap the fruits of their iniquity, not for a short time, but throughout an endless duration. So likewise the recompense of the persecuted and suffering just is often deferred from vanishing time to never-ending ages in the spheres of light, where joy

end of the verse, and its relation to the context, shew clearly and unmistakeably that it means "Eternity." In Job iii. 17, 19, the same word is used thrice to signify the future state beyond the grave. But there is some fatality about translators who deny the credit to the Old Testament saints of knowing much about a *future state*. Would they tell us what Solomon means by the *judgment* in chap. xii. 14? Is it in this or in a future world?

is unmingled, triumph complete, and rest undisturbed.*

“Then said I in my heart, God shall judge the righteous and the wicked, for there is a time for every purpose and for every action THERE.” “There,” beyond the grave—“there,” in eternity—“there,” in the awful visible presence and at the bar of the great Judge of the whole earth—“there,” where the wicked can no more persecute and the just no more suffer—“there,” where every action on the part of man ceases, and where judgment and justice are dispensed on the scale of divine wisdom and equity, and where no face of man is regarded—“there,” where a fire devours, and shall never extinguish, where a worm bites, and shall never die—“there,” where a crown of glory that never fades is prepared for the righteous—“there,” in the place and time, of which the suffering Job said, “There the wicked cease from troubling; and there the weary are at rest. There all the prisoners repose; they hear not the voice of the oppressor. Small

* But the same reason for which the righteous God put obscurity and confusion into the heart of sinful and fallen man, in order that he should not be able to find out the orders and plans of Providence (see verse 11 and explanation), explains also why the Lord does not punish every evil doer, and reward every just man in this world. Such a prompt execution would decidedly interfere with the *free will* of man (as it would leave him no choice) and with the exercise and perseverance of saints, and it would weaken the power and hence the recompense of faith. It is in darkness that the benefit of light is best appreciated; it is in obscurity and confusion that order and arrangement are the more wonderful, the more conspicuous. Parkhurst, on the above passage that speaks of the “obscurity and confusion” in which man was put regarding the plans of God, quotes the following excellent lines from Addison,—“The ways of Heaven are dark and intricate, puzzled in mazes, and perplexed with errors; our understanding traces them in vain, lost and bewildered in the fruitless search; nor sees with how much art the windings run, nor where the regular confusion ends.” All this is clear, but our *duty* is clearer still.

and great are there; and the servant is free from his master," (Job iii. 17—19.)

18. I then meditated in my heart,
 Concerning the reasoning of the sons of Adam
 Against God their Creator,
 In order to prove that they are beasts, even they
 themselves.*

This verse introduces us to a new, very interesting, and most important subject, which occupies also

* The construction of this verse in the Hebrew text is a very difficult one, hence it was so variously and so erroneously translated and interpreted by many. We shall therefore give and explain the Hebrew text word for word. אָמַרְתִּי אֲנִי בְלִבִּי (amarty ani belibi), "I said," "thought," or, "meditated in my heart." עַל דִּבְרֹתַי (all dibrath) "concerning the reasoning," or "over the argument"—this noun being derived from דָּבַר (dabber) "to speak; to argue, to reason," &c. בְּנֵי הָאָדָם (beney haadam), "The sons of Adam"—wherever this appellation is given to man it does not represent him in a favourable light, but always speaks about some of his defects inherited from his father; we therefore rendered it literally and not "the children of man," as is often done. לְבַרָם הָאֱלֹהִים (lebaram Haelohim) after much search and meditation we are decided that the word לְבַרָם is an abbreviation of לְבוֹרָאם (Leboram), "against their Creator"—the two original vowels ו and א being omitted (as is often done in the Hebrew.) The particle ל standing for "against," as 1 Sam. ii. 25; "If a man sin לְאִישׁ against a man, the judge shall judge him; but if a man sin לְיְהוָה against God," &c. &c. וְלִרְאוֹתַי (veliroth) must stand here in place of וְלִהְרֹאוֹתַי (ulharoth) "in order to demonstrate, prove, or show," (as Esther i. 11)—even as it stands it may signify, "in order to make it appear; to cause it to be seen," i.e. by the argument of the following verses. שֶׁהֵם לָהֶם (shehem behemah hemah lahem) "that they are beasts, even they themselves," viz. these infidel sons of Adam advance reasonings (contained in the following verses) which are not only against God their Creator, but tend to prove that they themselves are no more than the beasts of the field.

the three succeeding verses. In order to see the connection of this new subject with the foregoing part of this chapter (and a close connection there exists), we must again repeat shortly the lessons which we were taught in the verses preceding the 18th. These were, 1st, The special and absolute Providence and order of God in all the transactions of man here below; 2d, Heaven's appointments of all times and seasons and orders for every purpose and action in which man is employed; 3d, The impossibility for man to take anything from, or to add anything to, the arrangements and orders of Heaven. Then the question came, why God then allows the wicked to practise their crimes, and to persecute the righteous? The solution of this mystery was that God leaves the greatest part of the punishment of the wicked and reward of the righteous for another world. Ah! but there are infidels, atheists, materialists, deists, who not only deny the special providence, but even the existence of God, and who not only deny a future reward or punishment, but the very existence of an immortal soul in man, and who employ all the arguments of their perverted reason to establish the miserable theory that after death a man ceases entirely to exist, like any brute, and that hence there is no judgment, no future, no eternity.

It is of these self-brutalizing infidels that Solomon speaks in the passage before us. "I meditated in my heart concerning the reasoning of the sons of Adam against God their Creator." By "The sons of Adam" Solomon does not mean here to accuse the whole of the human family of infidelity and blasphemy, for, blessed be God, they do not all belong to that brutalized sect of Satan's disciples, but it simply means that many of fallen Adam's sons disbelieve God's revelation to their own preju-

dice and destruction—that there are always such infatuated men that argue and reason against God their Creator, who made them after His own image, and bestowed on them never-dying souls. And what is the object of that infidel reasoning? It is “to prove that they are beasts, even they themselves.” O brutish disinterestedness! O most horrid of suicides! How terribly does the Satanic venom operate in the hearts of the wicked! As they fear to approach the light lest their dark works become manifested, they not only hate the light, but even deny its existence. Trembling at the idea of having a soul eternally condemned to misery and gloom, they try to deny its existence; as if a thief or murderer, when detected in his lurking place by the agent of justice, would cry out, “I am not here,” or “I am dead,” and thus think to save himself! Such outcasts of humanity try to cover their guilty souls with a wretched cloak of brutal lowliness and nothingness; and thus they think to escape the bitter cup prepared for them; but will they thus escape the wrath to come? In the following two verses Solomon gives us the substance of these reasonings, by which infidels pretend to prove that they have no more souls than the beasts of the field.

19. For (say they) man is a mere chance,*
As also the beast is a mere chance;

* “Man is a mere chance,” born by chance like an herb, like a wild plant out of the ground, by nature, not by any special providence or will of a Creator. מִקְרֵה (mikreh) signifies, “a chance, an event, an occurrence,” independent of any will, uncalled for, and unforeseen. In the first two instances it is not said that a *mikreh*, a chance *befals* man and beast, but that man *was* a *mikreh* like the beast, *i.e.* that both are born and die by mere chance in nature, and that none—no special Creator—ordains their being. If it had been in the sense in which it is translated in the common versions, then

One event also happeneth to them both :
 As the one dieth so dieth the other ;
 Yea they have all one breath,
 So that man hath no pre-eminence over the beast :
 For all is a mere breath.

20. All go unto one place :
 They are all of the dust, and to the dust they return.

Such is the wisdom or philosophy that Satan teaches his victims, and he is treacherous enough, for he hides from his pupils that which he himself well knows and trembles at. So stupified are his victims that they cannot see that had they been mere brutes without souls, Satan would despise them, and no more would he occupy himself about them than he does about a herd of oxen or swine ; for they have no immortal souls to be ruined. Had this been the case, who would have instructed them to deny either the existence of the Supreme Being, the Creator and Governor of the universe, or the existence of their own souls ? Is not the very fact of their infidel reasoning the strongest proof that they are not mere beasts, but that they must have rational, and hence never-dying souls, by whose intelligence they are enabled to reason ? Does not even a denial of anything (accompanied with reasoning of whatever nature) demand the same intellectual power as that of believing and proving what one believes ? Of course we cannot deny or contradict the infidels in the too well-known fact that they must die like the beast, and this is probably the principle of their

the particle ל would have been used ; לִבְנֵי (libney) "a mikreh befalleth (or happeneth) to the children of man ;" and even then the same phrase would be twice repeated to no use or purpose. But the third time it is distinctly said, "One mikreh happeneth to both of them," therefore we rendered it, "One event also happeneth to them both."

vexation and the cause of their bitterness. But we can boldly oppose them with a louder and better speaking fact, which is, *that no beast is an infidel*,—that their adopted brothers never trouble themselves about the existence of a soul, or of living after death, for *they know not if they live*, nor do they know that they must die; they have neither intelligence nor conscience, and therefore are as ignorant about what they are, or about what they will be, as they are of the fact that there are infidels who greatly desire their alliance, and to become their equals. Had this been the case with revolted and revolting blasphemers, had they no intelligence, no soul, and no conscience that troubles them and drives them to despair, they would feed as calmly and quietly on their pasture as their adopted brethren, and would not be capable even of a single thought entering their minds about what shall become of them after death. But let us hear what the wise man, yea, what the voice of inspiration says to the above reasoning of the materialist.

21. Who understandeth that the spirit of man
That mounteth upwards, she belongeth to on high,
But the spirit of the beast that goeth downward,
It belongeth to below, even to the earth.*

* In the common version this verse reads: "Who knoweth the spirit of man that goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast that goeth downward to the earth?" But the objection to this translation is, that it by no means expresses fully the Hebrew text (besides that it perverts its real meaning.) With respect to the soul of man, it is first said הָעֹלָה (haolah), "that goeth upward," or, "that mounteth upward;" and then הִיא לְמַעַל (hie lemaalah), "that she belongeth to or appertaineth, or is destined for above, or for on high." But had the sacred author meant to express simply, "Who knoweth that the spirit of man goeth upward" (after death), then he would doubtless have said יָם רוּחַ הָאָדָם עֹלָה לְמַעַל (im ruach

The exclamation, "Who understandeth?" with which the argument is opened in our verse, has

haadam olah lemaalah), "If the spirit of man ascendeth on high," &c. Moreover, there would have been no need to repeat that the spirit (or breath) of the *beast* goeth downward, or, *if* it goeth downward, as this was already stated in the foregoing verse as a thing admitted by all, *i.e.* that it cometh from the dust and returns to the dust. The question was only regarding the spirit of man, if it also, like that of the beast, goeth to the dust, or not. Is it not thus evident that a new argument, a new idea, forced the inspired author to make that repetition in order to show the vast difference between the immortal soul of man, and the mere animating breath of the animal that dissolves in death? If the meaning which translators wished to ascribe to the text is, "Who knoweth, or who is acquainted with the spirit of man," *i.e.*, that none can tell what becomes of it, then it is not only a perversion of the Hebrew text, (for, *hie lemaalah*, is an *assertion*, and not a *doubt*), but it is also greatly absurd; for in that case they make also the author suggest the possibility that the breath of the beast may also go to heaven—be immortal; a thing which was already put beyond doubt in the preceding passage, and thus the whole argument would be a confusion of doubt, of childish suggestion, yea, of aimless folly.

But the fact is, that there is a deep and strong reasoning contained in this verse, and that the above-mentioned repeated words and phrases are most essential to the argument. מִי יוֹדֵעַ (mi yodea) "Who knoweth," or, "who understandeth," or, "who comprehendeth?" this having the same force as in Isai. liii. 1, מִי הֶאֱמִין (mi heamin), "Who hath believed our report?" so here Solomon exclaims against the above argument of the infidel, "Who understandeth?" רוּחַ בְּנֵי הָאָדָם הֹלֵךְ (ruach beney haadam haolah), "that the spirit of man (or, of the sons of man) that mounteth upward," or, "that lifteth itself by degrees," (*i.e.* towards heaven.) הִיא לְמַעַל (hie lemaalah) "that she (the soul) belongeth, appertaineth to, or is destined for on high," (*i.e.* belongeth, and goeth to heaven, is immortal.) But some hard-headed critic may say that we added a "that" without having authority for it in the text. Now, to satisfy ignorance, we shall show by examples that in such like constructions a preposition, particle, or conjunction is always left out, and must be understood by the context, or from a thorough knowledge of the Hebrew syntax. 2 Samuel xii. 22 David said, מִי יוֹדֵעַ (mi yodea), "Who knoweth?" יְהוָה יִדְּבַר (yechanany Jehovah), "be gra-

exactly the same force and meaning as the exclamation of the prophet, Isai. liii. 1, "Who hath believed our report?" &c. In chap. lii., at the end, that prophet states the disadvantageous outward ap-

erious to me, Jehovah," here a "whether" must be added, and must be read, "Who knoweth (or, who could have known) whether Jehovah would be gracious to me?" &c. The same Joel ii. 14, מִי יוֹדֵעַ (mi yodea) "Who knoweth," *i.e.* the threatenings of God, and his invitations for repentance, יָשׁוּב וְיִנְחָם (yashuv venieham) "that he may return and repent."

Here likewise the "that" is understood in the Hebrew text, and must be added in the translation. Such passages we could quote in abundance; but while the Hebrew scholar will be satisfied with the two quoted, and even might have seen it without any aid, the ignorant, hungry, and game-seeking critic will not be satisfied even were we to pour Jacob's pot of pottage into his mouth in a boiling condition, and will ever accuse us (as was the case with such ignorant and mischief-seeking reviewers on our translation of the Psalms) of adding "thats and ands" to the text.

Having established his argument with regard to the soul of man that mounts continually heavenwards (see our exposition), and that therefore she must not belong to matter, but must be immaterial, heavenly, must go up to heaven after her separation of matter (of the body) and be immortal, he now turns to consider the breath of the beast. With regard to it, he shows that from its attachment to the earth, from its incapability of lifting itself above matter, of thinking about things invisible which are on high, and from its continual decline (in gaiety, energy, liveliness) along with the body which it animates, it is clear that it must be a material and mortal existence like the body of man and its own, and extinguish along with the latter when by death it is delivered to decay and dissolution. וְרוּחַ הַבְּהֵמָה הַיֹּרֵדָה (veruach habehemah hayoredeth) "and that the spirit (or breath) of the beast that goeth downward," *i.e.* which not only can never lift itself above flesh and blood, cannot think, cannot reason, but which also continues to sink down along with the body in all degrees of feebleness, in all symptoms of decay produced by age—הִיא לְמַטָּה לְאָרֶץ (hie lemattah laaretz) "it belongeth (or, appertaineth, or is destined, to descend) to below, even to the earth," *i.e.* is a mere breath which animates the body while alive, but which gradually decreases and enfeebles along with the body, and when the latter descends to the dust, it dissolves along with it.

pearance of the Messiah, saying, "as many were astonished at thee; his visage was so marred more than any man," *i.e.* because He appeared in poverty and obscurity, therefore many were astonished at him, saying, "Can this be the promised Messiah?" The prophet, therefore, exclaims in the opening of next chapter, "Who would believe our report?"—*i.e.* who would believe that, notwithstanding the outward appearance of the Messiah, still it was the very promised glorious Saviour, who was to suffer and die for the sins of the world, who was to sprinkle many nations, and at whom kings were to shut their mouth (in astonishment), and worship Him as the Son of God. So Solomon, after having spoken of the outward disadvantageous appearance of mortal man, on account of which infidels deny that he hath an immortal soul, but maintain that as he must die as well as the beast he cannot have any preference to the latter, therefore exclaims, "Who understandeth" the mighty difference that exists between the immortal soul of man and the mere breath of the beast? This is, however, not to say that none of the human family understood that difference. No! no more than Isaiah in the quoted passage meant to say that none of the human family would ever believe Heaven's *report* concerning the blessed Messiah. In both of these passages the inspired authors meant to say, "How few there were of those enlightened and wise children of God who enter Jehovah's sanctuary, study His secrets, and convince themselves of His truths, notwithstanding all the outward appearances of things? How few understood the special manifestations and signs given unto us in the Revelation of the great God, by which we should be able to distinguish the heavenly from the earthly, the mortal from the immortal?" As there were given sure signs and tokens, by which

men could easily see and judge (if they would) that Jesus Christ, notwithstanding that He appeared in a body of mortal flesh and in poverty, still He could be none else but the Son of the Almighty God, the blessed Messiah promised to the fathers, the God-man at once, so likewise there are unmistakeable signs and manifestations given unto man, by which he can (if he will) clearly see, and irrevocably prove, that, notwithstanding the mortality of man's body, in which respect his lot is like that of inferior animals, still he was immortal in his soul, which belongs to Heaven.

These clear signs and unmistakeable manifestations by which we are enabled to see and judge of the difference between our immortal souls and the mere breath of the animal, are indicated by the wise man in short but most comprehensive and decidedly conclusive terms. The spirit of man, says he, is that being, הָעֹלֶה (haolah), "that mounts upward"—that lifts itself above flesh and blood, above mere matter and instinct, and that is continually ascending towards the place whence it came, and whither it is destined to go. But the spirit (or breath) of the beast, is a being הַיֹּרֶדֶת (hayoredeth) "that goeth down"—that constantly descends, that never lifts itself above the capacity of animated matter, either by thought, or by reason, or by aspiration, but sinks along with the body, of which it is the animation, until their existence is extinguished by death and decay. The substance, then, of this argument is, that the breath of life of the beast is material and inseparable from the body, which it animates; lives, and moves, and acts, inseparably along with it, and in it; gets feebler and feebler by age along with the body, and perishes at last along with it. But that the spirit of man must be a quite separate and separable existence from the material animated

body which it inhabits—that it must be independent in existence as it is in quality—that as it lifts itself in its thoughts and reasoning above the capacity of flesh and blood, of mere matter, therefore it must be immaterial, immortal, belonging to Heaven above, whereto it returns when separated from the mortal body by death.

22. Wherefore I concluded that there is nothing better,
 Than that a man should rejoice in his works ;
 For that is his portion :
 But who shall bring him again to behold
 What shall come to pass after him ?

Seeing that the soul of man belongs to Heaven—seeing that she therefore never rests satisfied with the terrestrial objects by which the body which she inhabits is surrounded—seeing that all earthly enjoyments have no attraction for a (converted) soul to bind her to matter, but that from the first to the last hour of her sublunary residence she eagerly pursues her journey Heavenward, and strives with all her might to liberate herself from the burden and prison of flesh and blood, and to return to her native country and to her Creator, man's duty therefore becomes more than evident. The best thing for him to do is, to prepare cheerfully and happily for the great journey before him—to live above earthly things, which he shall neither take with him at his departure hence, nor shall he ever return again to enjoy them or to take part in them—and to mind only Heavenly things, in endeavouring to accomplish (by the grace and aid of God) the “works” which his Creator assigned for him to do here. In these works alone man can rejoice, and in them alone he has his eternal “portion ;” for as he can only accomplish them through and by the agency

of his converted and never-dying soul, so shall he, in his soul, reap the fruits of them in eternity (compare verse 12, and our remarks there). In fact, this verse contains the whole substance of the holy advice given unto us by our Saviour, when he said, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: but lay up for yourselves treasures in Heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." Matth. vi. 19—21.

(CHAPTER IV. VERS. 1—6.)

1. But I returned and considered all the oppressions
Which are perpetrated under the sun;
And, behold, the tears of the oppressed!
But to them there was no comforter:
Yea, on the side of their oppressors was power,
But to them there was no comforter.
2. Wherefore I preferred the already dead mortals,
To the living ones that are yet alive.
3. Still happier than they both is he
Who hath not as yet been (here), nor seen
The evil work that is done under the sun.
4. I then considered all that travail,
And all the progress* of that (evil) work,

* כִּשְׂרוֹן (Kishron) is the noun formed from the adjec. כָּשָׁר (Kashar), which signifies "straight, right, or direct," &c. In the noun form it means sometimes "uprightness, equity," &c; but signifies likewise "prosperity," or "progress." So Gesenius very properly renders this word by "Gedeihen,"

That it cometh from a man being envied by his
neighbour.

This also is vanity and vexation of spirit.

5. The fool foldeth his hands together,
And devoureth his own flesh.
6. Better is one handful with tranquillity,
Than both hands full with toil and vexation of spirit.

The reader will remember that in verses 16 and 17 of the foregoing chapter, Solomon complained of the perversion of justice, and of the violence and iniquity practised under the sun. There he concluded with the theory of a world to come, and of a future judgment, where the great and righteous Judge of the whole earth shall punish the wicked, and reward the here-suffering just, according to their works. But the knowledge of this does not remove the pain, yea the horror, which we may daily conceive when seeing the poor, the weak, but just, persecuted and treated with injustice and violence by the wicked and strong; and that while the oppressed sufferers are destitute and helpless, and find none ready to support or comfort them, the wicked oppressors are always powerful and resistless in their violent career. With this consideration Solomon opens the present chapter, saying, that notwithstanding the certainty of a future judgment, he could not help returning to the melancholy facts re-occurring daily before his eyes; he saw again the hot tears of the oppressed, bereaved, and injured poor, flowing in uninterrupted streams, without either softening the adamant hearts of their tyrants, or awakening pity and compassion in others to come

also "Glücklieher vortgang," which means "progress." In our verse the word stands to signify the unhindered progress of the work of oppression, which the strong always exercise against the weak, and which was spoken of in the first verse of this chapter. But see Comment.

and comfort them. Thus their oppressors remain powerful, and proceed unmolested and unchecked in their injustice and outrage. This state of matters so much mastered Solomon's heart—so much impressed him with grief and sorrow—that he considered those whom death has set beyond the grasp of the wicked oppressors, happier than those yet living mortals, who consequently were still exposed to the violence of wicked men stronger than they. From this point he quite naturally went a step further, saying that he judged even more happy than both, dead and living, those spirits who have not yet left the regions of undisturbed rest and celestial happiness, and who have not yet come into this world of vice, either to animate bodies to be exposed to the violence of the wicked, or even to be only sorrowful spectators of that shocking misery kept up in continued activity by the insatiable violence of oppressors, or by the endless tears of the helpless sufferers.

Indeed, Solomon was neither the first nor the last of the inspired Old Testament authors that treated this question, so difficult and grievous unto shortsighted and short-lived men. The sore-tried and suffering Job said, "Wherefore do the wicked live, become old, yea, and are mighty in power?" (Job xxi. 7, &c., &c.) The inspired Psalmist made a confession of the moral danger into which the different speculations for the solution of that intricate and mysterious subject had plunged him, saying, "But as for me my feet were almost gone; my steps had well-nigh slipped: When I was envious at the foolish; when I saw the prosperity of the wicked." (Ps. lxxiii. 2, 3, &c., &c.) The oppressed and persecuted Jeremiah said, "Righteous art thou, O Lord, when I plead with thee; yet let me talk with thee of thy judgments: Wherefore doth the way of

the wicked prosper? Wherefore are all those happy that deal very treacherously?" (Jer. xii. 1.) The prophet Habakkuk said: "Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and who canst not look on iniquity: Wherefore sufferest thou them that deal treacherously? Wherefore art thou silent when the wicked devoureth him that is more righteous than he." (Habakkuk i. 13.)

But all these saints have found complete satisfaction in Jehovah's sanctuary. All saw that it was an essential point in the government of the omniscient Judge of the universe to delay the principal punishment of the wicked, as also the principal reward of the persecuted and suffering righteous, and to reserve them for another world. Were it otherwise the saints would have no room to exercise their faith, and to persevere in their journey towards the heavenly Zion, through the strait gate of sufferings and tribulation; nor would there be space left for the infatuated wretch to accumulate wrath against the day of wrath. Yea, all the above-mentioned saints (according to their own statements in the chapters referred to) perfectly agreed with the conclusion of the Psalmist, who said, "When the wicked spring up as the grass, and when all the workers of iniquity do prosper, it is that they shall be destroyed for ever and ever," while "The righteous shall flourish like the palm-tree; he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon" (in Jehovah's courts above.) Ps. xcii. 7—12.

Notwithstanding the knowledge of this blessed truth, when the persecuted righteous suffer they feel pain, and often mourn, for they are flesh and blood. None ever suffered for a more righteous cause than did our blessed Saviour. None was ever more sure of his ultimate victory, and of the punishment of his wicked persecutors than was He who bled and

breathed His last on Golgotha's cross. Did He therefore feel less pain when He was pierced? No! He felt the agonies in His body as any other man would have done. Or did the knowledge of the punishment of His murderers diminish the cruel sufferings from the scourge, thorny-crown, or iron nails? No! on the contrary, this seems to have added to the affliction of his soul, as may be concluded from His ardent prayers for them in the midst of His torments. We have no reason, therefore, to be surprised when we hear Solomon, after having stated that there was another time appointed in another world for the punishment of the wicked and for the reward of the suffering just, still introducing the subject (of oppression) in such pathetic terms, concluding after all, that this is a distressing, soul-wounding world to live in, and not only feeling the sting of persecution and sufferings in one's own flesh, but even bearing mere witness of the perversion, sin, wickedness, oppression, and affliction existing among and desolating poor fallen humanity.

After having given utterance to his feelings of grief at beholding the sufferings of the oppressed, and his horror at the wicked oppressors, Solomon proceeds, in verse 4, to indicate the source of all violence and oppression exercised by fallen mortals against their fellow-men. "I then considered all that travail," viz., the busy act of oppression, "in all the progress of that work," viz., the "evil work" above described, of the stronger persecuting and oppressing the weaker, "that it cometh from" (or proceedeth from, or originateth with) "a man being envied by his neighbour." Now if we examine the nature and object of any violence and oppression exercised by the wicked and strong mortal against his weak neighbour, in whatever manner the oppression is accomplished, we shall find that ENVY is

at the bottom and root of it. It is *envy* that prompts one mortal to bereave the other of his personal liberty; it is *envy* that entices a man to rob the purse of another; it is *envy* by which magistrates, judges, governors, and kings tyrannize over those whom they have power to oppress; yea, it is ENVY through which streams of blood were shed by the rapacious and murderous hands of Rome's demonized children in Germany, Britain, France, Italy, or inquisitorial Spain—yes, we maintain that if one could ask these long vengeance-crying streams of blood what made them flow? he should receive the short but expressive answer, ENVY! Ask the millions of victims that perished violently on the fields of devouring battle, “Who brought that untimely destruction upon you?” and you will hear, “*Envy!*” Thus you may begin your search in the bosom of a highwayman, and finish it in that of a sneering and infamously unjust *critic*, who with sheer malice calumniates and injures the labours of others, and you will find nothing else but the respective quantities of *envy* at the bottom of all mischief. The fact of the matter seems to be this. As every act of unrighteousness and oppression has its source in the persuasion of Satan, whose rebellion and fall were caused by nothing else but pure *envy*, so it is by this strong poison—by the infusion of *envy* into the hearts of fallen man—that he leads astray his victims to their own destruction, and causes sufferings and afflictions to the poor, weak, but just. Oh, Christian reader, pray God day and night that He may deliver you from that sly and formidable devil of *envy*, and aid you in your struggle for driving him out of your heart entirely, and under every shape in which he makes his appearance. As long as there be yet a grain of that poison in you, Satan

has a strong grasp of your heart, and who knows how far he may lead you if but once he find you absent from your watch-tower!

This malicious work of oppression, which Solomon traced to *envy*, is described by him in the same verse (4) to be "also vanity and vexation of spirit"—that is to say, that the wicked (though seemingly strong and prosperous) oppressors, were by no means to be envied, not only with respect to their condition in that world where they shall reap the fruit of their wickedness in the endurance of everlasting torment and unmitigated woe, but that, even in this world, their condition is by no means an enviable one. This is more explicitly explained in the following two verses, where we are told that the oppressing "fool foldeth his hands together," that is, he remains in idleness, as he depends on the labours of others, and thus "devoureth his own flesh," viz., in continued speculations and repeated machinations how to get at his prey. This is no very easy business—no very cheering occupation—for "Better is one handful with tranquillity," viz., sweeter is the small morsel which a man gets by honest means, and by the labour of his hands, "than both hands full with toil and vexation of spirit," that is, than a great heap of the mammon of unrighteousness and its enjoyments. One must not only toil very disagreeably in order to ensnare his victims and get at the prey, but even when he has it already in his possession, and even when he has already devoured it, he is in constant uneasiness, dread, and misery. Let their outward appearance be what it will, there is not such a hardened wretch on earth, at whose heart the worm of conscience cannot find an entrance, and if there, it will disturb him by day and torment him by night.

7. Again I returned, and considered a folly under the sun.

8. There is one alone,

And without a companion ;

Yea, he hath neither son nor brother :

Yet is there no end to all his labour ;

Neither is his eye satisfied with riches ;

Nor doth he say, For whom do I toil,

And deprive my soul of happiness ?

This also is vanity,

Yea, it is a distressing occupation.

If a subject was already touched upon by the inspired author, when he happens to come again to the same subject and treat particulars related to it, he indicates it by the expression "Returning." Thus, wherever Solomon says in this book "I returned and considered," it is because the subject to be introduced had already been touched upon in a general manner, while now it is to appear under a particular form. Man's "sore occupation" on earth, his bewildered and pre-occupied state of mind when pursuing riches, or carnal satisfactions and enjoyments, or any lasting advantage in the midst of a labyrinth of changes, trials, and dangers, had already been treated in a general manner in the first chapter of this book ; and in different passages of the succeeding chapters references were made to the same. But surely the particular case introduced in verse 8 is such a strange and horrid phenomenon, even among fallen, blinded, and depraved humanity, that it deserves to be treated by itself. It is like a terrible dream within a dream ; it is to be styled *madness* even by madmen. Still, alas, how many thousands of such examples can bewildered humanity shew even to-day, even among the most civilized nations, of such wretched misers, who are rich to enormity, who madly pursue riches by most ardent toils day and night—who, one would think, must have very

large families to support, but who in reality are like a decaying trunk of a tree in the midst of the African desert—who deprive themselves of all the necessary enjoyments of life; of which if the meanest of men were deprived by force, they would prefer death to life, and who at last perish like beasts under their heavy burdens, leaving their amassed treasures to individuals, to strangers, whom (in life) they would have allowed to starve before they would have given them a morsel of bread, of which they themselves partook but scantily.* The description that

* Not for the sake of confirming the above observation, for it needs no confirmation, as the reader, to whatever country he belongs, will either have known personally, or at least heard of the existence of such miserable beings as above described, but because I knew a man personally who may be called *chief* of the above band of human brutes, and saw his horrid end with mine eyes, therefore I shall shortly describe the fact.

A spectre-like, tall, yellow-skin-covered skeleton (animated, of course), of Bohemian origin, with one small blue eye (the other blind and shut up), deeply seated, and half-covered by long eyelids, wrapped in the coarsest of cloth, the first colour of which could no more be distinguished, a torn and crooked pair of boots on his legs, an old felt hat, so holed on every side as if it had come from the battle of Leipsic or Waterloo, covering his long and very thin head,—moved about in the capital of Vienna, from one coffee-house to another, making business in buying and selling jewellery, and sometimes even on the bourse. Though he was a Roman Catholic by religion it was not for penance, nor by prescription of any priest, that he ate nothing else (for his own money) but the coarsest of bread, with onions and salt; for some persons who wanted to examine the mysteries of human depravity, invited him once to their house on the driest of all Fridays (Good Friday), and he was as carnivorous as any bird of prey. Once he quarrelled with his landlord, who turned him out at a late hour at night, when he could find no cheap lodging-house open, a hotel was too dear, to sleep in the street dangerous for the jewellery in his pocket; then he feigned himself drunk and noisy, and thus got a night's rest in prison, and this he called "a fine trick, worth sixpence." But when he tried that "fine trick" again, he was recognized, and fined five florins, for which he mourned a longer time than for his parents. Once he filled his pockets with potatoes in a grocer's shop, without pay;

“he hath neither son nor brother,” (and not, “nor daughter”) is here intentionally used, because these were among the Jews, the chief heirs for inheriting the possessions and keeping up the name of the deceased among Israel. (See Deut. xxv. 5—10). These two, therefore (son and brother), stand here to signify no heirs whatever. Ah! it is distressing to see busy mortals, indefatigable in their toils for the increase of dust, and when you ask them, For whom is it that you thus labour?—for whose sake is it that you deprive yourselves of the enjoyments of Heaven’s bounties in this life, and your soul of preparation for her undecayable treasures in a world of realities, and in a life which never ends? they can give you no answer, but stand gazing at you like the maniacs, who know not by what power they are actuated in their strange doings, and are therefore irresponsible agents.

9. Two are better than one ;

Because they have a good reward for their labour.

10. For if either of them happen to fall,

The one will lift up his companion :

But woe to him that falleth, being alone,

And there be no other to help him up.

when discovered and brought before the police court, he, at this time, preferred a month in prison to paying other five florins. When he came out he spoke in admiration of the manner in which he was there fed. This very man went through, in his youth, the whole course of jurisprudence ; and in every manner of conversation he was rational, yea, powerful. One day I was told that Joakim (this, I think, was his name) hanged himself in his garret. The sole cause of his suicide seemed to have been loss of 60,000 florins, caused by a bankruptcy of a great house, and which sum he thought he could never fill up again during his life. According to rumour, that wretch was still worth 100,200 florins, which (as he was the natural son of an artist, who left no relations and no other children behind) fell either to government, or perhaps into the hands of men who were wiser alive than the wretch after his death. O miserable humanity !

11. Again, if two lie together they have heat :
But how can one be warm when alone ?
12. And if a man be too strong for one of them,
The two will be able to withstand him :
And a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

In opposition to the miserable and solitary miser, who has none to sympathise with him or to shew affection unto him during his wretched life, nor any near relation unto whom to leave his accumulated wealth, and in whom to have a worthy heir and representative after his death, Solomon, in the four verses before us, shews the temporal blessings and enjoyments that accompany a well-chosen and happy matrimonial engagement and life, which is included in the Divine words, "It is not good for man to be alone, I will make him an help meet for him." The fact alone of two individuals being united in reciprocal love, sympathy, and aid, is the greatest reward imaginable for their united labours, as regards terrestrial satisfaction and enjoyments of this life. When both are enjoying good health they find a double satisfaction in every morsel of bread which they eat together, as the fruit of their united labours. Every gift of Providence of which they are made partakers, brings with it a double measure of pleasure and joy ; first, the personal, and second, that which each feels at the enjoyment and satisfaction of the other. But this temporal blessing becomes far more conspicuous, and it is seen in its clearest light, when the one or the other of two faithful companions happens to "fall" on the bed of sickness. Oh, it is then that the suffering one feels as if the half only of his body was stretched on the couch of helplessness and pain, while the other half, animated with the purest love, and with the strongest of sympathies, continually endeavours to cheer it,

and to raise it from its present position by all possible means. This is, we think, what Solomon means by the "falling" of the one, and the "helping up" of the other; whilst it is a well-known fact, that when a solitary man falls ill, he may dispose of any treasure he likes to procure for himself attendants and nurses, but he will not find one of a thousand animated by that affection, or actuated by that unmingled sympathy and love which a faithful partner in life will feel even in the poorest and most needy circumstances.

The language employed in verse 12 is no less figurative than that of the former verses—it does not mean that the woman should participate in the private wars and quarrels of her husband, but it figuratively describes the consolation and encouragement which a downcast and despairing husband—who, either wounded by malice, robbed by envy, injured by the hands of injustice and violence, or even unfortunate in business—derives from the lovely reasonings, affectionate consolations, and even the well-timed rebukes of his faithful companion. This is considered as if he had a warrior with him to fight his battles; for it gives him new vigour to resist his enemies, to lift himself above the vicissitudes of time and fortune, yea, and often it leads him to cast his anchor in Omnipotence, where it cannot be moved by any storm or tempest of this life. "And the threefold cord shall not quickly be broken," which means when the happy union of two faithful mates is followed by children. These contribute to strengthen, yea, to perpetuate the tie between their parents, to multiply pleasure and enjoyment, to aid in labour, to attend in illness, and to console in trouble. Even when the mutual assistance of the parents decreases by the weakness of age, the children then fill up that gap most com-

pletely. In the last farewell hour of the parents, they derive no small portion of joy and satisfaction from the very tears that flow down the cheeks of these best and purest friends that the world has to show forth. Thus is the threefold cord not quickly broken; for at the very time when the original threads (the parents) grow feeble by age, and threaten to give way under any burden, the third thread is in full vigour.

13. Better is a poor but wise youth
Than an old but foolish king,
Who knew not yet how to take warning.
14. Behold, from the prison-house he came forth to reign;
Though he was born poor in his kingdom.
15. I consider all the living that walk under the sun,
With the second youth that is to rise in his stead.
16. There were no bounds to all this people,
Even to all those that were before them;
Nor shall they that come after, rejoice in him.
Surely this also is vanity and vexation of spirit.

The true key to this really obscure and entirely enigmatical passage will be found in two very important transactions that took place during the latter portion of Solomon's reign, and probably not long before the composition of the book before us. The reader will therefore see that Solomon had grave reasons for enveloping the important subject in mystery, in order that it should not be understood until after his death, when the prophecy which it includes should be fulfilled. These two transactions we find recorded in the eleventh chapter of the first Book of Kings. There we are told that Solomon having neglected, yea, refused to take the warnings which his gracious God gave him when He

twice appeared unto him—that having yielded to the temptations of this world and her false persuasions and promises—having forsaken the God of his father, and delivered himself to unheard-of extravagances, unlawful pleasures, and degrading sin, he consequently incurred the displeasure of Him whose eyes are like the flames of fire, and who cannot look upon iniquity but with abhorrence. The communication which Solomon received about it from his provoked God is described in the above-mentioned chap. vers. 11, 12, and 13, in the following words: “Wherefore the Lord said unto Solomon (likely by a prophet), Forasmuch as this was done of thee, and thou hast not kept my covenant, and my statutes which I have commanded thee, I will surely rend the kingdom from thee, and will give it to thy servant. Notwithstanding, in thy days I will not do it, for David thy father’s sake: But I will rend it out of the hand of thy son. Howbeit, I will not rend away all the kingdom, but will give one tribe to thy son for David my servant’s sake, and for Jerusalem’s sake, which I have chosen.” This is *one* of the two above-mentioned transactions, and here we see what a sore intelligence Solomon received at his advanced age from the highest tribunal. His kingdom was to be torn in twain under the reign of his son, and the far greater portion was to be given to his servant. But who was that servant to be? This we shall see from a second transaction, recorded in the same chap., from vers. 26 to 40.

There existed at that time a poor but valiant, a fatherless but flourishing youth, named Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, of the tribe of Ephraim, a native of Zereda, who was a servant of Solomon, and the name of whose widowed mother was Zeruah. This same youth, when Solomon saw that he was a mighty

man of valour and industrious, he made ruler or governor over all the affairs of the house of Joseph, that is to say, over the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, his kinsmen. Unto this promising and rapidly rising youth, the prophet Ahijah the Shilonite was sent by Him who disposes of thrones, and crowns according to His sovereign will. The prophet having found Jeroboam on the road, as he travelled from Jerusalem, said unto him, "Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Behold, I will rend the kingdom out of the hand of Solomon, and I will give ten tribes to thee. But he shall have one tribe for my servant David's sake, and for the sake of Jerusalem, the city which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel." The prophet having given to the astonished youth some more particulars, directions, and admonitions, for his future conduct, left him. When Solomon had in some way been instructed of what had passed between the prophet and his now declared rival, he endeavoured to kill the latter. From the expression used by Solomon in verse 14, "Behold, from the prison-house he came forth to reign," it is evident that Solomon had even succeeded in casting Jeroboam into prison, but happily the victim escaped from prison, when he fled to Egypt, where with Shishak, the king of Egypt, he remained in security until Solomon's death, when all his promises were literally fulfilled.

Now, before we proceed to explain the passage in question, let us remember that in the foregoing passage Solomon spoke of the blessings that accompany a happy matrimonial life, and that in verse 12 he says that "a threefold cord is not quickly broken," which refers to the comfort and aid which parents often derive from their children, even when their own strength begins to give way by reason of age, and that they fill up their place after them.

In verse 13, therefore, Solomon adds that besides the general and ordinary blessings which parents derive from their offspring, there remains unto them the hope of seeing them, at some future time, advanced to the highest stations in society and life, notwithstanding their low and poor origin. As an illustration of this he refers to the poor and low-born Jeroboam, the son of a helpless and obscure widow, but who, for his wisdom and valour, was now destined to the throne of Israel by an irrevocable decree of their God.

“Better is a poor but wise youth,” meaning Jeroboam, “than an old and foolish king, who knew not yet how to take warning,” referring humbly, and no doubt with a broken heart, to himself, who with all his wisdom was foolish enough to forsake the God of his promises, and to slight His warnings,—the Lord having told him twice that if he should forsake Him, severe punishment would be the result. He then proceeds to shew the certainty of Jeroboam’s success, notwithstanding his poor and low origin: “Behold from the prison-house (where he actually was put by him, or, where he would doubtless have been put), he came forth (or escaped) to reign.” Solomon could not but see in the case of Jeroboam the workings of God’s providence, as in the case of David under Saul. When David was anointed king over Israel, by the Prophet Samuel, during the life-time of Saul, the latter pursued David, wishing to kill him, but he escaped, found refuge with Achish of Gath, until Saul’s death, when he was made king during the reign of Saul’s feeble son. Exactly the same had now begun to be the career of Jeroboam, and Solomon saw clearly that his rival escaped not only not to be killed, but “to reign,” according to the prophet’s message. Here Solomon adds, “Though he was born poor in his kingdom,” (or, “during

his reign,") viz., though Jeroboam was born of a very poor and humble family, during the reign and in the kingdom of a mighty but "foolish king" (Solomon) who would not take warning—though Jeroboam was but his servant, still it was now evident that that poor boy will take away from him the greatest part of his kingdom and be established on the throne of Israel.

From the above consideration Solomon turns his attention to the people of Israel, and muses for a while on the thought how it was possible, or even probable, that after the prosperous and glorious reign of David's son, Israel would abandon Solomon's successor and choose such an obscure person as Jeroboam for their sovereign! But Solomon soon remembers what a turbulent and discontented people Israel was, and how they liked innovations at any price—that even in the days of David his father who lifted Israel from the dust of misery, and established them as a mighty nation, the dread of all their neighbours, there was nothing easier than to raise them in rebellion against their king, and scarcely was the struggle against Absalom finished, and the insurrection quelled, than Israel, at a slight invitation, gathered round the banners of the rebel Sheba the son of Bichri (2 Sam. xx. 1). This is what Solomon says in the last two verses: "I consider all the living that walk under the sun, with (or, 'in relation to') the second youth that is to rise (or, 'stand up') in his stead." This means that he considered the present generation of Israel in their relation to the "second youth," meaning Rehoboam his own son (*second youth*, as regards his rival Jeroboam), and who was soon to rise up in his stead (instead of the old king above mentioned), as the legitimate heir to Israel's throne. And what was the result and conclusion of that consideration?

This is stated in the last verse. "There were no bounds to (or, 'stability in') all this people, even to all those that were before them; nor shall they that come after (or, 'nor shall the coming generation,' the descendants of the former) rejoice in him." This means that Israel in the days of David had no bounds to their desire for innovations, and with the appearance of any rebel all lifted the banners of mutiny and revolt, and with one voice exclaimed, "We have no part in David, nor any inheritance with the son of Jesse, every man to his tent, O Israel!" Hence, the old king Solomon judged by experience that they that come after them—viz., the descendants of those mutinous and discontented people, were not likely to "rejoice in him," viz., in the "second youth" Rehoboam, the legitimate king from David's family; but that as soon as his rival—the first youth, Jeroboam—would appear, Israel would instantly desert their legal prince, and put themselves under the banners of his rival, were it but for the sake of change.

Having so exactly foreseen—partly through the prophet, and partly by inspired calculation—all that really came to pass after his death, hence he concludes this melancholy consideration with the words so characteristic of this book, "Surely this also is vanity and vexation of spirit." So have always been and are still even matters of crowns and thrones in this valley of change and mortality. Kings on their thrones are surrounded by many a thornbush, and the deep wounds that are often inflicted on the hearts of the mightiest and most prosperous sovereigns are sorer than we throneless and crownless people can either feel or imagine. Let us therefore leave these unto, and on the heads of those whom the great King of kings has chosen for these dignities, and let us pray the Lord that He would

enable these mortal sovereigns, and us along with them, to lift our hearts, eyes, and souls above this sublunary tumult of changes and disappointments, towards the regions of eternal bliss and unmingled joy, where the Ancient of Days, the Lord of the whole universe, sits on a glorious throne never to be shaken, and where His redeemed children in Christ inherit crowns of glory which no rivals can contest, and no rebels take from their heads.

(CHAPTER V. VER. 1.)

1. Observe thy feast days,*

When thou shouldst go to the house of God ;

* “ Observe thy feast days.” Here we do deviate, not from the Hebrew text, but from the Rabbies, who added the vowel points to the original text. Thus, we think that, instead of reading with the Rabbies שְׁמֹר רַגְלֶיךָ (Shemor Raglecha), “ keep thy feet,”—which has no meaning whatever—it should be pointed and read שְׁמֹר רַגְלֶיךָ (Shemor Regalecha) meaning, “ Observe thy feast-days,” referring to Exod. xxiii. 14, where the Lord commanded Israel שְׁלוֹשׁ רִגְלִים (Shalosh Regalim) “ three appointed times (or three ordered feasts) shalt thou solemnize unto me in the year,” &c. The word “ Regalim,” signifying “ repeated times” (as the steps of man which are regularly repeated—see Numb. xxii. 28, 32, 33, &c.) So it is applied to signify the three ordered Jewish feasts which followed regularly one upon another ; and so in our passage it signifies the three ordered Jewish feasts, when all male persons were to come from the whole country and appear before God at Jerusalem. That שְׁמֹר (Shemor) is often used to signify, “ observe,” or, “ sanctifying,” as Sabbath and feast days, see Exod. xxiii. 15 ; Lev. xviii. 4, 5 ; xxvi. 2, 3 ; Deut. v. 12 ; xvi. 1, &c., &c., in all which places Shemor means, “ Observe.”

And be thou more ready to obey
Than to offer the sacrifice of fools :
For they consider not that they do evil.

In the book of Exod. chap. xxiii. ver. 17, we read, "three times in the year all males shall appear before the Lord God ;" and in Deut. xvi. 16, "three times in the year shall all thy males appear before the Lord thy God in the place which he shall choose ; in the feast of unleavened bread, and in the feast of weeks, and in the feast of tabernacles : and they shall not appear before the Lord empty ; every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessings of the Lord thy God which he hath given thee." Again, we read in the same book, chap. xii. 17 : "Thou mayest not eat within thy gates the tithes of thy corn, or of thy wine, or of thy oil, or of the firstlings of thy herds, or of thy flock, nor any of thy vows which thou vowest, nor thy free will offerings, or heave offerings of thine hand : But thou must eat them before the Lord thy God in the place which the Lord thy God shall choose, thou, and thy son, and thy daughter, and thy man-servant, and thy maid-servant, and the Levite that is within thy gates, and thou shalt rejoice before the Lord thy God in all that thou puttest thine hands unto."

Precepts and regulations like the above were enjoined unto Israel in great numbers in the law of Moses, and in having to observe such a great number of different ceremonials, there was also great danger that the simple-minded among that people would build castles of self-righteousness, of justification by works alone ; or that they would multiply sin that sacrifices may abound. The more the religion abounded in ceremonial exercises, in sacrifices, and free gifts, in the performance of vows and lustrations, the more it was to be feared that some

would entirely neglect the sacred foundation of the law, which was the faith in, the fear of, and the obedience to Jehovah their God and His holy will, and that they would depend entirely on reconciling Him with their sacrifices. Moses already had taken strong measures against the probability of ceremony gaining ground over substance, and therefore, among other warnings, he said, "And now, O Israel, what doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to fear the Lord thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, to keep the commandments of the Lord and his statutes, which I command thee this day for thy good?" (Deut. x. 12.) From this, as well as from numerous other passages, Israel could learn that the basis of their holy religion was the love and fear of God, and the obedience of his children to his expressed will in the law which he gave them, and that sacrifices were only to atone for sins committed unawares, or by mistake, but not for wilful transgression. Still, after all warning, we read in sacred history that not only Israel as a nation, but even some illustrious individuals fell very deep into the pernicious error of thinking that they may willingly commit sin and atone for it by sacrifice. It caused the ruin of King Saul, when, in his war against Amalek, he broke the commandment of the Lord, sacrificing first to his covetousness the irrevocable order of God, and then thinking to atone for his rebellion by bringing on his altar some of the accursed things doomed to destruction. But the prophet of the Lord soon undeceived him, "And Samuel said, hath the Lord as great delight in burnt-offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams." (1 Sam. xv. 22.) David endeavoured to improve this doctrine, and to impress

its important truth upon Israel by devoting to it a conspicuous place in his precious songs. (Ps. l. li.) But, nevertheless, his illustrious son, King Solomon, fell headlong into that great error. Having erected a magnificent temple unto Jehovah, and having been profuse in the number of sacrifices offered on the great altar on feast-days and other solemnities, he thought that he needed not now be scrupulous in other matters of religion, that he might neglect the love and fear of God in the intervals, and indulge in the love of this world and its perishing objects, and that he would atone for the neglect of the Lord's commandments on the next feast-day by offering hundreds of bulls and rams. Too late only did he awaken from that deceiving dream, when already a sealed sentence had been communicated to him from Heaven's tribunal that he had forfeited the Lord's favour, and irretrievably lost the crown of ten of the tribes of Israel. It was then that he saw that Lebanon may be wholly kindled on the altar, and all the fatlings of Bashan and Carmel sacrificed, and all the incense of Sheba consumed along with it, and that all this will not atone for one *wilful* neglect of Jehovah's commandments.

In the foregoing chap. Solomon concluded by stating the great loss he sustained because of his errors, imprudence, and unwatchfulness, and as the chief design of that sinful but deeply repenting king was, to make in this book a full confession of his past errors, and to give warnings to future generations, so he opens this chap. in warning Israel not to depend on sacrifices for wilfully committed sin, and not to be exposed to its hard consequences. In the above quoted passages from the law of Moses we have seen that it was on the three appointed feast days that Israel was to come into Jerusalem from all the corners of their land, and bring with them their

tithes, free gifts, and all other sacrifices which they were to offer according to the law. It is with regard to this fact that Solomon said, "Observe thy feast days, when thou shouldst go to the house of God," viz., inasmuch as it is the will of God, and makes part of his ceremonial law—observe them scrupulously. But at the same time he warns them against wilful sin under the false cover of sacrifice, saying, "and be more ready to obey than to offer the sacrifice of fools," viz., rather guard thyself with all thy might against the breaking of the Lord's commandments, than break them under the vain imagination of atoning for them by sacrifice. Such offerings he calls, "the sacrifices of fools;" for, not only do they avail nothing, but they aggravate the crime—"for they (meaning these deluded fools) know not that they do evil"—to have such an unworthy notion of God, that He would suffer His holy law to be outraged for a sacrifice is to add sin unto iniquity, and throughout the law we find no sacrifice ordered unless for sins committed through ignorance; but as regards wilful sin we read in Num. xv. 30—31, "But the soul that doth ought presumptuously, whether he be born in the land, or a stranger, the same reproaches the Lord; and that soul shall be cut off from among his people. Because he hath despised the word of the Lord, and hath broken his commandment, that soul shall utterly be cut off; his iniquity shall be upon him."

Now from all the warnings which we find that the inspired authors have given unto Israel, in order to preserve them from the errors into which they were liable to be led under the ceremonial law—from the repeated exhortations given by the prophets of God unto that people not to take sacrifices as a cloak for their sins, and (as in the following verses), that they should rather not bind themselves by any vows than

expose themselves to the temptations of breaking them—from all these manifestations we see clearly how even the ancient saints understood that the Old Testament dispensation was only an imperfect and preparatory one, a schoolmaster to train the minds of the Lord's people for a perfect and complete dispensation, for a clearer Revelation, when ceremony and sacrifice should be done away with,—when the Ark of God should be spiritual, and the Holiest of all anointed, not with the blood of bulls by a mortal High Priest, but with the blood of the Son of God, by the everlasting High Priest after the order of Melchizedek, and when “the just shall live by his faith.”*

* Need we another proof of the apostacy and corruption of Rome and her maimed system? She despises the simple but holy and glorious doctrine, of justification by faith alone in the blood and accomplished work of Christ, and what does she adopt in its stead? Not the law of Sinai; for she breaks every one of the holy Ten Commandments. But, as we said, hers is a maimed system; for the greater part of her ceremonies are miserable inventions of wicked and stupid mortals, and the other part is a mere apery of ancient Jewish ceremonies, which were to be done away with under the New Covenant dispensation. The result of her rebellion against the will and Revelation of God is that she perverts the mind of the simple, and trains her victims into the most abominable errors, which, according to the Word of God, cannot but cause their everlasting destruction. The following may serve as an example what a notion Rome's deluded victims have of sin and of justification.

At Algiers, in Northern Africa, we had a neighbour, a young French woman, who came frequently into our house to visit my wife. That woman was very clever, and had got a tolerably good education, but, unfortunately, in a convent of nuns, where she imbibed more superstition and Jesuitical intrigues than true principles of religion. She often complained to us that her husband was an unbeliever, that he had no religion whatever, and that she failed in all her attempts to convince him of the truth of Christianity. Her husband being a very sensible and polite infidel, I often enough had discussions with him about religion. All his objections were that the mummary, perfidy, superstition, &c., &c., practised and taught by Rome's priesthood, cannot emanate from a reve-

2. Be not rash with thy mouth,
 And let not thy heart be hasty
 To utter any word before God ;

lation made by God unto man. I heartily agreed with him on that lamentable point, and showed to both of them; as they were almost always both present at such conversations, that the deplorable French infidelity was the son of Romish superstition and corruption—that civilised and sensible men cannot but be disgusted with such a religion as Rome exhibits, and not knowing *the Bible* and the pure religion and revelation of God, they take for granted that it is not better than Popery, and become infidels. But, while we thus continued on good terms, and in frequent conversation with these Catholic neighbours, a little but curious event occurred and put an end to our temporary friendship. As my wife entered one day their house (abruptly), she found that woman busily engaged in unfeathering a large cock, which, when alive, belonged to another of our neighbours. My wife having recognised the animal, asked the young woman how she came by it, and received the answer, “It came just now into my house, and I prepare it for a promenading party which we are to make to-morrow.” “But it is sin,” said my wife, “and don’t you fear God?” “Ah! as for that,” replied the woman, “next week we have Christmas, and next Saturday I must go to confess, when I shall get absolution for this little sin.” To this she added, in an earnest tone, “had I not done this, I know not indeed what I would have had to say at the confessional, seeing that since my last confession I have committed no sin, and, to say nothing, the priest would think me a hypocrite; for he keeps me always a long time, and presses me to confess sins which I never commit.” My wife having tried all in her power to show unto that poor being the horrors of such a diabolical system, and the woman still persisting with impertinence that the priest has all power to pardon, and that he forgives far greater crimes without any remonstrances, and that therefore she hates the Protestants, because their pastors do not pardon sins: My wife said, “Lest, at your next confession, you will commit some crime at my house in order to procure confessing materials for your priest, keep therefore to your own house, and to friends of your own stamp who could in turn procure confessing stuff at your house.” Such are the productions of Rome’s infernal system, and though it be far from me to conclude from the above, *general dishonesty* of her victims, yet we say, without hesitation (and history is a living witness) that no other instrument of Satan has ever succeeded in producing so much error, crime, sacrilege, perjury, adultery, &c., as the abominable confessional of Rome’s invention. The above may also serve to show the value of nunnery instruction to young ladies.

For God is in heaven and thou on earth :

Let, therefore, thy words be few.

3. For as the dream cometh by much business,
So is the voice of a fool known by many words.
4. When thou vowest a vow unto God,
Defer not long to perform it ;
For he hath no delight in fools :
Pay then that which thou hast vowed.
5. It is better that thou shouldest not vow,
Than that thou shouldest vow and not pay.

In the Book of Num. xxx. 2, we read, "If a man vow a vow unto the Lord, or swear an oath to bind his soul with a bond, he shall not break his word—he shall do all that proceeded out of his mouth." The whole of that chap. is then occupied with regulations and restrictions with regard to the vows of women, who, if they were still in their father's house, depended entirely on the will of their fathers, who could confirm, or disallow, and abolish the vows of their daughters as soon as they heard of them ; or, if they were married, this authority was vested in their husbands, as it is expressed in verse 13 of the same chap : "Every vow, and every binding oath to afflict the soul, her husband may establish it, or her husband may make it void." This branch of the ceremonial law was accompanied with great danger, in as far as man is apt to express much either in the heat of devotion produced by an unforeseen success, or in the depth of misery and sufferings, but which may be difficult, or even impossible for him to accomplish afterwards. Hence the law contains also many regulations and restrictions on that subject, and while it means man to fulfil scrupulously every word in which he bound himself towards God, it warns him, at the same time, not to be hasty in binding himself by an oath for things that he may find afterwards diffi-

cult to perform, and thus be in danger of sinning against God. Thus we read in Deut. xxiii. 21—23, “When thou shalt vow a vow unto the Lord thy God, thou shalt not slack to pay it; for the Lord thy God will surely require it of thee; and it would be sin in thee: But if thou shalt forbear to vow, it shall be no sin in thee. That which is gone out of thy lips thou shalt keep and perform.”

Several examples in the sacred history show us how zealously the Lord watched over the performance of such vows, whether contracted by individuals for themselves, or by public persons in the name of the whole nation. Jacob was severely rebuked for his delay and neglect to perform his vow made at Bethel on his way to Mesopotamia. Israel was repulsed with slaughter before Ai, because Achan took of the consecrated spoil of Jericho, which Joshua, by a solemn vow, devoted to the Lord. A similar lesson Israel received in one of their battles against the Philistines, when in the heat of war Saul said, “Cursed be the man that eateth any food till the evening.” (1 Sam. xiv. 24). A few words, but they nearly cost the noble Jonathan his life, and prevented Israel from improving their victory over their deadly enemies. But who knows how many private individuals and families incurred the displeasure of the Almighty God, and caused ruin and misery unto themselves by the rashness with which they bound themselves by oaths and vows unto the Lord, but which they neglected to perform!

Solomon, who himself experienced in a great measure the rigour and scrupulousness with which the Lord watches over his rights, warned Israel, in the first place, not to mistake the ordinance of sacrifices as a cloak for wilful sin, and now he proceeds in the second and following verses in warning them to be cautious in making vows. “Be not rash with thy

mouth," &c. The sacrifices vowed by individuals unto the Lord were called freewill offerings when they were vowed *after* some deliverance from great danger or recovery from illness, &c. But the proper נִדֵּר (Neder) "vow" was such as was contracted by individuals when in great danger, or on the bed of sickness, by the individual binding himself by an oath that if the Lord shall deliver him from the impending danger, or restore him to health, he would offer so many sacrifices, give so much to the poor, &c. &c. Now the danger here was, that when the individual was once delivered or restored, and found the promise he made too difficult for him to fulfil, he might think that as these sacrifices were not binding on him because of some sin committed directly against the law of God, but voluntarily contracted under an influence of danger and disease, so he needs not act to the letter of his vow when he found that it was difficult for him to fulfil it. To such an individual the inspired warning says, "Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thy heart be hasty to utter any word before God; for God is in heaven, and thou on earth: Let, therefore, thy words be few." In making resolutions, and promises and vows unto the Lord, one must think over and over again on what he does. He must remember that he has to deal with an holy God, who is a devouring fire, and not like a man with whom one may negotiate about satisfying his honour, or make amends for neglected promises, by paying a ransom in part. The vowing individual must keep in mind his own weakness and changes of circumstances, which may render it difficult, or even impossible, for him to perform his vows. He must consider that the Lord unto whom the earth and fulness thereof belong does not demand from him any gifts but his heart, which, when contrite and broken in

real repentance, He never despises, but accepts rather than sacrifices and gifts. But when once a vow is made to Him, let it be scrupulously performed, for the Lord is a jealous God, and sits on the circle of the earth, and guides the helm of Providence, and has power over us as the potter over his clay. Ah! how expressive and comprehensive are the words of inspiration, "for God is in heaven, and thou on earth; let, therefore, thy words be few!" Weigh them in the balance of calm and mature deliberation, measure thy strength again and again with the task thou undertakest to perform, and abridge the number of thy words in which thou bindest thyself in a solemn vow towards the great God of heaven. "For as the dream cometh by much business," (or "by a multitude of occupations"), viz., as the dream by night is caused by overloading the mind with different plans and complicated thoughts during the day, "so is the voice of a fool known by many words." Even a fool could screen his folly were he able only to keep silence, but as soon as he opens his mouth one hears him utter many words without knowledge, and sees to what class he belongs. Thus, as the foolish and confused dream is produced by much thought and overloading of the mind, so is the folly of the fool made manifest by the multitude of his words. If this be so disagreeable to our mortal ears, O how should we be careful in taking with us a few well-chosen and numbered words when we approach the throne of the Lord of Hosts. Verses 4 and 5 contain the same wholesome advices and warnings regarding the caution to be taken in making vows as the passage in Deut. above quoted, and almost in the same words.

6. Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin ;
Neither say thou before the angel, It was an error :

Wherefore should God be angry at thy voice,
And destroy the works of thine hands ?

7. For as in many dreams there are many vanities,
So also in many words : O fear thou God.

This passage evidently refers to the kind of vows by which one binds himself to a severe mortification of his body (as the vows of a Nazarite) by abstinence from certain aliments to which he was accustomed, or to mortify by crucifixion of his flesh by repeated and complete fast days. As such vows may be uttered (as is too often the case) in a state of religious excitement, produced by extraordinary and different circumstances, so the man who contracted them was exposed to great trials when he came to perform them in calm days after his first fit of zeal and devotion had gone. A hot and dangerous war was waged within him, the law of his members beginning to fight against the law of God, that bound him to perform what he undertook by an oath. If in that battle flesh prevailed, and he touched things which he bound himself not to touch, he committed a grievous sin, and the use of things which were always lawful for him now condemned him. All his excuses of having contracted his vows rashly, without sufficient deliberation, not only availed him not before God, who knew the heart and mind of man, and all his circumstances, but even greatly aggravated his crime. If we paraphrase the first injunction of verse 6, it will be this,—Allow not a rash vow to go forth out of thy mouth against thy body, by which (vow) thou makest a crime of the use of things which are otherwise lawful unto thee ; for in so doing thou exposest thy flesh to temptation and sin, when it shall desire and use the things to which it was formerly lawfully accustomed.

“Neither say thou before the angel, It was an error.” The angel here means God’s messenger,

the priest, before whom every Israelite was obliged to appear either at the beginning of the performance of his vow (if it consisted simply in sacrifices promised), or at the consummation of the time of the same vow when he was to offer the sacrifices prescribed in the law. The priest was also the only judge as to the nature of the vow, and gave the needful directions about the art of performing the different vows. Solomon therefore advises the man who thus bound himself by an oath to the Lord, by no means to impose on the priest by artificial excuses, as that "I have erred," or "I have done it rashly without sufficient deliberation," for though the priest may be persuaded to loosen his tie, he is still bound in the sight of God, who knows even his thoughts afar off, and who will punish him severely for his fluctuations and faithlessness. That מַלְאָכִים (Hamalach), "the angel," means here *the priest*, who was God's messenger to stand between Him and man in the performance of the duties in His sanctuary, we may see from the following passage in the prophet Malachi. That prophet, when speaking of the covenant which God made with the tribe of Levi, says, "For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they (Israel) should seek the law at his mouth, for he is the messenger (or angel, מַלְאָכִים, Malach) of the Lord of Hosts." (Mal. ii. 7.) In verse 7 the statement of verse 3 is repeated, and followed by a warning, "but fear thou God." Here the sacred author shows that whilst there is great danger in forming rash resolutions, and in binding oneself by an oath, the fear of the Lord alone was enough to keep man both from rashly contracted vows, which he may not be able to perform afterwards, and to fulfil exactly and cheerfully his promises and vows if once contracted. The man who has the fear of God has the wisdom of God, and will

be led in the path of righteousness, without binding himself with other ties than those of his conscience.

8. If thou seest the oppression of the poor,
 And violent perversion of judgment and justice in
 the province,
 Marvel not at Providence,*

* "Marvel not at Providence." But should the reader marvel how we got the word "Providence" out of the Hebrew and into the English text, the following will explain it. רָצוֹן (Chephetz) is a very rich and comprehensive word, and varies very often in signification, according to the context. It is necessarily variously rendered in all different versions of the Bible. In most places where it occurs it is rendered "pleasure," or "delight." In chapter iii., verses 1 and 17 of our book, it is rendered "purpose;" and in the difficult verse in question it is rendered "matter." Now the primary signification of this word is "will," or "desire." But while the Hebrew word רָצוֹן (Ratzon), signifies simply "will," or "desire," רָצוֹן (Chephetz), expresses not only the "will," or "desire," but also the "purpose" of any "will" or "desire." If one desires to go to London in order to see the largest city in Europe, his desire to go to London is his *Ratzon*—his primary will; but his *Chephetz*—his purpose—is to see that city. Even in this sense the word is differently employed, according to the demand of the context and subject. In *Isai. liii. 10*, it is twice rendered "pleasure," whereas that verse should read thus:—"Yet it was the Lord's design (or 'order,' not 'it pleased') to bruise him mortally; in order that when his soul shall make an offering for sin, he shall see seed, his days shall be prolonged, and the purpose ('plan' or 'design'—not 'pleasure') of God shall prosper in his hand." *Isai. xlv. 28*, it should be rendered thus: "And he (Cyrus) shall perform the whole of my plan" (or "design," with respect to Jerusalem, but it cannot be said that Cyrus was to "accomplish" all the pleasures of Jehovah.) In *Isai. lviii.* this word occurs once in verse 3, and twice in verse 13, and all the three times it is rendered "pleasure," while it means "business," or "secular affairs and employments." *Job xxii. 3*, it should be rendered "advantage"—"Hath the Almighty any advantage when thou art righteous?"—but, erroneously it is rendered, "Is it any pleasure to the Almighty that thou art righteous?" Surely the Almighty has a "pleasure" in righteous men! Now in our text it means the "design" and purpose of God in allowing violence and perversion of justice and judgment

For he that is higher than the highest regardeth
Even those high ones that rule over them.

9. Moreover, the advantage of ground is the cause of
all that,
For even a king over one field is served.
10. He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with
silver ;
Nor he that loveth abundance with increase.
This also is vanity.

In the preceding portion of this chapter Solomon gave an earnest warning unto man regarding his religious relations and behaviour towards God. He advised him to be very cautious in binding himself by vows, and very exact and scrupulous in the performance of them when once contracted. Moreover, he warned man not to utter harshly even a single word before God, for that He is almighty and jealous, and would punish severely any violation or neglect of any solemn promise. Here a serious question naturally introduced itself, viz., seeing that God required such an exactness from those that serve Him, why is it then that He allows so much violence and injustice to exist in this world and to be in continual practice by wicked men, without punishing them instantly? This question, therefore, is introduced in verse 8, and the answer to it is given in various ways and forms, not only in the whole succeeding portion of this chapter, but it extends also to the end of the following one. In all the following arguments and examples, Solomon endeavours to shew that besides the capital judgment of the wicked,

to exist. Marvel not at Providence," that is to say, at the purpose which God in His providential arrangement and government may have in allowing it. He then declares that God had not abandoned this world to the violence of the wicked, but that He regardeth their actions, and has His own time for recompense and punishment. See commentary.

which the Lord delays for another world (as was said chap. iii., 16, 17), the wicked are punished in various ways, even in this world, and that their situation here is an unhappy and miserable one.

“If thou seest the oppression of the poor, and violent perversion of judgment and justice in the province.” From the last phrase, “in the province,” as well as from verse 9, it is evident that Solomon refers here to the oppression exercised under a feudal system by petty tyrants of landowners over their unhappy vassals, whom they treat like slaves.* If, says Solomon, thou seest in the province such violence and injustice exercised towards the poor, “marvel not at Providence,” (or “at the arrangement of Providence,”)—ask no questions, say not, why does God allow such wickedness to exist? or,

* Those who know the history of the rise and progress of that inhuman feudal system in Europe—that originally the tyrants were not masters, nor the peasants slaves—that the former, who were the strangers, gradually infringed upon the privileges and liberty of the latter—the weaker; that there was a time of anarchy, robbery, and violence, when even those peasants who possessed property of their own, and needed not take ground of any chief, were obliged, through oppression or fear of outward robbers, to put themselves under the so-called protection of some mighty and ambitious chieftains, and to renounce into their hands their property and their liberties. We say that those who are acquainted with that horrid system in Europe will easily understand how such a system might have existed to a large extent among Israel even in Solomon’s times, though originally there were no more masters or vassals among Israel than among the original Asiatic tribes that settled in Europe at and after the dissolution of the Roman empire. Exposed to the depredation, murders, and robberies which the inroads of Philistia, Midian, and other savage neighbours practised on the borders of Judea, many Hebrew families were deprived of their original possessions, assigned unto them by Joshua, and were obliged to take ground and protection from some powerful and rich chieftains, who treated them ultimately as vassals and slaves. From Jerem. xxxiv. 8—20, and Nehem. v. 1—13, we see that this cruel system was practised before as well as after the Babylonian captivity.

why does He not punish the tyrants instantly?—nor be thou led astray to conclude that God must have left this world to its fate, and did not care either to punish the wicked and unjust, or to rescue and reward the suffering righteous; “for He that is higher than the highest regardeth even those high ones that rule over them.” The Almighty Governor of the universe, whose eyes run to and fro through the whole earth, though He dwelleth in the highest places of Heaven, yet regardeth at the same time all that is done on earth. Yea, he regardeth not only the great kingly and despotic tyrants who oppress their millions as if they were a heap of ants in their gardens, but He regardeth also the little savages of the provinces, who tyrannize over a few poor creatures who happened to fall into their power; and woe be to them, for at the time of retribution they shall pay to the last farthing. Jehovah, unto whom vengeance belongs, liveth and regardeth!

In verse 9 Solomon declares that the source of that great evil lies in the advantage of ground; the possession of much landed property by these tyrants procures for them the influence over the poor, who are attracted by the idea to attach themselves to these rich men, to work their fields and eat bread, and once settled they become bound to the ground and its tyrant master. In further explanation, Solomon says, “for even a king over one field is served,” viz., a little tyrant possessing only one field, and too lazy to labour himself, engages a few poor families, gives a piece of ground to each of them, for which they bind themselves to labour a day or two in the week for the laird. A time or generation passes away, and then the poor ensnared creatures become slaves with their lives and property, and are treated like beasts of burden.

Having stated the source of the evil, and assured

that the Lord does not overlook it, but regardeth all the actions of the oppressors, and will reward them in proper time, the sacred author proceeds to show that in the meantime these ambitious and cruel men are not to be considered as happy in their condition. "He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver, nor he that loveth abundance with increase." The ambitious oppressor never finds what he seeks, is never satisfied with what he finds, for the more he has the more he desires. Those that are not content with what God gave them, and seek to satisfy their ungodly pleasures and desires by the labours of others, shall never and can never enjoy their own portion. Hence the author concludes by saying, "This also is vanity,"—when men seek what they will never obtain, what can be more vain and vexatious? Instead of finding a real satisfaction in any thing they enjoy, their thirst for more will only be augmented, their hunger for the labour of others will gradually increase, and the farthing unjustly gained will devour ten of their own. Thus, unto their very grave they shall clasp their hands at the air, and find nothing but vanity in it. Solomon will now shew us in various ways how the Lord punishes the violent oppressors of the poor, even in this world.

11. The more goods are increased,
The more increased are they that consume them :
And what profit have their possessors,
Above the beholding of them with their eyes?
12. Sweet is the sleep of the labouring man,
Whether he hath eaten little or much ;
But the fullness of the rich deprives him of sleep.

Another argument against the infatuated tyrant who seeks to increase his own wealth and enjoyments by violence, and by the oppression of his poor subordinates, while it is impossible for him to enjoy

the prey himself. In proportion as wealth increases, in plain agricultural life (it is to ancient, simple, and rural life that this passage primarily refers), the family and number of consumers of that wealth also increase, in the shape of labourers, dependants, and servants. But the unjust owner cannot enjoy a double portion of the increase himself—he cannot eat more when feeding on the labours of the poor than he did or could do when eating the fruits of his own labours. What profit, then, has he of the increase of his wealth by unrighteous means, unless that he sees a greater number of labourers and domestics consume that increase? Another consideration is, that with regard to the labouring man, whether he eats plenty or whether he goes to bed after a scanty meal, his rest is sweet. No fears mingle with it, no worm of conscience disturbs it, and no cares and plans of new violence and mischief trouble it. But the lazy, fat, and luxurious oppressor who retires to his couch without physical exercise, and with a mind full of plans how to continue feeding on the labours of others, with anxiety to preserve, and with fear of losing his riches, spends many a sleepless night, and his system gets gradually diseased and feeble, notwithstanding his enjoyments. Solomon thus shows that there is no present advantage to the oppressor from the wealth he gathers by violent means. As to the advantage of accumulating riches for future days, or of leaving them to children, the author shows in the following verses how frivolous and stupid such a plan is, and how often such plans have reverse consequences.

13. There existeth a mortifying evil,
Which I have witnessed under the sun ;
Riches kept up for the ruin of their possessor.
14. These riches were lost by misfortune ;
And he begat a son when nothing was in his hand.

15. As he came naked from the womb of his mother;
 So must he return to go as he came ;
 Nor shall he get ought for his labour,
 Which he may carry away in his hand.
16. Yea, certainly, this is a mortifying evil,
 That he must depart in like manner as he came :
 What profit then hath he, having laboured for the
 wind ?
17. All his days also he consumeth in darkness,
 And heapeth upon himself sorrow, disease, and wrath.

The short life and shortsightedness of mortal man, and the mysterious pavilion in which the ways, judgments, and arrangements of the all-wise God of Providence are enveloped, all combine in putting a veil over our eyes to prevent us from seeing clearly and collectively all the punishments inflicted on the wicked even in this world. But this can be no argument against Jehovah's dispensation of justice, any more than his long-suffering could be advanced as an argument against His equity. The children of God in the exercise of their faith, and the evil-doers in the practice of their wickedness, would both cease from being *free* and responsible agents,—an irresistible stop would be imposed on the practice of the ungodly,—the pushing forward of the faithful would be a *necessity*, were we to behold clearly that in general the righteous is soon rewarded, and the evil-doer instantly punished. Nevertheless this is no less the fact—that the godly man has his reward in every good action he performs, as the wicked is punished for every ungodly practice even in this world, though only in part—than that the fire melts the snow and heats the water. Moreover the child of faith is put in a position for gathering certain facts, even during his short life, from which he can conclude that nothing escapes the omniscient eye of the great Judge—that as this special sinner, or that

special righteous man, was rewarded even in this life according to his deeds, it must certainly be so in general, though, for wise purposes, it is so arranged that we cannot discover all in this life. This was Solomon's experience when he said, "Behold, the righteous are recompensed on earth (viz. even in this world to a large degree) much more the wicked and the sinner." (Prov. xi. 31.) And what but a miserable determination for self-destruction prevents the wicked man from gathering also such striking facts of the judgments of God poured on sinners even in this life, and thus hinders his repentance and salvation? Let the wicked oppressors of the poor, the hunters of the mammon of unrighteousness, seek and take examples from the destruction and ruin that overtook some of their equals in the very midst of their prosperity, and against all probability in human calculation. Let them examine for a moment their own perplexed thoughts, and troubled mind, agonizing plans and vexatious inventions, which often enough accompany them on their couch in the night season, and deprive them of that sweet repose, of that calm conscience, which even their persecuted victims, poor and needy as they are, so richly enjoy after a day's hard labour. We say, let them examine these facts, and trace them to their source, then they will find out their position, and foresee their end, and to avoid which they might come to a happy resolution and say, "Let us die the death of the righteous, and let our last end be like theirs." Again, "Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright; for the end of that man is peace. But the transgressors shall be destroyed together: the end of the wicked is to be cut off. But the salvation of the righteous is in the Lord: he is their strength in time of trouble."

There are facts in daily occurrence, which shew

that wickedness is punished even in this world, though it is done in such different ways and times, that the children of God need much observation and much faith to behold it, and see in it the arm of the great Judge; while it does not strike the wicked and faithless, and therefore room is left for their revolt and persistence in their wickedness to gather wrath against the day of wrath. One of these manifestations is, that we see too often their riches are painfully accumulated, and carefully preserved, not for the advantage, but for the destruction of their owners. Riches awaken rivals and deadly enemies, attract robbers and thieves, false accusers, and wicked governments. But besides this, it also often occurs that men unwearied in amassing by every means of violence and unlawful tricks, and shunning neither pain nor danger, having no children at the time, pretend to preserve these riches for their heirs yet to be born; but it so happens that ere these expected heirs appear, the mammon of unrighteousness is lost in bad business, in miscalculated speculations, by which an increase of the treasure was expected; and when the rich but violent men thus become beggars, then their expected heirs are born, not to enjoy their wealth, but to take part in their misery and want of every thing, even of sympathy. To this fact Solomon refers, in verses 13—15, and calls it "a mortifying evil" (or affliction") to the children of the world who make mammon their God. They are afflicted and mortified at the gathering of their idol—they are so at speculating about the means of increasing and preserving it, but far more so when they see themselves stripped of it at the very time when they hoped to enjoy it along with their offspring. When a treasure which has been gathered, during many years of continual labour of perplexed days and

sleepless nights, is lost suddenly, and the wicked owner seeing himself naked and miserable at the very time for which he calculated a peaceful life of plenty and security, and now sees his children cry for bread and find none, this is certainly a "mortifying affliction;" yea it is unto the miserable oppressor a foretaste of hell; for here as there he must swallow his devouring grief himself, without a shadow of that sweet consolation which a child of God would easily find even were he to lose all the riches of this perishing world.

Occurrences and judgments like the above, which are by no means rare in this world, and still more afflicting ones, as those which the inspired author introduces in this succeeding chapter, viz., a man charged with great riches, but which he dare not touch, as God has shut his mouth against the use of them—we say, that such judgments like these should completely satisfy us as to the watchful eye of the Most High God, and His swaying the sceptre of Omnipotence with great severity over the heads of the wicked, even in this world. Nor should we marvel any more at the arrangement of Providence when we see the oppression of the poor and the violent perversion of judgment and justice in the province, even should it appear to our dim eyes that these tyrants remain unrestrained and unpunished. He that is higher than the highest of mortals regardeth—He that formed the eye shall He not see?—He that planted the ear shall He not hear?—He that chastiseth mighty nations, will He not rebuke and punish individual oppressors of the poor? "When the wicked spring up as the grass, and all the workers of iniquity do flourish, it is that they shall be destroyed for ever; For thou, O Lord, art Most High for evermore."

In verses 16 and 17 the argument is resumed,

and the purport of it seems to be that suppose even that the wicked man remains in the possession of the mammon of unrighteousness all the days of his short life, without losing it, and without turning a beggar, still, as he must leave it here at the moment of his death, without taking a single farthing along with him ; as he must return to the dust whence he came, what advantage then has he of all his accumulated riches ? What recompense can he expect to receive for all his pains, toils, vexations, perplexed days, sleepless nights, sorrow, disease, and wrath, which he heaped on himself during his rapacious pursuit after perishing dust, which he must abruptly leave to others, and depart hence as naked as he came ? A man without religion, without the fear and love of God in his heart, without the happy and self-rewarding occupation of well-doing, without the seeking to prepare treasures in heaven, and to enjoy them in eternity, is labouring for the wind, for all his works of chaff and stubble are carried away by the wind of death. He consumes his days in darkness ; his thoughts, his endeavours, his desires, his plans, and his hopes, begin in darkness, are carried on in a melancholy gloom, and are at last covered by the black mantle of the shadow of death, and perish along with him for ever, without leaving the least trace either in this or in the eternal world, except their horrid consequences in the place of woe.

18. Behold, therefore, that which I considered as good :
 That it is proper for one to eat and to drink,
 And to enjoy the good produced by all his labours
 under the sun,
 All the days of his life which God granteth him ;
 For this is his (legitimate) portion.
19. Also that every man unto whom God giveth riches
 and wealth

And giveth him power likewise to eat thereof,
And to take his portion and rejoice in his labour ;
This is the gift of God.

20. For he will not much remember (or count) the days
of his life,
When God respondeth to the joy of his heart.

The contents of this passage appeared already in chap. iii. 12, 13, though in fewer words. But as this argument has gathered additional strength in the preceding passage, where a description was given of the misery and madness of the hunters of the mammon of unrighteousness, of their certain failure in deriving any other fruits from their wicked plans and vexatious machinations than grief, disappointment, and sorrow,—it is, therefore, that Solomon returns to this subject now. In verse 18 he says, “Behold, therefore, that which I considered as good,” viz., in the passage above designed (chap. iii. verses 12, 13.) Thus the phrase in verse 18 may be rendered, “Behold, therefore, *why* I considered it as good,” viz., “after what is said in the preceding portion of this chapter, thou wilt see my reason why I recommended the enjoyment of the lawful fruits of his labour to the honest and laborious man.” Verse 18 evidently refers to the poor labourer, who is advised not to seek great things, but to be content with what God granted him by his labours. The expression “which God granteth him,” refers both to the fruits of his labour and to the days of his life. Both are the gifts of God ; both are the assigned portion of man in this land of the living ; both should be enjoyed in peace, satisfaction, and thanksgiving unto the Divine source of our lives, strength, and happiness. Verse 19 refers to the rich man, unto whom God in His sovereign will was pleased to grant abundance of wealth, even more than he needs for his own use. This rich man is carefully

distinguished from the wicked money hunter in the preceding passage, by the expression "unto whom God has given riches," that is, a man who is honest, pious, and laborious, and whom God blessed with abundance. But he is also distinguished from the miserable man introduced in next chapter (unto whom, indeed, God allowed to gather riches but not to enjoy them) by the expression: "And gave him also power to eat thereof," viz., He granted him riches, not to keep them for another, but to enjoy them himself; for this is no less a special gift of the God of Providence than the riches themselves. That even such a favourite man must take great care in the use of his privilege—that he must live in moderation, use and not abuse, enjoy and not waste; Solomon distinctly says: "And to take his portion." The rich man must not forget the owner of his wealth, and while he is allowed to take and enjoy "his portion," let him not forget the "portion" of God which he is bound to use in His service and for the promotion of His glory. The rich man must keep in mind that, were it not for "God's portion" which was confided unto him to be used in His service, it is more than likely that the other *portion* would not have been granted unto him.

It is not rare in this world to see even good men who have been favoured to be depositories of great treasure, which either came down to them from their ancestors, or was accumulated by fortunate business, suddenly deprived of the wealth which they possessed. These, as well as other good and sympathising men, may be astonished at such reverses of fortune overtaking so suddenly even decidedly pious and God-fearing men. Ah! could we but get one spark of the light that clears up such mysteries, then we would see that either that good man has forgotten

or neglected "Jehovah's portion," while he scrupulously watched over the enjoyment of "his own," or that he was about to mismanage his master's trust in one way or another. To save him from the commission of sacrilege, or to punish him in this world for one already committed, and to prevent greater guilt, the merciful and gracious Father in heaven removes the dangerous stumbling-block out of the way of that poor and weak treasurer, and thus preserves him from everlasting ruin.

Often enough we also see some children of God suddenly bereaved of an heap of earthly treasure which they neglected to employ in the Lord's service. They are thus left for a time to reflection, to see how fluctuating these earthly treasures are, and how foolish they were not to have availed themselves during their possession of them to do more for God, and to lay up a treasure in heaven, where it cannot be lost by a reverse of fortune. Thus humbled, exercised, and resolved to be better stewards in the future, they are as suddenly restored and entrusted with a still greater fortune than that which they formerly had lost. Ah! the ways of heaven, though mysterious and intricate to short-sighted man, are so wonderfully arranged, and scrupulously managed, that all things, whether prosperity and plenty, or privation and loss, work together for the good and salvation of those that fear God, so the very seeming prosperity of the wicked kills and destroys them. Let, therefore, every man unto whom God giveth riches and the power of enjoying them, remember that it is the free gift of God, and for some good purpose—that the portion of God must first be well employed to the promotion of His honour, and then let him enjoy his own portion in moderation and with thanksgiving, "for this is his portion." God gave it unto

him to enjoy it, and to deprive himself of the enjoyment of it is in many circumstances equally wrong as to abuse it.

In verse 20 Solomon adds, that such a favoured man "will not remember much the days of his life," viz., will not be wearied of life either in a spiritual or in a temporal sense. While such a man sees himself able and willing to do much for his God, for his soul, and for his fellow-men, he is free from the trouble of seeking his daily bread with the sweat of his brow, seeing that "God responded to the joy of his heart"—the Lord delights in the joy and satisfaction of His servants even in the use of the temporal blessings which he bestows on them on earth; but He also prepareth for them a far nobler enjoyment in heaven, where they shall hear the invitation "Good and faithful servant, thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

(CHAPTER VI. VERS. 1, 2.)

1. There existeth an evil, which I witnessed under the sun, and which is common among men :
2. A man to whom God hath given riches, wealth, and honour,
So that he wanteth nothing of all that his soul desireth ;
Yet God giveth him not the power to enjoy them,
For another man, or stranger, shall enjoy them :
This is vanity, yea it is a mortifying disease.

Be it observed that in this instance the rich man differs from one who gathers riches by violence and injustice, and by oppressing the poor; for Solomon distinctly says, "a man to whom God hath given riches, wealth," &c. Indeed even the oppressor could not gather riches without the will of God, still there is a great difference between the two rich men. The oppressor may be allowed to exercise his violence and robberies for a certain time, that the cup of wrath and judgment may be filled up, though it cannot be said in any proper sense, that "God gave him riches." But the rich man in verse 2, is described as one to whom "God gave riches," either by heritage, or by prosperous business. Now we must inquire into the character of that man unto whom God giveth riches, but not the enjoyment of them, which is reserved for a stranger! In the second chap. of this book, verse 26, Solomon said, that, unto a man who findeth favour in God's sight, He giveth wisdom and knowledge, and joy, but to the *sinner* He giveth an occupation to gather, and to heap up—not for his own enjoyment—but to leave it for another man who found favour in the sight of God, and who shall enjoy it without toil or trouble. Such a *sinner* is the rich man introduced in verse 2 of our chapter,—a worldly wicked man—to whom God gave the sore occupation to gather and heap up enormous riches and wealth, and even to be honoured by mortals because of his riches: but while he is the treasurer of such an heap of mammon, he durst not touch it—he cannot enjoy it. Such a poor being may think that it is his own free will and choice not to enjoy his riches—but if he would he could use them for the satisfaction of any desire of his soul. The world may think in the same manner of such a man: knowing that his coffers are full, they may think that if he would he could live in affluence and splen-

dour; but the fact is, that he cannot touch that which is not his, but is destined for another—for a man “that found favour in the sight of God.” His hands are invisibly chained, his will is constrained, and his mouth muzzled; he gathered for another, and he must keep it for its real owner whom he knows not, and who will not requite him for his labours, nor thank him for his carefulness.

These extraordinary transactions in Providence Solomon describes as “very common among men;” and indeed, no one who believes that the Most High God ruleth over man, and arranges all his ways, checks or prospers his actions and steps, gives him or takes from him according to His pleasure, prolongs or cuts short his life according to the plans of Omniscience that sees the future in the present, and the end from the beginning—we say that no man who believes such a strict Providence, can read history, or consider the human transactions, ups and downs, and changes in fortune, and not see with astonishment the substance of Solomon’s statement. Men were and are often hurried away hundreds and thousands of miles from their nativity and residence, either to live or die in places they little knew of, and all for the promotion of some or other great and fixed plan in Providence which, sooner or later, appears. Single days, or even hours, have often witnessed the strangest convulsions and changes in the destinies of thousands of mortals, the rich and mighty having been reduced to abject poverty and helplessness, and the poor and needy having found themselves surrounded with riches and covered with honours. How often do men see their treasures—on the gathering of which they spent scores of hard laboured years and thousands of sleepless nights—carried away suddenly by an individual or individuals whose face or faces they had never seen be-

fore! How often were mighty treasures accumulated during centuries by a wicked family or nation, and in the proper time discovered and taken away, and used for the promotion of a great and good purpose, and in the service of God! How often have wicked families on this earth—the seat of violence and oppression—used all the power of mischief and treachery for the sake of aggrandizing their territories and multiplying their riches, but when these Nimrods have reached the climax of their wicked ambition, and their territories the utmost borders, then came the children of strangers, whom Providence destined as proper heirs, and possessed themselves, without trouble, of immense lands and goods; either by cutting off or driving into exile those who called themselves legitimate lords or princes!

Such extraordinary changes and astonishing revolutions were once witnessed in great numbers, and during many centuries, in Canaan—in the land which was destined to be the cradle of true religion and where the preparations were to be matured for the salvation of fallen humanity by the Messiah. When that plan reached maturity another and new revolution took place; that land was turned into a desert, and its once favoured inhabitants were scattered over all the surface of the globe, to answer, in proper time, some other mysterious purpose of the Most High. Such, also, was the great mystery of the rise and progress of Rome, who was allowed to subdue many countries far stronger and more populous than she, to gather enormous treasures during many centuries, to become the mistress of the world, to subdue and destroy Palestine, and to prepare the high road for the empire of the New Testament *against her will*. When that plan was finished, the great way prepared, and she put upon

the balance of Jehovah's righteousness, and found unworthy of being the depository of the invaluable treasure of the Gospel, her empire was overrun and destroyed by fierce and barbarous tribes. Then were the ancient inhabitants of Europe delivered to the sword and famine, their territories and treasures were taken away, and a new people established themselves on and among the old ruins. Among that people Christianity, science, civilisation, and liberty were destined to flourish, and reach their climax when Rome shall be vanquished a second time, when Popish and monarchical despotism and tyranny shall be destroyed and vanish from the earth. Such deep mysteries are involved in the discoveries of America and Australia, which vast continents are doubtless destined to act a conspicuous part in the history of mankind and of revealed religion. Such is also the wonderful mystery about a small island in the Atlantic ocean, the inhabitants of which the great Jehovah was pleased to lift far above the summit of all nations of the globe in religion, in true wisdom, in riches, in honour, and in power, and gave them dominion over vast territories and mighty nations in almost every corner and part of the globe—why all that? What purpose shall this serve? The Lord who created all things, and ruleth all things for the promotion of His own glory, knows well the services which that island was to render to His purposes in the promotion of His gracious plans in the conversion of the world—we, his creatures, know it in part, and in proper time shall see it clearly.

All such mighty changes and convulsions, are not mere chances; No. They are the well calculated and irresistible plans of that great Lord who rules the innumerable stars, and calls by name all the hosts of heaven; and all to serve His eternal pur-

poses and promote the glory of His name—and in all these mysterious transactions, the judgments of God are carried out, and His justice vindicated. The sufferings of the poor and needy ones, the cries of oppressed innocents are not left unheeded, as the injustice and violence of the wicked are not left unpunished—all is put on the balance, and justice and judgment are dispensed with eternal equity. Let us therefore be cautious, and not envy the seemingly prosperous wicked man; for he knows not what is going on in his own mind—far less what is going on in heaven's tribunal about him—in the very time of his thriving. We know not to what agencies he may be exposed in the midst of his wealth—we know not for whom he gathers these treasures, and how soon he will have the mortification of seeing them in the possession of strangers, who will make better use of them than he. Let us therefore be always ready to exclaim with the inspired servant of God: "O, the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments and his ways past finding out! . . . For of him, and through him, and to him are all things: to whom be glory for ever, Amen."

3. Should a man beget an hundred children,
And should he live ever so many years;
Yet, however, many were the days of his life,
If his soul be not satisfied with good,
And also that he have no burial,
I say, the very abortive is preferable to him:
4. For though it came in vain, and departed in darkness,
And its very name be covered with darkness;
5. Though it saw not the sun, nor knew aught,
Yet hath it more rest than the other.
6. Yea, should he live a twice thousand years,
But without enjoying any good,
Do not all go to one place?

The child of God knows that here he has no abiding city, and therefore he makes every possible preparation for the world to come, and looks always up to the place where he shall enjoy eternal happiness and rest in the bosom of his Divine Redeemer. He knows, and is able to enjoy, any earthly riches, wealth, and honour, which Providence was pleased to deposit in his hands. Not only does he eat his bread with cheerfulness of heart, and with thanksgiving; but he rejoices (with a joy unknown to the children of this world), at every good work which he is enabled to perform by means of the talents left to his charge. His life is a life of peace and joy, even in the midst of trials, and his death is a triumph. He lived and moved, thought and acted, according to the light of the living, imparted unto him by the Revelation of God, and he departed hence to approach that Light which no man here can see and live. A glance into a happy future sweetened the bitterness of the cup often tasted in the present world, and an active preparative life drove away the shadows of death through which he passed from a dream into a reality, from time into eternity.

But the wicked man, to whatever class he may belong, be he an oppressor of the poor in order to gather riches, be he a miser or an extravagant prodigal, or be he a miserable sinner unto whom God gave riches, but does not allow him to enjoy them; in any case, he has no source of happiness whatever. Into the future his dim eyes cannot look; and how should he be able to prepare for it, or derive any spark of joy or happiness from it? His life is one of grief and sorrow, and of gloomy apprehensions. It is, therefore, that Solomon says that he preferred the very embryo which disappears as soon as it appears, and whose very name is covered with darkness and obscurity, to the wicked and miserable man who

spends his life in toil and sorrow without being recompensed by any earthly enjoyment. As a man born blind is to be preferred to one born with good eyes, but who, from the first day of his life to the hour of death, was confined in a dark prison, where not a single ray of light could penetrate, so the stillborn is surely to be preferred to a wretched man who lives long, but who knows neither his destiny, nor his privileges in this world, nor the reality of a future, and how to prepare for it. Thus his very existence here is embittered and obscured—he lives in darkness notwithstanding his eyes behold the sun, he dies and departs for everlasting gloom notwithstanding his soul was capable to live for ever in eternal light and felicity. Does he try to cheer himself with the idea of leaving his treasures to his numerous children, then his misery is doubled by doubled fears and sorrows; for in that case, he has besides the fears that these treasures might be wrested from him before he could divide them among his children, also the fear that the latter may soon lose them or waste them in prodigality. While “all go to the same place”—until all come from the dust, and must return to dust—the existence of the sinner is only an existence in perdition; for there is no rest for him in this life, and what shall it be in the world to come! Thus the obscure being that only passes hurriedly through this world in the shape of lifeless clay, has more rest than the wicked grey-headed man has in both worlds; for he is fit neither for life nor for death, neither for time nor for eternity.

7. If all the labour of man be for his mouth,
Then, certainly the soul will not be satisfied :
8. For else, what preference hath the wise man over
the fool!—

- Or what (preference) hath the poor man,
 Who knoweth how to behave toward the living ב .
9. The sight of the eyes is more pleasant
 Than the exercises of the soul :*
 This is also vanity, and vexation of spirit.

The sacred author in the foregoing six chapters of this Book, has spoken much of, and often recommended the enjoyment of temporal benefits which the Lord bestows on us, either by our toils, or when He is pleased otherwise to deposit in our hands riches and wealth. He has also spoken much of the wicked rich man and of the wretched miser, who either dare not, or know not, how to enjoy the gifts of God in this world, far less how to apply their riches in preparing for a world to come. He now

* The noun מֵהָלוֹךְ (Me-haloch) in this verse, and the verb לֵהָלוֹךְ (Le-haloch, the ב and the ל being prepositions) in the preceding verse, refer both to the spiritual or moral behaviour of man and his actions towards his Creator, and towards his fellowmen; and these moral actions are given as the produce of the נֶפֶשׁ (Nephesh) or "soul" of man. Thus in Hithpael, וַיִּתְהַלֵּךְ (Vayithhalech), "and he (Enoch) walked with God"—which "walking" signifies his moral behaviour, spiritual exercises, or, a spiritual walk and conversation, agreeable to the will of God (Gen. v. 24). The same is, הוֹלֵךְ הַתָּמִים (Holech tamim), "He that walketh uprightly" (Ps. xv. 2); and הוֹלֵךְ צְדָקוֹת (Holech Zedakoth) "He that walketh righteously," (Isai. xxx. 15)—both signifying the exercise of uprightness and righteousness towards God and man. The same meaning has the word in verses 8 and 9, signifying the moral actions and spiritual exercises of man, which are not only the production of his soul, but by which we distinguish the wise man from the fool—the spiritually-minded man (though poor) from the rich wicked man, who knows nothing above the animal satisfaction of his body. In both these verses the word נֶפֶשׁ (Nephesh) "soul" was perverted into "desire," or "appetite" (in all versions except the LXX., that renders it $\psi\upsilon\chi\eta$); for the whole passage was misunderstood, and hence mistranslated.—See Comment.

tells us that there are far higher and spiritual enjoyments which we should seek and obtain. "If all the labour of man be for his mouth," that is, if *all* the fruits of man's labours and toils under the sun be exclusively employed for his mouth, for the feeding of his mortal body, "then, certainly, the soul will not be satisfied," but she will be left to starve, and grow weaker and weaker until there will be little difference between man and brute animals. In verse 8 he proceeds to prove his argument by saying, "For else," viz., if the destiny of man in general were only that he should labour for the satisfaction of his fleshly desires alone, "what preference has the wise man over the fool?" seeing that the latter knows often better how to labour and how to feed his body than the former. Consequently, the difference between the two must lie in the manner how they do feed their souls. That while the fool knows only how to labour physically, and how to fill his body with the fruits of his labour, the wise man, while he provides for his earthly subsistence, has also far nobler aspirations, and higher and spiritual desires of his soul to satisfy. Hence, there are poor but wise men who, though they be not able to treat their bodies with dainties like the rich, still are far nobler and richer than the former in the sentiments, actions, and aspirations of their souls, and in knowing better than the rich fool, "how to behave towards the living." The wise though poor man understands the spiritual wants of mankind, and knows how to fulfil his sacred duties towards his and their common Creator, and towards his fellow-men. His hunger and thirst is to instruct them and to elevate them as much as possible to the height of their destiny; and while he teaches others, his own soul is satisfied and filled with joy. Thus is the poor but wise man not only superior to the rich, but of

vastly more important service to humanity ; for while the rich may do good to the poor in time of need, and preserve their bodies from starvation, the poor but wise man may teach them (rich and poor) how to feed, enoble, elevate, and prepare their immortal souls for time as for an happy eternity. The reader will thus perceive that in verses 7 and 8 Solomon erected a bulwark against error, as if he had said, “ Let no man misunderstand me, and think that when I recommended the lawful enjoyment of earthly riches, and of the fruits of man’s labour, I meant to say that man should apply all the fruits of his labour, and all the riches which God bestowed on him, for the satisfaction of his belly, and leave his soul to starve—if so, then humanity would be a large horde of animals, there would be no distinction between the wise and the fool ; yea, the rich fool would in that case be superior to the poor but wise, virtuous and good man—when, therefore, I recommend the lawful enjoyment of temporal benefits which the Lord confers upon man, it was to be understood, that, above all, man must seek to feed his soul, do good with what God bestowed upon him, because he is a rational being with a never-dying soul : and thus while he enjoys earthly fruits of his labour he prepares treasures in heaven—at the very preparation of which his soul is nourished and invigorated, and spiritual riches, joy and felicity are thus laid up for her in eternity.”

In verse 9 the author complains of the mournful fact, that to blinded humanity, “ the sight of the eyes”—the visible objects of pleasure and earthly enjoyments, are more pleasant, more attractive than the “ exercise (or conversation, practice, sentiments) of the soul.” Man prefers naturally the visible things of this world which ravish the eye and attract the senses, to spiritual things—to the desires, sen-

timents, productions, and enjoyments of the soul—which must be felt but cannot be seen, and for the appreciation of which his understanding must first be trained and refined. It is this lamentable fact that is the cause that so many mortals abandon their souls to starvation, while they scrupulously feed their mortal bodies. This perversion in humanity, says Solomon, “is also vanity and vexation of spirit”—the vanity of this world is the source and reason of the evil, and alas eternal vexation of spirit is the gloomy result.

10. Whatever he be, he received his name long ago,
And it is known that he is Adam (dust from the
ground):
And that he dares not contend with one
That is mightier than himself.
11. Seeing there are many things that increase vanity,
What, then, is advantageous to man?
12. For who knoweth what may be good for man
During the few days of his vain life,
Which waste away like a shadow?
Or who can tell to a man
What shall be after him under the sun?

Whatever man be, rich or poor, wise or simple, covetous or liberal, pious or wicked, all these vicissitudes and differences of character and behaviour were indicated in the very name which he received long ago in Paradise—which name is *Adam*, signifying dust from the ground, the creature of the dust. As this name was given unto him by the All-wise Creator, it must well answer and be exactly adapted to designate his character; and so it is. He is dust, and, alas! his very soul cleaves to the dust. He is full of evil desires, of weakness, of frailties of every kind, all of which are the works and productions of the flesh of the law in his members (see Galat. v. 19—21).

This being the case, we need not seek long the source of so many sufferings and privations that exist among fallen humanity,—of violence and injustice, of oppression and persecution practised by mortal man against mortal man; for as soon as we remember the name given by the omniscient God to that frail creature—Adam, man of dust—we know the source of the whole disorder. Hence the mysterious clouds which envelope Jehovah's providence and dispensation of justice with regard to man, for there are many oppressors of the poor unto whom time is allowed to fill up the measure of wickedness for their condemnation, as their victims are allowed to suffer for a short time, and then be richly recompensed,—there are also many evil-doers to be punished even in this world, by gathering treasures for strangers, and heaping at the same time disease, trouble, and wrath upon themselves,—there are also good men, but being members of the weak race of Adam, and hence exposed to every sort of danger from enemies without and enemies within, the Great Physician sees it often fit to make them undergo severe operations, which certainly are very hard and bitter for flesh and blood, but are wholesome for their souls and for their eternal welfare, and the only means to keep them from falling, when, by the grace of God, they are able to stand. “Such a frail and exposed being,” says Solomon, “dares not contend with one that is mightier than he.” This may have a double reference; for, in the first place, it may contain the admonition repeated by the Apostle Paul, when he says, “Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? shall the thing formed say unto him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?” (Rom. ix. 20); and, in the second place, it teaches man that during the battle of this life, he must submit to superior force arrayed against him

by the violent passions of his fellow-mortals,—remember that they are Adam's dust and ashes, and governed by wicked passions, but that soon they must appear, along with him, before the great tribunal of heaven, where strict justice will be dispensed to both of them, and therefore let him commit his cause into the hands of his Creator and righteous Judge.

In the two last verses the same argument is pursued and illustrated—Seeing that there is such a multitude of things that increase man's vanity, and do him harm instead of good, be it riches, wisdom, honour, power, or any other thing, man very often and naturally abuses them, and when they had filled his weak head with an increase of vanity, he runs into extravagancies and destruction—seeing this to be the case, what then can be said definitively to be advantageous to man? Who knows if the poor and righteous man would be better off if he were rich? Who knows if the oppressed man would be better or worse than his oppressor, were their fortune the reverse of what it actually is? Who knows if the simple would be happier with possession of science? Would not this fill their heads with increased vanities, and bring about their ruin? Thus none can tell what would be good or best for this or that man during the few days of his life of vanity, which passes away like a shadow, nor is it less vain for man to occupy himself with things that should be after him on this perishing earth.

But while man's life is so short, and when once dead he has no business whatever with this valley of changes and troubles, nor any intelligence of earthly transactions, and while it is not for him, nor in his power, to know or occupy himself about things which shall happen after him under the sun, there is a world above of which mortal man should con-

tinually think, and for which he should prepare himself during the few days of his earthly existence. It is there and there alone where the frailties and privations and dangers indicated by his name (Adam) shall have no power, no dominion, over him, for there, are no such things that can increase his vanity and thus ruin him. There the domineering voice of the oppressor is no more heard of, and there man has not to contend with one stronger than himself. Ah, yes, among the things of this earth we cannot know which would have been advantageous for our soul in time and eternity, and therefore we should not murmur when it pleases God to deprive us of any thing; for these things might have ruined us, had He granted them unto us. But the gracious God has provided for us something precious, something always advantageous for us, something eternally glorious, something that does not belong to the rich and mighty, to the wise and learned alone, but also to the poor and simple, something that can never do us any harm, but always good, and this is Jesus Christ and His salvation, free grace and remission of sins by faith in Him and in His work, which was completely accomplished and prepared for us. Ah, let us therefore turn our eyes from perishing vanities, and apply all our energy and zeal to procure that blessed celestial gift of gifts. Have we found it, let us embrace it, press it to our hearts, watch over it carefully, rejoice in it continually, as in the only good, invaluable, and everlasting treasure which can console, cheer, and encourage us in this life under any circumstances, and which shall lead us, and abide with us, even when all the earthly elements shall have melted away with fervent heat, and when earthly scenes and transactions shall have rolled into eternal forgetfulness.

(CHAPTER VII. VER. 1.)

1. A good name is better than precious ointment,
And the day of death than the day of his birth.

The ointment so much used by the orientals in olden times, and which is so often spoken of in Scripture, was chemically prepared, and very odiferous, as we read in the Song of Solomon, "And the smell of thine ointments (is stronger) than all spices" (iv. 10.) This was used on solemn occasions for the head, and even for the clothes, as we read again in the same sacred song: "And the smell of thy garments is like the smell of Lebanon" (iv. 11). A good name, says Solomon, is better than precious ointment—it spreads further than does the ointment from one's body; for the latter is only felt in the proximity of the person anointed, while a good name has an eagle's wings, and spreads over hundreds of miles, and travels to distant countries. Moreover, while the odour of precious ointment is buried along with the individual that used it, a good name outlives the individual who merited it; for it is even after his death that he is most mentioned, and his departure lamented. Precious ointment, however much and often used in this life, doth neither accompany nor avail the man in eternity, but a good name, which implies an holy life of benevolence and piety, serves the man there, in the other world, more than it did here; for it is there only that he reaps the full fruits of his good works which procured that name unto him. Hence, that the day of death unto such an individual is better

than the day of *his* birth;* for whereas he was born in a state of sin unto trials and sufferings, he died reconciled to his Creator, and went to enjoy the ever glorious and eternal pleasures in the regions of light and unmingled happiness; while he was born in obscurity, he died to be generally and widely lamented, and is long remembered, by the living left behind, with a sigh of gratefulness.

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 may lay it to his heart.

The place of feasting and mirth may prove dangerous even to a good and pious man, for in the fulness of temporal enjoyments and pleasures he may easily forget that he is a mortal creature of only a few days' existence, and he may be exalted without measure, and even utter words heedlessly. The frequent repetition of days and nights of feasting and joy had proved so fatal to the royal author himself in his younger years, that the now deeply-repenting Solomon speaks from experience as well as by inspiration. Such was likewise the fear of the pious Job, who, after the feast days of his children were over, offered sacrifices for them to expiate sins which they might have committed in their exultation and joy. (Job. i. 4, 5.) It is quite the opposite with visiting the place of mourning, where the general and inevitable end of all men is exposed to the eyes of the visitors in its naked

* It is astonishing how translators could overlook the emphatic *his*, implied by the last ך in הַיּוֹלֵדוֹ (Hivoldo), which is the possessive pronoun, and emphatically implies "his birth," viz., of the good man who acquired the good name by his piety and benevolence !

reality; where death is unveiled, and where even the most hardened of sinners may be struck with the silent yet eloquent scene before him—may remember that to-morrow it may be his turn to represent the same scene—and thus he may lay it to his heart, and return unto the Lord, and gain the victory over death and its horrors. Conversions at the sight of death are by no means of rare occurrence, though, alas! the ruin of souls in places of feasting and mirth is by far more numerous.

3. Sorrow is better than laughter :

For by the sadness of countenance the heart is improved.

4. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning :

But the heart of fools in the house of mirth.

The serious state of mind produced by the sorrow and melancholy that accompany the scene of death, the sympathy awakened by the bereaved and mourning relations in the heart of the visitors, can never fail to do moral good to one or another of the latter. No argument is so strong, no advocate so eloquent, as the beholding of the corpse of a man well known to the spectators, and who recently lived and moved and had the choice of free action as they have it yet. Therefore it is that the heart and thought of the wise, who never forget their own nature and destiny, is in the house of mourning; that is to say, they constantly remember the destiny of man in general, and their own end in particular, and thus they seriously think about their preparation for the inevitable and important journey. Such being their chief occupation, they will seek to improve themselves by visiting the sick and dying, by witnessing the happy state of mind of those who fall asleep in the Lord. They will even gather instruction by

seeing the agonizing death of the ungodly ; in taking warning for themselves they will endeavour more ardently than ever to become wise unto salvation. Thus, while their countenances are covered with sadness at the scenes of sufferings, death, and mourning, their hearts improve more and more, and their preparations for death and eternity will be stripped of any fear or sorrow. The fools and wicked men, on the contrary, shut their eyes against the sight of death, and their ears against the melancholy voice of mourners, as if by so doing they could hide themselves from that un pitying visitor, and as if death was only visited where already there are the dead or mourners. In order to avoid the very thought of dying and death—in order to chase away the most distant idea of a visit paid to them by that very disagreeable guest, they bury themselves alive in the houses of wild mirth and mad jollity, where the brutish noises of drunkenness and blasphemy turn their heads for a while from beholding or thinking about the graves that are ready for their reception. But as death certainly finds them out at last, their end is terrible, and the horrid scenes of their death are a foretaste of hell which they courted, and of everlasting torments which they invited.

O Jehovah, our Lord, enable us to walk in the light of thy countenance, and thus when we shall have to pass through the dark valley of the shadow of death we shall fear no evil, for at thy light we shall pass through darkness into eternal bliss.

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

* We must understand this verse as if it were constructed in the following manner :

טוב לְאִישׁ שְׁמוֹעַ מִשְׁמוֹעַ

6. For as the crackling of thorns under a pot,
Such is the laughter of a fool :
This also is vanity.
7. For distraction maketh the wise man stagger,
And corrupteth the benevolent heart.*

When we are rebuked by the mouth of a wise man who is decidedly our spiritual friend, our vanity may be offended, flesh and blood may think to be injured, but our soul greatly improves by such lessons, and ultimately the benefits produced by that improvement will reflect even on our temporal happiness. The company of singing and merry fools, on the other hand, is pleasant and agreeable to our flesh, their jokes and profane songs cheer and animate our old Adam, but then our souls do suffer great injury, and the repeated sufferings of our souls reflect mightily upon our physical condition, and the health of body and soul may be ultimately ruined, when it be too late to become wiser and repair past destructions. The laughter and foolish merriment of the fools is compared by the experienced and wisest of all men to the crackling of thorns under the pot. When the thorns under the pot crackle, and seem to be merry and dancing, it is because a fire devours and consumes them from beneath and behind, and this their destruction produces that

* Distraction (or, disorder). Some understand here the meaning of *עֲשֵׂק* (Oshek), which among its other significations means also "distraction," as it signifies in Prov. xxviii. 17, where it appears as a Parti. Paoul: "a man distracted (in conscience) by the blood of a person," viz. by the guilt of murder. In Job xl. 23 it signifies disorder, "Behold he putteth a river into disorder," &c. In our verse it refers to distraction or disorder produced by merriment.

"A benevolent heart," this is the signification of *לֵב מְתַנְּה* (Lev Mattanah). So Prov. xix. 6, *אִישׁ מְתַן* (Ish Mattan) a benevolent man—or, a man that gives much.

seeming merry noise. When fools do sing and dance under the influence of drunkenness, a destructive fire burns in and under them at the same time; it consumes their spiritual welfare, and at last it proves desolation and destruction to their physical structure likewise.

But such distractions and violent merriments prove ruinous, not only to the habitual fool, but even to the wise man who begins to associate with such fools. In the beginning of such a dangerous career one is apt to call such things *innocent*, and to say half gravely and half smilingly, "O it is such an harmless amusement, the time passes by so agreeably—these men, these women, these actors, &c. &c. are so lively, so funny, so comical, the entertainment is so rich, that the time passes away like a moment, and one is really amused for his money." Ah poor victim! hast thou so much time to spare in this short life, that thou canst employ it no better than to consume it, and to make it crackle like the thorns on the fire? Ask thy soul for a moment what she feels after such a pretended harmless, but really destructive play? Is she ready to approach the throne of her Creator, and claim the fellowship of the Holy Spirit after thou hast swallowed such a large dish of fun, mockery, vanity, and madness? If not, then be sure you have swallowed a large doze of poison, which, though perhaps slow, is certain in its operation; repeat the doze, and the Lord have mercy upon thee. There will be a time—and it cannot be far off—when thou shalt regard as venomous and destructive the very things which thou callest now *innocent and harmless*; but will it not be too late?

"For distraction makes the wise man stagger," it bereaves him of his sound judgment, and makes uncertain his spiritual steps, "and corrupteth the

benevolent heart," destroys his sympathy with his own spiritual welfare as with those of his fellow-men, and mar his compassion for the poor and needy ones around him. Our life is so short, our days so few, that no really good and benevolent man will waste a moment, but precious employ it in the service of his God. And a man whose short time is too long, is his own witness that he is morally dead, and has no spiritual life in him.

8. Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof ;
Better is he who is of a patient spirit,
Than he who is of a haughty spirit.
9. Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry :
For anger resteth in the bosom of fools.

Every reasonable human action is planned, resolved upon, undertaken, and begun for a certain end and purpose. When do we see that a thing begun and proceeded well? when we see that it ended well, and answered the purpose for which it was begun. Hence it is on the end of a thing alone that the sentence of good can be pronounced, but not on the beginning of a thing. Any thing begun with a patient spirit of reflection and mature calculation, has a strong guarantee in its favour—a strong presumption that it will end well and answer its purpose. Any thing begun with a haughty and precipitate spirit, presages failure and ruin. A man given to unrestrained anger is a most unhappy being, for he cannot expect a good end of any thing; being precipitated and transported at the beginning, he acts at once without reflection; and such a man often draws misery upon himself, while had he waited for a calm moment to reflect before action, he would have avoided all. Ah, beloved patience, thou most valuable gift of heaven, thou pattern of

celestial serenity, of angelic action, had we a large portion of thee in our hearts, how many sorrows and griefs, and sighs, and tears, might we have averted from ourselves in this wilderness of errors! How many mighty billows which came over our heads would have been broken and assuaged at the bulwarks of thy counsels! O Lord, give us patience that the end of our career may answer the purpose of promoting Thy glory in the salvation of our souls.

10. Say not thou, What is the cause
That the former days were better than these?
For not by wisdom dost thou inquire concerning this.
11. Wisdom is as good as an inheritance,
And even preferable to those who see the sun ;
12. For under the shadow of wisdom
Is like under the shadow of silver :
And the progress made in attaining wisdom
Giveth (or "preserveth the") life to its possessors.

A man might have been, in his youth, the possessor of a large property, got by inheritance or otherwise, but which property he afterwards lost by misfortune ; or he might have been carried away captive unto a distant land, where he cannot reap any fruits of his property ; such a man has reason to say that his former days were better than the present. A man might also have had great riches in gold and silver, in his young years, but as riches "have wings like the eagle and the fowls of heaven," they might have left him to make their nest in another man's coffers ; such a bereaved man may also say that his former days were better than the present. Not so is it with the wise man whose sole possession from his early youth is wisdom which he cultivates—he cannot say that his former days were better than the present, for wisdom cannot diminish

with the progress of years ; nay, on the contrary, it increases daily, and the wise man's possessions grow continually with every day and period of his life.

“ Say not then, What is the cause that former days were better than these ? for not by wisdom (or, not out of wisdom) dost thou inquire concerning this.” That is to say, in the very putting of that question man shows that his profession is and was not wisdom, and that he never cherished wisdom above all earthly and vanishing riches and possessions. It may, therefore, be considered as if Solomon had said, “ O thou man who dost inquire the cause and reason why thy former days were better than these ? the cause and reason is, because thou didst not make wisdom and wisdom alone thy profession and possession from thy youth—thou mayst have put thy trust in riches, which were stolen from thee, or which thou hast otherwise lost—thou mayest have boasted of and gloried in possessions which were taken from thee, as is very often the case ; but hadst thou made wisdom thy profession, thy boast, and thy glory, thou wouldst not have had reason now to complain.” “ Wisdom is as good as an inheritance (or property), and even preferable to those who see the sun,” viz., the wise man, who has eyes in his head and knows the preference of light to darkness, can also appreciate the preference of wisdom above any earthly property. “ For under the shadow of wisdom is like under the shadow of silver,” viz., even in a pecuniary and earthly point of view is the protection and support of wisdom as strong and as certain as that of silver. But while property and silver have the defect of being subject to be lost in various circumstances and misfortunes, and thus often leave their former possessors in abject misery in their old age ; wisdom is not so, for “ the progress made in attaining wisdom giveth life to its posses-

sors," or "the more the knowledge of wisdom increases, the more it increases the life of its possessors." Wisdom cannot be lost, cannot be taken away by force, cannot be stolen by thieves, cannot diminish in value. The possessor of wisdom cannot be carried away captive into a distant land, far away from his riches and possessions, for he carries them with him in his heart whithersoever he goes. It is therefore impossible for a really wise man (who prefers wisdom to all worldly vanities) to say that his former days were better than the present, for his profession, his riches and possessions are of a continually progressing nature, and not subject to loss, or decay, or change.

Be it now observed that the *wisdom* of which Solomon speaks here is not that hollow skeleton of worldly wisdom and of human speculations, a sort of wisdom which often makes man miserable (when not directed into a right channel), and shows him in his advanced age that he was grasping at the wind all the days of his life. No: *Wisdom* here means that blessed wisdom and knowledge that make man wise unto salvation; that make him rich and happy in time and in eternity. This wisdom is the same of which Solomon speaks elsewhere, saying, "Happy is the man that findeth wisdom. . . . For her merchandise is better than that of silver, and her gain than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies, and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her. Length of days is in her right hand, and in her left hand riches and honour. . . . She is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her, and happy is every one that retaineth her." (Prov. iii. 13—18.) This is the wisdom—the celestial and blessed wisdom of revealed religion that lifts man above the vanities of this world, shows him the nothingness and perishing nature of

earthly treasures and possessions, and teaches him how to lay up everlasting treasures in heaven, where the thief cannot steal nor the moth devour. Such a wise man, who makes daily and continual progress towards holiness and perfection, will never say that former days were better than the present, for his invaluable treasures increase daily. Should even such a man have once possessed all the perishing riches of this world and lost them again, if he found the salvation of his never-dying soul in Him who was rich and became poor for his sake—who left the bosom and glory of His Father in heaven, and came down to save sinners on the cross, he will neither murmur nor lament at any earthly loss. Such a man of God will always consider every perishing thing as dross when compared with the invaluable and everlasting treasures which he gained in becoming the joint-heir with Christ Jesus, the son of God, unto whom all power was given in heaven and on earth. His language will never be in his mouth “I was rich and now I am poor,” but “I was poor and needy, and now I am rich; I was miserable and lost, and now I am the privileged child of the Most High God; heaven is open to receive me into eternal rest, and a crown of glory awaits me in the regions of inexpressible joy and unchanging felicity.”

But Solomon seems to have hidden another and most important consideration in the above passage, viz. that even a wise man who began to run well in the career of wisdom and eternal happiness, may, by his own fault, destroy the brilliant prospect before him, and replunge himself into his natural and former misery. And in this respect he may make allusion to his own deep and still bleeding wounds; for he fell from the climax of glory and honour, from the highest and surest prospects of eternal happiness, into a frightful depth of confusion and

moral misery—not by his wisdom, certainly not, but by his own folly in having left the high road of wisdom and gone astray in the wilderness of this world's vanities. If he, or such like men, should ask, "What is the cause that former days were better than the present?" the answer would surely be that wisdom was not the cause of that lamentable change, but that it was folly that caused it—that while, had they persevered in their good course, wisdom would have led them on from strength to strength, from victory to victory, and from happiness to happiness, their own folly, neglect, and unwatchfulness formed a partition wall between them and progress, between them and peace, between them and the way to everlasting joy and felicity—that it was therefore their own fault, and not that of wisdom; for she is "a tree of life to them that lay hold on her; and (eternally) happy is every one that retaineth her." But this point is more fully explained in the two following verses.

13. Consider the work of God—
 For who can make straight
 That which he (man) hath made crooked?—
14. In the day of prosperity be joyful,
 But in the day of adversity consider that
 God hath arranged the one over against the other,
 To the end that man should find nothing after him.

If the wise and good man does experience a great and painful change in his career, if days of adversity follow after days of prosperity and happiness, he must seek the cause of that change in himself, and not in God's arrangement of providence, and not say "God would have it so that sufferings should follow prosperity;" for God is good, and His ways are perfect, and His works stable and not liable to change. "Consider the work of God," viz., that it

is a perfect work, a well-finished, well-ordained, and unchangeable work. If thou findest thyself in adversity after prosperity, remember it is through thine own fault, because thou art an unstable and changeable creature, and because thou canst not make straight again that which thou thyself didst make crooked, it is therefore thy folly, thy sins, thy many inventions, that thou shouldst complain of, and not of the arrangements of God, which are all good and perfect. "In the day of prosperity be joyful," seeing thou hast found out the way of life and of real happiness, "but in the day of adversity" murmur not against God's providence, as if He had brought these sufferings upon thee, but "consider that God hath arranged the one (misery) over against the other" (happiness)—remember that God hath set before thee the blessing and the curse, the way of life and the way of death, the good and the evil, and told thee again and again, and invited thee and advised thee to choose the good, the blessing, and the life. (Deut. xi. 26—32; xxx. 15—20). When, therefore, thou didst choose the good thou wast happy and joyful, but when thou hast neglected thy choice, when thy steps slipped from the way of life and happiness, thou didst find misery and suffering. So the Lord told thee beforehand, and so He unchangeably arranged the one over against the other, and left thee to thy free will and choice, "to the end that man should find nothing after him" (or against him), viz., that man should neither be able to alter anything of the Lord's arrangements, nor find any reason to complain against them. "Let, therefore, God be true, but every man a liar, as it is written, that thou mightest be justified in thy sayings, and mightest be overcome when thou art judged." (Rom. iii. 4.)

Such seems, in our humble opinion, to be the

meaning and substance of these two verses, and we would only add that the phrase in verse 13, "Consider the work of God," must be taken together with the phrase in verse 14, which reads "Consider that God hath set the one over against the other," and which have only been separated to introduce the explanatory phrases.

15. All this have I seen in the days of my vanity :
 There is a just man that perisheth in his righteousness,
 And there is a wicked man that liveth long in his wickedness.
16. Be thou not righteous over-much,
 Neither make thyself over-wise ;
 For why should'st thou destroy thyself ?
17. Be not over-much wicked, nor be thou foolish :
 For why shouldst thou die before thy time ?
18. It is good that thou shouldst take hold of the one,
 And then shall thine hand not withdraw from the other :
 For he that feareth God shall escape both (evils).

In verses 10—14 of this chapter, Solomon shewed us how that even a wise and good man may check his prosperous and peaceful career, and bring sufferings upon himself in his advanced age, by falling off from the principles and sentiments of wisdom which he practised in his younger years. In such a case Solomon advised the victim of his own folly not to accuse Providence or wisdom, as if they were the reason of the reversion of his fortune, but to enter into himself, and to seek and to find the cause of the change of his fortune in the change of his former practice and life ; also that God in His revealed law of wisdom had set these alternatives before man, viz., godliness and obedience with prosperity and peace, disobedience and folly with suf-

ferings, ruin, and death as the necessary consequences. But in the passage before us a new scene of vicissitudes, sufferings, and ultimate ruin is introduced to our consideration, not as emanating from the complete backsliding of a once wise and good man, but as issuing from an over-running of the mark set before us in the law of God, from excess and extravagance produced by fanaticism, and which is not less ruinous, even with respect to this life, than complete backsliding and sheer wickedness.

Solomon observed during the days of his vanity, during his short life on earth, which was perplexed because of the vanities of this world, and during his study of the lot and concerns of fallen humanity, that not only a man may ruin himself by backsliding from the way of life, and by falling into the practice of wickedness and sin, but also that there may happen that "a just man perish in his righteousness." How is this possible? will naturally be the question suggested by that statement. The Apostle Paul tells us regarding blinded Israel that though they "followed after the law of righteousness" they have not attained it, "because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the work of the law." (Rom. ix. 31, 32.) Again, "For I bear them record, that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God." (Rom. x. 2, 3.) Here we have already an awful example of men who are strong believers in God, and zealous pursuers after righteousness, but who nevertheless never attain the righteousness of God, and perish—eternally perish!—in *their own righteousness*, which availeth them neither in time nor in eternity. The case which Solomon introduces in

the above passage differs somewhat in form from that just quoted, while the deplorable consequences are the same in a spiritual point of view, though far worse in a temporal point of view. The just man whom Solomon saw perishing in his righteousness, is an individual who began his religious career in conformity to the law of righteousness (by faith which produces charity, and has the promise of God's righteousness), but who fell into error of self-deceit and self-esteem, and began to endeavour to outdo the law of God, to be more righteous in works and ceremonies than the revealed will of God requires him to be. Thus falling into extravagances, and subjecting himself to fanatical austerities, and privations of his own invention, he puts a rapid end to his embittered and miserable life, which act, far from being a merit, is an outrageous crime. That Solomon means here fanatical extravagance, we may learn from verse 16, where he warns others not to be righteous *overmuch*. This expression shows that he means excess, and a righteousness invented by fanaticism, a pharisaical righteousness, which consists in fastings and lustrations, austerities and violations to the body, while it usually neglects the righteousness of God, and forgets that the Lord requires mercy and not the sacrifices of fools—faith in His free grace, and not in the rags of human works. To that body and soul-killing fanatic, Solomon opposes a wicked man, who, though living in sin, and feeding on the toil of the poor, runs to no extravagances in his lawless life, uses the mammon of unrighteousness in moderation, and who, though he neglects his soul, and exposes it to the severe judgment of an holy and righteous God, still preserves his body from being injured by the excess of sin. Though in the world to come their lot and

place will be the same, the deluded fanatic loses in this world to no purpose what the other gains.

Scott in his Commentary is very explicit on this passage, and I cannot help quoting the following lines, "A man may be too tenacious of insignificant forms or human inventions; he may pretend to kinds and degrees of righteousness, which the Scriptures do not require, laying much stress on celibacy, fastings, and other austerities: his boldness and zeal may verge towards rashness and rage; his conscientiousness may degenerate into superstition and scrupulousness; his benevolence into indiscretion and indiscriminate profusion; and his candour and good nature into folly; and in affecting to be acquainted with the whole of divine truth, he may become presumptuously curious, and intrude into unrevealed things. Thus many run into extremes, and expose themselves to needless persecution or to the anger of God." (Here we would add, to a needless life of suffering and misery and privations; hence to an untimely death; hence to the wrath of God.) "That the affectation or ostentation of extraordinary righteousness, or an overdoing in outward observances, while more essential matters were proportionally neglected, was intended, and not humble purity and zeal, seems evident from the caution to the reader not to make himself overwise, that is, 'Be not wise in thine own conceit;' or do not intrude into secret things which belong to God. Here affectation or excess in some particulars must be meant, and so doubtless in the other clause." (Scott's Com. on Ecclesiastes.)

Such, then, is the character painted by Solomon in verse 15. It is a man who began to be just in pursuing the way of righteousness, as required by the law of God, but who, through human specula-

tions and false inventions, fell into fanatical extravagances, in foolishly seeking to be more righteous than the revealed law of righteousness demands from fallen and sinful man. This being no less impossible than absurd and daring, he falls into the usual error, in neglecting essential things, in putting in himself his confidence, and not in the spirit of God, in thinking he can by his own inventions arrive at perfection, and in materialising the process of sanctification. He puts himself under the pressure of foolish observances, fastings, austerities, and mortifications of human fabrication, he outrages and destroys his body, brings useless sufferings and diseases upon himself, and at last dies a victim to his own folly. His lot in eternity cannot be envied, for the Lord gave His holy laws of righteousness unto man in order that he should do them and "live by them," and a suicide through fanaticism cannot have any advantage over a suicide by iniquity and sin. At the sametime, Solomon says that there may be a wicked man, who, living in moderation, prolongs his career, viz., preserves his physical frame from suffering from the extravagance and excess of sin, and from an untimely death. The judgment of these two different characters may be delayed (for a mysterious purpose in Providence), for another world, but in this world it is desolating to see that the man who began to run in the way of justice and righteousness fell so deep as to apply all his energy to lose the righteousness of God, to remove the foundation of the salvation of his soul, and thus ruin it eternally, nay more, to destroy his body, and to cut off his earthly existence for no purpose; while the wicked man, living in moderation, far outlives the former, and prolongs the career of his wickedness. To outward appearance, to men who are either without religion, or who are short-

sighted enough not to distinguish between a mere mask of piety and the practice of a real child of God, the lot of the above two individuals in this world may offer a stumbling block, and they may say, "why is it that this righteous man perished in the very act of seeking righteousness, and that this wicked man lives so long in his wickedness?" But he that knows the ways of God and the law of His righteousness, sees clearly that the fanatic perished not in seeking the Lord's righteousness, but in seeking to establish his own righteousness in a manner which not only the Lord has never commanded, but directly against His law, while the wicked man, whose judgment is delayed for another world, prolongs his existence in this, by moderation.

Upon the indication of the existence of such characters follows the warning to others—"Be thou not righteous overmuch;" do not run out into extremes in seeking the law of righteousness, nor into madness in thy fanatic inventions. "Neither make thyself overwise," viz., in thine own conceits, by forging fasts, false ceremonies, and austerities of thine own invention, and thus seek to establish a righteousness of thine own wisdom, while doing violence to the word of revelation and rejecting the wisdom of God. "For why shouldst thou destroy thyself?"—destroy thyself in time and eternity, destroy thy body and destroy thy soul; for thou shalt not only die a violent death, but also thou shalt be found a liar and a suicide before the tribunal of heaven—mortal men thou mayest deceive, and by thine outward appearance they may think thee an extraordinary just man, who does even more than the Lord commanded, but there thou shalt find that thy extravagances are no less abomination in the sight of the Almighty and righteous Jehovah than

sin and iniquity. At the same time the wicked but moderate man is recommended, not as regards his character, his spiritual condition, or the severe judgment of God, which must overtake him sooner or later, but as regards his earthly existence and his moderation in life. "Be not overmuch wicked, neither be thou foolish: for why shouldst thou die before thy time?" Let it now be observed that unto the extravagant fanatic Solomon says, "Thou destroyest thyself," viz., by making efforts of thine own invention, instead of gaining, instead of adding to thy righteousness, instead of growing *in grace*, thou destroyest thy good career—destroyest what thou hast already gained by the favour of God, and the rags of thine own righteousness shall prove destructive to thee in time and eternity. But to the wicked, extravagant, and to the outrageous votary of iniquity, Solomon says, "Why shouldst thou die before thy time?" viz., having such a gloomy prospect before thee of an exhaustless ocean of sufferings and misery in eternity, why dost thou hasten towards it with rapid steps, by shortening thine earthly existence by extravagance of sin and crime, as debauchery and drunkenness? &c. Thus we have a clear indication that extravagances and excesses under the false cloak of righteousness are as destructive and ruinous even in this world, and in a temporal sense, as is extreme iniquity or outrageous debauchery. Both are of a nature to shorten life, to bring miseries and sufferings and an untimely death upon those who are given to their practice. In hell alone the extravagant fanatic and the pharisaical hypocrite will experience what he would not believe here—namely, that adding to the laws and revealed will of an holy and jealous God, is equally abominable in His sight, and condemnable at His judgment, as is diminishing or

breaking His laws; and that a suicide produced gradually by human extravagances, as austerities, barbarous fasts, flagellations, and the like, is no less a crime than the suicide committed by swallowing poison, by hanging oneself, or by blowing out his brains with a pistol.

Having told us the dismal consequences of the two opposite excesses, both of which produce destruction, Solomon adds, in verse 18, "It is good that thou shouldst take hold of the one," viz., of the one precept, which is not to add to the revealed will of God, and not to seek another righteousness than that which He demands from us. In so doing we shall escape the danger of losing ourselves in a labyrinth of excess and fanatical extravagances, from violent destruction of our bodies, and from an unexpected condemnation of our souls. But at the same time, if we lay hold on the law of God as the only rule of our life, then shall our hand not withdraw from the other precept, which is not to plunge ourselves into the whirl of sins, and thus ruin our souls, and bring a rapid end upon our lives. "For he that feareth God will escape both," viz., both dangers of destruction. He that takes hold on the fear of the Lord keeps strictly to His commandments, which are a light to our feet and a lamp to our path. The fear of God teaches man how to enjoy the gifts of God in moderation and thanksgiving, and neither to abstain from the use of them, nor abuse them to his ruin. The fear of the Lord will preserve man from adding ought to the word of God, and, on the other hand, from taking away from it, and thus from being the victim of superstition and fanaticism, from the seduction of evil spirits and from doctrines of devils, as those of celibacy, abstaining from meats, fasts, and flagellations, &c., &c., all of which persuade man to aban-

don the law of righteousness which is from God, and to seek righteousness and salvation in himself. But the fear of God also preserves man from all the degrees of crime, from the hardening influence of sin, and from body and soul-devouring iniquities. "The fear of the Lord is the principal part of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction." (Prov. i. 7.) "Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the Lord and depart from evil." (iii. 7.)

19. The wisdom giveth more strength to the wise
 Than ten governors who are in a city :
20. Though there is not a just man upon earth,
 That doeth good and never sinneth.
21. Give not, therefore, thine heart to all things which
 are spoken,
 Lest thou hear thy servant curse thee :
22. For oftentimes thine heart also knoweth
 That thou likewise didst curse others.

"The wisdom" spoken of in verse 19 is the wisdom of God, which enlightens the hearts and souls of His children, and of which wisdom Solomon often spoke in this book. It is, therefore, in the original text חֵכְמָה (Hachochmach), "The wisdom," with the emphatic definite article. This wisdom giveth more strength (or "affordeth a better defence") to the wise; shelters him better against sufferings and temptations, against sins and transgressions, against violence and extravagance, against disease and an untimely death, than ten governors that are appointed to defend a city against enemies. The man who is ruled by the fear of God, who arranges all his affairs, and regulates all his actions by, and according to, the instructions of the wisdom of God, is under the protection of Omnipotence, and has nothing to fear. He hath more guardian angels to

watch over him, to protect and shelter him against temporal and spiritual enemies, against attacks from without, and attacks within his own heart, than are the number of those that are against him. His tabernacle of flesh, and his soul dwelling within it, are, therefore, more secure than a city guarded and defended by the counsels and military forces of many governors; for if the Lord doth not guard a city and watch over it, then the watchmen watch in vain. Though we are but frail and changing creatures, though we are surrounded by temptations and snares, and often enough commit faults, and though there be not a man on earth who lives strictly according to the wisdom, love, fear, and revealed will of God, without committing sins and errors, still if we are the children of God, if we sacrifice our will to His will, if we are resolved to live according to His precepts, and to observe strictly, as much as is within us, the maxims of His revealed wisdom, He will bear even with our infirmities, and afford us counsel and strength even in our frailties. If our lives are hid with God in Christ, and if we still commit sin by our infirmities, then we have a mighty and eloquent advocate with the Father of souls, who is willing to pardon penitent sinners at all times. "He has not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward them that fear Him." (Ps. ciii. 10, 11.)

Seeing that the righteous and holy Judge exercises so much patience, long-suffering, and forgiveness, even with the best of men, who, if put upon the balance of Heaven's justice, could not stand for a moment, how much patience, therefore, and forbearance should not we exercise towards our fellow-men who sin against us? If man sins even against

the best of men, he sins only against a sinner, who in his turn has often done the same injustice to others. But man sins against an holy God, who is perfect in righteousness, love, light, and justice in all His ways, and even that God still pardons, still forbears, how then should we bear hatred and breed vengeance against our fellow-mortals, fellow-sinners that offend us? This argument is developed in verses 21 and 22—"Give not, therefore, thine heart to all things which are spoken, lest thou hear thy servant curse thee," viz., be not eager to hear thyself, or to have spies to record unto thee every word that might be spoken against thee; take not up such words as a reason of quarrel or revenge; for once carried away by anger and vengeance, behold temptation and sin at thy door. Solomon says here "thy servants," but speaking the language of a monarch, he must mean "thy subordinates." However just we intend and think to be in the treatment of those depending on us; however we may manage our affairs in equity and justice, we may always expect that discontented men will be found that will speak against us—nay and the best and most faithful of mortal servants may sometimes find, or think to have found, reason of discontentment and murmuring against the best and most conscientious of masters; and time alone and calm reflection can put aright such differences and grievances, while to take up the subject at the moment of irritation, the spark will break out into a raging flame, and a generous master and a faithful servant will separate eternal enemies, and the loss to both may never be restored. If there are unjust and discontented beings who murmur against Jehovah, the fountain of love and justice, should we, frail and erring creatures, expect that all mortals would approve of our actions? No; the only comfort and

consolation of wise and generous men must rest in God, who alone can see the sentiments of their hearts and the motives of their actions. But with respect to man let us never expect a general approval and applause even for the best of our operations. If we hear that the one or the other of our fellow-men speaks against us and does injury to the best of our motives, let us remember how that we ourselves, in our weakness and short sightedness, are apt to do the same injury to others, and to judge unfavourably of some of their actions, which, notwithstanding, may be done with the best of intentions. Let us, therefore, endeavour and learn to pardon all things rather than bear any hatred in our hearts. Instead of thinking of revenge, let us exercise *charity*, which suffereth long and is kind, which seeketh not her own, and which is not easily provoked, and which never faileth to produce the precious fruits of peace and joy in our hearts and souls.

23. All these things have I proved by wisdom :
When I said I will be wise ;
Behold it, was far from me.
24. Far off is that which hath been,
And exceedingly deep, O who can find it ?

Whilst the penitent and broken-hearted Solomon teaches wisdom and gives precepts to others, he remembers how dearly he paid for these lessons himself. He was not one of those doctors who give advice and make exhortations from mere theory or by the experience of others. No, he suffered personally, he saw the source of his afflictions and disappointments, and the remedies which he now recommends to others he had successfully applied to his own wound, and found them permanently effi-

cacious. Solomon had proved everything by the wisdom of God, that is to say, when led astray by the vanities of this world to commit an error which brought sufferings and temptations upon him, he soon laid his action upon the balance of the wisdom of God, and found it wanting. He then saw clearly that the reason of his failures and of his sufferings was a backsliding, a nonconformity to the precepts of heaven's wisdom. But seeing that for him it had been already too late to undo what was done, he could only make conclusions for others, and tell them by experience that the wisdom of God should be a counsellor to man *before* any action was undertaken, and not after, when it is too late to mend. With him, alas! it was not so; for thinking himself wise enough, and his reason sufficient to conduct him in all his affairs, he did not say, "Let me first go to the wisdom of God, and see if it approves of my undertaking," but he did say, "I will be wise, every thing that I undertake must be good, must prosper; for I am wisdom myself, and the teacher of wisdom, and none of my actions can be wrong." Thus he was led astray, thus he fell, thus he soon found himself in a frightful depth of disappointment, sufferings, and ruin, the reasons of which he could find when examining his actions by the touchstone of Jehovah's wisdom, but the existence of which he could not blot out; for it was too late. He then saw that though the Lord himself promised him that he should be the wisest of men, still He did not say that he shall be as wise as God, and as His revealed wisdom; nor had he a promise of infallibility. On the contrary the Lord warned him twice that with all his human wisdom he should keep close to the precepts of the wisdom of God and His law. Hence it was that when Solomon said "I will be wise," then wisdom "was far from him;"

for his promised wisdom was to be subject to and directed by the wisdom of God. His exhortations, therefore, to his fellow-men are of another nature than were his actions, for he now advises man not to venture on a single step without examining it beforehand and seeing that it is sanctioned and recommended by the Source of all wisdom and justice in His revealed will. After the humble confession made by Solomon of his errors (in verse 23) he vehemently exclaims (verse 24), "Far off is that which hath been, and exceedingly deep, O who can find it?" that is, the errors and follies which he had committed in his youth, by thinking himself wise enough and independent of the law of God, were now too far, too deep to be remedied—once done, it now remained for him to bear their fatal consequences on a deeply wounded breast, without being able to bring back and undo even the least of his unfortunate actions, and without any other remedy than a broken heart, a contrite spirit, sighs and tears, which the Lord of mercy never despises. As for others, he warns them, in the name of God and His revealed wisdom, to keep themselves from tumbling into the like snares, by depending on their own wisdom, and that if they stood they should take care not to fall.

25. When I and my heart turned around,
To know, and to search, and to find out wisdom and
calculation :
And to know the wickedness of folly,
And the madness of foolish actions :
26. Then I found more bitter than death
The woman whose heart is snares and nets,
And whose hands are chains ;
Whoso pleaseth God shall escape from her ;
But the sinner shall be taken by her.

The expression used by Solomon in verse 25, "When I and my heart turned around," is one of the many phrases peculiar to Solomon in this book, and which cannot be advantageously rendered in any other language, unless by making digressions from the text. The meaning of this phrase is that the aged and repenting sinner turned round from the present to examine the past. He turned round to look through the pages of his past history—he opened *his own heart* to consider its past ambitions and desires, which had led him so far astray. By the light of God's wisdom he tried every one of his past actions, in order to find out which of them contributed the most to his sufferings, disappointments, and estrangement from his God. He set himself to search and find out the wickedness of folly, and how far it is dangerous to man's spiritual welfare—to know and calculate the madness of mere foolish actions, which may seem harmless to the man that is overtaken by the desires and will of the flesh, but which are poisonous and fatal in their consequences. He then found out that none of his foolish desires and actions proved so ruinous to him as his matrimonial alliances with so many wicked and idolatrous women: for these had proved the worst and most ruinous snares and nets to his soul, in leading him astray from God, even so far as to gross idolatry. If the favour of the living God is better and more valuable to a never-dying soul than earthly life, surely, then, the accursed objects and desires which lead us astray from God, and cause us the incomparable loss of His favour, are "more bitter than death." The free grace of God alone can preserve us from these fearful snares. No fallen man has a weapon strong enough to defend himself against the mortal enemies of his own heart, unless he keeps close to God, puts on the whole armour of faith, and watches incessantly and prayerfully.

27. Behold this have I found (saith Koheleth),
 Take one to one, in order to obtain the number :
28. Because my soul desired more, therefore I found none :
 A man among a thousand have I found ;
 But a woman among all these have I not found.
29. Behold, this only have I found out,
 That God hath made man upright,
 But they have sought out many inventions.

When the omniscient and benevolent Creator made man after His own image, and placed him in Paradise, He said with regard to him, "It is not good for Adam (man) to be alone, I will make him an help meet for him." An help means one—one woman to one man. The woman having been created and brought to Adam, and the latter having expressed his entire satisfaction in the help meet for him, then followed the Lord's precept, which says, "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his (one) wife: and they (viz., the one man and the one woman) shall be one flesh." If man was not a complete social and happy being when alone, this completion was obtained when he got an help meet for him in the one woman. This mate and partner was completely adapted for man, not only in Paradise but even out of it after his fall, to complete his happiness, to sweeten the bitter portion of his earthly existence, to bear with him every burden in life, to share his sorrows and pleasures, to bear with each other's infirmities, to counsel each other in time of trial, to be united in every point, in mind, resolution, and action; in short, to be like one creature. This golden band is entirely loosed or broken as soon as the woman ceases to be *one to one*, for *two to one* can never be equal. The plurality of women to one man can never answer the purpose of the blessing pronounced by God at the creation of man, and must be counted as one of the greatest curses resulting

from the fall. Two or five women can never be the intended help for one man, as their hearts and affections can never be united; jealousy and rivalry destroy every bond of union and love. Instead of proving an help meet for him, a plurality of women procures unto man quarrels and disorders, sorrow and grief, which embitter his life and destroy his peace.

Our Lord's argument against the Pharisees as recorded in Matth. xix., speaks to the same purpose, and though the chief question there was about divorce, still it seems evident that it has the same force, and was intended also to stand against polygamy. "Have ye not read that he who made them at the beginning made them male and female, and said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What, therefore, God hath joined together, let not man put asunder." Here we see also clearly that the Lord intended that *one and one*—one man and one woman should be united into *one* flesh, and become as it were one inseparable creature—a thing impossible with the practice of polygamy.

This is what Solomon found out, not by theory only, but also by lamentable practice. Instead of choosing one wife as an help meet for him, to complete his existence and his happiness, instead of so doing, he took to himself a thousand women of different nations, climates, manners, tempers, languages, and religions. Instead, therefore, of finding that enormous number an help meet for him, he found it an hell meet to disturb his peace and destroy his soul. He was confused and confounded by their many quarrels and jealous disputes. Their reciprocal hatred turned naturally against him who

was the chief cause of producing it, by collecting so many rivals together. He disturbed their peace indirectly, and he was directly disturbed in turn. In seeking and endeavouring to gain the hearts and affections of some of his queens, he lost his own heart among them, but never could attach one of these hearts completely to himself so long as it had 999 rivals to fear and hate. But in endeavouring to gain the affections of many women at once, he was also involved in their dreadful snares and nets, by sacrificing to that useless attempt the love and fear of the God of his father David, by which he brought the wrath of a provoked God upon himself; and while he gained nothing of what he sought, he received a thundering message from heaven by the prophet of God, that his backsliding and infidelity would cost him the loss of the crown and throne of ten tribes of Israel.

In the above passage Solomon gives us the result of his dearly acquired experience. "Behold, this have I found, saith Koheleth" (or "the man who speaks in the name of experienced wisdom," see Introduction). "One to one, in order to obtain the number," viz., let *one* man take *one* wife, in order to obtain the number *one*, that is to say, to be no more *twain*, but one united body, and one flesh. "Because my soul desired more," (or, "Because my desire sought more,") "therefore I found none," viz., because I desired a thousand helps instead of one, therefore I found none. "A man among a thousand have I found." This, we think, may refer to himself, describing how that he went about with a truly open and affectionate heart, seeking among his thousand women one worthy of it, on whom he could centre all his affections, and whom alone he could consider as a real help meet for him. But the very fact of them being a thousand against one

man, suspicion and jealousy so bewildered them that there was not one among them ready or fit to meet him with a whole heart, and to cast herself into his arms without the reserve of suspicion, without a feeling of hurt pride and jealousy. But Solomon may also refer here to the thousands of his courtiers, princes, confidants, and officers, among whom he found some who faithfully and entirely attached themselves to his person, and served him with love and fidelity, while among his thousand women he could not name one entirely his.

The chief reason of the above confusion Solomon gives in verse 29, which is, that whilst God hath made man upright (or perfect), while He hath fully provided for man's happiness, fallen man is not satisfied with heaven's arrangement, and in desiring and seeking more than was appointed for him to perfect his existence, he forfeits and loses all by his own folly. This truth stands fast not only with respect to woman, that if fallen man seeks more than one to one, he will be sadly disappointed, but even with respect to any earthly possession, if man be not pleased with the portion that Providence assigned for him, but seeks more by the aid of his own inventions, he will certainly be deprived of every comfort which heaven's *little* would have afforded him. "He that hath not (enough in what God gave him) shall have taken from him all that he has."

(CHAPTER VIII. VER. 1.)

1. Who is like the wise man?
And who knoweth the interpretation of a thing?

A man's wisdom maketh his face to shine,
And changeth the boldness of his countenance.

In the foregoing chapter much was spoken of a wise man who possesses the wisdom of God, and about the advantages that such a man derives from his knowledge if he regulate all his affairs according to its infallible precepts. It was also stated that the wise man, and he alone, can see the reasons of all the changes and disappointments which he may experience during the voyage of life, and the means were pointed out how to avoid them. In the present chapter, Solomon introduces again the same subject, saying, "Who is like the wise man? And who (like him) knoweth the interpretation of a thing?" Who like the wise man knows how to behave in time of prosperity? Who knows, like him, how to find consolation in times of adversity? Who, like him, knows the way of true happiness in time and eternity? And who knows, as well as he, how to interpret the oracles of the living God, and how to draw with joy the refreshing and invigorating waters out of the wells of salvation? "A man's wisdom maketh his face to shine," as well in days of reverses and trouble, as in days of happiness and prosperity, for knowing the fragility and shortness of this life, and that he has here no abiding city, he directs his eyes towards eternity, and concentrates all his consolations and hopes in the foretaste of unchanging peace and felicity in a world to come. The wisdom of a man also "changeth the boldness of his countenance," removes from it that which by nature is rough and sad, and bestows on him softness of character and sweetness of expression; his look is cheerful and comforting, and his consolations like balm to a wound. He is not arrogant nor unapproachable in time of prosperity and

power ; he is not gloomy nor irritated in time of adversity and suffering ; for his wisdom (or rather the wisdom of God in him) teaches him that neither the sweets nor the bitter of this world are of any long duration, and hence that changes in life cannot be of any great consequence to a never-dying soul.

2. I tell thee, observe the king's commandments,
And that in the manner of an oath before God.
3. Dread not his countenance as thou walkest :
Nor persist thou in an evil matter ;
For He doeth whatsoever pleaseth Him.
4. Where there is the king's word there is power ;
And who may say unto Him, What doest thou ?

In chap. v. and verse 2d of this book Solomon said, "Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter anything before God, for God is in heaven and thou on earth, let, therefore, thy words be few." In the same chapter he warns man not to bind himself hastily by an oath ; but when he had done so then he should make haste to fulfil it, and thus escape the anger of God. In the passage before us such like warnings are renewed, and in verse 2d we are told that not only should we hasten to fulfil the will of God when we have bound ourselves by a special oath to do so, but that every commandment of the Lord is equally binding on us as if we had undertaken it by a special oath before God—that, therefore, we should hasten to fulfil every commandment and observe scrupulously every precept, without delay and without excuse. In verse 3d we are told that in fulfilling Jehovah's commandments and in walking in his ways we must not do so with a slavish fear, out of dread for the severe punishment which would otherwise overtake us, but that we should obey our God with filial cheerfulness, serve Him and fulfil his revealed will

in a spirit of pure love and happy devotion, and praise His holy name, because He alone is worthy of our adoring praise, because He is holy, just, merciful, and benevolent, and because He is good, and his goodness endures for ever. This cheerfulness, fearlessness, and happiness in the service of God is acquired by the wise man introduced in verse 1, who, as he knows the interpretation of God's oracles, commandments, invitations, and promises, has no reason to fear: but, on the contrary, the wisdom of God makes his face to shine with contentedness and cheerfulness, and he comes boldly before the throne of grace, knowing that his God is a God of mercy, of loving-kindness, and pardoning grace. But, whilst the child of God and the man who cherishes Jehovah's wisdom is invited to let go all fear and to serve God with joy and assurance of grace, the sinner who "persisteth in an evil matter," who continues impenitent in his wickedness, is told at the same time to tremble, for, having no part in Jehovah's grace and pardoning love, he has reason to dread, since he has to do with a jealous and almighty God, who does everything according to His sovereign will, and who has prepared everlasting punishments for every hardened evil-doer. This earnest exhortation to the hardened sinner is continued in verse 4, where he is assured that the great King of kings has all power in Himself—that He needed not another subordinate executive power in order to punish the wicked for their sin and rebellion. "Where there is the king's word there is power." God commanded and we must obey, and if not we have no other alternative than to await the dreadful consequences of rebellion against Him who gives only His Almighty word and everything is done, and who needs no other executive power but His irresistible verdict, His thunder word of condemna-

tion, and then all is done—no excuse, no prayer, no supplication, no appeal to another court, for there is none so high, and none can say to Him—What doest thou.”*

* The above passage is commonly interpreted by Commentators as referring to the obedience which we owe to our earthly kings. Now, not only would such a subject be entirely out of place, corresponding neither with the subjects treated in the foregoing chapter, nor with the first verse with which the chapter opens, nor with the matter contained in the immediately following verses, but also a doctrine like this would be the strangest, and the like of which we do not find throughout the Holy Scriptures—it would contain a commandment for the most implicit obedience and blind and slavish subjection to the most cruel of despots, to the most outrageous of sinners, and this in no less a manner than the obedience which we owe to God alone. What! the above passage referring to a mortal king! What would signify the phrase in verse 3d, “for he doeth whatsoever pleaseth him?” or the expression in verse 4, “And who may say to him, ‘What doest thou?’” Are not these the very words in which sovereign power and independent government are ascribed to God and to God alone through the Scriptures? Where do we find the like of it spoken of a mortal man that he *may do as he pleaseth* with millions of men, and that none dares say unto him *What doest thou?* Would not this be a sanctioning of the most horrid despotism—a precept for subjection to any monster of crimes and murder, even beyond that of Nero or Caligula? and that without that any man daring to say, *What doest thou?*—an absolutism far beyond that which any monarch enjoyed, even among the most barbarous of nations! But have the prophets of old observed or taught such a supposed commandment? Had they ever allowed the wicked kings of Israel to do as they pleased, without saying unto them, *What doest thou?*

It would be the height of folly to suppose to answer the above questions by making a difference between a good and a wicked king, or between a prophet and a private man, for the passage before us (suppose it referred to a mortal king) allows of no such difference; as it would be a general and immutable statement that a king, any king, may do *whatsoever pleaseth him*, and that no mortal, whatever be his quality, dares say to him, *What doest thou?* Moreover, if it should refer to a king governing in justice and equity, then it could not be said of him that he does what *pleaseth him*, but what he is commanded of God to do. A king who does what pleases him, and not that which pleases God and what is conducive to the temporal and spiritual welfare of the millions of mortals

5. He that observes the commandments
 Shall experience no evil thing :
 And the wise man's heart discerneth both time
 and order.

confided to his care, has no more right to his crown or to the obedience of his subjects than he has a claim to the crown of glory in heaven. No law, whether divine or human, was ever given, or founded, or suggested, by which millions of immortal souls should be bound against their will to abandon themselves unto the power of a wicked and cruel mortal, who might ruin their substance, and lead them like sheep to be slaughtered, without any one daring to say unto him What doest thou? True, cruel despots have made such laws of themselves, without the agreement of their victims, but not the legislature of entire nations. On the other hand, in a pious, good, and faithful monarch, we obey God and fulfil his will in obeying the crowned head who is worthy of our obedience and attachment. But such a king cannot be said to do whatsoever pleases him, nor will he be angry when his faithful servants and counsellors should say unto him, What doest thou? suppose that he was to commit a fault like a man. Far from this; but he will do nothing of importance without the counsel of his ministers, and often wait for the approbation of the nation at large. Solomon himself said, "It is an abomination in kings to commit wickedness, for a throne is established by righteousness." (Prov. xvi. 12.) "The king that faithfully judgeth the poor, his throne shall be established for ever." (xxix. 14.) Wicked and abominable kings were severely rebuked, and sometimes deposed, and their crowns put on the heads of others by the prophets and priests—as Saul, Jeroboam, Ahab, Jehu, Uzziah, &c., &c.—but neither despotism itself nor blind obedience to wicked and cruel despots is ever recommended in Scripture. "Be subject to authority" means "Obey the national established order," but not a national executioner and destroyer. Any impartial reader of the sacred history regarding Solomon's reign will see that it was one of mildness, of peace, of happiness, of glory and renown to Israel, and far from absolute despotism, which ruins and impoverishes a nation. With regard to his successor, instead of crowning and establishing him on the throne during his lifetime, he left the choice to Israel. Their murmurings and complaints after his death were no less unjust than their chidings with Moses in the desert. They grew weary of peace, riches, and prosperity, and were spoiled by nearly a century of happiness and glory, and wanted a change to replunge them into misery; and their right it was to choose.

Now, besides that we have (in the passage in question) the word of inspiration, and that we never find the shadow of

6. For to every purpose there is a (certain) time and order ;
 Though the afflictions of man multiply upon him :
7. Though he knoweth not that which shall be ;
 For when it shall be who will tell him ?

If we were left to ourselves in the wilderness of this world, we had certainly every reason to despair and tremble at every step we make in the dangerous journey of life. Our weakness, our darkness, our hesitations, the changes of times, subjects, objects, and circumstances, the trials and troubles which overtake us, the snares and stumbling-blocks put in our way by Satan and his emissaries, all would combine to make us miserable, and to lead us to destruction. But, blessed be God, this is not the case ; for He has not left us without guides, without light, or without instruction how to behave, and how to proceed on our journey. His holy commandments are so many brilliant lamps to our feet, to enlighten our steps, and to lead us in the path of righteousness. If the law of God be our rule and guide, and if we are so enlightened by the wisdom of God as to discern the times and orders of things, and foresee all the changes to which they and we are liable, and thus be always armed and ready to meet whatever come, then no evil shall befall us. Though the afflictions, calamities, vicissitudes, and disorders multiply daily upon us—though we are too shortsighted to know and foresee exactly how and when they shall take

such like a precept in the Word of God, surely even as an uninspired king, Solomon could never think to recommend what was supposed by commentators that he did recommend in the passage before us. The fact of the matter is that the whole passage refers not to mortal kings, but to the great King of Glory, and to the obedience that we owe unto His commandments. It is the Almighty Lord of Hosts, who doeth as he pleaseth in heaven and on earth, and unto whom no man, no angel, no seraph may say, What doest thou ?

place, or how we should provide and prepare antidotes against them, still if the Lord is our refuge, and His wisdom our guide, we have nothing to fear even should all the orders of this globe change, and the mountains be removed into the depth of the ocean. The Lord our God knows these changes well; for He orders them beforehand to come, and He it is likewise who calls by name all the hosts of heaven, who numbereth the stars, and also the hairs of our head; it is therefore certain that He will cause all things to turn out for the best for those that fear Him. If there are any who have reason to tremble at the changes of life and time, these are the wicked who live without God and without the precepts of His wisdom, and whom the least storm may overturn and cast into a gulf of destruction. But they that fear the Lord and live in Him are under His omnipotent protection—change world, change time, change circumstances, our God never changes; His promises never fail. He shall never leave us and never forsake us, until He has taken us from the midst of a tumultuous world of changes and dangers into the stable and unchangeable world of eternal peace and unmingled happiness.

8. As there is no man that has power over the wind to
restrain it,
So there is no power against the day of death;
Also there is no discharge in war;
Neither shall wickedness deliver those that practise it.

The wind blows where it listeth, and no man can restrain it or change its torrent; no more can a man restrain the torrent of death, or prolong his stay on earth by a single day. The same it is in war, where no one knows who will fall, and whose destiny it is, fall he must, as the arrows of the enemy make

no distinction between the men that fill the ranks and lines. As long as human breasts are of flesh, and arrows of sharp iron, there will be no discharge (or distinction) in war; the king's or the general's breast may be pierced by an arrow of no more worth than that which fatally wounds a common soldier. These three messengers, tempest, death, and war, sweep and carry everything before them, without distinction of persons; nor will the riches accumulated by violence and unrighteousness deliver their wicked owners when their time comes to perish. While the death of the righteous is a triumph unto them, as they go over from a world of changes and trials into one of peace and happiness, that of the wicked is a beginning of never-ending misery and agony. While the fear and wisdom of God affords comfort, counsel, and peace in time, shields against the sting of death, and carries victory in eternity, wickedness absorbs peace, and multiplies fear and sorrow in time, heaps agonizing horrors at the hour of death, and opens the door of hell and everlasting torments for those that practise it.

9. All this have I seen, and applied my heart
Unto every work that is done under the sun :
There is a time wherein man ruleth over man to his
own ruin.

10. And thus I saw wicked men buried and gone ;*
Even from the holy place they departed,
And were forgotten in the city, because they behaved
thus.

This also is vanity.

* "And gone," such is the signification here of the word **וָבָא** (Vavau), they had gone, they went down and disappeared, as **וַבֵּא הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ** (Uva Hashamesh), "and the sun goeth down," ceases to shine, and disappears, so the wicked when once dead and buried disappear along with their names, which are execrated, and none minds them, nor cares to remember their existence, which was the source of sighs and tears to many.

Having stated in verse 8 that the wickedness of the wicked will afford them no shelter, no defence, when their turn comes to perish, the inspired king says in verse 9 that during the course of his attentive observations of all the works that are done under the sun, he saw examples of it—he saw wicked men lifted up to rule over their fellow-men, not only to the harm and sufferings of the ruled, but to their own destruction and ruin. In verse 10 Solomon gives us some particulars, saying that he saw wicked men *buried and gone*, viz., who in the very midst of their progress, power, authority, renown, and violence, were suddenly cut off. These wicked men, far from dying a natural death, were obliged to depart for their grave even *from the holy place*, viz., whither they fled for refuge. Such was the dismal end of the wicked and violent Joab, the murderer of the two princes of Israel, Abner the son of Ner, and Amasa the son of Jether, whom he treacherously assassinated. Though he escaped punishment during the reign of David, though he fled for refuge into the *holy place* of the Lord's temple, and laid hold on the horns of the altar, still there he perished (as the sanctuary was no refuge for a wilful murderer—see Exod. xxi. 14); and from that very sanctuary he was carried off to his untimely grave. His name, his power, and his acts, which were execrated during his life, were soon forgotten even at Jerusalem, and all disappeared and dissolved like a shadow in the very city which he once filled with authority and crime. Nor was the miserable end of Joab a solitary instance of the dreadful punishment which often overtakes the wicked even in this world, and of the astonishing quickness with which their names and acts are forgotten among their survivors, and their very names are blotted out from the memory of their fellow-citizens. It is not so with

the good man, for the name he leaves behind him resounds melodiously from many lips, who deeply and for many years lament his departure; he is remembered by thousands of his fellow-citizens with sighs and tears, even when grass covers already the sepulchre of his earthly remains, and even when the latter are already reduced to ashes and mingle with their native dust.

11. Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily,
Therefore is the heart of the sons of man emboldened in them to do evil.

Had the wicked Joab received his sentence for the murder committed on Abner, he could not have taken the life of the brave Amasa, nor practised violence any more. But the ways of God are no less wise than mysterious, and no less righteous and scrupulously exact because they often seem unto us (short-sighted creatures of a day) too long delayed. The great Jehovah has mysterious plans to be carried out, complicated purposes to be served, which we cannot comprehend nor penetrate. But one thing is sure and clear as day, that the Lord is righteous, and that He will surely punish the wicked sooner or later. When the day of retribution arrives, their power, their riches, and their authority can no more defend them than they could restrain the wind in its course. Many Israelites might have thought it strange that Abner's murderer should be left unpunished, and thus opportunity afforded him to commit other crimes. But the heavenly tribunal passed sentence, to be executed in a time and manner the more fearful, the more conspicuous. The hour arrived, and all the influence of the old general, all his authority in the army, all the terror at the gray-

headed tyrant, yea even his refuge in the Lord's sanctuary, did not shield him—his guilty head perished for his iniquity, and his very name that so long spread terror around it, perished with him, and was forgotten in the very city which trembled at his authority.

12. Though a sinner commit an hundred crimes,
And he still prolongeth time unto him ;
Yet I am convinced that it shall be well unto those
that fear God,
That they should continue to fear Him.
13. But it shall not be well with the wicked,
Nor shall he prolong his days more than a shadow ;
Because he feareth not before God.

What was advanced in explanation of the foregoing passage explains likewise the two verses before us. Delay of judgment is not absence of justice ; and the shortness of our days, and the weakness of our understandings, which makes our desire so eager to see the wicked punished on the spot, is no argument against the proceedings of the great Judge, whose eyes are like the flames of fire, whose judgments are like the mighty mountains (stable and certain), and with whom a thousand years are but like one day. But when we see awful examples of the certain and severe punishments which overtake the evil doers after all delay, and how they are cut off suddenly from the land of the living, and perish miserably in the very midst of their progress and height of their prosperity, then we surely have the more reason to continue in our faith, and persevere in the love, fear, and service of our God. If the reward of our faith and fidelity often seems unto us equally delayed with the punishment of the wicked, what does this argue? Should

we therefore become also wicked, and thus make sure our everlasting ruin? Or should we not rather continue with fresh zeal, with deeper earnestness, and with invigorated assurance and hope, to walk in the way of righteousness and piety, and to cast our anchor in Jehovah's faithfulness? Consider, therefore, mortal and short-sighted man, the two ways set before thee, and the certain *ends* whereto they respectively lead. The evil way leads to certain destruction, and the delay of the frightful sentence is only to heap coals upon the fire prepared for the wicked, and when his cup is full, desolation shall overtake him suddenly, and deliver him to everlasting torments. The way of righteousness leads to unspeakable happiness in an eternal life of peace, joy, and felicity; and when the rich fruits of that precious seed remain sometimes a little longer under ground and invisible, this is to increase our appetite, and to prepare us the better for the enjoyments of those celestial treasures, which shall soon appear, as sure as the sun regularly appears in the sky after a night's absence, and then we shall also see the reason of its momentary delay.

14. There existeth a vanity, which is practised upon the earth;

That there be just men, to whom it happeneth

According to the work of the wicked;

Again, there be wicked men, to whom it happeneth

According to the work of the righteous.

I said that this also is vanity.

15. Therefore I commended joy;

Seeing that nothing is better for a man under the sun,

Than to eat, and to drink, and to rejoice;

And that this shall accompany him in his toil

During the days of his life,

Which God giveth him under the sun.

16. For certainly, I applied mine heart to study wisdom,
And to consider the transactions which are accom-
plished upon the earth,
Even by those whose eyes taste no sleep,
Neither by day nor by night.

We live in a world of darkness and perversion, among sinful, blinded, and often violently unjust fellow-men. Hence we see that not only do the world and her children sin against God, in not appreciating nor acknowledging His goodness, His mercy, and His continual loving-kindness towards the children of men, but we find the same outrage practised by men against their fellow-men, generally and individually. How little do men appreciate, esteem, or acknowledge the devotion, uprightness, benevolence, disinterestedness, and noble actions of the greatest friends of humanity, of the most noble patriots, of the purest and most devoted statesmen, of the most powerful and successful advocates of public amelioration, liberty, and prosperity, for which they sacrifice all their labour and time of their life's being without repose by day and without sleep by night! This vanity of injustice is still heightened and aggravated when we consider that the very reverse often takes place with regard to public hypocrites, egotists, and mammon gatherers, who, under the cloak of a false patriotism, and pretended philanthropy, seek nothing else but to fill their own pockets, to aggrandise their own families, to accredit and illustrate their own names, and to shine in public under a mask which their wicked hearts abhor in private. Such plagues of humanity, such whitened sepulchres, are often caressed and loved, applauded and eulogised, and even blessed by a blinded public as their best friends and protectors, while these actors of dissimulation and hypo-

crisy smile at their devilish success in the eyes of those whose liberties, welfare, rights, and claims they would easily sell and betray to gain any advantage to themselves. Exactly the same is it with respect to private individuals and their relations to and transactions with each other.

“There existeth a vanity (a folly, or madness) which is practised upon the earth”—a perversion of judgment, a violation of justice, which has always existed and does still exist in every country upon earth, and which will always continue to exist among its blinded and perverted inhabitants, until the precious promise be accomplished that the earth shall be filled with the wisdom of God as the sea is filled with water. “There are just men,” benevolent and upright men, “unto whom it happeneth” (or, who are rewarded by their fellow-men on earth) “according to the work of the wicked,” who are slandered, despised, and even attacked by the blinded and ungrateful people, as if they had practised the works of the wicked, and are considered and treated as evil-doers. At the sametime there are really wicked, selfish, and treacherous men, who so well manage the work of dissimulation, that “it happeneth unto them (or they are rewarded) according to the work of the righteous”—they are praised, applauded, and idolized by the maddened mob as their greatest benefactors. All this, says Solomon in verse 16 (this verse is the explanation of verse 14, and so we must take it up in order to combine and understand correctly the whole passage) he found out when he applied his heart to study wisdom,—that is to say, during his course of contemplation of the works and transactions of men in this world. It was then that he found out that the just man has no thanks in this world for all his devoted labours, for the good he seeks to procure for his neighbours, for all his

labours of love, though he thus consumes his time in their service, that his eyes see no sleep either by day or by night—all his labours are lost in that point of view, all his good intentions are misinterpreted, he receives curses instead of blessings from the very people for whom he gave all and himself.

Seeing that such is the perversion of this world—seeing that such is the reward which the best of men often receive from their fellow-mortals, Solomon therefore leads man back again from his vain and puerile expectations and hopes founded on the gratitude and acknowledgment of an ungrateful and unjust world, into himself, and into the Providence of God regarding himself; again the wise and experienced man recommends unto us the enjoyment of the gifts of God gained by our labours, and the innocent satisfaction and pleasure which these afford us; so that no man can impeach us. Inasmuch as these are the gifts of God who cannot err, and who never changes, we are therefore sure that they legitimately belong unto us, and that they are our real portion obtained not by the miserable favour of man, but by the omnipotent will and order of the living God, the Father of Providence. As no man gave them unto us, so no man is able to take them from us, and as these gifts are received honestly by labour, they shall continue to follow us all the days of our lives on earth—our bread shall be given, our water shall be sure, because it comes from a celestial fountain.

If Solomon says in this passage that he commended joy (or contentedness, and satisfaction), it does not mean violent mirth and foolish jollity, as he has condemned this himself in chap. ii. 2, “Of laughter I said, It is madness; and of mirth, What doth it produce?” When Solomon recommends to

eat and drink and rejoice (viz., enjoy, be contented and thankful), he told us already thrice that such an enjoyment is a pure gift of God in His providence (see ii. 24; iii. 12; and v. 18). The sum and substance, therefore, of the whole passage amounts to the following—That the best of men will be sadly disappointed were he to expect to be rewarded for his good works and services by his fellow-men in this dark and perverted world; but that he owed such works of benevolence and love to his Creator, and hence to his fellow-men, who are likewise the creatures of God, and the reward for which he shall receive in the world of realities, from the sure hand of Him who judges in righteousness, and recompenses richly those who serve Him: as for this world, one thing only is sure, that no just and upright man is forgotten or neglected by his benevolent and merciful Creator, and though the whole world of mortals may be mistaken in him, slander him, persecute him, and misinterpret his best intentions, and reward him evil for good, his God will never leave him nor forsake him all the days of his life. That he should, therefore, wait for his recompense in another world, and while living by faith he should enjoy the temporal mercies with thanksgiving, and depend upon it that these are the only things that will surely accompany him in all his labours during the days of his earthly pilgrimage—that he will never want these enjoyments of life, though men may deny him all his merits, and bereave him of everything he deserves.

17. Again I saw (regarding) all the works of God,
 That a man cannot find out the works
 That are accomplished under the sun ;
 Because though a man labour to seek it out,
 Yet shall he not find it ;

Yea, further, though a wise man think to know it,
Yet shall he not be able to find it.

In chapter iii. verse 11, Solomon has already declared that though the Lord has ordained and arranged everything beautifully in its season, still He has, at the same time (for wise and important purposes) put a confusion into the hearts of men, in order that man should not be able to find out the work which God performed from the beginning to the end. (See our explanation of that verse in loco.) In the intervening chapters Solomon entered much into particulars, in introducing subjects, transactions, and occurrences with which we meet during our lives, and which are strange, mysterious, and inexplicable unto us, be they in the relation of man to man, or in that of man to his God. Hence that the inspired author comes necessarily back to the same conclusion, viz., that because we and our actions, and even our thoughts, are so inseparably united to, and so entirely dependant on, the mysterious will, works, and plans of the Almighty God, therefore they are all involved and interwoven in the general labyrinth of Jehovah's mysterious dispensations, which is a depth that no human mind will ever be able to fathom, nor man's wisdom and calculation to penetrate.

"Again I saw," (or "Again I was obliged to conclude,") "regarding all the works of God." The Hebrew noun מַעֲשֵׂה (Maaseh) has a very extensive signification, and comprehends real "works," "transactions," "purposes," "plans," "arrangements," "orders and performances." (The first chapter of Genesis, where this word is often employed in different forms, shows its wide and rich significance.) All these ways of Jehovah's government in providence, are so complicated, so mysteri-

ous, and so intricate that no human intelligence, no human labour and perplexity, no wisdom and calculation, will ever be able to unravel the least of them either in their value in time present, or as to their bearing on future purposes and destinies. As man is a mere instrument in the hand of omnipotence, to serve incalculable objects and purposes, whether he will or not; so all his transactions, therefore, are either confirmed, aided, and accomplished by an invisible power and unchangeable will, or hindered, delayed, and even confounded and overturned by the same sovereign will, and all this for future purposes, into which we cannot look. Hence even our own plans, works, and destinies are likewise enveloped in a thick cloak of mystery, and are dark unto us like the midnight hour in the absence of moon and stars. Therefore "man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun." When we see wicked men prosper and thrive at the expense of the suffering just, let us not say rashly, "What is this?—Where is the righteous judgment of God?" This is an insoluble mystery to *us*, because we are short-lived, short-sighted, and selfish beings; but it has a reason—it has a purpose. Thousands of little and great mysteries and plans may be combined with the prosperity of these wicked men and the momentary sufferings of the just. All must go on as it does under its mysterious pavilion, until all be prepared, all be ripe, all be favourable, and all combustible materials be united. Then, then by one invisible but irresistible cause, a mighty explosion will take place, and all will change order and colour—all things will cast down their mysterious shells and array themselves in brightness before our eyes—the wicked actors will suddenly find themselves, like Pharaoh's army, in the midst of a foaming sea, will be severely

punished and eternally destroyed, while the afflicted just, who suffered during the process, will appear unhurt, vigorous, improved, and prosperous. O man! who would not condemn a captain of a vessel who, in order to please one of his sea-sick passengers, would cast anchor in the midst of threatening rocks, in the sight of a dreadfully threatening tempest, and also in the sight of a sure harbour, and thus expose and deliver hundreds of lives to perish in the deep, without being able to save the object of his misplaced charity? O suffering child of God! remember that on thy momentary afflictions may depend the life, future prosperity, and even salvation of thine own soul, as well as of hundreds of thy fellow-men, and also the emanation of dreadful punishments to hundreds of wicked persecutors of humanity! Wilt thou be foolish and selfish enough to command (were it in thy power) the whole of that wonderful machine to stop? And couldst thou expect to gain by it?

Seeing, then, that such mysterious plans and purposes are continually in operation, in every country, in every town, yea, in and with every man in particular, who, to whatever society or cast he belongs, is certainly (though unwittingly) an actor in some one of these mysterious processes, what then can we mortal men expect to know of the innumerable plans of infinite wisdom? Should we even live a thousand years, be armed with Solomon's wisdom, with Euclid and Newton's powers of calculations, with the perseverance of a Columbus, and researches of a Buffon, and devote all our days and nights to the study of the arrangements of the Lord, of His plans and purposes, how far will we arrive? What will we be able to conclude? "It is higher than Heaven, What can we know? It is deeper than hell, What can we do?" This was,

is, and will always be, the limits of mortal man's knowledge, and if some mistaken servant should ever venture to transgress that limit, he shall be violently repulsed, and a thundering voice will call behind him, "Temeritous worm of the dust, hitherto only thou shalt come, but here be done with thy vain pride." Let us, therefore, leave the secrets unto our God, and pay all our attention to His revealed will, and thus seeking to do what He recommended us, we shall surely accomplish that which He desires. If we do continually remember that we are in His hands like the clay in the hands of the potter, we shall never fall into the presumptuous error to ask the Lord of Hosts, "What doest thou?" or, "Why hast thou made us thus?" but, on the contrary, we shall always and in every circumstance be ready to say, "Here we are, Lord, thy holy will be done." Why else plague ourselves with vain speculations, and disturb and spend our few days in seeking that which the wisest of men could never find? "Unto man God said, Behold the fear of the Lord that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding." (Job. xxx. 28.)

[The following chapter is not only strictly combined with the above subject, but it is evident that verse 17 of chapter viii. is the introduction to chap. ix., which opens with the explanation of that verse, as shall be seen.]

(CHAPTER IX. VER. 1.)

1. For to all these things I applied my heart,
Even to inquire diligently into these matters ;

How the just, and the wise, and their works
Are in the hand of God ;
Even love, even hatred, such men do not know :
For all is before them.

The foregoing chapter ended with the conclusion that the ways and dealings of God in the dispensation of His providence with regard to man are so mysterious and so intricated that no mortal can find them out even after the most diligent search—that hence we cannot explain the changes, sufferings, trials, and vicissitudes which the best of men are often called upon to undergo, inasmuch as our destinies are strictly interwoven with the unfathomable plans and purposes of God ; that though the just are not always recompensed in this world, and though the sentence against the evil-doer is often long delayed, still should we continue to fear God. The present chapter opens with the assertion that the above conclusions were not made hastily, but after a life of diligent and urgent investigation—“For to all these things I applied my heart, (or, to the study of all these things I devoted my mind) even to inquire diligently into these matters,” (or, “to search out by illustration, or to clear up to demonstration all these matters”)—and what did he find ? that “the just and the wise, and their works (the reward of their works is also implied in the text) are in the hand of God ;” viz., their lives being devoted to God, and their actions for His service, the Lord, in turn, uses them and all their works as instruments in His hand for the accomplishment of His mysterious plans, for the good and prosperity of souls, and for the promotion of His glory. This being the case, the just and wise men and their works being thus strictly combined with the plans and works of the living God, they are therefore no

more their own, they can no more be said to have any transactions in this world for themselves, for all is for and belongs to God. He then necessarily changes their wills according to His pleasure, rules over their actions, directs their thoughts, and makes them all to flow into the channels which His omniscience has prepared for them.

Thus while the wicked man is left to himself, to plan, work, resolve, and act for himself—that is to say, to work out his own destruction, because he is left to himself—the just and wise man who has resigned his life into the hands of God, is no more his own, for God leads and guides him in all his ways, in all his actions, yea even in all his thoughts. “Even love, even hatred, such men do not know;” viz., the just and wise man who is entirely in the hand of God, is not left alone even in his passions, but like a rivulet which is divided into many branches by a wise husbandman, in order to circulate through every corner of his fields, and fertilize them in a manner that not a drop of its refreshing liquid be allowed to run away uselessly,—so the Lord directs even the passions of His children into such channels that they might be useful in one way or another for the promotion of their own salvation and of the glory of their God. Wicked men employ their passions of love and hatred to love the world, and its perishing vanities, and to hate all that is good and everlasting. Even the passions of just and wise men who consecrate themselves, their lives, and their actions, unto the service of their Creator, are so directed by the Spirit of God, that their love is employed to love the Lord, His law, His works, and His creatures; and their hatred is opposed to all that is bad, to Satan and sin, to violence and injustice, to the world and her foolish vanities. Thus the man of God “knows no love and no hatred,”

that is to say, he is not his own master even in that point; for God directs and regulates them according to His mysterious will and everlasting plans. But there followeth a clear explanation and reason why the children of God are not masters even of their passions, "for all is before them," viz., there exists an holy revelation which prescribes and teaches them what to love and what to hate, and they cannot act otherwise. There exists a mysterious but mighty influence and operation of the Spirit of God in the souls of His children, by which all their ways are marked out and their steps regulated.

2. Behold, all that is common to all :

One event (death) happeneth to the just and to the wicked ;

To the good and clean, and to the unclean ;

To him that sacrificeth, and to him that sacrificeth not :

As it happeneth to the good, so to sinner ;

As to the swearer, so to him that feareth an oath.

3. This is an evil above all that are done under the sun,

That though one event happeneth to all,

Still is the heart of the sons of men full of evil ;

Yea, madness is in their heart while they live,

And at the end of it they depart to the dead.

4. For who is it that is spared ?*

Yet, unto all the living there is hope :

* The Keri, the LXX., and other different versions read here יִחְיֶה (yechubar) instead of the textual reading, which is יְבִיחֵהוּ (yevuchar). They consequently render the phrase, "For he that is joined to all the living," &c. This is certainly a phrase altogether strange and unknown in the idiom of the Hebrew language. To convey simply the idea that man has hope as long as he lives, the expression would have been, "For unto all the living there is hope." But יְבִיחֵהוּ (yevuchar) signifies as well "to spare," or "to be spared," as it does signify "to be chosen," or, "to be preferred." So it should be rendered Job xxxvi. 21, "Take heed, regard not iniquity; for by this thou shalt be spared from affliction." The same sense it has

As it fareth better with a living dog than with a dead lion.

5. For the living know that they must die :
But the dead know nothing,
Neither have they any more a reward, [no work, no wages],
For even the memory of them is forgotten.
6. Then their love and their hatred,
And their envy have already perished,
Nor shall they evermore have any part
In whatsoever is done under the sun.

In endeavouring to explain and apply the instruction given unto us in these five verses, we must first of all keep in mind the following points—that the division of chap. viii. from chap. ix. is an unhappy one (to be attributed only to the ignorance of the Rabbies, who, not understanding the combination, divided an inseparable *whole* into two halves),—for the first seven verses of chap. ix. decidedly belong to chap. viii. In the foregoing chapter we are told not to measure either righteousness or wickedness by the reward or punishment that those who practise them receive *in this world*—that while the Lord may delay the reward of the just and the punishment of the wicked for another world, and for mysterious plans and reasons, the children of this world were so blind that they often confound the righteous with the wicked, persecute and hate the former, flatter, and love, and praise the latter—that the ways and

in many other places, and which, if so rendered, many obscure phrases become clear. In our passage, after having stated that death overtakes all men without exception, Solomon adds, “For who is it that is spared,” viz., where have we an instance of a man being *preferred* to others and spared by death, and left to live on earth for ever? Then he proceeds to show that a living man has yet hope of being made partaker of everlasting life by conversion and grace, but once dead all hope is gone.

dealings of our God are mysterious, and therefore we should leave the inexplicable and wonderful in the hand of God, and wait for *His time and arrangements* in all things, and that in proper time all will be explained unto us—that we may rest assured that, if we belong to the children of God, and are just and wise, our works, our transactions, and even our passions, are under the strictest orders and regulations of God's Providence, who will use them as instruments in His hands for the promotion of His glory, for the prosperity of our own souls, and for the salvation of others—that we should therefore withdraw our mind from ourselves and time, and turn it unto God and eternity. Such was the mighty difference drawn between the children of this world, who are left along with their works and passions to themselves, and hence to certain destruction, and the children of God, who, resigning all into the hands of their God, are instructed by His wisdom, and guided by His Spirit from strength to strength, until they arrive at their Father's house, where they shall reap the fruits of their faith, and receive the recompense of their godly behaviour, which the world denied unto them and thought them unentitled to.

Seeing that the moral difference between these two (spiritually) opposed families is so vast with respect to their ends—seeing that the tranquillity of the good and wise is so serene, and his hope so certain notwithstanding all opposition and vicissitudes which he meets in this world, while the life of the wicked is so stormy and his destruction so sure, notwithstanding his seeming prosperity and false applause which he meets in this world. What, then, can be the reason of the wicked continuing his travels on the road of eternal destruction? Is it that by his wickedness he can double or treble the

days of his earthly career? No; by practising all the wickedness of this world, by swallowing all its vanities, and even by enjoying all its perishing fruits, not a single moment of life can be procured above the life of the just and wise. This is the argument introduced by Solomon in verse 2, and continued unto verse 6.

There is one thing, says Solomon, in the passage before us, in which the children of God and the children of this world are alike, and this is, they are both mortals. One thing is common to all men, "one event happeneth" to all, and this is *death*, which makes no difference, but takes away just and wicked, clean and unclean, rich and poor, mighty and weak, king and beggar. Now, one would naturally think that such a striking event as death, which every mortal witnesses daily in all its horrors, would arrest the wicked in their violent career, and bring them to reflection—that they would consider that their practice was so far from adding a single day to their lives, that, on the contrary, it is usually shorter than the lives of regulated and sober, just and wise men—that while the just and faithful look upon death as a triumph, as a happy change, as the passage of the last river that separated them from eternal felicity, they, on the contrary, dread death as the most cruel event, which bereaves them of all hope, of all possession, of all enjoyment; which cuts off all existence, all activity, all aspiration, all joy, all relation, all satisfaction and all *self*, which was *all* unto them, and for which their death is always horridly agonizing. But no; "This is an evil above all (evils) that are done under the sun, that though one event happeneth to all"—though the wicked see and know that all their practices, that all their endeavours will not add an hairbreadth to their existence, and that

when the common enemy, death, will come to pay them his usual visit, they shall have no weapons, no shield of faith and hope to oppose him, no courage to meet him, no source of consolation, and no reason for resignation, "still is the heart of men full of evil"—still do they continue their voyage on the road of certain destruction, still do they go on from corruption to corruption, from rebellion to rebellion, from sin to iniquity. "Yea madness is in their heart while they live;" they are not only hardened but deranged, not only sinners but madmen, not only rebels but self-destroyers; their blindness is one which they invite, their hardness of heart is the fruit of their own cultivation, and their destruction is the work of their own hands; while they live they *will* not foresee the unavoidable event, *death*, which must overtake them sooner or later. Hence they pursue their wicked course with an indifference as if no such thing as death existed; but at last it comes; "and at the end of it"—at the fixed end of their wicked existence, at the border of their deranged lives, "they depart to the dead"—they are carried off suddenly from the scene of their wicked operations to the dead, to decay, to dust and ashes, to worms and dissolution, and also into eternity, unto judgment, into everlasting darkness.

In verse 4 the argument is resumed and pursued, and the wise man there shows that while none of the mortal family is spared by death, while no wickedness, no power, no violence, no riches, and no efforts can ever deliver an individual from death, and from the judgment that follows it, every moment of life is very precious, and to the wicked more so than to the children of God; for while the life of the latter is already hid in their God, the former have no (spiritual) life in them, but as long as they move in this world they have still hope that the

door of repentance would be open to them even at the "eleventh hour." Thus the poorest of sinners, while yet alive, has more chance to obtain pardon by repentance and faith, and eternal life, in consequence, than has the mightiest king when once dead; as salvation is not obtained at a price, but by repentance and faith, the living beggar is far nearer to it than the dead king. The illustration given is that "it fareth better with a living dog than with a dead lion," as the former can always secure his prey in one way or another, while the latter, mighty and dreaded as he was, when alive, is but a dead carcase now, and can do nothing. Moreover (ver. 5) the living know that they must die, and taking this knowledge to heart one day or another, it can lead them to "number their days and apply their heart unto wisdom," and for that no hour is fixed and no day too late, and the most hardened wretch may be struck by the spectacle of death, and thus be led to eternal life. But the sinner once dead knows nothing, he knows no way of repentance, no chance of escaping hell; to him the gospel is no more preached, and against him every door of mercy is shut. In this world his very name is forgotten among those who have witnessed his violence, wickedness, and indifference; in heaven he is no more counted among the number of those unto whom God's invitations are directed, saying, "To-day if ye hearken unto His voice." No; as his activity, his *free-will*, his love, his hatred, and his envy are for ever gone, as he can do no more good than evil, as he can no more mend what he destroyed, as he has no more any portion among the living in works performed under the sun, so he can have no portion in that invaluable treasure of salvation which was prepared by a gracious God for those of the living who should become partakers of it by

faith in Christ, the Saviour of the world, and be regenerated to newness of life. O that sinners would take this warning to heart, and remember that as long as the breath of life continues in their nostrils, every moment is precious, and every day propitious for making provision against death and judgment. A time shall surely come when "time shall be no longer," as soon as death comes, and they belong no longer to the favoured class unto whom the mighty arm of salvation is stretched forth. As it is sure that death follows earthly life, so sure it is that judgment follows death, and to hell shall go all those that forget God and die in their sin.*

* For many years I considered the above passage in quite a different light, and thought that Solomon introduces in it arguments of the wicked, who having no faith in future reward or punishment, say with Esau of old, "Behold I am going to die; and of what profit shall this birthright be to me?" So I understood Solomon to say that because death is common to all men, to the just as to the unjust, therefore the wicked are the more hardened and resolute in their wicked career, saying, "What shall come afterwards we know not; if the just and wise will be recompensed for their privations and sufferings after death, we believe not: Why, therefore, should we deprive ourselves of worldly enjoyments, and thus perhaps shorten our lives by privations and sufferings, while a living dog (a sinner) is far better than a dead lion (a just man when once dead). Let us, therefore, eat and drink as long as we live, and care nothing for what shall happen after death, for the righteous must die as well as we, and once dead they are no better than we; they shall have no more reward than we; their memory shall be equally forgotten with ours." But after mature study and reconsideration of the structure of the Hebrew text and of the context of the former half of verse 4, and of the whole contents of verse 6, I saw clearly that my former interpretation could not have been that of Solomon, and that the only explanation must (I humbly think) be that which I have given in the above commentary. Also that to squeeze the text into my former opinion would have been doing it violence, while the actual translation is as near *literal* as possible. The contents of verse 1, and those of the following passage (verses 7—10), contributed also much to confirm me in the translation and explanation which I have given in the text.

7. Go, therefore, and eat thy bread with joy,
And drink thy wine with a cheerful heart ;
For God hath already graciously accepted thy works.
8. Let thy garments be always white,
And let thy head lack no ointment.
9. Live joyfully with thy wife,
Whom thou shalt love all the days of thy vain life,
Which God giveth thee under the sun ;
For this is thy portion in (this) life,
And for thy labour which thou takest under the sun.
10. Whatsoever thine hand findeth to do,
Do it with all thy might ;
For there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor
wisdom,
In the grave whither thou goest.

Do we ask, who is the man addressed here by Solomon? The answer is at hand, clear and evident. It is the just and wise man introduced in the first verse of this chapter—the child of God, who, having taken Jehovah's revealed wisdom for his guide in all things, has resigned himself and his works into the hands of his Maker, and whom, consequently, the Lord took under His immediate protection, as His possession. God has sanctified him, and guided even his passions into prepared channels, to serve as instruments in the hands of His providence for the promotion of His glory, and for the advancement of His mysterious purposes in the government of this world, for the good of those that fear Him, and for the salvation of that man's own soul. It is unto such a man that Solomon says, "Go, therefore, and eat thy bread with joy," enjoy the temporal mercies which God gives thee in His good providence, for the labourer is worthy of his wages. As for thy devotion and thy works in the service of thy God, rest assured that the pleasure of God shall prosper in thy hands, and that

thy labours in God's vineyard shall answer the purposes for which God intended them. "For God hath already graciously accepted thy works"—they are no more *thy works*, for God has adopted thee and them as His own; continue to prosecute them in the fear of God, according to His revealed will, according to the guidance of His Holy Spirit of wisdom and counsel, and he shall do the rest with regard to their prosperity and application, as with regard to His promise to recompense thee hundred-fold in the world of everlasting joy.

In verses 8 and 9 the address is continued with some particulars about the different gifts of providence, which the child of God is invited to enjoy with cheerfulness of heart, with contentedness, and with thanksgiving, for God confers upon him these earthly privileges and benefits in order to aid, refresh, and encourage him in this valley of trials and dangers. At the same time, he is again reminded in verse 10 that he is to take great care that while he enjoys lawfully and with a cheerful heart the blessings of life which the Lord gave him as his earthly portion, not to forget or neglect his holy duties towards God, which must go before all, and in the execution of which no self-denial, no labour, and no loss of time, should be spared or taken into the least consideration.

"Whatsoever thine hand findeth to do (or, 'whatsoever it is in thy power to accomplish'—viz., in the service of thy God) do it with all thy might." Every good work within thy reach is within thy duty; everything that thou canst do, thou art bound to do. From no good work are we excluded because another could do it as well, or because we are engaged at present in the execution of another good work, or (and far less) because we are now occupied in the lawful enjoyment of some

rich gifts of providence, in which we shall be hindered if we undertake the prosecution of the good work that offers itself in our way. No; the question is, can we do it? Is it in our power, within our reach to accomplish it? Then we are obliged and bound to our Creator, to our own souls, and to those of our fellow-men, to deny all self, to look beyond difficulties or dangers, and to undertake it instantly, to prosecute it with all diligence, and to accomplish it with all possible expedition. Nor should we delay the doing of a good work for another day, for we do not know if that day be *ours*, if it be a day for work, or if in that day we shall already be in the silent place where all work ceases. The statement of Solomon that there is "no work, no device, no knowledge, and no wisdom," is followed by the phrase "in the grave whither thou goest,"—not in heaven, whither thy soul goes, for there is wisdom and knowledge there. As mortal man, as dust and ashes, when our souls take their flight to their Maker and Father in heaven, our mortal man, our earthly tabernacles, go down into a dark and silent grave, to be mingled with their native dust. There only the process of decay remains in activity, while all our moral and physical qualities, which we may have possessed when body and soul existed in union and acted in harmony, are for ever gone. Then the tongue of the most eloquent and successful gospel preacher moves and articulates no more, and thousand wretched sinners may stand around the grave, and will not hear a single invitation to come to Christ. No; no good works in the grave, no religion, no word of God, no worship, no praise, no knowledge, and no wisdom of God among the worms, the new inhabitants of our bodies in the place of dissolution. Our souls, which are then at home in heaven, are no more fit for the works and

services of their Master on earth, for they have no bodies, the medium by which alone spirits can act upon and influence man. Blessed are the just and wise children of God, who, while their lifeless bodies repose from all work in the dark place of eternal idleness, their immortal souls can look back to this world, to their accomplished works, with satisfaction, and enjoy the sweets of eternity without remorse. But we think it must be something (what, we cannot express in words) for a departed soul, even in Paradise, to remember that while in the body, during her *working days* she had neglected a good work while she was duty-bound and perfectly fit for doing it. Ah! horror! and perhaps this neglect had cost the salvation of a never-dying soul—or two—or more! O Christian fellow-pilgrims, let us watch over our duties, and let us not slacken in the performance of any good work as long as we can do it. Day is for work, and night for repose; life is the propitious time for us to labour in the Lord's vineyard, every one according to his call, one actually, and another by forwarding the work of our heavenly Father by means; one by preaching the everlasting gospel to sinners, another by sustaining the labourers; one by disseminating the holy Scriptures among ignorant mortals, another by providing these living books, &c., &c. These, and thousand good works like these, are the duties of our day. When the long night of death shall come our works shall for ever cease. O let us be up and doing while it is yet called day.

11. Often have I observed under the sun,
That the race is not (always) won by the swift,
Nor the battle by the strong;
Nor have the wise (always) bread,
Nor the prudent riches, nor the skilful favour;
But that time and chance happen to them all.

12. Also that man knoweth not his time :
Like fishes that are caught in an evil net,
And as birds that are taken in the snare ;
So are the sons of men snared in an evil time,
When it falleth suddenly upon them.

Another reason why man should be up and doing, as long as time and circumstances are favourable, is because they neither know what sudden change in their circumstances may take place, nor how soon an unforeseen and sudden death may overtake them, and thus take it out of their power to do anything for their God, for their souls, for their fellow mortals—even things which now are at their doors, easy to be accomplished. How often, alas! do we meet with delaying mortals, who, with the returned Jewish captives of old, say, “It is not time yet to build the Lord’s house,—it is not time yet to occupy ourselves earnestly about religion ; we are too young, too vigorous, to talk already about eternity, or to begin preparing for it—we are not yet rich enough to begin to spend our means for religion and for the advancement of the Lord’s kingdom ; we shall do so when our treasures be once increased to a certain degree, when our influence in society be once augmented, and when our plans be once ripe enough to put them in execution.” O what madness is in the heart of such men ! Are the reins of Providence in your hands ? Who is it that can or will tell you that your present career and circumstances will continue to be progressive, or if there will not rather be put a sudden stop to them ? Thou art a vigorous and active young man, and therefore thou countest on a certain and durable success for all thy transactions ; but how many mighty and swift young men are suddenly cut off in the midst of their valiant operations ! Thou art a man of science, or

very skilful in business, and hence thou concludest that with the increase of years the fruits of thy speculations must also increase, thy riches grow, and thy influence augment; but how many wise, skilful, rich and active men have seen their plans completely overturned and their hopes ruined by one hour's misfortune, and fell never to rise again! The fishes move with inconceivable swiftness in a vast and free element; still, how many millions of them are suddenly taken into small but fatal nets, and dragged away out of their element and existence! The birds in the immeasurable space move on cheerfully in their airy element, and when they wing their flight mountains high they scorn their enemies below, who seem unto them but immovable points in the dust, from whom no danger is to be expected; but how many millions of them are daily ensnared and taken, to the loss of their liberties and life! Even so uncertain is mortal man, whatever be his rank, his wisdom, his riches, or his power; yea, the mightiest king, surrounded by a numerous and faithful army, is not sure what will become of him, or where he is to be next day.

Man, therefore, has not a moment to spare or to lose in this world of sudden changes and uncertainties. Instantly and expeditiously should he seek to accomplish every and anything that Providence puts within his reach, and which belongs to the duties of man to his Creator, and to the preparation for the stable and unchangeable eternity. The Lord does never lay burdens on our shoulders beyond what we can bear, nor should we, nor dare we, despise the days of small things. Our duty is to do the work of each day as God is pleased to lay it before us. Nor is it without the greatest peril to our souls to say, "We have now only one talent confided to us, with which we can do but little; we shall, therefore, wait until

Providence puts five talents into our hands, when we shall be able to do much." Our Saviour assured us that from such men shall be taken that little which they already had. The Lord of Providence gives to one more materials than to another, but neither of them dares sleep and neglect the work assigned to him according to his means, but ought to be up and doing as long as it is working time.

13. In this shape also have I seen wisdom under the sun,
And great it appeared to me.
14. There was a small city, and a few men in it,
And there came a great king against it, and besieged it,
And built great bulwarks against it :
15. But there was found in it a poor wise man,
And by his wisdom he delivered the city ;
Yet no man remembered that same poor man.
16. Then said I, Wisdom is preferable to strength ;
But the wisdom of the poor man is despised,
And his words are disregarded.
17. The words of wise men, though quietly spoken,
Are better understood than the clamour of a ruler
among fools.
18. Wisdom is better than weapons of war ;
But one sinner destroyeth much good.

In the course of Solomon's observations, he met wisdom displayed on very different grounds, occasions, and under many diverse shapes and colours. Wherever it was manifested, he could easily see and appreciate its value in itself, and its preference to folly. But as regards the temporal services which it renders unto its possessors, he found it in this respect capricious, and (like many other good things and qualities) exposed to the changes, perversions, and violences which invade this fallen world. Precious as wisdom is in itself, differing as it does from folly as light from darkness, and numerous as are

its advantages, still this world is so dark, so perverted, and so stupified by sin, selfishness, and egotism, that unless wisdom is clad in power, riches, and splendour, it is despised and disregarded. The striking instance given in verses 14 and 15 perfectly illustrates that lamentable fact. Here a small city on the brink of utter destruction, has but a few men to its garrison, and these few frightened and demoralized mortals are called upon to defend it against a mighty king with his numerous army who besieged it, and who directed against it all the instruments of war, death, and ruin. But while the peril seems more than certain, while every one of the unfortunate besieged citizens prepares for death and the grave, there comes a poor but wise man, rallies around him the despairing mortals, lays his plans of defence before his horror-stricken fellow sufferers, revives their warlike spirits, reanimates their broken hearts, and stimulates them to perseverance, courage, and activity. His efforts are crowned with unheard of and most brilliant success; the mighty and dreadful enemy is obliged to lift the siege and retire with shame and confusion, and the small city and its inhabitants, delivered from the threatened and most certain destruction, are filled with joy and drunk with triumph. But what becomes now of the marvellous hero? What is now done for and to the wise and excellent deliverer of the city and citizens? Strange to say, he falls back into the same obscurity from which he came forth during the public calamity and terror! As soon as the danger is over he is abandoned to his lot, he dies in poverty, he is entirely forgotten by his survivors whose life and property he had so wonderfully saved! And why? Simply because he was a *poor man*, and this miserable world does not like to put a crown of laurels and of victory on a

head, the body of which is not clad in silk and splendour! Ah had this man happened to be a decorated general (of noble extraction of course) who got his high rank, not on the field of battle, but in the courts of favour and flattery, ah then, had he only been in that city during the siege, though not exposed to any danger, had he even been hid in a vaulted cave during the action and victory, had it even cost the precious lives of thousands of brave citizens slain on the ramparts, still the victory would certainly have belonged (and exclusively so) to the lazy and cowardly general. Feasts would be celebrated to his honour, illuminations ordered in the streets, and like a thunder storm the voices of "long live the general" would resound in every corner of the delivered town. Yea marble statues of monstrous heights and dimensions would be erected in every high place to the memory of the great man who crept into a hole when danger was near, and the ears of posterity would yet be filled with the praises of the great hero, who carried such a victory without getting a single wound. But that man happened to be of poor origin, *a mere man*, an obscure citizen, and perhaps badly clothed too—well, that man with all his wisdom, bravery, heroism, and brilliant success is neglected, forgotten, and disregarded by those who owe unto him life and all. Instances of that incomprehensible outrage of justice and duty, practised by blind and stupified humanity, were not rare in the days of Solomon. They were numerous among the ancient Greeks, Romans, Carthaginians, and other nations of antiquity (considering how few of such facts come down unto us.) And we have only to turn the gloomy pages of history regarding the middle ages of Christian Europe, and be horror-struck at the monstrosities of that kind, and at their incredible number. With a very few exceptions (and

for these no thanks to the despots), wisdom, bravery, devotion, and victory were denied to any other mortal but the privileged beings of riches and splendour, names and castles. Even in our days it is only in those countries where the glorious work of Reformation has either poured all or part of its benign influence, where these degrading abuses *are being* corrected. (But alas how slowly!)

The conclusions which suggested themselves to the wise observer of the above treated facts and illustration are contained in the three last verses of this chapter. 1st, Though wisdom is decidedly preferable to strength, still it is abused and disregarded in this perverted world if it dwells in the bosom of a poor man who cannot cover it with the frivolous splendour of riches; hence though his services may be accepted in time of need and danger, they will never be rewarded or even valued when danger is over and peace enjoyed. 2d, That the influence, power, and dominion of wisdom among wise men, and their calm and quiet deliberations, will always prove stronger in influence and more fruitful in success than will do the cries and clamours of violent rulers in the midst of a great army of fools. (This, we think, is intended to show how it comes that one wise poor man may succeed in delivering a city from the power of a great king with his mighty army—of fools.) 3d, That the best plans of wisdom and skill promulgated by the counsels of wise men, and which, if followed, would doubtless prove stronger than all the weapons of war, might be quite overturned and destroyed by one ungodly man, who either by his riches or family connections or pretensions might have acquired a powerful influence over men in public consultations. Such a single but mighty sinner may succeed in overturning the counsels of many wise men, and thus bring calamity or

misfortune over a whole nation or country, while the quiet measures of wisdom and prudence would have completely averted and prevented it. All the above considerations shew that in this world we can depend on nothing, build on nothing; for nothing is unchangeable or certain here below—that we must therefore look forward to the time and place when and where every thing good and just has its real value, where the presence of man is not respected, where justice is measured out according to heaven's righteousness, and equity abides for ever.

(CHAPTER X. VER. 1.)

1. As dead flies cause the perfumer's ointment
To send forth a stinking savour:
So doth a little folly him who is
In reputation for wisdom and honour.

The wiser and the more honourable a man is, the farther his reputation goes as such among his fellow-men, the more are his words and actions watched by all, and the more injurious will prove to his fame a single folly or fault committed by him. Even such a fault as would be entirely overlooked and disregarded in others will cause a moral insurrection against a widely famous wise man: as a few dead flies may cause no injury to common burning oil, while it entirely spoils the savour, and hence the value, of precious ointment. Children of God! ye are the precious ointment of this world; you, and your walk and conversation, are strictly watched by

all human eyes around you. You are scrupulously scrutinized by every mortal, especially by those whose infernal interest it is to find faults in you. Beware, therefore, of the least sin, of the least folly committed by you in haste, indifference, or forgetfulness. You are responsible not only for your own name and reputation, but in you and by your behaviour the cause of religion—which is the cause of the living God and the salvation of the never-dying souls of our fellow-men—will either be promoted or severely suffer. Watch, therefore, diligently over your steps, and even words which you utter, and examine every one of your transactions in the light of the Spirit of God, and by the touchstone of His revealed truth.

2. The heart of the wise man is (inclined) to his right,
But the heart of a fool is (inclined) to his wrong.*
3. Even when the fool walketh in the (right) way,
His heart faileth him ;
Thus proclaiming to all that he is a fool.

The wise and just man is so penetrated with the sense of his duty, be it towards his Creator or towards his fellow-men ; he is so decided in his judgment about what is right or wrong, that the exercise in well-doing becomes a necessity, a moral instinct, with him. His heart, his mind, his desire, his

* The Hebrew יְמִין (Yemin), and שְׂמוּחַל (Semohl), do signify not only the right and left hands, or sights of men and things, but also (figuratively) the right and wrong actions of man, and even falsehood and truth as opposed to each other. So in Isai. xxx. 21, it means that when either you are in the right or in the wrong, you shall hear a *word* (of conscience, excited by the Spirit of God) calling " This is the way, walk in it." The poss. pro. ׀ is employed in our verse, because, whether man acts right or wrong, he himself reaps the fruit of it, or he is in the right to his own advantage, or in the wrong to his own disadvantage.

affection, his pleasure, and his highest satisfaction, is to do what is right. He is always inclined towards the good and just, and, should he happen to make one false or retrograde step, he instantly feels the shock; something is wrong with him; he is sorely afflicted; he instantly begins to search the reason of his moral disorder, and discovers it; he resolutely decides on a quick return; and in a moment you see him walking on with a firm and earnest step in the way of righteousness, as ever before. But the fool is quite the reverse. His habits, desires, pleasures, and inclinations are on the wrong way. He rejoices in doing evil; for this became his element, in which alone he moves freely and finds himself at home. Should he once happen to be in the right way (by chance, or by forgetting a moment his quality), then he is miserable. He becomes bewildered, like a salt water fish taken out of his vast habitation and put into a small vessel of fresh water. He feels that he is out of his way, "his heart faileth him," for he can find neither pleasure nor satisfaction in that strange region of well-doing. He hesitates, he is in agony, plunged into confusion, and absorbed with heaviness. He thus shews unto all that see him in that strange condition that he is a fool, that he belongs to the children of darkness; wherefore light hurts his sight, and the way of righteousness is covered with pins and thorns unto him.

4. If the spirit of the ruler rise up against thee,
Leave not thy place;
For yielding pacifieth great offences.

When our superiors, governors, or judges rise in anger against us, be our cause ever so sure on our side, be they wrong in the most flagrant manner,

we do well to support calmly the injustice done unto us, and try to explain ourselves in submissive and calm language. Thus, after a moment of blind wrath, they will see their error, confusion will lay their hasty temper, and the lesson will serve them in future. But if, on such occasions, we do forget "our place," and lift ourselves in anger and defiance, we aggravate the evil, in raising the anger into rage; yea, we then cease to be innocent, and, however just our cause originally was, we shall now be judged and condemned according to our latter behaviour. Thus, while mildness, yielding, and submission, do pacify even real offences, anger and imprudence kindle a fire on both sides, and turn even innocence into crime.

5. There existeth an evil under the sun,
Which I considered as an error that proceedeth from
the ruler :
6. The fool is raised to the highest dignities,
And the rich (or nobles) are set in low places.
7. I have seen servants riding on horses,
And princes as servants walking on foot (Heb. upon
the earth).
8. He that diggeth a pit shall fall into it ;
And whoso breaketh a fence shall be bit by a serpent.
9. Whoso removeth stones shall be exhausted by them ;
And he that cleaveth wood shall be endangered
thereby.
10. If the iron be blunt and its edge not sharpened,
Then much force must be applied :
But wisdom directs to act advantageously.

The above evil needs not far-fetched illustrations, for the history of *every* country of our globe represents and furnishes us with numerous examples of such fatal errors—fatal to the crown as to the people—committed by imprudent and ill-advised

princes. Too often, alas! it so happened that irresponsible, voluptuous, and despotic monarchs, guided by evil spirits, undertook the monstrous work of destruction and confusion, by casting down all the nobles and highly reputed statesmen of a former solid and happy administration, and elevated wicked, selfish, aggrandizing and tyrannizing fools as their favourites, and clad them with the highest dignities of the state. Such savage plants, sprung up over night, were usually haughty, perfidious, and most cruel oppressors, not only to the people at large, but also to the princes, nobles, and old ministers and statesmen of the country, who saw themselves degraded and deeply injured, their dignities and eminent qualities outraged and trampled under foot by the lifted-up fool, and with him by those whom he raised to his secondaries; yea, by him who raised up the vile and base Haman, and conferred such powers on him that he be able to commit such abuses. Such misconducts on the part of stiff-necked and degenerate monarchs often (if not always) fell back on their own heads, and they fell into the very pit which they had digged for others; for these suddenly elevated fools became often in turn a deep sepulchre for the king, for his crown, for the state, and for themselves. Such kings have broken the fences of their government and throne, by outraging the rules of prudence and the wise customs of their countries, by making a wicked fool ride on *state horses* (an ancient mark of the greatest dignity—see Esther vi. 8—12), and causing the ancient and former dignitaries to be degraded and sit in obscurity in “low places,” or to march on foot before the fool, acknowledging his superiority (see again that passage in Esther.) The consequence of all this was that a serpent came forth from the ancient broken fence and bit the daring and stupid intruder

(the meaning of which figure is too simple and clear to need explanation). In verse 9 such a king is compared to one who removes the stones (the foundations) of an ancient building, by which act he exhausts himself; or to one cleaving wood, viz., destroying old fruit trees by the violence of an axe, by which work he shall be heated, and endangered by some splinter jumping into his eye, &c. In verse 10 that king is again compared to one who tries to cut wood with a blunt axe, the edge of which is not sharpened; viz., to overthrow the old customs, to degrade old dignitaries, and to govern an injured nation by the medium of a *blunt fool*. This is a work at which one must vainly apply all his strength without the work being done; for every bit of it breaks down instead of being cut right. The whole of the above argument is concluded by an additional remark on the advantageous direction of wisdom in all things—viz., of the great advantage to a monarch to be surrounded and aided in his government by wise, worthy, experienced, disinterested, and prudently active men. Such men are *sharp-edged* and well qualified instruments in the hands of a prince to direct, to rule, to order and to execute all things for the prosperity of the crown and state. Even when a cutting operation is unavoidable, such an instrument will accomplish it in a moment, and cut and heal at once. Such is the excellent and advantageous dominion of wisdom that it procures prosperity, peace, and honour to the ruler, to his ministers, and to his people at large.

11. As if a serpent doth bite without enchantment,
So there is no remedy against a calumniator.

It was believed by the ancients (and is indeed supported by some modern travellers—see Park-

hurst's Heb. Lex. under לָחַשׁ) that serpents are capable of being charmed by certain incantations, which would either render harmless or even entirely prevent their bitings; while without that remedy their bite is very dangerous, and often fatal. The calumniations of a bad tongue prove often as fatal as the sudden bite of a serpent. As one has no time (nor reason) to be provided (by charming) against the bite of a serpent, which attacks man suddenly when off his guard, so the innocent never thinks of providing against calumny, and is thus often wounded suddenly and without remedy. [אֵין יִתְרוֹן (ain yithron) in this verse means "there remaineth nothing," viz., against calumny—there remaineth no remedy at hand to counteract the poison of a calumniating tongue.]

12. The words of a wise man's mouth are graceful :
But the lips of the fool swallow up himself.
13. The beginning of the words of his mouth is folly,
And the end of his talk mischievous madness.
14. The fool also multiplieth words,
So that none knoweth what they signify,
As none can tell him what shall be after him.
15. The fool wearieth himself with his toil ;
For he knoweth not how to go to the city.

In these four verses we have a graphic description of the disadvantages and difficulties under which the fool labours; also of his great misery when compared to the wise man. While the latter says nothing without complete conviction, talks calmly and gracefully, maintains his right eloquently and powerfully, and refutes his opponents by the force of truth, the former babbles forth words harshly and and bitterly, without order and without force, and thus he confounds himself; he is his own accuser.

While the discourse of the wise man begins in wisdom, and ends in powerful demonstration, that of the fool begins in folly, and ends in sheer madness. The more the fool speaks the more he is confounded, and the more are those bewildered who hear him. His speech, both as to its contents and its aim, are altogether an insolvable mystery to the audience. As none can tell the things of the unsearchable future, so none can tell the meaning of the fool's arguments, nor where they are to end, nor what they are intended to establish—all is obscure. Lastly, while the wise man undertakes nothing without having a certain purpose and aim before his eyes—like an experienced traveller who, having to traverse a desert in order to arrive at a certain city, so marks out his journey that not a single step is made without advancing towards the place of his destination—the fool undertakes and acts without a preconceived plan, and without the premeditated purpose, and therefore he wearies himself in useless toil, without arriving at any end, like a foolish wanderer, who, having no guide and no signs, loses himself in the desert, exhausts his strength by going up and down to no purpose, and never arrives at any city of habitation.

16. Woe to thee, O land, when thy king is a child,
And thy princes eat in the morning !
17. Happy art thou, O land, when thy king is the son of
nobles,
And thy princes eat in due season,
For strength, and not for drunkenness !
18. By long neglect the building decayeth ;
And through the slothfulness of hands
The house droppeth through.

In this passage the subject treated in verses 5—10 is resumed. There Solomon talks of the danger

to which a king exposes himself and his country by elevating fools to the administration of his government, while excluding from it the able and worthy men who alone are fit for the task. In the present passage he tells us that the danger is not less imminent when—though the king be surrounded with able and worthy statesmen—the king himself is so childish, so neglectful, and so indifferent, as to set a bad example of wild merriment and foolish jollity before his courtiers and ministers, and allow them to go to feasts during the hours of public business. The custom of the oriental kings was to spend the morning hours in the place and on the seat of judgment, surrounded by their princes and chiefs, to hear the complaints and petitions of their subjects, to adjust their quarrels, and arrange the affairs of the kingdom at large. If these precious hours were devoted to merriment and feasting, then all order ceased, and the entire kingdom was delivered to confusion and decay.

“Woe to thee, O land, when thy king is a child,” viz., a light-minded and foolish novice, who when once he has swung himself on a usurped throne, thinks that he can now spend all his time in idleness and feasting, and who allows also his princes, his ministers, courtiers, generals, and magistrates “to eat in the morning,” to devour and destroy the only hours set apart for dispensing judgment and justice to the people of the provinces, who impatiently wait for it. In such a state of things the land not only suffers, but is exposed to certain destruction; the minister of state receives no other orders from his majesty than about the hours when he is to join the royal drunkard in his chambers of jollity, and thus the degenerate minister becomes the real monarch—and does he govern? No; he being engaged with his master in practising the art of time-

destroying, the high functionaries coming to the absent minister for orders, and receiving none, become little independent kings, and do they govern? No; they being employed in studying how to find out the best way of employing such a favourable time for replenishing their extravagantly emptied pockets, the subordinate magistrates receiving no other than money orders, become rulers—yea pillagers—yea, highway thieves themselves; the country judge, having no superior, becomes a cruel tyrant; the country people applying several days' trouble and means to go to the court to seek justice, find none, and exasperated, disgusted, and despairing, take justice into their own hands, and behold revolution, misery, bloodshed, and civil war; the thief unpunished becomes a wholesale robber, and the country is soon infested by beings far worse than wild beasts; famine, pestilence, and utter destruction follow, and when the real state of affairs reaches the brutish governor and his worthy ministry, they have no more either to gain or to lose. Such is the case with a country in the hands of a dissipated monarch and degenerated princes, and history will furnish innumerable examples.

“Happy art thou, O land, when thy king is the son of nobles,” viz. the son of kings, who, having been brought up in the palaces of his noble forefathers, where he saw judgment and justice dispensed on the balance of equity, knows how to rule and what his country requires—who, spending himself the usual hours in the administration of his government, teaches his princes, magistrates, and ministers “to eat in due season”—viz., after the hours of business, after the dispensation of justice, after orders have been given to their subordinate magistrates. Even then such men do eat and drink with moderation, to gather strength for their important labours,

and never give themselves to drunkenness in the evening, which would unfit them for their work in the morning. A kingdom is thus compared (by Solomon) to a house which must have continual attention and reparation; if the smallest hole in the roof be neglected, soon the rain will penetrate and drop in on every side, and the house will fall into a state of ruin and decay. So also the government of a country needs exceedingly much attention and watchfulness, wise laws, and timely arrangements; if neglected by those at the helm of its affairs, it will run into a frightful depth of disorder, anarchy, decay, and destruction.

19. A feast is made for joy,
 And wine maketh glad the living;
 And money supplieth all these things.
20. Even in the circle of thine acquaintances curse not
 the king;
 Even in thy bed-chamber curse not the rich (or
 mighty);
 For a bird of the air shall carry the voice,
 And a winged creature shall tell the matter.

A stupendous feast may be procured by the aid of money, and the living beings assisting at it may get merry and exalted on such occasions by means of wine, but then one must be circumspect about every word he utters with his stammering tongue (if he be able to do so); for he may find it afterwards difficult, if not impossible, to appease the king and his princes if they were slandered and slighted in the midst of unseemly exaltation and under the influence of wine. One may think himself quite secure when he speaks evil of his superiors amongst his friends and acquaintances, or even in a secluded chamber, but often, (as the proverb says), "the walls

have ears, and the doors tongues," and one finds himself suddenly in dangerous snares though he knew not who laid them around his feet. If this be so with mortal princes and rulers, how should we therefore be careful and beware of uttering any word against God who knows our thoughts afar off!

(CHAPTER XI. VERS. 1—3.)

1. Send thy bread upon the surface of the waters ;
For thou shalt find it after many days.
2. Give a portion to seven, yea, even to eight ;
For thou knowest not what evil there shall be upon the earth.
3. If the clouds be full of rain,
They will empty themselves upon the earth ;
And if a tree fall towards the south or towards the north,
In the place where the tree falleth there it shall abide.

All commentators agree that in this passage benevolence towards the poor, and generosity in contributing for good purposes, are recommended unto us under a metaphor. But they do not agree about the nature of the figure to which it refers, and hence different conjectures have been made even at the expense of violating the text. Not willing to enter into an examination of different opinions, we only remark that the margin reads the first part of the first verse, "Cast thy bread upon the face of the waters." But the strictest literal rendering of it is, "SEND thy bread upon the surface of the waters."

The meaning of it we humbly think to be the following. Solomon was the first monarch of Israel who began to train that people to maritime enterprises, to which he himself set them the first example; "For the king had at sea a navy of Tarshish, with the navy of Hiram: once in three years came the navy of Tarshish bringing gold and silver, ivory, and apes, and peacocks." (1 Kings x. 22, see also verse 11.) In these days, when navigation was in its infancy, so that even the Tyrian sailors took three years for one voyage to and from Tarshish (or Ophir) it required no small enterprising spirits to embark in such business. To make three years' provision for the crew, one certainly needed to "send much bread upon the surface of the waters," and then to exercise much patience and hope during three years, in the interval of which not the least intelligence was received. But if one was too timid to risk and send his bread on the surface of the mighty waters, he could never expect that after many days his vessels would return heavy loaded with silver and gold. This is the figure which Solomon uses here in order to teach man benevolence and generosity. We should give our bread and the first fruits of our increase to the poor and for benevolent purposes, and though we do not see the time when, nor the manner how, we shall receive the rewards, still we have a sure promise, and we must do so in faith and hope. Though many days lapse before it appears, still it is as certain as the rules of heaven and earth that we shall reap fruits either in this world or in a far better one. Ah, the reaping time of our spiritual crop is even far more certain than the metaphor used by Solomon; for while a vessel may be wrecked during a storm and never return to its owner, the reward of our benevolence is in the sure hands of Him who commands the

storm, therefore it can never be lost, and never fail.

In verse 2 the metaphor takes another turn, and teaches us another lesson. An enterprising man does not confine himself to one branch of business, to one vessel at sea, to one spot on land, but he divides his capital, and invests in different ways. If one of his vessels suffer shipwreck, the other six or seven will return heavily laden with riches, and pay for themselves and for the lost one. If one house, one partner fail, the other six or seven will fill up the gap. If in one town his business will suffer, he will repair his loss in the other six or seven towns. "Give a portion" (or, more literal, 'giving a portion') "to seven, yea, even to eight," viz., "Thou enterprising merchant dividest thy capital into seven or eight portions, investest it in different speculations," and why? because "thou knowest not what evil there shall be upon the earth,"—viz., knowest not which branch of thy business shall fail and which shall prosper, and therefore thou dividest it into many branches, that if one fails the others may repair thy loss, shouldst thou not do the same with regard to God? The moral lesson here is, that in the exercise of our charity we should not confine ourselves to one poor man or family, to one benevolent purpose, to one philanthropic undertaking, or to one religious enterprise; nor should we be discouraged by or take prejudice at the seeming failure of one of such objects, because such a person deceived us, such an enterprise or mission failed to answer the purpose for which it was established; nor should we in these transactions jump harshly from the one to another, abandon the one entirely and embrace the other with all vigour; for we are often grievously disappointed in these matters, and the thing or cause abandoned by us

begins to prosper and flourish and bear fruit, while the other, embraced with energy, begins to show real symptoms of decay, even as it often happens in mercantile enterprises. We must not, therefore, make choices according to our own wisdom, but rather give portions to seven and even to eight; in scriptural words, we must not be wearied in well-doing, but support everything intended and promising to do good, and leave the results of it and our reward in the hand of God.

In verse 3d the same argument is pursued and strengthened. Seeing our short-sightedness, and the entire absence of our knowledge about the issue of things, whether they will fail or prosper, we should, therefore, always pursue the good without speculating which of the good might be preferable to the other. A vain speculation it would be for a man to follow a cloud, fixing his eyes upon it in order to see where and when it will pour out its liquid contents, when it shall be full and attracted according to the laws of nature, and over which place the wind will have carried it by that time, then and there it shall empty itself upon earth. The same vanity it would be for one to fix his eyes on a tottering tree and try to divine on what side it will fall, for this also depends upon the wind, from which side it will breathe at that time, from the north or from the south. The same folly we should commit were we to search and speculate about the issue of things which depend entirely on the will and arrangements of a mysterious Providence. It is for us to do what is right and good, and according to the will of our God, and for the Lord it is to order and arrange all events.

4. He that observeth the wind will never sow ;
And he that regardeth the clouds will never reap.

5. As thou knowest not what is the way of the spirit,
Nor how the bones grow in the pregnant womb,
So thou canst not comprehend the works of God,
How He maketh all things.
6. In the morning sow thou 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.

It is easily seen that in these three verses the same argument is pursued with which the chapter began. Man is called upon to act while time is given or prolonged unto him, and while it is called day. His only sure direction is to do all that is commanded in the revealed will of God, and to do it without speculation either with respect to the prosperity and success of his exertions, or with respect to his own reward. Many good men have laboured for God all the days of their earthly pilgrimage, with zeal, love, faith, and self-denial, although they saw not the fruits of their labours while here below. Succeeding generations reaped an abundant harvest from the seed long covered under hard and apparently barren soil. As sure as these godly men sowed the good seed, and as sure as that seed bore fruits after their departure hence, so sure is it that they do now enjoy richly the fruits of their labours, and of the seed sown in tears by faith, and will continue to do so throughout eternity. The simple husbandman is called upon to exercise such faith and hope in his labours, to do his duty, and leave the rest to the faithful God, the ruler and commander of nature, how much more should the spiritual labourers in Jehovah's vineyard act by faith, and by faith alone! Should an husbandman be so foolish as to spend the whole of the sowing season in observing the wind, in speculations about the possi-

bility of a strong wind coming and carrying off the seed from the soil, then he would never sow, for he will always find reason to fear. Should an husbandman be so foolish as to regard continually the clouds and speculate about the possibility of a small cloud growing into a large one, and injure his crop when cut down, then he would never reap, but leave his crop on the field until the rainy season came and destroyed it. Is it not the same with regard to man's spiritual labours in the work of God? If we observe small difficulties, if we regard little disappointments, if we let our courage sink at any trial, if we despair at any adversity, if we speculate about the possibility of some storm rising and hurting our labours, then we shall sleep during day, and spend our precious time in laziness and hesitations until night come in and sweep us off from the scene of usefulness altogether.

If we are often called upon to labour, as it were, under thick and threatening clouds; if we have often to sow the precious seed of the gospel among thorns, and upon stony soil, if our labours are often covered with obscurity, and their success in impenetrable darkness, let us remember that the work is not ours, and that the heavenly master for whom we labour does not apprehend these things at all; for all is light with and about Him—"darkness hideth nothing from Him, but night shineth unto Him as day."

Solomon then concludes this argument with an admirable advice, "In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand." We must labour as long as it is day. If we rejoice in the works of our hands, when we see aurora smile at the very beginning of our enterprise; if we are encouraged in our labours when the sun of righteousness pours his radiant beams upon us in the very

mornings of our hope, let us not be discouraged or dismayed when we see clouds gather and conspire to turn our cheerful mornings into dismal evenings ; but let us remember that the Lord, to whom our works belong, is seated above cloud, sun, or star. Let us labour vigorously in promising times, and not let our hands fall under difficulties and adversities, for ours is to sow, and only to sow, the increase belongs unto God, who alone can give it. We cannot tell which seed will bear the most fruit, whether that sowed with joy under promising circumstances, or that sown in tears under persecution and sufferings, or if "both of them will be alike good." The latter is surely certain, that both are alike good, as far as our duty is concerned. What belongs unto God, He will prosper, the one or the other, or both, according to His sovereign will, for the promotion of his glory. Therefore it is that whether morning or evening as to circumstances, whether morning or evening as to the period of our life, we must work continually, and be on our watch not to lose our precious time.

7. Truly the light is sweet,
 And it is pleasant for the eyes to behold the sun :
 8 So that even if a man live many years,
 He may rejoice in them all ;
 But let him remember the days of darkness,
 For they shall be many.
 All that followeth is vain.

Time is so precious to mortals that there is not a moment to be lost. Even the longest life possible is not too long for the accomplishment of our duties, and for our preparation for eternity. The light of the "sun of righteousness" is as precious to every child of God who is enlightened "with the light of the living," as the light of the sun is precious to

material existence. As long as our day of activity continues, we have reason to rejoice in the opportunities afforded unto us for doing good in this school of probation. Considering the shortness of our residence here, and the nature of the work in which we are employed, our zeal and activity instead of abating, should augment with every hour, with every day of our life. Especially when we look forward to the "days of darkness," that is to say, to the long night that will follow death (which is dark with respect to our labours here, which shall for ever cease), then we can appreciate the value of every moment of our active life, and do with zeal and haste every thing which is in our power and within our reach to do, and thus accomplish the sweet task laid on us by our Creator. "All that followeth is vain," viz., all that follows our earthly existence and activity is *vain* or *nothingness* with respect to *work*—no preaching of the gospel, no exercise of charity, no display of benevolence, no invitation to sinners, no conversion of souls, no building of churches, no founding of religious establishments and societies, no distribution of scriptures, no circulation of tracts, no missionary labours, no philanthropic meetings, no collections and no distributions in the dark grave. In this respect this life is light and activity, while all that follows is darkness and vanity. As to the trials and difficulties of this life, and reward and felicity of the life to come—as to those redeemed ones who apply well the days of light and life on earth in their Master's service, it is otherwise; for whereas this their life may be called the short day of darkness, of troubles and sufferings, the long and never-ending day of eternal life is unto them the truly long day of radiant light, of undisturbed rest, and unmingled joy.

9. Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth,
And let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy vigour,
And walk in the ways of thine heart,
And in the sight of thine eyes ;
But know thou, that for all these things
God will bring thee into judgment.
10. Remove, therefore, wrath from thy heart,
And put away evil from thy flesh :
For childhood and youth are vanity.

When a physician has to enforce rules of moderation in diet, and regularity in the taking of a certain drug, on a young, wealthy, and naturally gay and vigorous patient, in the absence of any other authority he keeps before his eyes the sad consequences of disobedience. "I advise you to abstain from eating strong food, from drinking any spirituous liquor, from the exertion of hunting, from the tumult of balls and theatres, &c. I well know that in your station and at your age, these trials are great, but you must resist them all if you wish to recover from your dangerous illness. If you will not follow my advice, well ; eat and drink what I forbid you, expose your feeble and diseased frame to all the violent exertions of hunting and balls ; but know that in so doing you invite an untimely and unavoidable death, and while, in that case, I shall not consider myself in the least responsible, you must know that you have destroyed yourself, and you will be responsible before God. Take care, therefore, and stop the growing disease by observing strictly my orders, and thus it is to be hoped that you will escape an untimely death and a severe judgment. As for the little pleasures which you shall now deny yourself, when once a man and a Christian you shall see that they are but trifling and childish vanity,

and not worthy to be considered as a loss at all, especially to a moral and responsible agent."

Throughout this admirable book, Solomon preached moderation in everything, the use of which may be even lawful, but the abuse of which is dangerous and destructive to body and soul. As none are so prone to abuse earthly gifts and enjoyments as are young people in the full vigour of their life, Solomon holds out to them the consequences of both, obedience or disobedience to his wise and inspired precepts. It is therefore as if he had said, "O young people, I recommended in this book the moderate use of the gifts of God, which are to be taken with thanksgiving; but I also condemned the abuse of these very same things, and shewed how they may turn out to the destruction of our bodies and souls. I recommended a life of sacred joy, calm contentedness, and modest happiness; but I condemned a life of dissipation, wild merriment, and mad jollity, which lead to the certain destruction of soul and body. As I saw in the course of my long experience that none are more apt to fall into these abuses and extravagances than young people in the full vigour of life, when they see roses on every bush of the vanity of this world, but do not discover the thorns until they are pierced and wounded by them, and when it is too late to find a remedy, I therefore do earnestly repeat my warnings in the name of God and His wisdom. But if you will not hear me, if you will not practise my statutes, and not struggle against these dangerous temptations, well then! give yourselves to all wild pleasures, pursue every desire of your flesh, walk in the way of your eyes, plunge yourselves into every dissipation and disorder whither your sight will lead you; but know that you destroy yourselves soul and body, that you will certainly be condemned before the

judgment-seat of the Most High, and awfully suffer throughout eternity for a mere foolish dream, for vain imaginations, for shadows of vanity. Take, therefore, great care while it is yet time, and avert the wrath of God from your souls, misery and sufferings from your bodies, an old age full of diseases and remorse, a death full of horrors, and an eternity of darkness and agony. If the sacrifice of earthly and vain pleasures seem great to you in the days of your youth, you will one day see them in quite another light, you will be astonished how rational men can be given to them, you will laugh at them, and say that childhood and youth are vanity."

(CHAPTER XII. VERS. 1, 2.)

1. Remember, therefore, thy Creator in the days of thy youth,
Ere the evil days come and the years arrive
When thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them ;
2. Ere the sun and his light, and the moon and the stars
become dark,
And the clouds return after the rain.

In the two verses of the foregoing chapter, the young man was warned that he will stand in judgment before the awful throne of his God, and that he will have to answer for every sin and extravagance committed by him in the days of his vigour. That lesson implied that *youth* is by no means to rely on as any excuse for sin before the Judge of the whole earth—that the verdict of the highest tribunal will never say concerning a criminal, "his

chief crimes and errors were committed at a period when his earthly desires and fleshly lusts were in their height, when the world and its foolishness appeared to his youthful fancy in all beauty and splendour, and had every attraction for his inexperienced eyes; hence that all these sins cannot be counted unto him." No; all this shall be counted among the chief reasons for his condemnation, seeing that he spent the best time of his life, the most useful portion of his earthly pilgrimage, in the service of Satan, instead of having devoted them as the first fruits of his life in the service of his God; seeing that he extravagantly devoted the most vigorous and useful days and hours to foolish pursuits and sinful pleasures, instead of applying them for the promotion of the glory of his Creator, who called him into existence for that purpose and for that alone. After the above warning given, Solomon opens the present and last chapter with an earnest and wholesome advice to the young man to "remember his Creator in the days of his youth"—to remember early in life that he belonged soul and body unto God; that his duty was to love, fear, and to serve Him with *all* his heart, with *all* his soul, and with *all* his might; that therefore he is bound to consecrate himself as early as possible to the service of the Lord, and to renew the covenant of His grace in the most tender youth. This, says Solomon, should be done "Ere the evil days come," viz., before the useless, helpless, and lazy days of old age, of weakness, and of diverse sufferings come, and regarding which man says, "I have no pleasure in them," viz., when nothing pleases, nothing amuses, when nothing is undertaken with vigour, and nothing is accomplished with energy and satisfaction—such is not the time for which a mortal man should delay his conversion and his reconciliation to God.

For this reason the royal penitent advises young men to embrace the earliest opportunity for entering the service of their living and faithful God, before their energy and youthful vigour be for ever gone, "Ere the sun and his light, and the moon and the stars become dark, and the clouds return after the rain." Man's short life is accompanied by many storms, trials, disasters, and disappointments, and oftentimes he finds himself enveloped in utter darkness, as if the sun, moon, and stars had for ever abandoned him. In the days of youthful vigour, however, these lights pierce through (as it were) the dark clouds, and the young man sees himself once more extricated from darkness, and again agreeable hopes and pleasant expectations stand before his eyes and cheer his youthful fancy. But in old age, when one would think that as the clouds had so long emptied themselves, that light would now continue to shine in all its brilliancy, it is quite the reverse, for it is then that the worldly man finds himself lost in obscurity, and filled with and surrounded by thick darkness, without the least hope of the reappearance of light. After a rainy and stormy life, gloomy clouds cover all the horizon above him; the darkness is thicker and more threatening than ever before, and neither his age, nor his experience, nor his past life and practice, allow him to entertain the least hope of a favourable change. This world and its foolishness affording no more stimulants for his stained and stagnant soul, he is lost in a labyrinth of fighting thoughts, relentless remorse, piercing grief, melancholy fears, bewildering doubts, and dreadful forebodings of eternal misery and never-ending torment. Is such a time favourable for conversion and salvation? Should a question so grave, so important, as that of the salvation or condemnation of a never-dying soul be in-

differently delayed for such a period of darkness and uncertainty? Should eternal life be hung up on a withered leaf driven about by the wind? This every child of Adam must decide for himself as long as time is granted him to do so. But the inspired Solomon advises every man to decide about his conversion and salvation in the days of his youth, before the arrival of the "evil days," the symptoms and characteristics of which are the following:—

3. In the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble,
And when the strong men shall bend,
And the grinders shall cease (grinding),
Because they became few (in number),
And those which look through the windows become
darkened.
4. And the outer doors shall be shut up,
And thus the sound of the grinding shall become low.
And he shall arise at the voice of a bird,
And all the daughters of song shall be depressed :
5. When also they shall be afraid of high places,
And when terrors shall be in the way ;
When the almond-tree shall shake off its flowers,
And when the locust shall become a burden (to him-
self),
And when all desires shall fail ;
Yea when the man shall go to his eternal home,
And the mourners walk about in the street.
6. [*Remember therefore thy Creator*]
Ere the silver cord be relaxed,
And the golden bowl be broken,
And the pitcher be shivered at the fountain,
And the wheel roll into the pit.
7. Then shall the dust return to the earth, as it was before,
And the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.*

* The following is, in our humble opinion, the most probable explanation of the figures employed by Solomon in verses 3—7 for describing the changes, weakness, and infirmities of old age, which end with the dissolution of the body in

It was in the most noble poetical language, and

the grave:—Ver. 3. “When the keepers of the house shall tremble;” viz., when the feet and the legs which keep and support the earthly tabernacle, the body, begin to be feeble and tremble under their burden (see Judges xvi. 25—30); “And the strong men shall bend” (or the fighting men shall bow), viz., when the hands and arms shall lose their power, shall be able no more to fight and defend the body, and when they shall lay hold on anything they shall bend and give way at the least resistance. “And the grinders shall cease (grinding), because they become few (in number),” viz., when the teeth cease to exercise their grinding and masticating functions because the most of them and the strongest are gone, and the few shaking ones can do nothing. “And those which look through the windows become darkened; viz., when the eyes get dim and dark, and when, looking out of their holes and eyelids, they cannot perceive objects with the facility of youth, for shadows are placed before them. Ver. 4. “And the outer doors shall be shut up, and thus the sound of the grinding shall become low;” viz., old people, who, for the want of teeth are obliged to masticate their food with their gums and jaws, must shut up their lips when eating, that the food should not drop out, and thus the sound of grinding is scarcely heard. “And he shall arise at the voice of a bird,” viz., the least noise awakens old people, for their sleep is no more sound. “And all the daughters of song shall be depressed;” viz., the voice and the ear are the natural instruments or daughters of song, of music; these are depressed and disabled when the trumpet of the ear is stopped by old age, and when the throat, breast, and lungs are incapable of performing their offices. Ver. 5. “When also they shall be afraid of high places, and when terror shall be in the way;” viz., old persons are too feeble to ascend high places, their steps being so uncertain that they are afraid of falling even on the broad highway. “When the almond tree shall shake off its flowers;” viz., when the silver white hairs of head and beard begin to fall out from weakness and age, as do the snowy flowers of the almond tree at the end of its flourishing season (אֲנִיצִי—Nacitz, never signifies “flourish,” as the different versions render it, but always means “to cast off, shake off.”) Nothing can be a more striking comparison to the creeping out of the silver locks by old age than the falling down of the beautiful almond flowers when the tree is agitated by the wind. “And the locust shall become a burden (to himself).” J. Parkhurst, in his Hebrew Lexicon, under אֲנִיצִי explains this comparison in the following terms: “The dry, shrunk, shrivelled, crumpling, craggy old man, his backbone sticking out, his knees projecting forwards, his arms backwards, his head downwards, and the apophyses, or lunch-

in the strongest and clearest terms that our inspired penman described (throughout this book) the madness and nullity of a dissipated life. It was by producing the most ample, the most striking, the most familiar and irrefutable proofs that Solomon showed

ing parts of the bones in general enlarged, is very aptly described by that insect;" and in that state it is that the crippled body of the old person is a real burden to himself. "And when all desires shall fail," or all satisfaction shall cease, such a broken and worn-out body delights in nothing, finds satisfaction in nothing,—this world, and its vanities, luxuries, and toys, having lost all their attractions for man in that advanced age; for soon he shall go to his "eternal home," and the mourners shall spread in the streets (according to the oriental custom that when one died mourners spread in the streets, and in their lamentations mourned that such and such a one parted for his eternal home.)

Ver. 6 is evidently a resumed turn to ver. 1; and, as hitherto the shattered human body was compared to an old building, &c., now it is compared to an old apparatus and the broken utensils of an old deep well. "Remember, therefore, thy Creator ere the silver cord be relaxed;" viz., ere the spinal marrow, which runs along the back-bone and is combined with all the nerves to every extremity, be relaxed and loosed by degrees until its combining powers be entirely gone. "And the gold bowl be broken;" viz., ere a relaxation and disorder be produced in the brain by cause of extreme dissolution of the physical strength. "And the pitcher be shivered at the fountain." By this some understand the vena cava, or the vessel which sends back the blood into the left ventricle of the heart, called the fountain, but according to the metaphor it rather denotes a vessel that receives the blood from the right ventricle of the heart (the fountain) to distribute it into all the blood vessels. Thus, the pitcher here must denote the great artery. "And the wheel roll into the pit." This figure is (we think) independent of the former, and in it man is compared to a wheel, which, pushed by some force, rolls on until it finds a pit, whereinto it falls and its activity stops; so busy and active and ever moving man stands never still, but always desires to go forward, to make progress, physically and morally, until at last he goes into the grave, where all activity is at an end, and he rolls no more. Some think that by the wheel the lungs are described, on the continual play of which depends all the motion of the body; but then the meaning of its *rolling* and of its *falling* into the pit cannot be explained. We are, therefore, inclined to adhere to our former explanation as the more likely to be the true one, until a better corresponding one be found.

in so many places and in so different colours the danger, misery, and destructiveness of a course of pleasure-hunting and of a life of sin and extravagance, having their source in corrupted nature and in the youthful propensities of our fallen race. Now he winds up his long discourse by turning our attention to the frailties, sufferings, and helplessness of old age, for which uncertain time of half existence many straying sinners, many young and vigorous mortals, delay their conversion. Here we are told that when this tabernacle of our bodies enters upon the process of quick decay, when our eyes grow dim and our ears heavy for hearing, when our limbs grow weak and tremble under their burden, when our hands get dry, sapless, and powerless, and when our whole system becomes slow and weary and threatens entire inactivity—that this was by no means a fit time for a worldling, who spent all his life and vigour in the service of the prince of this world, to begin to think of entering the service of the great God of heaven. Old age, and its silent days and nights, is a fit time for the old soldier of Christ to look back to the days of his active service, in which he served faithfully and energetically his heavenly Master, to remember the victories he gained under the banner of the Lamb of God over His open and secret, visible and invisible enemies; and also a fit time for making preparations for death, judgment, and eternal rest and happiness in the bosom of celestial love. Happy is the man who on the eve of his earthly pilgrimage can say with a saint of old, “The time of my departure is now 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.” (2 Tim. iv. 6—8.) Again,

“For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. . . . We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.” (2 Cor. v. 1—8.) Such are sweet and cheering meditations for old age ; such are the most proper occupations for a devoted and experienced soul in an old and worn-out tabernacle ; but woe unto the unfortunate soul who in a half-decayed, trembling, and shattered tabernacle, only begins to dread a gloomy future, a tormenting eternity after death, which knocks already violently at the door, and may enter in a moment !

“Remember therefore thy Creator in the days of thy youth.” Remember early, O young and vigorous man, who thou art, who is thy Creator, for what purposes He has given you existence, what He does require of you to do, and how you are obliged to act. Remember, O young man, that thou art dust, that thy stay on earth is as short and as uncertain as that of a small cloud driven by the wind, that the least accident, the most unimportant change, may hurry thee into eternity, and thus that thou hast not a moment to lose. Remember that thy physical strength and youthful vigour were given unto thee by the same Creator who bestowed on thee a rational and never-dying soul, and that both must be devoted and employed in His service and for the promotion of His sovereign will and honour.

8. Vanity of vanities, saith Koheleth,*
All is vanity.

* “Koheleth,” or “the wise and inspired man, who, by personal experience, speaks in the name of wisdom,” as it is largely explained in the Introduction (at the end.) In this verse we have the second instance where the verb “saith” is also in the feminine form, as its metaphorical noun ; for we must

The sum and substance of every serious consideration, of every exact religious reflection, is, that this passing world and all his perishing pleasures, "the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life," are as vain and foolish in youth as in old age; "for the world passes away and the lusts thereof," and what remains unto mortal man after all his vain dreams, if he has nothing prepared for an everlasting world? Old age is a living witness and a severe judge against the deceitfulness of worldly pleasures, and the vanity of youthful joys. Here is a man still living and moving amongst the wild flowers of this vale of Baca, flowers which once fascinated his eyes, attracted and absorbed all his attention and energy, and the very thought of the possession of which animated him with an almost irresistible passion, and filled him with joy and pride. Now he passes by and through them, rarely regarding them, and when he happens to cast his look upon them it is sometimes with ridicule, sometimes with smiles of indifference, and oftener with indignation. The symptoms of decay which took up their abode in his mortal tabernacle begin to mortify passion and lust in the flesh, and earthly vanities become more and more detestable unto him—how then must it be to the departing soul? When after the defeat and death of the unnatural rebel Absalom, David returning to his royal residence and throne invited his old friend and benefactor Barzillai to follow him to Jerusalem and live at

read here אַמְרָה קֹהֶלֶת (Amrah-Koheleth) as it reads chapter vii. ver. 27, and not הַקֹּהֶלֶת (Hakoheleth); for the ה is irregular here, and answers no purpose. It must have been removed by mistake in a manuscript, and instead of leaving the ה at the end of the verb, the writer attached it to the beginning of the noun. The uncertainty of its signification contributed to the mistake.

court, the latter replied: "I am this day fourscore years old; and can I discern between good and evil? Can thy servant taste what I eat, or what I drink? Can I hear any more the voice of singing men and singing women? Wherefore then should thy servant be yet a burden unto my lord the king?" (2 Sam. xix. 35.) Such is the condemning verdict of old age against the foolish vanities of this world; and O what will be the verdict of the never-dying soul when entirely separated and freed from this abode of mean passions! Blessed and happy is the man who considers and weighs these things in the days of his youth, and early takes courage to change the *passing* for *lasting*, the *imaginary and foolish* for the *real and wise*. Such a man, when arrived at old age, is able even on this side the grave to see his triumph and rejoice, and glory in his choice. Even here he is able to contrast the invaluable treasures which he gathered for carrying into eternity, with the miserably dissolving vapours of worldly pleasures, which happily he early abandoned, and which had he embraced as do thousands of unthinking fools, he would now have found himself, like them, in the possession of a handful of wind—yea, he would have been obliged to perform the painful duty of self-condemnation, to bewail himself and his own actions, to wonder how he could have been so blinded and so foolish as to pursue a mere shadow, to embrace a vision, to worship the wind, to burn in the fire bricks of snow in order to build castles in the air, to bathe in mud in order to wash himself, and to waste the best of his days in a labyrinth of the grossest of vanities. Yea, youthful vanities are condemned even by old sinners and fools, who do not know the glory of man's real mission, as darkness is condemned by blind men though they cannot appreciate the rays of the sun.

9. The more wise Koheleth became,
 The more he taught the people knowledge,
 Yea he examined (all things),
 And invented and composed many proverbs.

The royal author, under the metaphorical name of Koheleth, left nothing in human life unconsidered, and no experience of whatever character was passed by without deducing from it useful instruction for his fellow men. "The more wise Koheleth became," viz., the more personal experience the wise man had gathered "by wisdom," "the more he taught the people knowledge." Solomon kept nothing for himself (if it was not the grief of his past faults), nothing unapplied, but he turned every thing into powerful proofs and examples, into useful warnings, earnest exhortations, and sound doctrine and counsel. And by what means? "He examined all things," he contemplated every subject exactly and carefully; he sought the source of every failure and disappointment in his own manifold and mighty experiments, in search of real and solid satisfaction—he found it to lie in the fact that immortal souls had nobler marks and far higher destinies than to reach any satisfactory point, or any lasting pleasure in the vain and perishing things of this material world. He then "invented and composed many proverbs," viz., he invented the figures and metaphors, and composed proverbs; or he wrapped up sound doctrine and brotherly advice in the most striking language of impressive figures and self-speaking examples.

The individual who would venture to say that it needs not much wisdom or experience to conclude about the nature and value of worldly lusts, and to describe them, and to give remedies against them, we say that such an individual would only betray

his ignorance of the subject and of himself. A man who swallows a deleterious drug, and feels the agonies of death, does not become a physician, because he knows now that the drug he swallowed is poisonous. A physician requires more knowledge than that even in this small department; he should know the nature of every poisonous substance, the manner in which it acts when, unfortunately, in the stomach, and the part of the body which it attacks, and fatally affects; he should also know substances which though including but a small quantity of poison, still, if taken in great dozes, would kill. Hence the physician is able not only to tell a poisoned man, "thou art poisoned," but to warn the ignorant, when it is yet time, to avoid danger, and when danger is incurred already, to try an antidote. Such an experienced physician was Solomon morally. Having been rescued by an Almighty arm of mercy and grace, and having in an exceptional manner escaped eternal death after having swallowed many large dozes of moral poison of different natures, which even separately were enough to destroy scores of souls of inferior strength, or rather of less grace, he after his recovery gathered materials enough to warn others in the name of experienced wisdom. His enormous riches enabled him to gratify every imaginable desire without the least difficulty; and when after all he found out the vanity and nothingness of all that these riches could procure, he can stand forth, and with more authority than any other mortal, can warn the bewildered and half-mad pleasure-hunters, that not only is it possible that they would perish before having satisfied their wild desires, but that even if they should find it as easy as he did to gratify them, they would at last experience that they pursued vanity of vanities.

10. Koheleth endeavoured to find out useful subjects,*
And to write upright words of truth.
11. The words of the wise are like harrows,†
And like the nails which are deeply fixed :
The collecting men are appointed by one Shepherd.
12. Moreover, by these, my son, be thou admonished ;
For in composing many books there is no end,
And excessive study is weariness to the flesh.

The experienced and inspired Koheleth composed this and his other books not for the mere vain object to be an author of many books, but his chief desire and earnest endeavour was to find out "useful subjects," and to write them down in "upright words of truth," that they may serve posterity, and be "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness." But he was not the only inspired writer under the Old Testa-

* דְּבַר־חֶפְזֵץ (Divrey-Chephetz). Both these words are very comprehensive in their respective significations ; for *Davar* variously signifies "word, speech, sentiment, subject, matter, affair, business, order," &c. ; and for the different significations of the Hebrew *Chephetz*—see note on verse 8, chap. v. of this book. In our verse we think it means that Solomon endeavoured, desired, or sought (for בִּקֶּשׂ [Bikesh] bears any of these) to find out "useful subjects" for contemplation and instruction ; and to write down the results of his labours in upright words of truth. We also read וְכָתוּב (Vekatov), "and to write," as in Jer. xxxii. 44 ; and not as the Rabbies (who have an erroneous interpretation of this verse) pointed the word וְכָתוּב (Vekatuv), meaning "it is (or was) written."

† דְּרָבוֹן (Dorbon) or דְּרָבָן (Dorban), means "the harrow," with its iron nails, used in agriculture to reduce a strong obdurate soil, to break the clods of the furrow, or to cover the seed by levelling the surface. Thus it should be rendered in 1 Sam. xiii. 21, "And to arrange the harrow," viz., to sharpen and fasten the nails in the wooden frames or bulls. In both places it is erroneously rendered "goads," and the different lexicons seem to have followed the error of ancient and modern Jewish commentators in the translation of this word.

ment dispensation; there were numerous prophets and men of God who were charged with that important mission, and who "spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost," as were also afterwards the apostles of Christ. Solomon, therefore, speaks in verse 11 of all inspired works collectively, and says that the words of the inspired wise man are "like harrows, and like the nails (of the harrows) which are deeply fixed (or well fastened or planted)," viz., as the harrow and its many iron nails is useful for reducing the clods of an obdurate soil, for levelling the furrows of the ground, and for covering the seed sown in it, so are the inspired words of the wise adapted to reduce and soften the stony heart (after having been opened by the plough of the Spirit), to prepare the hitherto barren soil for the precious seed of the Gospel, and then to cover that seed, when sown, from the birds of prey. "The collecting men," (or "those who assemble or gather them," viz., the useful subjects and the upright words of truth) "are appointed by one Shepherd," viz., are charged and inspired and sustained by one and the same Spirit: "For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man, but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." (2 Peter i. 21.)

In verse 12 we are told that we must consider these inspired collections and divine instructions as our *only* spiritual guides, to consult them always, and to prefer them all to mere human productions. It is from the inspired word of God alone that we should take our doctrines, warnings, advices, and admonitions; for all human wisdom and invention will assuredly lead us astray. No ancient or modern philosophy has ever succeeded, nor shall ever succeed, to render a nation (or even individuals) spiritually happy and morally wise unto salvation. Human

savants may compose as many books as the number of hairs on their heads; others may spend all the days of their life in studying them, but without the inspired word of God they will be floating in a shattered vessel without anchor or rudder, in the midst of the foaming waves of a troubled sea. After all their vain speculations, hard labour, infinite struggles, and forced hopes, they shall reach no haven, for the covered rocks shall add to the breaches in their wreck; the more they shall try by human wisdom to pump out the rushing-in waters, the deeper they shall find themselves sinking. At last a heavy tempest shock shall shiver their broken vessel, and they shall go down to the bottomless pit, and reap the fruits of their madness in an awful eternity.

13. The conclusion of the subject comprehendeth all,
Fear God and keep his commandments;
For this is the whole *duty* of man.
14. For God shall bring every work into judgment.
Even all those that are secret,
Whether they be good or evil.

Throughout this book Solomon laid down before the reader facts from his own experience, by which he endeavoured to convince him of the vanity and nothingness of worldly objects and pleasures; of their entire insufficiency of affording any real satisfaction, and of their incapability of producing any lasting advantage unto those who seek and worship them. He also showed unto man how much he will lose by embracing such vanishing shadows and destroying his precious time, which is very short, and that then he may suddenly be precipitated into eternity, where his own mouth will condemn him. All these arguments were clothed in the most beautiful language of upright words of truth, and

wrapped in lively figures and metaphors, and accompanied by examples, warnings, advices, and admonitions. At the close of this precious work the royal author wished to give us in a few words the sum and substance of the whole, and to show us in one short advice the whole of the important doctrines which he taught in detail. "The conclusion of the subject" (or of the argument), viz., of the subject treated in this work at large, "comprehendeth all,"—is the germ, the principle, and sum of religious teaching. "Fear God and keep His commandments,"—fear God and thou shalt see that all worldly and material pleasures are vanity of vanities,—fear God and thou shalt escape all temptations, backsliding, and sin, and their melancholy consequences,—fear thou God, and then the world and her children, the wicked, and Satan and sin, shall fear thee, and keep out of thy way. Then "keep Jehovah's commandments," compare everything with them, weigh every action by them, and thus thou shalt spare thyself the trouble, danger, misery, and disappointment of those who spend their lives in seeking lasting pleasures and solid advantage in things that perish. Fear Jehovah and keep His commandments, and thus thy real happiness, thy peace, thy pleasures, and thy satisfactions shall be flourishing and vigorous even at a time when the worn-out worldling begins to despise life and tremble at the very thought of eternity. "For this is the whole *duty* of man," viz., to fear the Lord and to keep His commandments. The reader will observe that the word *duty* is put in italics in the English version, for it is not in the Hebrew text. The reason why we likewise have adopted the word is, because the text may imply it, and because that without it the phrase may seem incomplete at the first sight. Literally the phrase reads "for this is

the whole man," and doubtless means that to fear God and keep His commandments is the chief end of man ; that but for this purpose man would never have been called into existence. To this Solomon adds in the last verse that man is a responsible agent ; that all his actions, whether good or bad, whether done in public or under the strictest secrecy, will be brought before the tribunal of heaven, and weighed in the balance of righteousness and equity, and that every man shall be judged according to his works. Seeing this to be the case, seeing that man's chief, yea, only mission and duty, is to fear God and keep His commandments, and that any other work that does not answer that purpose will be brought into judgment, the sinner may now be left to judge for himself, and see if there is time or occasion for him during the moment of life to go astray, or to begin to search in the midst of a labyrinth of vanities, for satisfactions, and advantages, which were he even as rich and as wise as Solomon, he will never find.

O mortal man ! O responsible agent ! Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth, and begin early, as early as possible, to fear Jehovah and to keep His commandments, for this is thy calling, this thy duty, this thy work, and this thy only way to eternal happiness. To disobey the Creator of the Universe, to do evil, to love the world, to serve sin and the lust of the flesh and the desire of the eyes, is the work and invention of Satan and his angels, and thou needest not go far to see and be convinced of the misery, disappointment, and certain destruction that unavoidably follow such a mad course ; for every day produces its dreadful examples of the consequences of sin, the fruit of which (eternal death) begins to be reaped in this life both by old and young sinners. On the other hand, to fear God,

to walk in the way of righteousness, to fulfil the Lord's commandments, to exercise justice and judgment, to love the Creator, and in return for His unspeakable love to us, to love also and to do good unto our fellow men—all these have, as it were, spiritual life in them, and give us unspeakable pleasures, everlasting advantages, and joy that passes all understanding. They leave a sweet taste behind, they heave with peace and silent felicity the breast of the aged and feeble servant of God, they alleviate the sufferings on the couch of sickness, they fill with holy boldness the dying child of God; and when the river of death is once passed, there waits for them the crown of glory and the infallible word of promise, "And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever."

Let us never forget that the foundation of this fear and obedience is laid in the work of redemption, promised afore by the prophets in the Holy Scriptures. "There is forgiveness with thee that thou mayest be feared, for with the Lord there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption." "This is his commandment, that we should believe on the name of his son Jesus Christ." "What shall the end be of those that obey not the gospel of God?"





