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PROVERBS 20: 1 Wine is a mocker, and beer is a brawler. Whoever is led astray by them is not wise.

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Against wine and strong drink. We should avoid contentions. The sluggard. The righteous man. Weights and measures. Tale-bearers. The wicked son. The wise king. The glory of young men. The beauty of old men. The benefit of correction.

Verse 1

Wine is a mocker - It deceives by its fragrance, intoxicates by its strength, and renders the intoxicated ridiculous.

Strong drink - שכר shechar, any strong fermented liquor, whether of the vine, date, or palm species.

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PROVERBS 20: 2 The terror of a king is like the roaring of a lion. He who provokes him to anger forfeits his own life.

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Verse 2

The fear of a king - Almost the same with Pro 19:12 (note), which see.

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PROVERBS 20: 3 It is an honour for a man to keep aloof from strife; but every fool will be quarrelling.

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Verse 3

It is an honoer for a man - The same sentiment as Pro 19:11.

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PROVERBS 20: 4 The sluggard will not plough by reason of the winter; therefore he shall beg in harvest, and have nothing.

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Verse 4

The sluggard will not plough - For other parts of this character, see the preceding chapter, Proverbs 19 (note). It is seldom that there is a season of very cold weather in Palestine; very cold days sometimes occur, with wind, rain, and sleet. They begin their ploughing in the latter end of September, and sow their early wheat by the middle of October. And this is often the case in England itself. The meaning of the proverb is: the slothful man, under the pretense of unfavorable weather, neglects cultivating his land till the proper time is elapsed.

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PROVERBS 20: 5 Counsel in the heart of man is like deep water; but a man of understanding will draw it out.

Verse 5

Counsel in the heart of man - Men of the deepest and most comprehensive minds are rarely apt, unsolicited, to join in any discourse, in which they might appear even to the greatest advantage; but a man of understanding will elicit this, by questions framed for the purpose, and thus pump up the salubrious waters from the deep and capacious well. The metaphor is fine and expressive.

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PROVERBS 20: 6 Many men claim to be men of unfailling love, but who can find a faithful man?

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Verse 6

Most men will proclaim - Many men merciful ben clepid: a feithful man forsoth, who schal finde?  
Old MS. Bible.

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PROVERBS 20: 7 A righteous man walks in integrity. Blessed are his children after him.

PROVERBS 20: 8 A king who sits on the throne of judgement scatters away all evil with his eyes.

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Verse 8

A king that sitteth in the throne of judgment - Kings should see to the administration of the laws, as well as of the state transactions, of their kingdom. In the British constitution there is a court for the king, called the King's Bench, where he should sit, and where he is always supposed to be sitting. The eyes - the presence, of the monarch in such a place, scatter evil - he sees into the case himself, and gives right judgment, for he can have no self-interest. Corrupt judges, and falsifying counsellors, cannot stand before him; and the villain is too deeply struck with the majesty and state of the monarch, to face out iniquity before him.

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PROVERBS 20: 9 Who can say, "I have made my heart pure. I am clean and without sin?"

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Verse 9

Who can say, I have made any heart clean - No man. But thousands can testify that the blood of Jesus Christ has cleansed them from all unrighteousness. And he is pure from his sin, who is justified freely through the redemption that is in Jesus.

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PROVERBS 20: 10 Differing weights and differing measures, both of them alike are an abomination to the LORD.

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Verse 10

Divers weights and divers measures - A peise and a peise; - Old MS. Bible: from the French pois, weight. Hebrew: "A stone and a stone; an ephah and an ephah." One the standard, the other below it; one to buy with, the other to sell by.

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PROVERBS 20: 11 Even a child makes himself known by his doings, whether his work is pure, and whether it is right.

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Verse 11

Even a child is known by his doings - That is, in general terms, the effect shows the nature of the cause. "A childe is known by his conversation," says Coverdale. A child is easily detected when he has done evil; he immediately begins to excuse and vindicate himself, and profess his innocence, almost before accusation takes place. Some think the words should be understood, every child will dissemble; this amounts nearly to the meaning given above, But probably the principal this intended by the wise man is, that we may easily learn from the child what the man will be. In general, they give indications of those trades and callings for which they are adapted by nature. And, on the whole, we cannot go by a surer guide in preparing our children for future life, than by observing their early propensities. The future engineer is seen in the little handicraftsman of two years old. Many children are crossed in these early propensities to a particular calling, to their great prejudice, and the loss of their parents, as they seldom settle at, or succeed in, the business to which they are tied, and to which nature has given them no tendency. These infantine predilections to particular callings, we should consider as indications of Divine Providence, and its calling of them to that work for which they are peculiarly fitted.

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PROVERBS 20: 12 The hearing ear, and the seeing eye, The LORD has made even both of them.

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Verse 12

The hearing ear and the seeing eye - Every good we possess comes from God; and we should neither use our eyes, nor our ears, nor any thing we possess, but in strict subserviency to his will.

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PROVERBS 20: 13 Don't love sleep, lest you come to poverty. Open your eyes, and you shall be satisfied with bread.

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Verse 13

Love not sleep, lest thou come to poverty - Sleep, indescribable in its nature, is an indescribable blessing; but how often is it turned into a curse! It is like food; a certain measure of it restores and invigorates exhausted nature; more than that oppresses and destroys life. A lover of sleep is a paltry, insignificant character.

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PROVERBS 20: 14 "It's no good, it's no good," says the buyer; but when he is gone his way, then he boasts.

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Verse 14

It is naught, it is naught, saith the buyer - How apt are men to decry the goods they wish to purchase, in order that they may get them at a cheaper rate; and, when they have made their bargain and carried it off, boast to others at how much less than its value they have obtained it! Are such honest men? Is such knavery actionable? Can such be punished only in another world? St. Augustine tells us a pleasant story on this subject: A certain mountebank published, in the full theater, that at the next entertainment he would show to every man present what was in his heart. The time came, and the concourse was immense; all waited, with deathlike silence, to hear what he would say to each. He stood up, and in a single sentence redeemed his pledge: -

Vili vultis Emere, et Caro Vendere.

You all wish to Buy Cheap, and Sell Dear."

He was applauded; for every one felt it to be a description of his own heart, and was satisfied that all others were similar. "In quo dicto levissimi scenici omnes tamen conscientias invenerunt suas." - De Trinitate, lib. xiii., c. 3; Oper. vol. vii., col. 930.

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PROVERBS 20: 15 There is gold and abundance of rubies; but the lips of knowledge are a rare jewel.

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Verse 15

There is gold - Gold is valuable, silver is valuable, and so are jewels; but the teachings of sound knowledge are more valuable than all.

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PROVERBS 20: 16 Take the garment of one who puts up collateral for a stranger; and hold him in pledge for a wayward woman.

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Verse 16

Take his garment that is surety for a stranger - I suppose the meaning to be, If a stranger or unknown person become surety in a case, greater caution should be used, and such security taken from this stranger as would prevent him from running away from his engagements.

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PROVERBS 20: 17 Fraudulent food is sweet to a man, but afterwards his mouth is filled with gravel.

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Verse 17

Bread of deceit is sweet - Property acquired by falsehood, speculation, etc., without labor, is pleasant to the unprincipled, slothful man; but there is a curse in it, and the issue will prove it.

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PROVERBS 20: 18 Plans are established by advice; by wise guidance you wage war!

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Verse 18

With good advice make war, - Perhaps there is not a precept in this whole book so little regarded as this. Most of the wars that are undertaken are wars of injustice, ambition, aggrandizement, and caprice, which can have had no previous good counsel. A minister, who is perhaps neither a good nor a great man, counsels his king to make war; the cabinet must be brought into it, and a sufficient number out of the states of the kingdom gained over to support it. By and by, what was begun through caprice must be maintained through necessity. Places must be created, and offices must be filled with needy dependents, whose interest it may be to protract the war, till they get enough to pay their debts, and secure independence for life. And for these most important ends the blood of the country is spilled, and the treasures of the people exhausted! I have met with a fact precisely of this kind under the reign of Louis XIV.

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PROVERBS 20: 19 He who goes about as a tale-bearer reveals secrets; therefore don't keep company with him who opens wide his lips.

PROVERBS 20: 20 Whoever curses his father or his mother, his lamp shall be put out in blackness of darkness.

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Verse 20

Whoso curseth his father - Such persons were put to death under the law; see Exo 21:17; Lev 20:9, and here it is said, Their lamp shall be put out - they shall have no posterity; God shall cut them off both root and branch.

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PROVERBS 20: 21 An inheritance quickly gained at the beginning, won't be blessed in the end.

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Verse 21

An inheritance - gotten hastily - Gotten by speculation; by lucky hits; not in the fair progressive way of traffic, in which money has its natural increase. All such inheritances are short-lived; God's blessing is not in them, because they are not the produce of industry; and they lead to idleness, pride, fraud and knavery. A speculation in trade is a public nuisance and curse. How many honest men have been ruined by such!

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PROVERBS 20: 22 Don't say, "I will pay back evil." Wait for the LORD, and he will save you.

Verse 22

I will recompense evil - Wait on the Lord; judgment is his, and his judgments are sure. In the mean time pray for the conversion of your enemy.

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PROVERBS 20: 23 The LORD detests differing weights, and dishonest scales are not pleasing.

PROVERBS 20: 24 A man's steps are from the LORD; how then can man understand his way?

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Verse 24

Man's goings are of the Lord - He, by his providence, governs all the great concerns of the world. Man often traverses these operations; but he does it to his own damage. An old writer quaintly says: "They who will carve for themselves shall cut their fingers."

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PROVERBS 20: 25 It is a snare to a man to make a rash dedication, then later to consider his vows.

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Verse 25

Who devoureth that which is holy - It is a sin to take that which belongs to God, his worship, or his work, and devote it to one's own use.

And after vows to make inquiry - That is, if a man be inwardly making a rash vow, the fitness or unfitness, the necessity, expediency, and propriety of the thing should be first carefully considered. But how foolish to make the vow first, and afterwards to inquire whether it was right in the sight of God to do it! This equally condemns all rash and inconsiderate conduct. My old MS. Bible translates, Falling is of men often to voven to seyntis, and after, the vouw is agen brawen. Is it possible that Wiclif could have translated this verse thus? as it strongly countenances vows to and invocations of saints.

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PROVERBS 20: 26 A wise king winnows out the wicked, and drives the threshing wheel over them.

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Verse 26

Bringeth the wheel over them - He threshes them in his anger, as the wheel does the grain on the threshing-floor. Every one knows that grain was separated from its husks, in Palestine, by the feet of the oxen trampling among the sheaves, or bringing a rough-shod wheel over them. Asiatic kings often threshed their people, to bring out their property; but this is not what is intended here.

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PROVERBS 20: 27 The spirit of man is the LORD's lamp, searching all his innermost parts.

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## Verse 27

The spirit of man is the candle of the Lord - God has given to every man a mind, which he so enlightens by his own Spirit, that the man knows how to distinguish good from evil; and conscience, which springs from this, searches the inmost recesses of the soul.

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PROVERBS 20: 28 Love and faithfulness keep the king safe. His throne is sustained by love.

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## Verse 28

Mercy and truth preserve the king - These are the brightest jewels in the royal crown; and those kings who are most governed by them have the stablest government.

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PROVERBS 20: 29 The glory of young men is their strength. The splendour of old men is their gray hair.

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## Verse 29

The glory of young men is their strength - Scarcely any young man affects to be wise, learned, etc.; but all delight to show their strength and to be reputed strong. Agility, one evidence of strength, their particularly affect; and hence their various trials of strength and fleetness in public exercises.

And the beauty of old men is the gray head - They no longer affect strength and agility, but they affect wisdom, experience, prudent counsels, etc., and are fond of being reputed wise, and of having respect paid to their understanding and experience.

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PROVERBS 20: 30 Wounding blows cleanse away evil, and beatings purge the innermost parts.

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## Verse 30

The blueness of a wound - חבירות chabburoth, from חבר chabar, to unite, to join together. Does it not refer to the cicatrice of a wound when, in its healing, the two lips are brought together? By this union the wound is healed; and by the previous discharge the lace-rated ends of fibres and blood-vessels are purged away. So stripes, though they hurt for the time, become the means of correcting and discharging the moral evil of the inmost soul, the vice of the heart, the easily-besetting sin.

In this chapter, verses fourteen to nineteen, inclusive, are wanting in the Septuagint and Arabic; and the tenth, eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth, come in after the twenty-second. It is difficult to account for these variations, unless they were occasioned by the change of leaves in MSS.