

CHAPTER 4

INTRODUCTION TO ECCLESIASTES 4

In this chapter the wise man reassumes the consideration of the case of the abuse of power, to show that there is no happiness in this world, in grandeur and authority enjoyed; since, as he had observed before, on the one hand, the oppressor shall be judged and condemned at the great day of account; so, on the other hand, the oppressed have their lives made so uncomfortable, that the dead are preferred unto them, and unborn persons to them both, (²⁰⁴¹Ecclesiastes 4:1-3); Another vanity he observes, that whereas men expect to be happy by their diligence and industry, this brings upon them the envy of others, (²⁰⁴⁴Ecclesiastes 4:4); hence some, on the other hand, place their happiness in sloth and ease, which is another vanity, (²⁰⁴⁵Ecclesiastes 4:5,6); and others again in covetousness; who are described by their unsocial life, toilsome labour, unsatisfied desires, and withholding good things from themselves, (²⁰⁰⁷Ecclesiastes 4:7,8); upon which some things are said, to show the benefits of a social life, (²⁰⁴⁹Ecclesiastes 4:9-12). And the chapter is concluded with exposing the vanity of the highest instance of worldly power and grandeur, royal dignity, through the folly of a king; the effects of which are mentioned, (²⁰⁴³Ecclesiastes 4:13,14); and through the fickleness of the people, who are soon weary of a prince on the throne, and court his successor, (²⁰⁴⁵Ecclesiastes 4:15,16).

Ver. 1. *So I returned, and considered all the oppressions that are done under the sun*, etc.] The wise man, according to Aben Ezra, returned from the thought, which he had expressed in the latter part of the preceding chapter, that it was good for a man to rejoice in his works, and called it in; since he could not rejoice, when he considered the oppression and violence that were in the world; but it does not appear that he did call it in, for he afterwards repeats it: or rather he returns to his former subject, the abuse of power and authority, mentioned (²⁰³⁶Ecclesiastes 3:16); and from whence he had digressed a little by the above observation; and takes a review of all kinds of oppressions which are done, and of all sorts of “oppressed”¹⁹⁶ ones, as some render it, which become so, under the sun;

subjects by their prince; the stranger, widow, and fatherless, by unjust judges; the poor by the rich; servants and labourers by their masters; and the like. Moreover, he saw by the Holy Ghost, as Jarchi paraphrases it, all oppressions by a spirit of prophecy; he foresaw all the oppressions that would be done under the sun; as all the injuries done to the people of Israel in their several captivities; so to the church of Christ in Gospel times; all the persecutions of Rome Pagan, and also of Rome Papal; all that has or will be done by antichrist, the man of the earth, who before long will oppress no more, (~~908~~ Psalm 10:18); the Targum restrains these oppressions to those which are done to the righteous in this world: and it is well observed by the wise man, that they are such as are under the sun, for there are none above it, nor any beyond the grave, (~~887~~ Job 3:17,18);

and behold the tears of [such as were] oppressed; which their eyes poured out, and which ran down their cheeks, and were all they could do, having no power to help themselves: it is in the singular number, “and behold the tear”^{f97}; as if it was one continued stream of tears, which, like a torrent, flowed from them; or as if they had so exhausted the source of nature by weeping, that the fountain of tears was dried up, and scarce another could drop; or it was as much as could be, that another should drop from them: and this the wise man could not well behold, without weeping himself; it being the property of a good man to weep with them that weep, especially with good men oppressed;

and they had no comforter; to speak a comfortable word to them; not so much as to do that which would be some alleviation of their sorrow, much less to help them, no human comforter; and this is a very deplorable condition, (~~200~~ Lamentations 1:2,9,16,17 ~~660~~ Psalm 69:20); indeed, when this is the case, good men under their oppressions have a divine Comforter; God comforts them under all their tribulations; one of the names of the Messiah is “the Consolation of Israel”, (~~025~~ Luke 2:25); and the Spirit of God is “another Comforter”, (~~646~~ John 14:16); and such are well off, when all other comforters are miserable ones, or other men have none;

and on the side of their oppressors [there was] power; to crush them and keep them under, or to hinder others from helping or comforting them: or there was no “power [to deliver them] out of the hand of their oppressors”^{f98}; so some render and supply the words; with which sense agrees the Targum,

“and there is none to redeem them out of the hand of their oppressors, by strength of hand and by power.”

It may be rendered, “out of the hand of their oppressors [comes] power”, or violence; such as the oppressed are not able to withstand; so the Arabic version;

but they had no comforter: which is repeated, not so much for confirmation, as to excite attention and pity, and to express the affliction of the oppressed, and the cruelty of others; and this following on the other clause, leads to observe, that the power of the oppressor is what hinders and deters others from comforting. Jarchi interprets this whole verse of the damned in hell, punished for their evil works, weeping for their souls oppressed by the destroying angels; and so, he says, it is, explained in an ancient book of theirs, called Siphri.

Ver. 2. *Wherefore I praised the dead, which are already dead*, etc.] Truly and properly so; not in a figurative sense, as dead sinners, men dead in trespasses and sins; nor carnal professors, that have a name to live, and are dead; nor in a civil sense, such as are in calamity and distress, as the Jews in captivity, or in any affliction, which is sometimes called death: but such who are dead in a literal and natural sense, really and thoroughly dead; not who may and will certainly die, but who are dead already and in their graves, and not all these; not the wicked dead, who are in hell, in everlasting torments; but the righteous dead, who are taken away from the evil to come, and are free from all the oppressions of their enemies, sin, Satan, and the world. The Targum is,

“I praised those that lie down or are asleep, who, behold, are now dead;”

a figure by which death is often expressed, both in the Old and New Testament; sleep being, as the poet^{f99} says, the image of death; and a great likeness there is between them; Homer^{f100} calls sleep and death twins. The same paraphrase adds,

“and see not the vengeance which comes upon the world after their death;”

(see ^{250b} Isaiah 57:1,2). The wise man did not make panegyrics or encomiums on those persons, but he pronounced them happy; he judged them in his own mind to be so; and to be much

more happy

than the living which are yet alive: that live under the oppression of others; that live in this world in trouble until now, as the Targum; of whom it is as much as it can be said that they are alive; they are just alive, and that is all; they are as it were between life and death. This is generally understood as spoken according to human sense, and the judgment of the flesh, without any regard to the glory and happiness of the future state; that the dead must be preferred to the living, when the quiet of the one, and the misery of the other, are observed; and which sense receives confirmation from (²⁰⁴³Ecclesiastes 4:3): otherwise it is a great truth, that the righteous dead, who die in Christ and are with him, are much more happy than living saints; since they are freed from sin; are out of the reach of Satan's temptations; are no more liable to darkness and desertions; are freed from all doubts and fears; cease from all their labours, toil, and trouble; and are delivered from all afflictions, persecutions, and oppressions; which is not the case of living saints: and besides, the joys which they possess, the company they are always in, and the work they are employed about, give them infinitely the preference to all on earth; (see ⁶⁶⁴³Revelation 14:13 ³⁰²²Philippians 1:21,23).

Ver. 3. *Yea, better [is he] than both they which hath not yet been*, etc.] That is, an unborn person; who is preferred both to the dead that have seen oppression, and to the living that are under it; see (³⁸⁵⁰Job 3:10-16 10:18,19). This supposes a person to be that never was, a mere nonentity; and the judgment made is according to sense, and regards the dead purely as such, and so as free from evils and sorrows, without any respect to their future state and condition; for otherwise an unborn person is not happier than the dead that die in Christ, and live with him: and it can only be true of those that perish, of whom indeed it might be said, that it would have been better for them if they had never been born, according to those words of Christ, (⁴¹²⁴Matthew 26:24); and is opposed to the maxim of some philosophers, that a miserable being is better than none at all. The Jews, from this passage, endeavour to prove the pre-existence of human souls, and suppose that such an one is here meant, which, though created, was not yet sent into this world in a body, and so had never seen evil and sorrow; and this way some Christian writers have gone. It has been interpreted also of the Messiah, who in Solomon's time had not yet been a man, and never known sorrow, which he was to do, and has, and so more happy than the dead or living. But these are senses that will not bear; the

first is best; and the design is to show the great unhappiness of mortals, that even a nonentity is preferred to them;

who hath not seen the evil work that is done under the sun? the evil works of oppressors, and the sorrows of the oppressed.

Ver. 4. *Again I considered all travail, and every right work,* etc.] The pains that men take to do right works. Some apply themselves, with great diligence and industry, to the study of the liberal arts and sciences; and to attain the knowledge of languages; and to writing books, for the improvement of those things, and the good of mankind: and others employ themselves in mechanic arts, and excel in them, and bring their works to great perfection and accuracy; when they might expect to be praised and commended, and have thanks given them by men. But instead thereof, so it is,

that for this a man is envied of his neighbour; who will be sure to find fault with what he has done, speak contemptibly of him and his work, and traduce him among men. This is also true of moral works; which are right, when done from a right principle, from love to God, in faith, and with a view to the glory of God; and which when done, and ever so well done, draw upon a man the envy of the wicked, as may be observed in the case of Cain and Abel, (^{<Q182>}1 John 3:12); though some understand this, not passively, of the envy which is brought upon a man, and he endures, for the sake of the good he excels in; but actively, of the spirit of emulation with which he does it; though the work he does, as to the matter of it, is right; yet the manner of doing it, and the spirit with which he does it, are wrong; he does not do it with any good affection to the thing itself, nor with any good design, only from a spirit of emulation to outdo his neighbour: so the Targum paraphrases it,

“this is the emulation that a man emulates his neighbour, to do as he; if he emulates him to do good, the heavenly Word does good to him; but if he emulates him to do evil, the heavenly Word does evil to him;”

and to this sense Jarchi; compare with this, (^{<Q185>}Philippians 1:15-18).

This [is] also vanity, and vexation of spirit; whether it be understood in the one sense or the other; how dissatisfying and vexatious is it, when a man has taken a great deal of pains to do right works for public good, instead of having thanks and praise, is reproached and calumniated for it?

and if he does a right thing, and yet has not right ends and views in it, it stands for nothing; it has only the appearance of good, but is not truly so, and yields no solid peace and comfort.

Ver. 5. *The fool foldeth his hands together*, etc.] In order to get more sleep, or as unwilling to work; so the Targum adds,

“he folds his hands in summer, and will not labour;”

(see ²¹⁶⁰Proverbs 6:10). Some persons, to escape the envy which diligence and industry bring on men, will not work at all, or do any right work, and think to sleep in a whole skin; this is great folly and madness indeed:

and eateth his own flesh; such a man is starved and famished for want of food, so that his flesh is wasted away; or he is so hungry bitten, that he is ready to eat his own flesh; or he hereby brings to ruin his family, his wife, and children, which are his own flesh, (²³⁸⁷Isaiah 58:7). The Targum is,

“in winter he eats all he has, even the covering of the skin of his flesh.”

Some understand this of the envious man, who is a fool, traduces the diligent and industrious, and will not work himself; and not only whose idleness brings want and poverty on him as an armed man, but whose envy eats up his spirit, and is rottenness in his bones, (²¹⁶¹Proverbs 6:11 14:30). Jarchi, out of a book of theirs called Siphri, interprets this of a wicked man in hell, when he sees the righteous in glory, and he himself judged and condemned.

Ver. 6. *Better [is] a handful [with] quietness*, etc.] These are the words of the fool, according to Aben Ezra; and which is the sense of other interpreters, particularly Mr. Broughton, who connects this verse with (²⁰¹⁵Ecclesiastes 4:5) by adding at the end of that the word “saying”; making an excuse or an apology for himself and conduct, from the use and profitableness of his sloth; that little had with ease, and without toil and labour, is much better

than both the hands full [with] travail and vexation of spirit; than large possessions gotten with a great deal of trouble, and enjoyed with much vexation and uneasiness; in which he mistakes slothful ease for true quietness; calls honest labour and industry travail and vexation; and supposes that true contentment lies in the enjoyment of little, and cannot be

had where there is much; whereas it is to be found in a good man in every state: or else these words express the true sentiments of Solomon's mind, steering between the two extremes of slothfulness, and too toilsome labour to be rich; that it is much more eligible to have a competency, though it is but small, with a good conscience, with tranquillity of mind, with the love and fear of God, and a contented heart, than to have a large estate, with great trouble and fatigue in getting and keeping it, especially with discontent and uneasiness; and this agrees with what the wise man says elsewhere, (~~201516~~ Proverbs 15:16,17 17:1). The Targum is,

“better to a man is a handful of food with quietness of soul, and without robbery and rapine, than two handfuls of food with robbery and rapine;”

or with what is gotten in an ill way.

Ver. 7. *Then I returned, and I saw vanity under the sun.*] Another vanity besides what he had taken notice of, and is as follows. Aben Ezra's note is,

“I turned from considering the words of this fool, and I saw another fool, the reverse of the former.”

Ver. 8. *There is one [alone], and [there is] not a second,* etc.] According to Aben Ezra, either no friend or companion, or no servant, or no wife, which last sense he prefers; no friend or companion he chooses, because friendship and fellowship lead to expenses; and no servant who would be chargeable to him; and no wife, which would be more expensive, and bring on a family of children; wherefore, to save charges, he chooses to have neither of these; for this is a covetous man who is here desert bed;

yea, he hath neither child nor brother; to inherit his substance, as the Targum adds; some worldly men, whose bellies are filled with hidden treasures, having enjoyed much, when they die, leave the rest of their substance to their babes; but the man here described has no children, nor any relations to leave his wealth unto;

yet [is there] no end of all his labour; when he has executed one scheme to get riches, he forms another; and having finished one work, he enters upon another; he rises early and sits up late, and works and toils night and day, as if he was not worth a dollar, and had a large and numerous family to provide for; or there is no end of what he labours for, or gets by his

labour; there is no end of his treasures, (²¹⁰⁷Isaiah 2:7); he is immensely rich, so Aben Ezra interprets it;

neither is his eye satisfied with riches: with seeing his bags of gold and silver, though he takes a great deal of sure in looking upon them too, without making use of them; yet he is not satisfied with what he has, he wants more, he enlarges his desire as hell, and like the grave never has enough; (see ²¹⁵⁰Ecclesiastes 5:10);

neither [saith he], for whom do I labour? having neither wife nor child, nor relation, nor friend, and yet so wretchedly stupid and thoughtless as never once to put this question to himself, Who am I toiling for? I am heaping up riches, and know not who shall gather them; it is a vexation to a worldly man to leave his substance behind him, and even to a man that has an heir to inherit it, when he knows not whether he will be a wise man or a fool; but for a man that has no heir at all, and yet to be toiling and labouring for the world, is gross stupidity, downright madness, and especially when he deprives himself of the comfort of what he is possessed of;

and bereave my soul of good? instead of richly enjoying what is given him, he withholds it from himself, starves his back and belly, lives in pinching want amidst the greatest plenty; has not power to eat of what he has, and his soul desireth; (see ²¹⁶²Ecclesiastes 6:2).

This [is] also vanity, yea, it [is] a sore travail; a very vain and wicked thing; “an evil business”, as it may be rendered; a very great sin and folly indeed; it is thought by some divines to be the worst species of covetousness, most cruel and unnatural.

Ver. 9. *Two [are] better than one*, etc.] The wise man takes occasion, from the solitariness Of the covetous man before described, to show in this and some following verses the preferableness and advantages of social life; which, as it holds true in things natural and civil, so in things spiritual and religious; man is a sociable creature, was made to be so; and it was the judgment of God, which is according to truth, and who can never err, that it was not good for man to be alone, (⁰⁰¹⁸Genesis 2:18). It is best to take a wife, or at least to have a friend or companion, more or less to converse with. Society is preferable to solitariness; conversation with a friend is better than to be always alone; the Targum is,

“two righteous men in a generation are better than one;”

such may be helpful to each other in their counsels and comforts, and mutual aids and assistances in things temporal and spiritual. The Midrash interprets this of the study in the law together, and of two that trade together, which is better than studying or trading separately;

because they have a good reward for their labour; the pleasure and profit they have in each other's company and conversation; in religious societies, though there is a labour in attendance on public worship, in praying and conferring together, in serving one another in love, and bearing one another's burdens, yet they have a good reward in it all; they have the presence of Christ with them, for, where two or three are met together in his name, he is with them; and whatsoever two of them agree to ask in his name they have it; and if two of them converse together about spiritual things, it is much if he does not make a third with them; besides they have a great deal of pleasure in each other's company, and much profit in their mutual instructions, advices, and reproofs; they sharpen each other's countenances, quicken and comfort each other's souls, establish one another in divine truth, and strengthen each other's hands and hearts.

Ver. 10. *For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow*, etc.] That is, if anyone of them fall, the other will lift him up, as they are travelling together, in whatsoever manner; if one falls from his horse, or out of his carriage, or into a ditch, the other will endeavour to raise him up again: this, as it is true in a natural, so in a figurative and metaphorical sense, with religious persons especially;

“if one of them falls upon the bed, and lies sick,”

as the Targum paraphrases it, his friend and brother in a religious community will visit him, and sympathize with him, and speak a word of comfort to him, and pray with him, which may issue in his restoration. So the Targum,

“the other will cause his friend to rise by his prayer;”

or if he fall into outward distress, poverty, and want, his spiritual friend or friends will distribute to his necessity; if he falls into errors, as a good man may, such as are of the same religious society with him will take some pains to convince him of the error of his way, and to convert him from it, and to save a soul from death, and cover a multitude of sins; and if he falls into sin, to which the best of men are liable, such as are spiritual will endeavour to restore him in a spirit of meekness;

but woe to him [that is] alone when he falleth! for [he hath] not another to help him up; no companion to raise him up when fallen; no Christian friend to visit and comfort him when sick, to relieve him under his necessities, when poor and afflicted, or to recover him from errors in judgment, or immoralities in practice; and especially if he has not Christ with him to raise him up, keep, and uphold him.

Ver. 11. *Again, if two lie together, then they have heat,* etc.] The Targum adds, in the winter; when it is a cold season, they warm one another by lying together. The Targum interprets it of a man and his wife; it is true of others; (see ^{<1000>}1 Kings 1:1,2);

but how can one be warm [alone]? not soon, nor easily, in time of cold weather. This is true in a spiritual sense of persons in a Christian communion and religious society; when they are grown cold in their love, lukewarm in their affections, and backward and indifferent to spiritual exercises, yet by Christian conversation may be stirred up to love and good works: so two cold flints struck against each other, fire comes out of them; and even two cold Christians, when they come to talk with each other about spiritual things, and feel one another's spirits, they presently glow in their affections to each other, and to divine things; and especially if Christ joins them with his presence, as he did the two disciples going to Emmaus, then their hearts burn within them.

Ver. 12. *And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him,* etc.] If an enemy, or a thief, or a robber, attack anyone of them, in friendship and fellowship together, and is more than a match for him; both joined together will be able to resist him; so that he shall not succeed in his enterprise, and do the mischief he designed; see (^{<1000>}2 Samuel 10:11); Thus, when Satan attacks a single believer, which he chooses to do when alone; so he tempted Eve in the garden, and Christ in the wilderness; and one or more fellow Christians know of it, they are capable of helping their tempted friend, by their advice and counsel, they not being ignorant of Satan's devices; and by striving together in their prayers to God for him: so when false teachers make their efforts, as they usually do, Satan like, upon the weaker sex, and, when alone, they too often succeed; but when saints stand fast in one spirit, and strive together for the faith of the Gospel, they stand their ground, withstand the enemy, and maintain truth;

and a threefold cord is not quickly broken; or "in haste"^{f101}; as two are better than one, so three or more united together, it is the better still; they

are able to make head against an enemy; and to conquer him, “vis unita fortior est”: if a family, community, city, or kingdom, are divided against themselves, they cannot stand; but, if united, in all probability nothing can hurt them. This doctrine is taught in the fable of the bundle of sticks the old man gave to his sons to break; which, while fastened together, could not be done; but, when art bound, and took out singly, were easily snapped asunder; teaching them thereby unity among themselves, as their greatest security against their common enemy. The same instruction is given by this threefold cord; while it remains twisted together, it is not easily broke, but if the threads are untwisted and unloosed, they are soon snapped asunder: so persons in religious fellowship, be they more or fewer, while they keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, they are terrible, as an army with banners, and the gates of hell cannot prevail against them. And if this is true of the united love and affections of saints, it must be much more so of the love of Father, Son, and Spirit; that threefold cord, with which the saints are drawn and held; and of which it may be said, that it not only is not quickly broken, but that it cannot be broken at all; and therefore those who are held by it are in the utmost safety. Some apply this to the three principal graces, faith, hope, and love, which are abiding ones; and, though they may sometimes be weak and low in their acts and exercise, can never be lost.

Ver. 13. *Better [is] a poor and a wise child than an old and foolish king,* etc.] The wise man proceeds to show the vanity of worldly power and dignity, in the highest instance of it, which is kingly; and, in order to illustrate and exemplify this, he supposes, on the one hand, a person possessed of royal honour; who has long enjoyed it, is settled in his kingdom, and advanced in years; and who otherwise, for his gravity and dignity, would be venerable; but that he is foolish, a person of a mean genius and small capacity; has but little knowledge of government, or but little versed in the arts of it, though he has held the reins of it long in his hand; and, which is worst of all, is vicious and wicked: on the other hand, he supposes one that is in his tender years, not yet arrived to manhood; and so may be thought to be giddy and inexperienced, and therefore taken but little notice of; and especially being poor, becomes contemptible, as well as labours under the disadvantage of a poor education; his parents poor, and he not able to get books and masters to teach him knowledge; nor to travel abroad to see the world, and make his observations on men and things; and yet being wise, having a good genius, which he improves in the best

manner he can, to his own profit, and to make himself useful in the world; and especially if he is wise and knowing in the best things, and fears God, and serves him; he is more happy, in his present state and circumstances, than the king before described is in his, and is fitter to take his place, and be a king, than he is; for though he is young, yet wise, and improving in knowledge, and willing to be advised and counselled by others, older and wiser than himself; he is much to be preferred to one that is old and foolish;

who will no more be admonished; or, “knows not to be admonished any more”^{f102}: he neither knows how to give nor take advice; he is impatient of all counsel; cannot bear any admonition; is stubborn and self-willed, and resolved to take his own way. The Jews, in their Midrash, Jarchi, and others, interpret it, allegorically, of the good and evil imagination in men, the principle of grace, and the corruption of nature; the one is the new man, the other the old man; the new man is better than old Adam: the Targum applies it to Abraham and Nimrod; the former is the poor and wise child, that feared God, and worshipped him early; the latter, the old and foolish king, who was an idolater, and refused to be admonished of his idolatry; and so the Midrash.

Ver. 14. *For out of prison he cometh to reign*, etc.] That is, this is sometimes the case of a poor and wise child; he rises out of a low, mean, abject, obscure state and condition, to the highest dignity; from a prison house, or a place where servants are, to sit among princes, and even to have the supreme authority: so Joseph, to whose case Solomon is thought to have respect, and which is mentioned in the Midrash; who was but a young man, and poor and friendless, but wise; and was even laid in prison, though innocent and guiltless, from whence he was fetched, and became the second man in the kingdom of Egypt; so David, the youngest of Jesse’s sons, was taken from the sheepfold, and set upon the throne of Israel: though Gussetius^{f103} interprets this of the old and foolish king, who comes out of the house or family, *pydws h*, of degenerate persons, as he translates the word, with a degenerate genius to rule; the allusion being to a degenerate vine; which sense agrees with (²⁰¹³Ecclesiastes 4:13), and with what follows;

whereas also [he that is] born in his kingdom becometh poor; who is born of royal parents, born to a kingdom; is by birth heir to one, has it by inheritance, and has long possessed it; and yet, by his own misconduct, or by the rebellion of his subjects, he is dethroned and banished; or by a

foreign power is taken and carried captive, and reduced to the utmost poverty, as Zedekiah, Nebuchadnezzar, and others: or if born poor, so Gussetius; with a poor genius, not capable of ruling, and so loses his kingdom, and comes to poverty. Or it may be rendered, “although in his kingdom he is born poor”^{f104}; that is, though the poor and wise child is born poor in the kingdom of the old and foolish king; yet, out of this low estate, in which he is by birth, he comes and enjoys the kingdom in his room to such a strange turn of affairs are the highest honours subject: or, “for in his kingdom he is born poor”^{f105}; even the person that is born heir to a crown is born a poor man; he comes as naked out of his mother’s womb as the poorest man does; the conditions of both are equal as to birth; and therefore it need not seem strange that one out of prison should come to a kingdom. But the first sense seems best.

Ver. 15. *I considered all the living which walk under the sun*, etc.] All men that were then alive, who were capable of walking upon the earth; even all of them that were under the heavens, in every land and nation, under whatsoever dominion or government: these, and their manners, Solomon had particularly observed, and made his remarks upon, by which it appeared how fickle the minds of the populace were under every government, and how precarious and uncertain were the honour and dignity of princes;

with the second child that shall stand up in his stead: the heir and successor or every prince, that shall rise up and take the throne of his father or predecessor, and reign in his stead. The wise man observed how the people commonly behaved towards him; how that they generally stood best affected to him, than to the reigning prince; worshipped the rising sun, courted his favour and friendship, soothed and flattered him; expressing their wishes to see him on the throne, and treated with neglect and contempt their lawful sovereign. Some, contrary to the accents, connect this with the word “walk”^{f106}; that walk with the second child, join themselves to him, converse with him, and show him great respect and honour: and there are others that, by this second child, understand the poor and wise child, that succeeds the old and foolish king, whom yet, in time, the people grow weary of; such is the levity and inconstancy of people, that they are not long pleased with princes, old or young, wise or foolish. The Targum interprets this of the foresight Solomon had, by a spirit of prophecy, of those that rebelled against his son Rehoboam, and of those that cleaved unto him, who was his second, and reigned in his stead.

Noldius^{f107} thinks Solomon refers to the history of his friend Hiram, king of Tyre, whose kingdom, in his and in his son's time, was very large, flourishing, and opulent, but in a following reign not so; and he renders and paraphrases the words thus,

““I saw all the works under the sun; [with] Baleazarus, the son of a friend” (Hiram, for *ynç*, rendered “second”, is the same as *rbj*, “a friend”), “who shall stand” or “reign after him: there is no end of all the people”,” etc.

the kingdom in those two reigns being flourishing; yet posterity shall not rejoice in him, in Abdastratus, the grandson of Hiram, destroyed by the four sons of his nurse^{f108}.

Ver. 16. [*There is no end of all the people, [even] of all that have been before them,* etc.] Before the present generation, the living that walked under the sun; a vast number they were that lived before them, and they were of the same restless temper and disposition; changeable in their affection and behaviour towards their governors; no end of their number, nor any stable affection for, nor settled satisfaction in, their rulers; but this itch of novelty, of having new princes over them, went from age to age, from generation to generation. Some understand this of the king and his son, the predecessor and successor, and of those that went before them; and of their behaviour to the kings that reigned before them; the people have not their end or satisfaction in their governors, but are restless: which comes to the same sense;

they also that come after shall not rejoice in him; that come after the present generation, and after both the reigning prince, and even after his successor; they will not rejoice long in him that shall be upon the throne after them, any more than the present subjects of the old king, or those that now pay their court to the heir apparent; they will be so far from rejoicing in him, that they will loath and despise him, and wish him dead or dethroned, and another in his room.

Surely this also [is] vanity and vexation of spirit; to a king, to see himself thus used by his subjects; for a short time extolled and praised, and then despised and forsaken.