

THE PEOPLE'S BIBLE:

DISCOURSES UPON HOLY SCRIPTURE.

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THE PROVERBS.

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THE PROVERBS.

Chapter i. 1-19.

THE PROVERBS OF SOLOMON.

“The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel” (ver. 1).

THE Book of Proverbs is not to be regarded simply as a collection of wise sayings, genial sentiments, prudent guesses, or affectionate exhortations. The book may be viewed, on the contrary, as representing the very science of practical philosophy. The proverb or saying is invariably put down after the event, and not before it. In the latter case it would rank only with suggestions and speculations, but in the former case it expresses an accomplished and well-established fact. Viewed in this light, the Proverbs are supreme moral riches. We find in them what the wisest men in ancient times have proved to be the truth in the most practical aspects of life. When they speak of sin and penalty they not only propound a philosophy, they record a personal and general experience. When they praise understanding they can support their commendation by the largest indebtedness to its guidance and protection. When they say the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, they say in effect that, having tried every other form of so-called wisdom, they have been brought to the conclusion that only he is wise who puts his trust in the living God and obeys the will of heaven. In this way let us carefully distinguish between sentiment and reality, moral poetry and moral experience, the guesses of sagacity and the testimony of earnest life.

It is not necessary to suppose that Solomon is the author of all the Proverbs in this book. He may have been the collector

or editor, as well as the originator.* Let us regard the Proverbs as a moral note-book, or practical guide to life; it will then be doubly interesting to look into a guide drawn up by no less an authority than "Solomon the son of David, king of Israel." Sir Walter Scott has said that the question ought not only to be, What is said? but also, Who said it? In this instance the author is one of the most illustrious men in all history. He did not occupy the cell of a hermit, or limit himself by the prejudices of a narrow class, or shut out light from any quarter; he was a man of large mind, of determined will, and of a most inquiring and resolute spirit. It should therefore be keenly interesting to us to know what such a man has brought back from the fields of experience, and what he has set down with the sanction of his own name. We could have declined the advice of a monastic, on the ground that he knew nothing of the length and breadth of life; we could have listened with indifference to the moralising of a mere philosopher, and have justified our inattention by the plea that he was acquainted only with words and phrases, and not with the actual discipline of life; but when Solomon, who swept the whole circle of social experience, seats himself in the preceptor's chair, and undertakes to teach the young and the simple words of understanding, we are bound to listen to him as one who has authority to speak—an authority not only highly intellectual, but intensely practical. What, then, was Solomon's view of life? His tone is marked by the deepest sobriety. We may

* "The Book of the Proverbs of Solomon contains more than the title indicates. A proverb is a short sentence, conveying some moral truth or practical lesson in a concise, pointed form, and sometimes the name is applied to enigmatical propositions of the same moral or practical tendency. In this book, however, we have, in addition, many exhortations to prudence and virtue, with eulogies on true wisdom. These latter form the subject of the first nine chapters. The last two chapters, moreover, are from the pen of another author. Those that are Solomon's are part, probably, of the three thousand proverbs he is recorded to have spoken (1 Kings iv. 32), and formed, besides the Canticles and Ecclesiastes, the only works of his which were undoubtedly inspired. He sought wisdom rather than any other gift, and God honoured his request by granting him a larger measure of it than was enjoyed by any of his contemporaries. To communicate a portion of what he had received for the lasting benefit of others was the aim of this collection. The Proverbs, from the 25th to the 29th chapters inclusive, were collected by the men of Hezekiah, among whom were Hosea and Isaiah."—ANGUS' *Bible Handbook*.

not fall back upon the errors of his life for the purpose of setting aside the urgency of his moral exhortations; if we are wise we shall rather regard these errors as adding new cogency to his pleas and persuasions. The man who has been in the pit can speak most vividly about its depth and darkness. He who is bruised in every limb can best tell how strong is the foe with whom the young man has to deal in the conflict incident to opening life.

“ To know wisdom and instruction; to perceive 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 ” (vers. 2-4).

Here is a great proposal, nothing less than to invest the young man with wisdom and clothe him with honour and discretion. Not a word is said about riches or social position. Solomon had proved the vanity of these things. He distinctly shows that it is possible for a young man to lead an intellectual life, and to ennoble that life by moral purity and beneficence, so that there shall not only be intense mental brilliance, but solid and useful character. The mind was made for wisdom and instruction. Commonplace as this remark may appear, yet its recognition lies at the root of all true endeavour to increase in judgment and wisdom. Frivolity cannot satisfy the mind. Things finite leave the mind in a discontented temper. All things that may be gathered by the hand, and measured by the eye, and estimated by figures of arithmetic, have been proved to be but transient blessings. - Yet who can define understanding, wisdom, justice, judgment, equity, honour, and discretion? These seem to be but sentimental terms or symbols of things impossible. The young man is not expected to realise their full meaning at once, nor does it lie within his power to do so. The growth of wisdom is like the increase of light, shining more and more from dawn to noon. We cannot tell when we become really wise, so gradual, so imperceptible is the process. Yet there is no doubt of the growth, for it is testified in innumerable ways. Little by little we see further and see more clearly, and grasp more intricate combinations, and feel enabled to judge larger occasions and interests than before. Wisdom is nothing so long as it is confined to the mind of the silent or inactive student; it is when

wisdom is put to the test of experience, when it can find its way in the dark without stumbling, when it can answer the deepest questions of the heart, when it can excel all other comfort which has been offered to the sorrow of life, that it proves its true compass and its genuine power. The young man should begin life as a listener. For a long time he should be almost silent. The world is now old enough to require great meditation in order to comprehend the issues of its experience. But whilst the young man is preserving a wise silence, he should at the same time be storing his mind with such instruction as admits of being applied to real necessities and demands. A fancy-wisdom, if it may be so called, is a mere intellectual vanity. It is possible to be intellectually industrious and yet for all the industry to end in moral uselessness. The two processes should be combined—namely, the pursuit of wisdom, and the pursuit of such wisdom as admits of being brought into utility in judgment and operation. This is what is called practical wisdom. It saves the mind from mere vanity, and whilst stimulating the intellectual power it lifts the whole character to a higher and better level.

“A wise man will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels: to understand a proverb, and the interpretation; the words of the wise, and their dark sayings” (vers. 5, 6).

“Appetite grows by what it feeds on.” Listening is a sign of wisdom. Wisdom is not self-complete, in the sense of being final in its revelations to the human mind. What wisdom has given is but an earnest of what it will give to the listening and inquiring soul. The wise man hears with a view to an “increase of learning.” To stop learning is really to prove that we have never begun it. This is true of Scriptural as well as of general learning. The meaning of the Bible is not limited by the letter. The best commentary upon the Bible is the history of mankind as we see it proceeding day by day. The Bible not only looks towards the past, but towards the future, and claims to prove its inspiration by keeping company with the evolution of all thought and action proved to be good and useful to mankind. We pay no worthy tribute to the Bible by supposing that we know it, simply because we can quote it in the letter, nor is it doing

justice to inspiration by regarding it as final and complete as to its adaptations. Events occur which unexpectedly interpret doctrines. We do not limit the providence of God to ancient history, then why should we limit his revelation to ages long gone by? We hold that Providence is active and beneficent to-day; it is the joy of the Christian to believe that even now all the affairs of the world are ruled by a living Power consummate in wisdom and in love; recognising this immediate and living Providence, there should be no difficulty in so enlarging our conception of Providence as to bring within its scope the daily illumination of spiritual mysteries, and the consequent daily increase of spiritual learning. The aim of true wisdom, according to the fifth verse, is that "a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels." That is to say, his understanding shall not be merely speculative or abstract, a miracle of useless genius, but it shall come to practical fruition in ability to deal with the affairs of life, discriminating almost infallibly between what is right and wrong, wise and unwise, fit and unfit, in all the mutable economy of life. Spiritual understanding is to be put to practical tests. Every age has a right to say, What have our religious men to say about this difficulty? Has God made no revelation to them as to the duty of the individual or the nation? What has been gained in the way of guidance by the single and united prayer of the Church? All this is in striking harmony with reason, for of what use is even understanding itself, unless it culminate in practical counsel which men and nations can accept in darkness and perplexity? By this time the Church should have brought itself into high sagacity, and prepared itself to deal with all the urgent problems of the day. When our prayerful and godly men take in hand the solution of the world's bewilderment, and the healing of the world's diseases, it will be acknowledged that understanding and prayer have realised their highest purpose.

A proverb does not always give up its meaning instantly, without effort on the part of the reader or student. Proverbs are condensed philosophies. Sometimes proverbs are condensed histories. Sometimes the interpretation of a proverb seems to lie a long way from what is most obvious in its mere letter.

Wise men who speak even about "earthly things" are often obliged to have recourse to "dark sayings." Some truths can only be hinted at; some reforms can only be outlined, and then can only be shown as if in twilight; there are dark things in life for which names can be found only by a kind of spiritual genius; there are also possible reforms or re-arrangements of life which even the proposers hardly realise in all their scope and uses,—hence even reformers and spiritual teachers of every kind have often expressed themselves darkly, suggestively, tentatively, so much so that their hesitation has been misunderstood and mocked by fluent ignorance and superficial ability. Dark sayings are often like roots, which lie a long time in the earth before their juices begin to move and their inner life seeks to express itself in stem, and leaf, and blossom, and fruit. Whilst all this is true, we are not to suppose that a saying is wise simply because it is dark. The stream may be muddy, not deep. The world has now had education enough to be able to judge between that which is really deep and that which is only confused. We should be sufficiently self-controlled to await developments, to test dreams, to give even improbable theories a hearing; ever have enough behind us which is historically and personally proved to enable us to await with calmness the issue of every new proposal and the solution of every difficult problem. Let wisdom justify itself by listening; let learning prove its reality by its increase; let understanding vindicate itself by wise counsels; let the most advanced thinker know that there is always some proverb yet to be interpreted, or some dark saying which has yet to receive illustration.

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction" (ver. 7).

The expression, "the fear of the Lord," has been counted thirteen times in the Proverbs, and may be considered quite characteristic of the Old Testament. Instead of the expression so suitable to the old covenant, we find in the New Testament the larger and more gracious term, "the love of God." The Apostle Paul says the love of Christ constraineth us. The New Testament proceeds on the theory that "he that feareth is not made perfect in love;" and the last writer in the New Testament

sums up his teaching in the striking expression, "If God so loved us, we ought also to love one another." It is to be noted that "the fear of the Lord" is only indicated as "the beginning of wisdom." A further education is needed, and is provided for by the increasing fulness and graciousness of Christian revelation. Whilst, however, it is but "the beginning," it is also a necessary or essential beginning; that is to say, a beginning without which progress is impossible: there are experimental beginnings which may be good or bad, but about the fear of the Lord there is nothing of the nature of mere experiment. It is as necessary to the building of the temple of wisdom as is a foundation with its huge and solid corner-stones. The fact that the fear of the Lord is but the beginning of wisdom should teach those who are in a merely reverential mood of mind that they are not called upon to be teachers, they are scholars of the first or lowest type, whose business it is to make progress in spiritual education. "Perfect love casteth out fear." Only those, therefore, who have passed from fear to love can understand the mystery of the divine economy and purpose. If we love not, we know not God. So then in the teaching of the divine mysteries, he who loves most sees furthest, and can best explain the law of heaven. The wise man said, "Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man." Fear is not to be considered as dispensed with in the Christian economy, for the apostle calls upon us, in his Epistle to the Hebrews, "to have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear." It is to be noted that in the seventh verse there is a contrast established between those who fear God and so begin knowledge, and those self-willed, obstinate persons who will receive no advice, who are called "fools," and are said to despise wisdom and instruction. They may be said indeed to be twice fools; first for despising wisdom and instruction, and secondly for being without the wisdom and instruction which they despise. The action is twofold, though at first sight it may appear to be without a double reference. Fools despise wisdom and instruction because their indolence is stronger than their energy, their self-idolatry is larger than their appreciation of things beyond their present possession; especially do they despise wisdom because of the moral effect which it would have upon their whole method and type of life.

Having despised wisdom and instruction they are necessarily imprisoned in mental narrowness and darkness, and are left behind in the march of a living and generous civilisation. Without reverence even knowledge itself tends but to vanity. It is not indeed knowledge in any deep or useful sense of the term; it is only the information which comes or goes with the passing hour, and is the minister of cunning self-promotion or any other aspect of false life. Religion is the foundation of solidity of character. It is no argument to say that religion has been debased into superstition, and that the effect of superstition upon the character has been disastrous; we are not talking about superstition, but about religion properly comprehended and applied—that intelligent apprehension of the divine personality and rule which divests the soul of self-confidence and vanity, and prompts it to seek daily light and help from the God who is lovingly adored.

“My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother: for they shall be an ornament of grace unto thy head, and chains about thy neck” (vers. 8, 9).

The word “son” in the eighth verse may be equivalent to the word “pupil” rather than to the word “child.” The son is invited to accept the experience of those who have lived before him and tested life at many points. It is important to preserve the line of moral discovery in all its continuousness and completeness, lest life should be frittered away in making needless experiments. Earnest men will ask, What has been done already? What have our ancestors discovered as to the operation of moral laws? History thus becomes a commentary upon revelation, and a treasure which may be freely drawn upon by those who wish to turn their lives to the wisest account. If analogy were needed, it could be found in the practice of those who study the economy of nations, the action and re-action of life in all its practical trusts and enterprises; in all these departments great store is set by what the fathers and mothers have said, and the higher the mind the more delicacy is there felt in treating precedents with neglect or contempt. We are not left to discover at this late period of time whether good results will follow good behaviour, and bad results will follow upon wicked actions; all that has been settled

for us by countless years of personal and national experience, and therefore it ought to be accepted as a starting-point, a standard, and a guide. Very beautiful is it to notice that the "son" is encouraged to hear his father's instruction and abide by his mother's law, on the ground that his obedience shall turn the instruction and the law into ornaments of grace and chains of honour. There is an operation of what may be called the law of rewards. A motive need not be corrupt because it is only secondary. The child works for prizes at school rather than for the love of learning, yet whilst he is gaining the prize he is preparing himself to appreciate that learning the acquisition of which the prize represents. Wisdom is evermore the true ornament. Understanding is a jewel which increases in value from year to year. All decoration that is merely outward belongs to the man without being part of the man, but intellectual accomplishments, moral refinement, mental discernment, gracious, sympathetic, wise appreciation of the weight and force of circumstances, patience, and long-suffering inspired by a hope which owes its existence to the power of comprehending larger fields of service and boundless horizons of outlook, are an integral part of the soul itself. Instruction will keep a man from isolation. Wisdom will lift him above the tyranny of mutable circumstances. Knowledge will enable him to throw a bridle upon his temper, and to keep the door of his lips when ignorant men would commit themselves to reckless judgments and ruinous pledges. "If any man lack wisdom let him ask of God." "Honour thy father and thy mother, which is the first commandment with promise." "Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing unto the Lord." Here, as everywhere, promise is attached to obedience, and heaven seems to meet halfway those who have made their vows at the altar of wisdom and bound their souls to enter the temple of knowledge.

"My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not. If they say, Come with us, let us lay wait for blood, let us lurk privily for the innocent without cause: let us swallow them up alive as the grave; and whole, as those that go down into the pit: we shall find all precious substance, we shall fill our houses with spoil: cast in thy lot among us; let us all have one purse: my son, walk not thou in the way with them; refrain thy foot from their path: for their feet run to evil, and make haste to shed blood. Surely in vain the net is spread in the sight of any bird. And they lay wait for their

own blood; they lurk privily for their own lives. So are the ways of every one that is greedy of gain; which taketh away the life of the owners thereof" (vers. 10-19).

Palestine was at all times exposed to the crime of brigandage, not only because of the wild character of its formation, but because of its neighbourhood to predatory tribes, who lost no opportunity of availing themselves of the weakness of the government supposed to preside over the destinies of that country. Although that which is local and temporary has no longer any place in these exhortations, the principle which inspires them is evermore operating in social life. Sinners enough are found in all ranks of society who would seek to tempt ardent and inexperienced youth to do that which promises immediate and substantial profit. Sinners who "entice" are the worst members of their species. Not only do they sin themselves, their delight is to corrupt and involve others. If sinners are so energetic, good men should be equally on the alert to repel their reproaches, and to bring the young into a state of spiritual security. Where the enemy is most active the Christian should be most watchful. Enticing sinners seek to excite enthusiasm in evil ways; there is a tone of grim cheerfulness and vivacity in their exhortations which would seem to promise the immediate realisation not only of great riches, but of great joy. As a matter of fact, men will do in crowds what they would shrink from doing in their individuality. Hence there has arisen a great distinction between war and murder. That which would be murder in the case of a single slaughter becomes glory in the destruction of hundreds and in the subjection of nationalities. Beware of all programmes the end of which is supposed to be self-aggrandisement. "We shall find all precious substance, we shall fill our houses with spoil." As in the case of goodness, so in the case of evil, there is a distinct promise of reward. Nothing, therefore, is to be judged by the reward itself, but rather by the promises which culminate in the reward. Satan promises liberty to the man whom he enslaves. Probably at the moment of promising them freedom he is the more firmly riveting their manacles and fetters. It is the part of wise men to dissuade the young from doing that which is evil. They cannot always begin with positive or constructive work, so much has to be done that is of the nature of caution or

prevention. The teacher in this case seeks to operate upon the sensibilities of the young by pointing out the cruelty of evil-doers—"their feet make haste to shed blood," in their hearts they are men-haters, they are murderers, they are blasphemers against the law of life and security. The teacher further makes a philosophical appeal to the young when he points out that bad men actually "will wait for their own blood; they lurk privily for their own lives," yet they are blinded so that they cannot see how in reality they are suicides as well as murderers. The teacher, therefore, has strong ground on which to make an appeal to the reason and feeling of the young. He remembers that the wicked pursue a self-defeating policy—"he made a pit, and digged it, and is fallen into the ditch which he made. His mischief shall return upon his own head, and his violent dealing shall come down upon his own pate." The Christian Church should energetically point out to the young the nets which are spread for them in every direction all over the field of life; it should also point out the hollowness of all immoral enthusiasm. In ancient days the wicked said to one another, and to those whom they would entangle, "Come ye, I will fetch wine, and we will fill ourselves with strong drink; and to morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant."

We have already seen in our studies in the Book of Deuteronomy that the same exhortation was delivered to the people of God in earliest times. "If thy brother, the son of thy mother, or thy son, or thy daughter, or the wife of thy bosom, or thy friend which is as thine own soul, entice thee secretly, saying, Let us go and serve other gods . . . thou shalt not consent unto him, nor hearken unto him; neither shall thine eye pity him, neither shalt thou spare, neither shalt thou conceal him." It should be pointed out that it is often the rudest and coarsest temptation that is offered to the young; in this case the teacher deals with the vulgar promise of having abundance of gain. It is supposed that money answereth all things, not only in the way of comfort, but in the way of temptation and seduction from honourable courses. "He that is greedy of gain troubleth his own house." "One of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went unto the chief priests, and said unto them, What will ye give me,

and I will deliver him unto you?" A nobler exhortation is given by the Apostle Paul than is given by the sordid men who figure as tempters in this section. Hear his noble words, "The love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness." Compare the two exhortations, and not a moment need be lost in deciding which is right and which is wrong. We know the voice of purity when we hear it. There is something in the heart of man which recognises noble appeals even when it does not respond to them. "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: but every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed." The two voices will always be addressing human attention—the voice of lust and the voice of love, the voice of knowledge and the voice of ignorance, the voice that is carnal and the voice that is spiritual. Blessed are they who distinguish between them, and gladly obey the exhortation which evidently comes down from heaven.

Chapter i. 20-33.

THE COMPLAINT OF WISDOM.

“Wisdom crieth without; she uttereth her voice in the streets: she crieth in the chief place of concourse, in the openings of the gates: in the city she uttereth her words, saying, How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity? and the scorners delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge? Turn you at my reproof: behold, I will pour out my spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you” (vers. 20-23).

WISDOM now turns from her children and addresses those who despise her. The address extends from the 20th verse to the 23rd. Wisdom in this address is personated; it has been considered that the word in the plural number represents the varied and all but innumerable excellences of true and just understanding. Even if we take the personation as highly poetical, this need not divest the speech of such merits as can be tested by reason and experience. If in the first instance Wisdom is here to be regarded as signifying the highest intellectual sagacity combined with anxious moral discrimination, yet the highest form of the thought is only fulfilled in him who is in very deed the wisdom of God. A comparison of Luke xi. 49 with Matthew xxiii. 34 almost shuts us up to the conclusion that Jesus Christ applied these words to himself. The Apostle Paul says that Jesus Christ has been made unto us wisdom, and that in him are hid all the treasures of wisdom. The description of Wisdom as uttering a loud cry in public, and making all the streets resound with her exclamation, represents the depth and poignancy of her solicitude. Christianity cannot see men rushing down to the chamber of death without uttering a protest and proclaiming a gospel. Wisdom should not enclose herself within her own sanctuary, and shut her eyes to the real facts of actual life as it is to be seen “on the streets,” and in the hiding-places of sin and shame. Jesus Christ went abroad amongst men and made himself acquainted with the actual condition of the people.

When he came near the city he wept over it. When he saw the multitudes he had compassion upon them. The Church is not to be the quiet and sacred home in which Christianity enjoys itself, but is to represent the refreshment and the strengthening which the Church requires in order to qualify her to deal with the depravity, the ignorance, the squalor, and the despair of the people at large. Wisdom urges herself forward until she attains a position in the chief places of concourse, even in the openings of the gates, and at the very centre of the city. Wisdom is an evangelist. Wisdom is not afraid of being contaminated by the pollution which it seeks to heal. Wisdom is assured that her counsels are necessary for the elevation of humanity, and the whole direction and happy completion of the purposes of human life. The attitude in which Wisdom is represented in this passage is the attitude in which the Church should constantly find herself. Wisdom is aggressive. Not only does she declare her own excellence, she seeks by zealous importunity to draw others to her shrine, that obeying her instructions they may become blessed with freedom and inspired with hope.

Wisdom first addresses the simple ones; that is, men who are open to good influences or impressions, but also to those that are evil. The Proverbs, according to the fourth verse, were intended to give subtilty to the simple. Then she proceeds to address the scorers, asking them why they delight in their scorning. The scorers are to be regarded as men who hold in contempt all holy things, and actually congratulate themselves upon their skill in so doing,—“A scorner seeketh wisdom, and findeth it not: but knowledge is easy unto him that understandeth,”—proud, arrogant men, who imagine that they cannot be instructed, and who pour their contemptuous criticisms upon men who seek the nobler life. Then Wisdom proceeds to address fools, men who hate knowledge, men of debased mind, who are all but incapable of high thinking, and who live with stolid content within the circle of their own ignorance. It has been noticed that, bad as is the condition of the simple, the scornful, and the foolish, Wisdom does not despair of reclaiming them from the error of their ways. It is not the part of divine wisdom to leave men where they are, uttering over them words of helpless-

ness and despair. God insists that even the worst may be converted, and those who are farthest astray may be brought penitently to the altars they have forsaken. This is a high and fascinating distinction of the blessed gospel of grace. It comes out into the highways and the hedges; it eats with publicans and sinners; it calls to them that are afar off, and assures those who are hardest of heart that love waits to welcome and to pardon them. Observe further that all these descriptions are to be taken in their moral as well as in their intellectual sense. Men have not only gone astray in their minds, they have committed treason in their hearts, and because their hearts are corrupt the whole estate of manhood has been overthrown and laid desolate.

Wisdom is not content with criticising the condition of the simple, the scornful, and the foolish, she proceeds to make a great offer to those who have most completely turned their back upon all her charms and claims. Her words are, "Behold, I will pour out my spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you."* This is the first great act of Wisdom—namely, the gift of a new spirit. Thus Wisdom deals radically with the awful circumstances which excite her solicitude. She does not propose to create a new environment—that is to say, to alter circumstances here and there so as the more thoroughly to please the eye, or gratify any of the senses. She aims at the renewal of the spirit; not at mere amendment, but at the substitution of the Divine Spirit for the spirit of selfishness and worldliness. It must be God's light that destroys men's darkness. The earth can only be warmed by the sun, and brought out of winter bondage by the graciousness of the heavens. As the earth never leads herself out of winter into summer, but is always taken upon that upward and enchanting journey by the action of the sun, so the heart of man never finds a way for itself into true and enduring liberty, but is conducted from bondage into freedom by the direct action of the Spirit of God. Not only will the Spirit be given as a new energy, but instruction will be added—"I will make known my words unto you." These words cannot be made known to any man who has the wrong spirit.

* In connection with this promise of the Spirit, read Joel ii. 28, John vii. 38, 39; then the account of Pentecost in Acts ii. 1-17.

“If any man love me, I will manifest myself unto him.” Divinest things are hidden from the wise and prudent, and are revealed unto babes. “If any man will do God’s will, he shall know of the doctrine.” Look now upon the whole picture, and see if it be not marked with the highest dignity and the most assuring tenderness. Even as a picture this description ought to arrest attention and awaken gratitude. According to the lines thus portrayed, men have gone astray from light, and truth, and love, and have involved themselves in all manner of evil thinking and evil doing; so much so that God is no longer in their thoughts, and the whole purpose of life is given up either to intellectual scorning or to moral putrefaction. To a world thus lost Wisdom goes forth as from the sanctuary of heaven, the very temple and throne of light, and, whilst condemning the state in which the world is found, she offers a new spirit and a new will, and does so with the infinite enthusiasm of love. This is not a mere offer, it is an act of importunity; it is not a proposal given with the air of an ultimatum, the proposition represents anxiety, concern, even agony. Wisdom has gone forth to win a conquest, or to retire as with a broken heart. When Jesus Christ offers men rest, the disappointment which will follow their neglect cannot but fill him with the intensest grief. Wisdom does not adopt the tone of curt argument, as one who would say to others, You are wrong, and I alone am right. Wisdom cries, she lifts up her voice in the street, she yields herself to the inspiration of a generous passion; she does not intend to return to her rest at night until the whole city has been filled with the music of her all-including gospel.

“Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you. Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me: for that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord: they would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof. Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices. For the turning away of the simple shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them. But whoso hearkeneth unto me shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil” (vers. 24-33).

The action now changes. We are to think of Wisdom having

made her offer, and having been refused by those to whom she addressed herself. Mercy now gives place to judgment. The day of persuasion is limited. We may form some conception of the range and intensity of the speech of mercy when we consider the blackness and completeness of the judgment which follows refusal. If to understand man's sin we may have to look at God's mercy, so to understand God's mercy we may often have to look at God's judgments. When all heaven is black with thunder, because of the violence which is found in the earth, we may form some conception of the nature of the violence by the blackness of the thunder which threatens it. Whatever may be the doom which awaits the sinner, whatever theory of the future may be adopted by speculative thinkers, no man can peruse the Bible without being made to feel that the penalty which follows sin is appalling, not only beyond expression, but beyond imagination. It may be that Calvary can only be fully explained by perdition. The Son of God did not die to save men simply from the sleep of unconsciousness, or from the insignificant ruin of oblivion. Men should tread the sacred ground which relates to the future of sin with trembling feet. He who makes light of the doom of the sinner makes light of the whole priesthood of Jesus Christ. Whatever may be the speculative truth, it is not too much to say that the evangelical conception of law involves a very glorious conception of the work which Jesus Christ came to accomplish.

Notice that Wisdom can only "call." It is for the sinner to say whether he will accept or refuse. Wisdom says, "I have called," and then she adds, with mournful pathos, "ye refused." This is a vivid statement of a great philosophical thought; the action of the human will is a mystery which has never been fully explained, but it is everywhere recognised in the volume of revelation. Jesus Christ said, "Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life." Even when the Saviour addressed men who came to him with the utmost humility, he said to them, "What will ye?" On the last day of the feast he offered to give water to the thirsty, but it was for the thirsty to say whether they would accept the gracious overture. Herein is the mystery of human nature; it is so weak as to be consumed before the moth, and yet so great that it can deny its God and reject his love.

But the action does not rest at this point: an offer has been made and rejected, voices of reconciliation and pardon have been disregarded; beyond this there is an action exceeding all others in melancholy—Wisdom will laugh at the calamity of the sinner, and mock when fear comes upon the bad man. Surely beneath all the poetry in which this future is represented there is the very spirit of philosophy and justice. The reason is given for the terrible judgment. The action on the divine side is in no sense arbitrary; even whilst the judgment burns as an oven it condescends to give a reason for its intensity. Observe the word “because” in the 24th verse, after that word comes a statement of the reasons upon which God proceeds. What we have to ask is whether the impeachment itself is correct. Have we in very deed refused the offers of Wisdom, have we disregarded the command of God, have we set at nought all the divine counsel, have we rejected all the holy reproof of the Lord? If we decide these inquiries in the affirmative, then the rest will proceed inevitably, irresistibly! So long as the offer is made our strength to accept it is recognised; but when that offer is rejected our only strength is to go forward to evil and ruin, to be driven before a righteous judgment into the punishment which awaits impurity and disobedience. Who can dwell upon the words “laugh” and “mock”? They need not be taken literally and thus become limited in their significance, or made to assume aspects which may be supposed to be unworthy of the Sovereign of the universe. They are poor signs of the reality of what God will do. He will act as if he laughed, and as if he mocked. There is a time predicted when men shall call unto the rocks and unto the mountains to fall on them and hide them from the face of the Lamb; but rocks and mountains have never been on the side of the sinner, all nature in her silent processes has ever been the servant and the ally of God. Nor does the action end even at this point. Let us see how the action now stands: first, Wisdom has called; secondly, men have refused; thirdly, judgment has ensued; and now, fourthly, those who have been condemned make suit unto the God they have despised. “Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me.” Jesus Christ distinctly points out that there is a time when the door will be shut, and

men will stand without, saying, "Lord, Lord, open unto us;" but he will answer, "I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity." All the meaning of this, who shall adequately reveal? These are not matters for intellectual speculation; may they never be matters of actual experience! We cannot, however, but be struck with the careful manner in which reasons are always given for this outcome of evil courses. Hear how the indictment proceeds: "They hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord: they would none of my counsels: they despised all my reproof—therefore"! If men will not plough the earth, or cast in the seed, or take advantage of the opportunities created by the sun, in harvest they shall beg, and in winter they shall be desolate. Does any one complain of the arbitrariness of the course of nature? Do not men instantly sit in judgment upon those who have allowed the seasons to pass by without availing themselves of the opportunities offered? Instantly the spirit of criticism arises and declares that nature has been outraged, that law has been dishonoured, and that only suffering can follow. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God; it is also a fearful thing to fall into the hands of neglected nature. The divine economy of the universe is one. A sacred unity binds together all worlds, all laws, all souls, all destinies. Surely he is a scorner and a fool who undertakes to live a life apart from that economy, and who supposes that, having detached himself from the central power, he can create a rival throne, and sway with success a competitive sceptre. "Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die?"

Chapter ii.

THE PROMISES OF WISDOM.

THIS third discourse consists of an exhortation to follow after Wisdom. The position of seniority is still retained, the voice of the father predominates throughout the whole of the animated and noble counsel. The general tone of the exhortation is that of profound and painful experience.

“My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee” (ver. 1).

The tone of entreaty of this verse is very remarkable. The father is by no means sure that the son will listen to him as he comes before the child in an attitude of supplication and appeal. The child can say No to the father, and the creature can repel the approaches of the Creator. As the father in this verse pleads with the son, so the Father of mankind pleads with his rebellious creatures. Not only may it be said, Like as a father pitieth his children; it may be added, Like as a father pleadeth with his children, or suffereth for his children, or is deeply interested in all that concerns his children, so the Lord, etc.

“So that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding; yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding” (vers. 2, 3).

Man must listen to Wisdom if he would be wise; his attitude must be one of attention; he must turn his ear towards the heavens, and listen for every whisper that may proceed from the skies; and whilst his ear is listening his heart must be applied with unbroken attention to understanding. Everything depends upon our spirit as to the results of our study in the school of Wisdom. Few men really listen, or incline their ear unto Wisdom; they think they are listening, whilst they are only hearing imperfectly; they do not store every little word in their

hearts ; they do not combine the word with the tone in which it is spoken. They leap to conclusions without anxiously and carefully passing through the whole process of exposition and exhortation. Not only is there to be listening to, there is to be crying after knowledge, and a lifting up of the voice for understanding. These terms may be regarded as equivalent to an exercise in prayer. If we personate knowledge and individualise understanding, then the attitude of the seeker is that of a suppliant ; he prays to the genius of knowledge, he wishes the spirit of understanding ; he begs them to be gracious to him, and to withhold nothing from him that can enrich his mind or edify his character. All this may be considered as subjective—that is to say, to have relation to the state of the mind and feeling with regard to the value of wisdom and understanding. But there must be more than a correct state of mind ; there must be activity or energy of the intensest quality. The proof of this is in—

“If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures ; then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God” (vers. 4, 5).

Hear how the process develops: “incline thine ear,” “apply thine heart,” “criest after knowledge,” “lifest up thy voice ;” now comes the exercise of energy. The student is to seek for wisdom as for silver, and to search for her as for hidden treasures. Seeking for wisdom as for silver is an allusion to mining, which was understood long before the time of Solomon. The remains of copper-mines have been discovered in the peninsula of Sinai, and the remains of gold-mines have been found in one part of the desert of Egypt. It is interesting to notice that inscriptions have been found upon the rocks near the copper-mines which point to a period of something like four thousand years before Christ. Wisdom does not lie on the surface. Wisdom is to be dug for ; no rock is to permanently interrupt the pursuit of the seeker. Deserts must be braved, rocks must be exploded, mountains must be tunnelled, deep waters must be searched, in order to find the object on which the mind has fixed its eager attention. The allusion to searching for wisdom as for hid treasures points to a custom in Eastern countries. In consequence of the great insecurity of life and property the habit was to hide treasure in the earth. Frequently the owner might

die without pointing out to any one the place where he had concealed his treasures. Consequently, the habit of seeking for such hidden things grew up in the East, and became a source of great profit to those who were successful in its cultivation. It would seem as if God had purposely hidden both wisdom and understanding in order that the energy of man might be developed in searching for them. When it is said that the Lord God cursed the ground for man's sake, it has been pointed out that the Lord meant through the discipline of labour and waiting to train man's faculties to their greatest perfection. There is pleasure in all reasonable exertion. The huntsman finds that the mere gratification of pursuing the prey is greater in many instances than its capture. To plough the land, and sow the seed, and reap the harvest, is a process which creates an appetite for the products of the earth, and turns mere eating itself into a healthful pleasure. So with wisdom and understanding; they are not found, as we have said, on the surface of the earth, to be taken up by any one who cares to stoop for them. Wisdom is hidden in ancient books; in the experience of the whole world; in all difficult places; and is to be sought for with perseverance and zeal, the very act of searching being accompanied by a blessing. When the apostle says, we have not, because we ask not, or because we ask amiss, he employs a form of words which may also be used in reference to the pursuit of wisdom. With regard to wisdom it may be said, if ye have not, it is because ye ask not, or seek not, or because ye ask or seek amiss. The living certainty is that wisdom is in existence, and wisdom is to be found, and understanding is awaiting the approach of those who are in pursuit of her prizes. On this side of the question there is no manner of uncertainty, the uncertainty is in our steadfastness of will and purpose; it is the human will that yields, it is not wisdom or understanding that has withdrawn from the field of inquiry. The promise is that the man who seeks for wisdom as for silver, and searches for understanding as for hid treasures, he shall understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God. This is a profoundly religious promise. Man everywhere finds more than he is immediately seeking for, when his purpose is good and honest. In seeking for wisdom we may find the Lord, and in inquiring diligently for understanding we may come

suddenly upon the knowledge of God. This indeed is the supreme wisdom. "This is life eternal, to know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." "The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple." The history of the world is the proof of the truth of this statement. It is not meant that complete intellectual knowledge of God can be attained, but such knowledge may be acquired as to divest the mind of all uncertainty as to his existence, and create in the heart a blessed hunger for a deeper and truer realisation of his presence and ministry in the whole life.

"For the Lord giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding. He layeth up sound wisdom for the righteous: he is a buckler to them that walk uprightly. He keepeth the paths of judgment, and preserveth the way of his saints" (vers. 6-8).

The Apostle James advances the same doctrine in the words, "If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not." The idea of the sixth verse is that the Lord alone can give wisdom. He is not one of the fountains of wisdom occupying an equal position with a thousand other fountains; he is in very deed the one fountain of wisdom, and there is none other. Elsewhere we may find partial revelations, broken experiences, hints of meanings, temporary satisfactions, but until we have discovered the Lord, and set him always before us, we shall be working without a centre, and having no centre we shall have no certainty that the light in which we work will continue to illuminate us. True religion comes before true philosophy. The pious mind is essential to metaphysical genius. Not that but there may be cleverness enough without religion, and great ability without even the form of prayer, but if we believe that God created the heavens and the earth, and that the hearts of all men are in his hands, and that he is the fountain of wisdom and of true knowledge, then of necessity it must be that he who most deeply knows God most certainly knows all wisdom. Not indeed that the knowledge may be technical or pedantic, but it will have such a living sympathy with all things proportionate, beautiful, true, and musical, that by the power of the Spirit the man shall know when he is in the sanctuary of God, and when he is in paths forbidden to the children of light.

The seventh verse would appear to support this view, in so far as it suggests that righteousness of character is necessary to the enjoyment of the treasures of sound wisdom. By sound wisdom we are to understand furtherance or advancement: the meaning would seem to be that whoever has begun to acquire wisdom shall have more and more added to him as the reward of his labour,—“Whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance.” The expression “layeth up” should be noted. They are truly rich who trust in God, for their reserves are infinite, and the riches of Christ are inexhaustible. The Apostle Paul speaks of “the hope which is laid up for you in heaven,” and the Apostle Peter also speaks of an inheritance that is reserved for those who are in Christ Jesus. We have more than we have merely in the hand. We do not live from hand to mouth, in so far as we are the living children of the living God. “All things are yours.” Not only has the Lord laid up wisdom for the righteous, and thus showed himself the complacent friend of such as are intent upon walking in the ways of understanding, he himself stands in a relation of energy to those who give themselves up to the pursuit of true knowledge. He is a buckler to them that walk uprightly, and he keepeth the paths of judgment—that is to say, he protects those who walk in them, and he preserveth the way of his saints, literally of “his ardent worshippers.” This term was used of the tribe of Levi because of their zeal in God’s service. The word saint implies dedication to God, and being set apart to the love and service of Christ. The doctrine of the text is that God is evermore on the side of those who are righteous, or upright, or holy. They represent him upon the earth, and as his chosen children they are dear to him, and on them the light first shines which is to fall downward upon the rest of the world, as the light of the morning first strikes the mountains and then passes down into the valleys and chases away all darkness.

“Then shalt thou understand righteousness, and judgment, and equity; yea, every good path. When wisdom entereth into thine heart, and knowledge is pleasant unto thy soul; discretion shall preserve thee, understanding shall keep thee: to deliver thee from the way of the evil man, from the man that speaketh froward things; who leave the paths of uprightness, to walk in the ways of darkness; who rejoice to do evil, and delight in the frowardness of the wicked; whose ways are crooked and they froward in their

paths: to deliver thee from the strange woman, even from the stranger which flattereth with her words; which forsaketh the guide of her youth, and forgetteth the covenant of her God. For her house inclineth unto death, and her paths unto the dead. None that go unto her return again, neither take they hold of the paths of life. That thou mayest walk in the way of good men, and keep the paths of the righteous. For the upright shall dwell in the land, and the perfect shall remain in it. But the wicked shall be cut off from the earth, and the transgressors shall be rooted out of it" (vers. 9-22).

Wisdom enters into the heart, and thus keeps the whole life pure. Knowledge is not merely an acquisition, it becomes a real pleasure to the soul, and not until it has become such a pleasure are we really in possession of it. In the learning of a language there is a great difficulty, simply from lack of interest in the thoughts which that language represents. When a vocabulary has been acquired, and a man can use that vocabulary with a measure of ease, enjoyment begins to be realised—that is to say, the language becomes a distinct addition to our intellectual pleasures. So not only is there profitable discipline in the acquisition of knowledge, there is hallowed enjoyment in its possession and use. The text represents discretion and understanding as the keepers of the soul—its protectors and guides, saving the soul from the way of the evil man, and protecting it from the man who delights in froward things, literally in the misrepresentations and distortions of the truth. The father now turns to give a vivid description of those who are evil, that his son may know them even whilst they are afar off, and avoid the paths which they delight to tread. The bad man has his peculiar advantages as well as the good man. The father here speaks of those who rejoice to do evil, and delight in the frowardness of the wicked. This is a shallow and uncertain gladness: it depends wholly upon circumstances; it describes but a momentary mood of the mind. On the other hand, the joy of the good man springs from his character and from his relation to God, and from his conscious companionship with truths infinite and doctrines eternal. The suffering patriarch was enabled to say, "I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food,"—he lived the mental life, he entered into the mystery of spiritual existence, and found that life was but a burden and a cloud, unless the soul were daily fed with the grace and truth of God.

Another triumph of wisdom, spiritually understood and honestly applied, is to save life from profligacy. The term "strange woman" would seem to refer to the evil example of Solomon, of which we read in 1 Kings xi. By marrying foreign women they had become common in Israel, and history shows that the corruption of their lives had tainted the life of the whole nation. Immorality and morality cannot be mingled with advantage to the latter. Many an attempt was made in ancient times to combine heathen practices with reverence for divine commandments, and in every instance the divine commandment was borne down by the heathen custom. A picture so awful as is given in the text is rather to be imagined than described. It does not deal with any local circumstance, or any mere antiquity, but with an evil that is present in every age, and more or less active in every mind. The evil woman has still forsaken the guide of her youth and forgotten the covenant of her God. She has broken her vows, and, being disloyal herself, she would seem to have entered into a compact to taint the loyalty of the world. All that the wisest man can do is to refer to the melancholy experience of the world, and to exhort the untaught and the unwary to accept the testimony of the ages. Things most beautiful in themselves may be turned to the deadliest uses. The passion of love may so be used as to upturn the very foundations of character and the corner-stones of society. That little can be done by mere warning events have abundantly testified, yet it is right that the Church in all its ministries, instructions, and practices should hold up the signal of caution and warning, that some at least of the young, being forewarned, may be forearmed.

Chapter iii.

THE PROGRAMME OF LIFE.

“My son, forget not my law; but let thine heart keep my commandments”
(ver. 1).

THERE is a tenderness peculiar to the paternal voice; if its tones are apparently harsher than those of the maternal appeal, yet they tremble with as true a pathos. There are few more subduing sights than that of the father instructing the child in the ways of wisdom. He adopts no cold and formal method of communication. His ministry is full of the heart's fondest love. He speaks not as a mere hireling, but with an affection unconstrained, profound, immeasurable.

This is a father's voice. Mark the persuasiveness of the father's method; there is no attempt to drive the young soul into the way of wisdom. The method is one of affectionate remonstrance and allurement. The method is in harmony with the purpose, and the purpose is in full accord with the spontaneity, the dignity, and self-control of man's mental and moral constitution. Men may be driven to despair; they cannot be whipped into joy. Let the religious parent then copy this method; let him know that strength loses nothing by gentleness, and that judgment is sublimated by mercy. There is a family piety which is family crucifixion; compulsion takes the place of persuasion, and the Father in heaven is only known as exceeding in terror the father on earth. This ought not so to be. Religion should be expressed in the tenderest tones, attired in the most attractive garb, surrounded by the most alluring fascinations. Religion thus taught will be a perpetual joy in the recollection of the child. In days to come he will say, “I delight in the law of God after the inward man.” “My delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law do I meditate day and night!” That which is a pleasure in youth

will be a delight in old age. "Make me to go in the path of thy commandments; for therein do I delight." All other joys fail, but this increases into rapture. "I will delight myself in thy commandments, which I have loved." "I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food." "O how I love thy law! it is my meditation all the day." Blessed are such memories! Much depends on the father's method; let that be right, and the blessing will be abundant as the showers that water the earth.

"For length of days, and long life, and peace, shall they add to thee" (ver. 2).

Reward must follow goodness. We are not taught to be good for the sake of the reward; in fact, it is impossible to make hope of reward the motive of goodness. It is not goodness; it is self-seeking. It is natural, however, that the good man should have all that God deems best for him. "No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly." All possible limitations of this promise are really only variations of method, not changes of nature. By discipline God refines the taste, enlarges the capacity, and simplifies the motive; and thus discipline itself does the winter's work in our nature, in preparation for the golden and prolific summer. The winter may be harsh, but May plants the most beautiful flowers in soil which has been held fast in the grip of frost. "O fear the Lord, ye his saints: for there is no want to them that fear him." "My God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus." Goodness marches onward, inspired by promises which fill the heart with the joy of assured victory. "He layeth up sound wisdom for the righteous: he is a buckler to them that walk uprightly." "Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God."

"Let not mercy and truth forsake thee: bind them about thy neck; write them upon the table of thine heart: so shalt thou find favour and good understanding in the sight of God and man" (vers. 3, 4).

Mercy and truth are the great pillars and ornaments of man. Strength and beauty make up the fulness of perfection. Strength is stern, it is softened by beauty; beauty is frail, it is dignified by strength. Every man should be anxious about truth; but truth should tend towards mercy. The perfect man combines both.

We lose nothing by gentleness. The mighty oak looks well when swaying in response to the rocking winds.

This wise father advises his son to make mercy and truth his ornaments—"bind them about thy neck." The figure is beautiful, and has had a Christian adaptation—"Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering." This is the abiding decoration. It brightens as time passes; it is rendered more valuable by long use.

Not only spiritual but social blessings are promised to the obedient son. "So shalt thou find favour and good understanding in the sight of God and man." In the long run the good man gets his right place, and wields his right influence. "The expectation of the wicked shall perish." The success of the bad man is apparent, not real; it is a glittering but an insubstantial prize. "The eyes of the wicked shall fail, and they shall not escape, and their hope shall be as the giving up of the ghost."

Character, in proportion to its depth, compass, and intensity, requires time for its full exposition and establishment. The politic man may find short cuts to popularity, but the profoundly earnest man takes nothing for which he cannot return a fair equivalent. If he works long without recognition, his recognition will be the more valuable when it is accorded. The young man has here a programme which cannot fail. There is a miserable and vile saying, that "honesty is the best policy." No man can possibly be honest who works only for politic ends—the policy vitiates the honesty. Let young men look well to their moral foundations, and how cold soever, or stormy, the winds which blow around them, their standing-place shall not be shaken.

"Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths" (vers. 5, 6.)

There is a self-reliance that is wisdom; there is a self-reliance that is presumption. Where there is self-reliance towards man, it is good and most praiseworthy; where there is self-reliance towards God, it is practical blasphemy. This direction of the wise father shows the individuality of divine oversight. God

directs each man as if he were the only man to be directed. "O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps." There is a solemn responsibility attaching to the fact that we may have God as a directing Father. The matter is not one of mere speculation, however hopeful, but of positive revelation. "I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye." "I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known: I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight."

The communication of suggestion to the mind is a most subtle yet interesting and important question. The springs of the mind are divinely touched, the vigour of the understanding is increased, and the eye quickened to unusual penetration, by influences beyond our control, though within the wide sphere of our prayers. Why should not ideas be directly communicated from the divine mind, as directly as when the prophet heard and saw the intimations of God in the ancient time? If the devil can tempt, why cannot God inspire, suggest, and direct? "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not." This is pre-eminently the age of the Spirit. All God's service towards man seems to move through the mental and spiritual sphere. The visible miracle has disappeared. The fleshly ministry is at an end. Now we have ideas, emotions, kindlings of genius, and a spirit of philanthropy such as the world never saw. What the hand once did the mind does now. God burns in the bush whose eaves have healing virtue, and the God of the living reveals methods of healing. God stands at the junction of roads and says, "This is the way;" he tells the toiling labourer where to cast the net, and, by controlling or affecting the operations of the mind, he shows the Church "greater works" than the miracles which struck an age with panic or thrilled a world with grateful wonder. Then let us know our ignorance, tremble in our weakness, and flee to heaven for direction, strength, and all comfort of the soul. "My people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water." In so far as this charge touches our experience, let us fall humbly

before the Lord and beseech him to pardon our self-dependence. "Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God."

"Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the Lord, and depart from evil. It shall be health to thy navel, and marrow to thy bones. Honour the Lord with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase: so shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine" (vers. 7-10).

This is a continuation of the same idea. Goodness has a happy effect upon the body, upon the circumstances, upon the whole man. Its result is altogether excellent, without defect or blemish of any kind. How stupendous the folly, as well as the sin, of those who seek prosperity elsewhere than in a right relation towards God! He is deemed insane who lights a taper in presence of the summer sun that he may shed light upon his way; but how mad is he who sets his own ignorance against the counsel of the most High! "Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight!"

The wise father now calls his "son" to honour the Lord with the firstfruits of all his increase, and promises that giving shall be getting—"So shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine." No man can "serve God for nought," but the man who serves him for sake of the reward shall perish in expectation. To every faithful servant God's promise is true: "The Lord shall command the blessing upon thee in thy storehouses, and in all that thou settest thine hand unto; and he shall bless thee in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee." We should soon be richer if we made ourselves poorer by generous service. "Whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward."

It is to be borne in mind still that this exhortation is addressed to a young man, one who has life before him, all its perilous hazards, or fortunate speculations; he is to give as he gets, to make an instant, grateful, and abundant recognition of God's mercy. God is to have the "first;" whoever is kept waiting,

God is to be promptly and liberally acknowledged. "He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully." When youthful Christians make this their rule there will be an overflowing blessing poured throughout all the churches. God waits for this! He has greater gifts in reserve, but he tarries for man. "Prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it." The promise transcends our unworthy faith. We receive it with doubting. The most compulsive motive almost fails to move us. "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." If this voice fail, we know not what trumpet can awake the dead.

"My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord; neither be weary of his correction: for whom the Lord loveth he correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth" (vers. 11, 12).

There is hardly a heart that will not understand the meaning of "chastening," but many hearts fail to connect the word "chastening" with the word "Lord," and some who acknowledge the connection misinterpret the purpose of the union. The course of human life is a course of "chastening." Among the child's earliest experiences are those of pain, restraint, rebuke, correction. Throughout the educational period the same experiences prevail. The mercantile, the professional, the domestic circles, all have their ordeals. It is to be understood, therefore, that "chastening" is not a word confined to the vocabulary of religion. The shadow falls everywhere; summer has its shadow as well as winter. A survey of human society will show the observer that "chastening" seems to be unequally distributed. The rod is not administered to all uniformly, periodically, and with common measure. The eyes of the wicked stand out with fatness, they have more than heart could wish; while many a godly man is tottering under an intolerable burden, or smarting with anguish which he cannot express. How is this? His chastening is not atheistic: it is "the chastening of the Lord." The divine sculptor is using a sharp chisel; the heavenly Father is employing a heavy rod; the severe refiner sits over a glowing furnace. Thus

“chastening” is taken out of the heart-chilling region of atheism, and set down in the midst of the very household of God. There is a “chastening” that hath on it no superscription ; but there is also a chastening which is written within and without by the finger divine.

One impressive idea of the text is that there is a possibility of treating godly chastisement in an ungodly spirit. It may be “despised,” or it may be endured with impatience. Jeremiah complains in this strong language : “Thou hast stricken them, but they have not grieved ; thou hast consumed them, but they have refused to receive correction : they have made their faces harder than a rock ; they have refused to return.” In this case the godly chastisement was received in an ungodly spirit. Thus chastisement is hard to endure. It fails of its purpose. Instead of moving the spirit to lofty aspiration, or subduing it to penitential tears, it touches the flesh only, and thus it is as if healing medicine intended to be imbibed should be merely thrown upon the surface of the body. There are preparations intended to be taken, and preparations intended to be applied. Reverse the intention, and how absurd or terrible the result ! It is even so with God’s chastening : it is intended for the spirit, yet it may be arrested at the body ; the smart of the flesh should tell upon the slumbering or rebellious spirit. It was thus that the Psalmist accepted “the chastening of the Lord,”—“Before I was afflicted I went astray : but now have I kept thy word.” “It is good for me that I have been afflicted ; that I might learn thy statutes.”

The first word—“despised”—is severe ; let it be assumed, then, that it contains no indictment against us ; can we say as much of the second word—“weary” ? Many hearts strong enough not to “despise” are yet weak enough to become weary and impatient. “Ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise.” God’s purpose requires time for its exposition and realisation, and we require patience to abide its complete unfoldment—“Let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.” We know the victories of patience in various departments of service. (Patience has accomplished what the most

overwhelming strength could never effect. Look at a piece of sculpture: patience, not muscular force, curved the lips, moulded the eyelids, softened the lines into easy gracefulness, and made the rough stone beautiful as death if not palpitant as life. So with delicate machinery, so with refined painting; and so, indeed, with the trifling matter of perfect ornamentation and completeness of dress—"perfect and entire, wanting nothing." Why, then, be impatient under the discipline of God? "I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end." We are then to be patient until we be "perfect and entire, wanting nothing." Here is a bride partially adorned for the holy altar, but in her impatience she has neglected one article of attire; she is not "perfect and entire, wanting nothing." Let God clothe us with the garments fit for his redeemed and sanctified creatures! He may take a long time, but the beauty will be perfect and immortal.

The lesson of the text is that we are not to receive godly chastisement in an ungodly spirit. "If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?" We are at liberty, indeed, according to holy example, to pray for a modification of divine displeasure: "O Lord, correct me, but with judgment; not in thine anger, lest thou bring me to nothing." "O Lord, rebuke me not in thine anger, neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure." God knoweth our frame, and he will temper the wind to the shorn lamb. "I will not contend for ever, neither will I be always wroth: for the spirit should fail before me, and the souls which I have made." We may, then, pray God to help us under his heavy hand: "Have mercy upon me, O Lord; for I am weak: O Lord, heal me; for my bones are vexed."

All passages which connect the Fatherhood of God with the fatherhood of man, for the purpose of elucidating the divine intent in relation to our race, are most important. This is an example—"Even as a father the son in whom he delighteth." We interpret, in some degree, the divine through the human. "As a man chasteneth his son, so the Lord thy God chasteneth thee." There are unfatherly fathers, men who are lower than the "natural

brute beasts made to be taken and destroyed ;” yet, as a rule, fatherhood among men is synonymous with love, trust, care, sympathy, and defence. God takes up all these ideas and gives them infinite expansion. Yet, as the good father maintains discipline, so God chastens his children. “Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous : nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.” It is remarkable, too, that chastening is but temporary, love is eternal. “Though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies.” If he forsake his people, it is but for a “small moment ;” when he gathers them it is with everlasting kindness. Weeping endures for a night, joy cometh in the morning !

This exhortation respecting “chastening” is addressed to one who is young in life—“my son.” The young should lay their account with discipline. “It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth.” The young tree will not escape the pruning-knife. We cannot conceive any man of mature years unthankful for the hardships of his early life : they opened his nature ; they gave him lessons in lore which the schools cannot teach ; they showed him human nature in its most inviting and most repulsive aspects ; and through his very weakness he learned how to value strength. In great cities young men are exposed to great changes of circumstances ; a fortune may be lost or won in a very short time. Some men have been driven hard ; they have been pressed, as it were, by a hotly-pursuing enemy, and have retreated before his pitiless and devastating power. There is a word in the text for such. In reality, the pursuer may be no enemy. “Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time.” If you accept godly discipline in a godly spirit your sorrow shall be turned into joy. “Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord ; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.” Where discipline is sent as a punishment it is not to be complained of. “Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins ?” If the knife probe deeply, it is because the wound is deep and the danger great. We are to guard the spirit lest we give way to despair, being swallowed up of over much sorrow. All God’s

chastening is sent "that we might be partakers of his holiness." We should, then, rather invite discipline than reject it. "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

It is generally supposed, especially by the young, that there is no trial except sorrow, arising from poverty, bereavement, sickness, disappointment, and the like. The truth is that wealth is a temptation; prosperity is beset with danger; summer brings as deadly diseases as winter. "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!" "Jesus answereth again, and saith unto them, Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God." We see, then, that it is not so short a distance from the sunny hill of prosperity to the heavenly city as we had imagined. "They that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition." Wealth has trials peculiar to itself. "The care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word."

I tremble for many when the wave of prosperity returns. They will trust in uncertain riches rather than in the living God. Sensual enjoyments will override spiritual duties. The lights will flare in the dazzling saloons long after midnight has sounded its solemn stroke. Sensuous Paris will rule mercantile England. Ladies will endeavour to outshine one another in the number and brilliance of their diamonds, in the gorgeousness and splendour of their attire. The sanctity of family life will be sacrificed to the glare and pomp of public display. Men, goaded by a mad ambition, will run to the very verge of their means; many will go beyond their resources in the indulgence of a spirit of rivalry; little children will be hurried through the sweet simplicities of childhood, and be sophisticated by the most miserable notions which can prevail in the human mind; all that is simple in enjoyment, all that is trustful in intercourse, all that is candid in friendship, may be supplanted by a chicanery and hypocrisy

which may make honest men tremble, and devout men perish in despair.

Under such circumstances there is much to be done by wealthy men whose trust is in the living God. They can wield the powerful influence of a good example : they can feed the hungry, clothe the naked, sympathise with those who are enduring "the chastening of the Lord." They are called upon by the corruption, the extravagance, the sensuousness of the age to witness a good confession before men. The devil must not have all his own way. We are right only in so far as we resist the tendency towards the state of things just described. The picture we have drawn is suggested by the accounts we read, from time to time, of the doings of fashionable society. We may not go so far, but we may be moving in the same direction. We should turn our foot from the path, and find our joys elsewhere. Better far, beyond all that tongue can tell, to be meekly enduring "the chastening of the Lord," than to be dancing around the alluring whirlpool into whose bottomless depths unnumbered thousands have sunk, and out of whose seething waters no soul was ever rescued.

Chapter iii. 13-30.

THE PRECIOUSNESS OF WISDOM.

“Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding” (ver. 13).

THE whole world is crying for happiness. There is a teacher who boldly declares the conditions upon which that supreme prize may be obtained. We have said that the Proverbs are not mere imaginings or suggestions, but that they express distinct personal experience: this being so, the Proverbist is really reporting a fact, or taking up a position which he can establish by the most definite and indisputable evidence. The terms of the text would seem to indicate what, indeed, has already been asserted, that men have to seek for wisdom, and to secure understanding by hard work. We read of the man that findeth wisdom and the man that getteth understanding. The getting expressing an effort; in many instances, indeed, much painstaking and self-sacrifice. Nowhere is it said that wisdom comes naturally, and understanding grows in the mind without effort and culture. We value that which we work for. The common proverb is, “Easy come, easy go.” Wisdom and understanding cannot come in this way; even if they appear to do so, the coming is an illusion which vanishes quickly, leaving the mind in all its darkness and sterility. Wisdom is knowledge turned to its highest uses; understanding is the mental faculty trained to the highest effectiveness—both being ready at a moment’s notice to direct the course of life and to escape all that is perilous and destructive.

“For the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold” (ver. 14).

The idea of trading suggests that wisdom and understanding are to be obtained in the way in which merchandise is produced for market uses, involving every species of calculation, effort,

arrangement, and legitimate adventure. Sometimes wisdom is as merchandise which is brought from afar, through much toil of shipping and much risk of sailing, yet so determined is the merchant that he will be deterred by nothing that threatens to overwhelm him. Silver and gold are set down as types by which we are to understand and appreciate the varying degrees of value: in the case of wisdom and understanding even these types of things most precious are left far behind. All history shows how truly the world has been devoted to money-getting; when the wise man wanted a simile by which to indicate the eagerness which should characterise the studious disposition, he turned to the market-place for his metaphor. Strabo tells us of men in his day who were entranced by the music of the accomplished harpist, but, to a man, they left him the moment the market-bell rang to announce the commencement of the day's business. Strange indeed, yet most instructive, that we should be called upon to look to merchants as an example of industry, economy, determination, and success. Thus the lower illustrates the higher; the material suggests the scope and uses of the spiritual; this little world affords many a parable by which we may interpret the mysteries of heaven.

"She is more precious than rubies: and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her" (ver. 15).

The wise man now employs another figure, even rubies; whether the gem which we understand by that word, or coral, or pearls, the thing indicated was preciousness or value; yet rubies, pearls, diamonds—yea, all precious stones—fall out of the reckoning when we would compute the intrinsic value of wisdom and understanding. Having used the images of silver, gold, and rubies, the wise man ventures farther, and challenges even desire or imagination itself to find out a fitting comparison for the value of wisdom. When we come to understand the divine word, and to realise its exceeding preciousness, we change our ideas of the value of things. Paul the Apostle emphatically did so, for he says, "What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ." He added up all his hereditary privileges and rights, and with no small patriotic pride he recounted the things which were dear to the common mind of his countrymen, yet he said

he counted them but dung, that he might win Christ. And there are some pearls which are worth all others. "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant seeking goodly pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it." There must be something ineffably precious about a wisdom which can be thus characterised and appreciated. "It cannot be gotten for gold, neither shall silver be weighed for the price thereof. It cannot be valued with the gold of Ophir, with the precious onyx, or the sapphire. The gold and the crystal cannot equal it: and the exchange of it shall not be for jewels of fine gold. No mention shall be made of coral, or of pearls: for the price of wisdom is above rubies." Once let this idea fix itself in the mind, and the world must subordinate every pursuit to its quest of wisdom. "Knowledge is power" is a proverb which is universally commended. It has been proved within the lines of civilisation and in every detail of common life. It is not an intellectual speculation; it is a discovered and universally affirmed fact. Equally positive are spiritual teachers as to the value of the larger wisdom and the completer understanding. They who have it seem to have the key of worlds, and to be able to open gates which fall back upon infinite spaces, and in their yielding to the touch of importunity seem to welcome all who would enjoy the hospitality of divine communion. We are not now talking of the wisdom of letters and the understanding of books and theories, but of the wisdom which leads the soul to God, and of the understanding which grasps the scheme of Providence and the reality of the philosophy of life, its responsibilities and most righteous judgment.

"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" (vers. 16, 18).

Both the hands of Wisdom are filled with blessings for those who come to serve her. Like the God of Wisdom she can never give enough to her devotees and worshippers. She has nothing but reward for those who love her counsels and obey her behests. As for her ways, they are like the streets of the New Jerusalem, paved with gold; and as for her paths, they are full of peace without disturbance, sacredly calm as the very security of heaven. Not only does Wisdom give with the hand,—she grows, she

abounds in fruitfulness, she surprises all her children with new products. She is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her; every season brings new leafage, new blossoming, and new fruitfulness. There is no monotony in wisdom, as there is no monotony in the light of day; it is a continual surprise and a continual charm. The expression "the tree of life" does not often occur in the sacred writings. We first find it in the Book of Genesis, then occasionally in the Proverbs, and finally in two instances in the Revelation. It is instructive to notice how reward is always associated in the Bible with the love and realisation of wisdom. "Moreover by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward." "With long life will I satisfy him, and show him my salvation." "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls." As early as the days of Moses this same truth was perceived and acted upon, for we read of him that he esteemed "the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward." Are we to understand, then, that those who are wise and of an understanding heart are saved from all the disappointment and trouble of earthly pilgrimage? The facts of life instantly contradict such a view. But there is life within life. The true life throbs beneath all the appearances which are possible to the observer, and even below the experiences which often trouble the believer himself. The Apostle Paul put the case, in his own vivid way, "as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things." The Apostle Peter states the case with equal vividness: "Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations." The most illustrious instance of all completely disproves the suggestion that true wisdom exempts from earthly trial, for the Son of God himself was a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as for his poverty, it is enough to know that as the Son of man he had not where to lay his head. The union of sorrow and of joy in the Christian life may be said to be one of the miracles of Jesus Christ. What, for example, can be more contrary, within the limits of mere words, than the estates represented in this statement: "In a

great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality"? Literal contradictions so palpable and so astounding can only be understood by those in whose hearts Christ has been born the hope of glory.

"The Lord by wisdom hath founded the earth ; by understanding hath he established the heavens. By his knowledge the depths are broken up, and the clouds drop down the dew" (vers. 19, 20).

In these verses the highest tribute of all is paid to the majesty and excellence of wisdom. We are called upon to look at earth and heaven, and to behold in their mechanism the wisdom and knowledge of God. "He hath made the earth by his power, he hath established the world by his wisdom, and stretched out the heavens by his discretion." "O Lord, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all: the earth is full of thy riches." The scheme of the universe is a testimony to the infinite wisdom of God. To wisdom God has always granted an under-power of creation. The wise man is continually dreaming new dreams, enriching the world with new inventions, discovering new fountains of feeling, and setting in motion impulses which have hitherto been unknown or dormant. The poet has said, "O to create within the mind is bliss." This power of creation is inspired and sustained by the living God in all his children who delight in him. Even where there is no genius grace itself gives fertility to the mind, so that the mind sees new aspects of God's greatness and goodness, and new occasions for songs of mercy and of judgment. The pious mind is never sterile; even where it cannot appeal to the highest forms of intellect and imagination it can, within its own limits, delight itself with an abundance of fatness, because of its nearness to God and its larger access to the throne of grace.

"My son, let not them depart from thine eyes: keep sound wisdom and discretion: so shall they be life unto thy soul, and grace to thy neck" (vers. 21, 22).

The exaltation of wisdom is followed by an appeal to the young man to keep fast hold of sound wisdom and discretion. We cannot live in pictures or in fleeting dreams, or in uncertain guesses after truth. We must lay hold with both hands upon everything

we have gained as students in the school of wisdom. The very retention of our lessons involves an act of discipline. "Take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life : but teach them thy sons, and thy sons' sons." We have had to expend energy in securing wisdom, and we have to expend equal energy in retaining her, for she is jealous of neglect ; yea, she will fly away from the mind that does not offer her the hospitality of its whole capacity. There must be no rival affections ; wisdom must dominate everything, bringing all other idols and affinities within the action of its own supreme will. Thus we are not called upon to be mere idolaters of wisdom, but to keep it in the heart, with the distinct view of reproducing it in an obedient and pure life. Thus wisdom does not imprison the heart in a palace of luxury and self-indulgence, but constrains the heart to give forth, to put to practical test, every counsel that has been learned in the spiritual school. Wisdom rightly used is increased in amount and energy. "Wisdom is a defence, and money is a defence : but the excellency of knowledge is, that wisdom giveth life to them that have it." So wisdom is not a mere decoration, a medal to be worn on the breast, or a badge to proclaim superiority of class, it is a life-generating force, living ever in the soul for its enlargement and establishment in goodness. The wise man promises that wisdom shall also be a decoration in the best sense of that term, for while wisdom is to be life unto the soul, it is also to be grace unto the neck. That which is inward shall have an outward expression. The spiritual mind shall refine even the face of the body. He who abounds in prayer shall have a light upon his face, of which he himself shall be unconscious, but other men will see it, and know that the glory was not kindled by human hands. "I am the light of the world : he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."

"Then shalt thou walk in thy way safely, and thy foot shall not stumble. For the Lord shall be thy confidence, and shall keep thy foot from being taken" (vers. 23, 26).

We now come to what may be called specifically the practical rewards of wisdom. Hitherto there has been much that is purely subjective. The wise man now does not hesitate to indicate that

there will be a more positive and tangible kind of reward attached to sound wisdom and discretion. Not only are the ways of wisdom ways of pleasantness, but the wise man is to go in his own way safely, so much so that even his feet shall not stumble. "The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord: and he delighteth in his way." The Lord takes knowledge of the feet of the good man, and knows all his goings. "He will not suffer thy foot to be moved." The blessing of the Lord pursues the wise man from the open public way into the secret chamber of solitude and sleep. Sweet sleep is promised to the students of wisdom. There are blessings for the body as well as for the soul. "Godliness is profitable unto all things, having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." "I will make with them a covenant of peace, and will cause the evil beasts to cease out of the land: and they shall dwell safely in the wilderness, and sleep in the woods." Then, when the good man comes from his chamber to fight the battle of the day, he is to be assured of the protection and honour of the most High. Perfect love is to cast out fear. The righteous are to be bold as a lion. "He that dwelleth in the secret places of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty." The good man no longer lives his own life in his own way, in his own strength, and for his own purposes—he lives, and moves, and has his being in God. He hears a voice continually whispering to his heart, saying, "The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms." The personality of God is always asserted in the Book of God. Nowhere is the holy One described as a mere breath, or influence, or afflation; but always as a personality—a living, loving, tender Father. In the twenty-sixth verse the Lord is pledged to be the confidence of his children and their daily protection. Everywhere the Lord identifies himself with the interests of his people, and invites them to put their trust in his omnipotence. "Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee: hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast." "I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep: for thou, Lord, only makest me dwell in safety."

"Withhold not good from them to whom it is due, when it is in the power of thine hand to do it. Say not unto thy neighbour, Go, and come again, and

to-morrow I will give; when thou hast it by thee. Devise not evil against thy neighbour, seeing he dwelleth securely by thee" (vers. 27-29).

To wisdom we must add charity, never forgetting that charity is only a form of justice. Yet this is constantly forgotten. Look at the expression—"to whom it is due;" these are the terms in which a debt would be described, and charity is a debt to the poor and needy. This is all we can owe them. For other commerce they have no capital. The Apostle Paul says he was a debtor to Greeks, and barbarians, and strangers of every kind; that is to say, he owed them the debt of the gospel,—he knew Christ and they did not, so he owed them Christ, and was bound to pay the infinite debt. Mark, the subject is not the limited one of money, but the boundless one of "good,"—we owe sympathy, money, time, knowledge, culture, direction, and all we have that other people need and deserve. Nor are we to defer the payment of the debt. We may not live until "to-morrow," therefore let us pay to-day; or the creditor may die before to-morrow, therefore let us not turn him away with an idle promise. Whatever we have we have for immediate use. Let us turn over our capital quickly, for thereby we scatter yet increase; we get many harvests in one year. If we have not much to give, we can at least do good by not doing evil. We need not "devise evil" against our neighbour; we need not get rid of him, or so treat him as to lessen our responsibilities towards him. Let him quietly dwell within such security as we can afford, for in giving him rest we give him the opportunity of strengthening himself and promoting his culture. It is good to be in debt when we owe no man anything but love. Such debt enlarges the affections, quickens moral sagacity, and sends a glow of joy through the whole nature. "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith."

"Strive not with a man without cause, if he have done thee no harm" (ver. 30).

Here, again, we are called to do good negatively. The strife-loving disposition is fatal to culture, solidity of goodness, and every instinct of beneficence. Where strife is, God is not. Where there is cause of strife be careful to ascertain its true

quality. It must be a cause so evident and so righteous that there can be no dispute about it. Some minds are ingenious in creating causes of strife, and they justify themselves by blinding themselves. "They speak not peace, but they devise deceitful matters against them that are quiet in the land." As for Christians, their course is distinct enough. "The servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men." This is a word to ministers primarily, but there is a broader and more inclusive exhortation—"Let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body." Strength is itself a temptation. Who can be strong and yet civil? Who can hold a gun and never discharge it? Who can live in a fortress and yet issue no challenges? Unjust contentions degrade their authors. False accusations need further lies for their defence and support. Whom we begin by ill-treating we end by hating. Nothing is so pure, so uniting, so fraternising, and so consolidating as love. "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord." "Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any:" and if you wish to know the measure and quality of true forbearance and gentleness you find it here—"Even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye."

"Envy thou not the oppressor, and choose none of his ways. For the froward is abomination to the Lord: but his secret is with the righteous" (vers. 31, 32).

The oppressor can realise but apparent success. He is not to be envied. His honour is but coloured smoke which the wind driveth away. Such envy always defeats itself and leads to self-condemnation. "Fret not thyself against evildoers, neither be envious against the workers of iniquity." The Lord himself must be left to deal with oppressors, and we must withhold our hand from judgment. The "froward" can neither pray nor love. To the froward the Lord will show himself froward. What a noise the froward man makes on earth; how he tramps and snorts and nods his proud plume in sign of sovereignty: yet in the morning he is not found, his memorial is blotted out, and his wooden sword is buried with him in a grave unknown. How

different is the portion of the good! The divine secret makes them wise. They are on confidential terms with God. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit make their abode with the humble heart. "Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do?" "Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his Lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you." Observe how great privilege is always associated with great character. The promise is not to the wise, or the rich, or the brilliant, but to the "righteous." The vigour of heaven is to be given to the good and faithful. "He that is spiritual judgeth all things."

"The curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked: but he blesseth the habitation of the just. Surely he scorneth the scorners: but he giveth grace unto the lowly. The wise shall inherit glory: but shame shall be the promotion of fools" (vers. 33-35).

Again, the Lord himself deals with the wicked. The word rendered "habitation" often refers to "pasture" and "sheepfold," a reference to the time of wandering when Israel had no permanent dwelling-place. The old watch-cry was, "To your tents, O Israel,"—tents, not houses; temporary buildings, not durable structures; yet long after Israel had settled, the old watchword was in use. Perhaps the word "house," as applied to the wicked, is put in contrast to the word "habitation," or "hut," or "tent," as applied to the righteous. The Lord is against the scorners as against the strivers, although he scorns the scorners, yet to the lowly he giveth peace. "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision." "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble." The word "fools," in verse thirty-five, may be taken as equivalent to "dull, stupid people," specially such as take no heed of God's threatenings, and who, therefore, are put to shame by every event in providence. Note how the simple twofold division is rigidly preserved—the wicked and the just, the wise and the fools; and the same distinction of issue—curse and blessing, shame and glory. The Scripture here, as everywhere, is consistent with itself; its law is from the beginning and is inexorable. "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." Shame

shall be the promotion of fools. How subtle the satire! How humbling the taunting irony! When the fool goes up for his crown he will be covered with shame as with fire, and will drop down his head towards the dust. Judge nothing before the time. On the morrow we shall see how it fares with those whose hearts are gross and whose feet kick against the pricks. Oh that revealing morrow! Many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, Father of all, and the Saviour of all, we bow before thy throne; we bless thee for the holy privilege; it touches our inmost heart, and leads us to new song and new prayer and new hope. Thou dost lead us along the line of life day by day. We are always beginning. There is no end to immortality; because we are immortal we can but begin, see new lights, further distances, brighter glories, and catch from afar some new tone of music; and thus we proceed, knowing that we are nearing a city which hath foundations whose builder and maker is God. These thoughts give us uplifting of soul; uplifting of soul makes us stretch out the hand in noble deed, in expressive sacrifice, in a thousand attestations of love to the Cross of Christ. We bless thee that this Cross makes us beneficent; being crucified with Christ we must indulge a larger love, a nobler brotherhood; our soul goes out to the uttermost ends of the earth, seeking in Christ's own spirit that which is lost. We bless thee for this holy religion. It is unlike all other; it makes us work; we cannot wait and tarry and linger and indulge ourselves by the road: this is the religion of inspiration, urging us to new effort, to wider and bolder enterprise, that we may tell every man in the hearing of his heart there is born unto him a Saviour. Thus we feed on the Son of God. His flesh is meat indeed, and his blood is drink indeed, and except we eat his flesh and drink his blood we have no life in us. Give us the higher meaning of these words; may we enter into all their spiritual significance; may our souls feed on the very heart of the Son of God. We bless thee for all noble thoughts, lofty aspirations, outgoings of soul marked by unselfishness: these are the miracles of God the Holy Ghost; these are the later wonders of the Cross. God forbid that we should glory save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. It glorifies everything; it explains everything; it turns agony into joy; it makes earth bud with the blossoms and flowers of heaven: it is the power of God unto salvation. Teach us that Christ's burial was his crucifixion, and that his crucifixion was his birth, and that in one and the same act he includes the whole mystery of godliness.

Lamb, from earth's foundation slain,
By whose bitter stripes of pain
We are freed from guilty stain,
Hear us, Holy Jesu.

Only Victim we can plead,
Our High Priest to intercede,
Advocate in all our need,
Hear us, Holy Jesu. Amen.

Chapter iv.

A PARENTAL EXHORTATION.

“Hear, ye children, the instruction of a father, and attend to know understanding. For I give you good doctrine, forsake ye not my law” (vers. 1, 2).

STILL the paternal exhortation proceeds with more and more rhetorical dignity. Doctrine and law form the staple of this appeal. By “law” understand “direction,” for life is an ever-bisecting course, and full of points that must bewilder inexperienced travellers. Do not venture upon great sea voyages without proper instruments and without being taught how to use them. So in life. Be enriched with doctrine or wisdom, and cultivate that tender filial spirit which gratefully yields itself to direction. It is at once wise and lovely for youth to consult the aged, and to avail themselves of accumulated experience. Any other spirit is vain, self-conceited, frivolous, and unworthy. Why should the father be anxious to instruct and direct the son? Because he has seen more of life,—more of its mystery, its peril, its tragedy; therefore his heart yearns to preserve the young from danger. The father’s position is one of moral dignity and supreme benevolence. Having suffered himself, he would save his children from pain.

“For I was my father’s son, tender and only beloved in the sight of my mother. He taught me also, and said unto me, Let thine heart retain my words: keep my commandments, and live” (vers. 3, 4).

Solomon knew youth because he had himself been young. He knew also the advantage of instruction, for he himself had enjoyed it. Thus one generation may benefit another, and increase its years by preventing a repetition of its errors. We save a man’s time by saving him from mistakes, and thus we actually add to the length of his life. It is to-day that men may compress centuries within the span of the allotted term: if we were wise we, though so modern, would be the true patriarchs of history. What

wisdom is stored for us! How easy now is the ascent to the temple of understanding! Every father can leave his son the fortune of a noble example. That is more than gold, more than acres, more than fame. Here it is that virtue has its splendid opportunity! Men may have been looking in the wrong direction for a heritage for their children. Let that heritage be a vivid recollection of a home sanctified by prayer, a life devoted to good doing, an example of industry and justice, a spirit of hopefulness and charity, and that memory will be an inheritance and a refuge in life's most painful hours. The man in the text was an only son, and therefore was in a trying position; yet his father and his mother were wise, so they enriched him with wisdom, and kept not from him the advantages of discipline. Fools are they who ruin their children under the hypocrisy of being kind to them. In after years the victims of such kindness will be the justest and bitterest of its critics.

“Get wisdom, get understanding: forget it not: neither decline from the words of my mouth. Forsake her not, and she shall preserve thee: love her, and she shall keep thee. Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding. Exalt her, and she shall promote thee: she shall bring thee to honour, when thou dost embrace her. She shall give to thine head an ornament of grace: a crown of glory shall she deliver to thee. Hear, O my son, and receive my sayings; and the years of thy life shall be many. I have taught thee in the way of wisdom; I have led thee in right paths. When thou goest, thy steps shall not be straitened; and when thou runnest, thou shalt not stumble. Take fast hold of instruction; let her not go: keep her; for she is thy life” (vers. 5-13).

The figure of merchandise is still maintained. Work, plan, seek, toil, are the watchwords of true zeal in this matter. It is as if the youth were face to face with many attractions—say, beauty, wealth, ease, pleasure, and the like, and whilst he is estimating their claims the father exhorts him, saying, Get wisdom, get understanding; do not be deceived; insist upon having the brightest treasure, and on no account be victimised by men who would urge you to sacrifice future satisfaction to immediate gratification. How full of wisdom is the exhortation—“Love her, and she shall keep thee:” that is a law of the widest application: it is true in every department of life; true of art, of learning, of friendship, of service; to love is to be loved. If any man love

me, I will manifest myself to him. The tenacious memory is lodged in the heart, and not in the intellect. Fall in love with wisdom ; make a heart-idol of her ; dream of her charms, invite her to yield her treasures, seek her daily companionship, long for her, hail her with delight, yea, in every way devote to her the undivided passion of the heart. "Exalt her, and she shall promote thee : she shall bring thee to honour, when thou dost embrace her." The wise man will come to honour amongst his fellow-men as soon as he has had time to show how truly wise he is. He can wait. He will not contend with clamour and madness ; he will not compete with selfishness as if the rivalry were honourable : he will teach, observe, pray, and wait, knowing that his time will come, and that his influence will be recognised. With no mean reward will he be burdened. Great and lustrous are his honours : "She shall give to thine head an ornament of grace : a crown of glory shall she deliver to thee." God withholds not heaven from those who make good use of earth. A crown of righteousness is laid up for the faithful. Crown and throne are familiar objects in the outlook of the godly. Nothing less will satisfy their holy ambition. Even on earth true wisdom always comes to the throne at last. "A drachm of this wisdom is worth a pound of wit." The Greeks expressed "learned" and "good" by one word (*ᾠπουδαίος*), so true honour even amongst men is synonymous with true wisdom and true virtue.

"Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men. Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away" (vers. 14, 15).

The exhortation continues to reveal the depth and reality of the personal experience of the speaker : he will not have his son so much as enter into the path of the wicked ; the young man is not to come even inside the gate ; on no account is he to make an experimental visit merely for the sake of forming an opinion as to the danger and loathsomeness of sin. The only safety is by keeping strictly outside, and running away from it with the eagerest haste. In every variety of manner the wise man cautions his son. The young man has to avoid the evil way, to pass not by it ; but to turn from it, and pass away. Both the active and the passive courses are thus enjoined ; not only is the evil way to be avoided, but it has to be turned away from,

the back and not the face has to be turned towards it, nor is there to be any loitering, but the feet are instantly to move in a precisely opposite direction, so that, when the tempter comes from his hidden place to seduce the wayfarer, he may find that the young traveller is no longer on the scene. We are not to halt between two opinions, nor to dally or compromise, or to adopt any middle course whatever, when the question is a moral one; but with definiteness, simplicity, and courage we are to elect the right and to persevere, even though the way lie up difficult mountains or across dreary sands. The moment we set a door ajar the enemy will enter. If the voice loses one tone of emphasis in repelling his approaches the enemy will note the change and immediately take advantage of it.

“For they sleep not, except they have done mischief; and their sleep is taken away, unless they cause some to fall. For they eat the bread of wickedness, and drink the wine of violence” (vers. 16, 17).

The counsellor knows the nature of those with whom he has to deal, for he has seen into their very motive, and understood their evil passion in all its sweep and fury. He says that bad men sleep not except they have done mischief. The expression is very forcible, meaning that evil-doing has become second nature to them, and until they have done some evil it is impossible for them to lie down with any sense of comfort. By “the bread of wickedness,” referred to in the seventeenth verse, we are to understand the bread which has been acquired wickedly. There is no sweetness in all the house of the bad man; upon his head is written “wickedness,” and upon his wine is written “violence.” When wicked people cannot accomplish their evil purposes, it is as if they had deprived the body of bread and wine, so that a kind of illness takes place in the mind, and they go to bed, not to sleep, but to spend a weary night of self-accusation and poignant regret. We know what it is for a man of business to spend an industrious yet unprofitable day, and how unsettling it is to the mind to return from such fruitless occupation to seek rest. It is precisely so with the wicked—they are described as going about their business with great eagerness, they are determined to bring some people into mischief and misery; but at the end of the day, when they find that their

purpose has failed of effect, sleep is driven from their eyelids, and disappointment begins to gnaw their hearts. From all this we may infer the quality of inspiration under which they labour. They are the servants of the devil. He is a cruel taskmaster. When his slaves return at night to tell him that their day's work has been a failure, he afflicts them with sleeplessness and torments them with self-contempt.

“But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day” (ver. 18).

Observe that the word “path” occurs in both instances under which it is shown that life is comparable to a journey. The distinction of the path of the just is that more and more light shines upon it, revealing not only the path itself, but all surrounding objects of interest and loveliness. The idea of light is always associated with the way of Christian progress. According to Psalm xxvii., the Lord is the light of the righteous. Jehovah was the guiding sun of the Psalmists. In Isaiah lx. the Church is exhorted thus, “Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.” She had been as in the darkness of Sheol, and now she is led forth into all the glory of morning. God himself is the sun of righteousness, and he comes upon thee as “the light of the morning, even a morning without clouds.” We are to understand that the just man sees God more and more clearly as life unfolds the mystery of its purposes. Providence reveals God. History is one of the temples in which he resides. Personal experience is the medium which he selects for the continual expansion of his light and truth. Paul speaks of the “marvellous light” of the gospel. God himself is light, and in him there is no darkness at all. Not only have we this revelation of the divine nature, but we have a standard by which to test our own spiritual progress. If we love light, then are we the children of the day, but if we tarry for the darkness, that under its concealment we may carry out our purposes, whatever may be our intellectual gifts or our social advantages, we are children of the night, unclaimed and unapproved by the God of glory. The more we love light the more light we shall have. “Light, more light,” must not be the poet's cry alone, but the desire of every heart which believes that God's light is infinite,

and that we should be entrusted with more of it if we were faithful to the degree in which we are already enlightened.

“The way of the wicked is as darkness: they know not at what they stumble” (ver. 19).

This is the direct contrast. Men cannot both leave the light and yet be in it. To leave the light is to go into the prison of darkness, and to live the dwindling life of deprivation and disablement. Our life was made for the light, and therefore without light we shall die. A cruel thing it is to deprive a plant of light; how infinitely more cruel to shut out the light of God's truth from the soul that was made to enjoy it. Other men cannot shut that light out from us, how bitterly soever they may be opposed to our Christian sympathy; only man can exclude the light from himself. Books, ordinances, and all manner of public opportunities may be taken away from us, and thereby great loss may be inflicted upon the spiritual life; but even under disadvantages so discouraging the soul can silently commune with God, and through intense and loving prayer can invoke his presence and support. Only suicide is possible in the spiritual life. No other hand can take that life from us; but, alas! we have power not only to grieve the Spirit, but to quench the Spirit, and thus to bring ourselves under the pitiless and boundless dominion of darkness. Light is the enemy of wickedness, and darkness, in a sense, may be said to be the friend of it. Bad men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil. They dread the rising of the sun; they fear even the unexpected flash of an artificial light, knowing that wherever light comes it will reveal them in an attitude of shame, or in quest of some forbidden object. They make a kind of heaven of their darkness. It is indeed their only security. Yet what can be taken away so quickly as darkness? Go into the darkest chamber, and by one stroke of the hand every corner of that chamber may be illuminated, for darkness seems to fly away as if in fear; it is a ghost which is more easily terrified than it can terrify others. The policy of the bad man is a policy of darkness—that is to say, it is impossible to tell what his real object is, or to find out what he is doing in his concealment, or to work in him any degree of frankness and transparency; he is a man of dark counsels,

of deep designs, of unrevealed plots and treasons, in very deed a child of darkness and a servile worshipper at its altar. The darkness comes stumbling, and in the case of the wicked a stumbling that cannot be explained, for verily they know not at what they stumble. There is but one light of the world—"As long as I am in the world, I am the Light of the world." "This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God."

"My son, attend to my words; incline thine ear unto my sayings. Let them not depart from thine eyes; keep them in the midst of thine heart. For they are life unto those that find them, and health to all their flesh. Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life. Put away from thee a froward mouth, and perverse lips put far from thee. Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee. Ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established. Turn not to the right hand nor to the left: remove thy foot from evil" (vers. 20-27).

The earnestness of the counsellor is indisputable. Why does he thus wrestle with his son? Why not utter to him a word or two, and pass on? Surely there must be something dependent on obedience and disobedience. It is this after-thing that gives its true point and value to the exhortation. When the husbandman is urged to sow his seed, it is not merely that he may do a day's work, but that he may provide a harvest. The act of sowing does not terminate in itself; it means bread for the eater, and seed for other sowers in other days. Obedience to wise directions means exactly what is said in the 22nd verse, "Life unto those that find them, and health to all their flesh." We admire the counsel which exhorts to temperance, and to cleanliness, and to self-control in all its aspects, because we are assured that such a course of discipline ends in health and vigour. Precisely so with counsels of a higher range; they are not merely fine sentiments, admitting of poetical expression and illustration, they bear immediately upon spiritual health, manliness, and completeness of development. Hence their importance, and hence the eagerness with which the young soul is plied by the man of manifold

personal experience. He entreated that his words should ever be kept before the eyes, that they should be stored in the very midst of the young man's heart. About the young man's "heart" the wise counsellor was specially careful. "Keep thy heart with all diligence;" keep thy heart above all things that are to be prized. The heart would seem to be the true seat of character, "for out of it are the issues of life." "Take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life." So deeply impressed were the ancients with the part that was played by the heart in the development of life, that they seemed almost to fear lest God himself should besiege it with temptation. "Incline not my heart to any evil thing, to practise wicked works with men that work iniquity: let me not eat of their dainties." Observe how the whole life seems to be touched by this exhortation. The heart is to be kept; a froward mouth is to be put away; perverse lips are to be kept at an infinite distance; the eyes are to look right on, the eyelids are to look straight before; the path of the feet is to be pondered; the foot is to be removed from evil. Compare with this the exhortation given by the apostle in the Epistle to the Ephesians, where he exhorts Christians to take unto them the whole armour of God. The whole life is to be guarded and protected because no man is stronger than his weakest point, and we may actually be weakest where we suppose ourselves to be strongest. It is possible to be careful about the mouth, and yet to allow the eye wide and perilous liberty. Alas, we can practise wickedness in silence! The eye can be enjoying a very harvest of evil whilst the mouth is fast closed, and not one sign is given by speech that the soul is rioting at the table of the devil. Who can keep his eyes aright? Who cannot open them, even in prayer, that he may feast them on some forbidden object whilst his lips are uttering holy words? "Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity; and quicken thou me in thy way." It is of infinite consequence that we should direct our exertions to the right point, otherwise our lives may be spent in mere frivolity under the guise of great industry and faithfulness. We may be watching at the wrong gate, or we may suppose that only certain gates are to be closed and that others may be left open

without danger. There is to be proportion in our discipline. Cobwebs will not keep burglars out. It is not the front door only that needs to be attended to, but the gate at the back, or the little window in some obscure part of the house. When the enemy comes as a house-breaker, he does not seek for the strongest part of the castle, but for its very weakest parts. "See that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise." "The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light." "Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good." It is not the red coat that saves the soldier from being wounded, but the armour that is underneath it. Not our nominal respectability but our real piety is the safeguard of the character. We are called upon to accept all these exhortations as words uttered by a father. That is to say, they are not judicial words—harsh, arbitrary, disciplinary words; they are not lofty, military, haughty words; even when they are sternest they are gentle, even when they impose the severest exertions their meaning is to bring the character to blossoming and fruitfulness. Hence the counsellor is always called father, and the counselled one is always addressed as son; we have to picture a benignant, gracious, gentle patriarch giving some young and inexperienced stripling the benefit of his stores of memory, and of pleasant or painful experience. The picture is thus charged with pathos. Alas! it is hardly possible to be wise in youth, otherwise with what interest should we listen to those who, from under their grey hairs and wrinkled faces, tell us what they have seen of the malignity of the enemy, the bitterness of evil-doing, and the joy which never fails to attach to the doing of things that are right and wise. And old men ought to be one of the very safeguards of society. An old teacher should be the most honoured of men, for he speaks not only speculatively and theoretically, but experimentally and practically, and he can show a proof of every wise word which his experience entitles him to utter. Let us listen to this gracious speaker in the Proverbs, for again and again he says, "My son, my son, my son."

Chapter v.

THE STRANGE WOMAN.

“My son, attend unto my wisdom, and bow thine ear to my understanding : that thou mayest regard discretion, and that thy lips may keep knowledge” (vers. 1, 2).

THE reason which is assigned justifies the urgency of the counsel. There are unwritten rights between man and man. The wise man by his very wisdom acquires the right to instruct the unwise, and the strong man by his very strength has the right to defend the oppressed. It is not a matter of mere sentiment in either case, but of positive and imperative right. This is the secret of true commonwealth and brotherhood. A reflection mournful beyond all others is that any form of riches except experience is eagerly accepted. Offer gold, and it is seized with avidity; offer a seat of honour or influence, and at once it is appreciated: but offer the wisdom of experience, and more than golden treasure of deeply-proved inquiry into practical life, and it is declined with indifference or contempt. God's harvests are accepted, but God's doctrines are rejected. We take wine and oil, but repel the offer of wisdom. How is such madness to be accounted for? This half-wisdom is indeed madness, for it shows sufficient sagacity to know good from evil, but insufficient decision to resist the things that would hurt the soul. Were we altogether foolish we might well be pitied, but we are ingenious in evil, brilliant in immorality, sagacious in escaping moral discipline. The light that is in us is darkness!

“For the lips of a strange woman drop as an honeycomb, and her mouth is smoother than oil: but her end is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword. Her feet go down to death; her steps take hold on hell. Lest thou shouldest ponder the path of life, her ways are moveable, that thou canst not know them. Hear me now therefore, O ye children, and depart not from the words of my mouth. Remove thy way far from her, and come not nigh the door of her house: lest thou give thine honour unto others, and

thy years unto the cruel: lest strangers be filled with thy wealth; and thy labours be in the house of a stranger; and thou mourn at the last, when thy flesh and thy body are consumed, and say, How have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof; and have not obeyed the voice of my teachers, nor inclined mine ear to them that instructed me! I was almost in all evil in the midst of the congregation and assembly" (vers. 3-14).

Here is the ruin wrought not by nature, but by the perversion of nature. Here, indeed, is the problem which vexes and defies the wisdom and benevolence of the world. Man and woman were made for each other, yet what ruin is wrought by the false relations into which they are thrown. All the other evils of society are insignificant compared with the perdition created by illicit intercourse. Such a subject repels its students, for it is full of all abominableness and shame. Yet surely the Christian teacher should not be silent. Our young men are being destroyed by thousands, yet we must not speak frankly to them, because the subject is loathsome! Its very loathsomeness should compel Christian teachers to break silence. Of course the painful subject may be so unwisely handled as to become a source of mischief, but its mismanagement is no argument against honest attempts to save young lives from ruin. In the text it is the "woman" who tempts! Certainly the letter excludes every other interpretation. On the other hand, every man when he is tempted is drawn away of his own lusts and enticed. Even gunpowder is harmless when thrown upon water. The fire that burns in man creates the very "woman" who is first dishonoured and then accounted "strange." Let us be just in assessing the blame. First and heaviest it must fall upon man. He is too prone, like Adam, to throw the blame upon woman, and thus he proves himself to be a coward as well as a criminal. Even lawful passions are to be held in check. The fiercest of them may be subdued by the power of Christ. It is unwise to make light of the fierceness of some passions; to do so is to lose the confidence of those whom we would seek to save, because they will suppose that we know nothing of the nature of the fire which we think can be blown out by a breath of wind. Never forget that the wind may fan the very flame it is meant to extinguish. Nature avenges every outrage committed upon her ordinances; in dizziness, in mental incertitude, in putrescent flesh, in loss of memory and will, she writes her judgment upon the evildoer.

No man can dishonour nature and yet live at peace with her. The wages of sin is death. "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto according to thy word."

Here I will avail myself of the language of another :—

Enter with me, in imagination, the strange woman's house—where God grant you may never enter in any other way. There are five wards—Pleasure, Satiety, Discovery, Disease, and Death.

Ward of Pleasure.—The eye is dazzled with the magnificence of its apparel,—elastic velvet, glossy silks, burnished satin, crimson drapery, plushy carpets. Exquisite pictures glow upon the walls, carved marble adorns every niche. The inmates are deceived by these lying shows; they dance, they sing; with beaming eyes they utter softest strains of flattery and graceful compliment. They partake the amorous wine, and the repast which loads the table. They eat, they drink, they are blithe and merry. Surely they should be; for after this brief hour they shall never know purity nor joy again! For this moment's revelry they are selling heaven! The strange woman walks among her guests in all her charms; fans the flame of joy, scatters grateful odours, and urges on the fatal revelry. As her poisoned wine is quaffed, and the gay creatures begin to reel, the torches wane and cast but a twilight. One by one the guests grow somnolent; and, at length, they all repose. Their cup is exhausted, their pleasure is for ever over; life has exhaled to an essence, and that is consumed! While they sleep servitors, practised to the work, remove them all to another ward.

Ward of Satiety.—Here reigns a bewildering twilight through which can hardly be discerned the wearied inmates, yet sluggish upon their couches. Overflushed with dance, sated with wine and fruit, a fitful drowsiness vexes them. They wake, to crave; they taste, to loathe; they sleep, to dream; they wake again from unquiet visions. They long for the sharp taste of pleasure, so grateful yesterday. Again they sink, repining, to sleep; by starts, they rouse at an ominous dream; by starts, they hear strange cries! The fruit burns and torments; the wine shoots, sharp pains through their pulse. Strange wonder fills them. They remember the recent joy, as a reveller in the morning thinks of his midnight madness. The glowing garden and the banquet now seem all stripped and gloomy. They meditate return; pensively they long for their native spot! At sleepless moments mighty resolutions form,—substantial as a dream. Memory grows dark. Hope will not shine. The past is not pleasant; the present is wearisome; and the future gloomy.

The Ward of Discovery.—In the third ward no deception remains. The floors are bare; the naked walls drip filth; the air is poisonous with sickly fumes, and echoes with mirth concealing hideous misery. None supposes that he has been happy. The past seems like a dream to the miser, who gathers gold spilled like rain upon the road, and wakes, clutching his bed, and crying, "Where is it?" On your right hand, as you enter, close by the door is a group of fierce felons in deep drink with drugged liquor. With red and swollen faces, or white and thin, or scarred with ghastly corruption; with scowling brows, baneful eyes, bloated lips, and demoniac grins; in person all uncleanly, in morals all debauched, in peace bankrupt—the desperate wretches wrangle one with the other, swearing bitter oaths, and heaping reproaches each upon each! Around the room you see miserable creatures, unapparelled, or dressed in rags, sobbing and moaning. That one who gazes out at the window, calling for her mother and weeping, was right tenderly and purely bred. She has been baptized twice,—once to God, and once to the devil. She sought this place in the very vestments of God's house. "Call not on thy mother! she is a saint in heaven, and cannot hear thee!" Yet all night long she dreams of home and childhood, and wakes to sigh and weep; and between her sobs she cries, "Mother! mother!"

Yonder is a youth, once a servant at God's altar. His hair hangs tangled and torn; his eyes are bloodshot; his face is livid; his fist is clenched. All the day he wanders up and down, cursing, sometimes himself and sometimes the wretch that brought him hither; and when he sleeps he dreams of hell; and then he wakes to feel all he dreamed. This is the ward of reality. All know why the first rooms looked so gay—they were enchanted! It was enchanted wine they drank, and enchanted fruit they ate; now they know the pain of fatal food in every limb!

Ward of Disease.—Ye that look wistfully at the pleasant front of this terrific house, come with me now, and look long into the terror of this ward; for here are the seeds of sin in their full harvest form! We are in a lazar-room: its air oppresses every sense; its sights confound our thoughts; its sounds pierce our ear; its stench repels us; it is full of diseases. Here a shuddering wretch is clawing at his breast, to tear away that worm which gnaws his heart. By him is another, whose limbs are dropping from his ghastly trunk. Next swelters another in reeking filth; his eyes rolling in bony sockets, every breath a pang, and every pang a groan. But yonder, on a pile of rags, lies one whose yells of frantic agony appal every ear. Clutching his rags with spasmodic grasp, his swollen tongue lolling from a blackened mouth, his bloodshot eyes glaring and rolling, he shrieks oaths; now blaspheming God, and

now imploring him. He hoots and shouts, and shakes his grisly head from side to side, cursing or praying; now calling death, and then, as if driving away fiends, yelling, "Avaunt! avaunt!"

Another has been ridden by pain until he can no longer shriek; but lies foaming and grinding his teeth, and clenches his bony hands until the nails pierce the palm—though there is no blood there to issue out—trembling all the time with the shudders and chills of utter agony. The happiest wretch in all this ward is an idiot—dropsical, distorted, and moping; all day he wags his head, and chatters, and laughs, and bites his nails; then he will sit for hours motionless, with open jaw, and glassy eye fixed on vacancy. In this ward are huddled all the diseases of Pleasure. This is the torture-room of the strange woman's house, and it excels the inquisition. The wheel, the rack, the bed of knives, the roasting fire, the brazen room slowly heated, the slivers driven under the nails, the hot pincers,—what are these to the agonies of the last days of licentious vice? Hundreds of rotting wretches would change their couch of torment in the strange woman's house for the gloomiest terror of the inquisition, and profit by the change. Nature herself becomes the tormentor. Nature, long trespassed on and abused, at length casts down the wretch; searches every vein, makes a road of every nerve for the scorching feet of pain to travel on, pulls at every muscle, breaks in the breast, builds fires in the brain, eats out the skin, and casts living coals of torment on the heart. What are hot pincers to the envenomed claws of disease? What is it to be put into a pit of snakes and slimy toads, and feel their cold coil or piercing fang, to the creeping of a whole body of vipers—where every nerve is a viper, and every vein a viper, and every muscle a serpent; and the whole body, in all its parts, coils and twists upon itself in unimaginable anguish? I tell you, there is no inquisition so bad as that which the doctor looks upon! Young man! I can show you in this ward worse pangs than ever a savage produced at the stake!—than ever a tyrant wrung out by engines of torment!—than ever an inquisitor devised! Every year, in every town, die wretches scalded and scorched with agony. Were the sum of all the pain that comes with the last stages of vice collected, it would rend the very heavens with its outcry; would shake the earth; would even blanch the cheek of Infatuation! Ye that are listening in the garden of this strange woman, among her cheating flowers; ye that are dancing in her halls in the first ward, come hither; look upon her fourth ward—its vomited blood, its sores and fiery blotches, its prurient sweat, its dissolving ichor, and rotten bones! Stop, young man! You turn your head from this ghastly room; and yet, stop—and stop soon, or thou shalt lie here! mark the solemn signals of thy passage! Thou hast had already enough of warnings in thy cheek, in thy bosom, in thy pangs of premonition!

But ah! every one of you who are dancing with the covered paces of death, in the strange woman's first hall, let me break your spell; for now I shall open the doors of the last ward. Look! Listen! Witness your own end unless you take quickly a warning!

Ward of Death.—No longer does the incarnate wretch pretend to conceal her cruelty. She thrusts—ay! as if they were dirt—she shovels out the wretches. Some fall headlong through the rotten floor,—a long fall to a fiery bottom. The floor trembles to deep thunders which roll below. Here and there jets of flame spout up, and give a lurid light to the murky hall. Some would fain escape; and flying across the treacherous floor, which man never safely passed, they go, through pitfalls and treacherous traps, with hideous outcries and astounding yells, to perdition! Fiends laugh! The infernal laugh, the cry of agony, the thunder of damnation, shake the very roof and echo from wall to wall.

Oh that the young might see the end of vice before they see the beginning! I know that you shrink from this picture; but your safety requires that you should look long into the ward of Death, that fear may supply strength to your virtue. See the blood oozing from the wall, the fiery hands which pluck the wretches down, the light of hell gleaming through, and hear its roar as of a distant ocean chafed with storms. Will you sprinkle the wall with your blood? will you feed those flames with your flesh? will you add your voice to those thundering wails? will you go down a prey through the fiery floor of the chamber of death? Believe then the word of God: "Her house is the way to hell, going down to the chambers of death; . . . avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away!"

I have described the strange woman's house in strong language, and it needed it. If your taste shrinks from the description, so does mine. Hell, and all the ways of hell, when we pierce the cheating disguises and see the truth, are terrible and trying to behold; and if men would not walk there, neither would we pursue their steps, to sound the alarm and gather back whom we can.

"For the ways of man are before the eyes of the Lord, and he pondereth all his goings. His own iniquities shall take the wicked himself, and he shall be holden with the cords of his sins. He shall die without instruction; and in the greatness of his folly he shall go astray" (vers. 21-23).

These are the grand reasons why men should take heed to their ways. Will you allow God, yea, compel God, to look upon impurity? Should no respect be paid to the divine observer?

He is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity with the least degree of allowance or approbation ; why, then, force it upon his attention, and smite him in the eyes as with a sharp weapon ? The end of evil is disastrous to the evildoer himself. He binds himself with cords he cannot rend. He makes a fool of himself, and a slave, in the very act of grasping his prizes and quaffing his delights. The bad man shuts his eyes, and supposes he has escaped hell, simply because he cannot see it. How great a fool may man become ! Yet this fact, universally allowed, would seem to go for nothing as a moral appeal. The heart drags the whole nature down to death. Knowledge alone cannot save the soul. Herein is the miracle of grace ! Here is the triumph of omnipotence ! Come, my Lord, my God, my Saviour, and take charge of me. Never leave me to myself. Thou alone bringest light, and without thee all is darkness. Thou knowest the meaning of temptation ; how persistent, how subtle, how sudden, how tremendous ! Why should it be so ? Is not everything a tribute to the mystery and grandeur of human life ? Woman ruins man or saves him. She is sorceress or saviour. God of heaven, pity young men and save them. Death lies so close to life. We are thy workmanship, and thy grace is sufficient for us. Let our very weakness be itself a prayer !

Chapter vi. 6-11.

“Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise: which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest. How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard? when wilt thou arise out of thy sleep? Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep: so shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth, and thy want as an armed man.”

A SECULAR SERMON ON FORESIGHT.

CREATION is full of teachers. There are indeed “sermons in stones, and books in the running brooks.” It is a mistake to imagine that men can learn only from the highest; there is learning in the lowest as well. “Praise” may be found even in the mouth of the “suckling.” God has written a lesson upon the minutest works of his hands. Everything represents thought. The infinite variety of his creations is but the expression of the infinite aspects of his mind. The facets of the diamond throw back differing flashes to the sun; and all God’s works are facets, which burn, each with a singular glory. All is eloquent. All is music—music in form, or music in motion. All light teaches; all beauty persuades; all life inspires. We are now to gather around an insect. The busy ant is to be our minister. Instead of looking upward we are to look downward. We who could listen to an angel are to incline our ear to an ant.

The great lesson which the ant teaches is foresight; the duty of rightly improving the passing hour, the wisdom of making the best of our opportunities. Some people appear to be utterly destitute of foresight. They cannot see the very next gate that is to be opened. They have no grasp of the day, the week, the month. They enjoy breakfast, and trust for dinner. They get the vicious notion that other people should work for them; and that, somehow, things will turn out all right. Now all wise people anxiously study the doctrine of inferences. They look

upon one action as bearing upon another. Their lives are practically logical. Their behaviour is a chain of reasoning.

The faculty of foresight, the power of doing something for the future, is a faculty most divine. Rightly educated and developed, it gives man peculiar elevation, and invests him with commanding influence. He who sees farthest will rule best. Foresight is not to be confounded with distrust. There is a loose and light-headed theology which says: "Let to-morrow mind its own business, God will make all right." That is not faith, it is presumption; it is not philosophy, it is nonsense; it is not repose, it is the laziest indolence.

The wise exercise of foresight makes life pleasant. The man who cannot see through two moments is always in a hurry, is never calm, is always jostled and pushed by an invisible crowd; he sees a spectre where he might hail a friend; he cringes as a serf where he might dictate as a baron.

This foresight makes life pleasant by economising time. Time is golden. Moments cannot be weighed by carats. Hours glitter with a light purer than the ray of rubies. One man finds no hours in the day; another finds twenty-four, and makes them forty-eight: and while midnight flings its solemn message over a sleeping town the wise man says to his God: "Thou deliveredst unto me a day, behold I have doubled its breadth of gold!"

This we find in our intercourse with men—that the man who has least to do takes most time to do it in, and that he who has most to accomplish is up hill long before the sluggard has saddled his lazy ass. Our greatest men have ever been the severest economists of time. The coxcomb spends time at the looking-glass which the philosopher spends over the inkhorn. While the pedant has no time to teach a child, great statesmen are teaching Homer to talk English. The ill-trained girl whose impoverished intellect is a lineal descendant of Pharaoh's leanest kine cannot find time to go to the Sunday-school, while one of our Lord Chancellors was never late at his Sunday class through eight-and-twenty years! Men grow very poetical about sunset who have never a single word to say about sunrise! Men have

cruelly rejected the Esau of morning, and flattered the Jacob of evening. Poor slighted sunrise! The West has many laureates, the East remains unsung. And yet not unsung. Work is its poetry; labour is the harp on which its praise is harped; and the moral monuments which industry has piled shall live when the palaces of the Cæsars have crumbled, and even the pyramids of the Pharaohs are the shadows of an unremembered past.

Foresight renders life pleasant by systematising duties. System is success. Some persons have no power of systematising. They are clumsy; their fingers are all thumbs, and all their thumbs are upon their left hands. This is true among men and women alike. A slatternly woman is tormentor enough for any man who loves order. She has many clocks, but no time. She rocks her duties to sleep, and then imagines she has discharged them. She puts off every engagement, and discounts all her purposes at a ruinous percentage. So also with the man of no system. He frets himself to death, and perishes not alone. Procrastination binds him hand and foot, and takes him out to be maddened by the laugh of triumphant enemies. He keeps books, but they are all waste-books. He has ledgers, but they are blank. He is always going to do something, but never does it. He moves, seconds, and carries resolutions every day; that is, he moves them off to one side, and carries them into oblivion! The men in the Church who do least are generally the men of leisure. They have only time to cross their legs beside a pleasant fire and criticise other people. They sleep long, that they may have vigour to grumble long. Half poisoned with wine, and half melted with fire, they have no apprehension of the possibilities of life. They dread noise because it is unfavourable to dreams, and their only objection to sleeping is that they have to waken again! Every Church is more or less cumbered with such men,—men of rapid tongues but leaden feet.

Foresight renders life pleasant by diminishing difficulties. To be forewarned is to be forearmed. The man who sleeps on fine days is sure to complain most loudly in wet weather. Fore-

sight numbers and weighs contingencies. Logical thinking leads to logical acting. The person who is destitute of foresight multiplies the difficulties of other people. He never carries an umbrella, but is willing to share that of his thoughtful companion; seldom has any change, so must have a beggar's stomach without a beggar's name; was going to bring something but forgot it, and therefore must share the oil of the wise virgins!

Solomon sends all such men to the ant, an insect which has "no guide, overseer, or ruler." Some spiritless people require guides, overseers, and rulers. They will not do anything except under the whip. Such people are never to be trusted. If men will not work without being watched, they will watch the watcher and sleep when they can. A true worker needs no watching. The darkness and the light are both alike unto him. He works because it is right. He is his own critic. His spirit is in harmony with the divine and absolute, and in his conscience is the tribunal before which his life is constantly arraigned. The man who requires watching is a thief. He may not have stolen money, but he has a thief's heart, and may one day have a thief's hand.

What is the action of the ant which is to be suggestive to men of the sluggard's mould? She "provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest." That is to say, she makes the best of her opportunities. Opportunity! Let the young think of that word; it is full of meaning. The bridge gives a traveller an opportunity of crossing the river; the ladder gives a man an opportunity of descending or climbing; the spring gives the farmer an opportunity of sowing seed. Now write it on the youngest memory; stamp it on the opening brain; set it before you as a lesson never to be forgotten,—every life has opportunities; every life has a summer! A summer! The ant provideth her meat in the summer; how wise, how well! No year has two Junes. May never comes twice in the same year. Only once! Once the summer binds the million-tinted coronal around her blushing temples; once she charms the landscape into beauty, and the forest into song, and the orchard into fruitfulness; once she waves her wand, and angels of celestial loveliness beautify the garden and shed the fragrance

of heaven through the tainted air of earth! Only once! The ant, without "guide, overseer, or ruler," knows this, and makes the most of it. Go to her, ye sons of folly, "consider her ways, and be wise."

The child has opportunities. Make of them opportunities to accumulate information; to lay the basis of pure and exalted habitudes; to take on the outlines of the only beauty that is immortal!

The young man has opportunities. His employers mark his conduct, calculate his capabilities, and adjudge him accordingly. Always be qualifying yourselves for something higher. "Aim high; he who aimeth at the sky shoots higher far than he who means a tree." Wait. He who waits often wins. Impatience is a sign of weakness. The weak twig trembles, the strong root is unmoved.

As every life has a summer, so every life has a winter. The ant, without "guide, overseer, or ruler," knew this, and consequently provided accordingly. Many men endeavour to remember this fact in secular life, and they do well. There is a money-making period in human life, and men should avail themselves of its privileges. No man of health who possesses reasonable opportunities for laying by a provision for what has been well termed a "rainy day" should spend all he makes, and throw himself upon society as a pauper. Remember that you will not always be so strong as you are now. The sun shines, make your hay! If you have only twenty shillings per week, save a few of them. Believe that debt is disgrace, and avoid it as you would flee from a serpent. You are to take a broad view of human life; to strike averages; to calculate contingencies; to institute inquiries, and balance antagonisms. This will afford a substantial basis of action. The summer and the winter will be looked at together; the morning and the evening will interpenetrate. If you fail to operate upon this plan; if you think the whole year will be summer, and that one day will be as advantageous as another; and that you are master of all circumstances,—then "shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth, and thy want as an armed man." See what comes of setting natural

law aside! Poverty and want are sent of God to chastise neglect of life's summer! Beware how you treat that sunny messenger of God! She comes laden in order that you may unburden her for your own advantage; she comes with a warmth which you may so use as to cause it to penetrate the whole year. But neglect it, and you perish! Poverty is behind her, and if you refuse riches you shall have want.

In thus recommending preparation for life's winter we are far from advocating penuriousness. Covetousness is an affront to God! The penurious man turns summer itself into winter, and if he had all the wealth of Golconda he would be as poor as the barren rock. Let there be no mistake then. "The liberal soul shall be made fat." "There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth; there is that withholdeth more than is meet, and it tendeth to poverty." Aye! covetousness tends to poverty as well as neglect. Strike the golden mean. Be prudent, yet be generous; be zealous for thine own interests, and then love thy neighbour as thyself!

Are we, then, fully at one upon this subject of foresight? Do we agree as to its desirableness, its value, its expediency? Does the mother turn to her daughter, and say: "Child, remember these things, and do them"? Does any father turn to his son, and say: "He that doeth these sayings shall build his house upon a rock"? I so, it is well! But I add to all this: if we are agreed up to this point, there is a point beyond to which we are irresistibly driven! If foresight is good in one department, it is good in another; and those who have tested its value should be the most eager to extend its application. Let us go from the less to the greater. Here is a person who prides himself on his foresight. He bears a high repute for range and intensity of vision in all secular concerns. Yet by the very sweep and clearness of his foresight I brand him as a fool! He never missed a train, yet he was never in time for public worship; he never failed to keep an appointment with man, yet he never made an appointment with God; he was never too late for the post, yet he is in danger of being too late for heaven; he never failed to see gold in any bargain, yet he has turned away the fine

gold of the gospel! He has foreseen everything but the chief thing: he has seen the shadow, not the substance; he has made a covenant with the servant and let the king pass by! Here is folly in the very midst of wisdom; and if the very wisdom be folly how great is that folly,—if the light be darkness how terrible is the gloom!

Here is a woman who also prides herself on her foresight, yet the mark of folly is on her forehead! “She seeketh wool, and flax, and worketh willingly with her hands,” yet her soul is naked; “she riseth also while it is yet night, and giveth meat to her household,” yet her heart pineth with hunger; “she layeth her hands to the spindle, and her hands hold the distaff,” yet she rejects the robe woven by the atoning Saviour; “she eateth not the bread of idleness,” yet she does not work out her own salvation! Wise in the little, but foolish in the great! She saves the copper, but gives up the gold to the burglar. Is this a foresight to be proud of? Is it not in very deed a fool’s sagacity? Christ simply requires of us what we willingly yield to others and ourselves. He says, Prepare, watch, be ready, trim your lamps; this is exactly what men do in the affairs of daily life, yet, while they deem themselves sagacious, they regard God as unjust! “I speak as unto wise men, judge ye what I say.” “O that men were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end!” Remember that to have foreseen everything but the day of death is to have lived a life which shall, in the words of Holy Writ, be “buried with the burial of an ass.”

Chapter vi.

ON SURETYSHIP—THE “NAUGHTY PERSON”— SEVEN THINGS HATEFUL TO GOD.

“My son, if thou be surety for thy friend, if thou hast stricken thy hand with a stranger, thou art snared with the words of thy mouth, thou art taken with the words of thy mouth. Do this now, my son, and deliver thyself, when thou art come into the hand of thy friend; go, humble thyself, and make sure thy friend. Give not sleep to thine eyes, nor slumber to thine eyelids. Deliver thyself as a roe from the hand of the hunter, and as a bird from the hand of the fowler” (vers. 1-5).

THERE is no necessary reference here to modern commercial usages. The passage may be easily misunderstood and misapplied. The case is well put in Bishop Ellicott's Bible: “When the Mosaic law was instituted, commerce had not been taken up by the Israelites, and the lending of money on interest for its employment in trade was a thing unknown. The only occasion for loans would be to supply the immediate necessities of the borrower, and the exaction of interest under such circumstances would be productive of great hardship, involving the loss of land, and even of personal freedom, as the insolvent debtor and his family became the slaves of the creditor (Neh. v. 1-5). To prevent those evils, the lending of money on interest to any poor Israelite was strictly forbidden (Lev. xxv.); the people were enjoined to be liberal, and to lend for nothing in such cases. But at the time of Solomon, when the commerce of the Israelites had enormously developed, and communications were opened with Spain and Egypt, and possibly with India and Ceylon, while caravans penetrated beyond the Euphrates, then the lending of money on interest for employment in trade most probably became frequent, and suretyship also, the pledging of a man's own credit to enable his friend to procure a loan.” The rest is easily imaginable. The text may be accepted as a distinct exhortation to ourselves. Have nothing to do with suretyship. If you can afford to give anything, give it, and there let the matter end.

You have no right to pledge what you do not possess. There are cases in which the temptation is very strong to help, but there must be no yielding. Give : give liberally if you can ; give heartily and promptly, but never come under enslaving conditions. The old man needs no caution ; the young man must be warned, and even besought with much importunity.

"A naughty person, a wicked man, walketh with a froward mouth. He winketh with his eyes, he speaketh with his feet, he teacheth with his fingers ; frowardness is in his heart, he deviseth mischief continually ; he soweth discord" (vers. 12-14).

The "naughty person" has no public friends. When his portrait is painted it is always in hideous colours. The aim of the artist is to reveal the villain's ghastliness. Eyes and feet and fingers are all delineated as servants of evil,—each a hired slave, each an instrument of shame. The matter, however, is not confined to the eyes and feet and fingers : the true reason is given in ver. 14 : "frowardness is in his heart." Thus again and again we come upon the seat and spring of mischief. We must (especially as public teachers) be on our guard lest we content ourselves with merely painting the portrait of evil. We are not to be religious artists, but religious examples. How easy to depict sin ! How pleasant to be merely a moral rhetorician ! How delightful to denounce sin in hexameters, and to curse the devil in blank verse ! Not thus will the Lord of righteousness judge it, for he will send sudden calamity upon the wicked, and suddenly break him as upon a wheel without remedy. Indignation and wrath are reserved for those who do not obey the truth but obey unrighteousness. "Thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them which do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God ?" All heaven is turned into a storm of wrath when God looks upon the policy and scheme of wickedness : "Thus saith the Lord of hosts ; Even so will I break this people and this city, as one breaketh a potter's vessel, that cannot be made whole again ; and they shall bury them in Tophet, till there be no place to bury." Fools are they, on a boundless scale, who try to shout down the thunder of God, and to turn away his judgments by the impotent uplifting of their palsied hands. They are buried in the cemeteries of ancient history and in the new-cut graves of this very day, and their

epitaphs may be discerned afar: "They mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against his people, till there was no remedy." The day of the wicked is short. In his pleasure there is no joy. He can only be happy so long as he is self-forgetful. My son, lay this to heart and shun the ways of evil-doers. Their purpose can only be to destroy thee. They cannot restrain their falsehood, nor can they curb their cruelty. Put thou thy confidence in God.

"Therefore shall his calamity come suddenly; suddenly shall he be broken without remedy" (ver. 15).

The most detestable of all characters was described in the former verses; we must remember this in order to see the justice of the sudden calamity with which he is threatened. The suddenness is rather in the consciousness of the sufferer than in any change in the judgment and righteousness of God. From the beginning the penalty has always been fixed, but its realisation, come when it may, always affects the soul with a sense of suddenness. Notice that this detestable character is to be "broken;" that is to say, he is to be shattered as a potter's vessel, and reconstruction is to be simply impossible. The words, "without remedy," sound like a knell of despair. In almost every other case there is some possibility of amendment and recall; but in the case of the malicious mischief-maker destruction is absolutely without promise of hope. In the sixty-fourth Psalm, David describes the action of the mischief-maker in energetic terms: "Who whet their tongue like a sword, and bend their bows to shoot their arrows, even bitter words: that they may shoot in secret at the perfect: suddenly do they shoot at him, and fear not." The suddenness of the action of the bad man is met by equal suddenness on the part of the divine Judge. "They encourage themselves in an evil matter: they commune of laying snares privily; they say, Who shall see them? They search out iniquities; they accomplish a diligent search [a search searched]: both the inward thought of every one of them, and the heart, is deep." The character of the malicious mischief-maker never changes. He is full of invention, he accomplishes "the planned plan"—terms by which "a diligent search" may be rendered. The portraiture is one of conspirators, who cal-

culate how they may lay snares privily and work out all the malign purposes of a secret league.

"Tis slander;
Whose edge is sharper than the sword."

David clearly saw as the portion of the mischief-maker the very judgment that is declared in this verse. He even makes use of the same word "suddenly." "But God shall shoot at them with an arrow; suddenly shall they be wounded. So shall they make their own tongue to fall upon themselves: all that see them shall flee away."

"This even-handed justice
Commends the ingredients of our poison'd chalice
To our own lips."

"These six things doth the Lord hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him: A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, an heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, a false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren" (vers. 16-19).

The first expression may be rendered "Six are the things which he hateth." Probably the enumeration is only used to enable the writer to indicate the supreme thing which is hateful to God. In six troubles God hath been with thee, and in seven he will not forsake thee. The eye of the consoler is upon the seventh trouble as the climacteric distress. We are not to look upon the six as merely an arithmetical number, but as the whole process preceding the crucial trial of life. So when God says there are six things which he hates, he simply means that while he hates all things evil there is a seventh which gathers up into itself all that is most hateful to him. This seventh or supreme offence may be regarded as the Unpardonable Sin of the Old Testament.* The Lord hates a proud look, because it disqualifies men from receiving favour and grace from heaven; he hates a lying tongue, because it is stained through and through with falsehood; he hates hands that shed innocent blood, because of their cruelty; he hates a heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, because it lives in a false world, in which the standard is wickedness, and the reward is increase of presumption; he hates feet

* Those who are curious about the numerical form of the proverb should consult chapter xxx.; Job v. 19; Amos i. 3, and ii. 1.

that be swift in running to mischief, as if they expressed great delight in their unholy work ; he hates a false witness that speaketh lies, because society is no longer secure when truth is not its chief ornament ; and God hates the man that sows discord among brethren, for whatsoever foils or diminishes the spirit of love is not of a godly nature. If God hates all these things, on what pretence can we love them ? Whilst the Lord hates all things that are evil, and might include them in one generic designation, it is a needful condescension to our infirmities that he should stoop to details, and such specific enumerations as may enable the sinner to follow the track of the divine displeasure. Besides, whilst a merely general condemnation of evil should be sufficient on the divine side, the human heart would take refuge in this generality, and be perfectly content to sentimentalise about it. It is when God charges sins directly and specifically upon men that they are driven from vague generality into minute and critical self-examination. It is evident that these "six things" are separable one from the other in many particulars. No one man may concentrate in himself all the six hateful offences ; for example, a man may have a proud look, yet he may not be a false witness that speaketh lies ; or a man may have a lying tongue, but his hands may never have shed innocent blood ; or a man may have a heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, but he may not have energy enough to run swiftly in the way of mischief. On the other hand, a truer analysis would find that all the six sins spring in reality from one source, and constitute, indeed, substantially an identical offence. It could be shown that a man could not have a proud look without sowing discord among brethren ; and it could be shown that a man who has a lying tongue spends his whole life in shedding innocent blood. These are not things that are to be judged in the letter but in the spirit. Whoever has a heart gifted with the genius of devising wicked imaginations could not be slow to speak lies, or to sow discord among brethren. So we are caught alike in the general, and in the particular. There can be no escape from the judgment of God.

"My son, keep thy father's commandment, and forsake not the law of thy mother : bind them continually upon thine heart, and tie them about thy neck. When thou goest, it shall lead thee ; when thou sleepest, it shall keep thee ; and when thou awakest, it shall talk with thee. For the command-

ment is a lamp; and the law is light; and reproofs of instruction are the way of life" (vers. 20-23).

The father will now have the child return to "the commandment" and "law," and regard them not as burdens but as ornaments. "Bind them continually upon thine heart, and tie them about thy neck." We are familiar with this figure, because we find it in the third chapter, "Let not mercy and truth forsake thee: bind them about thy neck; write them upon the table of thine heart." Long before this we have become accustomed to the same species of ornamentation. See, for example, Exodus xiii. 9, and Deuteronomy vi. 8. The literal interpretation of these orders led to the use of prayer fillets and phylacteries among the Jews. It appears that particular texts of Scripture were cut out, put in a leather case and tied at the time of prayer on the left arm and forehead. We are to distinguish between the application of moral truth and the mere idolatry of moral maxims. If our morality were to be written upon our forehead, it would be but a public spectacle; but when it is wrought into the very substance of the heart it expresses spirituality of character. The heart must be interested in all our religious studies, or those studies will degenerate into pedantry and hypocrisy. A very beautiful picture is given in verse 22. The young man is led by the divine commandments; in sleep he is kept by the law of wisdom; and when he awakes he communes with the Spirit of God. The commandment and the law as Scriptural terms are always associated with images of light and glory: "the commandment is a lamp;" "the law is a light." Other passages bear out the appropriateness of these symbols (Psalms xix. 8, cxix. 98-100). There are indeed details of life in the consideration of which not a little perplexity may arise, yet there is always a "commandment," a vivid "law," a specific "instruction," which may be consulted, and obedience to which will readjust all details. We are not to be eccentric moralists, looking for recondite points on which we may set up a special piety; we are to look to the broad ways and currents of life, and to see that they originate in a spirit of righteousness, and tend towards human utility. If we are faithful to these easily ascertained realities and demands, all that is recondite and peculiar in moral development will be revealed to us. The path of the just is as the shining light, shining more and more unto the perfect day.

Chapter vii.

A PITIFUL PICTURE.

“My son, keep my words, and lay up my commandments with thee. Keep my commandments, and live; and my law as the apple of thine eye. Bind them upon thy fingers, write them upon the table of thine heart. Say unto wisdom, Thou art my sister; and call understanding thy kinswoman: that they may keep thee from the strange woman, from the stranger which flattereth with her words” (vers. 1-5).

THE father gathers himself together as for a final effort to rescue his son from the temptations and perils of life. The appeal really begins with the twenty-fourth verse of the preceding chapter. By a description the most vivid and graphic ever drawn by human genius, the young man is warned of a vital danger. The only security of the “son” is to keep the commandment of the father, and to make his law as the apple of the eye. The father exhorts the son to bind the paternal commandments upon his fingers. It appears that the thong of the phylactery for the left arm was wound seven times round it and as many times round the middle finger. This represents the idea of trusting to other than merely human power, and being well prepared against the day of danger. It was not enough in the judgment of the father that the young man should be warned against evil, the wise father proceeds to fill up the very mind and soul of his child with wise words and useful occupations. “Say unto wisdom, Thou art my sister; and call understanding thy kinswoman.” Thus the negative and the positive are happily combined in the school of Scriptural teaching. The greatest danger of all is a vacant mind, and a heart that has no supreme affection and law is exposed to the seductions of sense. Our only security is in high and useful employment. We ought to be able to say with Nehemiah to every tempter and to every enemy, “I am doing a great work, and cannot come down.” The enemy is always on the alert, and, as represented by the figure of the text, night is as day, and day is as night; every form of blandish-

ment and eloquence is pressed into the unholy service, and the demon-possessed heart is resolute upon the accomplishment of one object. The process which is described vividly represents the reality of life. First, we are accustomed to the sight of evil; secondly, we become enamoured of it; thirdly, we are prepared to listen to its voice; fourthly, we are entitled to look upon its charms, and then suddenly, if after such a process there can be any sudden action, we lose our foothold and destroy our own soul. No man can take fire in his bosom without his clothes being burned, nor can a man walk upon hot coals without his feet being scorched. The pain immediately follows the pleasure. The drop from earth to hell is instantaneous. Awful, indeed, is the position of tempted lives. That which is revolting is hidden, and only that which is beautiful and fascinating is allowed to be seen. The bed decked with coverings of tapestry,* with carved works, with fine linen of Egypt, may be spoken of with artistic appreciation, and taste itself may delight in the perfume of myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon; but gates of pearl may open upon perdition, and at the end of the flowery way may be found the very gulf of hell. Pitiful is the picture of the man who is allured by mighty temptations. "He goeth as an ox goeth to the slaughter, or as a fool to the correction of the stocks; till a dart strike through his liver, as a bird hasteth to the snare, and knoweth not that it is for his life." It is a blind irrationalism which attempts to ignore all the machinery of hell which is working on the very surface of the earth. We may draw down the blind, and exclude the light, but the mighty engine is working to the destruction of all that is noble in youth, beautiful in manners, and hopeful in progress. The wiser piety will go out and confront the evil, exposing its subtle policy and its cruel design, and speaking about it with the holy audacity which can utter even corrupt words without being corrupted by their pollution.

"Hearken unto me now therefore, O ye children, and attend to the words of my mouth. Let not thine heart decline to her ways, go not astray in her paths. For she hath cast down many wounded: yea, many strong men have been slain by her. Her house is the way to hell, going down to the chambers of death" (vers. 24-27).

In the twenty-seventh verse there is an energetic expression full

* See note, *post*, page 81.

of mournful suggestion, "Her house is the way to hell." Observe, it is not the place itself but the way to it! In this case what is the difference between the way and the destination? Verily, the one is as the other, so much so, that he that has entered the way may reckon upon it as a fatal certainty that he will accomplish the journey and be plunged into "the chamber of death." No man means to go the whole length. A man's will is not destroyed in an instant; it is taken from him, as it were, little by little, and almost imperceptibly; he imagines that he is as strong as ever, and says that he will go out and shake himself as at other times, not knowing that the spirit of might has gone from him. Is there any object on earth more pathetic than that of a man who has lost his power of resistance to evil, and is dragged on an unresisting victim whithersoever the spirit of perdition may desire to take him? Like the young man in the parable, he is taken to the fire and to the water, and the infernal spirit does what he pleases with the victim. It is true that the young man can plead the power of fascination: all that music, and colour, and blandishment, and flattery can do has been done; the cloven foot has been most successfully concealed; the speech has been all garden and paradise and sweetness and joy; the word hell or perdition has not been so much as mentioned. The young man might have been on the way to heaven, so flowery was the path and so many birds sang blithely in the blue air as he passed along as upon wings rather than upon feet. How could such a path lead to aught less than a home beautiful as summer and blessed as heaven! This is what is meant by seduction; leading a man out of himself and from himself, onward and onward by carefully graded processes until fascination has accomplished its work and bound the consenting soul in eternal bondage. Sometimes indeed men have awakened to the reality of their condition, and with heartrending cries have appealed for help. Then it has been found to be too late. Are there any words in the speech of man so solemn and so awful as the words "too late" when addressed to the soul that feels the extremity of pain? Whilst we have no right to dilate upon this possible aspect of human experience merely for the sake of mocking human agony and despair, we are entitled to dwell upon it in the hope that the tempted and imperilled souls of the young

may be alarmed and excited to consideration. That there is a hell no man of experience can deny,—a hell here; a hell of remorse, self-reproach, appalling memory, hopelessness—a despair compared with which all darkness is as mid-day. How difficult to forewarn men with any success! The exhorter himself has been overwhelmed, the teacher victimised, the saintliest soul is conscious of a ministry not divine. Still on every hand the word of exhortation and persuasion must be spoken, and the prayer of entreaty must be breathed with eagerness and passion if haply one soul may be rescued from the way to hell and the chambers of death.

NOTE.

“I have decked my bed with coverings of tapestry, with carved works, with fine linen of Egypt” (Prov. vii. 16).—Baron du Tott gives a remarkable account of such a bed as is indicated in this passage. “The time for taking our repose was now come, and we were conducted into another large room, in the middle of which was a kind of bed, without bedstead or curtains. Though the coverlet and pillows exceeded in magnificence the richness of the sofa, which likewise ornamented the apartment, I foresaw that I could expect but little rest on this bed, and had the curiosity to examine its make in a more particular manner. Fifteen mattresses of quilted cotton, about three inches thick, placed one upon another, formed the groundwork, and were covered by a sheet of Indian linen, sewed on the last mattress. A coverlet of green satin, adorned with gold embroidered in embossed work, was in like manner fastened to the sheets, the ends of which, turned in, were sewed down alternately. Two large pillows of crimson satin, covered with the like embroidery, in which there was no want of gold or spangles, rested on two cushions of the sofa, brought near to serve for a back, and intended to support our heads. The taking of the pillows entirely away would have been a good resource if we had had any bolster; and the expedient of turning the other side upwards having only served to show that they were embroidered in the same manner on the bottom, we at last determined to lay our handkerchiefs over them, which, however, did not prevent our being very sensible of the embossed ornaments underneath.”

Chapter viii.

THE CRY OF WISDOM.

“Doth not wisdom cry? and understanding put forth her voice?”
(ver. 1).

HER cry has already been heard in this book of sharp-cut, clear sentences, and we have been afraid because of the tone of her accusatory eloquence. Her voice was not what we imagined it to be, and we turned away from the fair speaker staggeringly, sorrowfully. Should it not speak like mother, or sister, or the other half of man's poor heart? But it is somewhat like a fury. “Wisdom crieth without; she uttereth her voice in the streets: she crieth in the chief place of concourse, in the openings of the gates: in the city she uttereth her words, saying, How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity? and the scorners delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge? Turn you at my reproof: behold, I will pour out my spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you. Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you. Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me: for that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord: they would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof” (i. 20-30.) Now the voice is heard once more: what a change has come over it! Is it older? It is certainly tenderer. It has come after a new and sharp variety of experience. It is as one figure making its way between the soul and another figure, that other figure being

the spectral evil, the very genius of ruin. We must read the seventh chapter if we would know the value of the exhortations in the eighth. The young man has been exposed to all the fire of hell, and wisdom cries and understanding puts forth her voice, and she pleads with the young man that he may come home in wisdom and purity.

A very vivid instance of personification is this. Wisdom and understanding are represented as living agents, ministries that can be seen, apostles sent from the hills of light that they may speak of glory and beauty and pureness to the children who dwell in the valleys of darkness. What answer can we make to this interrogation? A distinct and emphatic reply that it is even so. Yes, wisdom cries, and understanding puts forth her voice: we know it. There is a voice which calls men to higher life, and we hear its sweet music every day, but do not receive it into an obedient heart. What if we suppose we discharge our duty by simply listening to its demands? That is a sad possibility in life. A man may think he accepts the gospel when he simply listens to it. True listening to the gospel means acceptance, obedience, sacrifice, reproduction of all holy life in sacred action, in solemn sacrifice. The voice is manifold. It is a voice within. What friend is that who inhabits your heart and says: My son, take care; be wise, be noble; scorn the mean deed; when thou doest thy charities open all thy fingers, and let thy liberality be a gospel to those who receive it; forget not thy God; pray without ceasing; be happy in thy Father; make the most of this poor little world, at the other end of it thou wilt find a white gate opening upon heaven; be brave, be true, be faithful, be grand; win an honest man's sleep, and I will see that on thy tired eyelids the spirit of slumber shall lightly rest? What other voice is that which says: Do the best you can for yourself; come home with both hands full, however you may fill them; when the poor look to thee, turn thine eyes away—cold, steely eyes; nor let one tear come into them, for that would be unmanly; fight the world, put thy foot upon its neck and fill thy pouch with all its pelf; never heed any other world that may yet have to dawn upon thee? We know these voices; we have heard them both. Sometimes they commingle, and the heart

is in tumult. The same good voice is in nature, talking to us in the spring blooms, in the summer gold, in the autumn purple, in the winter silver; revealing to us an energy equal to the occasion; speaking of powers we have never calculated, energies on which we have laid no measuring line, the pulsations that will not be reckoned arithmetically. We therefore reply to the interrogation of the text with a distinct affirmative.

Has wisdom a few children to whom she will speak? and has understanding a limited family within whose boundaries she will conduct her ministry of illumination and encouragement? The answer is given in these words:—

“She standeth in the top of high places, by the way in the places of the paths. She crieth at the gates, at the entry of the city, at the coming in at the doors” (vers. 2, 3).

She sets up her tower everywhere, and speaks to all mankind. That is the true wisdom. When we come to understand the purpose and range of true wisdom, our business will be to see how many people we can get in, not how many we can keep out. Sometimes we shall endeavour to enlarge the gate, if haply we may bring some one in who otherwise would be kept outside. Wisdom does not whisper; she cries; she puts forth her voice; she asks the assistance of elevation: where men are found in greatest numbers she is found in greatest activity. Universality is a proof of the gospel. Any gospel that comes down to play the trick of eclecticism ought to be branded and dismissed and never inquired for. We want ministers that will speak to the world, in all its populations, climes, languages, and differences of civilisation and culture. Thus we know the great sun that makes the day: he shines as cheerily on the wilderness as on the cultivated garden; he will smile as blithely upon a little waif or homeless wanderer as upon petted prince or pampered child of luxury. Let the light of the daily sun be the image of the higher life, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. The light will fall according to the medium which it penetrates: so the gospel will come to men in different ways, but it will be the same gospel, nothing wanting in glory, and nothing deficient in tenderness; yet it will express itself according to the individuality of the receiver,—here a genius and there a dull mind,

yonder one who flies and lives on the wing, and another who sits under his roof-tree and is afraid of the wind.

Wisdom shows herself to be truly wise by recognising the different capacities and qualities of men:—

“Unto you, O men, I call; and my voice is to the sons of man” (ver. 4).

Children who are at school are accustomed to distinguish between *viri* and *homines*—between the strong and the weak. “Unto you, O men, I call”—strong, virile, massive—“and my voice is to the sons of man”—the lesser, the weaker, the more limited in capacity, but men still—and I will accommodate my speech to the capacity of every one, for I have come to bring the world to the temple of understanding. Then there is further discrimination; we read of the “simple” and of the “fools.” “Simple” is a word which, as we have often seen, has been abused. There ought to be few lovelier words than “simple,”—without fold, or duplicity, or complexity, or involution: such ought to be the meaning of simple and simplicity. Wisdom comes to fools, and says she will work miracles. Could a man say, “I am too far gone for wisdom to make anything of me,” he would by his very confession prove that he was still within the range of salvation. “To know one’s self diseased is half the cure;” to know one’s self to be ignorant is to have taken several steps on the way to the sanctuary of wisdom. This might be Christ speaking; yea, there are men who have not hesitated to say that by “wisdom” in this chapter is meant the Wisdom of God in history—the Logos, the Eternal Son of God. Certainly the wisdom of this chapter seems to follow the very course which Jesus Christ himself pursued: he will call all men to himself—the simple, and the foolish, and the far-away; he will make room for all. A wonderful house is God’s house in that way, so flexible, so expansive; there is always room for the man who is not yet in. We thought we had filled the banquet table; but that was our mistake; when we had emptied all the hedge population, and all the highway wanderers, and brought them into the house, we found that the more we brought in the more room we created, and the expression of those who played the evangelist to the hospitable host was, “and yet there is room.”

Certainly! because yet there is another man not home, another nation not converted. The people who brought in all the wanderers were most impressed by the little effect which their labours took upon the space which was at their command. So wisdom will have men, and sons of men—simple men, foolish men. By this universality of the offer judge the divinity of the origin.

What does wisdom offer? She offers to surpass in value everything that men have yet honoured with their recognition and appreciation. She will put aside rubies, and things that are to be desired, and all gold, and she will stand alone, absolutely unique in worth. Gold may be lost; rubies may be stolen; desire may say, I cannot pant and gasp any longer, I have been filled to satiety; let me die. Not that these things are to be ignored as to their temporary value and uses. He is a foolish man who despises gold and rubies and pearls and choice silver; he is more foolish still who thinks they can buy anything that he can take into eternity with him. In death all these things leave the possessor. That is a mournful reality. May not a man take the family jewels with him? No, not one. Must he go into the other world empty-handed? Yes, empty-handed: he brought nothing into this world, and it is certain he can carry nothing out. Then we have only a life-right in them? That is all; and even that right is considerably mitigated and limited by other claims and relationships. Then they all seem to come to nothing! Exactly; now the arithmetic is right. It was a long process, and the issue was a long line of ciphers. Is there anything that will go with a man clear through to the other spaces? Yes; character will go with him. The man's character is the man himself. The wise man has the key of all the worlds; and the fool has the key of none. This is the one lesson that has to be learned, and the lesson that never will be learned, so far as our poor human imagination can carry us. Yet it is to be learned by all the world, according to the promise and decree of heaven. To have, and yet to act as if we had not; to use the world, and not abuse it; to have all things, and yet to stand above them, and make a mere convenience of them,—that would seem to be the issue of truest, largest spirituality. He who is without wisdom is without riches. He who has wisdom has all wealth. The wise man is

never solitary. He has the thoughts of ages. He is a silent prophet; he will not write his prophecies, but, oh, how they make him glow, how they send a radiance into his vision, how they make him despise the charms, seductions, and blandishments of a lying world that exhibits its emptiness to prove its treasure! Some men are never dull when they are alone. Sometimes persons will say, Do you not feel lonely? and the answer is, Yes, when anybody calls upon me I always feel lonely! Could I be let alone I would live in heaven—"never so little alone as when alone;" "I am alone, yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me." With all thy getting, get wisdom, get understanding, and thou shalt have banqueting all the day long without satiety, and music without monotony.

"I wisdom dwell with prudence, and find out knowledge of witty inventions" (ver. 12).

Many men are prudent who are not wise—that is to say, they are superficially cautious, sagacious, calculating; but they are never wise. True wisdom is the metaphysic of prudence. It is the innermost life and reality, and it expresses itself in the large prudence which sees more points than can be seen by mere cleverness. He that seeketh his life shall lose it; he that will throw away his life for Christ's sake shall find it, and shall thus prove himself in the long run to be the truly prudent man. Beware of the prudence that is as a skeleton. The true prudence is the living body, inhabited by a living soul—the soul is wisdom. Sometimes wisdom will drive a man to do apparently foolish things,—at least, things that cannot be understood by those who live in rectangles, two inches by one and a-half. But "wisdom is justified of her children;" she calmly abides the issue of the third day, and raised again she vindicates her origin and declares her destiny.

"I love them that love me; and those that seek me early shall find me" (ver. 17).

Jesus Christ himself used words almost identical with these, for he said, "If any man love me, I will manifest myself to him;" nothing shall be kept back from his reverent scrutiny. We should know more of Christ if we loved him more. "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these

things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father : for so it seemed good in thy sight."

"And those that seek me early." The word "early" is not in the original. The passage therefore might be read thus, "And those that seek me shall find me." Yet we cannot altogether throw out the word "early;" it seems to complete the rhythm. The word "seek," as originally employed, is a word which involves the meaning of seeking in the dawn—just as the east is brightening a little, just as the day is being born. Thus we have some claim to the word "early." There are men who do not wait until mid-day in order to resume their journey after they have been benighted; they have, indeed, succumbed to circumstances, saying, "The darkness has overtaken us, and here we must lie;" but the moment there is a streak in the east they rise up; the staff is resumed, and the journey is prosecuted with renewed energy. This is the image of the text: They that seek me in the dawn shall find me; they that seek me at daybreak; they that come after me ere the dew be risen shall find me, and we shall have a long morning talk together: when the soul is young, when the life is free, when the heart is unsophisticated, they that seek me in the dawn shall find me, for I have been waiting for them, yea, standing by them whilst they were sleeping, and hoping that at the moment of awaking they would see me, and exclaim, Blessed Spirit, take charge of my poor, frail life all the day, and tell me what I ought to do. Fool is he who begins the day prayerlessly, who takes his own life into his own hand; verily in doing so he puts his money into bags with holes in them, and at night he shall have nothing.

Some have not scrupled to find in the whole chapter, especially in the latter portion of it, an image and a forecast of Jesus Christ, the Wisdom of God. It is not necessary to believe that anything like a date is being fixed when "the beginning" is spoken of, and when creation is apparently outlined; the larger meaning is this, that before there was anything to look at, or any man to look at it, the Spirit of Wisdom was the Spirit of Eternity. True wisdom is not the child of civilisation—is not the child of creation: it is the Son of God; it partakes of the very quality

of God ; it comes up from the mystery of eternity, and yet accommodates itself to all the limitations and necessities of time. Fierce controversies have raged round the conclusion of this chapter. Arianism found its battlefield here, as in other verses, and orthodox men sprang forth with well whetted instruments to defend what they believed to be the truth. All that is gone. We have lived to see that Christ is indeed everywhere, in all power, in all light, in all wisdom, in all truth, in all love. Let us take care how we drive Christ out of any book. He himself found his name and office in many places that were supposed to be filled with merely local details ; he found himself in Moses, in the Prophets, in the Psalms, and in all the Scriptures. The apostles have not hesitated to declare that he was before all things, and that by him all things were created, and without him was not anything made that was made : "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." There is no genius in mere depletion. That may be the inspired genius which finds Christ in unexpected places, and marvels that he spake with the woman. This was the surprise that continually followed the active ministry of the Son of God upon earth. People were amazed that he was found in such and such places : why, there he eats and drinks ; yonder he has gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner ; and yonder he says, "Woman, thy sins are forgiven thee ;" expand thy wings, and fly like a dove to heaven's windows ; and yonder again the poor, little-minded, infantile disciples were amazed that he spake with the woman ; and so was the woman herself ; and so was every one to whom he ever did speak. "Never man spake like this man." There was a touch in his tone, a quality in his soft hand that hid by its concealment the might almighty. There was a sympathy in his blessing which made the lame man leap for joy, and the blind man open his eyes as if startled into vision. Whilst, therefore, on the one hand, we should be careful that men do not import Christ into blank places, or, as it were, force him into positions which he does not really occupy in the Scriptures, there is another danger to be still more guarded against, and that is to ignore him simply because our eyes are holden that we may not see him until we come to the destined Emmaus ; and then, when the day is far spent and the night is at

hand, he may break our supper bread, and in breaking it may show that all the time he was in places unsuspected, near us with a marvellous proximity, and preparing us for the revelation which, had it come before, would have been at once premature and intolerable.

Over this study let us pause that we may pray :—

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, thou art waiting for our answer to the cry of wisdom. May our answer be the response of acceptance and love. We know that wisdom cries and that understanding puts forth her voice, and that wisdom and understanding are as womanly figures, mother and sister, crying and calling with all the pathos of deepest love. We have been deaf; we have turned aside from the way; we have loved darkness rather than light; we have done the things we ought not to have done; we have made hand, and foot, and head, and heart, and will, and imagination, and understanding, and every faculty, do the devil's black work. It is well for us to say this to our own souls, that in our prayer we may speak in tones of humility, and in our despair may yet be prepared for some gospel of light. If we had hearkened unto thy commandments, and made thy statutes our songs in the house of our pilgrimage, we had made the earth beautiful as heaven. But we are as ravening wolves; we live upon one another; we watch for one another's stumbling and falling, and rejoice to be enriched by the poverty of others. We account him wise who is but a fool, if so be he fill both hands with gold, and pull down his barns and build greater. We would think of him as a wise man who knows most of God, who longs to see the larger spaces, to enjoy the longer summer day, who desires to be present with the Lord in all thought and sympathy and high resolve. Thus shall we come to a new standard of value; we shall account nothing manly that is not after the quality of Christ; we shall abhor all things that are evil and tainted, regarding them as sources of pestilence, and casting them away from us as things that are to be held in eternal hatred. Enable us to seek first thy kingdom and thy righteousness, that thereby we may prove ourselves to be wise. Let the

time past suffice, wherein we have served the spirit of darkness and the prince of evil, and hence on from this sacred moment may we live to serve him who is purity and love. Thou hast sent down upon us many messages from heaven. We know them every one; we know them by their love, their fulness of grace, their tender sympathy, their adaptation to meet all the weariness and want and pain of life. Who can mistake the light of the sun? Is it not its own proof? Does it need other eloquence than its own warmth and radiance to attest its identity? It is even so with thy word: thy word is a sun and shield, a gospel of grace, a cry to men in danger, an encouragement to those who would do good, a sweet rebuke in blessing ending, and a great promise because a great discipline. May we quit ourselves like men; may we be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus; wise unto salvation—fools according to this world's reckoning, but wise because beginning in God, and evermore tending to the point of origin, and living a life of worship that prays and serves and suffers and forgives. All this we have learned because we have been in the school of Jesus Christ thy Son; otherwise we had been as the pagans are, worshipping that which our own hands had made, looking down upon our gods in expectant pity, doomed to disappointment: now our look is upward, onward, heavenward; we see heaven opened and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God, and our hearts glow with a sacred fire, and our eyes are filled with wonder upon wonder never to be known. This is the work of the Lord Jesus Christ; this is the miracle of the Cross. Unto that Cross we come for pardon every day. The blood of Jesus Christ thy Son is our one hope; we have no other, we want no other; it is enough even unto infinity of sufficiency: grant that we may know its power, yield ourselves to its action; and may we know that we have been with Christ by the Spirit of Christ ruling in us, giving us sweetness of temper, breadth of charity, chivalry of soul—that noble manliness that yearns only to forgive. We would be baptized for the dead; we would fill up the ranks that have been thinned by the cruel scythe; we would that the young and the indolent and the latent might all come forward in spiritual energy, saying, Here are we; send us every one, for the harvest truly is great. We pray for the comfort of those

who are disconsolate. Teach the uncomforted how many are the sources of disquietude, lest they blame themselves too poignantly, and crush the very hope which thou hast created. We pray for those who are undergoing long, painful, unspeakable discipline; torn and wounded and bruised, beaten in the face and driven back when they think they have found the house-door that opens upon the kind hearthstone: we pray for them lest their hearts be too much discouraged,—thou knowest what flesh and blood can bear; thy tender pity is our safeguard in the extremity of sorrow. Bless all little children, young lives, dreaming souls, who are gathering knowledge every day only to find that there is much more to be gathered: spare them; make them wise and strong and good. Regard those who are travelling on the sea; who are in far-away lands; who are trying to make homes in homeless places with honest hands and brave hearts. The Lord grant unto all men, and the sons of men, light and grace and blessing, the music of promise and the glory of hope. Amen.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, we bring our tribute of praise unto thee, small and unworthy; but thou dost not despise that which is little and insignificant, thou dost even choose the things that are not to bring to naught things that are; thou dost turn our gift of water into a gift of wine, and our two small mites which make a fathoming thou dost look into gold. We therefore come to thee with such as we have; we give thee our hearts, our minds, the whole affection and the whole loyalty of which thou hast made us capable. We would keep back no part of the price; we would be thine altogether,—our judgment, our fancy, our will, our love, and every energy of our nature. Help us to give thee the entire sacrifice, withholding nothing, a holy offering unto the Lord. Thou hast made us what we are—wonders to ourselves, mysteries that have no answer in time; thou hast given us desires after immortality, longings and stirrings which cannot be explained in mortal tones, so that though we do ourselves injury and seek to grieve and quench thy Spirit, yet behold thy Spirit is here, a continual protest, and a continual promise. Teach us that if we do thee wrong we do ourselves wrong—no man can grieve the Spirit without also endangering the soul itself. We commend one another again to thy great care, to thy gentle patience, to thy long-suffering and thy perpetual kindness; it is a sea without a shore, it is a firmament full of stars, it endureth for ever. Therefore do we trust in God and hope in thee, and our expectation is from the heavens. This earth is too small for us, we need the firmament as well as the dry land; and shall not the firmament itself become too narrow for our growing powers, for our enlarging capacities, for our heightening and ever-purifying desires? We believe we shall need all thy heaven, and it is our joy to know that in our Father's house are many mansions. Help us, therefore, to yield ourselves to the inspiration of God, to follow the gentle lure of thy Holy Spirit, that we may come into the fulness of the estate of Christian manhood, being perfected in every power, and sanctified in every capability and every energy. Pardon our sins; every day exercise thine infinite prerogative of forgiveness; dismiss us from thy presence as pardoned ones, besprinkled with atoning blood—as men who, having by faith touched the Cross and confessed their sins, are free evermore from the burden and the torment of guilt. Give thy servants understanding of their business, comprehension of the times; excite their best ambition, influence their purest desires, satisfy their noblest expectations. Thus within the narrow scope of time may every one labour well with industry continuous, and with hope that cannot be quenched. When our poor short day upon earth is done may we find that it was no day at all, but a brief night previous to the infinite morning. Amen.

Chapter viii. 36.

"He that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul."

THE SELF-DESTROYER.

WHAT is the particular truth of the text? It is that sin is not only an offence to God, whom no man hath seen nor can see, but it is a distinct and irreparable injury to the man, the sinner, himself. "Whoso sinneth against me, doth not wrong me only, but wrongeth himself." And that is the only way to get hold of man. Oh, the infinite cunning, the infinite subtlety, the holy inspiration of this immortal volume! Tell a man that by sinning he is hurting the unseen God, and what does he care? You can only get hold of a man in so far as any truth you teach or any requisite you demand impinges upon himself. Touch the little Self, and you have put a hook in the nose of leviathan. That is the subject,—that to do wrong is not only to do an injury to an unseen spirit, but to do a positive injury to the man guilty of that wrong himself.

There is a plant, and I say to the sun, "I am not any longer going to be under obligation to you; I am going to keep this plant in the cellar," and I take down the plant that ought to be in the very middle of the garden, miles away from any shadow, and say to the sun, "I am going to do without you." Do I injure the sun? Not at all. What do I injure? The plant. The sun says, "I want to shine upon that plant, and to bring out of its juices all the beauty that is hidden there, and I would do so if you would allow me: whoso, plant of any kind, sins against me, or is made to sin against me, wrongs itself; does not wrong me, does not impair my shining. My light shall be as pure and lavish as ever, but the plant that is withdrawn from my shining shall die." And the sun blazes on, performing his circuit and accomplishing his appointed work.

I say to Nature, "You have given me two arms; I am going to bind one of them to my side and never to use it. My purpose is to do as well as I can with one arm and one hand." What does Nature say? Nature says, "I meant you to use both arms; if you do not use both those limbs you will not injure me—

Nature; you will set aside my purpose; you will destroy the limb." But cannot I bind my arm to my side and keep it there while I please, and allow it to hang there, and then let it grow as it may be able? "No," Nature says, "no." The everlasting ordinances of God, written on Sinai, written in the dust, written in the air, written everywhere, say "No." Whoso sinneth against physiological law wrongeth his own nature, his own flesh and blood, and he shall feel, in manifold penalty, in excruciating pain, in gradual and irresistible decay, that he has violated eternal law. That is the distinct teaching of the text. He that sinneth against wisdom, Christ, truth, light, purity, wrongeth his own soul, commits suicide, brings himself to an untimely death and a dishonoured grave.

It may be difficult to show men that they ought not to sin against a being whom they have never seen, or against spiritual and moral laws which they had no share in determining. Man may under those circumstances get up a kind of metaphysical defence against such obedience; but this unhappy possibility is met and overruled by the unalterable and appalling fact that not to obey is to suffer, to sin is to decline and perish, to go away from truth and purity and honour is to go into darkness and shame and intolerable torment. That is the tremendous hold which God has over us. Understand that God's argument with man is not an affair of words which may be twisted by strong and skilful reasoners in any shape and direction which their genius may suggest; God's hold over us is this, that if a branch be cut out of the vine no man on earth can save it from decay. And the appeal of the divine Being is to facts; the great contention of Christianity with us is not as to a set of notions—their metaphysical value, their philosophical relationship to one another, and their general bearing on the civilisation of the day: the great argument to man is this—He that believeth shall be saved; he that believeth not shall be damned. The issue is sharp enough: there is no room there for quibbling and shuffling; we are shut up against a granite wall, higher than we can measure with the eye, wider than any line of ours can bring to figures. This is the argument which can soon be brought to the test; a child can prove it—no giant can escape it. I propose,

then, to bring you upon ground that is very narrow—to shut you up to an argument that you cannot escape from and be fair to the first principles of justice, to the elements of common honesty.

You have a strong emotional nature; you allow that. You cannot deny it if you are sane. My question immediately following your admission is, What are you going to make of it? You can laugh, cry, grieve, rejoice; you can show anger, sympathy, feeling of every kind: you have a tremendous steam power in you—what are you going to do with it? The question is not, Will you have it?—you have got it. To what use will you put it? Suppress it? Then you will wrong your own soul. Turn it towards low objects? Then you will debase one of the highest gifts of your nature. You must use it; you have it without your own consent, and the question which you have to answer—must answer—practically or verbally, or both, is, What are you going to make of that emotional nature of yours? It is the grand motive power of your being; you have passion, you have enthusiasm, you can weep bitterly, you can laugh triumphantly and rejoicingly—what are you going to do with that dynamic power of human life? Are you going to despise emotion? That is the first sign of your falling. Are you—as the apostle describes some persons whom he knew—past feeling? Then you are very nearly in perdition; one step more and the outer darkness encloses you within its infinite fold, from which there is no escape.

If you do not touch a man emotionally you do not get the man at all. So long as he is merely arguing, contending, defending himself intellectually and logically against certain mental assaults, you may silence the man, but you will get no good out of him. Touch his emotion, move his heart, be master of his tears, keep the secret of his joy, and then you are master of him. Christ's grand appeal is to our feeling, our emotion, our homage, our loyalty: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy mind." The intellect itself is thus turned into an organ of devotion. If you suppress your emotion you will go down in the quality and the quantity of your being. You will desiccate your soul—that

is to say, you will take out of it all the vital juices, and you will become a mere thing, an article with a price attached to it, a life that has no immortality, a soul devoid of hope—without hope because without God in the world.

Observe—it is possible to suppress emotion: it is possible to say to your tears, “I do not want you;” it is possible to say to your laughter, “I shall never call you into operation;” it is possible to take a knife and cut out of the soul, so to speak, its grand emotional power. Some men seem to have done this; you never saw a hearty expression of emotion in all your intercourse with them: it is all dry, arithmetical, superficial, many inches deep in dust; wanting in the holy enthusiasm, the fiery passion, the tender emotion, which after all conquers and elevates the world. “He that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul,” tears the stops out of the great organ of his being, and then expects that organ to play as voluminously, as powerfully, as tenderly and delicately as if he had not torn out of their places the stops that were needful to give full expression to the powers of his soul.

, You have a great imaginative nature; the question is not, Will you have an imagination? You have it. Then the inquiry comes instantly upon that fact, What are you going to do with your imaginative nature? You cannot live within the narrow circle of things visible; you must, speaking generally—alas! there are exceptional instances—you must wonder about the unseen, the distant, and the future, if you are true to your instincts: and to begin to wonder in any intelligent and just manner is to begin to worship. Give me a man who sometimes says, feeling a pressure of the brain he can hardly bear, “I wonder what is beyond that blue veil, that stellar dome, that mystic night, that far and inaccessible horizon?” Give me a man who shall put these questions, express these wonders, and I say to him, “Thou art not far from the kingdom of God.” Wonder may be the beginning of worship. What are you going to do with your imagination? I will tell you what you can do with it: you can take a knife and cut its wings off, and let it labour and perish in the dust; you can keep your imagination at

home and starve it, but if you do so you will sit down to a pauper's crust when you might revel at the banquet of a king. What are you going to do with that imagination of yours? He that sinneth against that wrongeth his own soul. "Why," say you, "I intend to take in the whole material universe." Do you? What is the whole? There, you see, I bring you straight to a wall which you cannot scale and you cannot penetrate. What do you mean by the whole? How do you know that when you have reached the end of your line it is not the beginning of another and a longer line still? "Well, but," you reply, "I am going to keep my imagination within that line." Then you are going to prevent it enjoying its widest liberty. The moment you call it home you interfere with its functions, you endanger its life, you withdraw it from the sun and the light, which are the necessary elements of its very existence. But suppose now you could find out the whole material universe, and say, standing on some central star, "I see all the constellations, all the planets, all the asteroids, all the material creation;" even then that marvellous imagination of yours has not scope enough—it feels the bars and says, "I see daylight beyond; what is this which falls upon my eye, that assails my ear, that challenges me further still—what is this?" Aye, what is that? and if you say you will not go out of the cage when the door is open, and the greatening universe sends you still larger and more hospitable invitations, then you wrong your own soul. The whole material universe, as you call it, or as it is conceivable by us, is a bird's small cage compared with the infinite resources of him who fainteth not, neither is weary, and of whose understanding there is no searching. Whoso sinneth against me, wrongeth his own soul, belittles himself, trivialises his own nature, wastes his powers, shuts himself up in a cell, when he might be enjoying the liberty of an ever-expanding firmament.

You have a profound moral nature; what are you going to make of it? "Well," some one will say, "I am going to do right." What is right? Are you going to do the infinite right or your own notion of rectitude? What is your standard—to what do you appeal? Your right may be wrong to me, and I may be able to prove it to be wrong to you; right is not an

affair of terms, is not a metaphysical distinction between one word and another—it is an eternal quantity, it comes to man first by intuition, and secondly by revelation. Before, therefore, you can satisfy me on that side of the argument, you must give me distinctly to understand by what standard you determine the absolute right. “Well, then,” you may perhaps reply, “I am going to do the best I can.” Do you say so? I give you time to recall the words, and modify them. If you insist upon that form of words, I hasten with a reply, bright as lightning, cutting as a sword—Who is to be judge of the best you can? Whoever did the best it is possible for him to do? One young man thought he had done so, when he had kept the commandments in the letter. Whoever imagines that he has kept the commandments has reached the very consummation of self-deception; they cannot be kept, they grow upon the man who tries to keep them. He realises his first conception, and then that conception broadens, enlarges, heightens, and says, “Further still.” “Thou shalt not kill.” The man says, “I have not killed; I have kept that commandment at all events,” and the commandment says, “No—perhaps not; it may be thou art a murderer, though no red-hot blood ever fell upon thy trembling hand.” “Whoso hateth his brother, or is angry with his brother without a cause, hath committed murder in his heart.” Who then is to be judge of the best you can do? You cannot be your own judge, otherwise we should have millions of standards, and various heights and various qualities; there must be one law, one judge, one commandment, one faith, one Lord, one baptism. Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord. Ah, I find that your protestations and propositions of moral behaviour will not bear cross-examination; they shrivel under scrutiny because there is no real life in them.

So this is the hold God has upon us: “He that sinneth against me wrongeth himself.” You do so physically. Do you imagine that you can do as you please physically and escape all consequences? God makes you possess in your bones the effects of your moral action. Once a man came into a new experience, and abruptly exclaimed, “Thou makest me to possess the iniquities of my youth.” He thought he had escaped these—he

was fifty years away, mayhap, from boyhood and early manhood ; but at seventy his old sins caught him—and they always will do so. A man says, “Surely I can devote what hours I please to business.” You cannot without moral consequences. You cannot turn up a gas lamp after a certain hour without Nature standing over you and marking down something against your account.

You imagine that you have been proceeding comfortably, successfully, triumphantly, and making a fortune, while, in fact, you have so used your brain as to entail upon that little boy of yours and that little girl paralysis of the highest powers, a life-long disability and manifold discomfort. Do you imagine that you have got the keys of the universe at your girdle and can do as you like ? If it were a question of metaphysical morality, and you were to be told that there is an account against you above the blue sky, you would laugh at the speaker as a sentimentalist, and, therefore, God comes right down and works in your bones, so that one day will find you a tottering old man, saying, “I have not only injured myself, but my poor children. I so wrought my brain as to leave them a legacy of the most painful kind.” Therefore, God does not give up life—the Lord still brings us to practical judgments, to distinct personal consequences of our action, and we who would shrink from any merely metaphysical Divinity, from any philosophical conception of right, are bound to feel in our own flesh and blood and bones that we have done wrong. What are you going to do ? The good man makes the best of his powers ; the Christian man gets the best out of himself ; righteousness makes a man realise the grandest of his powers, the widest of his capacities, and imparts to him as he goes along such instalments of heaven as are consistent with a life upon earth.

If you want to sleep well, be good. If you want to do your business well, be good. If you want to enjoy your holiday, be good. If you want to make a penny go furthest, be good. If you want a happy home, be good. That is where God has his terrific hold over us if we insult him in what we suppose to be the sentimentalities and metaphysics of nature, in all those concerns which lie immediately within the range of our present experience.

Chapter ix.

“Wisdom hath builded her house, she hath hewn out her seven pillars : she hath killed her beasts ; she hath mingled her wine ; she hath also furnished her table. She hath sent forth her maidens : she crieth upon the highest places of the city, Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither : as for him that wanteth understanding, she saith to him, Come, eat of my bread, and drink of the wine which I have mingled. Forsake the foolish, and live ; and go in the way of understanding. He that reproveth a scorner getteth to himself shame : and he that rebuketh a wicked man getteth himself a blot. Reprove not a scorner, lest he hate thee : rebuke a wise man, and he will love thee. Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be yet wiser : teach a just man, and he will increase in learning. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom : and the knowledge of the holy is understanding. For by me thy days shall be multiplied, and the years of thy life shall be increased. If thou be wise, thou shalt be wise for thyself : but if thou scornest, thou alone shalt bear it. A foolish woman is clamorous ; she is simple, and knoweth nothing. For she sitteth at the door of her house, on a seat in the high places of the city, to call passengers who go right on their ways : Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither : and as for him that wanteth understanding, she saith to him, Stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant. But he knoweth not that the dead are there ; and that her guests are in the depths of hell.”

WISDOM AND FOLLY.

TWO women make their appeal in this chapter. One is Wisdom, the other is the foolish woman. So the broad distinction between wisdom and folly is consistently sustained. There are no half-wise people, no half-foolish people ; the virgins are wise or foolish, bad or good, angels from heaven or spectres from hell.

Wisdom has a festival prepared. We have seen in Exodus xxiv. that when the elders of Israel were favoured with the vision of the Almighty “they did eat and drink.” To the animal man these are but bodily exercises ; to the spiritual man they are sacramental acts. When the Saviour would represent the glory

and abundance of his house he spreads a banquet, sets forth the marriage of the king's son, prepares a supper, and sends forth messengers to say that all things are ready. If our interpretation of the latter part of the eighth chapter is correct, Christ may be regarded as Creator, and in this chapter he is the Sustainer of mankind. Men are to eat his flesh and drink his blood. He is the bread of life sent down from heaven. He is the answer to the world's hunger. All the details as to the feast of Wisdom would seem to be but so many anticipations of the parables and appeals of Jesus Christ. The idea of "building her house" runs through the Christian writings. "Upon this rock I will build my church;" "Built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets;" "Built up a spiritual house." We may speak of the house of Wisdom as we speak of the house of God. It is a sanctuary, a home, a centre of union, a bond and symbol of friendship. The invitation of Wisdom is the invitation of Christ: "Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage." All we have to do is to go; we take with us nothing but our hunger; the feast is Christ's, the invitation is Christ's, the house is Christ's; the hunger alone is ours, and a blessed hunger it is if we feel that only Christ can satisfy it. Wisdom mingles the wine and flavours it with choice spices, and sends forth invitations rich with the music of hospitality: "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price,"—come and do what otherwise would be impossible; claim as a right what is given as a grace, and treat as a purchase what is bestowed as a gift.

But to do all this there must be an abandonment of past preferences and associations—"Forsake the foolish and live." No man can live in both houses. "Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God." "Ye cannot serve God and mammon." To leave folly is the first step towards wisdom. But there must be progress, the soul cannot live on negatives. Hence the sixth verse continues: "Go in the way of understanding." Emancipation must be followed by

education. When God calls souls away from the house of bondage he does not leave them houseless and homeless wanderers, to do the best they can for themselves. Observe how the divine commandment runs: "Come out from among them,"—that is the first thing to be done; but does the text end there? Far from it; it goes on to say, "and I will receive you and be a Father unto you:" thus the commandment ends in a gospel; the sacrifice is followed with benediction, rest, and heaven itself.

"Madam Folly" is introduced in verse 13. "She is simple, and knoweth nothing." She affects simplicity. She can simper well. See, how winsome she is; how guileless, how gentle is her voice; how benignant her countenance. Take care, young unsuspecting soul. In her breast she hides the fire of hell! She is intent on working the ruin of thy life. "She hath cast down many wounded: yea, many strong men have been slain by her." Her look is blasphemy. Her sigh is a desire for blood. "As the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare; so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them." Alas! the best exhortations are often lost when the heart wanders after things forbidden. Nothing but the grace of God can quench the flames of lust. "Whoredom and wine and new wine take away the heart." The world does not go wrong for want of bitter experience and pungent testimony. "I find more bitter than death the woman, whose heart is snares and nets, and her hands as bands: whoso pleaseth God shall escape from her; but the sinner shall be taken by her." So said the wise man. Who will sell his soul for momentary gratification? Who will leap after a bubble and fall into hell? Alas! we see the right, and yet the wrong pursue. This is the tragedy of human life! This, too, is an aspect of its divinity, for it is that man is so God-like that he can be lost. Mystery of mysteries is it that man should tempt man! Here it is the woman who tempts. Eve never dies, nor can she die as a tempter until the seducing serpent dies. But if it is woman who tempts, it is also woman who represents the beauty and nobleness of wisdom. Remember both aspects of the woman-life, nor fail to do the mother of the world justice, whether in censure or in eulogy.

Between Wisdom and Wanton there is another person, curiously, but perhaps not illogically, introduced. That other person is the Scorner. "He that reproveth a scorner getteth to himself shame;" "Reprove not a scorner, lest he hate thee;" "If thou scornest, thou alone shalt bear it." Is the scorner one who is travelling from Wisdom's house to the house of the foolish woman? Is he affecting contempt, or really feeling it? Does not scorn sometimes conceal fear? Young souls should beware of a flippant tone, for flippancy opens the heart-door to many intruders. Veneration gives steadiness to character, and is in very deed the seal of dignity. He who jests with things divine will soon trifle with things human. Account for it as we may, the scoffer never wins the confidence even of those who laugh at his sneers. The buffoon has no friends. When they want to be amused they may make use of him; but when they come face to face with the realities of life they shut him out of their regard and trust. He who scorns the poor shall come to penury that no man will pity. He who scorns wisdom shall "be buried with the burial of an ass." "Judgments are prepared for scorners." Blessed is the man that sitteth not in the seat of the scornful. Thus Wisdom speaks to the sons of men. Would to God they would hear and fear and turn unto the Lord!

Chapter x. 1-10.

A WISE SON—THE TREASURES OF WICKEDNESS, ETC.

“A wise son maketh a glad father: but a foolish son is the heaviness of his mother” (ver. 1).

THE New Testament is careful to point out the duty of the parent as well as the duty of the child. That would seem to be neglected in some parts of the Old Testament, though not in the substance of the book. Is it not true that the father makes the son, and that the mother is responsible for her child? When a son is wise or is foolish, we are entitled to look into his antecedents, and possibly we may find that his father and mother explain the whole of his infirmity. Were this truth more profoundly considered, and more earnestly applied to life, endless mischief might be prevented. It is not to be supposed that wisdom and virtue are hereditary possessions; on the other hand, it is but reasonable to suppose that diligence in the education of the mind will end in the formation of solid and useful character. Some of the noblest parents have been burdened with children who have been unwise, unfaithful, and unworthy in all moral respects. Epaminondas used to say that he joyed in nothing more than that his parents were yet alive to take comfort in his progress and military achievements. To Abimelech was rendered the wickedness done to his father, and as Absalom hangs by his hair in the boughs of the tree we may see an instance of a man who cultivated an unfilial spirit. Parents cannot escape the consequences arising from the conduct of their children, whether those consequences be happy or unhappy. We have seen that Rebekah was weary of her life by reason of the daughters of Heth brought in to her by her son Esau. Mothers must remember that it is useless to complain and repine and indulge in reproach if they have let the opportunity of infancy and youth pass by

without improvement. He is a fool who neglects the seed-time, and then complains that there is no harvest. Parents begin the work of discipline too late, and then mourn that all their best efforts are thrown away; they should watch over the opening mind as benighted travellers watch for the dawn of day, that they may take advantage of it and pursue their purposes with vigour. He that spareth the rod hateth the child. There is a kindness that is cruelty, and there is an apparent harshness which is really the expression of the truest beneficence. Families have been ruined by ill-regulated discipline: there has been no reason in it; there has been no dignity of justice about it; it has simply expressed an arbitrary will, and has revealed a tyrannical rather than a paternal spirit. Against all such discipline the Christian Church should indignantly protest. Wise love will always find out the best methods, and true affection will not fail to apply them, even though momentary pain be given to the child.

“Treasures of wickedness profit nothing: but righteousness delivereth from death” (ver. 2).

By “treasures of wickedness” we are to understand the riches which are gained by bad methods, by sharp practice, by taking advantage of the weak, and by bartering the soul for temporary profit. There is an abundance of this kind of treasure in the world, and some of it is to be found in quite unexpected places. It is always difficult indeed to make money honestly in anything like large quantities. It would almost seem that honest labour stopped at the getting of bread and water, and that to advance beyond these elements is to advance into danger and probably to succumb to temptation. Nothing is promised by heaven but bread and water; yet no one is contented with these elementary gifts; every man wants what lies beyond; much will have more, and more will have an addition still; and thus the accumulation proceeds until the mind is unbalanced and the whole circle of life is set in false and bewildering relations. By “righteousness” we are to understand almsgiving, good-doing, beneficence. Jesus Christ says, “Take heed that ye do not your righteousness before men,” translated in the English version, “Take heed that ye do not your alms before men.” In this verse we have a contrast between riches gained by wrong, and advantages arising

from the exercise of righteousness or almsgiving. Beneficence delivers from death, because it is a sign of the divine life within. He who does good to others from a right motive is no longer under the dominion of death; he enters into life with Jesus Christ; his life is hidden with Christ in God: to do good from a motive like this is to show how entirely between the heart of man and the Cross of Christ a profound and joyous sympathy has been established. Good doing must not be made an investment of; that is to say, we must not try to buy ourselves off from the charge and claim of death. Done from such a motive, there would be nothing good in the action. The external relations of the action might be beneficial to others, but every action must be judged by the motive which inspires it. When a cup of cold water is given it must be given in the name of a disciple, or for the sake of Christ; and in this religious motive will be found the guarantee of that water being recognised in heaven, and turned into wine for the giver's drinking.

"The Lord will not suffer the soul of the righteous to famish: but he casteth away the substance of the wicked" (ver. 3).

This is the wonderful promise of the Old Testament, and it is confirmed by the exceeding great and precious promises of the New Covenant. The Lord takes charge of all souls; to some giving all the beauty and comfort of heaven, and to others awarding all that is due to unfaithfulness. "All souls are mine." It is beautiful to picture the Lord as having all souls in his custody, and dealing with each according to its moral tone and purpose. Given a righteous man, and it would seem as if all the angels of God were in charge of him. If a righteous man could be driven into everlasting punishment the whole security of the universe would be violated: yea, even if a righteous man could come to permanent mischief, or be exposed to loss of an ultimate kind, even in this world; if his spirit of contentment and joy could be taken away from him because of the withdrawal of external blessings, then righteousness is vanity, and prayer is wasted breath. All the promises of God are enlisted on behalf of the good and true servant. On the other hand, God "casteth away the substance of the wicked." That is to say, he repels the eager passion and desire of the wicked. However much

they may long for promotion, they do not get it; though their eyes are stretched out in eager expectation of advancement and blessing, riches and honour, yet disappointment shall fall upon their vision, and they shall see nothing but grievous darkness. Wicked men have substance; they have many riches; they have a great name in the world: but all this amounts to nothing, because within there is no heart of truth, no spirit of wisdom, no genius of spiritual devotion. The Lord is against the wicked—always against him, necessarily against him; nothing can ever bring about conciliation between the one and the other, except the uttermost repentance on the part of the wicked, and complete self-renunciation. Let no wicked man suppose that by the multiplication of his riches he can achieve a permanent standing in the universe as an honoured and accepted person. His wickedness will be as a millstone about his neck, and he will be drowned in the abysses of perdition.

“He becometh poor that dealeth with a slack hand: but the hand of the diligent maketh rich” (ver. 4).

Our life is dependent upon our industry. It is good for man that he should have to labour. Were God to do all, we should truly leave him to do it, not caring to co-operate with the divine husbandman in the culture of the field of life. We are called upon to labour with our hands, working the thing that is good, that we may have to give to him that needeth. By the “diligent” we are to understand the nimble-handed—those who are active and agile, who will lose nothing for want of rising early and peering about in the darkness, if they may but catch a glimpse even of an outline of things. The persons referred to in the text are those who take account of microscopic matters; they are particular about the smallest coins, about moments and minutes, about so-called secondary engagements and plans. The true business man lives in the midst of his business. In this matter Boaz was an example to the world; his eyes ranged over the whole field; he knew every servant and every reaper; yea, his eye was upon the gleaners also. Boaz lived in his business in the sense of being in the midst of his husbandry, well knowing that the eye of the master is worth more than the hands of all his servants. Let no one say that the Bible is a book of

abstractions and spiritual metaphysics, having no relation to the activities and duties of the present life, with such proverbs as these before him. The spirit of wisdom here deals with the daily affairs of life, comments upon the spirit and actions of men, and withholds not criticism alike from the good and the evil. We are not far from the sanctuary of God when we are listening to proverbs like these. They seem to be indeed destitute of what we commonly know as evangelical unction, but the destitution is apparent rather than real. Nowhere in the Bible is life regarded as a piece of mechanism that may be trimmed by the hand, but always as a profound vitality that can only be sufficiently regulated, inspired, and directed by him who created it. The Bible insists upon the poor being recognised and assisted, and it further insists that the rich hand shall empty itself into the lap of the poor, and thus shall increase in riches; by an apparent contradiction, it shall have the more the more it gives.

“He that gathereth in summer is a wise son: but he that sleepeth in harvest is a son that causeth shame” (ver. 5).

Our efforts in life must be seasonable. We must know whether we are working in spring or summer, autumn or winter. The men of Issachar were popular with their king because they had understanding of the times. There is a religious forethought. To gather in summer is not to show unbelief regarding God's goodness, but rather to show gratitude for its abundance. He who neglects to gather neglects the bounties of the Lord as well as neglects his own future necessities. The very fact that God has strewn his riches so abundantly is a silent call to men to arise and claim them in the name of honour and honesty and justice. God does not give his blessings that they may be trampled under foot, but that they may be gathered and garnered, laid up against the day of evil. The man who sleeps in harvest is pronounced a fool, because he lets his opportunity slip. The historian writes concerning Hannibal that when he could have taken Rome he would not, and when he would he could not. We are to be men of opportunity; that is to say, we are to buy up the opportunity, we are to redeem the time, to say, “There is a tide in the affairs of men, which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune.” When God opens a gate he means that we should

go through it, and pass into all the inheritance beyond ; when God sends autumn upon the earth, with all its golden wheatfields and purple vintages, it is that men may arise and gather in the fruits of the earth, so that when winter comes there may be a garden within the walls of the house, yea, an abundant store on the hearthstone. There was a king of Sicily who was called "The Lingerer," not because he stayed till opportunity came, but because he stayed till opportunity was lost. There is a time to wait, and there is a time to act. Overlong waiting means loss of chance, for the king has passed by and the gates are closed ; but to wait patiently until everything is ripe for action is the very last expression of Christian culture. "He that believeth shall not make haste ;" he who only half believeth shall live in fretfulness and anxiety, shall always be clutching at prizes and never seizing them.

"Blessings are upon the head of the just : but violence covereth the mouth of the wicked" (ver. 6).

All men must acknowledge this to be not only true in fact but excellent in reason and justice. The good man is a crowned man. Find the just man where you may, you find a sceptre in his hand in token of royalty and dominion. To be just is to be like God. To be just is to care for the interests of others. "But violence covereth the mouth of the wicked." Curses and deeds of violence issue from the mouth of the wicked in great storms and blasts, as if they could by fury accomplish their purpose, but God lays his hand upon the swollen lips, and causes the profane man to swallow his own blasphemies. The Lord conceals wicked lips in silence, or he turns the evil speaker to confusion by allowing the fury of the bad man to strike down the house which he profaned by his presence. All violent and wicked men shall be shamed and condemned. They do not speak the word of justice ; they are not animated by the spirit of truth ; they are not swayed by the angel of love : they take everything into their own hands, and would be masters and lords and sovereigns, forgetting that the Lord reigneth, and that all creatures are greatest and best when they bow in homage before the altar of the Creator. If we would increase in blessing we must increase in the spirit of justness. We must always

distinguish between violence and strength. Omnipotence is quiet because omnipotence is complete. When the heathen rage and the people imagine a vain thing, they are not far from the destruction which God inflicts upon those who boast themselves against him. God seizes the moment of human fury that he may confound the counsels of the wicked. To be in a passion of unreasonableness is to be within one step of doom.

“The memory of the just is blessed : but the name of the wicked shall rot” (ver. 7).

To a statement like this all men must say, So be it ; for this is wise and good and just. Who would not preserve a noble name ? The recollection of such a name is a continual inspiration. From that recollection many things may be shed that are mere matters of detail, but the substance and the honour, the real quality and worth, abide with us evermore. Who need be ashamed to own that he had a just father and a virtuous mother ? No man blushes when he cites the name of a conqueror who worked heroically, and succeeded perfectly in the great warfare of life. Just memories are flowers we cannot allow to fade : we water them with our tears ; by them we enrich and ennoble our prayers, and by them we animate ourselves as by a sacred stimulus. Blessed are they who have a noble past, a yesterday crowded with figures and memories of things beautiful and lovable ; they can never be lonely, they can never be sad ; they walk in the company of the just and the true, and the silence of the communion does not diminish its music. Let the name of the wicked rot. It is a name of ill-savour ; it fills the whole house with a sense of putrescence. Sad to think that many a man is so living that his own child will one day be ashamed of him, and will not, except under compulsion, venture to mention his dishonoured name. “He that perverteth his ways shall be known.” The Lord shall lead forth the foolish with the workers of iniquity, and shall cause them and their cunning contrivances to be forgotten. Here is a fame which is possible to every man. It is not possible for us all to win renown in fields of battle, in walks of literature, in lines of adventure, or in regions of discovery and enterprise ; that kind of renown must be left to the few, the elect who are created to lead the world’s civilisation ;

but the renown of goodness, the fame of purity, the reputation of excellence,—these lie within the power of the poorest man that lives. A good name is better than riches. The poor of this world may be rich in faith. A man who never invented anything to enrich the civilisation of his day may have so prayed as to bring down the blessing of heaven upon his times.

“The wise in heart will receive commandments: but a prating fool shall fall” (ver. 8).

The wise in heart will look out for the word of authority, and will not consider it an indignity to submit to God's rule. This, indeed, is the very perfectness of Christian education—to know that we are ignorant, and that we are under guidance, and that the true counsel and direction can come only from heaven. The consummation of all prayer is—“Not my will, but thine, be done.” This is not only the consummation of prayer, it is the last attainment of wisdom. We have to work faithfully and arduously in order to realise this remote conclusion. When a man has come to find that he knows nothing, and that he is in the hands of God, waiting for everything, and that his utmost might can only enable him to co-operate with God, never to go before, but always to toil behind with a willing heart, he is approaching the close of his earthly education—he is getting ready for the school of heaven, where the lessons are deeper, and where the opportunity of advancement is enlarged. The prating fool is nowhere well spoken of; he is doomed to fall. Fools despise wisdom and instruction. By “fools” we are to understand persons who are self-conceited, headstrong, who will listen to no counsel, but who insist that they know everything, and are independent of every one. They prate, they talk loudly, they vex others by their criticism, they will always be heard; it is not for them to sit still and in a passive mood receive instruction; they will be instructors, leaders, loud speakers, not knowing that whilst they are holding their heads so high their feet are steadily moving down to the pit. A companion of fools shall be destroyed.

“He that walketh uprightly walketh surely: but he that perverteth his ways shall be known” (ver. 9).

The man who walks uprightly is relieved from all fear, and is inspired by the very spirit of courage. He knows that he means

to be right and to do right, and therefore he can challenge the world to find fault with him. He does not boast of ultimate wisdom; he simply glories in an honest purpose. Far from saying that all his counsels are founded in wisdom and must end in success, he can say, Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I want to be like my Saviour, and to do all his will in simple and faithful obedience. That is enough. He has no cause to believe that he will bring discredit upon his profession; he trusts quietly in the Lord. The man who goes through life by crooked paths, sinuously endeavouring to avoid royal thoroughfares, will be discovered, and because he has a consciousness of this ultimate detection he lives a life of perpetual unrest. The man who perverts his ways shall be instructed by misfortune. He would not listen to more genial teachers, he put away from him the spirit of counsel and understanding; so the grim monitor known by the name of Misfortune comes and conducts his schooling, compelling him to read hard words, and to undergo severe discipline. To pervert the way is to make it crooked, to complicate that which is simple, and to exhibit moral cleverness at the expense of moral integrity. So we come again and again upon the solemn truth that in uprightness alone is safety, that honesty is a child of the daylight, and that true honour works for no advantage, but submits itself to the most searching analysis and criticism. "The righteous are bold as a lion." See a man who is endeavouring to pervert his way, and watch how every day brings him nearer and nearer to his fall. He may be singularly fortunate for a time, he may elude detection, he may deceive the very elect of his own household, so that they who are closest to him shall not know how true a servant of the devil he is; but in the end that which is spoken in secret shall be heard in public, the concealed place shall be as the open housetop, and a whisper shall multiply itself into thunder; and in that day of discovery it will be known that he that perverteth his ways cannot secure his purpose, but shall be foiled in the hour when he expected triumph and rest.

"He that winketh with the eye causeth sorrow: but a prating fool shall fall" (ver. 10).

He misleads people, he gives them false hints and suggestions, and then he glories in the vexation which he inflicts upon

them ; he is wanting in rectitude, straightforwardness, and social honour ; he does not care whom he misleads or misdirects, enough for him that he gains his point for the moment ; the more people he can bring into misery the greater will be his wicked enjoyment. Everything that is underhanded, that is aside from the straightforward course of virtue and wisdom, must cause sorrow, sooner or later. Have no part with men who give themselves up to tricks, to evil counsels, to the working of disappointment in the hearts of others ; only believe the man whose voice is clear, simple, and direct ; about whose word there is no moral mystery, whose word is his bond, whose words indeed may be few, but not therefore unwise : the man who means what he says, and who having sworn to his hurt will still carry out his covenant. The man who can submit to a mean trick will certainly not shrink from carrying it out in its fulness when opportunity serves. To wink with the eye may seem to be innocent enough, and so it may be under some circumstances, but when it is an indication of moral depravity, when it indicates knavery, trickery, deceit, the issue thereof must be sorrow of the bitterest quality.

What a table of regulations we have even so far in this Book of Proverbs ! Were we to cut the book short even here, we should have enough for the guidance of our life in all practical wisdom. The Proverbs would seem to vindicate the Bible, as we have already said, from the charge of dealing in things that are merely ghostly and far off. This book brings the whole Bible down to the very level of daily life, and causes men to think seriously about matters which on first appearance may not seem to be religious. In very deed, religion is found in all the actions of life, whether we sit or rise, wake or sleep, go forth to the market-place or enclose ourselves in the sanctuary of communion with God—all has upon it a sign of relationship towards larger things, and a hint of final and irrevocable judgment. Blessed are they who know the meaning of righteousness, uprightness, truth, justice, and wisdom. Wheresoever they walk they are walking towards the light, and whatsoever the discipline through which they are passing they are moving onward to reward and higher service.

Chapter x. 11-32.

THE RIGHTEOUS AND THE WICKED, ETC.

"The mouth of a righteous man is a well of life : but violence covereth the mouth of the wicked " (ver. 11).

THIS has been proved in all lands and in all ages. The righteous man sets his face towards the kingdom of life, and whatever has in it true life he claims for companionship and instruction. We know the good man by his love of life ; life lives in the light ; life indeed itself is light : in God there is no death, and in God's righteousness nothing is to be found of decay. The righteous man always speaks living words, whether they are words of justice, words of condemnation, or words of criticism ; he never speaks merely for the sake of destroying, or for the sake of displaying his power ; his continual object is to vivify, to refresh, to quicken into larger existence, and to bless with all the inspiration and comfort of hope those whose supreme purpose is to be good and to do good. The mouth of the wicked man is as the mouth of a volcano. When the wicked man speaks he utters curses or criticisms that are charged with censure ; his tone itself is full of bitterness, and as for his words they are drawn swords. Happily, his violence is such that it defeats itself. In all condemnation there comes a point when the object of it is pitied rather than reprobated. In the violence of the wicked man there is no measure ; it is simple exaggeration ; it is injustice expressed with fury. There are wicked uses of emphasis, especially in the case where bad men attempt to prove themselves to be earnest simply because they speak vociferously and with enforced and unnatural emphasis. The oath of a bad man is but an instance of violence. It is wanting wholly in the dignity and calmness of assured life : it is a spasm, a paroxysm, an ebullition, as wanting in nobleness as it is wanting

in reason. When a righteous man opens his mouth the world has a right to expect that words of wisdom will be spoken. Character justifies that expectation. Could the mouth of a righteous man be other than a well of life then all the comfort of social intercourse would be destroyed. Though we know not the precise words which a righteous man may utter upon any occasion, yet we are sure from his character that when he does speak his words will be seasoned with salt, and in them there will be the savour of a true, because rational, piety.

“Hatred stirreth up strifes : but love covereth all sins” (ver. 12).

Love is not a New Testament virtue or grace, nor is it left for the New Testament to praise it in high strains of music. From the beginning love has been as an angel in the world, gladdening men by its brightness, soothing men by its persuasiveness, and luring souls with infinite gentleness towards all that is true and beautiful. Hatred can only live in multiplying strife ; its conception of human life is so poor that it glories in tumults and uproars, being utterly unable to appreciate the importance and the value of peace. We may know whether we are inspired by the spirit of hatred by the preference we have for strife or unity. Where we are conscious of loving controversy, delighting in mutual hostility, and deepening the aversions of men one to another, we may be sure that the devil has taken full possession of the temple of our heart, and that all that is divine and heavenly has been cast out. Love takes the largest view of life ; it does not vex itself with temporary details, with transient aberrations ; it looks down into the very core and substance of the soul, and, knowing that the heart is true in its supreme desires, it covers many flaws and specks, yea, even faults and sins, in the hope that concealment may destroy their influence and their very existence. There is a covering up which is a vain concealment, a merely deceitful trick : no such covering up is meant here ; this is rather the covering up with which God covers the iniquities of the pardoned man, the sins of him who has confessed all his guilt, and desired an exercise of the divine mercy. Love is not mere sentiment ; an easy-going action of the mind, too self-complacent and self-indulgent to enter with energy into any moral inquiry. The love which is commended in Scripture is an ardent

love—keen, critical, sagacious, far-sighted, not imagining that things are destroyed because they are concealed; it is the love of God which at all costs must expel sin from the universe, and set up the kingdom of God amongst men. No Christian can yield to the spirit of hatred. When he feels that that spirit is getting the upper hand of him he betakes himself to secret intercourse with God and fights the awful battle at the Cross. For the time being he ceases all public profession, withdraws from everything like ostentatious show of interest in divine things, and conducts the tremendous controversy within the shadow of the Cross of Christ.

“In the lips of him that hath understanding wisdom is found : but a rod is for the back of him that is void of understanding” (ver. 13).

In no case will the wise man utter one word of commendation for the encouragement of wickedness or folly. With a genius marked by its supreme inventiveness, he never devises an excuse for the bad man. Not one of the bad man's sins will he cover up with the robe of charity, for he is talking about men who are utterly unworthy of such protection: they are bad at the core, bad at the root, bad in and out, altogether corrupt and God-forsaken. The rod is for the back of him that is void of understanding, and yet the rod will do him no good. We learn in other parts of this book that if a fool be brayed in a mortar his folly will not depart from him. What wonder if after being beaten with the rod he is still void of understanding? No outward appeal can create an inward capacity. The rod itself can only be useful where there is something within that can be quickened into beneficent activity. Yet the rod must not be spared from the back of him that is void of understanding, lest some men should take encouragement from his exemption to go and repeat his wickedness. Society is continually thrashing the man who is void of understanding: the chastisement may not be inflicted with a rod as that term is usually understood; but it comes in the form of neglect, or disdain, or contempt, or rejection, or scornful laughter. The man void of understanding is never admitted to the innermost home; he is made to point a jest; he is treated with the contempt which is due to men who have nothing to lose. Void of understanding!

to this degradation men may come! Wisdom may withdraw, understanding may decline to conduct its ministry any further, all that is beautiful may shrink back ashamed, and the man may be left little better than a ghastly skeleton. What is life without understanding? What is human intercourse without the inspiration of wisdom? We are not told that a man must have wealth in order to have understanding; on the contrary, we are informed that wisdom may dwell with him who has nothing of this world's goods, and that the poorest house may be the very sanctuary of God. God rebukes wisdom when it becomes conceit, and he looks down upon understanding when it forgets its indebtedness for its very life to the inspiration of heaven. There is a wisdom that is unwise; there is an understanding that is pitifully destitute of sagacity. Not many wise are called into the kingdom of heaven,—not because they are wise, but because their wisdom ministers to their conceit, and their understanding is paraded as a property of their own creation and maintenance. True wisdom is true humility. It knows that it knows nothing. It falls down before God, and asks for the wisdom which cometh from above, which by the very heavenliness of its descent forbids all self-inflation and self-idolatry.

“Wise men lay up knowledge: but the mouth of the foolish is near destruction” (ver. 14).

So the wise man has always the advantage. The fool always goes to the bottom, and is ultimately turned out of society with a laugh of disdain. Wise men continually add to their knowledge. Every wise man is further on to-day than he was yesterday. Oftentimes knowledge comes by self-correction, for wise men are not ashamed to say that they have made mistakes, and that they desire to correct them. To know ourselves mistaken is really to be on the high road to true wisdom. Who can expect to be altogether wise? or to come to an estate which glories in personal infallibility? The wise man shows his wisdom in remembering that what has to be conquered is infinitely more than that which has been already achieved. The wisest men are the most modest men. They are as sensible of their deficiencies as they are of their acquirements; yea, more so, for wise men think that nothing has been acquired whilst anything

remains to be accomplished. The wise man keeps abreast with all new literature, all new science, all new discovery; not that he necessarily receives it just as it comes to him, but he lays hold of it that he may examine it with patient care, with a heart prepared to receive whatever is proved to be divine and useful. The mouth of the foolish is full of wind; there is no tone of music in it; every word the foolish man utters brings him nearer and nearer to his destruction. The fool is always running down hill, and at the foot of it he will perceive an abyss into which he must fall without any lament on the part of those who witness his overthrow. The foolish man builds his house upon the sand. The foolish man is deceived by nearness and by bulk. The foolish man insists upon having his heaven in his hand here and now, and upon spending it as he goes. He has no future, simply because he has no past, and that again simply because he has no heart.

“The rich man’s wealth is his strong city: the destruction of the poor is their poverty” (ver. 15).

This is taking a limited view of social situations. It is the rich man himself who says that his wealth is his strong city: he supposes he can buy everything, and therefore possess everything, not knowing that mere money can never constitute the truest proprietorship. Money buys transient rights; money buys the land, but it can never buy the landscape. He holds the title deeds who really and truly loves the estate. The destruction of the poor is in very deed their poverty, because they are unable to avail themselves of opportunities which come and go: they see where they could enter in and be strong, but they have not the golden key which opens the door. In many instances they are contemned simply because they are poor, so that their counsel is not sought, and they have no chance of proving their wisdom. Every one expects the poor man to be silent; he would seem to have no right to speak; and his silence is mistaken not for modesty but for incapacity. Pitiable indeed is the sight of any man who owes all his influence simply to his money; to know that if he were divested of his property there is no one who listens to him would permit him to speak any more. A sad thing indeed when a man’s furniture is greater than himself;

when the house is greater than the tenant, where the outward figure and sign but represent in enlarged irony the emptiness of the soul within. Yet the poor man may wait for his opportunity, for it is sure to come if he is truly wise. It will come suddenly, unexpectedly, and if he be prepared for the crisis it will mark a turning point in his life. The great thing to be guarded against is the despair which naturally follows extreme destitution. What wonder if men who have a continual battle to live should sometimes be inclined to give up the strife, saying that it is too hard for their waning strength? Jesus Christ never contemned the poor; he said, "The poor have the gospel preached to them;" in many instances he rejected the proud rich, but in no case did he ever repel the humble poor. Still it is to be remembered that a man is not necessarily wise simply because he is destroyed by poverty. The soul is not pious simply because the body is naked. Character is altogether independent of circumstances. So let us beware of that loose indiscriminatio which regards all rich men as bad and all poor men as good. There are rich men who are poor in spirit, and there are poor men who are proud and intolerable in their vanity.

"The labour of the righteous tendeth to life : the fruit of the wicked to sin. He is in the way of life that keepeth instruction : but he that refuseth reproof erreth" (vers. 16, 17).

The labour of the righteous is indeed life as it proceeds; it has not to wait for life at the other end of the process; every righteous deed brings its own instant heaven, and its own sweet complacency, its own ample reward. As with the righteous, so with the wicked. Character is destiny. Whilst the wicked man accomplishes his wicked purposes he already enters upon his lot in perdition. His sleep is but troubled repose; his heart loses everything that tends towards the light and that gives promise of true and fruitful development. The wicked man grows in sin. We cannot stand still in iniquity, saying, We have taken our degree, and therefore need not add to our knowledge. Having begun to sin, it would seem as if we were compelled to advance, or to turn right round in the strength of God. To stand still in sin is impossible. The wicked man should lay this lesson to heart, because although it may not be obvious to him

that he is worse to-day than he was ten years ago, yet the great law of decay proceeds, and he will find, however much the outside may be as it was long ago, the inward nature has been corrupted and almost totally destroyed. To grow in life, what a heaven is that! Jesus Christ said he came to give life, and to give it more abundantly; to give it wave upon wave, and billow upon billow, until it should utterly drive out of the soul every remnant and shadow of death. To know whether we are in the way of life we must inquire whether we are keeping instruction, or whether we are yielding ourselves up to our own will, and allowing passion to dominate the soul. If we are prepared to accept reproof, we may be sure that the spirit of true wisdom is still within us. He who accepts reproof acknowledges his mistakes, and repents of his errors, and resolves never to repeat them. Passion can do nothing for a man but agitate and ultimately ruin him. Instruction alone is safety, is dignity, is completeness. Reprove a wise man, and he will become wiser, for he loves the reproof which brings him nearer to the altar of truth. Stubborn men can never grow in true wisdom; they are self-contented, they are self-complete, they boast of their obstinacy, and hardening their neck to all reproof they come to sudden calamity and final obliteration. Thus the appeal comes to us, by riddle, and prophecy, and psalm, and pious exhortation; by example and warning; by all that is truest in experience and most thoroughly ascertained in history; that if we would be wise we must accept instruction from above, and we have only to consult our own souls, and to follow our own desires, and to exclude the light of heaven, in order to plunge into the infinite abysses. Who will be wise? Who will refuse reproof? Who will take up his staff, and pursue a journey to the city of life? Who will run madly forth to seek the city of destruction? These are questions which every man must answer for himself. They cannot be answered sentimentally or temporarily; they must be so answered as to give tone to life, purpose to activity, inward and abiding motive to all the energy and exertions of life.

“The blessing of the Lord, it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it” (ver. 22).

∴ The word “blessing” and the word “rich” are each to be

considered in their uniqueness, and not in the general sense attributed to such words by lexicographers. Blessing may come variously, even through the rod of chastisement, through the furnace of discipline, through the wilderness of pilgrimage: it is not the less a blessing because it disguises itself under circumstances of a distressing character. "Rich" does not always mean wealth, or gold, or estates, things that can be numbered and valued and exchanged in the market-place. The poor are said to be rich in faith. He is rich who has not many necessities. Contentment always means true riches. The man who is blessed of God is rich in satisfactions of a spiritual kind—rich in wisdom, rich in hope, rich in gratitude: so rich that he never can be patronised, or bribed, or allured from highways of righteousness in order that he may secure to himself some temporary advantage. On the other hand, we may take "blessing" and "rich" as words that are to be used in their most ordinary significance. The sunshine is a blessing for the good man, because it means so much more than is visible to the eye or palpable to the touch: it is the open gate of heaven; it is the pledge of a light infinitely brighter than itself; it is a smile accommodated to human weakness. Sometimes, too, the Lord invests his people with wealth of a material kind, constituting them his trustees, knowing that they will act as faithful stewards, and minister their bounty to the weak and the poor and the helpless, according to ever-varying human necessity. No sorrow is added with it, to show that the wealth has not been honestly obtained; it is not stolen wealth; it is not wealth secured at the disadvantage of others; the Christian does not live upon the sorrows of mankind. He who makes money by illegitimate means, or by involving others in penury and distress, will find that in all he has there is a tormenting sting: conscience will not let him sleep; memory will trouble him with visions of evil which has been done by his own hand, and will haunt him night and day with the fear of just retribution. Whatever sorrow is in our life is not of the Lord's sending, unless it be in some disciplinary aspect; then it is sorrow intended to work out some larger joy. There is a godly sorrow, which worketh repentance. There is a selfish sorrow, which torments those who feel it with grief upon grief.

"It is as sport to a fool to do mischief: but a man of understanding hath wisdom" (ver. 23).

Everything depends upon our view of the universe as to what is regarded as mischief. If we are living in a universe whose end is harmony, and whose entire construction points to that end, then even an idle word may be an offence to the spirit of order, which is the spirit of music. The fool seeks only momentary titillation or delight for himself; it is a pleasure to him to see things thrown down, to draw a brush across the finest work of art, to puncture fair flowers with rough steel, to torture animal life so as to extort cry, or excite anger, or lead to some manner of collision as between animal and animal which shall give the foolish observer a fool's pleasure. Nothing is so easily done as mischief. It is emphatically a fool's occupation. The fool does not scruple to do mischief to reputation, to the peace of mind, to the prosperity and comfort of his fellow-men. It is not difficult for him to propagate false reports, to ask injurious questions, to suggest imaginary hindrances to confidence and promotion. Being detected in his folly, he says he was in sport; he meant no mischief by it; he thought he would create an opportunity for mutual laughter: he does not see that every action has a meaning, and that the wise man looks towards issues and results before committing himself to processes. A mischievous word once spoken can never be withdrawn except in a merely technical sense; it has gone forth and will continue to do mischief to the end of life. The man of understanding is set in opposition to the character described as a fool; he has wisdom, which is more than knowledge; he calculates, balances, adapts, and arranges, and in short his whole life is a construction well founded, well shaped, and gathering itself up into all that is lovely and secure in home and church and altar. The man of understanding may have less temporary excitement than the fool has: sometimes indeed he may seem to be slow, solemn, lifeless, taking little or no interest in the bubbles that are sparkling around him, and in the rockets that are hissing and spluttering in the night whose silence they offend. His riches are within. His soul is at peace. He is a continual worshipper, who, praying without ceasing, holds large and profitable commerce with heaven, and in his very worship he grows in intellectual wisdom. There is no fallacy

greater than that because a man is spiritually minded he cannot be intellectually energetic. The contrary proposition would more nearly approach the truth.

"The fear of the Lord prolongeth days : but the years of the wicked shall be shortened" (ver. 27).

In no merely literal sense is this to be taken ; otherwise we should be at a loss to account for the death of children, and for the death of those who in early life are taken away from usefulness, whilst wicked men are spared many years and die in a remote old age. We must take such words ideally, remembering that ideality is often the true reality. In the Old Testament length of days is set down as equivalent to what is known in the New Testament as immortality. Length of days is a promise made to obedience, to the honour of father and mother, and to the true worship of God. The Lord says he will multiply the days of those who love him, and though that is not fulfilled in the letter it is more than fulfilled in the spirit. Days are not to be numbered always. They are to be measured and weighed. A day to the wise man is more than a day to the fool. The wise man makes the most of his time ; every moment is a jewel, every hour is a crown, every day is an opportunity for securing blessings larger than can be contained within the limits of time. The fear of the Lord is true health. That may be regarded as the real meaning of the proposition. A man cannot truly fear God, and neglect himself, neglect his health, neglect all those minor considerations which are too little valued in estimating the whole sphere and purpose of life. Again and again the foolish sentiment is reprovèd which is to the effect that religion consists wholly in vocal exercise, in sighings and protestations and sentiments ; whereas it is in reality the severest of discipline, causing everything to be cleared out of the way that hinders upward and continuous progress. The years of the wicked are shortened, because there is nothing in them ; though their number be many their length is short ; they come and go without improvement, and the wicked man is no wiser at the end than he was at the beginning. He is living for the next speculation, the next excitement, the next uncertain and tempting chance ; he spends his years in running after bubbles which glitter in the air, and

when he grasps them he finds that he has seized the prize of nothingness.

"The hope of the righteous shall be gladness: but the expectation of the wicked shall perish" (ver. 28).

We must distinguish between hope and expectation. The righteous man lives by hope, and his hope is already a realisation of the soul. In the mere letter his hope may not have come to pass, but it brings with it the deep and serene assurance which no merely superficial circumstances can agitate or destroy. He knows that though sorrow may endure for a night joy will come in the morning. If righteousness could be dissociated from gladness a severe blow would be dealt at the claims of morality. To be right is to be happy. To be building on the true foundation is to be building in the right direction, and with the assured confidence that God himself will dwell in the house. The expectation of the wicked is mere nightmare; it is in very deed a castle in the air, without foundation, without roof, without walls—an airy nothing, existing only in the foolish brain of the foolish dreamer. The wicked man is devoid of everything that is solid, enduring, permanent; his, as we have just said, is a life of chance, and risk, and ambition, always ending in disappointment and mortification. If the wicked man could truly succeed the whole argument for righteousness would be overturned. The wicked man succeeds only partially, temporarily, in a very transient and unsatisfactory sense. In the very act of pulling down his barns to build greater he is called away to face the Judge whose existence he has denied, or whose claims he has disallowed. The only man who can live for ever in the sunlight of divine favour is the man who is righteous in motive, in soul, in purpose, and no man can be thus righteous who is not living in closest sympathy with the Son of God, and who is not daily inspired by God the Holy Ghost.

"The way of the Lord is strength to the upright: but destruction shall be to the workers of iniquity. The righteous shall never be removed: but the wicked shall not inhabit the earth. The mouth of the just bringeth forth wisdom: but the froward tongue shall be cut out. The lips of the righteous know what is acceptable: but the mouth of the wicked speaketh frowardness" (vers. 29-32).

The contrast continues to be between the righteous and the wicked. As we have seen from the beginning, not a word of

commendation or hope is extended to those who are out of sympathy with truth and love. The tongue of the froward may be glib, but never eloquent, in the sense of setting truth to music, and uttering the law with persuasiveness and consistency. The froward tongue shall be cut out, for it never did any good, nor can it ever be used to the instruction of the world. On the other hand, the lips of the righteous are a fountain of living water, knowing what is acceptable, and issuing only such words as can lift the life to a higher level, and confer benedictions upon the heart of man. The righteous and the wicked are absolutely distinctive as to their position,—the righteous shall never be removed, but the wicked shall not inhabit the earth: it is of infinite consequence to note that permanence is associated with righteousness, and that the triumphing of the wicked is but for a moment. Time tries all things. As human experience deepens men are able to test more critically and accurately all the elements which are offered to them for their moral satisfaction. Wickedness may come with a great flourish of trumpets, and with great offers of decoration and promotion, but all the offers are but so much wind, passing by and leaving no impression behind, and the oath of the wicked man is but a remembered lie. The Lord is on the side of the righteous man, and has promised to give strength to the upright. If there is any truth whatever in this promise (and all history attests its truthfulness), then there is equal truth in what follows—namely, that destruction shall be to the workers of iniquity. They themselves destroy everything, therefore they themselves shall be destroyed. They shall commit suicide with weapons of their own manufacture; they shall be hanged upon scaffolds which they themselves have erected. Were all this merely poetry it might open the way to a great deal of excited discussion; it is not poetry, however, but history which we ourselves can test, and, having tested it from year to year through a long lifetime, the venerable reader is enabled to say, This is in very deed the word of God, and he alone is wise who believes and applies it.

Chapter xi. 1-16.

FALSE WEIGHTS—PRIDE, ETC.

“A false balance is abomination to the Lord : but a just weight is his delight” (ver. 1).

INSTEAD of “weight” read “stone.” Israel had now become a commercial nation in some degree, and therefore had come into the use of balances and measures and weights. No sooner did a commercial life begin than dishonesty would seem to have begun with it. Men tell lies in their balances ; without ever saying a word they speak falsehoods in their unequal weights. The Lord is here represented as looking upon our commercial life. He not only hears our prayers, but watches all the way of our dealing, at the shop, the factory, the bank, and the market-place. He himself tests every balance and every weight. This is a thought which is apt to escape the attention of all who are engaged in the business of the world. Many men suppose that by a trick of the finger, or by some sleight of hand, they can deceive the unwary and make a profit out of the ignorance of those who unwisely trust them. This may be so for the moment, and in the letter, but it is forgotten that the permanent criticism is divine, the unerring judgment is from above, and that the eye of God is constantly searching, not only whilst we are in the sanctuary, but in all our commercial relations and responsibilities. Here again is a reason why all men should trust the Bible. Its morality is on behalf of the buyer as well as on behalf of the seller. The Bible has not a morality for one side of the counter and no morality for the other ; the whole transaction is exposed to divine criticism, and brings upon itself either malediction or blessing, according to the morality which the action expresses.

“When pride cometh, then cometh shame : but with the lowly is wisdom” (ver. 2).

Pride has a short day in which to live ; immediately behind red and blustering pride comes pale-faced, cowering shame. No

pride can stand that is not based on reason and sanctioned by morality : without these guarantees it is mere ostentation, vanity, irrational and unseasonable boasting, exploding by its own energy, and coming to nothing because of its irregularity. There is nothing to be proud of upon the earth. We cannot be proud of our strength, for in our highest estate we are but like the grass, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven. We cannot be proud even of intellectual abilities, for we have nothing that we have not received, and indeed the higher our intellectual power the more modest will be our whole feeling in relation to ourselves. Partial power is more likely to be proud than is complete strength. It is whilst we grow that we are a surprise to ourselves, but when we have come to something like maturity we begin to feel how little there is on earth that is to be accounted of, and how true it is that he that glorieth should glory in the Lord. With the lowly is wisdom, with the modest, with the simple in heart, with the unselfish : they may not have the wisdom of letters, but they have that deeper wisdom which is before letters and which will survive all literature—the wisdom of an open heart, an unprejudiced understanding, a loving and obedient will, a disposition whose mute prayer is continually, Lord, give me light, and show me what is true. God himself will dwell with the lowly man as in a chosen habitation ; he will come to him by night and tarry with him to the break of day, and if he leave him it is but for a small moment, that his return may be marked by an intenser desire and adoration.

“When it goeth well with the righteous, the city rejoiceth : and when the wicked perish, there is shouting” (ver. 10).

This is a tribute to righteousness which must come sooner or later. There is a heart in the city as well as in the individual man ; a kind of civic personality as well as a narrow individuality. When principles of the highest morality govern the life of the city there is rejoicing everywhere, because where righteousness is the blessing of God is, and the blessing of God maketh rich, and no sorrow is added to that infinite and tender benediction. It is singular indeed that even bad men rejoice when good principles are so received and applied as to revive commercial industry and commercial confidence, and create a healthy state of feeling as between

nation and nation, and city and city. When the wicked man perishes there is shouting of gladness, although there may have been during his lifetime adulation and hypocritical compliment paid to him. The wicked man never did anybody any lasting good. He always took away more than he gave, and he never pronounced a kind word except with a stinging spirit, and even in his superficial benedictions there was nothing enduring, nothing solid and lasting in the comfort which he pretended to bestow. The wicked man imagines that he is popular, but his imagination is vain. He is only made use of, looked for in order that he may help in a time of emergency, or in some way be unconsciously debased to uses the full range and purpose of which he does not perceive. No one weeps over the grave of the wicked man: it is an unblest tomb; it is a desert rather than a garden; whatever grows there does not grow in beauty and fruitfulness by the will of man or the purpose of God. The wicked man has nothing before him but a gloomy immortality, a destiny of tears, reproaches, and accusations of every kind; the time will come when men will be ashamed to mention his name, or, if they do mention it, it will be with parentheses and reservations which constitute the bitterest malediction. Every one is proud to recall the repute of a righteous man. It is like reminding others of gardens of beauty, orchards of delight, landscapes rich in all features of excellence and attractiveness: the name of the righteous is a name of health; it is breathed as with the fresh air of heaven; men delight to hear it and find their honour even in its repetition. By the blessing of the upright the city is exalted, but it is overthrown by the mouth of the wicked. The upright may be for a time opposed, but for a time only; the issue is certain; truth will prevail, and they who oppose the upright shall come to humiliation, if not to contrition, and to such a sense of injury inflicted upon the innocent as will elicit from them words of compunction, petitions, and supplications for pardon.

“He that is void of wisdom despiseth his neighbour: but a man of understanding holdeth his peace” (ver. 12).

How true this is in all departments of life! We have just said that imperfect wisdom is exposed to temptations of vanity and to all the snares of flattery. The man spoken of in the text is

simply void of wisdom : he only sees parts of things ; his is a mere worldly sagacity without root or foundation, without core or innermost life that can withstand all storm and uproar and trial, and be the better for the distress and discipline through which it may have to pass. The imperfectly educated man despiseth his neighbour, because he does not understand him ; his neighbour may be too large a man for him ; his neighbour may see things which do not come within his purview ; and because the unwise man cannot follow the man who is wise he vents his displeasure in criticism and depreciation. Many a man cannot be so clear and dogmatic in his statements as he would wish to be, simply because he sees a larger horizon than is beheld by those who are not of equal understanding with himself. The man who has large keen vision is afraid to tell the world all he sees, because the world is in so many instances half-blind, and could not test the reality of his vision, and therefore might be tempted to rail upon him, and call him by reproachful names. The man of understanding, however, holdeth his peace where his neighbour's character is under judgment. By the mere necessity of his understanding he sees more than the fool can see, and he is willing to abide in patience until processes eventuate in their proper issues. He may not commit himself to a definite judgment ; but he shows his wisdom by quietly observing, by giving his neighbour time for development, by operating upon the principle that self-evolution will explain every mystery in the long run. Many men have a reputation for clearness and positiveness who ought to have a reputation for mere shallowness and impertinence. They can only see that which is palpable, and handle that which is ponderable ; they have no inner life, no keen prophetic vision, no sense of the largeness and infinity of life, and therefore they can pronounce complete judgments, and pose as oracles and dogmatists, where they ought to be branded as men of vain minds, shallow understanding, and flimsy character. The man who is void of understanding is likely to be a tale-bearer ; he must talk ; he is a man of boundless words ; it is dangerous to meet him when you are in haste, for if you ask him the simplest question he is prepared to pour out a flood of words in reply to your inquiry ; he likes to be thought wise, to be in the confidence of people, and to be able to explain secrets which other men can only refer to with a

modesty that is inconsistent with falsehood: the tale-bearer talks with his eye, and with his feet, and by making signs with his fingers; he wishes to impress the company with the fact that he knows a great deal more than he will say; and he also says a great deal more than he knows even by the very signs which are supposed to confirm his self-control. The faithful spirit concealeth the matter: he is a confidential man; he knows that many words are spoken which were never intended to be repeated, and that self-control is one of the first conditions of true healthy discipline. The faithful spirit could often excite sensation, create interest in himself, draw around him men who are anxious to obtain knowledge of secrets that they may profit by their felony; but the faithful spirit is willing to be misjudged, misunderstood, regarded indeed in some instances as morose, and solemn, and self-involved: he passes judgment unto the Lord, and finds in his own faithfulness a consummate and abiding reward.

“He that is surety for a stranger shall smart for it: and he that hateth suretiship is sure”* (ver. 15).

Instead of “stranger” read “another.” Man is often pointed out in the Bible as the enemy of man. This might be thought to be churlish, if it were not so abundantly and tragically proved by daily experience. What could be kinder and more philanthropic

* “The phrase *t’sûmeth yâd*, ‘depositing in the hand,’ *i.e.*, giving in pledge, may be understood to apply to the act of pledging, or virtual though not personal suretiship (Lev. vi. 2). In the entire absence of commerce the law laid down no rules on the subject of suretiship, but it is evident that in the time of Solomon commercial dealings had become so multiplied that suretiship in the commercial sense was common (Prov. vi. 1; xi. 15; xvii. 18; xx. 16; xxii. 26; xxvii. 13). But in older times the notion of one man becoming a surety for a service to be discharged by another was in full force (see Gen. xliv. 32), and it is probable that the same form of undertaking existed, *viz.*, the giving the hand to (striking hands with), not, as Michaelis represents, the person who was to discharge the service—in the commercial sense the debtor—but the person to whom it was due, the creditor (Job xvii. 3; Prov. vi. 1; Michaelis, *Laws of Moses*, § 151, ii. 322, ed. Smith). The surety of course became liable for his client’s debts in case of his failure. In later Jewish times the system had become common, and caused much distress in many instances, yet the duty of suretiship in certain cases is recognised as valid (Ecclus. viii. 13; xxix. 14, 15, 16, 18, 19).”—SMITH’S *Dictionary of the Bible*.

than to be surety for another man? If all men were faithful this would be so; if all faithful men could control circumstances this would be still more truly so. But men are not all faithful; they lie in wait for one another; the strong intends to make a profit out of the weak; and even many who profess the morality of the gospel are willing to wait until the poor man is unable to carry his burden any longer, then they will relieve him of what property he may have, and enjoy themselves on the miseries of his life. It is difficult to apply any stated rules to these circumstances; the very difficulty of applying a stated rule to them suggests the need of our coming to them in the spirit of Christ, who never broke the bruised reed, took advantage of the fallen, or spoke unkindly to any man whose heart was sore and weary. It is an invaluable principle, however, that he that hateth suretiship is sure. There is a suretiship which is positively felonious—that is, the suretiship in which there is no security behind it; the speculation which says it will take its chance, and leave everything to the chapter of accidents: where a man is prepared to be surety for another, and has ample property to meet the contingency, and is prepared to meet it when approached, and to accept the reward of having endeavoured to do his best, then suretiship is divested of all that is undesirable and tormenting. Let young men beware how they become sureties: let poor men never enter into suretiships, for they tell lies by signing their names to bonds which they can never fulfil; they sail under false colours. When a man's name is on a bill it means that he is able to pay that bill, but in many cases the reality proves to be just the contrary. In all such cases the name is a lie, the surety is an oath hateful in the sight of heaven.

“A gracious woman retaineth honour: and strong men retain riches” (ver. 16).

Here the sexes are put in beautiful apposition: woman is gracious, man is strong. Graciousness dissociated from strength has indeed an influence all its own; strength dissociated from graciousness is mere strength, and is wanting in all those attributes which excite and satisfy the deepest confidences of the world. A woman can work miracles by her graciousness. She knows how to enter the sick chamber noiselessly. She knows how to enter

the room without violence, ostentation, or impressiveness, which signifies vanity and display. Woman can speak the gentle word, and look the gracious look, and use the magical touch of friendship and trust, and, in short, can carry her own way without appearing to do so by the very force of tenderness, sympathy, and persuasiveness. Who would raise the foolish question whether grace or strength is the more desirable attribute? Each is desirable in its own way; a combination that is the very perfection of character. Strength and beauty are in the house of the Lord. The great column looks all the better for the beautiful capital which crowns and enriches it. Men should endeavour to cultivate grace, tenderness, all that is charming in spirit, disposition, and action: this cannot be done by mere mimicry; it is to be done by living continually with Christ, studying his spirit, entering into all his purposes, and reproducing, not mechanically, but spiritually, as much as possible of all that was distinctive of his infinite character. The Bible has ever given honour to woman. He is a fool and an unjust man who wishes to keep women in silence, obscurity, and in a state of unimportance; and she is a foolish woman who imagines that she cannot be gracious without being strong, and who wishes to sacrifice her graciousness to some empty reputation for worthless energy. It is not good for the man to be alone, for he is without grace; it is not good for the woman to be alone, for she is without strength: when men and women stand to one another in the right Christian relation they will complete one another, and together constitute the divine idea of humanity.

Chapter xi. 17-29.

THE SPIRIT OF CRUELTY, ETC.

“The merciful man doeth good to his own soul : but he that is cruel troubleth his own flesh” (ver. 17).

WE have already dwelt upon this sacred and useful thought, that a man cannot be good without enriching his own soul. Whatever we do in the way of mercy does not terminate upon the object to which it is addressed, but it comes back to the soul itself, enlarging its capacity and refining its whole nature. The cruel man is always inflicting trouble upon himself; when he thinks he is injuring others he is in reality thrusting the iron into his own soul. This is the dispensation under which we live. Blessed be God for its severity as well as its gentleness, for its awful spirit of judgment as well as for its sacred spirit of benediction. The cruel man creates his own hell; and, in a sense, the merciful man creates his own heaven. He wishes to repeat his acts of mercy because he is made glad by the happy issues of all his efforts to relieve the misery and lighten the burden of mankind. He that watereth others is watered himself; he that giveth away has most; he that would save his life shall lose it; he that would lose his life for Christ's sake shall find it. May we all enter into the mystery of that profound philosophy which says that our gain is what we lose for Christ. No man envies those who are cruel in spirit : cruelty does not always show itself in the same way, by harsh blows or by cold neglect; it expresses itself in many subtle forms, many of which cannot be expressed in words, but all of which can be felt in infinite bitterness. He is cruel who does not speak the right word on behalf of the speechless and the downtrodden; he is cruel who withholds help when he can give it to deserving causes; he is cruel who selfishly seeks slumber for himself whilst others are sitting all night long in coldness and pain, and expectation that is full of torment.

Only the spirit of Christ can cast out the spirit of cruelty. The cruel man cannot be cured by the schoolmaster; no amount of knowledge which he acquires will have any effect upon his cruelty; he can only be made clement, tender, sympathetic, and really human by communion with the Son of God.

“As righteousness tendeth to life: so he that pursueth evil pursueth it to his own death” (ver. 19).

Thus the way of the Lord is equal. When we complain of the severity of law we should remember the graciousness of mercy. When we see how evil-doing results in perdition we should balance the thought by thinking how good-doing always tends upwards, and finds its proper resting-place in heaven. Both the righteous man and he that pursueth evil will bear testimony to the truth of the doctrine of this text. The righteous man knows that the more good he does the more obedient he is to law, and the more tender-hearted to his fellow-creatures the more his sense of vitality increases, so that he abounds in life, and indeed touches the passion and the joy of immortality; on the contrary, he that pursueth evil is well aware that he is inflicting wounds upon his own soul, depriving himself of all the blessings of this life, concealing from his vision all beauty, and driving back from his ear all music, and evermore tending towards narrowness of view, and to all that is depraving and debasing in the most contracted prejudices. It is instructive to observe how even in the Proverbs we are kept closely to the twofold division—namely, life and death: there is no middle course; it is a question of heaven or hell, the right hand or the left, God or Satan, eternal bliss or eternal destruction. With so vivid a distinction before us every man has it in his power to elect his destiny. Thank God, it is not a question of circumstances, of inborn faculty or genius, but a question of character; and surely over the formation and direction of his own character man has great power.

“Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished: but the seed of the righteous shall be delivered” (ver. 21).

The uselessness of opposing God must be manifest from every point of view. God is omniscient, and knows all things; is almighty, and can do all things; is omnipresent, and is everywhere; so that no device or counsel or plot can succeed against

him. The image of the text is that of conspiracy, wicked men combining, saying to one another in effect, If each of us cannot succeed singly, we may by combination succeed as a unity: the possibility of such a conspiracy was foreseen, and the issue of it is foretold in these plain terms. Let men add money to money, genius to genius, influence to influence, counsel to counsel, still it is but like the addition of so many ciphers—the number being very great but the value being absolutely nothing. What one man cannot do in this direction a thousand men are unable to do. Fool, then, is he who supposes that because he has followed a multitude to do evil, therefore no harm will come to him. Every man in the multitude will be judged as if he were alone responsible for the whole mischief. Hands that are joined together in wickedness may be dissevered on any occasion and for the flimsiest reasons. It is folly for any wicked man to trust in a man as wicked as himself, for the very fact that wickedness renders security impossible, and turns all manner of association into a mere matter of temporary convenience, which may be varied or destroyed according to a thousand contingencies. All evil partnerships in business are doomed to failure. All irregular alliances in the household must come to confusion and disappointment, and may end fatally. The same law holds good in the state, and indeed in every department of life. There can be no security but in righteousness, in high wisdom, in unselfish enthusiasm; where these abound the security is as complete as it is possible for man to make it. Men cannot be joined wisely and permanently together unless they are first joined to the living God. Men can only be joined to the living God through the living Christ; he is the vine, men are the branches, and unless the branch abides in the vine it cannot bear fruit, but is doomed to be burned. True union, therefore, must be religious or spiritual before it can be human and social. Neglect of this great law has ended in inexpressible disappointment and mortification on the part of statesmen, reformers, and propagandists of every kind.

“He that withholdeth corn, the people shall curse him: but blessing shall be upon the head of him that selleth it” (ver. 26).

Truly this Bible is a people's book. It is not a book of the landlord as against the tenant, or of the proprietor as against the

peasant, or of the few as against the many. The Bible everywhere speaks for the people, giving them wise counsel, protecting their rights, and promising to them the largest blessings as a consequence of their obedience and loyalty to God. The text may be regarded as suggestive of a still higher thought than the one to which it is limited. If men have no right to withhold corn, what right can they have to withhold knowledge? If it is an evil thing to injure the body or expose it to danger, what is it to injure the soul or to expose it to the peril of eternal loss? If it is wrong to keep back bread from the body, what must it be to keep back bread from the soul? An important doctrine is involved in the whole text; there are some things which a man may possess, as it were, for himself, and enjoy without sharing his delight with others; a man may have many precious stones, and may conceal them, and permit no eye but his own to look upon them, or hand to touch them but his own: so be it; the pleasure is a narrow and selfish one, and no great social consequences attend its enjoyment. On the other hand, it would seem as if no man could have private property in corn or in bread, in the sense of saying to the people, I have it, but you shall not possess it; though you offer double its price I will not allow you to take it from me unless you multiply the price five-fold. A man may talk thus about diamonds and rubies, but he is not at liberty to talk thus about bread. A man may have great property in pictures, but it is questionable whether he should have any property in land in any sense that makes the people dependent upon his caprice as to whether it shall be cultivated and turned to the highest uses. It would seem as if light and air and land were universal possessions, and that all men were equally welcome to them. In the case of the land, it may be necessary that there should be temporary proprietorship, or some regulated relation to it so as to prevent robbery; but with such regulated relation proprietorship might well terminate. All this issue, however, can only be realised as the result of the largest spiritual education. It is difficult to persuade any great landed proprietor that he ought to surrender his rights for the good of the commonwealth. This can only come after years, it may be even centuries, of education of the most spiritual kind; or if it come earlier by statesmanship it

must also come justly, for even good rights may be created by faulty processes, and by mere lapse of time ownerships may be set up which have no original force. We shall never have a commonwealth founded upon righteousness and inspired by the spirit of patriotism until we are just to every interest which immediately stands in the way of its realisation.

"He that troubleth his own house shall inherit the wind : and the fool shall be servant to the wise of heart" (ver. 29).

Not only is the Bible a people's book, it is also the book of the household ; it would keep families right ; it would direct parents and children and servants, and send light and sweetness throughout the whole dwelling. When a man troubles his own house he has no profit in his labour, except the "wind," which is here used as a term representing the utter nothingness of all unwise trouble. A man may trouble his house by his extravagance or by his niggardliness ; by his arbitrariness and selfishness ; by his continual meddling and fretfulness ; by discussions and contentions which are wholly needless ; by thwarting the will of others simply to gratify personal vanity, or by setting up laws which are not based upon reason, and which cannot be approved by utility. The end of all such household government is the wind, or nothingness—an empty, impalpable, worthless reward. "The fool shall be servant to the wise of heart ;" that is to say, the wise of heart will know exactly what to do with the fool, shall yoke him to his chariot as a beast of burden, shall make use of him, shall curb him by discipline, and shall restrain his folly by the imposition of wisely-regulated labour. The wise of heart will be master at the last, for knowledge is power, genius is influence, sagacity is dominion. They who can see furthest will have a most ample dominion over which to reign. The proverb is, "He who reads rules." It is another form of the proverb that "The fool shall be servant to the wise of heart." We are to observe that it is not a wisdom of the mind only, but a wisdom of the heart ; that is to say, a moral wisdom, a benevolent wisdom, as well as great intellectual faculty and power. A man may be intellectually wise and morally tyrannical. It is only where the intellect and the heart are in well-balanced relation that proper service can be demanded from others, and so administered and controlled as to be of happy effect on all sides.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, we cannot understand the Cross of thy Son; yet we feel that we need it all. It is thine answer to our sin. We stand before it, and wonder much, and sometimes cannot speak; yet our heart goes out in desires of love and in expressions of trust, and when we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ we feel that we are saved. We know not how; we cannot follow thy mind in all these things: but there comes into the heart a sweet sense of forgiveness and adoption, and we hear in the upper places music and dancing and songs of praise, because thy son which was dead is alive again, which was lost is found. May we live in this faith. It nourishes the heart, it strengthens the life, touches the hand into new industry, it makes the whole life beneficent, beaming with kindness, fruitful in holy works; and we know by these testimonies that the work which is being accomplished within us is not a work of human hands or of human device, but is verily of God. We know that the tree is good because the fruit is good. A bad tree cannot bring forth good fruit: it is corrupt in itself, and all its fruitage is also corrupt. We bless thee that we love the Saviour, for in such love we love all other men better than ourselves; we are no longer exclusive in thought, but we go forth in holy solicitude, in redeeming desire, wishing to do good unto all men, and to make all the earth glad with the joy which thou hast created in our hearts. Thus we know that the work is good because the fruit is good; the one seals the other. This is no vain argument in words to which thou hast called us, but to noble self-sacrifice, to heroic defence of truth and righteousness, and to beneficence, so that we become fathers to the fatherless, eyes to the blind, hands to the helpless man. Surely, this is God's miracle—the very token and sign of God's presence in the soul. Accomplish all thy work in us; make us pure, true, simple, self-forgetting, loving, always devoted to thy service, always asking, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? Thus lead us on, through morning dawn and growing light, until the time of the midday glory in thine own heavens—the home of the pure and the blessed. Comfort our hearts wherein we need special solace. Speak graciously to those who are in some difficulty and perplexity in life, not knowing which is the right road, and not being quite certain as to whether the door is this or that. Direct all men whose eyes are lifted up towards thee. Our life is short at the best; it shortens as it grows: may we look onward to the future rather than backward to the past; and, seeing all heaven opening and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God, may a spirit descend upon us which shall by its fire and purity convince us that it is none other than the Spirit of God. Be with us evermore. This prayer we say in the name of Jesus, once crucified, now crowned. Amen.

Chapter xi. 24.

“There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty.”

SCATTERING AND WITHHOLDING.

TWO of the principal words in this text are of course “scattereth” and “withholdeth.” We ought to be on our guard against mistaken definitions and incomplete meanings of such words. We ought also to be on our guard against short-sightedness and ill-managed perspective in the consideration of doctrines and the planning of life. Half a meaning may amount to a falsehood. A wrong angle of vision may deceive as to distance, magnitude, and proportion.

For example—one would say that to scatter anything is to part with it without advantage, to lose it; and that to withhold, to keep back, is undoubtedly to save and to retain. The text teaches us that this may be quite a mistake on our part. It must further be understood that all scattering is not advised, nor is all withholding condemned. The word scatter and the word withhold must therefore be regarded with modifications. There is reckless scattering and there is wise withholding. It will be seen, therefore, that the verse is not to be taken in its literalness; it is to be examined in its spirit. We must get into the method of the counsel, and understand the genius and scope of the doctrine. Happily we have no need to go farther in search of illustration of the truth of the text; we find it on every farm, in every business, in every school. The farmer will tell us that if the land be starved the crop will be starved as well. The merchant will tell us that if he be not often liberal in his outlay—liberal almost to the point of apparent recklessness—he will be short in his income. Some crafty persons will even give subscriptions to societies which they would gladly sink to the bottom of the sea, because these subscriptions come back to them in the way of patronage. Their donations are investments. Their charities are speculations. They turn benevolence itself into merchandise; they yoke generosity to the chariot of Mammon. Still they are preachers, and preachers of wisdom. If they

abuse the principle, they exemplify it by thinking that scattering may mean getting. Their charities, their gifts, their plaudits, and their liberalities are often so much manure with which they hope to enrich the harvest of their own fortunes. All these considerations show us the importance of understanding what is meant by scattering, and what is meant by withholding. Let us seek with all eagerness of Christian hope to know the meaning of both parts of the text, that we may order the scheme of our life by its profound and most excellent wisdom.

The text calls us to benevolent activity founded on religious faith. Not to activity only, but to benevolent activity; not to a benevolent activity only, but to a benevolent activity founded on a religious basis—and not a religious basis as the expression of a selfish sentimentality, but the only true and abiding religious basis, that which we find in the Cross and in the life of Jesus Christ. The doctrine enlarges and glorifies life by calling into play elements and considerations which lie beyond the present and the visible. The very exercise of scattering carries blessing with it,—brings with it a peculiar and special benefit. Observe the very exercise of scattering, without pointing in a religious or Christian direction,—the very act of scattering breaks up the mastery of selfishness, it enlarges the circle of kindly interests, it shows that there is something in the world beyond our own personal concerns. It were better, therefore, better for man, better as a discipline, better for his heart, better for every quality that is worth having, that a man should go to the river so many times a year and throw his money into it, than that he should never, never give anything away! Is that a hard saying? It is perfectly true, that rather than never part with anything except in the way of mere bargain-making it were better to go to the river and to throw some part of our property into it. What, then, of the benefit which accrues upon wise giving, upon philanthropic service, upon activities which bear the dear name and are inspired by the blessed spirit of Jesus Christ? Take a case. A man gives away a sovereign in Christ's name and for Christ's sake. Look at the elements which constitute that act and give it value. The man made the sovereign honestly; it is his, in point of fair service, by what is called

right. If he keeps that sovereign he will break no law in commerce; if he will it away to his family he will violate no law in social equity; if he spend it upon himself society will not condemn him. Yet the man deliberately gives that money away to a poor child, to a friendless stranger, to a Christian society. See what lies behind the deed. The man says, in effect if not in words, "The money may be mine, but I myself am not my own. How then can anything be mine, except temporarily, and under laws of stewardship and responsibility? I have no property in myself; I am bought with a price; I am God's agent. So far as I have given society an equivalent for this sovereign it is mine; but the strength, the skill, the knowledge by which I gained it are the gifts of God. The image is Cæsar's, but the gold is God's. I will hold what I have as Christ's; holding it so I instantly yield it at his call, saying, Thine—O wounded, blessed Christ—thine is the right!" So this giving away of the sovereign is not an off-hand deed; it is not done flippantly; it is not done to save appearances; it is not done from external social pressure; it becomes a great religious act, a solemn sacrifice, a holy thank-offering. So to give, so to scatter, is to increase. In many cases the man gets back two sovereigns for one, or fifty for one; but if he did not get a penny back he always increases in heart-volume, in joy, in love, in most mysterious and hallowed peace; the heavens become brighter; his cup of comfort is sweetened; he walks on a greener earth; he looks up to God through a bluer sky. Beneficence is its own compensation. Charity empties the heart of one gift that it may make room for a larger. He who lives towards God, whose life is an ascending line, will meet God coming to him with blessings unimagined and unceasing. "Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over." "The liberal soul shall be made fat; and he that watereth shall be watered also himself."

Some of you may think that it is a dangerous doctrine to preach that if a man give away one sovereign he may get two, and perhaps he may get fifty back. Understand, however, that if any man shall give God anything in the way of having it back again that man will be disappointed, humiliated, and justly so.

It is not an investment; it is not an appeal to some greedy, crafty one who says, "Well, if that be the way, I shall give away a sovereign just to try if I can get two back for it." Will you? Try it! and you will never see your sovereign again. Then you will not try it? Do not! We cannot have the footsteps of such evil men upon the floor of God's sanctuary. It is when we give alms free from all self-consciousness in the deed, when there is no calculation about it, when under the inspiration of love we touch the very holiness of God—it is then that the grain of corn cast into the earth dies, germinates, fructifies, and returns a hundredfold. I bear witness, simply and solemnly, without affectation and with the emphasis of thankfulness, that I never yet, in any happy moment of sympathy with the dear Christ of God, did a generous deed without God hastening, as it were, to repay the deed, to make me a wiser, stronger, tenderer man. "Whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward." No man works for God for nothing. His water is turned into wine, and that wine flows in unceasing blessed streams of divine love and comfort.

Two men started business with this vow: "We shall give to God one-tenth of all our profits." The first year the profits were considerable; the tithe was consequently considerable. The next year there was increase in the profits, and of course increase in the tithe; in a few years the profits became very, very large indeed, so that the partners said to one another, "Is not a tenth of this rather too much to give away? suppose we say now we will give a twentieth?" And they gave a twentieth,—and the next year the profits had fallen down; the year after that they fell down again, and the men said to one another, as Christians should say in such a case: "Have not we broken our vow? Have we not robbed God?" And in no spirit of selfish calculation, but with humility of soul, self-reproach, and bitter contrition, they went back to God and told him how the matter stood, prayed his forgiveness, renewed their vow, and God opened the windows of heaven and came back to them, and all the old prosperity. I do not wish to make too much of this

story, but I know it as a fact. There is no occasion to fear superstition in making such vows. If they be made in the spirit of selfishness, they will end in nothing; if in the spirit of little children, no man can tell the blessing.

The other side of the text is as emphatic and as often illustrated in practical life as the first: "There is that withholdeth more than is meet, and it tendeth to poverty." Selfishness is suicidal; selfishness lives in gloom; selfishness injects poison into every stream of life; selfishness actually makes the world less and less every day, degrades man, dishonours life; it is blasphemy against the infinite goodness and mercy of God! Selfishness is most intensely selfish when it assumes the name of prudence. When a man says he must be just before he is generous, that man cannot be just, that man is a thief in his heart. Selfishness is often most base when it calculates aloud at the dinner-table and the tea-table arithmetically, and shows the world the whole process of its dry arithmetic. Souls cannot be trained on arithmetic. When selfishness chatters proverbs, which are but half truths; when in the interests of so-called honesty it robs God with both hands,—then it has reached a depth beyond which there is no depth. Let it be known that upon such God has branded the stamp of failure. God is against thee O selfish heart! There may be great accumulation, may there not? Yes—yet not one moment's enjoyment of it all! There may be good standing at the bankers, may there not? Yes, and no foothold in any human heart. The property may outweigh the proprietor. As the stuff increases the man diminishes. As the deposit enriches the depositor impoverishes. "I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree. Yet he passed away, and, lo, he was not: yea, I sought him, but he could not be found." When God blows upon a man, who can find him? The whole universe is a protest against the selfish man. The light-streaming sun, the former and the latter rain, the odorous flower, the gift-bearing seasons, and yonder dear Father giving himself away in every pulsation of his being,—these are against thee, O selfish heart! and when thou totterest towards the gate of dismissal to find thine own place, thou shalt depart without regret as thou hast lived without

love. Such is the picture. Yonder he is at the further end of life. Room for the leper! It is singular that men by grasping lose; that by scraping they get nothing; that by having great bunches of keys to lock up seven-fold doors they cannot find what they have locked away,—there must be some way inside from the back; some way spirits get into it; at all events the thing goes. God has many ways of turning the selfish man's success to failure and disappointment. The darkness, the mildew, the locust, the frost, the lightning, the winds, are his servants. Thou shalt carry much seed into the field, and shalt gather but little in, for the locusts shall consume it. "Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes." "Ten women shall bake your bread in one oven, and they shall deliver you your bread again by weight: and ye shall eat, and not be satisfied." How God mocks the bad man! How he can turn the wicked man's very triumph into failure, and how out of selfish ambition he can bring the scorpion whose sting is death!

We must be careful to observe that though the text is found in the Old Testament the principle is distinctly held by Jesus Christ. It is not a temporary law, it is a moral principle; it is universal and unchangeable in its force and application. "Whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it." "He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal." "Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive." "Be not deceived; God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." What do you think of that in the light of common-sense? To non-Christian men it must sound very foolish. A man that gains his life loses it. A man who rises early and strives hard all day to maintain himself is actually diminishing the very quality of his manhood, the very volume of his being.

influence, smiles for influence, turns round and round for influence, and after awhile people are laughing at him, and saying, "What an extraordinarily foolish man that is!" He has all the influence he deserves, and that is no influence at all. All great life, divine life, life like God's, is not to be calculated about, and argued out, and worked out in that ridiculous fashion. Self-forgetfulness coming out of self-crucifixion, and then you will have blessings until there is not room to contain them. By all means get out of yourself, if you would really do yourself the greatest possible service. Scatter liberally with the right motive if you would gather in the harvest, before which you may say truly—not with atheistic insanity, but with Christian reverence—"Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years."

Some of you have your scheme of life yet to begin. Do not be narrow; do not be little; do not be what is termed prudent, in the poor shallow sense of that word. Be true, be noble, be self-oblivious. Have you natural amiability and philanthropic love of others? Encourage that. Do not live inwards; live from your hearts outward. And who knows but that Jesus Christ may meet you and show you the higher way, the only true and living way? All schemes which are mere schemes, mere programmes and methods of our own, are self-defeating if they are not conceived and executed in the spirit of self-crucifixion. Do not be a mere plan. Be a great soul, live a holy life, and may the great Father gather you to his heart and bless you evermore!

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, all souls are thine: may all souls be won to thee, for all we like sheep have gone astray; now may we return unto the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls. Without thee our souls have no light, no hope, no rest; with thee our souls seize the inheritance of immortality, and are already clothed with heavenly victory. Now that we know thee through Jesus Christ thy Son, our blessed and only Saviour, we are in heaven: our citizenship is there; all the subjects which excite our best thinking are there; all the ambitions that stir our noblest impulses descend from heaven. We thank thee that we have been won to Christ, drawn to him, persuaded by him to accept the great priesthood which he represents. Once we had no wisdom; we were not only in dark night, but no star gleamed upon us from the frowning clouds: now we are at least in the dawn, now we have hope of advancing light, now we think that noonday may be accorded to us; and as these thoughts burn in our hearts we are filled with thankfulness, we are lifted out of the limitations of time and sense, and for one brief moment we breathe the air of heaven. May our souls be faithful to thee; may they know the truth, and obey it; may they love wisdom, and increase in it; may they follow after understanding, and secure the infinite prize. For all thy mercies we bless thee; for our assurance that in Christ Jesus we are saved souls we magnify thy grace: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes. Thou hast saved us, and not we ourselves. We are saved by faith, and not by works; because our confidence has been given to thee in Christ Jesus thy dear Son we are saved, and no man can pluck us out of the Father's hand. Give us to see more and more of the mystery of thy love—its infinite range, its ineffable tenderness, its mysteriousness of pathos; then shall we be melted, bowed down in contrition, lifted up in praises, and our whole life shall be one solemn triumphant song. Take away from us everything that is hateful in thy sight; give us the clean linen of the saints, white and pure; grant unto us the Spirit of God, that he may dwell with us—a purifying fire, an enlightening glory, a daily monitor and guide, and thus bring our life to the fullness of thine own purpose. Hear us for all for whom we ought to pray: where then, Lord of heaven, would our prayer cease? When we think of all the millions upon the face of the globe, of all who are old and young, rich and poor, in joy, in sorrow, in strength, in weakness, in peril on the sea, and in strange lands working out some mystery of providence, our imagination is overwhelmed. But thou seest all things, for thou dwellest in eternity. Have respect unto those for whom we ought specially to pray, and grant unto them such blessings as their lives particularly need. Help us by all

means to become men in Christ Jesus—wise, understanding, strong, patient men, knowing thy will and doing it, accepting thy purpose and suffering it; and at last may we be found to have glorified thee, whether in life, or in death, or in heroic service, or in heroic endurance. As for our sin, we will not name it, for whilst we pray at the Cross the miracle must be ever Christ's, and he has completed it, in that he has said to contrite and believing souls, *Your sins which are many are all forgiven thee. Amen*

Chapter xi. 30.

“He that winneth souls is wise.”

SOUL-WINNING.

THAT is not the correct reading of the sacred text. The second part of the verse must be read in the light of the first part—“The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life.” The words ought to be read, as it were, by transposition of terms: “The wise man winneth souls.” The usual interpretation, whilst not correct, does not exclude the interpretation that is accurate. It is supposed that a man is wise because he wins souls. That is not the teaching of the text. He wins souls because he is wise. Let us look at the matter in this way—there is a necessity in wisdom that it shall win souls. Wisdom always wins. The wise man may never speak to a soul, and yet he may win it. This is not the picture of an ardent evangelist running to and fro in the earth upon the vague and general mission of winning souls, which is the popular misunderstanding of the verse. The real interpretation is that if a man is wise he will by the very necessity of wisdom win souls, draw them to him, excite their attention, compel their confidence, constrain their honour. There is a silent conquest; there is a preaching that never speaks,—a most eloquent preaching which simply does the law, obeys the gospel, exemplifies the spirit of Christ, works that spirit out in all the details of life, so swiftly, patiently, sympathetically, completely, that souls are won, drawn, saying, Behold, what virtue is this? what pureness, what charity, what simplicity, what real goodness and beneficence! This must be the right doctrine because it comes out in the right line. So then the scope of the text is enlarged. He who would found upon these words an address to evangelists might deliver a very excellent speech, but he would miss the principal point of the text which he had chosen as his

starting basis. The text makes all men preachers, by the necessity of their being wise. The sun never speaks, yet he draws all men who can walk out of the house. He does not come with a strong hand, smiting the door, or ringing the bell, and saying with sonorous voice, You must and shall come out. The sun simply shines, silvers the windows, seeks out all accessible corners, floods the house with glory, so that even cripples begin to feel they must sit outside, at least ; they would gladly walk and leap and praise God in the open meadows, but being deprived of this high festival of thanksgiving they must seek a warm corner just outside, and thank God for the ministry of light. It is precisely so with the wise man. He does not know what good he is doing. He gives away his whole life, and yet is almost unconscious of doing so. Men look at him, estimate his influence, study his motives, observe with what wondrous precision the whole mechanism of his life works, and how all his thinking comes to solid and beneficent conclusions, and they say, So long as that man lives we cannot laugh at his faith : he is a living argument ; he never speaks a word upon subjects of a metaphysical or even a religious kind, and yet his whole life is religious. He is like the concealed Christ ; he is mistaken for the gardener, and yet the mistake is self-convicting, for they who affect to mistake him feel in their innermost souls that there is about him a royalty which common men cannot honestly claim. Thus we have only to be wise in order to win souls. The fool wins nobody ; the buffoon is no preacher either by tongue or by example ; but the solid character, the wise head, the discerning eye, the judgment that is well based, and that goes straight upward, heavenward, will in the long run secure attention, confidence, and honour.

The wise man does not drive souls—he wins them. Souls cannot be driven. We may attempt to drive them, and therein show our folly, but it is of the nature of the soul that it may be charmed, lured by angel-like beauty, by heavenly eloquence, by mighty persuasion of reason. The soul that is driven offers no true worship ; nay, as we have just said, the soul can defy the driver. The body can be driven to church, but not the soul. It does not follow because a man is sitting in church that he himself is there. A child forced to church is not at church. The house

of God, therefore, should be filled with fascination, attraction, charm, so that little children should long to go to it, and it should be to them a deprivation not to go there. The wise man would not drive men to any form of goodness, though he is bound to prohibit them under penalty from certain forms of social evil, because those forms involve the health, the prosperity, and the best advantage of others. Men cannot be driven to observe the Sabbath. He who does not open his place of business because the law forbids him to do so, or society would frown upon him for doing so, opens every shutter of his window and every desk in his counting-house, and he is as busy there and as guilty as if he were there palpably, visibly, and defiantly.

Souls are to be won. The only way of gaining souls is by winning them. He that is wise in everything but soul-winning is not wise. There are those who are winning the world and losing themselves. A man cannot healthily affect the souls of others until his own soul is in the right mood, and in the right relation to God. There is a sense in which every man must preach himself—that is to say, he can only preach according to the level of his own experience: he may say much beyond that, and aside from that, but in so saying it it is the tongue alone that is employed; the whole preacher is not there unless his experience be there, his entire heart, his deepest conviction,—then how he talks, and burns, and reasons, and allures, and persuades! What is it to have won everything but souls—everything but affection, confidence, trust, real honour of the heart? Such a man is dead whilst he lives: nobody cares for him; people will hear years hence without surprise that he is dead; his death created no blank, disturbed no equanimity, extorted no tears, arrested no festival. There is, therefore, a sense in which we should seek to prove our wisdom by the winning of souls. He who has won many souls is rich. The souls he has won will never forget him, never neglect him, will always put up the shielding hand, and offer the needful sympathy and help. Win the souls of your children; win the souls of all around you: give them to feel that you are a divinely-created centre, a high influence, a vitalising energy, a tree of life, and that your fruit is meant for the satisfaction of the world's hunger. The tree does not publish an

announcement on paper or in ink that its fruit may be plucked ; the tree simply grows the fruit, and when it has ripened, by its very ruddiness it says, I am ready ; put out your hands, and satisfy yourselves with this food. It is the same with the wise character. All its experience is for the use of society ; all its records are open documents, to be perused by those who would know the way of understanding and the secret of wisdom and the reality of noble life. Every true man is thus a living gospel.

Christianity is a direct appeal to the soul,—to that inner spirit or organ or faculty—for we need not stop to determine names—which gives man manhood, spiritual accent, divine figure. Wherein Christianity is a religion of the body it is so secondarily ; rather—for the terms admit of amendment—Christianity looks upon the whole man, and treats him in comparative degrees, never helping the body without its intention being to go further, and in helping the soul always including the body. But it is right to define the function of Christianity as a religion that appeals to the soul, wants to get at the mind, to find its way into the heart, to sit down upon the throne of love. Christianity does not come asking us to believe certain statements only ; when Christianity offers statements for belief, it is that those statements being believed should be transformed into life, character, beneficence. You would not say that a man is honest in all his actions because he believes the pence-table. It is precisely what people are saying about the religion of Jesus Christ—that a man is a Christian because he believes Christian dogmas, doctrines, or statements. You would not say that because a man believes the railway time-table therefore he often takes a journey. Yet this is precisely what men say regarding the truths of Christianity. They would describe a man as a thorough Christian because he believes a certain number of definite statements. He may intellectually believe every statement in the long enumeration, and yet know nothing about Christianity, as a man might believe the time-table and never take a journey. Christianity, therefore, wins the soul's homage—not the assent of dry intellect, not the fascination of excited fancy, not the entrancement of a bewildered imagination, but the sacrifice of a life. It wants every man to say, Jesus Christ, Son of God, I

am thine; take me, use me, keep me in thine hand, hide me in thine heart, and let me have no life but thine. Failing that, the rest is decoration, sentiment, utterance without eloquence, words without wisdom. So the position of the Church is defined. The Church does not claim to speak upon all subjects. Its supremacy is in one direction. A preacher might do very much good by discoursing upon the structure of the universe, by treating with information that is up to date questions which are troubling men's minds in all lines of thought; but the preacher's business is with souls, to get out of souls wrong thinking, prejudices, sophisms, follies, madneses, of every name and mould and tone. Christ's business was to heal the mind, to work restoration in the soul, to glorify man by a resurrection from death in trespasses and in sins. Whatever is done of another kind must be done with distinct reference to this supreme purpose; then the initial work becomes sacred, of high value, almost indispensable in a complicated social system, but the end of all must be that the soul shall be won, have rest and peace, be a child of music, an angel of light, an ally of God.

Christianity thus becomes a persuasive appeal. "We beseech men," said Paul. Who beseeches men to take gold? Who beseeches men to double all their earthly possessions? Who beseeches men to seize an immediate advantage, and to insist upon its retention, when that advantage is of a physical and ponderable kind, which can be weighed and estimated and valued in plain figures? Yet, mystery of mysteries, every man has to be reasoned with when it comes to a question of the soul's relation to God. Why? Because of the vastness of the subject. We are not entitled always to say it is because of personal aversion to God, but because the subject itself is boundless as the firmament,—yea, where the firmament ends this subject begins, making all things little by the sublimity of its vastness: whereas, other advantages are there, just at hand, immediately realisable; the appetites are pressing for satisfaction, and there is a fountain where they may drink and be filled; and the soul thirsts with a desire which drinks up all the fountains and rivers, and burns with unquenchable ardour, until it is led to the living God, and in eternity finds the reply to the necessities of time. Christianity

occupies the position of a mendicant, an appellant, a suppliant—one who goes up and down the world, saying, Believe me, receive me, give me heart room, and I will give you pardon and rest and hope. But the metaphysics are so profound, the advantages so spiritual, the competition is so tremendous, the world is so large because it is so near, the devil so mighty because so persistent, that sometimes the soul falters, hesitates, balances itself, withdraws, returns, and spends a life of peril, now almost in hell, now almost in heaven. There is no driving in Christianity. Therefore there should be no attempt to drive any Christian to church or to preaching; everything should be winsome, persuasive, attractive, alluring. This is the very genius of the gospel, because it is the very spirit of Christ.

This attempt to win souls, on the part of Christianity, is a philosophical attempt. Christianity is adapted to human constitution, mental and moral. He who invented Christianity, whoever he was, had laid a line upon the human mind, and had plumbed the depths of the human heart, and had noted all the outgoing and issue of human imagination. So much is this the case, and so truly and so really, as to resent the idea that Christianity had any builder or maker but God. Only he who made the human heart knows how to satisfy the human heart. That nothing can satisfy the human heart but the living God, in some form, is a proof that man was made in the image and likeness of God. Do not scorn the idolatry of heathen minds; do not pour contempt upon the superstitions of those who have never heard of the Son of God: rather ought they all to be accepted as points to begin at, as so many assumptions; yea, they may be regarded as so many solid bases on which to proceed, and sometimes the foundation has to be taken out after the building is up. Herein is a mystery, or would be but for what we know of practical life. We have seen one foundation taken away, and another put in its place. In the education of minds that have no Christian advantages you must begin where they can begin, and after long processes return to initial points, and work the miracles of Christ. The education of the world is the largest of all questions, and every element may be needed, and judgment should be suspended until the last element has been introduced

and the top-stone has been put on. By this standard we would have our Christianity judged.

Christianity is philosophical in that it is also progressive. The education of the Christian never stops. When a man says his Christian education is finished you may be perfectly sure it has never begun. Said Paul, "I count not myself to have apprehended." The horizon is always a million miles further on. When I reached the mountain I thought I should lay my hand upon the limit of the sky, and behold the mountain-top only helped me to see how much larger the sky was than I had ever imagined. So when we advance from one Christian stage to another it is to see that the horizon yet lies beyond. This should humble the soul in the very act of inspiring it. This, too, should make men modest in all acts of judgment; for we are not all upon a level, nor have we all attained the same points. There is no monotony in our Christian attitude in relation to God. The strong are far beyond us; we are little and faint, yet we are pursuing, and the voices of the great strong climbers come down the hill, saying, Struggle on; be not weary in well-doing; it is very difficult where you are now, but take hold of that projection, look at yonder point, halt a little to get your breath again, and then follow on; up here it burns with ineffable beauty, and every spot of land is a flower; we cannot see the mountain because of the Paradise. A soul is won when it repents. A soul is won when it says, "Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief." A soul is won when it says, "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee."

Chapter xii. 1-11.

THE DISCIPLINE OF KNOWLEDGE, ETC.

“Whoso loveth instruction loveth knowledge : but he that hateth reproof is brutish ” (ver. 1).

THE literal translation is, “He that loveth knowledge loveth discipline;” he is aware that nothing can be done in life except under disciplinary regulation; he accepts the bit and the bridle, because they are necessary to his proper control: the wiser a man becomes the less conceited he is of his own information; the larger a man’s knowledge the larger will be his wisdom, unless indeed he has quenched the aspirations of his own heart, and thus has proved that his love of knowledge is only a love of words. He that hateth reproof, or discipline, is brutish. The ox never takes kindly to the yoke in the first instance. The bullock unaccustomed to the yoke chafes and plunges, and in every way opposes efforts to curb and utilise him. It is no proof of independence or superiority that a man should reject hours, and methods, and stipulations, and contracts, under the pretence that they limit his liberty; all this is brutishness, and not civilisation. Wisdom is always prepared to hear any well-meant correction of its mistakes, and is always prepared to suffer for others if by so doing others can be really benefited.

“A good man obtaineth favour of the Lord : but a man of wicked devices will he condemn ” (ver. 2).

By a “good” man we are to understand a benevolent man; that is, a man who always wills happiness to others, and carries forward his benevolence into the active form of beneficence. Jesus Christ himself “went about doing good;” the Apostle Paul says that “for a good man some would even dare to die.” The good man is not an intellectual fop, or a moral phenomenon,

but is well disciplined, thoroughly chastened, adjusted in all his faculties, and sometimes concealing exceptional excellences under a general average of fine nature; that is to say, instead of living in his eccentricities, and making a reputation out of his occasional excellences, he brings down these mountains and irregularities, and smooths them, so as to consolidate a general average of true worth. Whoever does good is an ally of God; he is in immediate co-operation with heaven: even though he may not have a technical relation to Christian bodies, yet his goodness should be recognised as part and parcel of the very issue which such churches are established to realise. A man of wicked devices has no favour from above, and what favour he has from below is, as we have often said, but temporary: he is always suspected; detectives are continually upon his track; society is saying that such a man will presently reveal himself, and when he is revealed the people who nominally trusted him will be the first to deride his claims and bring into contempt all that he has done. The wicked man must not imagine that anybody will have favour to show him at the last; indeed, he will feel that the less favour is shown to him the better it is for himself, because he well knows that his hypocrisy has been fully understood, and that he is realising what is richly due to a life of sham and pretence and selfish vanity.

“A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband; but she that maketh ashamed is as rottenness in his bones” (ver. 4).

The moral element is not excluded from this term “virtuous,” but it is latent and assumed rather than active and pronounced. It must be understood that the moral element is indeed essential; yet that does not impair the true etymology of the term. By “virtuous” we are to understand a woman of power,—so to say, a virile woman; a woman of great capacity and faculty, of penetrating sagacity, and of ability to manage household and other affairs. She is a high-minded woman, giving the very best help to her husband in all the difficulties of life, crowning him with grace and with light; such a woman as he can trust in perplexity and exigency of every kind. She will not be less an intellectual woman, or a woman of strong mind, because she is morally pure, spiritually sympathetic, and religiously tender.

She will not be less a philosopher because she is a true child of God. The Bible is not only a people's book, and a family book, but in very deed it may be called a woman's book: it always speaks in the interests of women; it unhesitatingly pronounces the justice of their claims, and fearlessly asserts their right to social status.* The Bible is the book of the mother and of the wife—of woman indeed in all her aspects and relations. If she is weak it is more than ever hers; if she is strong it commends her strength and shows her how it can be nourished and consolidated. The foolish woman brings distress upon her husband, perplexes her husband, mars his usefulness, loosens all his relations to society in general, and makes him blush where he ought to feel a sense of honour and glory in society. How just the Bible is! how true to all aspects and sides of life! It will yield nothing to wealth, nor will it abate its high moral tone in presence of poverty; it speaks the right, and declares the just, and calls for even balances and upright standards under all circumstances, and is therefore the book to be trusted and relied upon with entires confidence in all times of personal, social, and national danger.

“A man shall be commended according to his wisdom: but he that is of a perverse heart shall be despised” (ver. 8).

By his “wisdom” we are to understand his intelligence, his sagacity, his perception of things: in the long run every man's title to confidence is proved by events; a word may appear to be very wise and timely, but as circumstances unfold the wisdom and the timeliness of the word may be entirely disproved. We are to judge the prophecy not by the eloquence of its language, but by the completeness of its realisation. It is here the Bible proverbs take their stand, and have never been displaced by rivals. All history has shown the infinite value of Christianity, for wherever it has been received and reduced to practice it has made new creatures, new lives, new functions, new relations, and new destinies. Never once has it failed to do so. Even where it has nominally failed the failure has been exclusively nominal, and it has always been because the spirit of Christianity has not been understood, received, and exemplified. Not one word that

* See note, *post*, page 160.

Jesus Christ ever spoke has been disproved by after history. Christianity must claim this aspect of its own evidences, and insist upon it in the spirit of justice. When men are commended according to their wisdom none can begrudge their just fame. To commend a man according to his wealth is to give way to the meanest form of idolatry; or to commend him even on account of intellectual gifts is rather to pay an indirect tribute to one's own appreciation of genius; but to recognise a man's wisdom, in the highest moral sense of that term, as well as in its purest intellectual aspects, is to be just to the man. The time will come when monuments need not be built, and will not be built, to destroyers, warriors, men of great power of opposition; but marble will be wanted, and brass will be needed, to memorialise men who have been patriotic, independent of fear or favour, and religiously devoted to all the deepest interests of the people. The perverse or wicked heart shall be despised: it never had any great thought for the benefit of the community; it never escaped the baneful influence of its own eccentricity; it was always thinking how best to help itself, and the only heaven to which it can ever come is a heaven of intelligent and eternal contempt.

"A righteous man regardeth the life of his beast: but the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel" (ver. 10).

This verse might be rendered—A righteous man knows the feelings of beasts. He gives them credit for feelings; he does not look upon them as merely so much animated matter, but as standing in some relation to himself, and the more complete his ownership the more considerate ought to be his treatment even of the beasts he owns. Even when the wicked man supposes himself to be merciful there is cruelty in his tenderness. Men may become so debased as to lose all sense of moral distinction, and not to know when they are tender and when they are cruel; yea, rather, they may lose all sense of tenderness, and may sink into the utterest severity and cruelty of nature. A wicked man cannot be gentle. Men should remember this, and distrust all the gentleness which is supposed to attach to men who are without conscience. The tenderness of such men is an investment, is a political trick, is a bait by which to catch the unwary, is an element of speculation. Rowland Hill used to say

in his quaint way that he would not value any man's religion whose cat and dog were not the better for his piety. This is but a new translation of the text. This is the beauty of the Christian religion: it flows throughout the whole life, it ramifies in every department of the existence, and carries with it softness, purity, sympathy, kindness. The good man cannot be self-neglectful: his very goodness makes his self-discipline the more complete; and the more complete his self-discipline the larger will be his charity to those who are looking on, and who are not blessed with the same favourableness of circumstances. So then the Bible is not only a people's book, a household book, a woman's book, but it would also seem to be the book of the very beasts of the earth. "Doth God care for oxen?" "Not a sparrow falleth to the ground without your Father." The young lions roar, and seek their meat from God. The universe must be looked upon as a great household, belonging to the Almighty, regulated by his power and his wisdom, and intended to exemplify the beneficence of his providence. In our Father's house are many mansions. All life must be most precious to him who created it. Life is a mystery which remains unsolved, bringing with it claims which none can safely or religiously set aside.

"He that tilleth his land shall be satisfied with bread: but he that followeth vain persons is void of understanding" (ver. 11).

The wise man here lays down what ought to be the law of cause and effect, and what indeed is that law in the great majority of instances. Only he that tills his land should be satisfied with bread; he for whom the land is tilled without any exercise of forethought or prudence on his own part should have but little to eat. By tilling the land one branch of industry alone is not to be understood; the wise man is praising thriftiness, energy, care, and regard to opportunity for making solid and healthy progress. It is one man's business to till his brains; another to till the soil; another to engage in adventure; and so on, according to the endless variety of human gift. Whoever gives an equivalent for his bread will enjoy that bread all the more: he can have but poor satisfaction in his food who never worked for it, and who is indolently availing himself of the activity and enterprise of other men. The man who follows shallow persons proves his

own mental quality. The wise man cannot follow vain persons, simply because he is wise, and their company would be an offence to him; he could not understand their language; he could not enter into their pursuits; he could not reciprocate their sympathies: he lives in another and upper universe. We may know what a man is by the company he keeps. The sober man cannot enjoy the society of drunkards. An honest man can find no home among thieves. You may not know the man himself, but if you know his company you know him also; find one in the company of vain, shallow, worldly persons, and, without even knowing so much as his name, you may describe him as "void of understanding."

NOTE.

"The most salient point of contrast in the usages of ancient as compared with modern Oriental society was the large amount of liberty enjoyed by women. Instead of being immured in a harem, or appearing in public with the face covered, the wives and maidens of ancient times mingled freely and openly with the other sex in the duties and amenities of ordinary life. Rebekah travelled on a camel with her face unveiled, until she came into the presence of her affianced (Gen. xxiv. 64, 65). Jacob saluted Rachel with a kiss in the presence of the shepherds (Gen. xxix. 11). Each of these maidens was engaged in active employment, the former in fetching water from the well, the latter in tending her flock. Sarah wore no veil in Egypt, and yet this formed no ground for supposing her to be married (Gen. xii. 14-19). An outrage on a maiden in the open field was visited with the severest punishment (Deut. xxii. 25-27), proving that it was not deemed improper for her to go about unprotected. Further than this, women played no inconsiderable part in public celebrations: Miriam headed a band of women who commemorated with song and dance the overthrow of the Egyptians (Exod. xv. 20, 21); Jephthah's daughter gave her father a triumphal reception (Judg. xi. 34); the maidens of Shiloh danced publicly in the vineyards at the yearly feast (Judg. xxi. 21); and the women feted Saul and David, on their return from the defeat of the Philistines, with singing and dancing (1 Sam. xviii. 6, 7). The odes of Deborah (Judg. v.) and of Hannah (1 Sam. ii. 1, etc.) exhibit a degree of intellectual cultivation which is in itself a proof of the position of the sex in that period. Women also occasionally held public offices, particularly that of prophetess or inspired teacher, as instanced in Miriam (Exod. xv. 20), Huldah (2 Kings xxii. 14), Noadiah (Neh. vi. 14), Anna (Luke ii. 36), and above all Deborah, who applied her prophetic gift to the administration of public affairs, and was so entitled to be styled a "judge" (Judg. iv. 4). The active part taken by Jezebel in the government of Israel (1 Kings xviii. 13; xxi. 25), and the usurpation of the throne of Judah by Athaliah (2 Kings xi. 3), further attest the latitude allowed to women in public life. The management of household affairs devolved mainly on the women. The value of a virtuous and active housewife forms a frequent topic in the Book of Proverbs (xi. 16; xii. 4; xiv. 1 xxxi. 10, etc.)."—SMITH'S *Dictionary of the Bible*.

Chapter xii. 12-24.

THE ROOT OF THE RIGHTEOUS, ETC.

“The wicked desireth the net of evil men : but the root of the righteous yieldeth *fruit*” (ver. 12).

THE wicked man would prosper according to the law of evil. He would take evil men in his net, and make a profit of them if he could ; or he would borrow the net of an evil man with which to ensnare the good : he lives by what he calls his wits ; being devoid of morality he is exempt from discipline, and so he lives the wild, loose life that is uncontrolled and all but irresponsible. The root of the righteous yieldeth fruit : the fruit is in the man himself ; the stem may be feeble, the branches may be exposed to rough and cruel weather, but in the root there are juices that must by-and-by reveal themselves in abundant fruitfulness. The wicked man's possessions are all external ; they can be held in the hand ; they can be carried to the market-place and disposed of for an equivalent in gold and silver : the treasures of the righteous are in the root ; they are hidden, deeply down, where they drink the juices of the earth, and receive the light of the sun, that by the chemistry of nature they may express themselves in due time in leaf and blossom, in bud and flower and fruit. It is fruit which is yielded by the root of the righteous ; though the word fruit is in italics in this text, yet it would seem to be the right word, and the only right word. Where only leaves were yielded Jesus Christ pronounced his condemnation ; Jesus Christ continually said that his Father was glorified by the bringing forth of much fruit by the branches that were in the vine ; he taught that the purpose of pruning was to multiply the fruit : there can be, therefore, no difficulty in adopting the word “fruit” in this instance as the right word. We are not to bring forth leaves only, or blossoms only, nor are we to afford opportunity

for birds to build their nests only; all these things may be included, but the supreme object is the bearing of fruit which the husbandman can approve, and which can be turned to high utility by the hungering world.

“There is that speaketh like the piercings of a sword: but the tongue of the wise is health” (ver. 18).

Some men pride themselves on the pungency of their speech. They delight in sharp answers, keen retorts, quick repartees, and boast themselves when they cut their opponents in two. There are others who are gifted in the expression of complaint, reproach, and criticism against the whole providence of life. They can say sharp and bitter things about God and man, and they can be satisfied because of the edge of their own epigram, no matter against whom or against what that edge is directed. The tongue of the wise man is slower, but healthier; the wise man weighs his words; he is anxious to be associated only with judgments which can be confirmed by experience and illustrated by wisdom. The wise man speaks healthily—that is to say, he speaks out of the abundance of his own health, and he speaks in a way that will double and strengthen the health of others. To come near him is to ascend a mountain and breathe the freshest air of heaven, or to go down by the sea-shore and receive messages across the great deeps, full of vigour, and truth, and strengthening influence. Wise men keep society healthy. But for their presence it would stagnate, and go from one degree of corruption to another until it became wholly pestilential. There are two speakers in the text, and to the end of time there will probably be two speakers in the world—the critical speaker and the judicial speaker; the man all sharpness and the man all thankfulness. The business of Christian discipline is to tame the tongue, to chasten it, to teach it the speech of wisdom, and to instruct it as to the right time of utterance and the right time of silence.

“The lip of truth shall be established for ever: but a lying tongue is but for a moment” (ver. 19).

Here, as usual, we have the two sides—truth and falsehood. We know as a matter of fact that truth will be established for

ever : it may not be established at first ; cruel cross-examination may put it to many shifts, because of a deceitful memory ; such an examination may even develop apparent inconsistencies, showing the man of ten years ago with the man of to-day, and triumphing in the discrepancy shown by the contrast. All this is possible, yet "truth will stand when all things fail." Events will occur, it may be long years after, to bring forth the judgment of the righteous as noonday, and to glorify the truth-speaker with the crown which belongs to verity and uprightness. The lying tongue succeeds indeed, but its success is momentary ; it flashes and expires ; it has a clear, straightforward story to tell, but events come and cross-examine that story, and set it in proper distance and perspective ; alliances to which the story owed its consistency are broken up, and evil men begin to divulge secrets regarding one another ; piece by piece the story falls asunder, and at the end it is found that it was the fabrication of a malignant genius. Be sure you are true yourselves and have a true purpose in view, and all discrepancies, inconsistencies, and difficulties will ultimately be smoothed down, and men will be brought to acknowledge the integrity of your heart. Be as skilful as you please in the way of telling lies, arrange everything with consummate cunning, hire all your allies, bribe your spies, and make your way clear by abundance of gold, and yet in the long run your very confederates will turn against you, and they to whom you have given most money will be glad to expose your cupidity and falsehood.

"There shall no evil happen to the just : but the wicked shall be filled with mischief" (ver. 21).

The next verse may be taken in connection with this—namely, "Lying lips are abomination to the Lord ; but they that deal truly are his delight." All history pledges its own spirit in favour of the just and the true and the good. Evil may happen to the just, but the evil shall be but for a moment ; it shall be an evil touching circumstances but not realities ; affecting the atmosphere, but having no effect on the rock upon which the life is established. When evil does happen to the just it shall be turned to his advantage, sooner or later ; if he has been

wounded in the fray, it is that he needs rest and will be the stronger for withdrawal from the throng and conflict of life ; if he suffer loss of property, it is that he may learn the value of things, and deport himself as a wise and thrifty householder, gathering only such things as are of permanent value, and sitting loosely in reference to everything that is of temporary advantage. The wicked shall have satisfaction, but it shall be mischief ; he shall have mischief upon mischief, until he himself groans because of his very success in evil-doing. He will turn the day into night because of evil works, and the night into day, because he will repeat himself in his dreams, and the shadow of the evil one shall overpower him, darkening the very noon-tide, and the voice of evil spirits shall haunt his ear, and trouble him with whispering and suggestion full of the deepest malignity. There are evil spirits in the very pillow on which the wicked man rests his head. When he extinguishes light that he may encourage sleep, the darkness is but the cover of numberless wicked ones come to torment the bad man in his repose, and to turn his solitude into a companionship full of sorrow.

“The hand of the diligent shall bear rule : but the slothful shall be under tribute” (ver. 24).

The whole world says on hearing this law, Truly this is right and good. It is right that a diligent man should be at the top of society, because where there is true industry there are always innumerable other virtues in association with it ; there is forethought, there is punctuality, there is a due regard to others, there is an acceptance of the law of cause and effect, there is vigilance in relation to times, seasons, and opportunities, and there is a desire to give an equivalent for all the advantages that are enjoyed. The slothful man shall always be the servant of the diligent man,—he shall be under tribute ; he will have to pay for his indolence ; he seems to be pursuing an easy course, but the ease is in seeming only, and not in reality. The slothful man will be looked down upon, trifled with, mocked, put to confusion, and when he knocks at the doors of others he will be told that he should have knocked at the door of providence, and not at the door of charity. This rule respecting slothfulness

applies to indolence in all directions ; to the boy at school, to the mother in the household, to the father in the market-place, to the student in the college, to the agriculturist in the field. "Seest thou a man diligent in his business ? he shall stand before kings." We are urged by the Apostle Paul to be diligent in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord. The diligence that is religious is elevated, unselfish, beneficent ; it is not gathering for itself alone, but gathering that it may scatter, so that those who are unable to toil for themselves may be the children of legitimate charity and bounty. By the "slothful" we are not to understand the unhealthy, those upon whom a burden of infirmity has been laid, and who are simply unable, because of physical disability, to perform the duties of life ; another law should operate in regard to such—the law of Christian sympathy, charity, and holiest love. The slothful in this text are criminals—men who yield to self-indulgence ; men who allow the morning to come and grow into noonday and fall into night without bestirring themselves in any wise and profitable activity. All society says it is right that such should be laid under tribute, and should be made to feel the irksomeness and unprofitableness of neglect and unlawful sleep.

The chapter proceeds in the same tone to the end, indicating on the part of the writer the keenest observation of human nature, and the truest appreciation of human wants. How true it is that "heaviness in the heart of man maketh it stoop ;" burdens it like a weight that cannot be borne ; takes out of it all energy and litesomeness and hope, all spring and fire, and depresses it to the earth with cruelty of weight. How true it is that "A good word maketh the heart glad ;" the speaker is looked upon as an apostle from heaven ; he is hailed as a friend who is able to drive away the lowering clouds, and turn the desert into a garden : a place for the good word must always be found in life ; even the gladdest souls have times of depression ; and those who lead the world sometimes fall into the rear, and the song dies upon their lips. The church should be the place where the good word is always spoken,—a word that cheers men, enlivens, elevates, inspires, and ennobles them ; the great broad word that comes down from heaven, rich with everything that

the human soul can need in all the moments which make a mystery of its existence. How true it also is that "The righteous is more excellent than his neighbour;" has about him a peculiarity of quality; he is not only equal to his neighbour, as wise and generous and genial and kind, but there is a point at which he rises above his merely worldly neighbour; he can go further into the darkness of human life, speak more tenderly to its sorrow, and kindle the light of hope where other men flee away because of a darkness that may be felt. How true it is that "The slothful man roasteth not that which he took in hunting;" as he desired some one else to hunt it for him, so he will permit anybody to roast it for him: all he wants is to enjoy the result; and yet he is deprived of the enjoyment because he took no part in the process. To work for one's food is to enjoy it when the work is not burdensome; in the very act of going into the field we create an appetite for the enjoyment of what is found there; in this wonderful way has God linked together all the events and sequences of life. How grand is the final word of the chapter, "In the way of righteousness is life; and in the pathway thereof there is no death." Verily, this is the gospel before the time; there is no higher truth of a practical kind in Christianity itself than this. The righteous shall go away into life eternal. To the good man death is abolished. It is never goodness that dies, but always disobedience. Obedience brings life with it—growing life, growing health, growing joy. Happily, all these maxims can be put to the test; they are not mere intellectual ventures, audacious guesses, or wild propositions; they sum up in themselves the experience of the most comprehensive and varied life: they are not anonymous publications, left to be contradicted by any one who may care to call them lies; they have been proved, tested, verified, in innumerable and indisputable instances, by the writers. If any man would show that there is death in the way of righteousness, let him prove it by being righteous himself; then he will show that in the very act of endeavouring to disprove the proverb he magnifies and illuminates its holy truth.

Chapter xiii. 1-13.

THE HEEDLESS SCORNER, ETC.

"A wise son heareth his father's instruction: but a scorner heareth not rebuke" (ver. 1).

THIS verse has been rendered, "is his father's instruction;" the meaning being that a wise son embodies his father's instruction,—“Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men:” a wise man may point to his son and say, This is the sum-total of my educational efforts. Observe, however, that the most careful and loving endeavours may be thrown away, as good seed may be cast upon stony ground and profit the sower nothing. The proverb is careful to define the quality of the son whose education embodies the purpose of the father; he is to be “a wise son,”—that is to say, a son who can make the most of his opportunities, who really understands the process through which he is passing, and who can assimilate the intellectual food with which he is nourished. It is made clear that only such a son can profit by his father's instruction by what immediately follows—namely, that “a scorner heareth not rebuke,”—that is to say, a scorner is profited by nothing; being a satirist himself, he turns everything into satire; he mocks the speaker of good things, he parodies the highest poetry, he resents the most delicate and spiritual approach; wine turns to vinegar in his mouth, and all that is beautiful is blighted when he looks upon it. We should not be struck by the mere ability of satire; we should remember its moral disadvantages, for it debases and impoverishes whatever it touches that is meant for its good. We are not now speaking of the satire which may be used as an argumentative weapon, for the exposure of wickedness, and for the ridicule of mere pretension: we are speaking of the satire which takes the moral purpose out of every appeal, and turns

to derision all the efforts that are directed towards the soul's real education. When instruction has been lost upon a man, we should look to the man himself as the explanation of that loss. It is easy to look upon the pastor of a church, and blame him for the poor results which have accrued from his ministry; we may mock him, and looking at his people may say, Are these the fruits of your labour? whereas we ought to look at the people and say, Is this the use you have made of the noble opportunities which have been put within your reach? had ye been wise sons ye would have received instruction, and profited by it, and in a blessed incarnation would have represented it to the whole world. Wisdom gathers everything; scorning gathers nothing: it is for each man to say that he will walk in the one spirit or in the other, but let him distinctly know what the consequences of each spirit must be.

“There is that maketh himself rich, yet hath nothing: there is that maketh himself poor, yet hath great riches” (ver. 7).

Christ's own teaching is here anticipated. He that loseth his life for Christ's sake shall find it; he that seeketh his life for his own sake shall lose it. Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened except it die. We have to lose before we can gain; to sow before we can reap; to trust all the ministries of nature before we can fill our arms with sheaves. The voice of experience is heard in this testimony. There is nothing in mere reason to support it; on the contrary, there is much on the first appearance of things to discredit the assertion. Cause and effect would seem to be here wholly neglected. If a man be gathering all his days, will he not have an abundance at the last? If a man be scattering for a lifetime, is it possible that he can have a mountain left at the close? The answer to these inquiries would seem to be instantaneous because obvious. Yet spiritual experience goes in a directly contrary direction. He who gives himself away most secures himself, provided the motive of the oblation be good, and that the spirit in which it is offered be the spirit of Jesus Christ. There must be no investment of charity; there must be no speculation in alms. The very spirit of sacrifice is revealed in this noble text, especially in the words, “There is that maketh himself poor, yet hath great riches.” A philosopher

once said he had nothing except that which he had given away. Christian natures go out of themselves and live in the good of others; that is to say, when they see others prospering they rejoice, and draw comfort from advantages which do not immediately belong to themselves. A man who has made himself poor in order that he might educate his children, and bring them up in the ways of virtue and honour, is a rich man, provided his children are grateful, and return to him due compensation for his endeavours: that compensation need not be in money, but in pureness, in nobleness of purpose, in chivalry of spirit; when he sees how his money is, so to say, growing crops of golden wheat in their mind and character, he is delighted, and accounts himself a rich man. Whoever has suffered in order that others may be free is rich in the liberty which he has secured for them. Whoever has expended himself that the sick and the dying may be recovered is rich in the health which has been established through the instrumentality of his labour. The selfish man always comes to nothing; for a time he seems to succeed, but he has no satisfaction even in his treasure; his flowers are without fragrance; his sky is but a great glaring arch; it is not atmosphered and made beautiful through the action of a thousand ministries, subtle in their operation, but gracious and infinite in their results. If this proverb could be thoroughly understood, it would set up a new standard in every life by which to judge prosperity and failure; it would make the first last, and the last first; men who understood it, and applied it to daily practice, would know that there is a success which is failure, and there is a failure which is success, and that nothing is to be accounted of that does not go down to the very foundations of righteousness and rise to the very glory of God.

“The light of the righteous rejoiceth: but the lamp of the wicked shall be put out” (ver. 9).

By this we are to understand that the light of the righteous burns joyously, is a very image of gladness and rapture: the sun rejoiceth as a giant to run his course; he is, so to say, conscious of his power and of his speed; travelling does not weary him, shining does not exhaust him; at the end he is as mighty as at the beginning. It will be observed that in the one case the word

is "light" as applied to the righteous, and in the other the word is "lamp" as applied to the wicked. The path of the just is as a shining light, shining more and more unto the perfect day; the light of the righteous man is above, it is not of his own making, it never can be exhausted: the light in which the wicked man walks is a lamp of his own creation, he made it, he lighted it, he is above and greater than that light, and at any moment it may be extinguished; he walks in the fire and in the sparks which he himself has kindled; he is full of brilliant fancies, flashing and glaring eccentricities; he rejoices transiently in the rockets which he throws up into the air, but as they expire and fall back in dead ashes at his feet he sees how poor have been his resources, and how mean is the issue of a cleverness that is without moral basis and moral inspiration. God's blessing is always attached to the true light. God himself is Light. Jesus Christ was the Light of the world, and Christians are to be lights of their day and generation, reflecting the glory of their Master. The wicked indeed have a kind of light; that should always be amply acknowledged: but it is a light of their own creation, and a light that is doomed to extinction,—it shall be put out; a drop of rain shall fall upon it, and the little flicker shall expire, never to be rekindled.

"Whoso despiseth the word shall be destroyed: but he that feareth the commandment shall be rewarded" (ver. 13).

The more literal rendering would be, "He that despiseth the word shall bring ruin on himself." This is a great law of the Biblical revelation—namely, that destruction is not a merely arbitrary act on the part of God, a mere penalty, but that it involves the idea of suicide or self-ruin. The man is not merely punished from without, he is punished from within. There is no threatening in the statement that if a man put his hand into the fire he will be burned; it is not a threatening, it is a warning, a foretelling, a statement of simple fact. So we are told here that whoso despiseth the word—the innermost wisdom, the logos, the eternal truth—shall bring ruin upon himself, shall commit suicide. A view of this kind enables us to escape several practical mistakes into which they fall who do not understand the constitution of man and the purpose of divine law. As far

as possible we should exempt God from the thought that he is standing outside of us merely for the sake of rewarding the good and punishing the evil, and that he does the one by so many crowns and sceptres, and the other by so many rods and stripes. The law of reward and also the law of punishment are to be found within ourselves. There is a profound truth in the proverb that virtue is its own reward, and vice is its own punishment: we need not wait to go before the divine Majesty in any ceremonious formality; we no sooner eat the forbidden fruit than we die. How true it is, "in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die:" thou shalt consciously die; without a single word being spoken from the judgment-seat death shall take place, the whole heaven shall be clouded, the whole earth shall become a sepulchre, and man himself, though living physically, will know that he is in very deed twice dead. Experience on every hand proves this. We ourselves know it. No sooner does an evil word proceed from our lips than we feel that we have sustained moral loss; no sooner do we execute a forbidden deed than we fall down dead in the presence of God. It is a mistake to limit the word "death" to merely physical decay or extinction. It is a consciousness of the soul, always connected with the doing of evil and the conscious desert of punishment. He that sinneth against God wrongeth his own soul. See, on the other hand, how equal is the law, for "he that feareth the commandment shall be rewarded;" he who looks above for wisdom, and who will not move until God indicates time and place—he shall be rewarded, with peace, with a sense of security, with daily light for daily needs. If this were a Biblical doctrine only it might be put to the disadvantage of being denominated metaphysical, or even sentimental; but we find the same law operating in the family, in social life, in the whole sphere and action of the commonwealth.

Chapter xiii. 15-24.

THE WAY OF TRANSGRESSORS, ETC.

“ Good understanding giveth favour : but the way of transgressors is hard ” (ver. 15).

GOOD understanding gives favour with man, and it also gives favour with God ; it may stand for sympathy, or appreciation, or mutual knowledge ; or it may stand for a desire to do that which is right and good at all costs and under all circumstances ; a man who displays this high moral quality will be found to have made many friends without any attempt to make them. Character asserts itself, and brings its own results in due sequence. The cantankerous or contentious man is continually separating himself from his fellows. He is a firebrand, he continually brings an element of discord with him : he does not understand the large word, the gracious interpretation, the sympathetic feeling ; he takes up all hard things, and magnifies them, and makes them harder still ; he dwells upon their qualities and turns them into occasions of offence. A genial man, a man of good understanding, a man of fine sagacity, and solid judgment, and really responsive heart, lifts up the valleys, brings down the mountains, makes the crooked places straight and the rough places plain ; and wherever he goes men are conscious that he brings with him the spirit of peace. Are we not prepared to re-echo the words, “ The way of transgressors is hard ” ? It is rough, stony, difficult to travel, always uphill, or sinking suddenly down into bottomless pits ; it is put in contrast to the green pastures and the still waters by which the good man walks. Is this a merely Biblical doctrine, a doctrine of churches, of priests, of superstition ? Is it not the most plainly-written fact in conscious life ? Even where the transgressor seems to succeed, we cannot tell how much he has

to endure in his own conscience ; we know not how hard is the pillow of the man who has been plotting mischief all day, and who has lain down only that he may dream of further iniquity. There are other transgressors whose way is obviously hard ; they have destroyed all confidence in their probity, they have revealed an iniquitous spirit, they have shown how hollow is their whole nature, how absolutely devoid they are of conscience and honour and every element of good. When they go out of our presence we know that they go into a wilderness of darkness ; no man has a smile for them ; no heart has a place of trust in which they can rest ; the world turns against them, and leaves them to ever-increasing humiliation and ever-extending loss. The results of wickedness come upon a man in a thousand different ways. They are not summed up in one punishment, which may be endured once for all. The consciousness of wickedness follows a man all the days of the week and all the hours of the day, and comes up at the most unexpected times ; it afflicts him with constant nightmare ; every tap at the door may be the coming-in of the jailer ; every post may bring the letter of doom ; everything that occurs is charged with a possibility of mischief. The stars in their courses fight against the bad man ; he has no satisfaction in his feast, no holiday in his summer ; the flowers that he plants in his garden become poison trees, and the birds that ought to sing to him seem to bring messages suggestive of vengeance and penalty. Yet though all this is known perfectly, how few are they who turn away from transgression, hating it with a perfect hatred, and proving the reality of their hatred not by moaning over the consequences of sin, but in repenting of it because it is an essential evil, not only hurtful to man but offensive and wounding to God. How deeply founded in human nature seems to be the divine law when every breach of that law leads to punishment of the most distressing kind. We may know somewhat of the dignity of the law by the immediateness of the punishment which follows its violation. A little law could never have ended in such disastrous consequences to those who have trespassed. By the infinity of the consequences we may know somewhat of the dignity of the law which has been transgressed.

"He that walketh with wise men shall be wise : but a companion of fools shall be destroyed. Evil pursueth sinners : but to the righteous good shall be repayed" (vers. 20, 21).

The very desire to walk with the wise is itself a sign of wisdom. No bad man could ever wish to be in heaven, for heaven itself would be no paradise to him, because of the condition of his soul. No fool could desire the society of the wise, for he could not understand their language, nor could he identify himself with their purposes. The wise are men who are disposed to encourage approach rather than to resent it, if by such encouragement they can really develop wisdom in others. It might be thought that wise men would not allow any but the wise to walk with them, which is perfectly true ; but they distinguish between a desire to be wise and the attainment of wisdom itself ; in their eyes the desire for wisdom is itself wisdom, and is accounted a credential and guarantee enough of good faith. It is no sign of refinement to mock the vulgarity of others. It is no sign of wisdom to be dwelling ostentatiously and resentfully upon the ignorance of men who have had no opportunities to learn. It is the part of wisdom and of dignity to find out what is good in a man, to encourage and to foster it, if mayhap that which is little may become great, and that which is weak may be made strong. Fools can do nothing for their companions but bring them to moral ruin. Even their laughter is madness, and their mirth is but a variety of despair. Their laughter is all in their mouth, it is not in their soul, it is not the deep healthy rational laughter which indicates real spiritual gladness. The difficulty is to persuade young people of the difference between the wise and the foolish, because in many instances the foolish seem to have no little amount of enjoyment ; and youthful sagacity is not sufficiently strengthened and quickened to see that things are not to be judged within the limits of to-day or to-morrow, but are to be estimated according to their final and lasting consequences. Fools never begin knowledge, so they make no progress in its upward and heavenward way. They live entirely by the day, and from hand to mouth ; they have no resources of knowledge, no deep treasures of wisdom : what water they drink flows on the surface, it does not spring from the rock, therefore it is dried up in summer, and in winter it is frozen over ; they cannot go

below and find the springing water which no sun can dry and which no frost can readily penetrate. Wise men have bread to eat which the world knoweth not of. They do not live upon superficial maxims, which are the mere inventions of momentary wit, but upon those deep and vital principles which are modern throughout all time because they are ancient in all history, yea, because they are part of the very substance and constitution of manhood. What is said of fools applies to the whole circle and range of folly; it applies not only to intellectual tools, but to moral fools, for there are moral lunatics as certainly as there are mental incapables: men who have false rules of business, false maxims by which they direct their conduct, little empty proverbs which sound as if they were wise, but which experience has proved to be unphilosophical. There is no living word but the Word of God, no wisdom but that which is found in the inspired volume; it knows man, it speaks the language of man, it understands all the necessity of man, and will abide when all other words have exhausted their barren messages. The thought is pursued in the word—"evil pursueth sinners." It would seem as if the hounds of vengeance were set upon the track of the evil man, and as if escape from them were simply impossible. How many are the penal resources of God! What snares, and fire and brimstone! What thunderbolts and hailstones God can command! Evil pursues sinners in the body, ruining health, impairing digestion, rendering sleep impossible, fevering the brain, and maddening the whole being with tempests of excitement; evil pursues the sinner in his children; it would seem as if they grew up to smite him for his folly, and to rebuke him with many judgments, and even with sore penalties for his neglect and perversity and selfishness. "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked." The sword is not willing to make a bed for him; the flowers shudder when he plucks them, the sunlight is abused by his very presence, all nature is out of sympathy with him, for nature is the manifestation of God, the very embodiment of his natural attributes. Turn from these consequences, which are inevitable, and look to the fact that "to the righteous good shall be repaid"; in the harvest-time he shall know what kind of seed he has sown, and into what ground he has cast it. In seed-time itself there is much that is doubtful,

speculative, much that is trying to faith and patience ; not until the harvest can we tell what good we did in the sowing season. Blessed be God, there is a time of reaping as well as of sowing. On the other hand, awful is the law of the Lord, because the wicked man cannot escape the harvest for which he has prepared. "Be not deceived ; God is not mocked : for whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap."

"A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children : and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just " (ver. 22).

All this is true in the matter of material possession, but in a still larger sense is it true of moral character. There is a sense in which no man can leave his character to another ; that is to say, a man cannot adopt the character of an ancestor, and use it as if it were so much material property. There is, however, another and larger sense in which we do inherit the character of our forefathers ; we are respected on account of that character ; great things are expected of us because we have come of a good stock ; people reason that as the father was so excellent a man, it is impossible that the children can be altogether wanting in excellence. In this sense we are reaping what we have not sown, and are in the enjoyment of riches for which we have not laboured. This gives us a view of posterity which ought to act as an inspiration. No man liveth unto himself, even for a single day ; all the time he is really living for posterity, and in such a way that posterity will be affected, either happily or unhappily, by the course of action with which his name is identified. It is just as true that the bad man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children : how impossible it is for the children of a bad man to get credit for being and doing anything really good ! Alas ! they are followed by the world's suspicion to the very end of the chapter of life : when they do well no credit is given to them for their well-doing, because it is known that their fathers were men of corrupt spirit and low character. This is indeed wholly unjust : but who can take out of human nature the line of depravity out of which the injustice springs as out of a native and congenial soil ? The wise man teaches that the wealth of the sinner is not always to be in the hands of the bad man, but that really the sinner without knowing it is working for the just.

Jesus Christ says, "Blessed are the meek : for they shall inherit the earth,"—that is, they shall possess the earth, they shall hold it as men hold property ; they shall govern it by the very gentleness and modesty of their spirit. All things are yours if you are Christ's. Even when the bad man seems to prosper, he is simply increasing your balance at the bank. The money of the bad man leaves him, is afraid of him and ashamed of him, and will not tarry with him from one generation to another : with a kind of spiritual consciousness it says, This is not my rightful owner, this house is not my home ; I must go to sustain the good and the true in extending and upholding the kingdom of light and life. The main thought that should fix itself upon every mind is that whatever we do runs on from one generation to another. The empty sophism that posterity has done nothing for us ought to give way before the certain and solemn truth that we are doing a great deal for posterity ; for every good thought we think and every good word we speak must have an effect in moulding the character of the coming time. What is true of good is true of evil. To think that we shall one day be execrated for our selfishness is surely an intolerable punishment, and is such as ought to turn us from the evil of our ways.

"He that spareth his rod hateth his son : but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes" (ver. 24).

Under this apparent severity is to be found the spirit of true kindness. It would seem as if the last word in the text were an emphatic word. There is a good deal of chastening, but it is not timely ; the will has grown strong, the passions have acquired tenacious hold upon the mind, the chastening comes too late in life. It is the easiest of all things to spare the rod ; it enables family life to proceed with fluency ; it avoids all controversy and all painful collision as between the elder and the younger. For a time this is beautiful, so much so that people commend the family as one characterised by great harmony and union ; on the contrary, it ought to be reprobated. It is the severest cruelty that can be inflicted upon a child not to show that child the limits of his will, and the necessity of accommodating that will to the judgment and pleasure of others.

The spoiled child comes to hate the spoiling parent. The child that is wisely chastened comes to love the very hand that used the rod. Children must be taught that all things are not theirs, that the world is a place for discipline, and that all life is valuable only in proportion as it has been refined and strengthened by patient endurance. What can be more pitiful than to see a parent who imagines that by allowing the child to have all its own way, he is kind, benevolent, and tender? Such a man has no right to such a character: call him foolish, selfish, cruel, tyrannical;—all these characteristics are his, for he has deserved them by the course of imbecility which he has selfishly pursued. Let no merely cruel man take encouragement from these words to use the rod without measure, and to use it merely for the sake of showing his animal strength. That is not the teaching of the passage. The chastening is to be with measure, is to be timely, is to have some proportion to the offence that is visited, and is to give more pain to the inflicter of the punishment than to its receiver. Great wisdom is required in the use of the rod. The rod has to be used upon every man sooner or later; we cannot escape chastisement: we must be made to feel that the world is not all ours, that there are rights and interests to be respected besides those which we ourselves claim: the sooner that lesson can be instilled into the mind the better; if it can be wrought into the heart and memory of childhood it will save innumerable anxieties and disappointments in all after-life.

So the book of wisdom rolls on, touching human life at every point, decorating the whole house of life with motto and maxim and philosophy, infinite in suggestion and gracious in encouragement. It would seem as if the wise man were first throwing out of his right hand and then out of his left hand—something for the good, something for the bad; a blessing for the wise, a curse for the foolish; each sentence is self-balanced, the light and the darkness go together, heaven and hell are set in juxtaposition: it is the good man, and the bad man; the wise man, and the foolish man; the righteous, and the wicked; the faithful, and the transgressor. Where the classification is so broad and distinct no mistake can be made as to our position. If we have shaded down wickedness until it has lost somewhat of its

ghastliness, it is only ourselves that are deceived, the nature of wickedness itself is unchanged. If we have mitigated the penalty of righteousness until it has become quite easy to us, so easy as to cost us no thought and no effort, we have deceived ourselves, we have not brought down the standard of righteousness. All these proverbs are a call to discipline, they never spare the soul, they never caress it into idleness, or soothe it into indifference; the proverbs are so many spears dug into our sides, that we may run the race of life more surely and more speedily, keeping our eyes steadfastly fixed on the goal towards which we are hastening. We cannot, however, live upon proverbs, however sententious and epigrammatic; we must have gospels, expositions of the fatherhood of God, comments upon the nature of sin and upon the possibilities of the soul; we must be entreated and wooed and persuaded, not spurred and goaded by sharply-pointed maxims. To the maxims we shall come in due course, and we shall affirm every one of them, sealing each with the seal of our companionship and experience. Meanwhile, we may go to the school of Christ, and learn of him who is meek and lowly in heart, and find rest to our souls, not in the adoption of moral epigrams, but in the reception of saving truths.

Chapter xiv. 1-12.

WOMEN: WISE AND FOOLISH, ETC.

“Every wise woman buildeth her house: but the foolish plucketh it down with her hands” (ver. 1).

IT would appear, then, that there are foolish women. The Bible pays no attention to mere civility or courtesy; it stands upon truth, and speaks with frankness and even bluntness concerning evil persons, whether men or women, whether kings or subjects. The Book of Proverbs does not spare the king, though supposed to have been written largely by a royal writer. This is a characteristic of the Bible which begets confidence in its integrity and in the pureness of its purpose. The foolish woman does not know that she is plucking down her house; she thinks, on the contrary, she is building it up; by unwise energy, by self-assertion, by thoughtless speeches, by words flung like firebrands, she is doing unutterable mischief, not only to herself, but to her husband and her family. There are, on the other hand, wise women who are quietly and solidly building the house night and day: they make no demonstration; the last characteristic that could be supposed to attach to them would be that of ostentation; they measure the whole day, they number its hours, they apportion its work; every effort they make is an effort which has been reasoned out before it was begun; every word is looked at before it is uttered, every company is estimated before it is entrusted with confidence; in this way the wise woman consolidates her house. How many ministers have been ruined by foolish wives who have not known how to speak to the people of the congregation; wives who have been foolishly haughty, foolishly reserved, or foolishly talkative; women who have retired when they ought to have gone forward, and gone forward when they should have retired; women utterly without sense. On the other hand, how many ministers have been made by their wives; wives who

knew how to speak the healing word, how to apply kind words to every necessity that has arisen in church life ; women who have kept their houses well, and have looked well to the ways of their children, and who without ever being eloquent have never ceased to be persuasive. Whether any foolish woman can ever be made wise is a question to which it would be rash to return a reply. The thing that is lacking cannot be numbered. The only thing that appears to be immediately possible is for the foolish woman to be taught to hold her tongue : even if she could do that, she might be supposed to be a considerable distance on the way to wisdom. But who can stop the loose mouth ? who can tell the clamorous heart to be still when its very heaven is in foaming speech, in gossip, in the exchange of opinions, and in the multiplication of criticism ? It would seem as if it lay with man himself to determine whether the house should be built or thrown down. Yet such is only an appearance, it is not the deepest reality of the case : "Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it," for the walls are thrown down in the night-time, and the roof is carried away by the wind. Whilst, however, we acknowledge this to be the fundamental and the ultimate truth, there is a great middle space within which human energy is called upon to work and human patience to endure. If a man has become unhappily attached to a foolish woman, he should remember how much of the responsibility is with himself. In proportion as his wife is foolish, he ought to redouble his own wisdom. If any man has been guided by the living God to the election of a wise partner in life, let him remember that a good wife is from the Lord, and let him not throw upon the woman a burden greater than she can bear ; she is wise, true, prudent, full of the spirit of economy, a very genius of understanding ; but for that very reason she ought to be spared from undue pressure as to engagements and duties and responsibilities. The husband should be the head of the wife in the sense of sustaining the load of life, and giving her what he can of ease, joy, and peace.

"A scorner seeketh wisdom, and findeth it not : but knowledge is easy unto him that understandeth. Go from the presence of a foolish man, when thou perceivest not in him the lips of knowledge" (vers. 6, 7).

Everything depends upon the spirit with which we work.

This is true in intellectual toil, and it is true in religious pursuits. "Ask, and it shall be given you," means that the asking should be executed in the right spirit and with the right intent; it must not be a mere use of words, an eloquence of empty wind, but the expression of a deep and earnest desire. "A scorner seeketh wisdom"—that is to say, he seeks it vainly, that he may acquire a name in society, that he may seem to be wise upon formal occasions, that he may not be looked down upon by those who are his superiors in understanding and acquisition; but in so far as he is animated by the wrong spirit all his seeking ends in emptiness; he comes back from the harvest-field without a single sheaf. Wisdom will not speak to the scornful spirit; wisdom is solemn, just, divine; wisdom cometh down from above, and hath about her all the air and light and blessedness of heaven; to the scorner, the contemptuous man, the frivolous person, the sneerer who turns all life into bitterness, she has no communication to make; on the other hand, how easy is knowledge to him that understandeth! he seems to have the right of entry into the sanctuary of understanding; he is known there, he is welcomed there, he brings with him the spirit of reverence and of hopefulness; he comes as a worshipper rather than as a man who is in quest of merely selfish enjoyment. The foolish man is to be left to himself; if we tarry in his presence we confer a false reputation upon him, for men seeing us in his society may suppose that he is a wise man, and therefore to be honoured. Find a man who is talking frivolity, who is misunderstanding the universe of which he is a citizen, who ignores all that is solemn and profound in life, then let that man be taught by the dreariness and coldness of solitude that he has offended the spirit of society. In such a way only can the foolish man be brought to consideration; so long as he is the centre of a circle, or in the companionship of another man, he loses himself in a kind of dissipation; but when every man avoids him because of his folly, he may begin to ask why it is that he is thus left alone.

"Fools make a mock at sin" (ver. 9).

They do not understand it; they regard it as a mere accident, as a root of pleasure, as a blossom that comes and goes within

one sunny day; they do not estimate the awfulness of sin aright, as an offence against God, against the universe, against all things holy, pure, and beautiful. Sin is not a merely metaphysical action,—something that occurs far back in the mind, and that relates to something inexpressibly high; sin is concrete: sin is visible in its results; sin brings with it darkness, shame, fear; sin sunders man from man by making every man suspect his neighbour; sin is not a cloud in the heavens only, it is a great shadow which rests upon the whole earth. Find a man who mocks sin, and you find a fool. How easy it is to mock the intoxicated man! how easy to turn to frivolous uses the adventures of the gambler and the schemer! how easy to laugh at that which has a humorous aspect, although its root be one of blackness and horrible shame! We are called upon not to look at the mere accidents of the sin, but at the sin itself. Notice that in this text we are not looking at particular sins, as lying, drunkenness, dishonesty, and the like, but we are looking at a generic term—"sin." We are not to suppose that one sin is greater than another, that one commandment is greater than another; we are to feel that every sin is an abomination to God, and every commandment is golden in the estimation of the Spirit of the sanctuary. There are no little sins; there are no little virtues; there are no minor pieties: the character of the universe is one; it is equally holy at every point; he who breaks one law injures the whole circle of duty, and proves himself to be capable of breaking out of that circle at any point that may suit him at the moment. Sins are not to be estimated by number, as if we should say one sin amounts to little, and two sins are hardly to be accounted of; we are to look at each sin as involving all other sin, as carrying with it the whole burden and frown of God's judgment and anger. This may appear to be exaggerating some sins, and so it may be so far as they are accidentally concerned, but there can be no accidental relations of sin towards the living God, all relations are vital and abiding.

"The heart knoweth his own bitterness; and a stranger doth not intermeddle with his joy" (ver. 10).

Man can shield himself from the closest scrutiny of the most friendly or the most hostile eyes. The heart can conduct all its

wondrous ministry of life, and thought, and purpose, without any one ever dreaming of all the tragedy that is exciting and exhausting its solitudes. Sometimes a smile is made to cover the bitterest distress. Observers can see the smile only, and judging by that they conclude that the heart is in a state of contentment, whereas at the very moment it is undergoing the very agony of perdition. What is true of distress is true also of joy. It is not always convenient to reveal the joy that is in the heart, because it may be misunderstood, or attempts may be made to pervert it, or to make it the medium of communications of a destructive or injurious nature: it is desirable, therefore, that the heart should eat many a feast in secret, and delight itself without being overlooked by strangers and foes, and sometimes even by friends. A most noticeable thing is this, that life has its quiet sanctuaries, its innermost recesses, where no human eye can penetrate, and where it can be really its very self, without danger of misconstruction by ill-informed or malignant criticism. It is in secret that we eat the sweetest bread: it is within the sanctuary of our uninvaded imagination that we create new heavens and a new earth, and project ourselves into the sunny future, on which there rests no burden, no cloud, no shadow of fear. "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." We are not to conceive that the exclusion of human criticism means also the exclusion of divine judgment. "All things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do." We must remember that it is he, even the living One, who has enabled us to enjoy all the delights of shelter and security from intrusive observation. He has made us, and not we ourselves, and in his wondrous creation of our system he has made provision for solitude, even in the midst of a crowd, and for concealment even from the eyes that look upon us with the most loving anxiety. All this should be regarded as fraught with moral significance. Life is more than the word that is upon the lip. Worship is more than the language in which it seeks to express itself. Music has always something more to say than can be uttered through the few notes that are at its disposal. Man looketh on the outward appearance, continually comes to false and rash conclusions regarding his brother man; but because the Lord looketh on the heart, and knows the inner-

most thought of every soul, we may rejoice in the assurance that his judgment will be complete and gracious. With the heart's riches no man may intermeddle. From the treasure-house of that heart no thief can steal. Let us be rich, therefore, in heart-wealth, laying up within us all the wisdom of God that is accessible to us through the medium of his revelation, and feeding ourselves with the bread of life ; then, though heart and flesh do fail in a physical sense, and all outward things be marked by traces of sorrow, there shall be in our deepest being a peace like the calm of God, a hope brighter than the sun at noon-day. Bitterness and joy seem to be the two words which sum up human experience. Every heart has its moments of bitterness ; even youth has its hot tears, its stings, its disappointments, its failures in all manner of hopeful attempt : manhood has its fuller sorrow, its deeper melancholy, its sadder depression, because the life sees more, and is capable of bearing more than in days of infancy and in youth : it would seem as if old age alone could lay claim to the realest and ripest joy ; there is so much behind it, and there is yet so much in front of it, that it can strike an average, and form a true valuation of life, and look forward with buoyant expectancy to the revelation of mornings and summers, undreamt-of even by the imagination of poetry.

“The house of the wicked shall be overthrown : but the tabernacle of the upright shall flourish ” (ver. 11).

Here, again, the reason alike of overthrow and of prosperity is profoundly moral. We are not to fix attention upon the word “house” or the word “tabernacle,” but upon the word “wicked” and the word “upright,” for in these moral terms the whole meaning of the passage is conveyed. The wicked man builds his house out of plumb, or he builds it upon the sands, or he erects it in utter ignorance of the laws of nature, and the consequence is overthrow beyond the hope of reconstruction. The tabernacle of the upright would seem by its very name to be a sacred place, for “tabernacle” is associated with the presence of God, is sanctified by the ark of the covenant, and is looked upon with favour from above. Wherever the upright man dwells he creates a tabernacle. No matter how poor the roof which covers his head, there is an inner roof, rich with stars, surcharged with the very

benediction of God's own heart and love. What is our dwelling-place? Is it a commodious house built by the hand only? or is it a tabernacle created according to a divine specification? Every man builds his own house, and the wind and rain and flood will test every man's building, whether it is founded upon the sand or upon the immovable rock: "I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree. Yet he passed away, and, lo, he was not: yea, I sought him, but he could not be found." "The ungodly are like the chaff which the wind driveth away. Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous." Where the house has been built for God, God himself never forsakes it. He breaks the bread of poverty, and turns it into a feast; he transmutes the tears of sorrow into jewels of joy; by day he is an all-illuminating light, and by night he is a fire alike of defence and of comfort. The happiest place on all the earth should be the good man's house, for it is sanctified with prayer, it is resonant with praise, it stands on the very highway which leads to eternal blessedness: it is a halting-place on the road to heaven, and the angels come out to meet us upon it, and conduct us day by day, and mile by mile, to the city of light, the temple of peace.

"There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death" (ver. 12).

Beware, then, not to look exclusively at appearances, at beginnings, or at attempts. In order to form a correct judgment we ought to have the complete case before us. If the road be fifty miles long, it may be apparently right for forty-nine of them, and because it is right for so large a proportion of the distance, we may hastily conclude it must be right even to the very end. Against this delusion we are cautioned in the text. It is the last mile that dips down into bottomless abysses. It is when we think we are just at home that we begin to fall away into darkness, uncertainty, and despair. Ships have been lost within sight of land. Men have fallen back in their old age, the very time when they seemed to be ripening for heaven, and have lost all the accumulation of virtue and honour stored up through a long lifetime. We have to deal continually with deceptive appearances: the

summer morning would seem to end in winter night: the first draught which we are tempted to take means exhilaration, the next means excitement, the next means violence, and the last means extermination. It is never to be supposed that because the first draught is harmless, therefore the last will be harmless too. The harm is in the very draught itself, how pleasant soever it may be to the palate at the time of drinking. The text holds good in commerce, in theological thought, in moral conduct, in social relationships; indeed, it holds good along the whole circle of human relation and experience. What is the lesson which such a state of affairs conveys to the wise and understanding heart? It is that life should be spent in a temper of caution; when we seem most secure we may be most exposed to danger; not only is our enemy a roaring lion, whose voice can be heard from afar, he is also a cunning and silent serpent, drawing himself towards us without making any demonstration, and not revealing himself until he is within striking distance. How awful is the expression "the ways of death"! No man returns from those ways to tell how crooked they are, how full of all manner of horror and distress, and how swiftly they dip into pits that are bottomless, abysses that are without measure, darkness that is uttermost and appalling. We begin to die when we begin to do wrong. Awful is the thought that it may be impossible to return along the way which we have trodden so mirthfully: we suppose that we can at any moment retrace our steps, and find our way back into an earlier experience, when we knew naught of the bitterness of sin and the sting of divine judgment. Every step we take in a wrong direction disqualifies us from advancing in an upward movement. We lose strength in this downward travel. Even when we would return we cannot recollect the prayers with which we once communed with heaven; we cannot speak the language of the upper world; we are afraid indeed to look upward lest some avenging angel should strike our vision with darts of fire.

Chapter xiv. 14-34.

THE BACKSLIDING HEART, ETC.

“The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways: and a good man shall be satisfied from himself” (ver. 14).

BACKSLIDING takes place in the heart, and not in the foot. It is in the foot indeed that we show it, but the collapse took place in the spirit before the foot began to falter, and to recede, and to fall. The issue is that the backslider shall be filled with the fruit which he has coveted; he shall drink deeply of the draught which he has mingled: he shall be allowed to see how fully he has succeeded in making a failure of life. He shall be mocked and taunted by the spirit of judgment, so that when he takes up his idol of success, he shall find it to be an image of utterest disappointment; his harvests shall rot in his hands; if he pull down his barns and build greater that he may store his goods, he will find that when he has completed his barns his goods are nowhere to be found. There is no substance in sin, no real treasure, no solid enjoyment, nothing that abides with the consent of benediction and the security of a broad and generous defence. Sin gives what little it has in the way of joy at once, and at the end it is nothing but ruin. On the other hand, “a good man shall be satisfied from himself:” it has often been observed that he is not to be satisfied with himself, but from himself, from the treasure that is within him, from the thoughts which he has accumulated, from remembered prayers, from recollected promises, from all the retrospect of discipline and progress he shall draw comfort continually. “Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.” The word of God becomes part of the very man who treasures

it and studies it; it is impossible to distinguish between him and the word on which he lives, for the word has entered into the very fibre of his soul, and to take it away, were the extraction possible, would be to leave the man without faith, and hope, and joy. Here is the difference between badness and goodness; badness fails; after making desperate efforts to cheer and to gladden, it sinks into the deepest melancholy; whereas goodness grows, extends, ripens, becomes more and more by daily use, and at the end is a greater blessing than it was at the beginning. The good man can bear to look back upon life; he knows its failure; he owns the sins which he has committed against God; yet knowing that his supreme purpose has been to please the Almighty and to walk in the ways of Jesus Christ, he feels a blessing descending upon him, whilst he causes to pass before his eyes all the goodness and mercy of God. Take from a good man his money, his health, his society, yea, his very books, from which he has drawn innumerable thoughts stimulating and ennobling, yet his memory abides, a treasure-house well filled, an inspiration renewed from above day by day, as necessity increases in the urgency of its claims. Goodness shall stand when all things fail. A good man need not be a learned man, a pedantic man, a man full of intellectual ideas, speculations, and romances; he is to be meek, simple, genuine, real in every thought, unselfish in every desire; and when a man sets his life by the grace of God in this direction he will enjoy such satisfaction as God only can cause him to realise.

“The simple believeth every word: but the prudent man looketh well to his going” (ver. 15).

Such belief is not to the discredit of the simple man, but to the disgrace of the man who misleads him. No character is more admirable than that which is marked by simplicity and consequent trustfulness; it is only because the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, and the courses of the world are so much out of line, that simplicity is not only undervalued but sometimes contemned. The prudent man is put in apposition to indicate that he is a man of affairs, who understands a good deal of the way of the world, and who looks below

the surface to find real meanings : this kind of prudence is itself an affirmation of the wickedness of the world : prudence in itself may or may not be a virtue ; everything depends upon its origin and its purpose : when a man is so prudent as to suspect everybody, to regard every word as a trap, and every proposition as a lure to destruction, his prudence simply signifies that he has found out that he is in a bad world, and that everything is to be examined with a view to detecting in it the spirit of selfishness and all evil. Whether simplicity or prudence would in the long run the more prevail cannot now be told, because no fair test can be applied. Certainly Jesus Christ would seem to teach that simplicity is better than wariness, and that trustfulness is nearer to the Spirit of God than is suspicion. It is right to understand the men by whom we are surrounded, and to obtain some notion of their spirit and purpose, in order that we may conduct ourselves aright towards them. This is what God himself does : to the froward he shows himself froward ; to the meek he is all gentleness ; to the trustful he is all grace. There are men who pride themselves upon their prudence, not knowing that their prudence may have been gained through an experience which has cost them dearly, and which has revealed in many instances their folly and their incompetence. The prudence of the wise man will be placed at the disposal of the simple, and will not be wholly devoted to the confounding of those whose intentions are evil. Wherever one man is wiser than another he is a debtor to the man who is not so wise, and is bound to pay him of the gold of wisdom, that the man may be able to manage his affairs in the world with discretion and success.

“He that is soon angry dealeth foolishly : and a man of wicked devices is hated ” (ver. 17).

The angry man and the man of wicked devices may be two very different characters ; the one is foolish, but the other is morally bad. Anger that is soon excited seldom succeeds in its object ; it is so obviously irrational, untimely, and unequal to the occasion, that it produces no lasting effect upon those who are the objects of the ebullition. Anger that comes soon goes soon. It is mere excitement, agitation, tumult, having no basis

of reason and no spirit of justice ; having no deepness of earth of a moral kind it soon withereth away. The very word "soon," however, shows that there is a place for anger in the administration of human life :—"Be ye angry, and sin not : let not the sun go down upon your wrath." Jesus Christ himself was angry ; we are to be angry with all evil, all meanness, all want of honour, with everything that partakes not of the spirit of justice and charity. But the deliberateness of our anger will be the measure of its sacred effect. When a man is heated through and through with moral indignation his whole nature will feel the glow, and his words will be inspired with an energy which nothing could give them but a conception of what is due to the very throne of heaven. Angry men make speeches which they have to withdraw ; angry men commit themselves by many words that are not critically chosen or justly applied ; and in the multitude of their apologies and the abjectness of their humiliation they lose every trace of moral dignity. A man of wicked devices may appear to be very clever ; he is inventive ; he is always equal to the occasion ; he is cunning in the manufacture of traps, in the manipulation of gins and snares ; he always knows the course which the enemy is going to take, and he can lie in wait for him at some convenient point : but the very fact that he is a wicked man spoils all his devices of their inventiveness and genius ; that which would be able, strategic, soldier-like, in arrangement and execution, becomes merely a trick, a shameless endeavour or attempt to outwit clever men in doing that which is good, or evil men in doing that which is destructive : the moral character of the man destroys even the intellectual attributes of his inventions and devices. Receive nothing from the bad man ; have no dealings with him, avoid him, pass by him, and turn away ; even when Satan himself quotes Scripture look not so much at the Scripture that is quoted as at the enemy who quotes it, and be sure that when he applies Scripture to human necessity he is about to wound rather than to heal, to stimulate in a wrong direction rather than to "allure to brighter worlds." Happily, the man of wicked devices so reveals himself in the issue that he is hated, contemned, loathed, and abandoned. He who once thought himself so clever as to be popular is now seen through, and is not so much the object of pity as of contempt. All wickedness leads

downward. There are no upward slopes from wickedness; the whole course is bleak, downhill, and necessarily brings itself to a close in the fire that is unquenchable.

“In all labour there is profit: but the talk of the lips tendeth only to penury” (ver. 23).

Sometimes it is difficult to see where the profit is. We speak of having spent our strength for nought, of having run in vain, of having brought the day to a close without having filled our arms with sheaves. There is, however, a sense in which all labour ends in advantage: it is so in learning, in study, in the prosecution of art, in devotion to business, in the study of character, indeed, throughout the whole circle of human thought and occupation. A man may write much, and may throw his writing away because it does not fulfil his expectation or purpose, yet the very act of having written it has been as a discipline to the writer, has stirred his faculties, and by even revealing weakness has prepared the way for the cultivation of strength. Every time the arm is lifted the muscles are improved. Every time the fresh air is breathed a blessing of healthfulness is left behind. Labour means industry, devotion, conscientious attention to affairs that demand our interest: it is set in apposition to the talk of the lips—mere breathing, mere foaming, mere boasting, wordy declarations of great programmes which are never brought to realisation. The teaching of the text would seem to be that labour brings wealth, and mere talk brings penury. If this is so the law is obviously just and good. Society would no longer be consolidated and secure if mere talk brought men to honour and wealth and solidity of position. In all society the labourers must be more in number than the talkers. Understand that nothing is here said against talk; society cannot do without speech; eloquence has a great part to play in the education of the world; what is spoken against is the talk of the lips—that is, mere talk, talking for talking's sake, love of hearing one's self speak, talking with the lips when the heart is taking no part in the communication: when a man truly talks his intellect, his heart, his conscience, his judgment, his whole being speaks; every word is marked by sacredness of purpose, every promise is a vow, every declaration binds the soul. It

must not be understood that anything whatever is said in disparagement of talk, speech, eloquence ; we must again and again remind ourselves that the talk that is condemned is formal, mechanical, labial, taking nothing of virtue out of the speaker, and communicating nothing of strength to the hearer.

“In the fear of the Lord is strong confidence : and his children shall have a place of refuge” (ver. 26).

Such is the testimony of the ages. The Bible is full of illustrations of the action of this doctrine. In no book probably is the fear of the Lord so elaborately described as to its nature and its application as in the Book of Proverbs. Throughout the whole of the Bible the fear of the Lord is declared to be the beginning of wisdom. It is not a servile fear ; the worshipper is not a croucher, waiting in an abject position in order to be noticed by a tyrannical despot : fear means reverence, veneration, awe, a sense of the grandeur and majesty of the Lord, not only as that term stands for infinity, brilliance, and attributes of an intellectual kind, but as it stands for holiness, truth, purity, justice, and every expression that indicates moral supremacy. He who fears the Lord is strong in the confidence of ultimate justice ; he is confident also in the final exposition of providence, being assured that the way of God to man will be so revealed at last that it will be seen to have been the right way, the only true way, notwithstanding the varieties of the road, the steep hills, the bleak deserts, the stony paths, the cold rivers that had to be crossed in the dark night, the afflictions that had to be endured when heart and flesh had failed and strength had been exhausted,—at the last it will be seen that God has not given one stroke too much, taken away one treasure too many, or dug one grave too deep ; the righteous will be the first to confess that God has done all things wisely, well, and lovingly. A beautiful expression is “his children.” Here in the very midst of the Proverbs, a book of merely sententious maxims it might be thought, we find the sublime doctrine of the fatherhood of God. Here too we find that God’s children need a place of refuge ; they have often to flee from the storm, from the wrath of man, and from an apparently angry nature, for every law seems to fight against them : blessed be God, when all outward things are marked by an excitement of

an apparently uncontrollable kind, are heaving and tossing as if shaken by an earthquake, the children of God can go not to law but to the Lawmaker himself, yea, to the very heart of God, and there can rest in hope and confidence, and whilst the storm howls without around the rock of the sanctuary that holy place can be filled with sacred and triumphant song. Have we really endeavoured to find a refuge in God? Have we not too often made him a mere object of veneration and not a tower that is to be fled into as into an inviolable home? What are the uses, so to say, which we have made of God? We ought to be able to exclaim, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble."

"Righteousness exalteth a nation : but sin is a reproach to any people" (ver. 34).

By "righteousness" we are not to understand any formal system of theology, or any sectarian definition of religion. Nor can we make an ideal religion and set it up as a national idol, pointing towards it as if it indicated all our belief, and then turning aside to do what we pleased in the world at large. Righteousness means morality, justice, truthfulness, moral frankness, a sense of moral obligation, a lofty, dignified, all but divine character. It is true to-day that wherever the character of a nation stands highest all its obligations are regarded as certain of fulfilment; men trust such a nation; even when that nation comes into temporary adversity men are perfectly sure that when due time has elapsed and strength has been recovered, every word that has been spoken will be redeemed with honour. Commerce bears the same testimony; let a nation be known to be fickle, to trifle with its monetary obligations, to be capable of making great promises and forgetting them, and that nation can never issue a loan with any advantage; the world laughs at the roguish device, and flees away from the tempter as from a robber: on the other hand, let it be known that a nation is so moral, so sensitive of honour, that come what may it will redeem its pledges, and all the world is anxious to lend money to that nation. We do not keep within theological bounds when we admit a proverb of this kind. We go outside all merely theological limitations, and find the proverb accepted and endorsed by men of the world. Sin is

a reproach to any people, because it trifles with their character, destroys it, perverts their purposes, makes their word of non-effect, turns every covenant into an empty pretence. Sin enfeebles people, takes out of them their moral pith, and by so much depletes them of physical strength and dignity, so that they are unprepared for the time of assault, and are unable to cope with the overwhelming foe. Character should lie at the basis of all greatness and all stability: it does this in reality, but it ought to do this by universal admission, so that men may know to what they are trusting, on what ground they are sowing their seed, and with what reasonable expectation they are looking forward to harvest. A marvellous thing is this that sin operates politically as well as religiously—bears upon the general condition of the people as well as upon the specific condition of the churches. Kings have to weigh their people morally as well as to number them physically when they would set forth on any expedition of aggression, advancement, acquisition, or civilisation. The people may be many, but if their character is rotten their arm cannot be strong; they will play fast and loose; they will flee away in time of danger, for only he whose soul is alive with a sense of the **divine** presence is courageous, steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the works of patriotism as well as in the works of the Lord. Every man who teaches a child the way of true wisdom is a benefactor of the nation. Every church that is wisely conducted is a support to the empire. Every sermon that is delivered with fervour, intelligence, and effect is a guarantee of national advancement. Let us look more to morals, and less to politics, when we would estimate the influence and dignity and usefulness of any nation. Let not our praying people cease their holy ministry; it is despised, laughed at, by men who are guided wholly by physical considerations, who bow down before the idol of pomp and glitter and wealth: but in reality prayer may be doing more for the nation than is being done by all its fortifications and battalions. It is our business, however, as Christian people, without endeavouring to compare and to balance one action against another, steadfastly to cleave to God and constantly to exhibit to those who look on a character that is marked at once by strength and gentleness, courage and unselfishness, a desire to advance and yet a willingness to let patience have her perfect work.

Chapter xv. 1, 3, 10.

THE SOFT ANSWER, ETC.

"A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger" (ver. 1).

UNDERSTAND by "a soft answer," not a reply marked by intellectual feebleness, but one inspired by the very spirit of modesty and graciousness. Such an answer cannot be returned as a mere art, because the wrath to which it replies excites natural surprise and indignation, and may be supposed to necessitate a communication in its own key and temper. The soft answer is unique by contrast. It is so unexpected, so unlike the surrounding circumstances, so much more than what is generally regarded as human, that the man to whom it is addressed is astounded as if by a miracle. Only he can give a soft answer who has a soft heart;—that is to say, the answer is not a mere art or trick of the vocal organs, it is the direct and blessed creation of God. Christianity is anticipated by the doctrine of the text, for Christianity says, Love your enemies, and if thou art smitten on the one cheek turn the other also. A soft answer may appear to be spiritless, but in reality it expresses a greater energy than is possible to ill-regulated and resentful wrath. Light is mightier than lightning. Thunder is harmless; it is a mere collision and crashing together of electric clouds. Meekness endures longer than wrath, has greater staying power, feeds itself upon the very grace of God, and is sustained through long watching and much suffering. Wrath fumes and splutters and brings upon itself swift destruction. Wrath is altogether unprofitable; it convinces no one; it is mere explosion ending in impotence and humiliation. We are not now speaking of moral wrath, but of mere ebullition of temper, a species of fleshly excitement, not a light from heaven, but a flame from perdition. It is right to be indignant with injustice and oppression and wrong of every name and

form. Grievous words stir up anger as certainly as an effect follows its cause. They lead to recrimination, resentment, self-defence, and self-assertion. For the moment they seem to be smart and spirited, betraying a dignified temper and a haughty courage, but in reality, they are nothing more than proofs of littleness, spitefulness, chagrin, or other emotion lying on the same degraded line.

“The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good” (ver. 3).

Such words are at once a comfort and a terror. The universe would be but an infinite darkness were it not for the assurance that the eyes of the Lord watch every throbbing heart, every thought, every purpose, every action of the multitudinous life of men. When the Lord “beholds,” he judges. He cannot look upon man’s life as a mere spectator; he must always look with judicial eyes. A more commonplace thought it would be difficult to find; yet it is only commonplace because of our familiarity with it, and not because of inherent indignity. Given a full assurance that our life is lived under the critical inspection of heaven, and what more can we need by way of stimulus and comfort, sense of security and spiritual freedom? On the other hand, given a purpose to lead a selfish, carnal, degraded life, and what can be more terrible than to reflect that every evolution of it draws upon itself the fiery and destructive vision of God? The bad man cannot live in the light. Even when he purposes to do evil he must needs close his eyes, and thus create an appropriate darkness as the theatre of his villainy. Not only do men close their eyes in sleep, they close their eyes in the perpetration of wrong, that under the shelter of a temporary night they may commit their offence against all sacred law and holy obligation. But the darkness and the light are both alike unto God. So mad is man that he can delude himself with the belief that darkness is impenetrable even by God. Never would this be allowed in mere theory; on the contrary, it would be strenuously and contemptuously denied. Yet the practice of life overthrows its finest theories, and shows that desire may be mightier than judgment. Blessed are they who can truly rejoice that they walk under the searching-eyes of the Most High. Only they can so rejoice whose uppermost desire

is towards pureness and good doing, and whose one purpose in life is to praise and magnify the living God. Desire and purpose can only be sanctified by vital communion with the Son of God.

Correction is grievous unto him that forsaketh the way : and he that hateth reproof shall die " (ver. 10).

Let the text stand thus, " There is a grievous correction for him that forsaketh the right way." It is so in all action ; why not so in all the higher aspects of human life ? Building that forsakes the right way overthrows itself. All things hastily and insecurely repaired or restored soon show that they have been mismanaged. Imperfect answers to great questions never fail to reveal their insufficiency. Duties discharged perfunctorily end in a harvest of blackness and disappointment. Children neglected in early life live to be the curse of those who neglected them. Seeing that the law operates in all these directions (and that it does so operate is proved by the whole round of human experience), why may it not also apply to spiritual culture, to moral purpose, to worship, to all that is loftiest and divinest in human aspiration and action ? The punishment inflicted upon evil is the dark aspect of that law which never fails to place a crown of glory on the brow of righteousness. Never believe that the evil-doer can prosper, that there can be any worth in the bread which he steals, or any joy in the intoxication which is made to mock the gladness of honest men ; there is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked ; only they can escape grievous correction who escape grievous error. Correction will indeed fall upon the good man, for even his prayers need to be purified ; but such correction is never grievous ; it is itself a hidden blessing, and is felt to be such by him who submissively accepts it at the hand of God. We do not chastise a child as we chastise a beast. In all divine chastisement of the good there is a purpose which signifies elevation, refinement, and completeness of character : Blessed is the man whom the Lord correcteth. Judgment falls upon the evil man, he is suddenly destroyed and that without remedy, but benediction follows the good man even in loss and pain and loneliness and death. He kisses the rod that smites him, and thus by resignation makes the bitter sweet, and turns what otherwise would be poison into food that sustains and satisfies.

Chapter xvi.

THE ANSWER OF THE TONGUE, ETC.

“The preparations of the heart in man, and the answer of the tongue, is from the Lord” (ver. 1).

HERE is a doctrine of inspiration which descends to the most practical line of life. This doctrine deals with the individual man, as well as collective humanity. Whenever the preparations of the heart are good—that is, wise, prudent, purged of selfishness, and generous with the love of God,—we find nothing less than a miracle of the Holy Ghost. Naturally, the heart is deceitful above all things; it requires, therefore, great preparation, that is, cleansing, purifying, and ennobling; it is like an instrument out of tune, on which no good music can be played, and which indeed spoils every note which it professes to express; we see, therefore, how large is the work which God has to do in the human heart before that heart can represent the integrity of divine purpose and the unselfishness of divine love. When the heart is prepared the tongue is likewise qualified to play its part effectively and happily in the ministry of life. When the tongue is under the control of a purified heart its words will flow as from a fountain of wisdom, and men will know that the stream is worthy of the spring. It is in vain to attempt to tame the tongue until the heart has been subdued. After all, the tongue is but a servant, and it will respond to the discipline which is imposed upon it by the moral nature. First, then, make the tree good, then the fruit will be good; ask the Lord to cleanse the heart utterly from every evil purpose and mean desire, and the eloquence of the tongue will be limpid, honest, and beneficent. The practical duty suggested by this text is that we are to beseech the Lord that he would grant unto us the suitable preparation and the wise answer. If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God. A man undertaking to prepare

his own heart is like a musical instrument undertaking to put itself in tune. The whole work is to be done from without and from above ; in other words, it is a divine action, a very miracle of almightiness. Who can control the heart ? Who can track all the devious way of the manifold purpose of life ? Who is not conscious of an under-consciousness, a kind of sub-life, that never shows itself wholly even to the most careful observer or even to the man himself,—a subtle far-away life that has plans, outlooks, motives, contemplations of its own ? Verily, great is the mystery of life, and only One can control it, and that is the Lord who created the marvel.

“Commit thy works unto the Lord, and thy thoughts shall be established ”
(ver. 3).

Here we find the practical outcome, as we have pointed out, of the doctrine of the first verse. Man is to have no way of his own which he is not willing to subordinate to the inspiration of the Almighty. “Commit thy works” means, Yield thyself and all thy purposes to the Lord : ask him about everything : consider nothing too minute or insignificant for the regard of heaven. The downsitting, the uprising, the outgoing, the incoming of life, all these are to be watched and guarded from on high. Our danger is in supposing that we can undertake little things for ourselves. In reality there is nothing little, because everything we think or do or attempt has a distinct relation to a moral nature and to a moral responsibility, and consequently to a moral issue. When we begin to divide the actions of life into great and small we subject the soul to a very insidious temptation. If things were divisible into the two definite classes of great and small, the danger would be less extreme ; but actions are graded into one another, colours are subdued from their highest expressiveness and shaded into lower colours, and it is at the point of shading, or at the line of transition, that the great spiritual difficulties of life occur. Whilst the final distribution is to the right hand and to the left, there is during life a process continually going on between the two extreme points, and somewhere in that process the soul may forget the vividness and definiteness of moral distinctions. There is a reward promised even in this text ; may we not say a kind of heaven is outlined in this

Book of Proverbs? The heaven of the man who commits his works unto the Lord is in the fact that his thoughts are to be established, his purposes are to be consummated, he is to be blessed with a sense of solid satisfaction; he is to be no longer a child driven to and fro and tossed about as by a fickle wind; he is to be rather as a tree planted by the right hand of God and abounding in all pleasant fruitfulness; or he is to be as a pillar in the house of God, founded on the eternal rock and reaching to the eternal heavens. The blessed effect of religion is to express itself in personal character. The religious man should be known by the clearness and largeness of his thoughts, by the nobleness and permanence of his character, by the beneficence and all but boundlessness of his charities. We shall know whether we have fully committed our work unto the Lord when we are assured that our thought is strong and true and wise and generously good.

“Every one that is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord: though hand join in hand, he shall not be unpunished” (ver. 5).

What is there to be proud of? What hast thou that thou hast not received? Are we proud of beauty?—beauty is but skin-deep, according to a well-approved proverb. Are we proud of wealth?—riches make to themselves wings and flee away, as has been proved in many a tragical event. Are we proud of health? our breath is in our nostrils, and every man is but a tenant-at-will in the house of his body. But the pride here spoken of is a pride of heart; it may be a subtle and unexpressed pride, so far as anything concrete and definite is concerned. It may not relate to beauty, or riches, or bodily strength, or social position; it may be rather in a consciousness of superiority to other people, resulting in the cultivation of vanity, self-conceit, haughtiness, or contempt of others: they are not good enough for our society, they are unworthy of our regard, they are hardly of sufficient importance to be religiously cared for; it is in all such thoughts as these, so unchristlike and so undivine, that we find the most vicious pride. Hand joining in hand is no protection against the operation of the penal law. Proud men may combine themselves into a strong confederacy, but they shall burn like tow and go up like a crackling flame. God is mightier than all the forces that

can be consolidated against him. Punishment slowly but surely follows the bad man in all the deviousness of his way, and in the long run he is crushed and ground into powder as by a great rock. It is folly to set the soul against God; for who can stand when the divine wrath burns? or who can answer when the thunder interrogates? Here again we come upon the necessity of a miracle being wrought in the heart, so that all pride may be taken out of it, all contempt may be subdued, and the heart itself be filled with generous thoughts and Christly charities. When anything is an abomination to the Lord, the Lord, as a consequence, fights against it, opposes it, humbles it, crushes it. Who will enter into controversy with the living God, challenge Omnipotence to contest? It may be because we have mistaken the mercy of God that we provoke such controversies: could we think for one moment of his almightiness, we should decline to appear to lift our puny hand against him. No man can subdue the pride of his own heart. Again and again we are brought to the solemn truth that that heart is an instrument which God alone can attune, and on which he alone can discourse music acceptable to his own ear.

“When a man’s ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him” (ver. 7).

Who has not proved this in his own practical experience? Efforts have been made to overcome the enemy, to flatter him, to bribe him, and yet his enmity has remained in all its stubbornness, the daily vexation of life, the daily difficulty of progress; but when the man who has suffered such enmity has committed his ways unto the Lord, and has invoked divine assistance, praying that he himself may be saved from the passion incident to provocation, and when he has made it his one business not to please his enemies, but to please the Lord, by a very curious and puzzling process enemies have been converted into friends. If this were not provable by countless instances, it would be one of the most incredible of all miracles; but there is hardly a man who has lived a large and active life, and who has lived at the same time a life devout and unselfish, who has not proved that this miracle has verily taken place. Perhaps there may be a negative aspect of the action of this miracle involved in the final

words, "at peace with him:" there may not be cordial reunion, there may be no interchange of fellowship or visitation or confidence, but the enemy will forget to sneer, he will forbear to fight, he will withhold the malignant criticism, he will be as a beast of prey whose teeth and claws have been extracted. On the other hand, it is more likely that enmity will be turned into friendship, and hostility into confidence, for the Lord seldom builds a pillar without placing upon it a capital. He seldom leaves a tower half-built; it is not enough for God merely to subdue enmity. His glory is in its transformation to actual trust and love. We do far too much for ourselves; we seek our life, and therefore we lose it; we suppose we are more than a match for the enemy, and therefore we play off our resources against his: better to pray than to plan; better to forgive than to circumvent; better to think of God than to think of man—or to think of God and thus think more truly and profoundly of man. Sometimes we do everything by doing nothing. Sometimes we win the battle by simply standing still and watching the wondrous ways of Providence.

"How much better is it to get wisdom than gold! and to get understanding rather to be chosen than silver!" (ver. 16).

Solomon returns to a very familiar doctrine, the very doctrine on which his book is based, and the very doctrine which he himself had proved in all the earlier processes of his better life. Gold changes in value; gold sometimes flies away like a frightened bird from the nest which it has warmed; but wisdom abides in winter and in summer; it is at once the most silent and the most eloquent of companions: it takes up no room, yet it fills the whole horizon of life; it can sing as well as speak; it has a key for every lock, it has an answer to every enigma; it loves to bow down in loving homage before the eternal throne, and to increase its volume and its quality by cultivating vital communion with the only wise God. Gold can remain with us in this world only; even suppose we can keep it to the very last day, and enjoy the very last luxury it can buy, we know of a certainty that it is the last luxury, that it is the last day, that it is the final effort; but wisdom is not something which the soul possesses, it is something which is transformed into the very nature of the

soul ; it gives the soul its highest and divinest qualities. What is it to have much silver, and to have no understanding ? What is money in the hands of a fool ? "Understanding" means sagacity, farsightedness, power of balancing one event against another, and especially that patient power which can wait until seed has grown, and until the mystery of growth has consummated itself. All human experience corroborates this text. There is nothing in gold, there is nothing in silver, that is not terminable ; there is nothing in wisdom that is not of the nature of seed, which requires only to be sown in the right soil, administered to by the right agencies of nature, to grow up, some bearing thirty, some sixty, and some an hundredfold. A verse like this may be considered to be the very pivot of the Proverbs. Everything turns upon this pivot that relates to real sagacity, true prudence, faithful industry, profitable study, and a right comprehension of life and application of its functions.

"Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall" (ver. 18).

Sentences of this kind can only have come after great experience. As we have before said, these proverbs are not speculations, but conclusions drawn from actual processes. We understand a statement of this kind best when we figure the writer as a man who has been watching the ways of life, and who has seen in a thousand instances ten times told how pride eventuates, and how a haughty spirit comes to fruition. The wise man tells us that pride yields the fruit of destruction, and a haughty spirit bears the fruit of humiliation. Pride can only grow for a certain time, strutting forth in all emptiness and vanity, as if it were a figure that deserved attention, and, behold, all the time it is walking along the level road to the pit of destruction : and a haughty spirit—that is, a spirit full of self-conceit and contempt for others—becomes so inflated and exaggerated and intolerable that at last it falls over the brink, and no man utters a cry of distress because it has sunk into the abyss. Only modesty is safe. Modesty is the first condition of true moral prosperity. When we come to know that we are nothing and have nothing in ourselves, and that we depend for everything upon the living God, we shall be saved from pride and from haughtiness.

“The hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness” (ver. 31).

Here, again, we come upon the moral test. The test is not, if it be found upon a throne, or with the control of vast material resources, but “if it be found in the way of righteousness.” An aged fool represents the very sum of folly; having, according to a well-known speech, seen the consequences of a thousand errors, he continues still to blunder; and in his case age has only meant a continuance and ripening of unwisdom. There is no more pitiable object upon the earth. All education has been thrown away or despised; every opportunity has been declined; every blessing of nature has been used for the succour and nutriment of error, mistake, and folly. On the other hand, how beautiful is the picture of the text! it is that of an aged philosopher who has seen the mystery of life unfolding little by little, and watched how wondrous is the purpose that is hidden in the little child, and has seen how all the way through life there has been the guidance of a hand invisible, the inspiration of a spirit far away and yet near at hand; the aged saint acknowledges that life is moral, that it is to be judged by the standard of righteousness, that it is not a game of chance, that the battle is not to the strong nor the race to the swift, but that through all there runs a purpose as beneficent as it is holy. The aged saint is found sitting at eventide telling all the wonders of the day, recounting the story of the fight, and going over all the particulars which have constituted the mystery of human experience. When such an aged saint is found in society all men gather around him who themselves wish to be wise; they consult him, they religiously admire him, and they praise him all the more that they first praise the God who made him what he is. We cannot prevent having the hoary head; the flying days, the hastening years, turn the raven locks into hoar-frost; but it does lie within our power to say whether that hoary head shall be a crown of glory or whether it shall be a token of humiliation and shame. We are not to put off the education of the soul until old age; old age is rather to be the proof that youth was devoted to the pursuit of wisdom and the love of understanding. A nation well stocked with hoary heads that are found in the way of righteousness is a nation rich with true riches.

"The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord" (ver. 33).

Life without a sense of providence would be intolerable. With a sense of providence life becomes solemn, religious, in a sense appalling. When we cast the lot into the lap we seem to be taking the chances of life, to be merely speculating, and to be guiding ourselves by whatever may turn up in the whirling wheel of uncertainty. There is indeed such a wheel, but it is under the control of the living God. We think we are going to do something of our own wit and strength, yet we do but come to know that we have done nothing but realize what was written aforetime, yea, even in the counsels of eternity. The bad man says he will bring to ruin those whom he hates, and lo! when he has wrought out his evil purposes he finds that he has only established those whose power he intended to throw down. The crafty man elaborates counsels of wickedness and selfishness, and thinks he will bring them to fruition in the night-time, and surprise society in the morning by his astuteness and his patience; and lo! no sooner does the dawn make the landscape evident than his counsel is seen to have been successful only in the out-working of his own confusion. Within limited circles we have great power, but within the great circle there is only One that reigneth, and that is the Lord of heaven and earth. We cannot overthrow men, we cannot do permanent injury to good men, we cannot finally hinder the progress of wise thought and beneficent ideas; for a while we may seem to be very successful herein, when we are all the time writing down the story of our own impotence, and we shall have to subscribe with our own hand the narrative of folly which we would gladly disown. Let any man recount the oppositions he has had to contend with in life, and then recount all his communion with God, and he will be the first to say that though the road has been very steep, and the wind often cold, and the whole air seemed to be filled with evil spirits, yet he has been led into an open place, and has been constrained by the mere impulse and inspiration of love to build a temple in honour of the God who has consummated his life in lovingkindness and tender mercy.

Chapter xvii. 7, 9, 17.

“EXCELLENT SPEECH,” ETC.

“Excellent speech becometh not a fool : much less do lying lips a prince”
(ver. 7).

BY “excellent speech” we are to understand superfluous or pretentious words; and by “a fool” we are to understand a vile person. Discrepancy between words and character should always be pointed out as a most vicious fault. The words and the character should be equal to one another ; so should the sermon and the preacher,—that is to say, the sermon should not be read, or delivered as if it did not belong to the preacher, but should be spoken as part and parcel of the man himself, expressing his character, his spiritual quality, and his supreme purpose. Vile persons have found it to their advantage to imitate the speech of the excellent ; they have spoken beautiful words without beautiful meanings, and they have been content to poetise rather than to realise, to treat life in its merely sentimental aspects, or in its speculative views ; or to treat it as an investment for social favour : they have never been solid, real, and true. Judge not by the speech alone, for therein we may be often deceived by skilful speakers, who have quite a critical choice of words and a dainty way of producing them, and yet they themselves dwell apart from their speech, and are living a totally different life. Vile persons should speak vilely ; pure persons should speak purely. The character should be the origin of eloquence. But all this is mere maxim which a rhetorician might teach, and which a moralist might confirm : the great point is that man cannot speak well with his tongue until a great regenerative work has been done in his heart. Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh ; as a man thinketh in his heart, so is he. These are sentiments with which our Biblical studies have made us familiar, but their familiarity must not destroy the reality of their reason

and the wisdom of their conception. A man is not to be put right externally, but internally: out of the heart proceed lies, adulteries, murders, and every form of wickedness. "Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again."

"He that covereth a transgression seeketh love; but he that repeateth a matter separateth very friends" (ver. 9).

In the New Testament we read that charity covers a multitude of sins, and this verse ought to read, He follows after charity who covers a transgression. The truth is thus doubly presented, and yet it is unchanged in its central quantity and purpose: the Old Testament and the New Testament concur in representing charity as delighting in the covering of transgression. We are not to understand by covering a transgression merely concealing it, cherishing its spirit, and intending to repeat its purpose, but secreting it from public observation; we are rather to understand that love delights in making the least possible of any transgression that may have been committed; it does not aggravate matters by dwelling upon them, it does not employ fancy to colour them; it rather seeks to show that the transgression was not meant as it has generally been understood, and that really the transgressor sinned rather out of ignorance than out of intention. The latter part of the text should be read, He that always returns to old grievances separateth very friends; that is to say, he cannot let a matter rest; he must go again and again to it; even when it is apparently buried, he must exhume it, and dwell upon its enormity, and show how impossible it is to overlook a transgression so great. The two speakers are therefore put in opposition, the one being inspired by a spirit of charity, and the other being animated by a spirit of exasperation and malice, always recurring to events that ought to be forgotten, and always giving new life to memories which have been buried beyond resurrection. Here again we come to fountain and origin, and must take away our attention from detail and accident; only he who is filled with the love of God can work these miracles of charity; only he who buries sin as God himself buries it can cease to repeat matters which ought to be forgotten by the recollection of love, by the memory of pardon. Sometimes men forgive sins or errors on the part of others, but

their friends insist upon keeping up the old feud, saying that whatever the original sufferer may have pardoned or overlooked his friends must insist upon inflicting penalty upon the offender. There would be more forgiveness in the world were controversies confined to the two parties immediately interested in them; but friends or outsiders or critics will make note of the matter, and irritate and exaggerate and do all in their power to make every sore a continually open wound. The one cure for this is baptism into the Spirit of Christ, a full and glowing realisation of the presence of Christ in all the thought and intention of life. Here again we may quote the words of the Blessed One—"Marvel not that I said unto thee, **Ye must be born again.**"

"A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity" (ver. 17).

A different and correcter rendering would give the verse thus: The true friend loveth at all times, and loveth like a brother born for adversity. We are to be on our guard against merely whimsical friendship, a friendship that is governed by moods and atmospheres, and incidental and ever-changing circumstances; our friendship is to be without changeableness or shadow of turning, a really rooted attachment to persons or to doctrines, and not subject to climatic influences, and not exposed to those variations which render it quite uncertain in what mood we may meet our friend when we next see him. This is what we mean by whimsical friendship,—we do not know whether we shall encounter a smile or a frown, whether it would please our friend to be jovial or ungenial, whether he may be in a mood to help us or to hinder us: **that** is not friendship; certainly it is not the friendship that is represented in this text. The text rather teaches us that we are to know our friends when we are in adversity; the friend then becomes a brother, because adversity develops him, tests his quality, elicits his resources, awakens the whole circle of his sympathy, and turns his sentiment into reality and action. We do not know who our friends are until we have been in trouble. The cloudy day dissolves the crowd that delights in sunshine. When we have need of our friends we shall know how many friends we have. The men who call upon us in the day of trouble are the men who are born for adversity, and who are representing the genius of true friendship. Here we are

brought to the Friend of sinners ; nothing can change him, if we be faithful and constant in our love towards him. He does not found his actions towards us upon the reports of others. He reads our heart for himself, comprehends the motive, in its beginning, and in its development, and in its consummation, and when all others forsake us he is nearer than ever to our soul. In six troubles he hath been with us, and in seven he will not forsake us,—“I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.” Jesus never turns away from those whom he loves ; he has given them into the Father's hand, out of which no man can pluck them. “The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his.” Of what avail is it that we have innumerable friends when we can entertain them, when we can give more than we receive, when we are sources of inspiration or blessing or satisfaction to them ? Under such circumstances we cannot test their character : it is when we are misrepresented, misunderstood, falsely accused, that we shall know how many stand by us ; the men who go with us into Gethsemane are the men who are our truest friends.

Chapter xviii.

THE EVILS OF NARROW-MINDEDNESS, ETC.

“Through desire a man, having separated himself, seeketh and intermeddleth with all wisdom” (ver. 1).

IN connection with this thought we have always turned our attention to student life, fancying a man so burning with an unquenchable desire for wisdom as to betake himself from public highways and tumults that he might study in solitude and silence. Another rendering of the text, however, will show its true meaning: “The separatist seeketh after his own desire, and against all improvement he shows his teeth.” We have here, then, a picture of the recluse, the hermit, the narrow-minded man,—a man who believes his own ideas alone represent true wisdom; a misanthrope; a man who will not take larger views, but who, having got an idea or two, separates himself from all other men, fondles and caresses himself, lives in the vitiating atmosphere of self-flattery, and literally intermeddles—that is to say, showeth his teeth against all other wisdom; sets himself in relation to it as a snarling dog, imagining that his own universe is sacred ground, encloses the whole of the divine paradise, and that whoever would oppose him would really oppose the Almighty himself. Narrow-mindedness is the curse of the Church. It leads to mistaken ideas of orthodoxy, to false limitations of philanthropy and divinity, and ends in the purest bigotry, which delights in persecution and penalty. Narrow-minded men call themselves earnest; but narrow-mindedness cannot be really earnest, though earnestness can often assume the appearance of being uncharitable or unsympathetic, but really its hostility is directed against darkness, error, superstition, and the narrow-mindedness of wrong thought. It must not be supposed that because a man is a heretic, therefore he is a wide thinker; because he is an infidel, therefore he is a philosopher;

because he is an unbeliever, therefore he is a genius. Who so wide-minded as the Son of God? Who like him gathered into his heart the whole world, and tasted death for every man? Never must it be allowed that Christianity is essentially narrow-minded; it is the man-loving religion, it is the world-converting power, its mercy endureth for ever; it is a religion for wanderers, prodigals, lost men, yea, it fills itself with the spirit of hopefulness, and even goes forth into the spiritual cemeteries of the world to awaken men from their death in trespasses and in sins; it hates all death, it dreads all pestilence, it seeks to vitalise, to purify, and to ennoble, and never to deaden, or to debase, or to contract the mind. Separatists cannot be strong men. They can have a kind of intensity which is often mistaken for strength, but real strength is made up of the counsel of many minds, so that personal wisdom becomes general philosophy, and the few ideas which are given to any man are enlarged, varied, and multiplied by trustful controversy, and attrition with other minds. Men were made for one another, and only in fellowship can they realise the fulness of the divine idea of human nature.

“A fool hath no delight in understanding, but that his heart may discover itself” (ver. 2).

That is to say, the object of the fool is that he may display his own cleverness; that is the meaning of the words “that his heart may discover itself,”—in other words, may disclose itself to those who look on, and show how able and clever and versatile and ingenious it is. The fool thus makes a kind of merchandise of understanding. He spreads out his wares, he calls attention to the counter, and says, Look how many are my resources; what an industrious collector I have been of old philosophies and modern wisdom. In reality he does not care anything for one of them; he rather despises understanding and wisdom in their spiritual conception and discipline. But it is his supreme delight to fill a whole market-place with gathered wares, to ticket them, to appraise them, to call attention to them, in order that he himself may be admired on account of their multitude and excellence. In the case of men who truly love wisdom their acquisitions are largely concealed by their modesty,

and have to be discovered little by little, and so they come as surprises upon the attention of even the closest observers. We say of some men the more we know them the more we are struck with the largeness of their nature, with the number of their attainments, and with the range of their sympathies: they do not display themselves at once, or in any degree that is avoidable; they leave others to explore their character, and to find to their astonishment and delight how rich they are in thought and feeling and every moral attribute.

“The words of a talebearer are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly” (ver. 8).

We should read, The words of a talebearer are as dainty morsels which are brought up again and again, so that they are wrought into the whole nature, and become as wounds in the body of him against whom they are directed. The general meaning would seem to be that when a talebearer has got hold of a number of reports they are to him really dainty morsels, very precious things, rumours that are to be very carefully cherished, repeated, made the most of, so much so that when other men have forgotten them they are reminded of their existence with a sense of delight and satisfaction. The talebearer takes malicious pleasure in never letting anything die that can excite curiosity or gratify a malevolent disposition. The talebearer is a cruel man, for with his dainty morsels he strikes the wounds that were healing, and re-opens them, and keeps them evermore inflamed; he would seem to watch until the wound is nearly healed, then he will revive some unhappy memory, or call into renewed existence some forgotten act associated with the keenest pain, and thus by long practice he becomes skilled in inflicting injuries of the subtlest as well as broadest kind upon men to whom he relates his lying stories. Talebearers are to be discouraged, resisted, and contemned; they are to be made to feel that they are nuisances in society, that they have nothing to say that is not of the nature of the most frivolous or malicious gossip; if wise men would treat talebearers so, talebearing would cease to interest and cease to bring upon itself any compensation. The moral atmosphere in which we live should be so pure that no talebearer could live in it.

"The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity ; but a wounded spirit who can bear ?" (ver. 14).

We are to understand that man is so constituted as to have power over weakness, whether it be in himself or whether it be inflicted upon him by a hostile hand. Suppose a man has suffered injury or loss, he is, so to say, to gather up his courage to a degree that will enable him to bear all the injury nobly and even forgivingly ; he is to take so large a view of life and all its claims and responsibilities as to put things into their right proportion, so that nothing may exercise upon him the influence of an exaggerated grievance. By "a wounded spirit" we are to understand a self-brooding spirit ; that is to say, a spirit that nurses the recollection of its injuries, delights in telling how much it has suffered, and spends days and nights in talking to old grievances as if they were old friends, and in conjuring up all manner of slights and offences and wrongs, insults and losses, until the whole nature becomes inflamed as with the very fire of perdition. Sometimes it has been represented that by "a wounded spirit" we are to understand one who has been very seriously injured, crushed in soul and in thought, who has indeed endured a kind of spiritual assassination : but that is not the meaning of the text ; by a wounded spirit understand a spirit that delights in brooding over its injuries, nursing its grievances, and making the most of them. Thus the two parts of the text are put into their proper relation ; in the one case we have a magnanimous spirit bearing a man up against all the infirmities of life, and in the other we have a self-worshipping or self-brooding spirit that afflicts itself with intolerable exasperations. Under all spiritual transitions, discipline, endurance, and the like, we are to remember that there is but one grace that can sustain us, one holiness by which our moral nature can be determined as to its growth and quality.

"A man that hath friends must show himself friendly : and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother" (ver. 24).

Curiously, the passage should be read, A man of many friends will suffer loss ; friendship cannot be inexpensively sustained ; by many attentions, hospitalities, outlays, friendliness will come to tax itself to a very high degree. Nor can this be avoided with any show of reason or conscience. Friendship ought always to

be more than a mere sentimentality ; it should be prepared with its strength, its time, its money, to help those who require its attention, and who deserve the comfort of its solicitude and sympathy. That "there is a Friend that sticketh closer than a brother" is true of some human friendships ; though rarely true, it is certainly true, and as such it is a fact that ought to be remembered for the cheering of the soul in much disconsolateness. The fulness of the meaning of this text can only be realised in the person and ministry of Jesus Christ. He alone remains when the storm is loudest, when the way is most difficult, when the whole outlook is one dense and thunderous frown. Having heard that there is such a Friend, we should ask his name ; we should say to every man who knows the way of life, "Sir, we would see Jesus." We are not to be content with the disciples or apostles ; they rise and fall, they live and die, and pass away ; we want to see the Christ, who is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever—the unchanging One, the Priest who proves his deity by his unchangeableness, and who gathers up into himself all prophecies and priesthoods and ministries, glorifying them by all that is divinest in heaven, and yet offering with marvellous condescension to place all his resources at our disposal. As a friendly man must go to great expense in maintaining friendliness, so must the brothers of Christ hold nothing dear to themselves that he requires for the propagation of his gospel, for the declaration of his love, for the maintenance of his kingdom. It would be wrong if Christianity were a cheap religion ; the very cheapness which we attach to it shows the value which we set upon its claims. Everything we have belongs to Christ, and only as we give it with a warm and loving heart do we show how much we love him to whom we owe everything, and how much we value the friendship which cost him his crown, his heavenly estate, and brought him to earth, that he might suffer and die, and rise again, and reclaim as if by some larger title all that he had lost on our account.

Chapter xix.

MAN'S CHIEF BUSINESS, ETC.

"He that getteth wisdom loveth his own soul: he that keepeth understanding shall find good" (ver. 8).

IT might be supposed that by the term "wisdom" some form of intellectual life and energy was signified; then the passage would read, He that is of capacious and brilliant mind, equal to the handling of any difficult mental question, is one who loveth his own soul. That, however, is not the meaning of the word "wisdom." In this connection we are to understand by "wisdom" the heart or the moral nature, and then the passage will read, He that keepeth his heart in all soundness and goodness, he that looks after his moral nature, cultivating, guarding, and succouring it at every point and according to every opportunity, is a man who loves his own soul; he is in very deed a man who is making the culture of his soul his principal business. A man may cultivate his mind to the highest pitch of refinement, and yet may utterly neglect his soul. By the term "soul" understand the innermost and noblest self; the divine and immortal manhood; that which was made originally in the image and likeness of God. No cultivation bestowed upon the brain can touch the moral faculty; indeed, where the intellectual powers are cultivated and the moral faculties are neglected man grows but in the power of doing mischief. Pitiful is the sight of any man who spends his life in loving other people's souls in the form of going after public reformatations and taking an interest in general progress, and utterly neglecting his own spiritual nature. The proverb does not point in the direction of selfishness, but in the direction of faithfulness. If a man cannot keep his own soul how can he keep the souls of others? We have noticed in life how some men are nobly unselfish in all public matters. They are prepared to sustain national reforms, to

contribute to great public funds, to labour almost constantly upon the public platform, and to associate their names with all manner of heroic and beneficent resolutions which are to be adopted by public assemblies. Under such circumstances men are often called unselfish, generous, public-spirited, and large-minded. Let us, however, do justice to all the interests that are involved, and declare plainly that a man may be utterly selfish even in the act of promoting public reformatations. There are men who would rather teach in a Sunday-school than teach their own families at home. They must be abroad, they must be in the public gaze, they can only live in the atmosphere of recognition and applause. Now these men are utterly selfish, though their conduct bears to public observation the aspect of great generosity and philanthropy. A man may never go outside his own family for the purpose of teaching, and yet he may be leading a truly unselfish life. Another man can only live in public meetings, so that his life at home is to him a burden and to others a discomfort. The text in speaking about a man's own soul does not call that man to narrow self-introspection and self-enjoyment, but calls him to the culture of his soul with a view to his going forth to minister to the deepest and most sacred wants of other men.

‘ The discretion of a man deferreth his anger ; and it is his glory to pass over a transgression ’ (ver. 11).

Probably no finer imitation of the divine character can be conceived than that which is given in this statement. Man here represents some of the most attractive attributes of the divine character. The man is great, and therefore he can afford to wait ; he is noble, and therefore he can defer his anger, saying even to his hottest passion, Stand back, for thou shalt not find expression to-day. This is an instance of self-control of the highest kind. Anger will speak, will splutter, will flash, will insist upon having vent ; here discretion says that anger shall not disclose its fires, but shall wait to know what is the will of the well-regulated mind, the will of justice, and the will of magnanimity. Pleasant it is, no doubt, to take instant vengeance upon those who anger us, but the whole spirit of the Bible binds its believers to discretion, forbearance, long-suffering. Sometimes we speak of it being high-spirited to resent an injury, to

bring the whip down sharply upon the back of a transgressor, and to lock up in penal exile those who have offended our vanity or even trampled upon our rights: the Bible teaches us that our glory is shown in making as little as possible of the transgressions which are committed against us; herein is the spirit of Christ, who when he was reviled reviled not again, and when he suffered he threatened not. Worldly minds make great mistakes about the dignity and independence of men who have subjected themselves to prolonged and earnest spiritual culture. Worldly minds do not understand that it is greater not to strike than to deliver a blow; they do not comprehend the philosophy which teaches that it is nobler to wait than to hasten the infliction of vengeance; they do not follow the reasoning which binds them to the conclusion that the highest glory of a man is to resemble most perfectly the meekness, patience, and forbearance of Almighty God. It does not follow that we are not to recognise the transgression, nor does it follow that we are not to be angry, but we are to remember that anger is all the nobler for being deferred and for being matured by the reasoning of conscience, and we are to remember that a transgression looks all the fouler when it is pointed out by an unstained finger. The more holy we are ourselves the blacker will the transgressions of other people appear—appear, not to us only, but to the transgressors themselves. There is a silent judgment in holiness. Without speaking one word, righteousness condemns every sinner and maintains the cause of pureness; whilst if it raged in the stormiest eloquence it might only get credit for being an ardent rhetorician. What we have to see to is that our character is so solid, so pure, so unselfish, and so radiant that it constitutes itself into an argument higher than any reasoning that can be expressed in words.

“Chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying” (ver. 18).

This is what Almighty God does in his parental relation to the human race. The very fact that we are being chastened shows that there is still hope that we may be recovered and established in goodness. The very fact that the rod is being laid upon us shows that our soul is yet within lines that are consistent with the hope that the soul may be saved. This

text has a peculiar meaning which is not obvious on the surface. We might read it thus: Set not thy soul on his destruction,—that is to say, do not go too far in thy chastening or correction. Anger, pure and simple, can only be satisfied by utter destruction. Interpreted in a Christian sense, anger is controlled by righteousness, it is limited by conscience, it is under the restraint and inspiration of reason, and, therefore, men are to see to it that those whom they strike are not over-punished, but that the hand is withheld in order to give time for the expression of penitence. Wrong-headed people cannot be cured by beating. Sometimes the rod is employed when reasoning alone ought to be called into exercise. If the reason has lost its faculty, or lost interest in all processes of moral inquiry, it is in vain that the back should be beaten with many stripes. Where the sin is one of the flesh, or ill-temper, or obstinacy, then the rod must be applied strongly and hopefully. The text teaches the necessity of discrimination in the administration of punishment. Do not punish a man too much. Do not go beyond the limits of reason; give the man himself to feel that his punishment is calculated and regulated, and therefore is all the more potent.

“The desire of a man is his kindness: and a poor man is better than a liar” (ver. 22).

This text is obscure. The second part of it is plain enough as to its letters; but what possible reason can there be in putting a poor man and a liar in comparison? The text should be so rendered as to express the idea that kindness makes a man desired or beloved. We draw near to kindness as if by a species of right. As a cold man approaches the fire, so does a desolate heart approach any one whose spirit is marked by kindness. By “kindness” we are to understand sympathy, philanthropy, geniality, approachableness. There are men whose very appearance seems to invite confidence. We say of some men, though we do not know them intimately, that we could tell them our troubles and seek their advice in our perplexities, because of the sweetness of their manner, the gentle dignity of their whole demeanour. Who ever draws near to mere dignity, pomp, circumstance, haughtiness? Who would go up to an iceberg

when he is shivering with cold? Who would go to a nest of stone in the wilderness when his head is aching from weariness? There are houses on whose fronts are marked the word Hospitality and the word Welcome; there are faces which indicate readiness to sympathise with and help those who are in trouble, darkness, or fear; there are voices full of the music of sympathy; to hear them is like hearing a gospel. This, then, is the meaning of the text—what makes a man desired or beloved is kindness. Little children run to him, poor women feel that they are in the presence of a defender, and helpless souls recognise in kindness a desire to protect, assist, and strengthen. When the text says “a poor man is better than a liar,” the sentence must be regarded as incomplete. Put in its proper sense it would run thus, A poor man who cannot help is better than a man who says he would help if he could, when all the time he knows he is telling a lie. The “poor man” of the text is an honest man. According to the limit of his ability he is willing to assist. The liar in the text is a man who may have much but is unprepared to part with anything, and who makes up for want of charity by profuseness of asseveration and false and heartless promises. Poor men, when they are honest, are amongst the best helpers of their fellow-men. They do not stand on ceremony or on dignity, or on any exchange of rights. The poor woman with many children of her own is more likely to assist the child of some poor neighbour than is a rich woman who has no sympathy with littleness, feebleness, cold, and want, and yet who speaks the word of charity and utters the sentiment and cant of heartless regard for the general wants of society. We are called upon to be honest, true, and simple, and to do according to the best of our ability, and to shame those who tell lies, saying how much they would do if they could, whilst all the time they will part with nothing of their strength and nothing of their luxury. There is a spirit of judgment in society, and at last the liar is unmasked and proved to be what he is in reality, unsympathetic, untrue, unlike Jesus Christ,—a living and mischievous lie.

“Cease, my son, to hear the instruction that causeth to err from the words of knowledge” (ver. 27).

The instruction of bad men can only tend to badness. It may

have all the form and colour of philosophical teaching, but its moral inspiration is bad, and therefore it must come to darkness and confusion in the end. The passage might be rendered, "Cease to hear instruction if you are going to err afterwards." This gives another view of the exhortation. Do not attend church if you mean to turn your religious service into an excuse for immorality : do not go to college if you are gathering information merely for the sake of increasing your power to do mischief : do not read books if you are simply seeking for a key that will enable you to open gates that are forbidden : better not appear to care for instruction than to accept it as an instrument which is perverted to mischievous purposes : be honest, be sincere in your love of ignorance, in your profession of unbelief, in your disregard for all things sacred,—on no account pretend to love the right and yet do the wrong, because you add to the wrong the aggravation of hypocrisy. Get instruction for the purpose of being stronger. Pursue knowledge that you may have both hands filled with instruments which will enable you to do a great and useful work in society. Thus the Bible doctrine always seeks to establish harmony as between purpose and conduct, motive and policy ; the Bible will have no discrepancy or contradiction in any man's constitution ; it will insist upon the man moving in his integrity or completeness in whatever direction he has chosen to pursue. How honest a book is the Bible ; how it insists upon bad men showing themselves in their true colours ; how it further insists that the good man shall not be good merely in parts and sections of his character, but good through and through ! The best exposition of this text is to repeat the rendering—"Cease to hear instruction if you are going to err afterwards."

Chapter xx.

THE FOLLY OF STRIFE, ETC.

“It is an honour for a man to cease from strife: but every fool will be meddling” (ver. 3).

“**M**EDDLING” is a word which might be rendered “showing his teeth”; then the text would read—Every fool would be showing his teeth, snarling, threatening to bark and to bite, as if his dignity were threatened. The subject is strife, and the wise man is teaching that he who ceases from strife gets to himself a distinguished honour; he sees through the folly of striving and through its uselessness, and he perceives that life can only be wisely and beneficently conducted by a policy of conciliation and sympathy: on the other hand, the fool does not take this view; he proves his folly by showing his teeth, by asserting his dignity, by insisting upon his rights, by declaring that he will never have anything settled until he has it settled his own way. The Bible never hesitates to call such a man a fool. We have come to regard the word “fool” as a vulgarism, and we hesitate to use it; but in the Old Testament it is used with great freedom, and always in relation to moral shortcoming and perverseness. To call a man a fool in a vindictive spirit, or merely to accomplish his humiliation in the eyes of others, is wholly anti-Christian and positively wicked; but to describe a man as a fool who is always standing upon his rights and asserting his dignity is but to adopt the very spirit of the Bible. The great man will show his greatness by his love of peace: the fool will show his littleness by his love of controversy. In a life like ours it is impossible for every man to have his own way, or for each one to see as every other man sees; society is so constructed as to require the inspiration of mutual regard and mutual deference; otherwise society would fall to pieces. It is easy to get up a controversy; easy to show the teeth; easy to insist upon punctilious rights;

easy to turn ceremony into a moral ordinance ; but all this is opposed to the spirit of the revelation which we believe to be divine. It is indeed humbling to human pride to have to retire from some controversies ; on the other hand it is a mortal insult to moral dignity to have to continue certain contentions. We may obtain our little and temporary rights, but in obtaining them we sacrifice the eternal right of love, conciliation, and peace. Never give away the greater for the sake of the less : never surrender the substance in order merely to seize the shadow.

“The sluggard will not plow by reason of the cold ; therefore shall he beg in harvest, and have nothing” (ver. 4).

The sluggard has his reason for not acting, and he thinks that reason of sufficient consequence to justify his abstention. He says it is cold, and he will wait until the sun shines. He forgets that the very act of ploughing overcomes the inconvenience of cold, that if he would exercise himself he would soon be warm, and that it is within the power of man to do without the sun for a certain period and for certain purposes. The sluggard insists upon being warmed from the outside, and not from the inside ; he will have his skin warmed by the sun, he will not warm his own blood by exercise. What is the consequence ? He will not know the full issue of his conduct until harvest comes, and he finds in desolate fields the rebuke of his indolence and the condemnation of his neglect. Whatever we obtain in this life should be the result of labour : that labour may be of the mind or of the hand, but it must in some way be true labour ; otherwise whatever is obtained will bring with it little of sanction and little of blessing. What applies to the sluggard in the culture of a field applies to the sluggard in all the relations and bearings of life. The student who will not study shall beg in examination and have nothing to show as the result of the expenditure which his schooling has occasioned. The man who will not think shall beg in the time of action, and shall have nothing ; because his mind was neglected his hands shall be empty. This is the great rule which binds society in happy consolidation. In all labour there is profit, and the profit is oftentimes as surely in the labour itself as in the substantial advantages which it brings. The huntsman declares that it is not for the sake of the prey but for the sake of the exercise that he pursues

his sport. Virtue is said to be its own reward ; so is study, so is all painstaking, so is all real devotion of heart. If we could apply this doctrine in all its fulness we should destroy a good deal of religious selfishness. Sometimes men are good merely that they may obtain heaven. Where that is the motive goodness is impossible. We are to find heaven in the goodness itself, in the exercise of prayer, in the service of charity, in the cultivation of all virtue. There are many sluggards who are not known by that contemptuous term. He who does not give to philanthropic appeals is a sluggard. He who does not religiously watch the evolution of providence and apply its solemn lessons is a sluggard. He who does not spend the strength which is renewed in sleep in doing good to others is a sluggard. In all cases the issue is the same : the harvest will be a desolation, and in the end there will be emptiness, disappointment, and grievous shame.

“Most men will proclaim every one his own goodness : but a faithful man who can find ?” (ver. 6).

The “faithful man” is one who carries out what he has promised to do. If he has sworn to his hurt he will still fulfil his vow. He has determined not to preach his goodness, but to realise it, to embody it, to make it the principal fact of his life. Most men will claim theoretical goodness, or acknowledge some philosophy of virtue, or prate about the shortcomings of other men, and thus indirectly magnify and glorify themselves : many men can talk about religion, can enter into controversy respecting its doctrines, and display great zeal and eloquence respecting its dogmas ; all this amounts to nothing unless it be followed by that faithfulness which realises, executes, embodies the goodness that is talked about. The wise man in his day found it difficult to discover a faithful man. The question which he asks is proposed in a tone that is deeply pathetic. Who can find a faithful man ? Where is the man whose action is equal to his word ? whose heroism is equal to his theory ? whose self-abnegation is equal to his professions of obedience ? Although the wise man asks the question and leaves it without reply, we are not to suppose that it is incapable of being answered. Truly it cannot be answered unless there be a motive higher than any known within the limits of human nature : there must be inspiration

from on high : direct action of the Holy Spirit upon the human mind and heart : this is the miracle of Jesus Christ, and it can only be wrought within the shadow of the Cross. It is time men had done talking about goodness. One action is better than a thousand theories. To lead the blind by a way that they know not, to be a helper of the helpless, to give shelter to those who are houseless, is better than to talk fluently and copiously about theories of virtue, philosophies of goodness, and airy schemes of impracticable reformation. One act of charity will outweigh ten thousand romantic dreams of amelioration.

“Divers weights, and divers measures, both of them are alike abomination to the Lord” (ver. 10).

Not here only, but elsewhere, is this doctrine laid down in the Bible. It is indeed laid down in this very chapter, in the 23rd verse, wherein we read, “Divers weights are an abomination unto the Lord ; and a false balance is not good.” The meaning of this declaration is evident : it cannot be right to have one weight for the rich and another weight for the poor, one weight for those who can test our honesty, and another weight for those who must take our honesty on credit. Men must not tamper with the standard weights and measures of the country. Such standards are not human and social only, they have a direct religious significance, as we infer from the fact that any violation of them is an abomination to the Lord. We need not limit the doctrine actually to weights and measures of a commercial kind ; there are weights and measures in speech, in criticism, in moral judgments, in rewards and penalties, and indeed in all the economy of social life. In society we must have certain standards common to the whole body, otherwise disorder will ensue, and misunderstanding may lead to war. Take the doctrine, for example, in the matter of language : there is a national language with which no man may tamper ; we must not have words used in other than patent and well-established senses ; otherwise we shall have a system of criticism which may lead to endless confusion and practical difficulty of every kind. The English language must be interpreted by the English lexicon. It will not do for moralists to employ common language in uncommon senses, otherwise the populace will be unable to follow

their teaching or to determine their meaning. As a man must not interfere with the metallic currency of his country, so he must not interfere with its verbal currency. We can have no mental reservations, no reading between the lines, no saying one thing and meaning another; private glossaries must not be allowed; our Yea must be yea, and our Nay, nay. To this frankness and simplicity and reality of life will the Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ conduct us. Many a man who would shrink from the idea of giving short weight in a mercantile sense may be guilty of giving short weight in a moral sense or in a verbal sense. He will so curtail his speech, or reserve himself in the declaration of his vow, or avail himself of recondite criticism in the construction of his utterances, as to destroy their meaning, and turn them in a direction precisely opposite to that in which they are accepted by the common mind. Words are given to us that we may speak the truth, not that we may conceal it or serve a lie.

“The hearing ear, and the seeing eye, the Lord hath made even both of them” (ver. 12).

The meaning would be, that therefore he who made the ear can hear, he who made the eye can see. Our faculties are all numbered, and their force is precisely determined by the Judge of all the earth. He knows how much we can hear, how much we can see, how much we can do, and when the evening comes and the hour of reckoning strikes he will only expect little from those to whom little has been given, and much will be expected from those to whom great gifts have been entrusted. It is curious to observe how continually the Bible refers to the fact that the ear and the eye are of God's making. There is a great moral conveyed by this fact, namely, the moral just stated, that he who made our faculties understands them, controls them, and exercises them himself on an infinite scale. If we could once realise the idea that God hears every word we utter and every breath we draw, the whole spirit of our life would instantly change. It is because we befool ourselves in these matters, imagining that the Lord can neither see nor hear, that we do the things which are roots of evil and occasions of burning shame. The true man always lives under the distinct conviction that his life is daily

judged by heaven. "Thou God seest me" is the motto of the wise man. But even this motto may be perverted, for we may endeavour to serve God with eye-service, and so escape the discipline of the heart, the inner service, the deeper obedience, which can only spring from divine inspiration. We are to do good as certainly and as copiously as if the Lord paid no heed to us. We are to be as careful about our words, whether uttered to ourselves or to others, as if the Lord did not hear our speech. Seeing, however, that we are but of the dust and that our poor life is marked most conspicuously by frailty, it is needful that we should view every motive and impulse of a concrete kind, that we may be lifted out of our moral sluggishness, and become animated by a spirit of hopefulness, a hopefulness which leads us to desire that at the end the Master may say, "Well done, good and faithful servant." It is noticeable, however, that even in that judgment it was the servant who had to return the record of his life. There are two distinct methods pursued in the awarding of honour and shame: in the first instance the servants come forward and tell the Lord what they have done with the talents with which they have been entrusted, and upon their own statement they are appointed to wider rulership: in the other set of cases the Lord himself states the record, points out the good that had been done and the good that had been neglected, and upon his own statement he awards honour and dishonour. That we are under the continual criticism of heaven is an encouragement to us when we are trying to do good, but is a fearful and appalling reflection, if we are endeavouring to deceive the eyes of Omniscience and to find a place where the presence of God is not realised.

"He that goeth about as a talebearer revealeth secrets: therefore meddle not with him that flattereth with his lips" (ver. 19).

What relation is there between a flatterer and a talebearer? There may be a subtle flattery in the suggestion that the man is fascinating the attention of the hearer and probably making some inroad upon his confidence. It happens, however, that there is no reference to what is commonly understood as flattery: but the text should be read, He that is open with his lips:—meddle not with a man who cannot keep his lips closed. There

are men who are dying of a flux of words. They run themselves out in endless streams of vapid talk ; they multiply words to no purpose ; what is lacking in moral emphasis they seek to make up by a multiplicity of words or an aggravation of noise, as we speak loudly to those who do not understand our language, thinking that by heightening the voice we are elucidating our meaning. Have nothing to do with wordy men, would seem to be the injunction of the text.* Society could not live if it were not for the sacred principle of secrecy, which may be called honour or confidence or trustworthiness ; at the same time, there remains the fact that man must be upon confidential terms with man, otherwise business would become an impossibility, and friendship would soon degenerate into hypocrisy. The good man prays every day that God would keep the door of his mouth and watch over the entrance of his lips, that he sin not with his tongue. Here again we come upon the necessity for religious culture, as distinguished from merely artistic stipulation or Spartan discipline. Unless the heart be under the control of the highest religious motives, the tongue will reveal every secret and the lips will stand open like a door continually ajar.

“It is a snare to the man who devoureth that which is holy, and after vows to make inquiry” (ver. 25).

This is a peculiar expression, greatly in need of simplification. The idea is that a man gets himself into trouble when he rashly says concerning anything, “it is holy” : having thus put himself into a thoughtless relation to his property, he afterwards vows to inquire whether he can keep his word : he plays fast and loose with religious principles and obligations. In order to escape a duty he pleads that he has nothing wherewith to respond to the appeal of charity or the claim of righteousness, because he says that all he is possessed of is “holy,” that is to say, dedicated to religious uses. When the appellant has gone away and left the man in the possession of his gain, the man begins to enquire whether after all his property is really dedicated ; then he begins to shuffle, to change his ground, to trifle with principles, and to proceed to a selfish use of that which he had declared to be sanctified. So the man gets wrong through a profession of over-

* See note, *post*, page 230.

religiousness. He is a hypocrite. He assumes a most pious air in the presence of men who seek his assistance, and no sooner are they gone than he recalls his vow and declares that he has a right to do what he will with his own. Is it not true that the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked? Is not piety sometimes put on as the protection of selfishness? Is it not needful for us to place ourselves constantly under the scrutiny and inspiration of the Holy Ghost, lest we tell lies to ourselves and to God?

“A wise king scattereth the wicked, and bringeth the wheel over them” (ver. 26).

A passage of this kind may easily be perverted by being used for the purpose of supporting a doctrine of persecution. To bring the wheel over a man seems to be a figurative expression for the very direst cruelty. If a man is wicked, crush him with the wheel, tear him limb from limb, decapitate him, in some way show that there is a power that can terminate not only his enjoyment and his liberty, but his life. That, however, is not the meaning of the text. We are not urged by these words to persecute those who differ from us, or who are even desperately wicked. Always distinguish between persecution and righteous penalty: between mere oppression and the assertion of that righteousness which is essential to the consolidation of society. When the stacks of corn were spread upon the threshing-floor the grain was separated from the husk by a sort of sledge or cart which was driven over them. The process was for the purpose of separating the chaff from the wheat; the process therefore was purely beneficent: so with the wise king; he winnows out evil persons, he signalises them, he gives them all the definiteness of a separate position, and by bringing them into startling contrast with persons of sound and honest heart he seeks to put an end to their mischievous power. Indiscrimination is the ruin of goodness. We have only to bring evil men into the conspicuousness of their real character—that is, to show others what they really are—in order to terminate their corrupting influence. Whilst the tares and the wheat are both to grow together until the harvest the tares are never mistaken for the wheat; it is not so in moral relations; sometimes there may be such an

association of the evil with the good as to demand prompt and vital separation the one from the other. Men are separated by different ways, not by imprisonment, not by merely personal penalty, not by stigma and brand of an offensive character; they are separated by contrariety of taste, aspiration, feeling, sympathy; in proportion as the good are earnest do they classify themselves, bringing themselves into sacred association with one another, and by sensitiveness of moral touch they feel the evil and avoid it; they know the evil person at a distance and are careful to put themselves out of his way and reach. What is represented as being done by the wise king is done by the cultivation of high principle and Christian honour.

NOTE.

"If instead of the miserable platitudes, or good-for-nothing gossip, which now does so much to kill our time and enervate the intellect, some really refreshing interchange of thought could be effected, how much more we should act like human and immortal beings! And yet, so vitiated is the social taste, that any attempt to realise this, by the use of wise and well-chosen language, would most likely secure contempt, and the intruder would probably be the object of derision.

"But ponder a few sentences which good English writers have left on this subject: 'The first ingredient in conversation is truth; the next, good sense.' 'He who sedulously attends, pointedly asks, calmly speaks, coolly answers, and ceases when he has no more to say, is in possession of some of the best requisites of man.' 'The secret of tiring is to say everything that can be said on the subject.' 'Speak little and well, if you wish to be considered as possessing merit.' 'When I meet with any that write obscurely, or speak confusedly, I am apt to suspect two things: first, that such persons do not understand themselves; and, secondly, that they are not worth being understood by others.' 'Eschew fine words as you would rouge; love simple ones as you would native roses on your cheeks. Act as you might be disposed to do on your estate; employ such words as have the largest families; keep clear of foundlings, and of those of which nobody can tell whence they come, unless he happens to be a scholar.' . . .

"Make Christ the theme of your converse, and take him as your pattern. 'In him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.' 'And all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth.' Trace the records of his ministry with respect to conversation. He condemned the trifler and the jester, as much as the cynic and the hypocrite. No light and wanton words came from his lips, but words of purity and truth. Let us imitate our glorious Pattern, and by a sensible, earnest, and spiritual conversation 'seek to minister grace unto the hearers.'"

—GERVASE SMITH, D.D.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we praise thee with a loud voice and a cheerful heart, because thy gifts are many, thy love is constant, thy mercy is very tender. We are often walking in the cloud, yet even in the cloud we hear a voice saying, This is my Son, hear ye him ! and when the cloud has dissolved we see no man save Jesus only. We are often in mystery and pain and agony, and we say in the morning, Oh that it were night ! and at night, Oh that it were morning ! for we are tossed to and fro, and made weary with many a vexation, and behold our souls are fretted in anxiety and care. Yet then thou dost come to us with healing. Thou art the God of all comfort ; thou hast innumerable solaces, so that we say, There is balm in Gilead ; there is no sorrow which our Saviour cannot understand and sanctify. Then we glory in tribulations also, not for their own sake, but because thou hast so ordained that tribulation shall work experience, and experience hope, and thus out of the darkness we shall get our light, and out of the sorrows of life we shall gather our harvest of joy. This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes. We count our griefs as treasures, we count our losses as gains, and we reckon up all our chastisement as part of our education. Continue to handle our poor little life as thou wilt : we can make nothing of it ; we cannot direct it, we cannot see to-morrow, but thou knowest all that is meant by life, its possible immortality in heaven, and thou hast so set before us thy truth and thy kingdom and thy promise that we shall know what thou wouldst have us be and do. We are redeemed, not with corruptible things as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Jesus Christ ; we are sanctified by the Holy Spirit, we are daily meetened for some higher school and nobler society : may we not be fools wasting our hours, but wise men buying up the opportunity, redeeming the time, and making it large and rich with usefulness. Save us from the laughter of the fool, from the joys that are like foam dying as it rises ; save us from all mean, corrupting, and debasing society ; may we never condescend to drink at the troughs of time when we may slake our thirst at the fountains of eternity ; from all that is low, and mean, and worldly, and selfish, Lord, deliver us by thine almighty grace. Help us to spend our little life-day well, wisely : may we sprinkle it with tears as with dew ; may we work in it as a garden of the Lord which the Lord himself will one day visit to look at the fruits and the flowers which we have grown ; may we try to be better and to do better every day ; may we be gentle, sympathetic, condescending, kind, courteous, loving where love is possible, and saving men where thy grace will reach them. Make our homes castles of security, defences against all that is unruly, confused, and tumultuous ; may our houses be temples of the

divers estates of body, soul, and mind, let thy blessing rest upon each of us according to the speciality of our need; let it come first upon the great mountains of prosperity, health, strength, confidence in the goodness of God, so that they who have no pain and no weakness may receive according to their present happy condition an increase of the benediction of God. May all the mountain of their strength be offered to thee on the altar as a tribute of thankfulness and obligation to thy beneficence. Then regard those who are in great fear and distress because of the plague of sin, the torment of remorse, the bitterness of memories which they seem to be unable to quench and to destroy—pursued by ghosts of evil days, tormenting spirits, and affrighting recollections of things that have been done, that shall burn as an eternal shame, and to such do thou speak the great gospel of forgiveness of sins and the total oblivion of iniquity on thy part, seeing that thou dost cast it behind thee like a stone into the depths of the sea. Regard any upon whom sudden calamity may have fallen,—unexpected bereavement, great, solemn, startling sorrow, whose houses have been suddenly darkened, and the light of whose eyes has been suddenly quenched. Thou alone canst help the heart in such agony; we do, therefore, lovingly commend to thy tender care, to thy merciful regard, and thy healing benediction, those upon whom the strokes have fallen, that stagger and shake the very life of man. Give such a vision of thy providence that shall be itself a new redemption from fear. Enable them to take wide views, to form just estimates of thy way, lest, being suddenly overbalanced, they may yield to the human distress in forgetfulness of the divine grace. Look upon those who are honestly and honourably endeavouring to live the life of earth in the sight of men, and who yet have to contend with much difficulty, whose days are periods of contention and fierce struggling; help us in every honest purpose and in every just design, and in thine own time send such success as shall save the mind from despair and create in the heart a flame of praise. Regard our country, defend our shores, save Her Majesty the Queen, and add many to the days of her reign; establish her throne in righteousness, and let her house be favoured of God. Guide us in all times of peril, in all crises; in all national emergencies and dangers help us to be simple, sincere, just, and honourable. Save us from all foolish panic and unreasonable alarm; enable us to walk in paths of wisdom and of honour, and to delight above all things in discovering and doing thy holy will. The Lord now come to us during this day; may it be a day of spring in our hearts, when buds shall open in widening blossoms, when that which has hitherto been apparently unfruitful shall bring forth according to the bounty of the divine purpose. May we all be clothed with some vernal grace, some spring beauty, so that we may give, each of us, a new tribute to the Lord who made the seasons, and causes them to pass in perpetual procession. Dry our tears, lift our burdens from our shoulders, and if they must needs be imposed again, we shall at least be stronger for the rest, and better able for the remaining difficulties and dangers that are before us. So let thy blessing come upon every one of us, that out of each heart there may go a song of his own, of tender, grateful recollection, of childlike and loving trust. May our whole life be set to the music of thy will and to the purpose of thy government. Lead us

into all truth ; save us in the time of trial and temptation ; as gold is tried in the fire, so may we be tried in the furnace of thy providence, and after thou hast wrought thy will in us and upon us, through a manifold and often inscrutable discipline, bring us from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south, a redeemed household, a holy family, a noble priesthood, a royal generation, to inhabit the courts of the upper sanctuary, to abide in the abiding Zion. Amen.

Chapter xx. 9.

“Who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin?”

A GOSPEL QUESTION.

THIS is a gospel question before the time of the gospel. Every indication of great human pain and unrest, fierce trouble and tumult that will not be calm, is of the greatest consequence as enabling us to form some opinion of the mysteriousness of human nature and the purpose of God in its constitution. It would be a false supposition that all this moral pain, fear, shame, distress, and sense of moral impotence came upon men in consequence of the birth of Christ into the world, who came with a new revelation of human nature, and consequently to suppose that if Christ had not come into the world no such self-humiliation and self-despair would have been experienced. All the great conditions of the human mind we find as distinctly in the Old Testament as in the New: all the questions that sharpen themselves into fierce agonies are in the nature of man and part of the mystery of his constitution. They are not learned from books or derived from external teaching; they rise up in the heart of man to assert a mysterious purpose and an incalculable and solemn destiny. It would be impossible for any man seated at the Lord's table, or seated at the Cross itself, to put a more intensely evangelical question than is put in the text, which occurs actually in the Proverbs—“Who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin?”

When the lawyer stood up and tempted Christ, saying: “Master, which is the great commandment in the law? What shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?” Jesus Christ did not make a new answer for the occasion: he threw the mocking inquirer back upon the first ages—upon the law, his favourite

study, thus showing that all the great questions of the human heart were anticipated in the Old Testament, and that, properly read, the Old Testament is in its own degree as evangelical a book as is the New Covenant written with the precious blood of Christ. Does any man suppose that if we did not come to church we should not be troubled by great and solemn inquiries? Let us first of all do away with that mischievous sophism in our moral thinking. A man has only to look into his own heart, as the enlightened and foremost pagans did, to find in that heart questions that demand a revelation, agonies that can find no healing balm away from God. The inquiry of the text is a purely personal one; it comes to each of us: if any man can answer the question in the affirmative let him do so. We do not find anything in the inquiry that forecloses any novel and peculiar experience on our part, so that if there be a man who can say, "Yes," to the inquiry of the text, he will entitle us to put to him some very searching cross-examination.

Let us examine the ground that is laid down in the text. The solemn, personal, direct, urgent inquiry is this—Who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin? Can you? Then why those occasional doubts, and fears, and gloomy forecasts which trouble your conscience? The pure man ought to be lifted above fear, the clean soul ought to have a peculiar, a shadowless joy. Have you that gladness? Then why those nightmares of the soul, why those sudden fears, why those peculiar distresses, why those doubts and scepticisms and questionings—why so many indications of unrest and tumult? This ought to suggest that you have not completed the task which you supposed yourself to have accomplished in the heart. Can you say yes to the inquiry? Then why those blemishes on your character which are so obvious to every observer? how comes it that you do not impress other people with having done this work, the purification and cleansing in your nature and conscience, and will and purpose—how account for this marvellous misconception of your character that prevails on every hand—so conceited, so peevish, so fretful, so truthless, so unreliable, so inconstant, so difficult of management, pleasant when you have your own way, disagreeable when you have to

take some other course? Why so—where is the purity, where is the cleansing, where is the proof? Questions of this kind, in return for calm assertion of purity and cleansing, must considerably impair the integrity and wholeness of the claim. A man cannot have made his heart pure and clean without somebody knowing it. Where is the witness? Would your wife sign an affidavit to testify to your purity and cleansing—your husband—any two of your sons,—any two persons who have known you for the last ten years only—would they sign that this man A.B. has cleansed his heart and made his soul pure, so that there is now no flaw in all the integrity of his manhood: he is holy, complete, clean, and ineffably and superlatively true and right? The challenge is laid down, I await until it be taken up. But I cannot wait so long, for life is short—I must make more limited stipulations with you. And why with you? Because with myself. How do I know you so well? Because I know myself in and out. How did you acquire all this knowledge of human nature? By studying my individuality and nothing else. He who knows himself knows everybody: humanity is one.

Have you made your heart clean and purified yourself from sin? How did you do it? You cannot hesitate to reveal the process if you have accomplished the result. We shall question the reality of the result if you hesitate one moment about revealing the process. Have we not seen little children, who have been set to do a puzzle, suddenly in the midst of the fierce buzz of conversation say, "There it is"? How did you do it? "I will not tell how I did it." But did you do it fairly and honestly? Just in proportion as you decline to say how it was done, we must think that it was done wrongfully, clandestinely, that some liberty was taken with the law of the case, and that there is a blemish in the process. How did you make your heart pure and clean from sin? how did you come to be able to do something which no other man in Biblical history has ever confessed that he did in any sense that God himself would accept and endorse? Where the nitre, the soap? Where the strange chemistry? Abana and Pharpar, and broad rivers and deep, in the east and in the west, have been useless for the

removing of this deep ingrained stain of the devil,—how did you remove it? In the fifty-first Psalm, David, in the supreme agony of his self-abhorrence and contrition, desires God to be merciful to him, and to cleanse him, and to create in him a clean heart, and to renew within him a right spirit. Here we have David and David's sin renouncing themselves, giving up the problem of self-purification and cleansing,—how then do you account for having done something which has been the supreme and impossible miracle of all antecedent human consciousness? We encounter an affirmative declaration with very stubborn doubt.

We must make a very broad distinction between crime and sin, between the overt act and the inner and spiritual motive, purpose, and inclination of the soul. Crime is the vulgarity of sin; crime is the blackguardism of evil nature. We must therefore leave that quarter altogether and go indoors, looking at the secret heart, looking into the mysterious constitution and operation of all the motive powers which impel us in our constant thinking and in our daily action. It is a question of the reins, of the heart, the desire of the soul, the motions of the will, the suggestions of the deep nature. This is not a matter of washing hands, but of washing hearts, and the rivers can supply no water that can get far enough in to touch the black blood of the rebel heart. This is the grand evangelical doctrine without which it would be impossible to understand the priesthood and the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

Suppose a man should say, "Yes, I have made my heart clean, and I am pure from sin." How would such a testimony affect the general judgment of mankind—would it instantly secure implicit and grateful credence? Think a moment. I have heard a man say, "I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin," or words which seem to involve the precise meaning of that declaration—how did that testimony affect me? I do not want to take any pessimist view of human nature: I am so constituted that I always take the best view of every man until he has proved himself to be unworthy of confidence; I could not live under any other impulse or standard of judgment. When the declaration therefore was made, taking this optimist

and brightest view of human nature, what impression did it make upon my mind? Did I at once invite the witness to my confidence, and offer him all the resources of every kind that were at my command? Instantly I encountered his testimony with incredulity, just as one would have done if he had said that by lifting up his shoulders he was preventing the planets from falling from their orbits. How is that testimony regarded in your place of business—would you allow the man, upon that testimony, to become your debtor? Why then should you sentimentalise about a possibility which you would ignore in all the practical transactions of life? Why have a sentimental theory and a practical theory? Why be liberal and noble in all regions where you are not touched or implicated, and be thoroughly sceptical and stubborn in doubtfulness in all those lines where you are really summoned to a deep and solemn judgment upon appearances and realities?

Was the man then unanswered? Certainly not. Where then was the blemish? He did not know what he was talking about. He meant crime when he said sin; he meant outrage when he said wrong, evil. He thought of the magistrate, not of God; it was the constable he defied, not the Judge of the whole earth. Understand, therefore, that within a given region man may be honourable and upright and clean and pure. Relatively, socially, no one may be able to say one word against him. That proves nothing whatever as to his interior and spiritual condition before God. How can such a man be brought to a clear understanding of the realities of things? By talking? Never. By hearing profound and eloquent exposition of evangelical truth? You might as well speak to him in an unknown tongue. How will he be brought to a right standpoint? By scourging, by sorrow by bereavement, pain, loss, by earthquakes that shall make the fabric of his prosperity and his confidence tremble. Meet him coming back with slow and dragging step from his one child's grave, and then he will have ears to hear what the Spirit saith to all mankind. Meet him sitting on the ruins of his prosperity, unable with palsied hands to put one stone on the top of another, and then with paralysed lips he may try to tell what a fool he was when he thought himself good and true and clean. Not the

evangelical sermon but the evangelical Providence will take hold of that man, and wring him till he cry out, "I abhor myself in dust and ashes." When such sorrow overtakes a man it is like morning falling upon a traveller: it is not darkness, it is light; it is not imprisonment, it is deliverance; it is not limitation, it is an expansion and enfranchisement in divine rulership and dominion and sacred, holy hope. So when the Providence darkens around us, it is a cloud full of bright stars and suns. Let the outer enclosure fall off, and the shining orb will beam and burn upon our eyes in ample, genial summer.

There is a tremendous responsibility in returning an affirmative answer to the inquiry of the text. The nature and extent of that responsibility throws immeasurable doubt upon an audacious and profane affirmative. If a man were to say, "Yes, I have made my heart clean, and am pure from my sin," the first thing he would do would be to contradict the whole testimony of Scripture. Nowhere in the Bible is it allowed that any man can purify his own nature. Everywhere in the Scriptures the exact contrary is explicitly and emphatically laid down. We ought not to forego the testimony of Scripture lightly upon the easy affirmation of a man who in all probability has not taken into consideration the full signification of the terms which he employs when he declares himself pure and clean.

The next thing he does is to supersede the work of Christ. The declaration of the gospel is that the blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin; without shedding of blood there is no remission. The gospel declaration is that "if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." The evangelical statement is, "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost." He therefore undertakes a very grave responsibility who testifies that without Christ he has solved the problem of purity and self-cleansing.

The next thing he does is to withdraw himself from all the cleansing, purifying agencies which constitute the redeeming ministry of the universe. He commits the sin against the Holy

Ghost—the unpardonable sin. Why unpardonable? Because he comes out of the region within which the Holy Ghost operates. Were it possible for an owner of many fields to withdraw one of them from the influence of the sun, and the dew, and the living air, he would commit the unpardonable sin in that department of action. That is the unpardonable sin—getting away from, cutting the connection with, all spiritual agency, all redeeming power, all the mediatorial scheme of Christ, involving and including his life, his doctrine, his example, his atoning sacrificial death, his divine resurrection, his priestly intercession, and his great gift of the ever-pleading, ever-living, ever-renewing Holy Ghost.

Seeing then that so much responsibility would be incurred by returning an affirmative reply to the text, who will dare say Yes? Let God be true and every man a liar. Blessed are those who know the power and the painfulness of conviction of sin. Until we know what sin is we cannot understand the meaning of grace. Only he who has been plagued as with the torment of fire till his tongue, a blistered tongue, has been unable to ask for the one drop of water that would cool its fever and renew the sufferer's hope—only those who have known the hopelessness of that agony—are prepared for the Cross, the Christ, the Blood, the Gospel.

Are we trifling with little external terms and neglecting inner and spiritual realities? Are we debating etymologies when sin is drinking our blood, and leaving us withered, desiccated, at the Creator's feet? Begin to be wise by beginning to be self-renouncing. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. There is no heaven along the line of self-hope, there is no pardon in the direction of self-trust. Could we see a man with condemnation written upon his own brow with his own hand, and the same word written upon his heart, upon his will, upon his understanding, upon his imagination—could we see a man who has written himself unworthy of God's light and God's love, we should see a soul in the right direction for receiving and appreciating the infinite gospel of the eternal God. May he who can give the hell of conviction bless us with the heaven of reconciliation!

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, for every tone of hope in thy blessed word we praise thee, for our hearts are much cast down, and are in great pain and fear from time to time, so that we need some word from thy holy Book to touch our life in its shame, and to bring back the hope which we have sinned away. Thy word is full of light, the entrance of thy word giveth life to the heart. We have lost our first estate, and are no longer upright before God; we have sought out many inventions, every one of which has proved a deceit and a lie, so that we, who began in our own sagacity to give ourselves life, have utterly failed to do anything but aggravate our degradation and our shame. We come to the living for life, to the sun for light, to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ for new creation, new manhood, new hope, for the purity which in itself is immortal, for the rest which is deep as the peace of God, and coming so, even along the line of thine own sweet welcome, thou wilt not say to our hearts one word to increase their discouragement or their distress. We live in thy Son, who died for us; we live by faith on the Son of God; we live, yet not we, but Christ liveth in us, and the life which we now live in the flesh is a life of faith, a mystery that is full of light a wondrous enjoyment beyond the expression of words. For every hope of immortality we bless the Lord alone. He made us, and not we ourselves, and it hath pleased him to make us in his own image and likeness. We mourn our sin, for therein have we found the truth of thy word, "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." The wages of sin is death; the soul that sinneth it shall die; we are all dead men; before the Lord we are as if we had never been, and thou, blessed Christ, Eternal Son of the Eternal Father, art come as the Resurrection and the Life to bring life and immortality to light, so that in thee we live again, and in thee we cannot die. This day we keep holy festival; we take the Bread and the Cup, which typify the body and the blood of Jesus Christ. We need such memories; we bless thee for such tokens of recollection and such simple helps on the wilderness way. These things remind us of Christ's presence here and Christ's great ministry. We would eat and drink after examination of our souls in the sight of God—not that we may find no sin there, but that we may find an earnest and simple desire that our sin may be washed away and our souls be thoroughly cleansed. We come before this table of memorial, not as perfect men, but as souls that trust in Christ, that renounce themselves and their sins, that look away from their own strength unto the omnipotence of the loving Saviour, as men who, having tried sin and found it wanting, come to Christ the living Lord, and cast themselves upon his finished work, as men who do not deserve to be pardoned, and who yet, by the grace of God, may be forgiven. Inasmuch as we come before thee in

living God, may our fire be kindled from the fire of the altar. Bless us in business, where it is almost impossible to be blessed, where lies are profits, where falsehood is canonized. Deliver us from double speech, from double meaning, from all manner of duplicity; may we be sincere, transparent, knowing that it is more needful for us to be good than that we should live. The Lord be with those for whom we ought to pray in special tenderness: be with the bereaved in their loneliness—oh, so cold, so cold! Be with those who are in great sorrow because of imminent calamity; thou knowest the power of the imagination, thou knowest how our enemy can operate upon our fancy and make great calamities out of small appearances; remember our frame, remember we are dust. Be with all the little children; they know not upon what scene they have come, they think of flowers and play and music and dance and revel of innocence; they know not that they are already in the enemy's land: to thy keeping we commend them; they will not be lost if thou canst save them, thou Shepherd of the universe. Come out from thy dwelling-place, O thou that inhabitest eternity, and seek us, and find us, and save us. We pray at the Cross, for there alone may men pray; we behold the dying Saviour; we pray at the open grave where the angels say concerning our loved One, He is not here, he is risen; yea, we come to his seat of intercession and there pray, knowing that he will take up our supplication into his own great pleading and make it prevalent before the throne. The Lord help us, the Lord carry our burdens himself awhile, the Lord lead us, through many a dark place, into the land of the morning. Amen.

Chapter xx. 23.

“A false balance is not good.”

FALSE BALANCES.

TEXTS of this kind show the quality of the Bible. No man can in one sentence adequately represent the contents of the Book of God. When we say “Bible,” what part of the Bible do we mean? There are many Bibles in one. It is possible to admire the Bible. Admiration is an offence to God. God does not seek admiration, he seeks worship. When we admire and praise the Bible we may be thinking of its comforts and promises, its minor music, its tender speeches to the heart. That is not the Bible; that is part of the great Book—an essential, beautiful, indispensable part, because it is fitted to the valley and the darkness, the pain and the restlessness of life: but it would be a poor Bible if it were a Bible of promise only. We must go into other books if we would know what the Bible is in its totality. The bad man must hate the Book of Proverbs; the low-lived business man never looks into the book that rebukes him, the book that knows his little tricks, the book that exposes

him in every line. He wonders who wrote the Proverbs. He is content to make it a historical question whilst he goes on with his low villainy. We think of the Bible as a Book of spiritual metaphysics, dealing with the unknown and the unknowable, the unthought and the unthinkable. The Bible does deal with these lofty subjects, but it also comes in and tests your yard-wand, saying, You thought this wand was thirty-six inches long, it is only thirty-five and a half. How glad we should be then if the Bible would deal with the unthinkable! Then we could be Agnostics in relation to it; but when it impertinently, with divine rudeness, takes up the yard-wand, what becomes of our little theory that "business is business, and religion is religion"? Not in the estimation of the Bible. We do not want men who talk so to know the Bible in any sense of patronising it; we do not want such men, we want them to be infidels. To have the Bible and disobey it is agnosticism; to cry, The Bible for ever! and never to practise its morality, is the direst, shame-fullest atheism. We do not want such people to come to church unless they come in the spirit of penitence, the spirit of men who are ashamed of themselves and want to be better and to do better. This Book of Proverbs should be the business man's book: then he would sweat nobody, injure nobody; would help everybody; would say, The loaf of bread is mine to share with a man who has no loaf. The Book of Proverbs would soon make a new society. When the Bible is discussed, in what parts do men take refuge when they would oppose it? Why do they not go into those parts which they can understand and apply, and wait until the other door is open? There is a good deal in the Bible that men might do, and whilst they are doing that they might be waiting in holy expectation for brighter visions, for widening horizons; meanwhile, what doth thy God require of thee, O man, but to do justly, to love mercy, to walk humbly with God? Begin there, and you will end there; you will sweep through an infinite firmament of thought, but you will come back to that in heaven. What more shall the bright souls do? It is a long way from the first note to the last in this great life-anthem, and yet the first note and the last are identical.

Texts like this throw responsibility upon the right parties

Upon whom is the responsibility thrown in this text? Upon the seller, upon the inside of the counter. The man is not to stand up and say, I cannot be both buyer and seller; if the man does not know what a yard is, it is no business of mine to tell him; if he does not know how many ounces there are in the pound, I am not a schoolmaster to go over the table of weights and measures: he ought to have known all these things before he came to me. No, thou whited sepulchre! You should go upon the principle that you must do right whoever else does wrong; you should be a gentleman, whoever else is a clown. Your place of business should be the asylum, the refuge, of honesty and confidence, so that men shall say about you, We shall get justice here; we should like a few ounces more to the pound, but we shall get table measure and table weight here, for here is a man who would rather die than be dishonest—here is a man who says, It is not necessary for me to live, but it is necessary for me to maintain my character and to please God. If you have anything to sell you take the responsibility belonging to your superior knowledge; it is your business to point out the disadvantages of the situation. And yet we think the Bible is unknowable and unthinkable! Certainly it is in many instances, judging by the weakness and cupidity of men, impracticable. It is for the seller to say, On the whole I would advise you not to buy this; it is not so good as it looks, there is not so much of it as it appears in bulk; all the best are at the top, as you get down and down you get worse and worse: turn the matter over in your mind and come back to-morrow if you want it. Would that end business? Never! It would improve business, it would improve incomes, it would improve society, it would sweeten the heart and soul of things,—perhaps not to-day or to-morrow, but in the long run. The Bible is not so unthinkable as we supposed it was. We thought it was a supernatural book, dealing in spirits, and spectres, and ghosts, and cloudy outlines and impossibilities. It may do so in other parts, but just here a wayfaring man, though a fool, need not err therein.

“A false balance is not good.” Then there must somewhere be a true balance; somewhere there must be an authoritative standard. What is the meaning of this word “false”? Where

you find false you expect to find true ; when you find wrong how do you know it is wrong but by the right ? Somewhere there is an equipoise. It is all there. Where is that authority ? where is that plumb-line that will not tell lies to please any crookedness in the world ? What a world of philosophy is in that one reflection that somewhere there must be a true balance, otherwise we could never know that there is a false balance. Somewhere there must be an essential standard of morality ; somewhere there must be a moral authority that is infallible and unchangeable. Why palter with details and incidents and accidents and controversies in words ? why not gird ourselves up and go in quest of the eternal and unchangeable standard ? We could find it ; it is not far from any one of us. Weigh your goods out to yourself before you weigh them to your customer ; be your own customer first and see that you get the right weight, then pass it on. Beware of all casuistry : avoid men who are too fluent to be honest, too subtle to be true ; who make so many distinctions and divisions and subdivisions and classifications that you despair of their ever reaching good, sound, honest conclusions. The casuist first votes on one side, then on the other ; he gives you ten reasons for doing, and ten reasons decimal nine for not doing ; and whilst you are balancing the one against the other he tells you that even then it is impossible to get at anything that is really and abidingly substantial in the matter. He will refer you to conscience, and when you are going to that court he will tell you that the judge is not sitting to-day ; in fact, if he has to come to real matters of simple acknowledgment there is no judge to sit. All casuists are liars, and all liars are thieves. We have, even as laymen in the school of philosophy, come to the false conclusion that wrongs exist separately ; so we draw one line, and say, Lying ; another, and say, Stealing ; another, and say, Hypocrisy ; and so on : in reality they are all one. No man can be a liar without being a thief, and no man can be a thief without being a liar, and no man can be either without being a hypocrite under some circumstances. We thought the Bible was a Book of spirits ; it is a Book of morals.

All this we are more or less agreed upon with regard to weights and scales and measures ; there is no discussion amongst

us as to the pence-table, or avoirdupois or troy or apothecaries' tables, we know all their ounces and pounds and drams and pennyweights. But does not a text like this suggest the larger balancing of things? Even the balance on the counter is a preacher. The clock ticks for eternity; the dewdrop may be a lesson in astronomy. We thought it was a little wet jewel, and snipped it off the rose-leaf with our thumb and finger; in another sense it is the sun in miniature, one of the great planets come down into measurableness and visibility. So this plumb-line is the eternal measurement. The angels have nothing but that same cord with the little weight at the end of it, and that little weight will make the cord right presently. That little weight is seeking the centre of the earth, and the centre of the earth is seeking the centre of the sun, and the centre of the sun is seeking the centre of God. Is it so that a little dangling cord will shake and quiver until it says in stillness, This is right? Is it possible to be right in all these comparatively little matters, and to be wrong in matters that are vital, essential, everlasting? Is there not a great principle of equipoise here? Has not everything to be in harmony with everything else? Is there not a standard by which all things are to be meted and measured and adjusted? Let us beware sometimes of the merely individual conscience. It is possible to have a pedantic conscience, it is possible for a man to say that such and such arrangements do not suit his conscience. But, in the name of the soul of things, what is his conscience? How has he trained it? How has he treated it? Has he put out both its eyes? Has he choked its voice of reproach? Has he bribed it? Has he put it into a dead sleep with some chemical opiate? We treat men's consciences with a healthy rudeness when they want to make too much of them in the pence-table, and when they want to buy by apothecaries' and sell by troy weight, and then say, "My conscience . . ." We soon get rid of these little pedants in the market-place, but in the Church of God we encourage that species of pedantry, and a man with a pedantic conscience wants a whole pew to himself. Beware of unhealthiness; be on your guard against moral morbidity; know that everything is weighed by the sun, and all life ought to be weighed and estimated and settled by the sun's Sun.

There is a false balance in the weighing of character. We are unjust to one another. We pinch one of the scales, we touch the balance subtly with our finger, and give advantage to one side; we add a little to the weight, it may be but a grain of sand, but yet a grain of sand is not without its value and influence. Even an atom has a shadow. We may have damped the weight; that water tells in the weighing: we may take up the weight and say, This is the right weight; so it is if it were dry. We do not give credit to one another in a spirit of justice, we see little points, we conceive small prejudices, we do not like the incident that may be changed in a moment, we do not deal with essentials, substantial, continuing and abiding quantities, and thus we have measured even our friends with a false balance.

We may apply a false balance to the providences which make up our life. What skill some people have in dealing only in dark things, black aspects, wintry phases, deprivations, bereavements, losses! They are eloquent when they tell you what they have parted with. Who can be equally eloquent in numbering mercies? Who ever mentions the great mercies? Who ever gets beyond the outside of things, the mere rim, the palpable environment? Who gets into the soul, and who says, I have reason, how can I be poor? I have health, how can I fail? I have home, how can I be desolate? In balancing life take in all these reasons and thoughts and considerations, and so doing you will see that all the while God has been making you rich, or giving you the possibility and opportunity of acquiring and enjoying the true wealth. Who is there that keeps a right balance when he has to weigh the present and the future? The unsteady hand can never get an equipoise; the palsied fingers cannot hold the scales. You must have health in weighing. No drunken man can weigh out to you justly what you have asked him to give you; no man of biassed mind, prejudiced soul in any way, can give you right judgment in anything on earth. The present is here, the future is yonder, and when did "here" fail to carry the war against "yonder"? We have even formed little foolish proverbs about this, we have gone so far as to tell the lie that "a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush." Whoever says that is guilty of a palpable sophism. He seems

to be speaking truth, he forgets that everything depends on the bird that is in the bush, and all the possibilities and contingencies and promises which relate to the possibility and certainty of its capture if the right way be pursued. We are the victims of the present. It would seem impossible for some men to do justice to spirituality. Spiritual teaching goes for nothing. There are people in certain rural districts who never have paid the schoolmaster, and they say they never will—the schoolmaster indeed! They pay the farrier, they pay the toll-keeper, but the schoolmaster—a man who deals in ideas, thoughts, culture, a man who addresses himself to the soul, how could they ever think of recognising his work? If you deal in clothing for the head you will get your money; there is a county court to support you—but if you give a man ideas, if you pray him into heaven, if you lift up his soul into a new selfhood, the county court would smile at you if you made application for assistance in any direction that you might think honest and equitable. And the very best of men play at that game. They cannot help it. Pay a poet!

All this leads up to the fact that there are men who are prizing the present in the highest relations in preference to the future. They set time against eternity, earth against heaven, the body against the soul. Have we not aforetime pictured the possibility of a man over-feeding his body and starving his spirit? “Beloved, I wish above all things thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth.” What an irony is this—a body fed four times a day, a soul never fed at all! no book ever opened, no high authority ever consulted, no poetry ever learned, no study set apart for the culture and training and nurture of the mind. There are men who boast they never open a volume. So let it be. He that soweth to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption. He shall have his inheritance, he shall lie down with the worms and be forgotten. How are we weighing things? There are two forces that now seek to rule our lives—the force that tends downwards, the force that tends upwards. How long halt you between two opinions? The devil wants us, and Christ calls for us; the enemy of souls would ruin us by telling us comforting lies; the Saviour of souls would save us by bringing us to his sacred cross.

Chapter xx. 24.

“Man’s goings are of the Lord; how can a man then understand his own way?”

DIVINE CARE OF LIFE.

MAN is bound to be religious. Even atheism is a religion. In proportion to its supposed intelligence and sincerity is it one of the religions of the world. We cannot escape mystery. It has occurred to some minds, if they may be dignified by that appellation, that if we could close the Bible and burn the Church we should escape all mystery, and get into fine weather, and under clear skies, and breathe an air full of health. The Bible does not make mysteries, it recognises them. That there is a Force somewhere, and of some kind, that controls and limits us, is undeniable. I will not ask you to give that Force any name. I simply ask you to recognise what has been recognised by the greatest and calmest thinkers of all times—the fact that there is above, below, behind all things a Force that limits us. I will not ask at this point whether that unknown Force directs us or blesses us. I confine my remarks in the first instance to the simple fact that it limits us. We cannot do all that we want to do. Sometimes we are mocked because our actions are less than our prayers. What say you to the taunt that your actions are less than your desires, your accomplishments are less than your ambitions? Who would you like to take his own medicine? That is exactly how the case stands. Some say in mocking tones, “Are these the men who pray? Behold, how inconsistent they are, how self-contradictory.” So it is. “And are those the men that plot, and plan, and scheme, and go out on noble adventures, and come back with empty hands?” We must not taunt one another. The taunt is as complete on the one side as on the other, and it adds nothing to the illumination of the mystery which deeply concerns us all. Granted that there

is such a Force, and, compared with inquiry into its nature, compass, and laws, all other investigation not only becomes common, but becomes contemptible. Consider that point well. If we get hold of that doctrine, we have got hold of a key that ought to open many a difficult lock. Let me repeat in other words this grand conviction. Granted that there is such a Force watching us, limiting us, guiding and directing our life, and finally bent on judging it; then inquiry into the nature and compass of that Force dwarfs all other inquiry; it becomes the supreme inquiry of the human mind. How little, how abject, how contemptible is every other inquiry as compared with the inquest into the unseen Spring and Secret of things. There is a learned book upon "Heat Considered as a Mode of Motion." Very good; but extremely trifling compared with this inquiry, What is it that moves and moulds and inspires all things? Whilst you are outside counting the bricks of the house, measuring them one by one, and making memoranda of what you call the phenomena of the building, I want to know who lives in it. It is the life that interests me, not the outer habitation. Do not suppose, therefore, that religion undervalues any inquiry on its own merits. Keeping upon its own ground, it may be excellent and useful, but no inquiry can touch the supremacy of religious investigation reverently conducted. It is customary to laugh at the religious fanatics; but granted that there is such a Force, written with very large capitals, and you have granted all I want to have admitted to justify me in the statement that, in inquiring into the nature of that Force, I take the leading position in human investigation. I may bring you false reports, and you may bring me false reports from your inquiries as well. I may in my little book write many things I must expunge, but your note-book is full of interrogations and marks indicating points that must be re-investigated. Do not let us mock one another. If your note-books were all written in capitals, and read straight on, without erasure or correction, then you might wonder that our books were not kept so clearly. But when we read the memoranda of men of science, we find that they have been contradicting and correcting themselves all through. The object we have in view is to find out as much as we reverently can of the upper universe, and we, when conducting that inquiry,

feel that we cannot come down and chaffer with those who are pursuing inferior objects so long as there is a glint of light in the sky by whose aid we can take another upward step. I do not feel that in pursuing these inquiries I am so remarkably foolish. I do not feel that I am at all fanatical in conducting these inquiries. You are looking at a man's clothes; we want to see his heart. You say you are confining your attention to what you call phenomena. Many persons are the victims of that word. They do not understand it, but it has a rich, full sound in the mouth; it seems as though it meant something, or ought to. We are not engaged in the study of phenomena; we are engaged in the pursuit of the Unseen Secrét that lies behind all phenomena and gives them shape and meaning. Do we then hold these phenomena in contempt? Nothing of the kind; only when we compare them with the Secret that gives them their place. They are assistances in our higher inquiries; they give us foothold, they supply points from which we can reckon progress. By putting them together and watching their wondrous ways, we find they shape themselves into a revelation, and lift themselves into the dignity of a providence. Granted that it is possible for a man to read your soul's thought, of what avail would it be for him to renounce that high prerogative and function, and to count the buttons upon your coat, to observe your general habits, to note the times of your rising and lying down, your times of taking exercise, and of replenishing the waste of the body? All these things have their importance,—we are not undervaluing them,—but if we keep ourselves to these inquiries when we might read your thought, we are abandoning a higher plane for a lower. Can we then find out the Lord unto perfection? No; but that is no reason why we should not go as far as he permits us to go. We have not yet found out phenomena to perfection—is that any reason why we should leave our inquiries? We, in trying to find out more and more of God every day, are rewarded, not by a full disclosure of his personality, but by a growing love, an increasing humility of spirit, and by a continual ennobling of our thoughts; we are made more restful, more tender, and more charitable, and other rewards we cannot ask for just now, it promises the consummation of heaven!

It is in this fact, as stated in the text, that we find the secret of superstition. No doubt there is a great deal of superstition in the world. Do not hold superstition in contempt. I would rather trust my life with a man sincerely superstitious than with any man who denied the existence of God. Were I dying, and had a child to leave to the tender mercies of some guardian or friend, and did my choice lie between a man whose veneration was so excessive as to run up into the region of superstition and a man who blatantly denied the existence of a God, I could not hesitate for one moment into whose hands to commit the destiny of the child. Once let God go, and man goes along with him. Once let the Sabbath go, and the Monday goes at the same time. You cannot keep the one if you let the other escape. The second commandment grows upon the trunk of the first, and you may as well say that you will keep the apple and cut down the tree as say you will love your neighbour and deny your Maker.

Even superstition has its defences. We know not all that is about us; what wonder if some timid minds should bow down in fear? Be mine the friend who sees God in every age and scene, who calls the lightning his wings, and the clouds the dust of his feet, rather than the man so conceited and so unmanned as to say, "The name of God has no meaning for me." No more has the name of man. You must not imagine, however, that because there is superstition in the world that, therefore, there is no true worship. We believe, as Christian men, that we have a revelation of this unknown God. We do not accept the revelation simply because it professes to be one, but because it comes with ten commandments, a high morality, a noble patriotism, a force that frees the slave, deposes the oppressor, and gives to authority its necessary and rightful place. If the Bible came to us and said, "You must believe that or you will be damned," we might rebel against so peremptory and arbitrary a command. But it does not say so. Do not separate anything from its own atmosphere. What is the atmosphere of the Bible theology? It is righteousness and true purity. The Bible that says, "Man's goings are of the Lord," says a wicked balance, an unrighteous balance, is hateful to the Most High. False weights are a temptation of God's wrath. The Bible that introduces all

this wondrous revelation and display of mystery says, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." Do not, therefore, imagine that you can separate the revelation from the morality, the mystery from the righteousness.

"How then can a man understand his own way?" We do not understand it. Why, for example, are you not as gifted as your brother? I do not ask why you are not as gifted as a man on another continent. You might plead difference of circumstance and surroundings; but why are you not as gifted as your own brother, born of the same mother, nurtured in the same family? He is a philosopher, you are a common man; he is a thinker, you are a worker; he is a statesman, you can take but a parochial view of any subject that challenges your attention. He is a painter, and you are no artist; he is an orator, and you can hardly stammer out your meaning in your native tongue. How is it? Do not ask me to explain the mysteries of the Bible—I ask you to explain the mysteries of your own family. Why cannot you guarantee the success of your purposes? Why cannot you say, "I have done this and that, and have made all my arrangements, and the result must be good"? What—what hinders you? Do answer that question. You see, if you renounced your seat in church, and never read a chapter in the Bible, you would only step out of one set of mysteries into another. Can you not explain the reasons of your actions? Why did you leave the town you resided in last? Why did you resign the work you enjoyed so much? Explain your actions so as to leave no doubt as to the motives from which they sprang. You cannot. Life is a mystery, breathing is a mystery, the whole sum total of what we call our being is steeped in mystery. The lifting of a hand, the glancing of an eye, these things have their religious and inexplicable mysteries. Why, then, I will give myself right up to God. "Commit thy way unto the Lord." That is what I will do. I will not murmur at what pains; what pains is sometimes best, if mine is a filial spirit. I will have nothing to do with myself. I will go every morning as soon as I awake, and say, "Father, what wilt thou have me to do?" I will have no tastes, no whims, no fancies. I will say, "Thy will, not mine, be done." It is not necessary

for me to live, but it is necessary for me to be true. "Lord, undertake everything for me ; put me here or there, high up or low down ; if I do but know that thou hast chosen the place for me, that will do." "Thy will be done." Sometimes he allows me to tell a long tale of what I would like, and he is always pleased with it, if I end with "Nevertheless, not my will, but thine, be done." We all have our times of ambition, and we want to live in such a place, and such and such a house, and under such and such circumstances. "Lord, this is my little programme, burn it if thou wilt, laugh at it if thou wilt ; thy will be done." If I can say this with my whole heart my life cannot be a failure, the saying of it makes my life a supreme success.

Then my life has been so beautifully directed hitherto that I will not have anything to do with its directions, but leave it to be guided as seems best to God. How wonderfully he has trained us ! I once heard one teacher say of another celebrated in his profession, "He does not reveal his system all at once, he leads his pupils on from point to point, enforcing the doing of things the meaning of which they do not fully understand, until lo ! in the process of time the whole purpose is revealed and success is enjoyed." It is even so with God. I have said, "I do not want to go there, I would rather not go," but he has troubled my life until I said, "Then, Lord, I will go." I have not wanted to be associated with such and such persons, but he has said, "This is right, accept the association, and work out the result patiently."

Young man, what are you going to do with your life ? Your life is not a something four square, so many pounds' weight, measurable, and to be wholly accounted for. Your life has roots, your life is a mystery, is an agony, and I want you to give yourselves to Christ's keeping. I want you to say, I will take Christ's prayer as my prayer, "Not my will, but thine, be done." And if riches are good for you, you shall have more than you can put your arms around. If acres are good for you, you shall have mile on mile ; and if these things would make fools of you, would dispossess you of natural dignity, you shall have none of them ; just crust enough to be going on with. "Not my will,

but thine, be done." Oh, my Father, thou hast done wondrous things for me in times that are gone. No weapon that has been formed against me has prospered! Those who have come out from their houses to injure me have been struck with blindness and have never got back again! Thou dost not do such great things to reverse them, and by their inversion prove thine own weakness.

Now for a holy vow, a solemn, sacred, glorious vow, to give ourselves, body, soul, and spirit, to the divine guidance. Come, dear old traveller, a few days more thou hast; give thyself into the Father's hand. And, dear little child—bless thee, a thousand blessings be thine!—say with thy dear little sweet mouth and most eloquent eyes, "Father, take care of me always, for Christ's sake." Say that. These are little words, but they are full of dewy meaning and sweet and happy thought. And you, poor, poor wanderer, who went out from your Father's house with the portion of goods that fell to you to make your fortune in a distant land! Famine-bitten, come! Weary, hungry, drenched through and through, come! "I dare not." You dare. "I may not." You may. This Man—there is but one Man—this Man, Son of man, receiveth sinners and eateth with them.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, how delightful it is to sing thy praise! because how delightful to realise the tenderness of thy mercy. Thy love is a great love; it is like the sea, beating upon every shore. Thy mercy is an everlasting mercy; all the houses of history which have known it have said so one to another across the ages; and now we in our time take up the grand refrain and say, His mercy endureth for ever. Who can wear out the mercy of God? Yet thy Spirit will not always strive with man; there are appointed times which thou hast fixed and none can disarrange. We are in the hands of the living God; we are watched by the unslumbering eye; we are guided by the infinite counsel. Oh that we were wise, that we might know the meaning of all this blessedness, and receive it into our hearts, and repeat it in conduct worthy of its grace and music. But that we wish to do so is itself a blessing; the desire is the beginning of heaven. That such a purpose is in our heart is a miracle wrought by none but God. We would live in thy light; we would study thy will; we would do all thy bidding; we would be the slaves of the Son of God. We thank thee for these cleansing thoughts, for these high animations of soul, for these beginnings of immortality; this is the Lord's doing—the very miracle of heaven. Once we were dead, once we strayed far and knew not where we were; but we have returned to the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls, and to-day we are found within the gates of the city of God, praising him with a loud voice and a fearless heart. Thy word is very precious to us; it is most precious when we need it most. Who can find out all its meaning—deeper than all the depths we have fathomed, and higher than all the heights we have scanned? We are lost in wonder and in praise as we peruse the inspired pages. In all things give us the seeing eye, the receptive mind, the understanding and responsive heart; then shall our prayers be answers, our waiting shall be working, and our endeavour shall be success. Thou knowest every life—its joy, its sorrow, its innermost pain, its distress that may never be spoken, its penitence too sacred for created eyes to look upon. We are in thy hands: do thou answer us according to our necessity, and be pitiful to us because of our great weakness. The Lord help us to do all we know of his will, for in the doing of it shall we know more, and the doctrine shall be revealed through the practice. Direct us in all perplexity, strait, and embarrassment; comfort us in all sorrow, long-standing or newly-come, and help us to become chastened because of its action upon the soul. Where we realise our weakness most, may we realise thy strength as the help of our infirmity. When we hesitate between two opinions, incline us to the right, and make us strong in virtue and in goodness, and valiant in all truth and

nobleness. Destroy the mean thought, the unworthy suspicion, the cruel jealousy, and set up thy kingdom within us, thou Christ of God, Son of David, Son of Mary, Son of man. Grant thy holy Spirit unto us to abide in the heart, to sanctify it, direct it; and make a temple of the living God of every affection which moves us. Heal the sick, thou loving, sympathising Christ, if not with bodily health, yet with spiritual hope and moral victory and saintly fearlessness; then shall they praise thee in the valley and conquer when they fall. Regard all our interests, and do not allow our minds to be distracted by them: for who can be in all the ends of the earth at the same time but God? We will watch at the altar, we will fight in the field, we will suffer in solitude, we will study thy word: as for all that belongs to us, thou wilt take care of it, for thou art our Father and Lord. We fall into thy hands. Thou didst give us Christ, and in him thou wilt freely give us all things; the Cross is the measure of thy love, and whilst we look at that we have no fear. Amen.

Chapter xx. 24.

"Man's goings are of the Lord; how can a man then understand his own way?"

[ANOTHER TREATMENT.]

THE WAYS OF MAN.

IN very deed has he any way that is his own if he be at all moved by the spirit of obedience and trust? What we call our own may not after all be so very much our own. May not a man do what he will with his own? Let us grant that; but the further question will occur, what is his own? Will a man say that what he has in his hand is his own? Instantly that would be disputed, because though what he has in his hand may be his own, his hand is not his own. "Ye are not your own." The question is fundamental, vital, inclusive. What property we have may be our own in a certain sense, but we ourselves who have it are not our own. Thus the smaller is swallowed up of the larger, and he only takes the true view of life who says, "I am nothing, I have nothing but what I have been made and what I have received; you do not see the whole when you see me. Behind me, above me, beyond me, is the all-explaining but never-explained Secret." When a man touches that region of thinking, we call him a religious man. He is no longer a flippant creature or a person moved by such calculations as he can make upon a slate; he belongs to the general assembly and church of the firstborn. He is a point in a cir-

cumference—a little light in a great firmament of planets—he belongs to the whole family. He is, therefore, distinctively and (I think) rationally called a religious man. That is, a man who acknowledges a Secret in the universe, which is not a puzzle but a revelation, and by so much a contradiction, a Secret that watches him, claims him, inspires him, lifts him up by the locks of the head, bears him away, brings him back, uses him like a trumpet through which to announce the blast of battle, and lets him down like a shattered thing. “Ye are not your own.” We are errand-bearers, little children, free slaves, contradictions to the vulgar and the patent, but happy, harmonious, sacred reconciliations and unities to those who know that Three may be One and One Three. You cannot deny that there is a secret in the world or in the heavens that baffles you and disappoints you, sets the winds laughing at you at night when you go out; or makes the summer into a great and gracious smile upon you when you turn your face upwards in filial piety and saintly expectation. We may differ about the name, but there is the reality. One man may say, Secret; another may say, Force; another may say, Infinite; and another yet may say, Father. But there, under all the names and round about them, is the solemn reality that we do not see all things and cannot handle all force; but that there is in creation a mysterious and governing power. Consider this well. Once let the idea get into your mind, and every other idea that comes into the same mind must sit down at its feet, and all other ideas must look up to this sovereign force and take their tone and being from its royalty. You cannot escape that conclusion. Let the idea of God—present, ruling, fatherly, redeeming, actual—take possession of the human mind, and all other ideas stand back and bow themselves in dutiful homage to that central and all-ruling thought. Hence we have what are called “religious men;” men of solemn mind, of thoughtful, sober, reverent habit of soul. Men who often put off their sandals and lay down their staves and call for quietness—silence more than silent—that they may hear in its ineffable quietude the music of the heavens. We cannot despise such men; they cannot be little men; they cannot be mean-minded men, they cannot be narrow and prejudiced men if faithful to their central and sovereign idea. When they do deserve such descriptive terms

they have fallen from their high intellectual and spiritual estate and are no longer sons of the morning. It stands to reason that where the idea of God is in the mind all other ideas must of necessity be secondary.

Do you wonder, then, that Jesus Christ, who proceeded forth and came from God, who revealed God, who spent his eternity in the bosom of the Father, said, "Take no thought for the morrow," "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness;" "Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell"? That was the tone of his ministry. God being his Father, all worlds, planets, constellations, universes interlinked with universes fall back into little flecks of light upon the disc of the Infinite, and Christ's life was an oblation at the altar of his God. This is reason. This is true rationalism. He is a foolish man who is busy here and there gathering worthless things out of a worthless dust, and letting the king pass by without homage or recognition. This idea has taken possession of the human mind in all ages and places, and with varying, yet not inharmonious, results. Hence we have in one sphere of human progress what is termed superstition. There are people who will not begin important enterprises on certain days of the week. There are other persons who will not sit down at a dinner-table with a certain number of guests. Others observe the wind, and others steal out in the darkening eventide that they may forecast the future by the manner of the stars. Others are always hearing noises, seeing shapes, and allowing themselves to be moved by what they call "intuitions." Do we despise any of these phases of what we may call the religious thought, for there is a deep solemnity under them all? Certainly not. Have no faith in any man who is destitute of veneration. If any man can say jauntily, "All days in the week are alike to me," that man is not to be trusted in solemn hours and in great crises. Be it Friday that he fears, or be it Sunday that he sanctifies, he is a better man for his doing either of them. In that action you find the link that unites him with upper places and upper vitalities. By-and-by he will learn that Friday is no more to

be feared than the day before or than the day after. But, meanwhile, do not mock him, he will not be taunted out of his superstition, he will be educated out of it in due time : presently he will learn that the Sabbath Day is to be sanctified in order that through its intense sanctification all the other days in the week are to be brought under a common sanction and a common benediction. In other cases, you have true worship ; but whether in the case of superstition, or in the case of true worship, you find the secret of the perpetual influence of religion ; so long as there is anything behind the scene, above the cloud, within the wind, which man cannot feel, grasp, and comprehend, you will find in him elements which admit of religious challenges, appeals, and education. If life were a flat ball, a superficies, a lineal surface, you could have no superstition as well as no religion, no poetry as well as no prayer. Everything goes down before the superficial, it is in the cubic mystery that you find poetry as well as prayer, and that you find religion as well as superstition or faith. God keeps one thing amongst us which exerts a continual education among the human faculties, and that one thing is—the future. Where is the future ? How much is there of it ? How near ? How far ? What is its tone ? What is its mystery ? So near, yet so far. Near as the next hour that will be chimed on the bells of the clock. Far away as ten billenniums multiplied by themselves, and then cubed into inconceivable magnitudes of years. A face at the window dimly seen ; a voice that never speaks to you ; an eye that never looks at you ; a presence that never sits down with you—that is the future—mystic, ghostly, divine. And God sets that among the ages to touch men's fears, and charm men's hopes, and move them to noble destiny.

It is as impossible to comprehend the future as to comprehend God himself. On this reasoning the text founds a practical question—"How can a man, then, understand his own way ?" We are mysteries to ourselves. We are our own church. The man who mocks my faith has to take away ninety-nine hundredths of my life before I can join him in his bitter taunt. I have in a sense to commit suicide before I can give myself into his mischievous hands. Can you understand your own way ? Can

you explain anything? What is it that constitutes the difference between you and your brother? Why are you not intellectually of the same weight, the same volume, the same tone and quality? Why are you so fond of arithmetic and he so fascinated by poetry? Why will you always stay at home and he never can be persuaded to remain within the family circle? What is the difference? Explain it you cannot; but there is the fact. Or take it contrariwise. He is an abler man than you. You are given the same piece of work to do and he will succeed while you will fail? How is that? You go out on the same day in the same city to do the same kind of work, and he comes back bearing his sheaves with him and you come back having cut your fingers all to pieces with your sickle. Explain it. That is a mystery that exists independently of the church. The priests did not make that mystery, that is not a trick of priestcraft, nor is it a line in the Bible. There is the patent, mysterious, solemn fact. Account for it. Why can you not guarantee the success of your purpose? Why all this hoping? Why all this timidity and hesitation of tone about "possibilities"? Why those parenthetical annotations which speak of "contingencies," "ifs," "buts," "mayhaps"? Why do not you "stand up like a man" and rule the future? Your speech is riddled through and through with qualifying and limiting terms. The man who never prays on his knees is obliged to pray in a semi-dumb way by the parentheses with which he guards and limits his most impetuous declarations.

Why can you not always explain the reasons of your actions? You do a deed, and when you are asked to explain it you say you felt as if "I must do it." Why "must"? Why did you not accomplish that deed three months ago? Why did you ever hesitate about it? How did you come to do it at that particular time? What was it that whispered over your shoulder, "The opportunity is come, 'There is a tide in the affairs of men' and this is the flood—quick"? What was it that spoke to me just now? Not a priest—I don't know one. Not some one belonging to the church—I never go to church! What was the imp, the deity? Such is life. Not an empty thing, not a straight line, not a bubble seen upon a river, but a mystery, a wonder, a

religious thing. This being the case, let us commit all our ways to God, and let us do it now. All our ways in business, in education, in proposals of every kind, in all thy ways acknowledge him, and he will direct thy paths. We acknowledge him in some of our ways, but I want to know whether I ought to go from this house to that; whether I ought to change my residence now or not now; whether, having written this letter, it is wise to send it; whether the child shall go to this school or to that school. I want to ask God about little things. But will he be troubled with little things? Yes, "the very hairs of your head are all numbered." Do nothing without God. Plunge right into his presence and say, "Unless thy presence go with me carry me not up hence." Say that with your whole heart and then act according to the best of your judgment, and the result will be right in the long run. Have no fear after you have given your heart away in one great love-gift to the Father. He will make the crooked straight; he will make the rough places plain. He will touch the mountains with his fingers and they shall smoke before you and shall be lost as a cloud dissolved. O trust in the Lord! Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him: and he will give thee thy heart's desire.

Then let us escape the spirit of murmuring. Murmuring is worse than infidelity of an intellectual kind. In fact infidelity of an intellectual kind is nothing at all. Do not trouble yourselves with it for a moment. There is more infidelity than intellect when you speak of "infidelity of an intellectual kind." Murmuring is atheism, murmuring is blasphemy, this is high treason. What is it that you murmur against? All-Power, All-Wisdom, All-Love? Then we should vividly realise and represent the Spirit by which we are ruled. Hearing two men speak about life and duty and future revelation and action, we ought to have no difficulty in distinguishing between the Christian and the non-Christian. To the Christian there is no future in any sense that awakens anxiety, or fearful and demoralising speculation. To-morrow, Lord, is thine—not mine. I live in the present. If I and the Father are One in a sympathetic and deeply spiritual sense, then like him I live in one continual Now. Let it be seen amongst men that you have a bank that cannot

be broken ; that whatever fluctuations take place here and there, no fluctuations take place in your treasury. Let your religion be in your face. A man cannot see God with his soul's eyes and then have a dull face. There will be shining on the very countenance, singular, penetrating, revealing radiance in the very skin. "Moses wist not that his face shone." Herein glorify the darkening end of life in having perfect trust ; in committing all things into God's care ; in abstaining from murmuring as you would abstain from profanity, and in letting your light so shine before men that they may say, "This is not man's doing." That lamp was never lighted by man, and by man can never be blown out. Christ realised all this mystery and duty in his brief, sweet, gracious, joyous life. He murmured not ; he committed himself in all things to him that judgeth righteously. He had no future that was not secure, and wherever he was seen there streamed from him a radiance above the brightness of the sun.

I understand nothing ; I do not know what I am going to do, how I am going to do it ; I cannot tell by what impulses I shall be swayed and directed. I was born yesterday, and to-morrow I am going into the unseen. I do not behold anything as it really is. Just treat me, O Father, like a little, little child. "Not my will but thine be done." If it is thy will, labour will be rest, and pain sweet, and loss gain, and winter will be the beginning of summer. Into thy hands I commend my spirit.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, thou hast not left thyself without witness. All around we see the fruits of thy presence and ministry. Thy presence is a great light, and thy ministry a great love. Once we were blind, and could see neither of them, but by thy grace we have received our sight, and now all nature is full of thy beauty, goodness, and wisdom,—a great wide-open volume written all over with the finger of God. It is a great sight: we will turn aside and see it; we will watch until thou dost speak to us from every burning bush, from every quiet hill, from every lovely flower. May we have ears to hear: then shall thy gospel come to us from all quarters; thy still small voice shall be heard in the thunder; in our souls there shall be a whisper not human. We bless thee for these hopes, yea, for these confident expectations, for we are as men who wait for their fulfilment: we know they will be realised; we shall not always have our ears filled with din and noise and tumult; there shall come a day when we shall hear as it were the going of God, the movement of the Eternal, and we shall say, This is none other than the house of God, and this the gate of heaven. Train us away from all dulness, from all blindness and darkness of mind; give us sharpness of vision, great sensitiveness of soul: may we hear thee, and answer thee; may we behold thee, and fall down prostrate in loving adoration. Thou hast made us in a fearful and wonderful way: how complex is man! what a terror to himself! sometimes what a joy! now burning with intolerable agony, and now as it were on the wings of eagles, away up where the light is born, and where heaven is fully seen. How abject, how august is man! Help us to study ourselves in the light of thy revelation, in the light of thy daily providence; enable us to ask great questions, to put reverent but fearless inquiries; may we not stand back in superstition and wondering ignorance, but approach quietly, lovingly, hopefully, to ascertain what we may of the mystery of things, and be ennobled by a higher veneration, softened and chastened by a sweeter consciousness of thy presence. We have been in all things too superstitious, we have held thee to be a God afar off and not nigh at hand: but now we see thee in Christ Jesus thy Son—how tender, how majestic, how wise, how simple, how awful in spiritual grandeur, how condescending in spiritual brotherhood! May we know more of Christ, not in the letter, but in the spirit. We know all his outward history, but we would have him live in our hearts, be born in the Bethlehem of our spirits, the hope of glory; there we would have him, babe, and child, and man; teacher, friend, example, Saviour, priest: in our own hearts we would re-live the story, and thus be able to speak out of our own experience concerning the largeness and brightness and purity of Christ's kingdom. Thou knowest our need; it is manifold; its only name is legion. Yet thou art able to do

exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think : even when we have asked all heaven, still thou canst always add a line we never dreamed, a gift we never imagined. Fill us with all the fulness of God : the river of God is full of water. Give us light, comfort, joy, sense of duty, obedience of will, gladness of heart, so that our broken bread shall be as the body of Christ and every cup we take be filled with sacramental blood : thus life shall become a holy peace, a sacred duty, a period of school and discipline and training ; then shall we be brought among thy saints and princes in the upper spaces—the great, white, beautiful heavens, home of the pure and good—and shall enter upon service that brings with it no pain of weariness, no shame of regret, the very Sabbath of heaven, the sanctuary of eternity. Amen.

Chapter xx. 27.

“The spirit of man is the candle of the Lord.”

THE SCRIPTURAL DOCTRINE OF CONSCIENCE.

WHAT is the Scripture doctrine of conscience ? The Bible is before us ; let us look at it, simply as a record, and inquire what is its particular doctrine on conscience. Does it recognise conscience at all ? Does it concern itself about conscience ? Does it ever become very earnest about conscience ? Is the matter treated incidentally, in a measure casually and off-handedly, or remotely referred to ? or does it constitute what may be called a principal line in the record ? Observe, we treat the Bible in this initial argument simply as a document. We do not ask who wrote it, where it came from, by whose authority it speaks ; we simply want to know, in the first instance, what the Bible says in reference to this great and anxious question of the human conscience.

It cannot be denied that from beginning to end the Bible recognises the fact that man has a conscience. I am not aware that the Bible says, There is a God ; or that the Bible begins human history by saying, There is a conscience : in both respects it would seem that a great assumption is made. The very first sentence in the Bible is the greatest sentence in all literature. There is nothing else that can cover it wholly for pregnancy, suggestiveness, comprehensiveness, sublimity ; and so certain words were spoken to man which could not have been spoken to him except under certain assumptions and conditions. It is better that it is so. There would

have been, perhaps, a more dignified formality in a specific sentence to the effect, There is a God : there is a conscience : there is a heaven ; but the Bible, by whomsoever inspired or incited, makes great assumptions, starts upon certain conditions and propositions, and works its way from these, and so works its way as to justify the reasonableness and truthfulness of the assumptions upon which its mystery, argument, and exhortation are founded. Does a child come into the world with a conscience ? That might be turned into a metaphysical inquiry, and might occasion the human mind great trouble as to analysis and specific statement. But there is a practical way of dealing even with an inquiry so profound. Does a child come into the world with responsibility, judgment, imagination, faculty of any kind ? Verily appearances are against it. Looking fairly upon a child, without prejudice, appearances go heavily against it as to its being a responsible creature, as to its having any poetic fire, moral sense, spiritual faculty, or destiny beyond the little day in which its body breathes. But can we limit the argument to the area of appearances ? Must we not go further ? Must we not interpret one life by another ? We have not to deal with a solitary or isolated infant, and get up a large amount of wonder about it, conjecturing whatever can it be, wherever has it come from, to what end can it be moving ? Human history is now old enough to fall back upon itself, with certain lights and explanations. Therefore I do not see that language would be outraged, or reason put to any extremity, if we said, The child belongs to the human family ; being a member of the human family, it must possess certain instincts, germs of reason, certain hints of faculty, certain suggestions of possibility : at present they amount to next to nothing ; if you had to set them all down on paper by a separate estimate, and in easily-added figures, you would not have much to do in an arithmetical way. No doubt appearances are so far against the child. But human history is all in its favour. Who will believe that the child is dumb ? When all the world has given the child up as dumb, the mother will still expect to hear some little articulation, and she will be quite sure she has heard it. So who will say the child has no conscience ?—give it time. No understanding ?—give it time : let it be developed. God has never spoken to lion or eagle, to whale, or largest, finest beast of

the forest, as he has spoken to man. Every speech made to man has assumed that man could answer. "There is a spirit in man"—a ghost, another, truer self than is seen by the eye. You can find an oak in an acorn: no man ever found an oak in a paving-stone. We must, therefore, look into the plasm, that very first hint of life and purpose and issue; and so looking I, for one, cannot see, let me repeat, that language would be outraged if we said, standing over a little child, This child has judgment, sense, moral faculty, spiritual power,—all in germ, all undeveloped, all unawakened; but give time, bring the right ministries to bear upon the child, and then the issue will show how the child is constituted.

The Bible proceeds upon the assumption that man has what may be called a conscience, a moral sense, a faculty that can in some measure understand, worship, and serve God. I am not aware that there is any hint in the Bible that would serve as a proof that this moral sense is the gift of society or of law. It would seem to precede all society, and to be its beginning and extension; it would seem to lie deeper than all law, and to give law whatever real value it possesses. Society does not give a man imagination, or talent, or genius, or high faculty; it may sharpen all these, create opportunities for the exercise of all these, but the gift is within, the secret of God is in the heart, some sign, token, pulse, throb,—call it by what name we may—something in the man that says, I was made to keep society with God. One man says, I can think, therefore I am. Another might add, I can pray, and therefore I am spiritual, almost divine. It cannot but be interesting to find in ourselves—not round about ourselves, like so many decorations and investitures made by society—certain elements, pulsations, aspirations, which attest that we are better than the best beast, that between us and the greatest of the unintelligent creation there lies the diameter of an unmeasured universe. It seems to me, therefore, on reading the Bible through, that everywhere the existence of conscience is assumed, not as having been created by society or law, but as being in man, part of man without which, indeed, he could not be man in the truest and highest sense of that complex term.

The Bible further declares that the conscience or moral sense

may be trained upward or downward, may be sanctified or corrupted, strengthened or weakened. Conscience does not stand apart, taking no interest in the fray of life ; it is in some sense the most active and energetic of all the ministries of our nature, and it cannot escape the general atmosphere in which we live. Even conscience may be desecrated ; the choicest golden vessels of the temple may be stolen and may be carried away to the tents of the Philistines. Paul says, "Herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men ;" "Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience." There is a history of adjectives. There is a moral history and a natural history of epithets. Who could imagine that "good" would have come and set itself against "conscience," to explain it and to help it ? Who would gild refined gold ? Is not this painting the lily that a word like "good" should attach itself to conscience ? Is not this a despicable patronage ? Does "conscience" want adjectival commendation or exposition ? Is not the very word itself a star to which nothing can be added by way of completing its magnitude or increasing its radiance ? You will find in answer to this inquiry that many epithets or explanatory words have been attached to the high term conscience to show what was meant in particular relations and conditions and at special times. The natural history of words finds a copious and instructive chapter at this point. Conscience is not necessarily good, but it may be trained to goodness. I have so read the Bible as to believe that the Bible will never allow there can be a good conscience towards man until there is first a good conscience towards God. Am I right in my reading ? I am not using the word in any secondary sense, as socially tolerable, decent, useful ; but good in its own true sense—all pure, without flaw, sincere, transparent, profound goodness. The Bible always insists that there must be first a right relation to God before there can be a right relation to man. Thus the Bible is unlike any other book. It will not be content with secondaries, except as recognising them as such, saying, You are secondary, you are but reformers, you are helps, but what you must be at and get at is a right relation towards God. In no official or institutional sense, but in the profoundest sense, a man must be religious

before he can be philanthropic. Man cannot understand man's value until he has held communion with God. May we not justify this by Christ's words? "On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets,"—namely: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself." The process cannot be reversed or inverted. Attempts may be made in that direction, but how much do those very attempts owe to high religious and Christian education in the first instance? To love your neighbour is impossible, in Christ's sense of the term, until you have first loved God. The religious love brings with it all the faculty and fervour of the soul, makes the soul realise itself, and then sends it back into the world, solemn with reverence, tender with pity, hopeful with God's own love, sacrificial as in sympathy with the very Cross of Christ. Meanwhile, observe how we stand. We are not asking, Is all this true or not true? We are simply endeavouring to find the doctrine of a particular book on a particular subject; and the contention is that Jesus Christ would never allow the possibility of neighbourly love, in its highest, deepest, and fullest sense, except as sequential upon true, honest, deep, sacrificial love of God. What applies to love would seem to apply at least to conscience. "Herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men." Life is not a trick, a social arrangement, a series of attitudes, or exchanges of courtesies; social life itself is a great religious mystery when properly treated, and can only be handled effectually and beneficently by men who have been closeted with God in long solitude, in the solitude of a dual companionship—an irony and a contradiction in words, but easily reconciled by the soul who has spent much time with the Father. If this be at all true, it is simply vain for any man to attempt to have a good social conscience without his first having an honest religious conscience. Not that he may not be intermediately and secondarily very good, most useful, reliable in many respects, calculated to bear a certain amount of pressure with mathematical exactness; but the man who can endure all things, and can bear all sorrow, is the man who has been with God and learned of Jesus Christ; then no mathematician can calculate the amount

of pressure which he can bear; then the mathematicians do not gather around the pillars of his life, and say, By so much may the rivers run without injuring the pedestal on which he stands;—they fall back and say, This is an equation that has never fallen within our mathematical reasoning; the man must be explained by God; he is right in the sanctuary, he has been weighed in the heavenly places, his heart is ideally, and by the law of aspiration at least, right with God; therefore he comes down and handles the affairs of life with a mastery and a beneficence impossible to any man who has not connected himself with the living fountain, the unseen and eternal spring. A poor, shifty, thriftless life, a surface pool, a little thing that the sunbeam can dry up, is that life that does not come up out of the Rock of Ages or flow down from the fountains of eternity. We live and move and have our being in God: otherwise we are plucked flowers, or artificial creations, and our destiny is to die.

Thus far and in this way have I read the Bible. So strong is the apostolic conviction upon this point that the apostle will insist upon the conscience itself being brought under what may be called evangelical conditions and discipline. Says he, "How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" "Having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience." So then he would treat life as being wrong at its very centre and spring; whether by personal conduct, whether by some mysterious action of the law of heredity, however it is, the apostles all concur in saying, The work must be done within, and all reforms that are to be complete and lasting must be interior reforms and must work out towards the exterior, carrying life, health, and beauty with them. Except the heart be clean the life cannot be pure; except the conscience adjust itself by the meridian of eternity it cannot tell to life what time it is, what duty is, and how duty is to be done. The apostle is, therefore, by so much argumentatively clear; he will not hold any dispute with us, or any conference that implies acquiescence and friendliness, unless we yield at once to the doctrine that we must be born again, we must pass through a regenerative process. Name it as you please, attach what verbal

definition you may to the mere way of saying it, there must, according to apostolic doctrine, be a great mystery of re-birth accomplished in the soul, heart, spirit, conscience, before the hands can be clean, or may put themselves lawfully forward to serve the altar of heaven.

But the conscience, on the other hand, may be corrupted, ill-used, slain. I have referred to the use of certain qualifying terms. Take another—"Having their conscience seared with a hot iron,"—having the pith taken out of it—the life, the fibre, the vitality, the meaning; having a conscience like a withered leaf, like a piece of burning wood; everything taken out of it that was divinely created, with voices and ministries meant to inspire and direct, control and ennoble, the whole life. Take another qualifying term—"Even their mind and conscience is defiled": the wreck is within, the ruin is spiritual, the tremendous collapse—whatever the theologians may choose to name it—has taken place within the man; his are no flesh-wounds, no cutaneous diseases; there is something the matter with him that cannot be touched by earthly physicians, or by invention or ingenuity of his own. The Bible says that all redeeming help must come from the creating God. This doctrine is applied to the conscience as well as to the soul in its more general and comprehensive definitions.

Then the conscience may not only be corrupted, seared, defiled, but it may be turned into a pedant and be forced to ridiculous uses. "If the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!" The conscience may be made to do servile work, to patronise bad things. The conscience may be appointed managing-director of the most accursed confederacies ever invented by the depravity of man. Conscience, therefore, requires continual culture, watching, assistance; it must for ever draw its vitality from the God of righteousness.

Now we must in the uses of conscience distinguish between the eternal right and the secondary right. The word "right" requires continual definition. It does not always stand for the same thing. Like the term "law," in the apostolic reasoning, it must be distinguished in its uses, and only by an analytical

discrimination can it be saved from perversions the most disastrous. But how are we to ascertain the eternal right? There should be no difficulty about that. How are we to ascertain the institutional or secondary right? There ought to be no difficulty about that. Let us see whether we can render one another any little assistance in that direction. I should say that rest is the eternal right: that the time when it should be taken is the institutional right. Never must we trifle with the eternal right of every human being to rest. As to whether it shall be on the first day, or on the last, or in the middle of the week, there you touch what is secondary and institutional; there you may have change, modification to your heart's content; there indeed you may enjoy fullest liberty: but you have no liberty in the matter of treating the rest itself. One man esteemeth one day, another man esteemeth another day: let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind; but let no man lay wicked or violent hands upon the divine gift and ordinance of rest to every human creature.

Faith I should declare to be the eternal quantity—that mysterious life which may be called the faith-life, the living out of oneself, the tender dependence, the filial expectation, the assured relationship to God; that is the eternal quantity: but creed, catechism, church, institution, organisation,—these are secondary and intermediate, and there what liberty is offered by the very genius of the Bible! How the Apostle Paul gives lavishly of this gift of liberty, about eating, and washing, and fasting, and observance, and ceremony! He says: Be kind to one another; make allowances for one another: we cannot all think alike upon these matters; but no man must interfere with the central and eternal quantity of faith, larger than any creed, larger than any church. The creed is temporary. It may have been up to date the very best thing that could be written. But no creed can be permanent unless it be inspired. And when did God inspire a creed-maker? If we claim inspiration for the miscellaneous Bible, the multitudinous Bible, the unmethodised, unsystematised, yet coherent and harmonious Bible, we must not be claiming it too lavishly for mechanisms, formulas, human inventions. Change the creed as civilisation changes; re-adjust

your terms as education advances; re-set all your theological positions and dogmas if you please: but you must not interfere with the eternal quantity, Faith—that upper soul, that deeper life, that truer-self; that marvellous system of tentacles that hooks on to the Eternal Life—call him Jehovah, Jove, or Lord. You must not take away the idolater's faith when you take away his idol. Even the idolater may know the mystery of self-translation, and may have no explanation of the mystery which makes his spiritual life august and grand. Do not destroy his idol even until you can substitute it with the living God. Destruction may be carried too far, unless you are prepared with the work of construction, which ought to go on almost concurrently with the destructive process.

I should say that worship is the eternal right, but that methods of worship are the secondary right. Worship with a written formula, if you so please, and can realise most profitably, and God bless you in the exercise and use of a noble, all but inspired liturgy; if you can worship God better by free, spontaneous, unprepared addresses to the throne of the heavenly grace, by all means approach your Father along the broadest, amplest, most hospitable way: but you must never interfere with the right of worship. You can address yourselves wisely to methods, operations, systems, plans, mechanisms,—all these may undergo continual change; you may change your form of worship every day in the week: but the worship itself abides, the eternal quantity.

Take a simple illustration which even a child can understand. Suppose we appoint that worship should begin at eleven o'clock in the morning. There you have two rights. There is nothing in the eleven o'clock; that is a point agreed upon, partly by compromise, partly by study of the situation, partly by cognisance of special circumstances in the city, in the parish: but it is right we should be there at eleven o'clock, because we have agreed upon it. What is the eternal right? Punctuality. No man must interfere with that. He is a thief who palters with that. Punctuality is the eternal quantity, the eternal right; the eleven o'clock is but the point at which that right takes visible effect, or

embodies itself in concrete realisation. But punctuality abides. You may change the eleven o'clock, you may change your time of meeting every Sabbath in the year, but having changed it you cannot interfere with the spirit of punctuality. There is a substance ; there is also a shadow : there is the eternal right ; there is the secondary accommodation.

But let us beware how we make a pedant of conscience, how we expend our strength on punctilios when we ought to spend it upon principle,—real things. Never have a conscience that is not founded upon reason. In so far as conscience can vindicate itself by reason it will make headway in society. Reason always triumphs. It has a long weary fight, a destructive struggle sometimes, but it comes up at the last, and sits by right upon the throne, judging all men. Do not judge another man's conscience by your own on all these secondary matters. In proportion as you are addicted—and here we come back to the central principle—in love and loyalty to the eternal right will you be large and liberal in the uses of the secondary right. Find a man who is punctilious about little things, about details, about passing matters, and you find a man who has never been in the sanctuary of the inner right. Find a man who has communed with God, drunk the very spirit of Christ, become imbued with the very meaning of the gospel, and he, Paul-like, gives great liberty, looks with magnanimous complacency even upon the controversies of the Church, asking only that they shall be conducted gently, quietly, lovingly, and that a good deal of allowance should be made by one man for the peculiarities of another. When did Paul—a Pharisee of the Pharisees—learn this lesson? To what school did he repair to study this philosophy? The man who said this, who gave this liberty, also said, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." Out of such lofty tabernacles he came to distribute amongst men rights and franchises and opportunities and privileges with the lavish hand of a princely donor. But about this conscience in the house, and in business. You may be killing your children with your conscience, because it may be an irrational conscience.

Children will have amusement. You never can put down drama and dancing and recreation and jubilation; you never can cut off the foam and efflorescence and blossoming of life without doing great injury; and in attempting to do all this you may defeat yourself. That child of yours, whom you have oppressed with your conscience because you will not allow certain recreations, comes quietly in every night after having been enjoying them, and looks at you in the face with a blankness which you would understand if you were not so conscientiously stupid. Why not make your home the great joy of life, saying, Boys and girls, let us all do here what we can to alleviate life's burdens and life's darkness, and let us all be children together, so far as we may: do nothing behind me you would not do before me, and if I can join you I will, and the old man shall be as young as any of you? Then home will be church, and church will be almost heaven. Beware of the perverted conscience, the soured conscience, the right that is only secondary being put in place of the right that is primary and eternal. How is all this to be learned? Only by communion with Christ. Blessed Christ, Son of God! what liberty he gives; he said, If you like to wash your hands, well; if you prefer not to do so because the ceremony is unmeaning and fruitless, then sit down and enjoy the hospitality of the house. The Son of man is Lord also of the Sabbath. When men rebuked him because he went to eat with publicans and sinners, He said, "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." When they said, "This man eateth with sinners," he did not disdain the sneer; he took it as the highest eulogium that could be pronounced upon him by such lips. But let us beware lest we enjoy the secondary liberty without sustaining the primary relation. Do not play with sacred things. Be right at both ends. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself:" "On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." Do not live an empty, superficial, linear life, but live a full, solid, cubic, square, all-round life—the very life of God. If any man says, "Such a life would I live," all God's angels will take up their abode with him; yea, the Spirit of God will be his instructor, and sanctifier, and loving friend.

Chapter xxi.

“An high look, and a proud heart, and the plowing of the wicked, is sin”
(ver. 4).

THE PLOWING OF THE WICKED, ETC.

BY “the plowing of the wicked” we are to understand the whole scope of their work; all that the wicked man does is sinful. Here we see an operation of the law of cause and effect. Sometimes it is supposed that a man may be very bad, and yet may do good deeds; we say a man is a drunkard, and yet he is most generous to the poor; we say that a man is cruel, and yet that he is disposed to take a charitable view of certain actions; we say that a man is covetous, and yet that he is magnanimous in judgment. The text will have nothing to do with such reasoning. It first establishes the character of the man, and having determined that, everything else falls into proper position and value. Whatever the bad man does is itself bad, not relatively but essentially. A drunkard may give an alms to a poor person, and that alms may be well bestowed and most acceptable; yet it counts nothing to the credit of the drunkard himself, for he may be but bribing his conscience, or enlarging his opportunities for self-indulgence, or yielding to a merely animal sentiment: the act itself is bad because the actor is bad. Beware of the discrimination which seeks to distinguish between the doer and the deed. If a bad man could do good deeds, then the necessity for regeneration would be disproved. If a good tree could bring forth bad fruit, or a bad tree could bring forth good fruit, essential relations would be changed. The Bible teaches us everywhere that everything depends upon the state of the heart, and that though deeds may be relatively good and temporarily of great value, yet as water cannot rise above its level, so no deed can rise above the moral level of the doer.

“Ye must be born again.” Only the good man can do the really good deed.

“The thoughts of the diligent tend only to plenteousness; but of every one that is hasty only to want” (ver. 5).

“Every one that is hasty” points to those who the more haste they make the less speed they realise; they do things carelessly or perfunctorily; they wish to get them out of hand; instead of being critical, patient, painstaking, looking into everything carefully with a view of securing exactness, they hurry their work, they drive along with thoughtlessness, anxious only to gain a goal, and utterly careless as to the way through which they pass to its attainment. This policy of life is utterly condemned because of its consequences; there is nothing abiding that is not in itself really good; the harvest depends upon the seedtime; if we have not been correct in our moral basis and just in our moral policy, no matter what our gain may be it will evaporate, or take to itself wings and flee away, or be only an aggravation of our discontent. Only that is done which is well done. Only that is settled which is settled rightly. Only that will bring forth a great harvest which is in harmony with the structure and the purpose of the universe. We must work by the ways of God, and by eternal ordinances: all our short cuts, and ready methods, and accelerated policies, tend to confusion, and disappointment, and want. This is the affirmation of the wise man, and how far it is correct can be judged by the open page of human history, and can certainly be tested at once by reference to our own experience.

“The way of man is froward and strange: but as for the pure, his work is right” (ver. 8).

The meaning is that if a man himself is bad, all the way or track which he makes in life will be marked by crookedness or sinuousness. The bad man cannot go straightforwardly. When a man is intoxicated he reels from side to side of the road; when a man is carrying a burden that is too heavy for him he cannot keep steadfastly on his feet, and the way which he leaves behind him is marked by irregularity: this is the teaching of the text; if a man is laden with sin he will leave a tortuous track behind him; he will be here and there, he will be unsteady and uncertain;

it is impossible for him to go straightforwardly because of the oppression of the weight under which he reels. The contrary is the case with the pure: his work is right or straight; he has nothing burdensome to carry; his eyes look right on and his feet are set down with solidity and precision. If we could mark the way by which the pure man passes through life we should see how comparable it is to a straight line. The bad man is continually dodging, eluding, or evading some real or imaginary danger; the wicked flee when no man pursueth, but the righteous are bold as a lion. The pure man walks straightforwardly, and by the mere force of his pureness he makes a way where there is none, and those who would have opposed him shrink out of his path, recognising in him the representative of truth and honour.

“The righteous man wisely considereth the house of the wicked: but God overthroweth the wicked for their wickedness” (ver. 12).

The “righteous man” should rather be the “righteous one,” and by that one we are to understand the Almighty himself: the text would then read: The righteous God marks the house of the wicked, and God throws down the wicked for their destruction. Here is the solemn principle of judgment applied to individual life and individual habitation. The picture is that of God seated in the heavens, and marking the house of the wicked man, noting all that goes on under its roof, marking all the history that is enclosed by its walls, and at the right time bringing upon the roof of the wicked man’s house the rod of lightning, so that it is cleft in twain, and the wicked are overthrown even in the midst of their orgies and the very madness of their delight. For a long time the house of the wicked seems to be secure; every window is aflame with a rosy light through the long night-time, and through the open door are heard noises of music and of dancing; the rejoicing is for a time only; God is watching the whole process, and at the right moment he will overthrow the house and plough up its foundations. Better to be in a little house of honesty and righteousness and truth than in a great palace of dishonesty and unrighteousness and falsehood. He that is righteous lives in a rock that cannot be overthrown, a pavilion within which there can be no fear of the

violence of raging storms. How is this to be obtained? What is the rock within which the heart of man can safely live? Has it been named? Has it not been called the Rock of Ages? And have not they who have fled to it been assured day by day of ever-increasing security? That rock is open to us all,—the very granite bears upon it an inscription indicative of hospitality and welcome. Blessed are they who flee to it that they may find rest and sustenance.

“It is joy to the just to do judgment: but destruction shall be to the workers of iniquity” (ver. 15).

A curious apposition of sentences. The doctrine is that workers of iniquity cannot do right without being afflicted with a sense of terror. So debased are they by the spirit of evil that even to do right brings with it a sensation of doing wrong, or of drawing too near to God to be safe from the stroke of his lightning. It would seem that wickedness so affects the character and the tone of the whole life that bad men cannot trust divine promises. Bad men cannot commit themselves to spiritual policy or spiritual trust; it is like asking blind men to go into danger without any guidance or protection; bad men feel that if they would live they are bound to be dishonest; it seems utterly impossible to them that honesty can be the best policy, or that truth can bring itself to successful issue and satisfaction. See what ravages are made in the judgment and in the heart by long-continued processes of sin. When a man loves iniquity he cannot love God; he cannot pray; he cannot think aright; the Sabbath is a burden to him; the Bible is a continual offence to his corrupted reason; and the whole way of life seems to be a way of danger and trouble and manifold terror. The bad man can do wickedly as if by a species of right, earned by long custom; but when he opens his mouth in prayer he feels as if he were committing a trespass against himself and the universe.

“The sacrifice of the wicked is abomination: how much more, when he bringeth it with a wicked mind?” (ver. 27).

The supposition is that a wicked man feels that he must offer sacrifices, but in the very act of being religious he is secretly imagining himself in a position to make God a confederate in his sin. The idea is that when the wicked man is offering a sacrifice

he is buying permission to do wrong. It is as if by going to church occasionally a man earned the right to do selfishly and unjustly all the week long. Or as if a man by giving an alms to poverty earned the right to cheat the simple-minded and overthrow those who put their trust in him. Yet we are told that the doctrine of original sin is a mere phantasy! Can the debasing influence of sin go further than this, that it shall make a merchandise of religion itself, and turn prayer into a species of investment, and draw profits from the very act of attempting to worship God? The picture is that of a man who is offering a sacrifice at the altar, and yet at the same time is plotting future wickedness. He says to himself, All this shall turn to my advantage; I am really not so much at the altar as I am in the mart, or in the exchange, or at the place where merchants most do congregate: all this looks very religious on my part, but I am simply setting up a ladder by which I may scale higher worldly eminence,—all this will presently turn to my advantage; do not imagine me to be superhumanly religious, I am only pre-eminently clever; this is not piety, it is policy; this is not sacrifice, it is elaborate scheming. Can we see these revelations of human nature without asking ourselves how that nature can be vitally changed? And can we consider that great inquiry without feeling that “Ye must be born again” is the only doctrine that is radical, vital, complete, and enduring in its happy effects?

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we can say with our heart's consent, The Lord is mindful of his own, he remembers his children ; like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him. Thou hast made us in thine own image and likeness, and towards thyself thou art continually calling us by the whole ministry of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. We are called to bear the divine image in our souls, to be as perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect. The call overwhelms us : but where thou dost send the call thou dost send the helpful and needful grace. Thy call is a call of life and love, and thou dost sustain those who obey it, giving them grace upon grace, yea, to fulness of joy and peace, so that in their increase of power they say, We can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth us. Our praise be evermore to Christ ! If we forget thee, Immanuel, may our right hand forget its cunning and our tongue cleave to the roof of our mouth. Behold thou art the Son of God ; to us thou art God the Son. We cannot tell thy beginning, or thine ending, or the way of thy mediation and sovereignty : but we put our trust in the living Christ, and from him would draw the life we daily need. We have no faith in our own bow and spear and sword ; we have renounced our invention and mental fertility, and power of planning ways out of infinite difficulties ; and now we stand still, like so many little children, and see the salvation of God, beginning in mystery, showing itself momentarily in a great light, withdrawing for our accommodation, appealing to us in whispers and tender entreaties, and showing us daily the way of deliverance and safety. Blessed be God, this is thy way ; we are now led to accept it ; we praise God for his redemption in Christ Jesus, and call ourselves men redeemed. We cannot follow the mystery of thy love in the atonement wrought by thy Son, but we can follow the mystery of thy love in daily providence ; we see the rising sun ; we feel the summer warmth ; we are made glad by the fruitfulness of the healing earth consenting to the ministry of light and the baptism of rain, and answering the heavens in orchards and wheatfields rich with fruit and bread. We can see how we ourselves have been led along the way of life. We remember the days of long ago—the days of darkness and difficulty, when every hill was steep, when every mountain was hanging over us in a threatening attitude, and when there was no blessing pronounced by human lips ; we have seen the angel delivering us, leading us forth, showing us the way where we should find health, peace, companionship, and service worthy of our spirits. Thou hast fed us day by day ; in the night season thou hast ministered to us ; there is no day void of God ; thy love is set upon each hour as the king's seal. Knowing all these things, we are filled with hope ; we say, The end shall be better than the beginning ; thou art able to do more than we ask or think, yea, exceeding abundantly above our

prayers : so we are rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, confident in the sovereignty and grace of God. Continue thy miracle ; complete it in our heart's experience ; give us liberty of soul, confidence of spirit, obedience of will, aptitude of mind, docility of heart, so that we may receive thy will, and do it all, with patience and love and thankfulness. We pray for one another. We need so to do. In this way we can help our lives : seeking blessing for one another, we are blessed ourselves. We pray for those who are deaf in thy house, who hear nothing but noise, who miss all the music and all the tenderness. We pray for those who are dumb, who do not even sigh or secretly say Amen, or cause their voice to be heard in the singing of thy praise. The Lord pity the deaf and dumb. Perhaps some of them hardly mean it all ; perhaps they hear more than we suppose,—yea, they may, for ought we know, be secretly sighing their sorrow, or singing their praise ; but we leave them in thine hands, O gentle One. Look upon those who are perplexed, distracted, bewildered ; men of fine impulse and noble intention, but who are baffled and struck in the face by a thousand hands, so that they cannot tell one way from the other. They do not mean all their sin, or thou, even thou, merciful One, couldst not keep them out of hell. They are distracted : they are half-praying even whilst they are denying the altar : they are looking into thy Book if haply they may find something in it for their hearts' healing at the very moment when they are raising questions about its inspiration. Thou knowest the heart—strange, wild, perverse heart. Thou understandest all the mystery of its motion and impulse and desire, passion and madness ; thou didst make it : its intricacy attests thine own creation. And look upon those who have half-turned home, who are looking towards abandoned altars and forsaken securities, and who are saying to themselves they will arise and go to their Father, but have yet kept their intention a secret, so that they have not the advantage of public support and countenance in their holy resolve. Lord, now determine them ! May they take the first step this very moment, and may they be found at home at the time of the setting of the sun. Look upon all wasteful spirits—men who do not know what life is, who have begun a wrong arithmetic concerning it, who have been adding whilst they should have been subtracting, and who have been multiplying cyphers by cyphers in the hope that they might find a substantial result ; strange men, worldly men ; men who have had to murder themselves in order to begin this way of folly and vanity ; men who dare not speak to themselves because every word spoken by the spirit would be a contradiction of every deed done by the hand. Thou knowest them altogether ; search them, and **try them**, and let them know that the candle of the Lord is being held over their inmost life : perhaps—who can tell?—they may repent. Comfort us with an assured forgiveness. Let every soul feel that for Christ's sake his sin has been pardoned. Let a great joy, as a joy of liberty and release, seize the heart. God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Ghost : we need this Triune God to save us. We bless Thee for the Cross, for the sacrificial blood, for the infinite atonement ; we rest at the Cross, for at the Cross we find pardon and peace. Help us the rest of our lives ; thou knowest every man's struggle, his peculiar battle and special agony ; according to the need of each heart send angels from heaven. **Amen.**

Chapter xxi. 10, 15.

"The soul of the wicked desireth evil. . . . It is a joy to the just o do judgment."

NATURE AND PRACTICE.

HERE are men working according to their nature. That is a universal necessity. Here are men who are not only doing evil but desiring to do it; not doing evil in one passionate and hurried act, but doing it constantly; liking to do it, doing it in anticipation, planning it; making all things concur and focus upon it; making evil part of a plot, a plot conceived and wrought out in the burning, vehement heart. The mere doing of the evil itself is momentary, and is not worth doing. The devil will not give us time enough when he has brought us to the point of absolute transaction; it is one mouthful of the interdicted fruit, and then sudden hell. Where the enemy gives time is in anticipation, fore-arranging; as who should say, How shall this be done? and when? under what circumstances? What condiment can we add to this to make it titillate the palate? what contributory circumstances can we arrange so as to make the feast long? The devil gives no long feasts. He gives long notice, long preparation; he causes the soul to delight in the outlook upon the positive occasion that is coming; but when it comes it is a sudden opening and a sudden shutting,—a baleful light, an everlasting darkness.

"The soul of the wicked desireth evil,"—likes it, longs for it, delights in it. That was not Paul's particular state o mind as described in the seventh chapter of his Epistle to the Romans. He did evil, and did not want to do it; he put forth his hands to actions which he hated. There is all the difference in the world between desiring to do evil and simply doing it. Many a man does the evil who does not desire to do that which is wrong. I have not hesitated to teach that many a man who drinks deeply is no drunkard. His body is drunk, but his soul is sober. Herein is a great mystery—the eternal conflict between passion and reason, body and soul, the dust we carry and the deity that burns within us. Paul set forth the experience of such conflict in vivid

and graphic terms. He would not do the evil, and then he did it ; he would do the good, and then he found himself unable to accomplish his own purpose ; he hated the evil and then went out and did it ; he longed to serve the good, and when he went out to do it he forgot his road and was brought home a blind man. Do not confuse this state of heart and soul with the disposition that wallows in evil. Many a man is drunk who is a total abstainer. That is the converse truth. We are what we want to be. Out of the heart proceed murders, thefts, adulteries, blasphemies. O thou well-dressed and heavily protected hypocrite ! Thou art now caught in a shower of darts ; it is no rain that beats upon thee, or thou mightest keep it off, but sharp steel sent down from God's heaven, and thou hast no protection against that assault. What is the state of your heart ? Do you wear the saint, and keep the blackguard well concealed ? Do you say your prayers, and live your desires ? Let every man search himself, whether he preach the judgment, or only hear its proclamation.

So subtle are the operations of the heart, so incalculable are the temptations of the enemy, that even here we have to be very particular lest we take comfort to which we have no right. We must not deceive ourselves ; we must not suppose that we are those who would not do evil and yet do it, if in our hearts there is a testimony against us, urgent, not to be kept down, resurgent, that comes up through all temptations and all illusions, and asserts itself as the leading and dominant fact in our spiritual consciousness. Besides, the doing, even the reluctant doing, may excite the desire to do with a will. If we go very frequently back and back to our bad habits they may become easy to us ; we shall not always remain in the state of doing the evil which we do not want to do. Presently we may want to do it, we may desire to do it. Observe how wondrously that word "convenient" is used in the New Testament. It is used in connection either with excuses or with debaucheries. "When a convenient day was come." Herod can make his own conveniences. He had arranged that he should be called at this hour and that his interview with unpleasant interlocutors should be interrupted five minutes later, and that his door should be thundered at by an importunate fist, and that he should have wine ready when

the simulated spasm tears his breast; and he can arrange that by accident the tempter come upon the scene: whereas the tempter's name was written upon the programme a week ago. "A convenient day"—a coming-together day, when lines and threads, and arrangements and appointments, can be made to con, to get together, to form a so-called necessity.

The way of evil is not always agreeable at first. Evil brings its own immediate penalties. It is so with uncleanly practices, with undesirable habits that may afterwards grow into luxuries. Many a young man has had to fight his way into slavery. When he first tasted the thing, it was deadly; he said he revolted from it. The enemy said, Try it again. He tried it again; it was little better. A third time, and it was not so unmanageable; a fourth time, a twelfth time, and then he desired it. Think of a free young soul fighting its way determinedly into bondage! This is possible. Oh, mysterious human nature! "how abject, how august!" When does a man lose his soul? We speak of the loss of the soul sometimes as if it were a momentary and complete act. There is a sense in which the loss of the soul is both momentary and complete. There is a sense in which death may be sudden, though it has been looked for for years. Is not death always sudden? Can any man wholly prepare himself for that grim guest? When he takes his seat does he not take it suddenly, and blight the little festival by his presence? There is another sense in which a man loses his soul little by little. That is the loss to fear. The soul goes down in volume, the soul loses its fine bloom wrought by the summer of God: the will is more reluctant in good directions; the heart has lost its eagerness to pray. The church is not now the sweet necessity of the week; the soul no longer says, When will the Sabbath dawn? when will the golden gates be thrown back that I may enter into fellowship with the saints and into the common prayer and worship addressed to Almighty God the Father? Religious enthusiasm has cooled; we can not adopt an excuse and magnify it into a reason when it is on the side of delay or inactivity. We now look at the barometer, and can be easily persuaded that we are not well enough to go to the sanctuary! Ah, we are losing our souls, we are going down to hell a step at a time. Didst

thou think, poor fool, that men went into perdition by one sudden leap? To some men, to go to hell is only the next thing, the next natural thing, the next easy thing; it is not a mile, it is but a span. How solemn is life! The man looks as he has looked for many a day, and yet if you could see him interiorly he is wasted. By what disease? Consumption. Consumption of what? Of the soul; the enemy has nearly eaten it all up. There are those who do not want our preachers to speak of perdition. What is their reason? Hath not the devil some trick of this kind which he plays with a master's hand? Think!

Blessed be God, the rule operates also on the other side: "It is a joy to the just to do judgment." He not only does judgment or justice, but he joys in doing it. He is delighted with the opportunity of doing it; he longs to make men glad, to set the oppressed free, to open the prison door to them that are bound unjustly. When he has to make reparation to any man on his own account he does it magnanimously; he says to the wronged man, I thank God for this opportunity of telling you what injustice I have inflicted upon you; I did not understand you, in the sight and fear of God I must own I did not want to understand you; I closed my eyes and then struck in the direction where I thought a blow would tell upon you: I was wrong: God has now given me the spirit of righteousness and integrity and justice, and I will lie down at your feet and say, Have mercy upon me! I have done wickedly. When Christian men learn to do this they will know what the Cross means. We are not to do our duty merely, barely, grudgingly, with critical nicety; we are to carry up duty to the point of generosity and over-soul and overflowingness of all good feeling; we are to do it again, and again, and again, with the abundance, the wave-chasing-wave fulness of the sea. We never can apologise for doing wrong. We must repeat the apology, and study the eloquence of penitence; where we have done wrong it may take the rest of our lifetime to make reparation, and then we shall need all the help of God to heal the heart or the life we have wronged. Sometimes, however, we can only begin at the point of duty. We must begin good-doing where we can. All men

have not the same largeness and richness of nature. There are those who tell us that all men are equal—simply because they do not know what they are talking about. No two men are equal. Some men never get beyond the point of servitude—a day's wages for a day's work. They can only do what they call their duty, and any man who sets himself simply to do his duty never does it. Duty can only be done from above; we cannot carry up our actions to the point of duty, we must rise above them, and with Heaven's help work according to Heaven's gravitation, and thus do our duty with a masterly hand, as with an eager and grateful heart.

Some men cannot be other than little. They cannot help it; if they are only little in judgment they must be taken for what they are worth, but if their littleness of judgment interferes with their moral integrity then we must watch and rebuke and restrain them. It is impossible for some men to be good. Down to the very last it is impossible for some men to pray—to pray in that way that is almost praise, to utter a prayer that has a hymn in the heart of it, to commune with God in some heaven-dissolving way that tears aside all veils and screens, and that sees the Father through the Son, and delights in the ineffable presence. Still we must pray where we can. Sometimes the prayer may be hard and may therefore be costly in the sight of God—that is, of great price in the estimation of him who knows through what difficulties we have come to the altar. On the other hand, it is comparatively easy for some men to pray. Let them take care lest they are offering prayers that are not steeped in blood, prayers that are not sacrificial, bleeding at every syllable, prayers that are merely eloquent breath. Each man must examine himself and come to his own conclusion, accepting help from pulpit or press or friend as it may be offered to him. To the last it is hard for some men to give. They cannot part with money. They could part with any amount of good advice—in fact, they make themselves the servants of the church in this matter: but in their soul—their what?—let courtesy prevail over judgment—in their soul they are avaricious. Did you ever see Avarice? It is a thing mainly of hands—hooked, crooked, grasping hands. Avarice never had a good dinner; even when it dined at others'

expense the food went for nothing, because Avarice was thinking what it would do to-morrow. There is avarice in the church, a bargaining spirit in the sanctuary; a spirit that would settle once for all with God in order to get it over: whereas God will not have it so; he would not have it so in Judaism,—he must have the sacrifice every morning, every evening, no intermission. He will have the giving to-day and to-morrow and every day, regularly as he gives the sunshine. By such detail and discipline, by such sharpness of exaction and criticism, he brings us to the last refinement of consent and joy.

Blessed be God, the law is equal. As the law operates in one direction, so it operates in the other: as we lose our souls little by little, we may gain them little by little. You may be more a man to-day than you were seven years ago. You delight more in the law of God, in the expectation of the kingdom; you have begun to say, After all there is something in this religious mystery that is necessary to the completeness of human nature, and to the fulfilment of human hope and human destiny. Be glad of that admission. That is a point to begin at. You say that though you cannot make out the mysteries, here and there you come upon a clear point of reason in your studies of these great religious appeals. Now you are beginning to live. Once you could not sing in the sanctuary, but lately you have joined the hymn in a note or two, blessed be God! We shall have you yet; the Lord will hold you as his willing captive. Once you could not speak to others about spiritual affairs, and latterly you have begun almost to design an attack upon some friend in whose spiritual interests you are deeply concerned, and it may be ere the week is out you will venture the first word. God grant it may be so! Then your friend will tell you he has been waiting for, and expecting this; or if he cannot speak to you in words he will send to your heart the thrill of a masonic grip that says, God be thanked for this touch of human sympathy!

Seeing that the whole matter is so intensely spiritual, that it penetrates to the heart and core and essence of things, what can we do with mere theories, inventions, reforms, propositions, and

the like? If we are so spiritually constituted we must be spoken to spiritually. If the beginning, continuance, and end of all this mystery of growth is so intensely spiritual, we must be brought into contact with God the Holy Ghost. It is his work; he must take the things of Christ and show them unto us; he must interpret the Cross in all the meaning of its blood to the aching, wondering, despairing heart. You cannot be brought into divinest relations by merely intellectual argument. "If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" Let your prayer be for the gift of the Holy Ghost. He only can throw back all the hindrances that keep him from the heart; he alone can find his way into the recesses of the soul, the innermost chambers of our mysterious life. Pray for the Holy Ghost. Say, Take not thy Holy Spirit from me! Say, "Come, Holy Spirit, heavenly Dove, with all thy quickening powers." Wait upon God for this. Say to him plainly, Father, this is not a human matter, this is not to be done by human thought and human scheme; this mystery lies between thyself and myself—oh, help me! Dost thou believe? saith the voice from above. Let your answer be, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief."

Chapter **xxi.** 28-31.

THE FALSE WITNESS, ETC.

"A false witness shall perish: but the man that heareth speaketh constantly" (ver. 28).

THE mystery is that there should be such a character in society as a "false witness." We are apt to take the existence of such characters as a matter of course. If, however, we look carefully into the case we shall regard a false witness not only as a curiosity in nature but as an unspeakable monstrosity. Consider how awful a thing it is to violate truth, to trifle with uprightness, to give a false colour or accent to human action or language: what possible motive can there be for such wantonness and profanation? Searching into the matter, we shall find here, as everywhere, that selfishness explains the whole of that mischievous action. The man has some object to gain, either money, fame, influence, or flattery of himself; on the other hand, he may be fearing danger, penalty, loss, or affliction in some form; whatever may be the details of the case, there remains the suggestive and alarming fact, that it is possible for man to tell lies about his brother man and to swear falsely in the very courts of truth and justice. In this direction we find the miracles that ought to astound us. If by familiarity we have become accustomed to the possibility of false-witnessing, that does not at all diminish the awfulness of the act in the first instance. Who was the first liar? Who began the mystery of falsehood? Whose name towers out into a bad eminence as the original witness against the truth and light? Whilst we are searching into the ancestry of the bad man we may possibly overlook the reality of contemporaneous wickedness. We need not go back to the original for false-swearing, inasmuch as each man may find a false witness in his own heart. Bad as it is to bear false witness

against our neighbour, we should remember that it is possible for a man to bear false witness to himself; he may deceive his own imagination, he may bribe his own conscience, he may overpersuade himself that this or that course is right; he may silence the voice divine which would guide him into the upward way, and for some avowed or unconscious reason he may take the way that ends in death. When a man can bear false witness to himself, there will be no difficulty in his bearing false witness concerning others. The end of the false witness is declared in the text—"shall perish." We know not the meaning of that awful term; it would seem to be more than destruction, even more than annihilation; it is an outgoing and vanishing from the sphere of life, amid sneers, detestation, execration of every kind, as if the universe were glad to be rid of so black and cold and noisome a shadow.

Contrasted with the false witness is "the man that heareth," literally, heareth carefully, and repeats with exactness and precision what he does hear, so that not a word is lost, not a tone is changed, not a single colour is varied; the man speaks constantly, that is, consistently with himself, all the parts of his speech are equal and mutually illuminative, and in the whole there is a solidity or constancy that shall not decay. The word "constantly" is put in opposition to the word "perish"; the one abides, the other departs; the one is unvarying in its testimony, the other is ambiguous, equivocal, and self-destructive. Here, then, we have as usual the two aspects of moral life, namely, falsehood and truthfulness, the false witness and the exact speaker, the child of night and the child of midday. It is curious and instructive to observe how perfectly this twofold division of character is maintained throughout Biblical history. Each man can take his position under one or other of the divisions of this verse: we have only a right hand and a left, we have only falsehood and truth: there is no middle place in which a man may lodge himself in security and honour: when the Son of man cometh in his glory he shall divide the gathered nations into sheep and goats, and third division or modification there shall be none. With such a fact **before us** we may realise the day of judgment **now**.

"There is no wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against the Lord" (ver. 30).

This is a religious philosophy of life. If there is a Lord according to the Biblical revelation and description of his character, it is impossible that he can be opposed with ultimate success. Even if we empty this word "Lord" of its personality, and regard it as a term symbolical of righteousness, judgment, truth, and goodness, it may still be affirmed that in the long run these must prevail over every form of wickedness. It would seem to be impossible that evil should be eternal. From the beginning there has been in human consciousness a hope, yea an assurance, that by-and-by light will expel darkness, and righteousness will occupy the place of wickedness. Account for it as we may, that hope has sustained the human race in all the agony of its transition, in all the battles and storms of its manifold progress. Upon an instinct of this kind is built many a temple of religion and many an altar of sacrifice and service. Religious rites and ceremonies would be too costly and arduous to maintain simply in their mechanical bearings and aspects; there must be under the whole of them something that is stronger than themselves: call it an instinct, a persuasion, a conviction, a consciousness of divine revelation—it is in that depth that we must find the reason of all that is external in religious pomp, circumstance, or simplicity. Men would become weary of doing things that are merely superficial and mechanical; it is the ineffable motive, the profound conviction, that explains all the deepest religious action of life, and that sustains men in the maintenance and defence of their religious purposes. Undoubtedly there is an opposition to everything that is of the quality of purity and nobleness: there are passions in men which clamour for gratification, and those passions are instantly opposed and threatened with destruction by everything that is heavenly and divine. Man grows, and in his growth he undergoes processes of trial which are essential to his development. Many a combat is to be traced, not to the evil that is in a man, but to the good that is rising within him and claiming pre-eminence. We may be too apt to trace all battle and conflict to evil purpose or motive, whereas, in many cases, it will be found upon a correct and complete analysis that there would have been no conflict but for the good that was rising to

assert itself and claim dominance over the mind. If there were no good there would be no bad; it is because we are more conscious of the evil than of the good that we sometimes do ourselves injustice. Who can tell how much good is going with a man even when he enters upon a course of depravity and practical suicide? We only see him pass out of his door and hasten away into forbidden paths; we cannot tell what voices are clamouring after him and within him, and how awful is the conflict from which he is vainly seeking to escape. Then, again, there is another aspect to the whole tragedy: when the man turns his face homeward he is already a victor; when he breathes one sigh of regret he has already begun to pray; when he brands himself as a fool in the sight of God, he has already entered into the agony and the joy of spiritual resurrection. The universal lesson of the text is that all evil will come to nought, that every counsel that is uninspired with the spirit of truth and beneficence will go up as smoke and leave nothing behind it of which men shall speak with honour and thankfulness. Only the good can stand for ever; only the counsel of the Lord is charged with all the honour and dignity of eternity, and will abide through all the ages, in their coming and their going, an unchangeable, an infinite blessing. Here is the strength of the good man; this is the very secret of divine communion and spiritual hopefulness. The eternal God is the refuge of his saints because he is eternal. A God that could change would be no God: the unchangeableness of God is not an attribute only, it is the very essence of his Being.

“The horse is prepared against the day of battle: but safety is of the Lord” (ver. 31).

Horses had been imported largely from Egypt in Solomon's time, and the importation of horses was a direct breach of the law as laid down in 1 Kings iv. 26, and before that in Deuteronomy xvii. 16. Man has always been trying to be “as God.” He has never escaped the first temptation offered by the serpent in Eden,—Do this, and ye shall be as gods; eat this, and your eyes shall be opened; change your point of view, and the whole universe will give up its length and breadth, its depth and height, to your enjoyment. So man has prepared himself a horse, and set the

horse in battle, and assured himself that the animal would win the victory; he has laid his hand upon the horse's neck, and declared that neck to be clothed with thunder; he has lifted the horse's hoof, and declared it to be as a flint; he has looked into the horse's eye, and has seen already in the lustre of that eye the assurance of complete triumph over every foe. In all this process man has been looking at the wrong object, or looking in the wrong direction, or making his calculation upon a false basis. In reality, the horse has nothing to do with the battle, nor has the sword of the warrior; in the last result safety is of the Lord, that is to say, only in proportion as a man is right is he safe, only in the degree of his true religion is he assured of prosperity and final peace. But we must be minor gods! Such is the perversity of our will, and such the disease of our imagination, that we continually suppose that we should be able to construct for ourselves a new and better base of action. It would seem impossible to expel this idea from the human mind. By some change of ceremony, by some variation of policy, by some new dream which we are presently to realise, we shall escape all ghostly dominion and enter into the enjoyment of consciously personal mastery over matter and mind; yet age comes after age and leaves behind it unspeakable disappointment and mortification: still we dream, and hope; still we delude ourselves with imaginations of greatness, and thus we continue the tragedy which often becomes farcical, and the farce which often becomes tragical. We shall never be right until we see that we are creatures, not creators; subordinates, not principals: that we are under the direction and inspiration of God, and are not sources and fountains of self-inspiration. We must be brought to the holy resignation which says, "Not my will, but thine, be done: Lord, what wilt thou have me do? Lord Jesus, into thy hands I commend my spirit": in that holy state of resignation and confidence we shall look no longer to the horse, to the helmet, or to the sword, but to the God of battles, and shall find in his direction and consolation all that we need in order to throw down our enemies, and enter into the sanctuary of victory and the temple of peace.

Chapter xxii. 1-11.

A GOOD NAME BETTER THAN RICHES, ETC.

"A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favour rather than silver and gold" (ver. 1).

WE are here taught that favour is better than silver and gold. The word "favour" signifies the peculiar sweetness or loveliness which excites and elicits the love of other men; it also means that the expression of the favour of others is elicited by the grace that is within ourselves, and that we increase our own graciousness by the approbation of those who look on, observing with gratitude how large are our resources of amiability, forbearance, long-suffering, meekness, and other fruits of the Spirit. Favour wins love, and favour confers the blessings of love on others. A good name is more than mere reputation. We are often reminded that reputation is what a man is said to be, and that character is what a man is in reality. Many a man may have a good name who does not deserve the honour, simply because he is imperfectly known, because his power of concealment is great, because he can draw round himself a garment of impenetrable darkness, within which he can work deeds of evil without his iniquity being known. Repute that is merely the result of calculation is a bubble that will burst and leave its possessor poor indeed. We are not to understand that it is impossible to have both a good name and great riches; it is perfectly possible to have both, as has been illustrated in numberless instances; but where we can only have one it is the good name that is to be chosen in preference to great riches. Sometimes we are called upon to choose one or the other of two blessings. No wise man will deny that great riches create great opportunities for doing good, or that they release the mind from the canker of anxiety. Persuading ourselves that such is the case, it is difficult to quench

our ambition, which operates in the direction of the accumulation of wealth. When we are at the point of election, having to choose between a good name and great riches, we are at the very crisis of life. Only an inexperienced man will reduce the energy of the temptation to a minimum. It is indeed a great temptation when riches are placed within reach, and when a man is called upon to decide between being wealthy and being well-reputed. Riches are seductive, are false in all their suggestions, are unable to realise their own promises, and so men are misled, disappointed, and ultimately confounded or ruined by the very friends to whose protection they had confided themselves. Great riches can only be used in one world, whereas a good name can be carried throughout all spheres, and will abide through the lapse of all duration. We cannot have a really good name amongst men until we have a good name with God; we cannot have a good name with God until we accept his conditions and utterly repudiate our own. A name that is really good is more than a name, it is a character, it is the expression of a spiritual wealth, it is the exemplification of a deep and holy reality of conscience, rectitude, and beneficence. Names should be characters, names should be realities, names should be doors that open upon hearts that are hospitable homes, yea, that are very sanctuaries of purity, wisdom, truth, and every form of goodness.

“The rich and poor meet together: the Lord is the maker of them all” (ver. 2).

It may seem to be hard on the part of Christian observers to say that the poor are always with us in order to develop the piety and beneficence of the rich. Such, however, may be the fact. The world would be poorer but for its poverty. Society would be robbed of one of its supreme opportunities of spiritual and social culture but for the poverty, the weakness, the pain, the destitution of many men. Whilst the critic says this, the Christian must feel it. The Christian is not a mere constructor of society, an architect of fortune, a theorist who says that this and that and something beyond are essential to the perfect structure of society; when the Lord Jesus said, “The poor ye have always with you,” he was not remarking upon a mere fact in social economy, he was pointing to a deeper fact in the purpose

of God in his marvellous education of the world. The nursery softens the whole household, the sick-chamber turns the house into a sanctuary; so in the great general world,—poverty, sickness, helplessness, blindness, every form and aspect of destitution, may be looked upon as needful to the deepest and completest education of the soul. The poor man is at your door, not to be looked at, but to be helped; not to be regarded as a symbol in social arithmetic, but as a heart needing sympathy and brotherhood. When the rich look upon their duties in this light they will be no longer rich in any sense that implies vulgarity, self-confidence, or vanity of any kind: they will be stewards, trustees, men put in trust for the good of others, and who will only enjoy their night's repose as they can look back upon a day of beneficent activity and sacrifice. Then they that are rich will act as if they were not rich, because they will place no confidence in silver and gold, but will simply use them as mediums for the comfort and strengthening of others. In this way religion will sanctify political economy, and political economy will become an obedient servant of the highest spiritual conception and impulse. If the Lord is the maker of us all, the Lord is also the judge of us all. The whole arbitration is in his hands; he knows whether we have helped the poor, or whether we have stifled their cry, or charged their prayer with hypocrisy so as to save ourselves from inquiry and expenditure. The Lord is not ashamed to be regarded as the maker of the poor; he made the poor, not that they might continue to be poor, but that they might continue to elicit the affectionate attention of those who are in better social circumstances. It is true that poverty is often self-induced, or that it can be traced to criminality, indifference, incapacity, and the like; but to regard all poverty as explained by this fact is to ignore all the largest and truest mysteries of life; poverty has a mission in society; poverty ought to be saved from suffering; it may be used to show how dependent one man is upon another, but that dependence should never be allowed to drop into servility on the one hand, or to be regarded as a mark of dominance and contempt on the other. Let the rich man consider that he might have been the poor man, and that reflection will chasten him when he begins to magnify his own ingenuity and to talk

proudly of his own commercial capacity. The richest man has nothing that he has not received, and all his treasure he should hold, not as proprietor, but as trustee.

“A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself; but the simple pass on, and are punished” (ver. 3).

Passages of this kind should be read with care, or they may seem to minister to a kind of ingenuity that is superficial and selfish. We have often had occasion to point out that there is a little prudence as well as a great prudence: a prudence that merely takes care of itself, and a prudence which never seeks its own life, or makes any selfish calculations about its own comfort. “He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.” We are not called upon anywhere in the Bible to make little calculations, small and selfish arrangements, to build for ourselves little refuges that will hold nobody else: we are called to far-sightedness, a large conception of men and things and divine purposes, and to such a calculation of the action of the forces of the universe as will save us from needless trouble and assure us of ultimate defence and protection. Foresight is everywhere taught in the Bible, but not a foresight that is of the nature of selfishness. We are called upon to read history so as to transform it into prophecy. Men who have an opportunity of reading the action of ages ought to have no difficulty in forecasting the future; providence is the same, moral demands and relations are unalterable; we have behind us century upon century of human development, enterprise, speculation, and should therefore have no difficulty in saying what will happen on the morrow, or what will happen in five centuries. About the details we of course know nothing, but the details are the least part of the prognostication: say ye to the righteous, it shall be well with him: say ye to the wicked, it shall be ill with him: this is an eternal prophecy; nothing can modify it or set it aside permanently; come and go as circumstances may, ever and anon we shall hear the solemn judgment pronounced upon human action, that the wicked shall go away into everlasting punishment and the righteous into eternal life. We shall treat history frivolously if we look only at detail and incident and transient colour: all local circumstances change, but the central truth

abides, that they that do good shall come forth to everlasting glory, and they who do evil shall descend into everlasting confusion. Why say that we know nothing about the future when we know everything about it that is worth knowing? Why live as if we had no vision of the times to come? The future has been painted with a vivid hand in Holy Scripture; we know exactly how heaven is constituted and how hell is populated, and there is no mystery about either condition that is not of the nature of detail or passing incident; the character which is the key of the whole mystery is open to our scrutiny and immediate estimation. If men will not take heed of great moral ordinances or spiritual standards, they will pass on and be punished. They must not look upon such punishment as arbitrary; it is part of the nature of things, it is the pulsation of the life of creation: punishment follows error in all worlds, and must do so, not as a mere chastisement, but as a solemn and inevitable consequence. Here we find the whole philosophy of moral existence. At this point the simplest minds may become philosophical by adopting the grand conception of life which expresses itself in the fact that whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap. This is true wisdom; herein is the fear of the Lord, and herein begins the solemn action of the soul which expresses itself in aspiration, in religious hopefulness, and in religious confidence; that action which rises first into desire, then into prayer, then into praise, into praise because God has vindicated his throne, showing it to be established in righteousness, and has vindicated his promises, showing them to be the flowers which grow in the garden which his own right hand has planted. Thus again we come upon the two classes, the prudent and the simple, the false and the true, the right and the wrong; he who would add to these classes any section in which he would find comfort because of wrong-doing trifles with the economy of God, and will be punished by daily disappointment and final punishment with infinite confusion and mortification.

“The rich ruleth over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender. He that soweth iniquity shall reap vanity: and the rod of his anger shall fail. He that hath a bountiful eye shall be blessed: for he giveth of his bread to the poor” (vers. 7-9).

These are instances of the operation of the law of cause and

effect. The rich ruling over the poor is a necessity which cannot be easily controlled; no mechanical arrangement can bring the relation to a proper point of forbearance and magnanimity; until the heart is made right all economical adjustments will fail at point after point. When rich men rule over the poor they show the lowest kind of power; yet there is a sense in which wealth ought to rule over poverty, the sense of beneficence, direction, and succour: the poor man ought to be able to say, The more the rich man has the more I have; he is trustee and steward, and he will not see me want within the limits of reason. The latter part of verse seven is a caution against borrowing. The borrower has to submit to many humiliations which are painful to him: he has to make calculations and arrangements, to withhold judgments, and to change the very tone of his speech, lest he should offend the man who can punish him by demanding the fulfilment of his bond. "Neither a borrower, nor a lender be." The philosophy of the eighth verse we have had occasion to prove day by day in the development of ordinary life. Bad seed never comes to good fruit. Oftentimes men sow iniquity without ever reflecting that seedtime is followed by harvest; they had a kind of grim joy in sowing iniquity, they describe it as "sowing their wild oats"; they do not stop to consider that after the sowing will come the reaping: herein is an inevitable and inexorable law: "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." Whom should a man blame? Should he blame providence? Should he reflect adversely upon the economy of nature? Should he describe himself as unlucky, unfortunate, and worthy of commiseration? On the contrary, he should say, Here is a proof of the divine sovereignty and of the inexorableness of law; here is a distinct testimony to the fact that we are not living a haphazard life, without bound, without purpose, and without judgment, but we are pursuing lines of thought and effort which must end in practical consequences. When the bad man puts in his sickle to reap darkness and the ashes of death, he should say to himself as he looks upon his empty hands, Lo, this also confirms the judgment and power of God. In the ninth verse the picture is seen on its reverse side. Instead of a man who sows iniquity we find a man who sows beneficence and gives his bread liberally to the poor, who studies the necessities of his

age and neighbourhood, and ministers to them with Christian hospitality. What is the consequence in this instance? Precisely the reverse of the consequence in the former instance. The man whose eye is bountiful and whose hand is liberal is to be blessed. The word "blessed" can never be fully explained in language; it must be explained in the heart and by the heart; and when the heart has whispered to itself all the gospel it can conceive as expressed by this word "blessed," there will still come before the heart visions of further beneficence and grace and honour, yea heaven upon heaven, for it would seem as if God could never give back enough to him who regards the poor as his children and looks upon the helpless as furnishing the field and sphere of beneficent operation. How wise is the Bible in all these practical philosophies! Here is a book that protects the poor, that guards men against borrowing and all the servility following upon excessive obligation; here is a book that declares the issue and consequence of the sowing of iniquity; and here is a book which proclaims the blessedness of beneficence and self-sacrifice. It is upon these grand bases that the claim of the book to be considered divine is founded. They are not metaphysical or philosophical bases in any sense that can only be comprehended by intellectual penetration and culture: they are philosophical in a practical sense, in that they can be tested by the simplest man in the simplest duties of life. Every Christian can be a commentator upon passages like this; it is not necessary to know the original language or to parse the mere words with grammatical accuracy: every loving heart can stand up and prove the blessedness of the bountiful soul, the sacredness and the happiness of beneficent activity.

Chapter xxii. 11-29.

THE PURE IN HEART, ETC.

“He that loveth pureness of heart, for the grace of [*or*, and hath grace in] his lips the king shall be his friend” [*Lit.*, “He that loveth pureness of heart, his lips are gracious, the king is his friend”] (ver. 11).

THIS would seem to be the lower level of the holy word spoken upon the mount—“Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.” This proverb sets forth the image of a man whose pure heart finds an equivalent or correspondence in the grace or favour of his lips. We may take it in this way: when the heart is pure the speech will be clean; when the spirit is right with God, language will be lifted above all equivocation or double-meaning—will be simple, direct, true, sincere; when the soul is holy the language will rise into music. Good men are known by their speech; they are not rough in words, or crude in tone, or boisterous in claim; they do not lift up their voice, nor cry, nor strive with the clamour of conscious weakness; they speak quietly, graciously, gently, hopefully; so much so indeed at times that their very gentleness may be mistaken by the superficial for weakness, whereas it is the very perfection and refinement of strength. Only weak men are boisterous; only men who are uncertain of their intellectual or moral position seek to make up by noise what is wanting in truth and equity. It would seem as if the pure heart were destined to bring kings into subjection. The king is to be the friend of the man who loves pureness and speaks music. Here is a hint of the ultimate triumph of moral power. No longer is the king to be amazed and fascinated by mere thunder and lightning, by iron and chariots and horses; his ear is to be entranced by heart-music; he is to say, This is the voice of heaven; he is to admit that the man who can so speak must have been schooled and cultured in the very sanctuary of heaven.

"The slothful man saith, There is a lion without, I shall be slain in the streets" (ver. 13).

A singular illustration this, of how the decay of one faculty may be the beginning of the activity of another. Industry has gone down, but imagination has risen. The slothful man seeks to make up by excuse what is wanting in energy. How ridden by the nightmare is the slothful man's imagination! He sees foes in the air; he hears voices which none other can detect; he is wishful to impress upon his friends the fact that he himself is most willing to go out, yea, even eager to work, and prepared to undergo any amount of sacrifice, but he sees a lion, he is assured of a supreme difficulty, he is prepared to testify that his life is not worth a day's purchase should he attempt to work under such and such circumstances. He cannot fell a tree, but he can see a lion; he dare not encounter the cold, for he is sure that he would be slain by a foe. The man that is thus a lion-maker in his own imagination will soon bring himself under the subjection of his own diseased fancy; presently the lion will be real to him, although it will be imaginary to all who stand by and look on. Beyond a certain point fancy ceases, and fact begins, in the case of the diseased mind: literally there is no lion, but imaginatively and sympathetically the whole road is crowded with beasts of prey. To the man who is so diseased it is no relief to tell him that other people cannot see the lions; he sees them himself, he watches their open mouths, he is terrified by their gleaming eyes, he flees away from them as from pursuing death. Men should be careful how they permit any morbid influence to operate upon their fancy; health should be the first law of nature; every man should feel himself bound to attend to the laws of bodily health; for oftentimes through their observance alone can healthfulness of mind be sustained. So intimate is the relation between mind and body, that when the one is neglected the other falls into desuetude; and when the one is abused even in the sense of temporary enjoyment, the other goes down in quality, in force, in executive ability. "Know ye not that ye are the temples of the Holy Ghost?" Is not the body a consecrated sanctuary? You cannot laugh men out of their superstitions after a certain point. Christian trainers should take the mind early in hand, and see that it be disabused of all superstition; and not only so—for

negative work is not enough—the mind should be inspired by sacred impulse and filled with pure and reverent thought. When the mind is so guarded and so sustained it will be impossible for the fancy to create lions.

“He that oppresseth the poor to increase his riches, and he that giveth to the rich, shall surely come to want” (ver. 16).

Read the passage : he that oppresseth the poor is really preparing for his own oppression ; for he is giving to the rich, and in due time the rich will rule over him with a rod of iron. Here is the same great law whose operation we have watched with interest and thankfulness. For a time the great man seems to do what he pleases, to order the poor as if they were his dogs, forgetting that all the while he himself is only enabling some other man to rule over him with a like severity. All bribery is to be brought low, all oppression is to lick the dust, the great purpose of the kingdom of heaven is to bring in the Son of man, who shall rule in righteousness, in simplicity, and tenderness ; all trickery of subordination, all tyranny shall be brought to destruction as in an instant, and man shall respect man because he first honours and loves God. No rich man can love the poor man, no poor man can love the rich man, as simply between themselves : the second commandment follows the first, and is to be approached through the first, and is accessible only through the first, and the first commandment is—Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and soul and mind and strength ; then afterwards it shall be easy, yea a supreme delight, to love one’s neighbour as one’s self.

From the seventeenth verse we are enjoined to hear the words of the wise. The word “wise” being in the plural number, it has been supposed that what follows is a collection of proverbs or sacred sayings, rather than the exhortation of the mind of Solomon alone. There is a concensus of wisdom. In all ages and in all lands wisdom, though speaking in different words, has invariably spoken in the same sense. Truth is one. No matter in what language it may be spoken, or by what local colouring it may be affected, the great consequence, the profound philosophy, is the same : truth and love, pureness and compassion, divine communion and self-sacrifice, rightness with God and rightness

with men,—these things God hath put together, and no man shall put them asunder without feeling that he has incurred a just and tremendous penalty. There is nothing more corroborative of truth than the fact that come whence it may, from what land or in what language soever, it all ends in the same grand injunction—do right, and be happy; be pure, and be at rest; aspire towards heaven, and thus adjust all earthly relations: in philosophy, in eloquence, in prophetic vision, in poetic numbers, this holy wisdom has been taught in all the ages and in all the lands blessed by the higher civilisation.

From the twenty-second verse we have words that come along the way of the market-place, that address men in their counting-houses and in their mercantile relations. Here is the grand philosophy of socialism: how the words roll on in the noblest music:—

“Rob not the poor, because he is poor: neither oppress the afflicted in the gate: for the Lord will plead their cause, and spoil the soul of those that spoiled them” (vers. 22, 23).

“Be not thou one of them that strike hands, or of them that are sureties for debts. If thou hast nothing to pay, why should he take away thy bed from under thee? Remove not the ancient landmark, which thy fathers have set. Seest thou a man diligent in his business? he shall stand before kings; he shall not stand before mean men” (vers. 26-29).

Thus again (for the point should never be omitted) we have the best proof of the inspiration of the Bible in its human injunctions, in its comprehensible economies of life. We have seen that if the mantle was taken in pledge it had to be restored before sundown for the poor man to sleep in; but it would appear from injunctions such as these that the law had been evaded, and the poor had been exposed to nakedness and cold because of their poverty. What law of God is there that has not been evaded or perverted? Have we not a genius of disobedience? How wonderfully inventive is the mind in blunting the point of the law or in escaping the edge of the sword when some selfish purpose is to be gained! Even in the days of Solomon, and long before, the stones marking the boundaries of the fields were thrown down in order that men might increase their estates. Is not this the daily battle of life? What is business in many an instance but a throwing down of ancient landmarks and breaking

up of honourable boundaries, a confusion of division lines, so that the strong may oppress the weak? Whatever is possible to honest industry we should aim to realise. Industry has a right to the rewards of its own labour. The industrious man is more than he appears to be; he is not only a labourer in the dust, he is not a mere toiler in the mud; he is a servant of God, he is a minister of heaven, he is an exponent of an abiding and a beneficent law: such a man shall have honour even amongst his fellow-men; the industrious man shall attend upon kings as their minister, and kings shall be glad to be served by a man who has proved his honourableness, not in some grand temporary heroic effort, but in the simple toil and daily discipline of life.

NOTE.

'Section xxii. 17-xxiv. contains a collection of proverbs marked by certain peculiarities. These are: 1. The structure of the verses, which is not so regular as in the preceding section, x. 1-xxii. 16. We find verses of eight, seven, or six words mixed with others of eleven (xxii. 29; xxiii. 31, 35), fourteen (xxiii. 29), and eighteen words (xxiv. 12). The equality of the verse members is very much disturbed, and there is frequently no trace of parallelism. 2. A sentence is seldom completed in one verse, but most frequently in two; three verses are often closely connected (xxiii. 1-3, 6-8, 19-21), and sometimes as many as five (xxiv. 30-34). 3. The form of address, "my son," which is so frequent in the first nine chapters, occurs also here in xxiii. 19, 26; xxiv. 13; and the appeal to the hearer is often made in the second person. Ewald regards this section as a kind of appendix to the earliest collection of the proverbs of Solomon, added not long after the introduction in the first nine chapters, though not by the same author. He thinks it probable that the compiler of this section added also the collection of proverbs which was made by the learned men of the court of Hezekiah, to which he wrote the superscription in xxv. 1. This theory of course only affects the date of the section in its present form. When the proverbs were written there is nothing to determine. Bertheau maintains that they in great part proceeded from one poet, in consequence of a peculiar construction which he employs to give emphasis to his presentation of a subject or object by repeating the pronoun (xxii. 19; xxiii. 14, 15, 19, 20, 28; xxiv. 6, 27, 32). The compiler himself appears to have added xxii. 17-21 as a kind of introduction. Another addition (xxiv. 23-34) is introduced with 'these also belong to the wise,' and contains apparently some of 'the words of the wise' to which reference is made in i. 6. Jahn regards it as a collection of proverbs not by Solomon. Hensler says it is an appendix to a collection of doctrines which is entirely lost and unknown; and with regard to the previous part of the section xxii. 17-xxiv. 22, he leaves it uncertain whether or not the author was a teacher to whom the son of a distinguished man was sent for instruction."—SMITH'S *Dictionary of the Bible*.

Chapter xxiii.

SELF-RESTRAINT, ETC.

THIS chapter is full of mechanical rules and exhortations. When a man is invited to eat with a ruler, he is to consider diligently what is before him (ver. 1).* Properly, who is before him ; that is to say, the guest is to observe the mighty man lest by some inadvertency he should offend his majesty and thus turn his friendship into enmity.

A very strong figure is used for the purpose of representing self-repression.

“Put a knife to thy throat, if thou be a man given to appetite” (ver. 2).

Put the very strongest restraints upon thyself: better dine alone before thou dinest with the king, because he will forgive self-control sooner than he will forgive self-indulgence: self-indulgence is not all enjoyment; it is only so in a very narrow or personal sense; there are observers who are forming their judgment of the glutton and the wine-bibber, and who will make that judgment felt in many practical ways.

“Be not desirous of his [the ruler’s] dainties: for they are deceitful meat” (ver. 3).

That is to say, they are not offered out of friendship and regard for thee, there is a purpose behind them; an unguarded word spoken amid the festivities of the night may be turned into high treason, or into a reason of suspicion, or into a ground of persecution. The ruler may be giving wine for the purpose of eliciting a secret; the ruler is an investor; he is not showing his guest hospitality, he is laying traps for the feet of his visitor in order that he may ensnare him and bring him within his power. Although it is not wise to cultivate a spirit of suspicion, yet it is wise always to be on our guard when we are surrounded by those who make their lavish hospitality a means of emptying our hearts of their secrets and purposes and vows.

* For notes on this and following verses, see *post*, p. 310.

“Cease from thine own wisdom” (ver. 4).

That is, from thine own cleverness in piling up wealth. There is something very seductive in the accumulation of property. When did ever a man say, I will stop at this boundary? Did he not always see a boundary beyond? Do we not desire the field at the corner, the house on the hill, the meadow in the valley, the plantation that skirts the family estate? Do we not covet the vineyard of our neighbour? To be contented is to be wise; to say, This is enough, is to pray: to stand back and say, Our hands are sufficiently full, is to assume a religious attitude.

“As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he” (ver. 7).

The reference is to a man who has an evil eye, and who is fixing that evil eye upon his guests. Judging by appearances, the guest considers his host to be amiable, generous, friendly; but the wise man in the text says, Be careful: do not desire the dainty meats of this man, for his eye is evil; as he thinketh in his heart, so is he; thou canst not see his heart: he begrudges thee every mouthful of food: he hopes that the next draught of wine will overpower thee, and taking away thy self-control will open the way for the disclosure of thy thought and purpose: he is not a host, he is an enemy; he is not giving thee bread for thine hunger, he is laying a trap for thine overthrow: beware; take counsel with thyself and with wisdom, for this man's heart is not with thee: by-and-by the morsel which thou hast eaten thou shalt vomit up: thou shalt be disgusted with thyself for having partaken of an evil hospitality which was only offered to thee as a bribe and a temptation, and thou shalt rue thy sweet words; all civil observances, all kindly acknowledgments, all expressions of thanks, shall be found to have been misspent and worthless. When we thank a man for that which is not freely offered to us, and when we come to discover that it was not freely offered, we shall withdraw every amiable expression, every cordial recognition, and shall reproach ourselves for want of sagacity in not penetrating the man's mean design.

“Speak not in the ears of a fool: for he will despise the wisdom of thy words” (ver. 9).

Do not waste time in trying to make a fool a wise man; you

may waste your time in explanations, you may try to bring him to a sense of right and wrong, you may imagine that by patience you can soften his hardness, or modify his stupidity, or penetrate his mental opaqueness; nothing of the kind: believe in the gathered wisdom of the ages which expresses itself in the free and apparently cruel judgment—if thou bray a fool in a mortar he will be a fool still.

From the tenth verse we have cautions which cannot be too earnestly repeated. The Bible is never afraid to repeat its own wisdom. We need repetition, for our memories are treacherous; repetition may not be a mere rehearsal of words, it may be an accumulation of strength, an increased fervour of expression, a growing passion; when words are mechanically or literally repeated the repetition becomes a weariness to the flesh, but when with repeated words we are assured of accumulated earnestness and passion we should take heed to the new pathos and not be wearied by the old words.

“Remove not the old landmark; and enter not into the fields of the fatherless: for their redeemer is mighty” (vers. 10, 11).

They may not have a near kinsman, a goel, one who in the name of the family will redress their wrongs; but they have a Father in heaven, a mighty deliverer, who in due time will avenge them of their adversaries.

“Withhold not correction from the child: for if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die. Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell” (vers. 13, 14).

There is a discipline which expresses the utmost kindness. Probably kindness to children is as little understood as any practical duty can be. He is not kind to his child who allows that child to have its own way, to do as it pleases, under the impression that correction would amount to the breaking of the spirit or the wrecking of the will of the child. In every life there must come a point of obedience, surrender, of acknowledgment of the superior: the sooner that conviction is wrought into the mind the better, and when it can be brought to effect by the parent it is better than to have it forced upon the reluctant soul by an outward and overwhelming tyranny. To be taught obedience is to be taught the beginning of the way of life. There need not

be any harshness, there must not be any cruelty; discipline carried to such lengths is discipline no longer, but sheer oppression; but to teach that there are higher powers than our own, that there are laws we must not transgress, that the transgression of such laws brings penalty—these philosophies cannot be too early instilled into the opening mind; they will anticipate and prevent a thousand sufferings, they will save strength, they will direct all healthy energies to the right point, and thus save wanton waste of time and power.

So this Book of Proverbs becomes a Book of daily guidance and daily discipline. The man who will train himself by these lines shall in the end be a strong man: he shall be free from envy, because the fear of the Lord will abound in his heart all the day long; he will avoid the company of wine-bibbers, and shun the society of riotous eaters of flesh; he will see that the drunkard and the glutton must come to poverty, and that the end of drowsiness is to be clothed in rags; he will buy the truth, and sell it not; he will set a high value upon wisdom, self-discipline, and understanding; he will distinguish the precious from the vile; gold and silver and precious stones shall not be confused with wood and hay and stubble. The good man does not bring pleasure only to himself, but gives joy to those who are round about him.

“The father of the righteous shall greatly rejoice: and he that begetteth a wise child shall have joy of him. Thy father and thy mother shall be glad, and she that bare thee shall rejoice” (vers. 24, 25).

But how is all this happy issue to be brought about? How is life to be thus consolidated, sanctified, and crowned with immortal honour? The answer is given in the 26th verse—“My son, give me thine heart, and let thine eyes observe my ways.” The meaning is, until the heart is right, the life must be wrong. We cannot change our habits until we have changed our motives. The true life is not a mechanical arrangement, an affair of schedules and codes and stipulations: it is first a surrender to God, secondly an acceptance of the divine will, thirdly a steady purpose by the power of the Holy Ghost to walk in the ways of wisdom. The man whose heart is not corrected is like a man who closes his eyes and tries to make for himself a straight path in the thoroughfare. He cannot do it. When he opens his eyes he

will find how zigzag has been his way, and how uncertain have been his steps. We must have the eyes opened, or we shall never see the right road. The eyes are not in the head, but in the heart; many a man is intellectually able to see far, but morally he is blind. The eyes of our hearts must be opened, then we shall see moral distinctions, estimate moral distances, correctly adjust moral proportions; we shall know where to be strong, where to be hesitant, where to be meek, where to be gentle: but this instruction is only to be had in the school of the sanctuary, yea, within the holy circle of which the Cross of Christ is the living centre.

NOTES.

"When thou sittest to eat with a ruler, consider diligently what is before thee" (ver. 1). "*What is before thee*"—sc. "beware lest his dainties tempt thee to excess. It is better, however, to take the pronoun in the masculine, 'consider diligently who is before thee,' the character and temper of the ruler who invites thee."

"And put a knife to thy throat, if thou be a man given to appetite" (ver. 2).—"If we keep the imperative, the sense is 'restrain thy appetite, eat as if the knife were at thy throat.' Others, however, render it 'thou wilt put a knife to thy throat,' etc.; 'indulgence at such a time may endanger thy very life.'"

"Be not desirous of his dainties: for they are deceitful meat" (ver. 3). "*Dainties*"—"the word is the same in meaning and nearly the same in form as the 'savoury meat,' sc. venison, of Gen. xxvii. 4." "*Deceitful meat*"—sc. "offered not from genuine hospitality, but with some by-ends."

"Labour not to be rich: cease from thine own wisdom" (ver. 4). "*Cease from thine own wisdom*"—"the sense is determined by the context. 'Cease even from thy prudence, from the use of what is in itself most excellent, if it only serves to seek after wealth, and so ministers to evil.' 'If thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee.' There is no special stress on the contrast between 'thine own wisdom' and that given from above, though it is of course implied that in ceasing from his own prudence the man is on the way to attain a higher wisdom."

"Eat thou not the bread of him that hath an evil eye, neither desire thou his dainty meats" (ver. 6).—"Not an identical danger with that of ver. 1, but altogether different. There is a hazard in the hospitality of princes. There is also a hazard in that of the purse-proud rich, avaricious or grudging, even in his banquets." "*Evil eye*"—"not with the later associations of a mysterious power for mischief, but simply, as in Deut. xv. 9; Matt. xx. 15, in the sense of 'hard, grudging, envious.'"

"For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he: Eat and drink, saith he to thee; but his heart is not with thee" (ver. 7). "*As he thinketh*"—"the Hebrew verb is found here only, and has received many interpretations: (1) 'as he is all along in his heart, so is he (sc. at last) in act;' (2) 'as he reckons in his heart, so is he;' sc. he counts the cost of every morsel thou eatest, and hates thee in proportion. Of these (1) seems to be best, as supported by Arabic usage."—*The Speaker's Commentary.*

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, thou dost claim our whole heart, and sometimes we long to give it all to thee, without a break or flaw, and then we take it back again to our own unsafe and unsteady hand. We know sometimes that we are made in thine image and likeness, for our soul moves out over liberties and dominions wider than all the spaces and periods of time, and then we know again that we are truly fashioned out of the dust, for our whole nature is a heavy weight that seeks the very centre of the earth that it may dwell there. We are fearfully and wonderfully made; thou hast so made us as to be our own mystery; we need not go out of ourselves to find the supreme difficulty—behold, science cannot understand us or interpret us fully, and it is not in man to know himself as he really is, and knowledge is found to be but a point of light within an infinite circumference of darkness. What then shall we do? We will lift up our eyes unto the hills whence cometh our help; we will cry mightily for the Living One, the source and spring of all being and energy and hope; our souls will go a-voyaging beyond the horizon to find that which alone can give them satisfaction and rest. We bless thee that we have found peace in believing. We who had no quietude are now settled in a gracious rest, in him who is the centre and the life of the whole universe. We live and move and have our being in God; no longer are we broken parts of a great whole, we belong to that great whole itself, and now that we have found our place within thy purpose and will, our souls are comforted with a sacred calm. We look up unto thee for daily bread. We cannot nourish ourselves; we eat up, but we cannot produce! Thou alone canst give us the continual nutrition on which the living soul subsists. Mystery of mysteries is this, yet it is the very crown and glory of love, that the branch cannot bring forth fruit of itself. Behold it is the branch that is laden with fruit, there is none upon the stem, yet is the branch itself dead and useless if it go not down into the root, and drink of the unseen but living juice. So teach us we are not complete in ourselves, that of ourselves we are nothing and can do nothing, that our safety and our productiveness are to be found only in proportion as we are in the living Vine. Saviour of the world, may we never be cut out of thee, may our life go right back into the very throbbing of thine heart, and find its inspiration, its impulse, and its immortality there. Comforted by all thy words, lifted up by thine infinite promises, worthy of thine infinite grace, may we be strengthened, established, settled, and made immovable, and so may we always abound in the work of the Lord. Each heart has its own hymn, for each heart has its own mercy. Thou hast not forgotten one of us. The old man thinks that all thy mercies have been heaped upon him, for he says goodness and

mercy have followed him*all the days of his life ; and the young man feels that all thy morning light has been poured in baptism upon his opening life ; and the busy man knows thy signature upon his basket and his store, and feels the incoming of thy tender blessing into all his counsels and enterprises, commercial ; and the mother at home that the window is full of the presence of thy light, and her cradle is the centre around which thou dost constantly move, and her life is precious to thee beyond all others. This day all thy children think they have thee all, yet so infinite art thou that the whole heaven is too small for thee ; and as for the earth, it is as a drop of water glittering under the brilliance of thy blessing. Let each of us feel how near thou art, let every soul feel its own littleness in itself and its all but infinite capacity in thee. And according to the pressure of our sin and the fierce accusation and reproach of our conscience, do thou show us the great Cross, stretched upon it the dying Lamb, the priestly Victim, the Victim-Priest, who is our propitiation and atonement, and our one answer to all the thunder of reproach which deafens, arising from the voice of our troubled conscience. Wash us in the sacred stream. We know not the meaning of the words, the precious blood of Christ, but we feel more than they can express in mere terms of human speech : we feel their unction, we answer their energy, we are moved by their infinite pathos. Apply all their meaning, as thou thyself dost comprehend it, to our plaguing sin, to our restless heart, to our accusing conscience. With some of us the days are becoming fewer. We can count them now as men count the few things that are within the grasp of their fingers. Behold thy servants who are now looking at their latter end, and seeing how near it is, and how small, and how it dwindles as they look. Upon them let the eventide light of thy peace gently fall, and make them more glad than they were when the opening fire of the day summoned them to the activities of life. Regard those who are in special circumstances of wonderment, perplexity, distress ; answer any personal appeals that may now be arising, unexpressed and unutterable, to the heavens, dumb because no words are good enough to express the meaning of sorrow so sacred, or desire so pure. Let thy blessing be granted to such as lift their hearts to thee in the name of Jesus Christ. If thou hast scattered any man's prosperity, if thou hast made a heap of his riches and driven them away by fierce wind, if thou hast bereaved any family, if thou hast put out the household fire in any instance and darkened the pleasantest room in the house, if thou hast laid any new burden upon shoulders long carrying heavy weights, and thou art for the first time laying pressure upon young lives that hitherto have escaped the more grievous responsibilities of existence—according to these diversified conditions which we now represent, let thy blessing be accorded to us, and there shall be in our hearts the singing as it were of angels, and the resounding of a heavenly psalm. Let thy blessing be multiplied upon us, let thy grace be increased in our hearts, clothe us with the humility that is unfeigned, grant unto us the modesty that is unconscious of itself, clothe us with the strength of thine own almightiness when we endeavour to do that which is good in our moments of infirmity and weakness. When we would put forth the hand to the forbidden tree, the Lord touch our hand that it fall back in powerlessness by our side. The Lord make our old ones young, our young ones happy, our women glad

with sweetest joy, our busy men thoughtful and considerate about the measure of things, lest they mistake distance for insignificance. The Lord hear us in all our psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, in the outpouring of our delight and gratitude, in our supplication for pardon, forgiveness, and sweet communion. The Lord enable us to live the remainder of our days with a steady faith, a longsuffering patience and noble trust, showing a right estimate of the things that are round about us, keeping them under our feet and not above our head, and so interpreting and so using passing time as to make sure of a blissful eternity. Holy Saviour, smile on us; gentle Jesus, touch us with thy healing hands; dying, rising Mediator, take up our poor sentences into thine all-prevailing prayer, and may our answer come, not according to the measure of our desire, but according to the breadth of Thine own intercession. Amen.

Chapter xxiv. 1-9.

MISCHIEVOUS LIPS, ETC.

“Be not thou envious against evil men, neither desire to be with them. For their heart studieth destruction, and their lips talk of mischief” (vers. 1, 2).

“**E**VIL men” is a very emphatic and inclusive expression. Men may sometimes be said to be bad in parts, and yet to have excellent qualities; but in the case of this verse the men are evil through and through; the whole head and the whole heart, the entire inner nature, will, conscience, fancy, may be said to be steeped in iniquity, saturated with all the qualities that constitute the very devil himself. They may indeed be prosperous outwardly, and may attract great attention by their ostentatious living, and by their loud promises and vain speeches; but they are as insubstantial as the wind, as worthless as an empty cloud. Young souls may be tempted and fascinated by them, because there is so much glittering surface, and there is such an uproar of pretension; but experience will show that the whole castle is founded on the sand, and that everything that is good fights against it, and will certainly overthrow it. Evil men never construct any building; their aim is destruction, their talk is of mischief; wherever they can tear down or despoil or blight, they find an appropriate sphere for the exercise of their mischievous talents. After spending an hour with a wicked man, what is the impression left upon the mind but that a great cloud has covered the sky, a great blight has darkened the earth, reputations that were held dear have been for the moment thrown down, and altars that were regarded as sacred have been

strewn with ruin? There is no health in evil-mindedness; no bloom of vigour is upon its cheek; no breath from the high heaven comes with it to refresh those who are round about; no word inspired with gospel music ever drops from the lips of evil. What wonder if we are taught to pray, "lead me not into temptation, but deliver me from evil"? There is no rest in the course pursued by iniquity; there are no green places in all the wilderness of evil. Jesus Christ came to redeem the world from this infinite night, this ruin of all light and trust and hope, this intolerable bondage and oppression; he came to seek and to save the lost, and to make the chief of sinners chief of saints.

"Through wisdom is an house builded; and by understanding it is established: and by knowledge shall the chambers be filled with all precious and pleasant riches. A wise man is strong; yea, a man of knowledge increaseth strength. For by wise counsel thou shalt make thy war: and in multitude of counsellors there is safety." (vers. 3-6).

Here evil is contrasted with wisdom: evil throws down, wisdom builds up; evil brings darkness, wisdom brings light. Understanding is represented as a factor continually engaged in the establishment of goodness, establishing, that is, founding upon a rock, consolidating, making strong at every point, so that wind and wave and great tumult of the elements should not prevail against its security. Wisdom is represented as a builder; one who builds with a plan, not merely putting stone upon stone for the sake of building a high tower without purpose or utility, but building a house, signifying arrangement, commodiousness, security, hospitality: a very home that should have in it the elements of a school, the beginning of a sanctuary, and a hint of heaven itself. Wisdom is represented as strength, and knowledge as power. What we account a modern proverb is, therefore, really an ancient saying. We have proved the philosophy of these words. The fool cannot build; when he rears a few courses of stonework he throws down what he has put up, and rejoices with the laughter of madness over the ruin which he has wrought. True building is not to be hurried. Sometimes the builder rests from his labours, that he may give the wall time to settle, lest by overpowering the foundation he brings the work to destruction. True life-building means that a plan and a specification has been provided, whereby the work as to its scope and

purpose is clearly indicated, and the materials with which the work is to be executed are named one by one, as to their quality and their proportions. It is not to be supposed that men go forth into the open field, and begin to build as on the spur of the moment. When an excavator puts his spade into the ground he begins to carry out something that is written in detail, and that has been thought out by the carefulness of experience and practical skill. We do not see all that is behind the building. It is supposed that a man begins to build suddenly; whereas if we could know the whole history of the case we should find quiet observation of the site, silent contemplation of possibilities; then we should see the pen or pencil taken out, and a sketch made, suggesting what can be done under the special circumstances of the case; we should see a ground-plan and an elevation and a section. All this time the building is confined to paper, but it is not therefore a mere theory or fancy or dream. Behind every life-building there is a great writing, yea, a writing that is done by the finger of God; every wise builder hears a voice in the ear of his soul saying, "See that thou build according to the pattern that I showed thee in the cloud." Every building will speak for itself. If the perpendicular has been broken, if the horizontal line is out of course, if doors and windows are out of proportion, even the fool can see how abortive has been the labours of the builder. Where everything expresses thoughtfulness, experience, and skill, the trained eye will approve the figure of the building, and all men will feel that no encroachment has been made upon the propriety of life. Every duly considered and well-built house comes into existence as if by right; it establishes its own claim to abide among the homes of men. So it is with a heart-house, a life-house, a house representing character and action and purpose; there is nothing violent about the building, and when it is set forth in all its proportions it needs no vindication, for its strength is a defence, and its beauty is an explanation.

"Wisdom is too high for a fool: he openeth not his mouth in the gate. He that deviseth to do evil shall be called a mischievous person. The thought of foolishness is sin: and the scorner is an abomination to men" (vers. 7-9).

Fix attention upon the distinction which is here made between wisdom and the devices of evil, between the fool and the wise

man, and, again, between the wise man and the mischievous person. These are not merely intellectual distinctions and contrasts; such distinctions and contrasts we must always look for in a world constituted as ours. What is pointed out in this connection is that there is no mere foolishness, in the sense of error, mistake, or mischance of judgment; on the contrary, the thought of foolishness is sin, that which we laugh at as a mistake, or condone as a momentary error, may really represent moral corruption and moral obliquity; therefore we are not to dismiss many things as merely foolish, we are to brand them as sinful and abominable. It is not uncommon to speak of men as guilty of indiscretion, but not of positive wrong; in making this distinction it may be charity that errs, not criticism that delivers its solemn judgment. On the other hand, we are not called upon to make sins, to force mere aberrations, negligences, omissions, or mistakes into the rank and quality of positive sin; the man himself will always know whether his foolishness indicates momentary mental imbecility, or whether it expresses some deep and abominable purpose of the heart.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we have tried to count it all joy when we have fallen into divers temptations, but we have failed in the attempt. It is hard to count it joy. The temptations are hot, swift, strong, coming without notice, urging themselves upon us without pity: how can we count it all joy when we are in the midst of the tremendous assault? And other temptations come: our house is thrown down, our children are carried away as by a great storm or by a subtle poison in the air, all our business prospects become one great cold cloud, the plans and purposes of our life are thrown into confusion; how, then, can we count it all joy amid the wreck and utter overthrow? Yet we will try to learn the lesson. This is thy purpose concerning us, that we should hold everything with a light hand, saying, The Lord gave, and the Lord may at any moment take away; we are but trustees and stewards: blessed shall we be if we can give a faithful account. Train us to this high-mindedness, this noble reverence, this rational and religious submission. This only can be done at the Cross of Jesus Christ thy Son; there is no other school in which we can learn such wisdom: elsewhere we may become indifferent, callous, hardened, fatalistic; but here only, at the Cross, clinging to the Cross, can we learn to say, Lord, this pain is severe, this loss is great, this burden is heavy; nevertheless, thy will be done; then shall we be thy sons indeed. So we do not ignore the burden, or the difficulty, or the pain, or the distress; we look at each and say, This is hard to bear; nevertheless, even this may be borne by the omnipotence of the grace of God. This is the teaching we have received in the school of Christ—the blessed teaching, so deep, so large, so true, and at the last so tender: help us to receive it gratefully, to realise it obediently; then shall men know that we have been with Jesus, and have learned of him. We are here but for a little while. We are going from the place where we say we are even at the moment when we declare we are present in it: behold, one foot is always lifted up in the air in sign of pilgrimage and progress; if we take off our sandals it is but to prepare ourselves for a longer walk to-morrow; if we lay down the staff, it is that we may presently resume it. We seek a country; here we have no abiding city. We behold the glory of things, and it fades whilst we look at it, and here there is nothing worth gathering for its own account; it is only worth gathering because of the use which may be made of it. May we be wise arithmeticians, men who can count and reckon correctly, and set down figures, and dare look at them, and say, Their value is thus much, and no more; then shall we know that the days of our years are threescore years and ten, and after that all is speculation, uncertainty, conjecture, doubt, fear, hope, mingled in one strange emotion. Then shall we

say, The days of the years of thy servants have been few and evil upon the earth; then shall we know that the grave is next door, and that there is but a step between us and death. Realising all this, we shall become wise, we shall set a right value upon things, and see life in all its right proportions, and conduct ourselves with sobermindedness, and with assurance that the reality is behind and beyond. That we may attain this sublimity of life, Holy Spirit, dwell with us. We are rude, and fleshly, to begin with: but what shall the end be? First that which is natural, afterwards that which is spiritual—the winged power, the invisible strength, the very almightiness of God, the perfected refinement, and assimilation with the spirit and thought of the Eternal. It doth not yet appear what we shall be. We shall go no more down into the earth; we are rising upward, climbing to the sun, hailing the light, and saying to it in our struggles, Stop, and help us, and at last take us up into thyself, thou angel of brightness, thou symbol of God. For all these religious aspirations we thank thee: they do the heart good, they lift up the whole life, they bring morning into the soul which has sat in long, cold, bitter night; we bless thee for these desires, these upward looks, these far penetrations into things beyond. We walk by faith, not by sight. At midnight we sing songs in the prison, and make the foundations of the dungeon shake. Behold, thou dost turn our affliction into sacrament, our pain becomes a disguised blessing, and at the last we say, It was good for us that we were afflicted, for the black angel brought us home again, and made us pray even when we had thought to give up the altar. We give one another to thy tender care. Weary life, mysterious life: now a laugh loud and merry, now a groan full of pain and despair; now young, but young only for a day, and to-morrow quite old and grey, and almost taken for the last stage of decrepitude—a walk by the graveside, and feast in the presence of death. Yet thou didst make this life: it is thy miracle; it is not beyond thy power, it lies within the palm of thy hand. Guide us, then; help us; love us always; be patient with us: we are dull scholars; at the best we have had but little time for schooling, and the little time we have had we have not always used well: be patient still, merciful evermore, pitiful even unto tears. The Lord send his blessing upon us according to our need, make us glad in the Son of God who died for us and rose again, and give us the joy of pardon, the blessing of peace, the prospect of heaven. Amen.

Chapter xxiv. 10.

“If thou faint in the day of adversity, thy strength is small.”

STRENGTH OF CHARACTER.

THE special object of all the training and discipline through which we pass in life is the increase of strength. There are some things which we do, not so much for their own sake as for the sake of their strengthening effect upon the body, mind, or the character. No man goes through gymnastic exercises, for

example, merely for their own sake. I do not suppose that any man plays with the dumb-bells simply because he finds in such play amusement enough to satisfy his idea of pleasure. Why, then, does a man pass through gymnastic engagements and exercises? It is to harden himself, to train his body, his muscles, that he may become agile, active, capable of walking, running, enduring, as the case may be. The object is not in the thing itself; it lies beyond the exercises. He says, "For every spin I have at these things I feel more muscular, more active, and better able to endure the fatigues of the day." So, also, there is much which a child learns at school, which he, in all probability, forgets; yet the very act of learning it is itself an advantage. A child may not be able seven years hence to tell you much about the technicality of the education through which he passed at school, yet there will be left in the child's mind and character a strength which nothing could have given but the trial and discipline through which he passed during his school-days. A father has sometimes said, "Why should this boy of mine learn Latin, when he is going into trade? he will have no occasion then for the Latin language. A little good sound grammatical English will answer all the purpose of his engagements in life; why should I put myself to the trouble of teaching him a dead language?" Not for the sake of the Latin; in all probability, by the time he has been three years away from school he will be utterly unable to quote one rule in Latin syntax. This is more than probable. Probably many of us, who have been tossed about a good deal in the world, would find it difficult to quote anything of the kind; yet the getting of it, the drill we went through in our Latin exercises, has left upon us a beneficial effect. We cannot explain it; we cannot tell the measure thereof; but there has been an influence at work in the mind, strengthening and quickening us, so that we are now—in utter forgetfulness, it may be, of all scholastic and technical Latin—able to look on subjects with a robuster intellect and keener eye than we otherwise could have done. The boy who is not very fond of doing much work at school says, "Why should I commit 'Paradise Lost' to memory, when I am only going to be a clerk in a warehouse? What can I do with 'Paradise Lost'?" I am invited to commit the whole of the books to memory, and to repeat them aloud. What possible

use can such an exercise as that serve in my case ?” I answer frankly : “ Probably, as a clerk in a warehouse, you will never meet persons who will judge of your abilities by the number of quotations you make from any book in ‘ Paradise Lost ’ ; probably you will be able to get on in the world and make a fortune without ever quoting a solitary argument that Milton ever set himself to discuss in verse. Yet it will be an advantage to you as a clerk in a warehouse to commit Milton’s ‘ Paradise Lost ’ to memory.” “ How so ? ” “ Because it will be a tax upon your attention ; it will compel you to read carefully ; it will cultivate, develop, strengthen the memory ; and though you may never have occasion to quote it, yet the intellectual exercise through which you have passed will give you strength which you may bring to bear upon what may be called the soberer and graver paths and pursuits of after life.” So in all these things we are undergoing preparation. The things themselves, strictly looked at, may be of very little use to us ; but they leave behind them influences which will tell in the whole scheme and tone of our after life.

So it is, then, in all the higher concerns of being ! The events that are passing around us are to be studied in their moral bearings. Are you suffering to-day ? If you rightly accept your suffering, it will prepare you to bear the still keener agonies that are coming to-morrow. The little worries and vexations of daily experience are to prepare us for the martyrdoms and the tragedies which lie beyond. There is no particular object to be served, may be, in the special affliction which you are now undergoing ; it looks to you like mere worry, the thing you might have been spared at all events. You say, “ I could lay down this right hand upon the block, and have it struck off by the axe of the executioner ; something of that kind I should like to do. But to be bitten by these mosquitoes, and to be worried and fretted and chafed by the ten thousand little ills of everyday experience, oh ! this is the thing I cannot submit to ”—not knowing that all these so-called little taxations, these visitations of anxiety and care, which are comparatively insignificant, are to be accepted as a preparation for higher engagements, for more energetic service, for more patient endurance. These things are educational. I know that we may go through them without learning anything from them ;

or we may so accept them that when the next great trial comes we shall be by so much the better prepared to bear it, and the better qualified to find honey in unexpected places, and joy in storm and darkness and trouble.

With what familiarity the writer of the text speaks of "the day of adversity"! It is not introduced with explanatory words; he does not speak of it as if it were a day for a particular latitude; he does not attach a marginal note, saying, "Probably this will not be known beyond a certain line of longitude, and therefore I wish to explain that by the day of adversity I mean so and so." No; he speaks of the day of adversity as if it needed no introduction, no hint,—as if it were part of the universal language. He proceeds upon the assumption that he has only to name the day to be instantly understood by every living man under the sun. And so it is. Yet we see so many youthful, bright, glowing faces around us! So it is: every life has its day of adversity. Some lives are one long day of trial. There seems in some lives to be a great preponderance of depression, difficulty, disappointment, sorrow, pain; so that a streak of blue sky brings laughter to the face and gladness to the eye,—it comes as an astonishment, as a surprise upon the beholder. The strongest of us, with the merriest and loudest laugh, has his bitter hours, his experience of keen pain and agony; and though he may not show all, yet he could, were he to take us into his confidence, tell us that the element of tragedy mingles strangely with that apparently mirthful and joyous life of his. It is, then, in the day of adversity that a man's character is tested. We do not **know** what we are until we have fallen into divers temptations. **You** point out to me a particular building, and say, "Does not that look strong, beautiful? is it not well-proportioned architecturally? is it not most beautifully decorated?" I say, "So it is, but I cannot pronounce any further opinion upon it till I see how it bears up when the whirlwind gets hold of it." The house looks well,—yes; but I shall defer my judgment until the wind blows and the rain falls and the floods come, and they all conspire and beat upon that house,—then I shall know what it is. The paint is fresh and well laid, but what if the building rot at the foundations? It is the day of adversity that tests us; it is affliction that assails

us and discovers whether we are gold or not, whether we be not red-lead with a little silver and a good deal of gilding. The day of adversity is the acid that tests us, the aquafortis that bites down through the surface. Trial is the force that gets hold of us and reveals us to ourselves. It says nothing to us, but just lays us before our own vision that we may form our own conclusions. Many a man promises well when there is no fear or difficulty at hand, who cuts up but badly in the time of distress and pain. Many a man speaks you fairly, but what will he do when the clouds gather and the storms break upon your fortunes? Young man, you don't know yourself, you don't know what life is until you have been ploughed up in your heart, till your affections have been torn, till your hopes have been turned into disappointment, until the wine of your supposed joy has turned to bitterness in your mouth. You will not be wise in these things till you have encountered the day of adversity.

"In the reproof of chance

Lies the true proof of men : the sea being smooth,
 How many shallow bauble boats dare sail
 Upon her patient breast, making their way
 With those of nobler bulk !
 But let the ruffian Boreas once enrage
 The gentle Thetis, and, anon, behold
 The strong-ribbed bark through liquid mountains cut,
 Bounding between the two moist elements,
 Like Perseus' horse : where's then the saucy boat,
 Whose weak untimbered sides but even now
 Co-rivall'd greatness ? either to harbour fled,
 Or made a toast for Neptune."

Adversity makes or mars a man. A man is either the better or the worse for the trial through which he has passed. Afflictions, trials, temptations, either make a man worse or they make him better ; they throw him down deeper, nearer the pit, or they lift him up nearer God ; they either harden his heart, or they make the heart mellow, tender, sensitive, sympathetic. But rest assured of this, that no man knows himself until he has been caught in the storm, until he has been tried in the fire, until he has passed through the discipline of manifold temptations. Let us be gentle with one another whilst we are undergoing the process. It is one thing to stand off from the furnace and see a brother in it, and

to be ourselves undergoing the trial of flame. Do not let us be impatient with our brother who is being tried. Give him time, that he may get his breath again; do not mock his tears. He says, "I know it looks unmanly to be seen in this way." He who can stoop gracefully to such unmanliness will rise to be a king! This is the result of my pastoral observation. I have watched the ways of men; up many a rickety staircase have I climbed to see the poor in their sorrow and pain and dying; beside the bed of many a rich man have I stood in his last spasms and convulsions. I know what life is a little, therefore. And this—taking the whole breadth of a lifetime, not looking at this particular case or at that, but taking the great average of human experience—this is my testimony: That Christianity does sustain and comfort and refine men beyond all other influences. It enables them to see that labour itself is rest, and pain is sweet, when accepted in the name and for the sake of Jesus Christ. It gives elevation to suffering, a new meaning to dark providences and painful visitations; and where it does not lift a man up to the point of praise and triumph it enables him to be quiet as a weaned child, to be submissive, to fall into his Father's hands, offering all prayers in one, all desires in one grand liturgy,—“Thy will be done”! I have seen a man suffer until his suffering has actually tormented me. It has been a pain to myself. I have called upon him, from time to time, during a period of five years; I have heard his moanings and his complaints; and I have heard him mingle all the utterances of his sufferings with praises and with prayers and with hopes which I dare not re-echo. I have stood in silence as I have heard him—I had not been in the same agony, I had not caught that highest lesson of human experience—I wondered at his heroism, and felt myself but a craven and a coward! Christianity does sustain and does comfort men in the time of affliction.

An infidel lecturer was explaining his view, his creed, and his method of looking at things; and in concluding his discourse he told his audience that he was quite willing to answer any question that should be put, or any contrary statement that should be made. Whereupon a poor woman, bent and tottering upon a staff, came to the platform, and there was a rustle in the audience

as though this poor creature was demented and had utterly forgotten herself. But with a true, strong, yet feminine voice she said: "Mr. Chairman, I have heard the lecture. Twenty years ago I was left a widow with eight children; I had not a crust in the house, I had nothing in the world that was worth calling my own; I may say that I was in a friendless condition. I was then converted by the preaching of the gospel; I was enabled to give my heart to God, through Jesus Christ, his Son; the promises of the Scriptures have been very sweet and precious to me; I have been able to give all my children a bit of schooling; I have never known them to want; we have had but little, but that little has been blessed to us. Now, Mr. Lecturer, what have your principles done for you?" A right challenge! "That," said he, "is not the question." "But," she said, tapping her staff on the platform, "it is the question. What have your principles done for you?" The woman had had a day of adversity; she had tried Christianity in the time of darkness, poverty, pain, and desolation, and Christianity had sustained and comforted her; and now that she heard an enemy attempting to tear it in pieces, she had a right to ask what his principles had done for him. Yes, we must wait till that day comes,—the day of adversity, of cloud, of storm, and the shaking of things. Then we shall know what men's principles have done for them. It is one thing to chatter a blasphemous argument; and another to live a true, profound, beautiful and useful life!

Two men sustaining a great loss in business, the one a Christian and the other an atheist, the Christian man ought to bear his loss very differently from the way in which the atheist bears his. The atheist may have a louder Ha, ha! he may have a more defiant tone; he may stand in some rougher attitude; but the Christian will be more quiet and devout. He will have his pain; he will feel what it is to be crushed in heart; and yet under it all he will know that the everlasting arms are there, and that he is called upon, in the time of loss and desolateness, to glorify the Master whose name he bears.

Now it is here that we as Christian men can show what Christianity has done for us. But if we be as peevish, as restless, as

excitable, as men who have no religious faith, what is our faith worth? It we be loud in our reproaches and complaints, in our weakness and moanings, and if we be hardly articulate in our praises and supplications, and utterances of loyalty, what is our faith worth? It is not easy to leave your house and go out into the cold streets, to give up everything; it is not easy, I say; I do not expect a Christian believer to do all this as if it cost him nothing. There will be a wrench, a time of pain, a crisis almost intolerable; and yet, under the pressure of all these contrary and difficult events, there will be a spirit of sweet submission, of deep religious confidence, that where right has been done, if it has ended in failure, joy will assuredly come after a night-time of weeping. I would preach this to all who need it. Things have gone wrong with some of you, they have gone awry; though you have risen early, sat up late, and schemed and planned and racked your brain, so as to do that which was right towards both God and man, yet things have gone contrary with you, and the day of adversity has set in with all cloudiness and coldness upon your life. It is now you are to show the value of your faith, the value of your prayerfulness; it is now that you are to glorify God. This is the day of your martyrdom; men are watching you; and if out of the darkness of your present obscurity, and the pain of your present adversity, they hear a low, soft, sweet voice of resignation and prayer and praise, they will be constrained to say, "Truly this man is near to God."

Think what it is to faint as a Christian. It is to distrust God. Circumstances are contrary, winds seem to be beating upon us from all points of the compass, the sea is very rough and the vessel is all but unmanageable, and we faint. What does it mean? Our fainting means that we have lost somewhat of our old confidence in God. We cannot at least sit down and say, "It will be right yet,—the sea is God's, the boat is mine; I myself am his; he has redeemed me by the precious blood of his Son; he will not cast me away, or if he do cast me away it will be that he may find me again; he will be sowing me as a farmer sows his seed, that I may bring forth fruit to his honour and his glory." We cannot triumph, perhaps, in our desolation; in our friendlessness and poverty we cannot utter the pean of

victory ; but we can say, though it be with a sob and a terrible spasm of grief, "Thy will be done!" A man who says that with his heart when the wolf is at the door, when there is no fire in the grate, no bread in the cupboard, no money in the bank, no friends about him, has spoken all the lessons that the Cross of Christ can teach the heart of man!

Will you faint in the day of adversity? Then you will be unlike the men who have made history glorious by their much-enduring, uncomplaining heroism. Job was one. He said, when things were breaking to pieces before him, when the earth was being dried up, when the very footprints of his children were being blown out by the cold, cruel wind, when all the earth was to him one gigantic graveyard, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord!" He did not faint in the day of adversity. Habakkuk came up afterwards and said, "Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation." He was prepared for the day of adversity. With what preparation was he qualified? With a deeply religious preparation. Nothing can break through the darkness of such days but the light of divine truth; nothing can heal such wounds but the balm of the grace of the Cross of Christ. Have there been no Christian heroes? Job and Habakkuk were Old Testament men. Are there not men in the New Testament who hold an equally high tone and an equally noble attitude? Yes. And Paul shall represent them. When they told Paul that the day of adversity was at hand, that bonds and imprisonments awaited him in every city, that every step he took was a step into danger, he said, "None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I may finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus." That was his tone in the day of adversity. When he was plagued with a thorn in the flesh, when his nights and days were but experiences of pain, and he cried mightily unto the Lord for the removal of his torment, and God said unto him, "My grace is sufficient for thee," he was

quieted like a child in his father's arms. He spoke no more about the day of adversity, but the day of prayer and renewed consecration. As for the grand old men that come up from olden time, behold their port! "They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth!" See how they deported themselves in the day of adversity! We are in this great succession: They are no medium men who are in front; it is over no common dust that our pathway lies; we set our feet in the footprints of the giants, and we are to follow them as they followed Christ. Yes, it was the Saviour who showed us how to act in the day of adversity, in Gethsemane pains, in Gethsemane darkness; it was he who taught us that all-including prayer, "Thy will be done!" That was the Lord's prayer. That other prayer of his was a prayer that children may learn; but this is a prayer that consecrates Gethsemane for ever! This should be the first prayer that a man learns; and when he has learned that prayer thoroughly, the next thing to learn is the song of heaven! God grant that when the battle is set, and the foe comes upon us in the fierceness of his wrath, we may be more than conquerors through him that loved us!

Chapter xxiv. 11-20.

OPPORTUNITY AND OBLIGATION, ETC.

"If thou forbear to deliver them that are drawn unto death, and those that are ready to be slain; if thou sayest, Behold, we knew it not; doth not he that pondereth the heart consider it? and he that keepeth thy soul, doth not he know it? and shall not he render to every man according to his works?" (vers. 11, 12).

THUS a great fire is set to the excuses which men make in regard to their negligence of opportunity. We are not merely called upon to do the work that we see, we are also called upon to go out and see if there be not more work to be done. A man may enclose himself within walls of luxury and beauty, and declare that he sees no poverty, no weakness, no need of exertion on his own part; but he has put himself in a false relation to society, and that false relation will not save him from divine inquest and judgment. We do not destroy the poverty of the world by declining to look upon it. We are not released from moral obligation by moral indifference. Job says, "The cause which I knew not I searched out"; I made inquiry about it; I cross-examined men who could give information, and in conducting this course of inquest I was not gratifying curiosity, but creating a basis for beneficent action. Were we in proper mood of heart towards God and towards man, we should call upon poverty in its retreats, we should cause all human necessity to breathe its prayer into the ear that we might according to our means relieve its distress. Whoever pleads that he would do more good if he could see more occasion for doing it is guilty before God of falsehood. Poverty is at the door; if it is not on the broad thoroughfare, we have but to turn down a little to the right or to the left, and there we find every form of human want. God will not allow us to say we do not know; Jesus Christ himself protested against this foolish plea, when the men on his left hand said, "When saw we thee an hungred, or athirst,

or naked, or sick, or in prison?" He was not moved by the suggestion to release them from their obligations. The things we do not know we ought to know. Thus we are called upon to work with both hands diligently; we are called upon both to find the opportunity and to use it for God. If we sit until everything is made ready to our hands probably we should complain of having little to do; but if we go out in the early morning, and spend the whole day in anxious inquiry, we shall soon discover how large is the field within which our labour is to be spent. The poor and the neglected, the sore in heart and the helpless, should find from this verse that the divine eye is engaged on their behalf, and the divine judgment will follow those who neglect opportunities which might have been discovered. Poverty and want and helplessness are set in our midst as opportunities for the culture of the soul, as opportunities for proving that giving is the true receiving, that sacrifice is the true life, and that good-doing is the assured immortality. When is God represented in the Bible as other than the friend of the poor, the judge of the fatherless, and the saviour of all men? More people will be driven away into darkness on account of moral neglect than on account of intellectual heresy. Nowhere are we taught that mere opinion will save men, but everywhere we are assured that he who does justly, loves mercy, and walks humbly with God shall be received into everlasting habitations. Here, then, is a point at which all men may begin, without knowing aught of grammar, philosophy, or theology; salvation is not by metaphysics, salvation is not by works; salvation is a consciousness of the free gift of God, and a response to that free gift in the form of personal purity and social beneficence. Away with excuses, with shallow pleas, with selfish devices; let the overflowing river destroy them, and let the judgment from above burn them up.

"Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth, and let not thine heart be glad when he stumbleth: lest the Lord see it, and it displease him, and he turn away his wrath from him" (vers. 17, 18).

What can be more intensely evangelical than this exhortation? Although it may appear to be but a moral maxim, yet in its outworking we shall require all the aid of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. Never was human nature

put to such strain and stress as at this point. How difficult it is not to wait for the halting of our foe, and not to rejoice in the fall of our enemy! Even when we restrain our lips from ostentatious delight, there may be hidden in the heart a subtle and secret congratulation, because our prophecies have been fulfilled and our estimates have been verified. The spirit of the gospel operates in a directly contrary way: "Love your enemies" is the golden motto of the Christian faith; "Feed those that would destroy you" is the holy exhortation of the Cross of Christ. The reason given for this self-repression is profoundly religious, namely, "lest the Lord see it, and it displease him." We know that the Lord looketh not on the outward action only, but on the inward and inspiring motive. Can we truly say that we are not glad when the enemy falls? Are we quite sure that in our heart there is no secret felicitation in consequence of the mischief which has come upon the head of him that opposed us? Do we not quietly say, it may be with assumed reverence, that we are not surprised, because we were sure that such conduct must be followed by such consequences? It is difficult for a personal enemy to be just; it is almost impossible for us, when we are prejudiced against a man, not to hear of that man's disasters without inwardly rejoicing that they have fallen upon him. We are called upon to be Godlike in our magnanimity; we are to have no merely personal enemies; we are to regard ourselves as parts of a great whole, and to consider that all evil-doing is directed against the Holy One rather than against ourselves. To these sacred realisations we are called by the Holy Spirit: how difficult it is to attain them, and to give practical utility to them, they know best who have seen most of the tragedy and horribleness of actual life. It is hard for Christians to be Christlike. We have certain theological opinions behind which we are too prone to perpetrate certain moral delinquencies; we mistake the nature of the kingdom of heaven, and we wound the very spirit of Christ, when we suppose we are right morally because we are right intellectually. Moreover, there can be no intellectual rectitude that does not stand upon moral righteousness; the words may be right, the form of the speech may be unquestionable, the nominal and formal orthodoxy may be beyond all successful contention, yet, because of the want of moral earnestness, integrity,

love of honour, and love of equity, all that we profess in words and set forth in form shall be accounted worse than worthless. To him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin; to him who has a fine intellectual conception that is not balanced by a faithful moral consecration shall be given to feel the weight and the bitterness of the judgment of God.

“Fret not thyself because of evil men, neither be thou envious at the wicked; for there shall be no reward to the evil man; the candle of the wicked shall be put out” (vers. 19, 20).

Thus we come again and again upon the commonplaces of moral behaviour. Why this repetition? Is it because of intellectual inability? Is it indicative of a failure of moral imagination? Far deeper than this lies the reason of the reiteration of such exhortation and injunction. It is because we are so weak, it is because temptations are so numerous, it is because the enemy is so industrious, that we require to be guarded at every point and that we need to be exhorted constantly, lest our inspiration should fail and our impulses should cool and vanish. After every period of intellectual excitement there should come a period of moral instruction and comfort, lest the excitement should leave us in a state of weakness, and so should leave us a prey to the ever-watchful enemy. A wonderful piece of mosaic is this Biblical literature: here we have intellect, there we have imagination; here is reasoning, there is music; here is a statement of doctrine in the sublimest terms, and there is a persuasion to obedience in tenderest words; here is a battle illustrative of great principles, and there is a prayer expressive of conscious need: we must comprehend the Bible in its totality and in its unity; we must be Biblically learned even if we are textually ignorant,—that is to say, although we cannot quote separate and independent texts we should have within us the spirit of the Bible, the very genius of revelation, that shall prevent us foisting upon Jesus Christ any sentiment which is unworthy of his history or of his Cross. The reasoning which follows the exhortation is **once** more profoundly religious,—“there shall be no reward to the evil man,” for “the candle of the wicked shall be put out.” We are to look at the end rather than at the beginning; where we cannot understand the beginning we may be able to comprehend the end; if men are continually sowing

seed and no harvest comes, we know that the seed that has been sown was worthless or has been sown only in seeming and not in reality. Every action is known by the fruit it bears: first there comes the motive, then there comes the deed, then there comes the consequence of the deed; and not until we have seen the whole process are we qualified to judge any part of it. Beautiful and suggestive is the figure that the light in which the wicked man walks is but the light of a candle, an exhaustible flame, a perishing glory, a merely flickering spark; whereas the righteous man walketh in the glory of the sun, the splendour that is round about him is the radiance of the eternal throne; he walks not in a light of his own creation, but in the very radiance of heaven. Jesus Christ is the light of the world, and Christians are the light of the world only in a reflective sense. Many there be who light their own candles, who speak their own praise, who live upon their own theories and speculations, but in the end there is nothing but darkness. The earth receives its light from above, the flowers drink in the glory of the sun; so in our earthly light we should be related to the eternal fire, and in all the expansion of our character we should be fed and sustained, comforted and blessed, by ministries far beyond. We cannot struggle up by some poor intellectual effort to the moral dignity which does not fret itself because of evil men; all this superiority of circumstance comes out of our communion with God: he who is hidden with God in heaven can come down to the affairs of earth and time with a dignity which reckons correctly, and which abstains from the debasements which attach themselves to the earth. The man who has seen eternity makes a proper estimate of the bubble of time. He who has seen a light above the brightness of the sun is not dazzled by the candles of this world; he who has entered into the spirit of the triune God can look upon the prosperity of the bad man as upon an idle dream, coming out of nothing, and vanishing into nothing evermore.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, show us somewhat of the wonders of thy way, that we may be rebuked and kept in expectant silence, and restrained from interfering with the course of thy providence even by our words. Thou hast set us in a great mystery of life; one thing belongs to another; all the lines travel up towards thyself; the right hand of the Lord is full of power, and the Lord's throne is at the head of all. We are lost for want of view. All things are too near us. We are too near ourselves. We cannot see ourselves until we stand in God; then do we behold our littleness and frailty, and then do we begin to kindle with the consciousness of immortality. But we are looking down to the dust; we are mistaking all things as to their size and colour and use, and our very ability becomes a snare, and our inventiveness is but a new way to destruction. Oh that we were wise, that we were often silent, that we could breathe out our life in quiet prayer, and that many a time we could but look up when we wish to interfere. What an effectual working is thine. How thou dost commingle all things, and curiously relate them, so that men cannot take them to pieces, and understand the mechanism thereof. We always leave out the principal item; our calculation is always wrong in the first line, and therefore all our multiplication is but an elaborate mistake. Oh that we could stand still and see the salvation of God. Oh that we had grace enough to let things alone. If we could but watch thy wonder-working hand, we should see how thou dost crown all things with perfectness. Yet thou wilt keep us in our own sphere, and there we can do our little day's work with industry and patience, and with some measure of success. Yet help us to know that it is only an intermediate sphere, not a portion cut off from thy creation, without any relation to central life and thought; show us that we are working in a corner which is vitalised from the centre. May we be diligent cultivators; may we answer the opportunity which comes to us—yea, may we buy it up as a precious pearl, and use it well, to the master's praise. May we be found at the last to have been wise, seeing things that are afar off, reckoning up forces that lie away at a great distance from the vision of the body; and thus as the ages come and go, may the word of the Lord, as known by us and spoken by us, appear, reappear, and shape the moulding of all time, and direct every thought and impulse, and sanctify every ambition. We bless thee for the religious life. How it warms the heart; how it stirs the mind; how it feeds the best forces of our nature; how it keeps us back from littleness, meanness, malevolence, impurity, injustice, wrong! Verily, it is the presence of God in the soul: may it never be taken away from us. All these things we have learned through Jesus Christ thy Son. He was like

unto a man—yea, he was in all points tempted like as we are: he hungered, thirsted, and was often tired and sat down by the roadside; but still when we came near him we fell back from him again: there was a line of limit—there was a point of approach, and yet a point of separation. Never man spake like this man. Never man looked like this man. There was healing in the very hem of his garment; there was heaven in his gracious smile. He died for us, and rose again; he paid the price of his blood for our redemption: we will therefore not think of our littleness by reason of our sin, but of our value because of the price paid for our ransom. Amen.

Chapter xxiv. 21-29.

INTELLECTUAL CONFLICT, ETC.

“My son, fear thou the Lord and the king: and meddle not with them that are given to change: for their calamity shall rise suddenly; and who knoweth the ruin of them both?” (vers. 21, 22).

IT has been suggested that we should read for “them that are given to change,” “those who think differently.” Here the caution is not directed against variety of intellectual method, but against variety of moral judgment. Thus we have been reading that there shall be no reward to the evil man, and that the candle of the wicked shall be put out; and now the wise father would seem to say to his son, If any man shall teach thee any other doctrine than this, meddle not with them that think differently. Intellectual variety or contention should within proper limits be encouraged, because out of intellectual conflict there may come intellectual light; but men must not have moral variety—that is to say, different definitions of moral obligation; there must not be any interfusion of right and wrong, as if there were some things partly morally right and partly morally wrong; the distinction must be vital, deep, unchangeable, otherwise we shall be led into such confusion as shall be used for the purpose of excusing selfishness and delinquency. It would be unworthy of the Bible to exhort its readers to have nothing to do with men who are given to intellectual change because intellectual change may be indicative of progress; but it is worthy of the Bible to point out that moral distinctions must not be trifled with, and that where a moral course has been vividly indicated in holy writ it should never be regarded as open to the criticism and revision of dissenting minds. Sometimes we may vainly imagine that there is an intellectual force superior to that which is

discovered in Biblical literature ; but we must never delude ourselves with the idea that there is a morality loftier than the ethics of revelation. We cannot go beyond the purity of the commandments, we cannot transcend the moral lines indicated by the beatitudes ; beyond the boundaries of the Sermon on the Mount there is nothing worthy of the name of morality. Intellectual difference may be a sign of vitality, but moral confusion is a sign of moral obliquity.

“ Prepare thy work without, and make it fit for thyself in the field ; and afterwards build thine house ” (ver. 27).

Life should proceed upon method. For want of method how little progress is made by some people ! By beginning at the wrong end, men’s best devices and most arduous endeavours come to nothing. The words to be taken notice of are “ prepare,” and “ make fit,” and “ afterwards.” Here are three things to be done,—get ready, adapt one thing to another, so as to avoid all confusion, and when the material is brought together and part is adapted to part, then proceed vigorously to build. Here is a whole philosophy of life and progress. In early life education is preparation : after merely technical or scholastic education should come a kind of apprenticeship to practical service : men should not rush at their ultimate work in a desperate hurry, but should take time to test their qualifications, and to gather a little initial experience : but surely there comes a time when a man should say to himself, I must now arise and build, with a view to permanence. Many people waste all their time in fruitless industry. If they could be charged with indolence, a case might be got up against them on moral grounds ; but they are very far from being indolent : if possible they are much too energetic and industrious, but, unfortunately for themselves and for others, they are energetic and industrious about the wrong things. Some men are qualified to deal with details, and are never so happy as when arranging minute points, and describing precise lines, and seeing that all manner of punctilious observances are realised ; other men can only deal with great principles and with ultimate conceptions, being utterly regardless of details : if such men were to change places, see what confusion would occur. The man of detail may know nothing of principles, and the man who is

devoted to the philosophy of principles may be incapable of dealing with detail. Sometimes our work has to be made ready for us by other people. It does not follow that life is incoherent or inconsistent because some part of it is done by one man and some part by another. There are instances in which the sculptor adds but the final strokes to the statue—by which it is made almost to breathe: he says that all the preliminary work can be done by the mechanic, and that it is his province alone to give the artistic and final touch. So with painting: the great artist may add but a few tints or lines or shadows at the last, but these comparatively small additions give the whole value to the picture; it does not therefore follow that the picture was not done by the artist who gave it whatever it possesses of artistic energy and significance. According to the modern distribution of functions and occupations, we shall soon come to the time when life will be the upbuilding of society rather than that of a mere individual. We have betaken ourselves to the study of specialism; no longer does one physician undertake the cure of the entire body; it would seem as if each part of the frame of man had a physician appropriated to itself. So with this work of preparation: one man writes the alphabet, another the primer, another the advanced book, and another the higher and the highest literature. But in reality the whole work is one. Who would think of commencing to write a book without a knowledge of the alphabet? Yet some men commence the building of a life without the knowledge of first principles, without the realisation of moral instincts and duties; hence confusion, hence industry worse than indolence, and hence results absolutely devoid of beauty and utility. Educate thyself, gather information, study the history of the world, watch the ways of other men, and do not begin to build until ample preparation has been made for the successful carrying out of the building project. On the other hand, do not spend all your time in preparation. There are men who are ever learning, never able to come to a knowledge of the truth. Others have been getting ready for the production of a great book all their lives, and yet the book will never be produced. We all probably have acquaintances who assure us that by-and-by they will be able to vindicate their methods by a realisation of labour which will astound the world; yet all

this boasting or promising or vapouring comes to nothing. Be moderate in your preparation, if you would be successful in your building. Building is only to be learned by building. No man can ever learn to swim who simply stands on the shore and looks at the sea: no man can ever learn to build who simply frames fine theories of architecture, but never puts one stone upon another. Be not discouraged by early blunders, by introductory mistakes of any kind, but recognise them, confess them, and avoid their repetition. In all life-building the first thing to be assured of is the security and fitness of the foundation; then let every man take heed how he buildeth!

“Be not a witness against thy neighbour without cause; and deceive not with thy lips. Say not, I will do so to him as he hath done to me: I will render to the man according to his work” (vers. 28, 29).

This does not refer only to witnessing in a court of law; it includes talking about a man behind his back, gossiping respecting his character and service, or making him the subject of casual criticism: hence the verse might read, Do not bring thy neighbour's faults under review simply for the sake of talking; do not turn him into a text for the purpose of giving information regarding his faults and blemishes: if thou hast anything to say against thy neighbour, name him plainly, speak to him personally, adduce evidence precisely and circumstantially, and thus proceed with solidity and solemnity. How wonderfully are evangelical principles anticipated in the 29th verse, “Say not, I will do so to him as he hath done to me.” That would be mere resentment, mere pettishness; there would be in it nothing of real judgment or equity. When a man takes the law into his own hands, he himself becomes the victim of the rash proceeding. The value of law is that it is not to be privately administered, but that it is to express itself in human life with all the dignity of an impersonal influence. Wherever mere individuality expresses judgment and penalty there is a necessary limitation; the penalty may be regarded as expressive of resentful feeling: but where the law comes without immediate reference to personality, it comes without limitation, it seems to express, so far as can be done, the Eternal and the Infinite. In human nature there is of course a strong tendency to resent every injury. This tendency can only be overcome by the larger tendency created and inspired by the

spirit of Jesus Christ. Here again the Lord of glory becomes the pattern of men : when he was reviled, he reviled not again ; when he suffered, he threatened not ; he was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth. That is the ideal relation we are to sustain to one another. We are not to be discouraged because we cannot attain to it at once. If our spirit is operating in the direction of its realisation, that should be accounted to us as a completed service. The heart may easily be discouraged by momentary outbreaks of the old nature : we may so to say detect ourselves in evil passion or purpose, or even in the plotting of some scheme that should bring retribution upon the head of the man who has offended us : let not the enemy turn such experience into an accusation against us of an overwhelming kind ; true it is an accusation, but where sin abounds grace may much more abound ; and the very fact that we had caught ourselves in the fault may lead us into deeper penitence, and enable us to offer more comprehensive and pathetic prayer.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we cannot tell anything as it really is, for what light have we, and what time for thought? We are driven, we are hastened away; a great wind impels us forward; where we would stop and linger, and think and pray, behold the darkness comes down suddenly, and blots out the appearance of the very altar itself. From all this we think thou hast a good purpose concerning us; in itself this cannot be the way of wisdom or of love; we feel that afterwards we shall see how it was, and be glad with a great joy, exultant with an inexpressible thankfulness. Meanwhile, the night is cold and dreary, and the hills are very high, and all the gardens seem to be barren; there is no fruit in the orchard; oftentimes all nature seems to be withering under thy displeasure: but it is by such circumstances that thou dost train us; all this is part of the soul's hard drill, that it may see things as they are, value them by a right reckoning, set down their price and force, and understand them as they exactly are; and all this leads us away, first in vague wonder, then in reasoning hopefulness, towards the heavens, if haply this be not an empty universe, but a great church in which there is a suffering Priest. We have found the Priest of the universe; we have seen him upon the Cross; we have heard his cry of weakness, and his utterance of pain; we have watched where they laid him; we have gone in the morning and found him risen, having made time anew, and set all history in an unexpected light, and brought to bear upon the human family, and all its interests and destinies, a wondrous and gracious influence. We have come to Christ, we have felt the mystery and the power of his blood: it cleanseth from all sin; after its application there is no stain, or taint, or memory of guilt; thou dost cast our sin behind thee, and none can find it—yea, though the enemy search for it, and would bring it back in fatal accusation against us, he shall not succeed in his cruel quest. Thou hast trained us by many processes, and now our faith is strong and our hope is clear, though there be many cloudy days, and many remaining difficulties, and much has yet to be done; yet we know what the faith-life is—the better sense, the spiritual faculty, the marvellous thing that takes hold of God, and will not let him go. Lord, increase our faith. By increase of faith we shall have access of love, accumulation of all things good and true and wise and beautiful,—yea, the accumulation shall advance even unto riches immeasurable, unsearchable, inexhaustible. We bless thee for all newness of heart, for all regeneration of life, spirit, and purpose—these are thy miracles, thou Holy Spirit. Continue and complete thy sacred work. Thou wilt bring us home, thou wilt not be baffled in thy purpose; at the last thou shalt crown us with a crown of righteousness. But for these hopes we should die; but for these inspirations we should deem life a mistake and look upon to-

morrow not as a friend but a foe, which comes to frown upon us with new displeasures : now we await to-morrow in hopefulness ; it can bring with it nothing that may not be sanctified to our good—come as it may, thou wilt come along with it, and thou wilt give us strength to bear the burden. Help us in time of trouble and sadness to remember all the wise answers ever given to human inquiry in the hour of pain and sore distress. May the word of God dwell in us richly, so that to every temptation we may have a reply, and to every suggestion of evil we may return a gospel of peace. We live in God ; we trust to his Son, equal with the Father ; we cry for a baptism of the Holy Ghost ; and we know, by the very prayer, that it cannot be lost. Now unto him that is able to keep us from falling, and to present us faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.

Chapter xxiv. 30-32.

“I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding ; and, lo, it was all grown over with thorns, and nettles had covered the face thereof, and the stone wall thereof was broken down. Then I saw, and considered it well : I looked upon it, and received instruction.”

THE FOOL'S VINEYARD.

BY such allusions the Bible constantly shows us how much the generations of mankind resemble one another. In every age the sluggard and the fool have had a place, as well as the labourer and the wise man. In this respect the village has been as the great city, the great city as the greater kingdom, and the kingdom itself has been a world in miniature. Truly, then, we may go back to old scenes and read the unequal and troubled story of our own life. That which is now hath already been ; and as for our originalities, the ancients knew them, and pronounced them stale. Any difference that may appear in the history of the world or in the development of human life is rather a difference of incident than of essence. Let us see if many modern experiences have not been anticipated by this dreary scene of the fool's field, as it was looked upon by the wisest man of his age.

The scene shows that if we will not have flowers and fruits, we shall certainly have thorns and nettles. Let us clearly understand that we are living under an economy which we cannot change, and to which we must submit with grace, or which in its turn will avenge itself upon our negligence and

unfaithfulness. We cannot set aside the laws of nature. On they roll, grinding all things that come in their way, or making all things beautiful that were intended by the Creator to assume the image and aspect of loveliness. We can neglect the laws of nature, but we cannot set them aside and expect to realise the advantages of obedience. Man must give in, for law never will succumb. We cannot say to nature, "I am going to sleep, so you must stand still until I awake." There is a law of growth in the very ground: we may co-operate with it, and turn it to our advantage; we may, so to speak, throw the reins of our discipline upon it, and turn it to good uses; but, though we sit down and fold our hands slumbrously, that great law will go steadily on, and thorns and nettles will show how inexorably it proceeds. It is the same with the character of man. We cannot simply do nothing. Life has its laws. We may pay them no heed, but they will assert themselves notwithstanding, and show by painful proofs that neglect is crime. A man may resolve, for example, not to cultivate his mind. He says he will be a child of nature; he will leave himself to the development of external and internal forces, without any exercise of his own will; he will have no purpose about himself, but at the end will be precisely what nature chooses to make him. Is his mind then simply a blank? Impossible! The weeds of false notions, the thorns and nettles of prejudice, the undergrowths of superstition, will prove his intellectual indolence, and he who would not carry the generous bounty of harvest shall be weighted with noxious and worthless plants. Nature will do nothing for a man except with the man's own co-operation, and even that co-operation must be modified, cultivated, rearranged day by day, and only as the result of faithful devotion to the altar of wisdom will nature cause all her issues to result in strength and nobleness of manhood. A man may purposely neglect to cultivate his moral nature. He says he will leave all that to the forces that are above him and around him, and they can make of him just what they please. He despises religious service and exhortation; he holds in contempt all ideas of self-control; he derides the suggestion that he should consider the religious aspects of the uncertain future; he says in one decisive sentence that he has made up his mind to have nothing whatever to do with religion. What then?

Can he keep himself in a strictly negative condition? Is it possible for an atheist to have no religion? Is he at the end of ten years the innocent lamb that he proposed to himself to become? Look at his false ideas, his superstition, his narrowness, his want of veneration, his superficial judgment, and see how far he has succeeded. We must understand that there will be growth even if we do not attend to cultivation. There is a great law of production evermore in operation. We can use it for our highest purposes, or we can neglect it, and it will avenge our neglect by weeds, thorns, thistles, and all manner of worthless growths. It is impossible to stand still. It is impossible to become merely nothing. There is no law of negation in God's well-ordered universe. If men would consider this they would be wise; failing to consider it, we can account for nearly all the folly in the world.

The scene clearly shows that the sluggard and the fool cannot hide the results of their neglect. Every man is a living witness to the life which he lives, how secretly soever he may conduct that life. In this case the results were observed and reported. We must see more or less of each other's work. We are in the same world—a small and crowded world it is, too—we belong to one another—we hold mutual rights of inquiry—in short, we cannot hide ourselves from our fellow-men. We cannot confine the results of a wasted life within our own bounds. The drunkard says he injures nobody but himself, than which there is no greater fallacy in all human misthinking. The man deludes himself with the notion that he only is suffering pain of body, wreck of mind, loss of understanding, and forfeiture of property: he little thinks that every child he has will suffer for the outrage of appetite of which he stands convicted. His children will be tainted in health, and will be clouded or dwarfed in mind, in consequence of their father's excesses. The spendthrift says he is only spending his own money; but in this sense of the term no man has any money of his own to spend. Every penny we hold we should hold in a spirit of trusteeship, and our object should be to discover how much good we may do with it; for it we waste it, not only is the money itself gone but our mental economy is injured, our moral integrity is impaired, our sense of

honour has undergone modification or collapse. It is impossible to tell a lie without injuring other people. It is impossible to disobey the laws of cleanliness without affecting the health of society. In the deepest, largest, truest sense, no man liveth unto himself; every breath we draw would seem to affect the atmosphere in which we live. This being the case, we have not a right to do as we please with what we call our own. First of all, there is nothing which we can call our own. Life itself is not. Life is a precious trust. We have to account for life in some cases even to our fellow-men. In ordinary intercourse we see again and again proofs of the fact that society will not allow us to do what we please with our own. Surely a man may say that his own child is his, and his only; but such is not the fact; no man has a child which is exclusively his own; the child sustains not only family but social relations; if you were to attempt to lay violent hands upon your child's life society would arrest you and forbid you, and, if you persisted in your foul purpose, society would imprison you, or, if you succeeded in it, society would hang you. You cannot do what you like with your own life. If you were to attempt to take it, society would again arrest you and show you that your life is not your own. Let your garden become covered with weeds, let those weeds come to seed, and when the seed is blown into other people's gardens, see if they do not protest. Surely, a man may say, I have a right to neglect my garden if I please, and let it grow whatever may come by nature. But even your own neighbours would protest against this superficial and mischievous notion. The neighbours would say, If you have a right to injure your own garden, you have no right to injure ours, and no man can let weeds come to maturity in his garden without injuring the gardens of the whole neighbourhood. We are bound together by singular but vital ties, and we cannot touch one of the filaments by which society is connected without sending a thrill to the very centre of social existence. What is true of weeds growing in gardens is true of other nuisances. You may not even build a chimney that will throw its black smoke over your neighbours' property. Society claims a right of judgment. Public sentiment insists upon being respected. There is not only a written law of protection but an unwritten law of protection; and indeed written

laws would have no force and effect but for the laws that are unwritten: it is the spiritual judgment, the moral sentiment, the indwelling and all-ruling conscience that settles and determines public law.

The scene shows how possible it is to be right in some particulars and to be grievously wrong in others. The legal right of the slothful man to the possession of the field might be undisputed. The vineyard might have fallen into the hands of the fool by strictly lawful descent. So far, so good. The case is on this side perfectly sound. Yet possession was not followed by cultivation, and possession without cultivation is of necessity diminution. It is not enough to possess; we must increase. We must make the world a thousand times larger than it is; not in mere miles, but in its power of production. The man who had one talent buried it, and although he restored it, yet was condemned as a negligent, unfaithful, and wicked servant. We do not, if we are wise, allow even a house to fall into decay. There is no right of abuse. Let this be clearly understood; it applies to the whole compass of life: there is no right of abuse in property, in social usage, in social confidence, in personal cultivation. Society holds us all as trustees and stewards, and demands an account of our procedure. Is that dog yours? Surely a man may call a dog his own. Nothing of the kind. Society will protest against its starvation or other cruel treatment. Only let society know that even a dog which you call your own is cruelly treated, and you will find that society will assert its rights and bring you to punishment. You have not a right to be unclean, to be ignorant, to be careless of life; on that line no rights have ever been established. We have only the right to hold property for the good of others, to hold it for cultivation, to hold it for multiplication, in order that social life may be benefited and strengthened by its appropriation. Coming to examine these things in a practical light, apart altogether from theories and exhortations, we see that we are living in an economy that is self-watchful, self-guarded, and self-avenging. **It is a solemn and awful thing to live.**

The scene shows that even the worst abuses may be turned to

good account. "Then I saw, and considered it well: I looked upon it, and received instruction." So even the fool may be accounted a teacher, through no will or purpose of his own. The good man is an eloquent example; the bad man is a loud warning. Keep your eyes open, and you will read moral lessons everywhere; watch the men who go regularly to business, who are faithful to their engagements, who are steadfast, sober-minded, zealous in all goodness, and you will see to what rich estate they will come,—not necessarily rich in mere money, but morally and spiritually rich, blessed above all things with a contented and thankful mind. You will see that the finest possessions may be wasted: property, talent, influence, opportunity, may all be thrown away. There is no wealth which may not be utterly exhausted. Beware! even mountains may be levelled—even rivers may be dried up. The fool thinks that there is no limit to his wealth, but his very thinking so brings it the more quickly to an end. We prosper in true wealth only by care as to details. A leak will ruin a reservoir. There are many men who pay much attention to what they consider the larger and more important affairs in life, but who allow little things to take their own course. In the result such men are proved to have acted a foolish part. If they had acted from the other point—that is to say, if they had been careful about little things—they would have found that the great things would have fallen into happy economical arrangement. In looking abroad upon society in all its action, you will see that wickedness always moves in the direction of destruction. It must do so. Remember the awful words, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die,"—not die in the sense of a mere threat, but die as a necessity—cannot help dying. Sin is the broad and open way to destruction. "He that being often reproved hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy." All indolence must go down—down in moral fibre, down in moral volume, down in moral dignity; all wickedness not only goes down, as if a step at a time, but rolls and plunges down with an infinite and irresistible velocity. All sin forces itself in the direction of perdition. In all this reasoning we are not relying upon our invention or imagination; we are simply writing sententiously the history of the whole world. The proofs which the Christian teacher has to adduce are not

always to be found in books, are not always concealed in learned languages, but are often lying upon the wide page of daily life. No man well considers facts, realities, circumstances, within his own knowledge, who does not see that there is a great law in nature and in life, binding and ruling all things, and eventuating in solemn and impartial judgment. How did the wise man know that the man was void of understanding? What right had he to speak of another man as a fool? He spoke because he saw the state in which the vineyard was. We know a man by his surroundings; we know him by his habits; we know him by the very tone of his voice: there is character in everything. Society cannot help judging every one of its members. Does not this social judgment point to a higher arbitrament? Is there not an outline even in all natural economies of great spiritual realities and holy ministries? It is because wise men have diligently considered the bearing of these things that they have felt no difficulty in passing from what is called the material to what is denominated the spiritual. The road has been clear and open, and has invited the pilgrimage of reverent travellers. It is because we have seen sin that we hate it; it is because we have seen righteousness that we are prepared to affirm that all the worlds are related to one another, and that all laws originate in a sublime moral purpose, and that all life is ultimately to be brought not only to social but to divine and unalterable judgment. A man may so live as to be pronounced void of understanding; he may so act as to be pronounced a fool. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, who can answer thee when thou dost arise to shake terribly the earth? Then are we filled with fear, and cry unto thee for pity, for no answer is found in our mouths concerning thy righteousness and judgment. In such hours thou dost teach us how little and frail we are; and yet in our feebleness thou dost show us how great we may become by living and moving and having our being in thee, drawing our strength from the fountain of all true power, and living evermore under the benediction of the all-ruling God. But these things are too high for us; we cannot attain unto them; they rise above us and defy our pursuit: what then hast thou done that we may know thee, and approach thee, and look upon thee with the eyes of love? Thou hast sent thy Son, Emmanuel—God with us. He took not upon him the nature of angels, but the seed of Abraham; he is bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh, and he condescends to speak our language as if it were his own, and to teach us through the words we know the best. He speaks to us of light and love and peace; of forgiveness, and release, and joy, and holiness: we understand thy Son,—this Man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them, turning their common food into sacramental flesh, and their wine into a token of his blood. We love the Saviour; we wonder at the gracious words which proceed out of his mouth; we see him on the hill, and hear him teaching the disciples; we watch him in the house, and mark all his gentle ways; we see him surrounded by sinners, taking up little children and blessing them; going onward to the Cross, his soul exceeding sorrowful, even unto death. We know the power of his resurrection, having had fellowship with his sufferings; now we have peace with God, being justified by faith through our Lord Jesus Christ. Henceforth we would know no man but Jesus; we would crown him Lord of all; we would wait for his law, we would do his bidding, we would imitate his example, we would fill our memory with his words and enrich our hearts with his promises. This is our one desire, that we may be found not having on our own righteousness, but being clothed with the righteousness of Christ as a man might be clothed with a garment: then shall we be accepted in the Beloved, we shall know that all things are for Christ's sake,—yea, the very church, beautiful in virginity, beautiful with the comeliness of heaven. Enable us to do what appeals to us as thy law and bidding; may we be found constant in our faith, undivided in our consecration, simple in our motive, endeavouring to realise in all things the purpose and decree of heaven. We are of yesterday, what can we know? To-morrow we shall be gone, what can we do? Help us by thy Spirit to see how every moment may be turned to account, how every breath may become sacred as a prayer, and how our whole life may be lifted up in practical and loving aspiration. Pity us in our sinfulness; wash us, O thou

Christ of God, anointed from all eternity, in thine own blood: then shall we be without spot or wrinkle or any such thing,—the very miracle of thy grace. Holy Spirit, teach us; teach us all the innermost things of the sanctuary; lead us past the first gate, and the second gate, even unto the holy of holies, and having seen what is there, the very secret of God, the very mystery of eternity, we shall be solemn for ever, yet glad with ineffable joy. Come to us, thou Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and we shall have strength and rest and hope and joy; we shall have all things, and abound. We commend one another to thy care whilst we tarry at thine altar. Some are sad of heart; some are tired of labour that brings no profit; some are weary because the road is long and the burden is very heavy; others are distracted and disappointed and bewildered because whatever they do comes back upon them only in mockery: some are full of joy because they are the companions of prosperity and honour; when they go abroad success goes with them; when they return at eventide they have to pull down their barns and build greater, so plentiful is the harvest of the day. Look upon us whatever our state. May we not faint in the day of adversity, and thus show that our strength is small; may we not boast in the day of prosperity, and thus in our presumption lose our faith. May we feel that all things work together for good to those whose hearts are in the heart of God. Be with our sick, and heal them at least with hope which is better than health of body. Be with our loved ones who have gone abroad to find honest bread under other skies. Watch over them and bless them night and day. If they are in sore straits, do thou send an angel of deliverance. The Lord thus direct us, guide us, enrich us, sanctify us, wash us in the precious blood of his own dear Son, and make us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light. Lord, hear our cry, and thy hearing shall be as an answer of peace. Amen.

Chapter xxv. 1-13.

OBSERVATIONS ABOUT KINGS.

“These are also proverbs of Solomon, which the men of Hezekiah king of Judah copied out” (ver. 1).

HERE is a very simple exercise, and yet one of great consequence. The men of Hezekiah king of Judah “copied out” certain proverbs, which had been probably scattered about in various writings or spoken in ordinary conversation: * but now the time had come when Hezekiah was desirous to bring all these wise words into one book, and so give them permanence. We find, therefore, in these proverbs which follow, not the wise sayings of one man only, but the conclusions which had been reached by long-continued observation and very varied experience of human life. The man of physical science delights to gather

* See note, *post*, p. 355.

together what he terms facts, and the wider the basis from which he can collate his facts the better satisfied is he with their general teaching ; it is not enough for him to find an odd fact here and there, he must find his facts in series well-connected and long-continued, and so repeating themselves as to constitute their action into the operation of a law. When the man of literal science discovers one fact, then another of the same nature, and ten more, and can then multiply by ten again, he begins to realise what he terms certainty, and to formulate upon the basis of these facts what he terms a law of nature. There can be no objection to such induction and to such nomenclature ; on the other hand, it ought not to be denied that there are moral facts and moral consequences, repetitions of action and repetitions of issue, so that by taking a large breadth of life into view men should be able to detect the existence and operation of a moral law, and should discover certainty in moral philosophy, and be able to warn the ages that such and such actions will issue in such and such events. There is no mere speculation in such reasoning ; it expresses a fact, a certainty, a judgment. This is emphatically the case with the Book of Proverbs, which may be regarded as a storehouse of facts ever accessible to the use of the moralist, whether philosopher or practical teacher.

“ It is the glory of God to conceal a thing : but the honour of kings is to search out a matter ” (ver. 2).

Concealment is not a fantastic art, practised merely for the purpose of puzzling and bewildering the human mind. Rather, there is in every little thing, so-called, a whole universe, could we but grasp the particle in all its content and meaning. When we suppose ourselves to have reached the end, we discover to our surprise and delight that we have but realised the beginning. In God's work there is no end ; it is all beginning, all new suggestion, all new and brilliant opportunity. On the other hand, kings concern their minds with matters purely political, which can be thoroughly searched out and understood in all their practical relations and bearings. Kings are not to live a haphazard life, taking things for granted and giving rough solutions of subtle and vital problems ; they are to diligently consider the philosophy of statesmanship and sovereignty, and to rest their throne upon

a basis of reason. So also when it comes to matters of practical justice: they are not to take a superficial view of cases brought under judgment; they are to search into them, to compare statements, to trace out the operation of motives, and thus they are to reach conclusions which should be marked by reasonableness and equity. Nothing frivolous is becoming in rulers. Even justice itself, how practical soever it may appear, is founded upon the deepest philosophy. Men should not extemporise law, even for social purposes, because law that is extemporised is likely to be inspired by passion and to be marred by partiality or prejudice. It is the beauty of the deepest and grandest social law that it was formed in anticipation, rather than in retrospect of social order or disorder. Magistrates do not sit on the bench to make law and to formulate punishment, when they are under the excitement of an individual case; the law was made in secret, in solemn quietude, under a deep sense of responsibility, and is therefore supposed to be untainted by prejudice or passion; the magistrate has simply to acquaint himself with the law, and to administer it in its purity. God and kings are not set in opposition in this text, in any sense that would bring discredit upon either. From whatever point the universe originated, it is a universe of concealment; that is to say, it holds within itself enigmas and riddles which the human mind has hardly begun to appreciate. Say the universe was created in one grand solemn act, as if by the immediate realisation of a divine word: then how much is there to be explored! what an analytic work remains to tempt the imagination, and to refine the senses to the highest quality and expression! Say the universe began in a tuft of fire-smoke; see then how wondrous was the concealment that within a little cloud of fiery mist there should have been hidden a universe so grand, magnificent, and radiant as that which is accessible to our senses;—in either way the issue was great, the concealment profound, and the opportunity for the education of human inquiry and the chastening of human imagination was boundless and gracious. We may search into the works of God without being merely curious; in searching into those works we should take with us a spirit of reverence, for reverence may be able to see many things which are concealed from the eyes of self-conceit and even from the vision of genius.

“The heaven for height, and the earth for depth, and the heart of kings is unsearchable” (ver. 3).

The compliment thus paid to a king may be considered to be ironical rather than literal. The lesson points in the direction of the depravity of the human heart, when that heart is brought under the influence of ambitions of a secular and selfish kind. The idea would seem to be that the heaven could be measured in height, and the earth could be represented in plain figures for depth, but when both these arithmetical miracles have been performed there remains the impossibility of rightly reading the heart of a king. Who can ever find out all that is written in a king's mind? It may be supposed that in the Book of Proverbs we have something like the personal testimony of a king, so that we have not to deal with a commentator who is making notes upon what he himself has observed in the life and ministry of kings; we have rather an autobiographer who is reading to us somewhat of the secret of his own mind. In general terms the case may be put thus: the king is talking to you, but his words have a double meaning; under an appearance of extreme civility he is hiding a very selfish policy; whilst apparently treating you with the greatest geniality he is in fact endeavouring to lead you to your destruction. The king has many points of interest to consider; he has to balance and refine and adjust, and conduct a very intricate system of manipulation, so that he himself can hardly at all times tell his own purpose; he himself may be surprised into conclusions, and may merge out of a fog of diplomacy into the clear light of reason and justice: the teaching of history is, beware of kings who are not simple-minded, frank-hearted men, but diplomatists, managers, manipulators, persons who do not reveal their whole purpose or discover their entire resources. Live with the simple, the true, the meek; deal only with men whose object is righteous and beneficent, and avoid all men whose minds are involved, bewildered, diseased by the action of diplomacy and by all the perversity of selfish calculation.

“Take away the dross from the silver, and there shall come forth a vessel for the finer. Take away the wicked from before the king, and his throne shall be established in righteousness” (vers. 4, 5).

When the dross is taken from the silver there results a vessel

to the refiner—that is to say, he is able to make a vessel out of the pure metal: the dross hindered his processes; not until the dross was removed could he really begin to shape his vessel, or if he had done so the vessel itself would have been impaired and worthless. We are here taught not to begin what may be called our final processes until initial processes have been thoroughly accomplished. Always there is a negative work to be done before the positive or constructive work can be wisely and successfully attempted. Take up the weeds from the garden before you plant your flowers; remove the dross before you shape a vessel out of the silver; remove the old building before you lay the new foundations: do all manner of introductory work before you set yourselves with all zeal and determination to build the house or the temple. So with regard to the social vessel: “Take away the wicked from before the king,”—in other words, take away the dross, take away everything that is of the nature of alloy, destroy all evil counsels; and then the throne of the king shall be established in righteousness, and being established in righteousness it shall be permanently established. Only righteousness is eternal in its duration. That which is wicked has in it the principle of decay, and only time is required to bring that principle to its final issue. Righteousness feeds, as it were, upon eternal resources; it draws its supplies from every attribute of God; it lives to do good; it is more than mere uprightness, rectitude, or stern virtue; it is pureness, kindness, holiness, charity; it belongs to the very throne of heaven.

“Put not forth thyself in the presence of the king, and stand not in the place of great men: far better it is that it be said unto thee, Come up hither; than that thou shouldst be put lower in the presence of the prince whom thine eyes have seen” (vers. 6, 7).

The same doctrine is laid down by Jesus Christ in the Gospel according to Luke. It is a doctrine which belongs to the Bible of human history as well as to the Bible of divine revelation. Men who have put themselves into wrong positions have soon come to know how great is the mistake which they have made. They do not fill the positions; their responsibility sits too heavily upon them; their faculties are not equal to the discharge of their unfamiliar duties,—thus at every point they are driven into vexation, they are fretted and exasperated, by action which they cannot

control. Always work within the limits of your strength; always be sure that you can do more than you are attempting to do. The man who boasts of an ability beyond his strength is always brought to disappointment and humiliation. The proverb points out the better way of procedure. It says in effect, Take the lowest place, and then possibly you may be called to a higher; it is better to go up than to go down: go down you most certainly will, if you have taken too eminent a place; your incapacity, your inadequacy will soon be discovered, and the discovery will lead to your deposition; and the man whose deposition has been noticed by his friends, or by the public at large, is by so much weakened or disabled, so that he really cannot effectively use the talents with which he has been endowed. Do not seek to be aggressive in the matter of self-promotion. When you are wanted at the front you will be sent for; when any throne is vacant which you can occupy with dignity and efficiency you will undoubtedly be called to its occupation. Here we find the meaning of true contentment; it is not a state of mind devoid of ambition, but a state of mind in which ambition is controlled and chastened, awaiting a call evidently true and wise that it may advance to some higher position. Well-controlled ambition is itself an element of energy in the mind; it does not operate outwardly and aggressively, but it operates in the sense of moving every faculty in an upward direction, and stimulating every ability quietly to attempt some further duty in life.

“A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver” (ver. 11).

The reference may here be to time, as thus: A word spoken at the proper time. Words are not always of equal value; expressions used to-day may be pointless and pithless, and the same expressions used to-morrow under altered conditions may be full of moral inspiration and energy. Some people always speak at the wrong time. They assure themselves that they have spoken wise words,—which may be perfectly true, but even wisdom may be thrown away. As the next verse picturesquely puts it, “As an earring of gold, and an ornament of fine gold, so is a wise reprove upon an obedient ear.” When the ear is not obedient the eloquence of wisdom itself is lost. Men should study opportunity; sometimes their friends may be ready to receive

the word, may be even eager to listen to it, and wise teachers should be on the alert to notice every sign of interest, every attitude of attention, and to respond to the same with joy and with measured haste. Sympathy itself has often been so administered as to become an exasperation. There are times when men cannot bear even to have passages of Scripture hurled at their heads. Sorrow is not to be rudely encroached upon, but is to be approached gracefully, tenderly, modestly. Sometimes we best give advice to others by giving it to ourselves. There are men who have the gift of monologue, so that in the presence of others they can be talking to themselves, and yet all the while be talking indirectly and happily to those who are in sorrow. All this counsel is not to be taught in words; it is to be taught to the man by the Spirit of God, and is to be practised in secret, and is often to be practised as if it were not being practised,—that wise, singular, gracious art, which can hardly be explained, yet which can be felt, and which can be used with infinitely happy effect.

“As the cold of snow in the time of harvest, so is a faithful messenger to them that send him: for he refresheth the soul of his masters”* (ver. 13).

Snowstorms are not referred to, because they might be untimely and even disastrous. Snows were employed in eastern countries for the purpose of cooling drinks in the summer time. We know what it is to use ice in attempering our liquids; we praise the cool drink, speaking of it as grateful, comforting, and refreshing: that is the meaning of the use of snow in this verse,—as the cold of snow in the time of harvest in a hot day, as it enables men to drink with pleasure when they are thirsty, as it turns a liquid into a healthy stimulant, so is a faithful messenger to them that send him: for he speaks wise words wisely; he studies opportunity and turns it into religious action; he considers exactly what men can bear, and how much they can hear at a time with advantage, and he measures the delivery of his message according to the ability of those who have to receive it. There is nothing hot, eager, violent in his manner; everything is measured, considered, adjusted, and the wise man is seen in every word and in every tone. We must never forget that

* See note, *post*, p. 356.

there may be as much in the tone as in the actual word itself. We may repeat the identical terms of a message, and yet not deliver the message at all. Gentlest words may be delivered in roughest tones; then all their meaning is lost, and their music is as if it had never been. When we are called upon to repeat a message we are called upon to repeat it in the original tone in which it was delivered. Apply this law to the delivery of the Gospel, and consider how we are called upon to reproduce the very tone of Jesus Christ. The words which he uttered were gracious, and the mouth with which he pronounced these words was also gracious; the whole manner was marked by ineffable dignity, tenderness, persuasiveness. What if we be delivering evangelical truths in an unevangelical tone? What if we be remembering the words and forgetting the tears? What if we have but a cross of wood, and not that cross of flesh quivering with agony which was stretched upon it. The true cross is on the cross; the Son of God with outstretched limbs and drooping head represents the Cross which Christian preachers have to declare. Who is sufficient for the delivery of this message? Men may be trained to utter Gospel words, but they cannot be trained to shed Gospel tears. It is at this point that we are called upon to be true to ourselves, to express our inmost and deepest feeling; then shall the delivery of the Gospel be complete, all its words being words of inspiration, and all its pathos being a distinct utterance of that which the heart itself tenderly experiences.

NOTES.

"XXV.-XXIX. 27. The superscription of this section, 'These are also proverbs of Solomon, which the men of Hezekiah king of Judah copied out,' is, in many ways, significant. It pre-supposes the existence of a previous collection, known as the Proverbs of Solomon, and recognised as at once authentic and authoritative. It shows that there were also current, orally or in writing, other proverbs not included in that collection. It brings before us an instance, marked indeed, but one which we cannot think of as solitary, of the activity of that period in collecting, arranging, editing the writings of an earlier age. It is a distinct statement that both the collection that precedes, and that which follows, were at that time, after careful inquiry, recognised as by Solomon himself. The chapters to which it is prefixed present a general resemblance to the portion chs. x.-xxii. 16, which all critics have regarded as the oldest portion of the book. There is the same

stress laid on the ideal excellence of the kingly office (compare xxv. 2-7 with xvi. 10-15), the same half-grouping under special words and thoughts, as *e.g.*, in the verses xxv. 2-7, referring to kings, in the words 'take away,' in xxv. 4, 5, in the use of the same word (in Hebrew) for 'strife' or 'cause' (xxv. 9), of 'gold' (xxv. 11, 12), of the 'fool' in the first ten verses of ch. xxvi., of the 'slothful' in xxvi. 13-16, of the 'righteous' in xxix. 2, 7, 16. The average length of the proverbs is about the same; in most there is the same general parallelism of the clauses. There is a freer use of direct similitudes. In one passage (xxvii. 23-27) we have, as an exceptional case, a word of counsel which is neither a proverb nor a comparison, and is carried through five verses, in which, unless we assume a latent allegory, like that of the 'vineyard of the slothful,' in xxiv. 30-34, the instruction seems to be economic rather than ethical in its character; designed, it may be, to uphold the older agricultural life of the Israelites as contrasted with the growing tendency to seek wealth by commerce, and so fall into the luxury and profligacy of the Phœnicians."—*The Speaker's Commentary.*

“As the cold of snow in the time of harvest, so is a faithful messenger to them that send him: for he refresheth the soul of his masters” (ver. 13).—“Here again we have a picture of the growing luxury of the Solomonic period. The 'snow in harvest' is not a shower of snow or hail, which would in fact come as terrifying and harmful rather than refreshing (comp. 1 Sam. xii. 17, 18, and yet more the proverb in the next chapter, xxvi. 1); but rather the snow of Lebanon or Hermon put into wine or other drink to make it more refreshing in the scorching heat of May or June. The king's summer-palace on Lebanon (1 Kings ix. 19; Song of Sol. vii. 4) would make him and his courtiers familiar with a luxury which could hardly have been accessible in Jerusalem. And here also he finds a parable. More reviving even than the iced wine-cup was the faithful messenger. That the custom thus referred to was common in ancient as well as modern times we know from Xenophon (*Memorab.* 11. 1, § 30), and Pliny (*Hist. Nat.* xix. 4). In x. 26, it will be remembered, we have the other side of the picture, the vexation and annoyance caused by a messenger who cannot be trusted, compared to the sour wine that sets the teeth on edge.”—*Ibid.*

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, we thank thee that in thyself alone is satisfaction for our souls. We have hewn to ourselves cisterns, broken cisterns that could hold no water. We have sought pleasure where there is none. We have endeavoured to find gardens in the wilderness, and we have returned from stony places, stung with disappointment. There is no rest but in thyself. We have tasted the world's pleasures, and they are bitter after awhile; they are sweet only for one dying moment, at the last they bite like a serpent, and sting like an adder. In thy presence is fulness of joy, and at thy right hand alone are pleasures for evermore. In our Father's house there is bread enough and to spare; we will then no longer perish with hunger, but with all haste, and joy, and expectation we will crowd into thy house, and accept the hospitality of thy love. Thou dost not turn us away from the door. The Lord is very pitiful and kind. Thou art a Father expecting thy prodigal son every moment. Thou wilt not close the door, for even yet the wanderer may come. We have learnt this of thee from Jesus Christ our Saviour. He always told us of our Father. He taught us to call thee our Father in heaven. He often spoke of thee as our heavenly Father. God is love. The mercy of the Lord endureth for ever. The pity of the Lord is a continual compassion. The Lord is gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. We have learnt this also from thy Son, our Saviour and Sacrifice, our Priest and Intercessor, the living Son of the living God. Make thyself known to us in him, according to the pressure of our need. We are strong, yet are we weak. Every heart knoweth its own bitterness. There is a shadow upon every life. Some are breathing prayers in secret they dare not and cannot put into words. Hear the sighing of those that are ill at ease. Withdraw the thorn which has wounded the heart to its inmost fibre. Let thy people find new supplies of grace. Surprise them by the sudden in-coming of light. Show them that even yet there is meal in the barrel and oil in the cruse, and whilst they seek these things may they grow under the strong hand of faith. Destroy the spirit of fear, for it destroys our rest. Perfect love casteth out fear. Do thou, therefore, create in our hearts perfect love. The love that never doubts, the love that hopeth evermore, the love to which there is no midnight, for the midnight is as the noon-day. Pity us wherein we are little and weak, wherein we are vain and foolish, and grant us the spirit of wisdom and understanding, and of a sound heart. When we go out into the world again, may we go as men who have seen God, and may the vision of the Lord leave its impress of light upon our very countenances, so that men will know in what high heights we have been by the shining of our faces and the fragrance of our robes. Amen.

Chapter xxv. 16.

“Hast thou found honey? * Eat so much as is sufficient for thee, lest thou be filled therewith, and vomit it.”

PLEASURES AND PENALTIES.

THERE is no denial of the goodness and the sweetness of honey. Not one word is spoken against the thing that is found, or against the appetite that desires it. We are not told that honey is a bad thing and dangerous to take; nor are we told that the appetite which desires honey is a bad appetite and must be crucified. Let us clearly understand this, because out of it will come the whole reasoning of the discourse. Honey is good. To eat it is perfectly proper; but the text tells us that we ought only to eat sufficient, because if we eat to excess we shall really punish ourselves. That is a wonderful law of nature. It is marvellous to notice how our appetites are our constables—taking us up, arresting us with a strong hand, if we over-indulge them. The beginning is very good. You say it is impossible to eat too much of this, it is so sweet; and before the clock has gone half round you blame yourself almost for beginning the very feast which was so delicious.

There is a stopping-place in nature. If you go beyond the proper stopping-place, nature arrests you, and smites you with an unsparing hand. You profess to be lovers of law, and you call yourselves law-abiding. Prove your own words. It is easy to be law-abiding when there is no temptation to be law-violating. It is just where we are tempted to break the law that we require the exhortation to keep it. “He that breaketh through a hedge, a serpent shall bite him.” How is it that there is always a serpent on the other side of the hedge? Who put that serpent there? Why is that serpent there? That serpent is the very security of your life. You would kill yourself with honey if it did not sate you. You would revel in license, not in liberty, if the serpent did not bite you whenever you exceeded the determined line of God.

* “The words point to an incident like that told of Samson (Judg. xiv. 8), and of Jonathan (1 Sam. xiv. 27). The precept, it need hardly be said, extends to the pleasure of which honey is the symbol.”—*The Speaker's Commentary*.

Be thankful for punishments ; they keep the world sweet and pure. Be thankful that your appetite can be sated, and that sweetness turns to poison ; that wine brings madness, and that self-indulgence brings the very de-humanizing of your nature. It is along that line of penalty that you find the security of your individual life, of your family relations, and of your social completeness and rest.

One would think that men did not need such an exhortation as is in the text. Yet it is precisely these commonplace exhortations that men do need. We require to be spoken to plainly right along the line of common every-day experience, and that book and that teaching will get the strongest hold upon us that does not pass over our heads in obscure mysteries, but addresses the middle line of life and that turns commonplace itself to the highest and noblest uses. What I want to teach is this: the satisfaction of man can never come out of anything that is finite therefore man himself is not finite in any sense that can bring his nature into insignificance and contempt. Man can only be satisfied with the very fulness of God, therefore man is immortal. From the very circumstance that honey sates and returns from the appetite that once it pleased, I argue that there is no satisfaction in things sensuous, in things material, in things finite ; and that if we want rest, contentment, completeness, and peace we must find these in the infinite. Let us thus fearlessly apply the principle, and not handle it timidly. Apply it to the obtainment and possession of money. It is not in money to make any man rich. Men say they will be content when they have enough. Precisely. But what is enough? Name the amount, and say, That certainly is enough. So it may be in the distance, and whilst yet it is unobtained, but the moment you obtain the sum which you considered in your comparative poverty to be enough you will find that it is still too little. Much will have more, and more will magnify itself into more still. It is not in anything that is finite to satisfy that inward self of yours ; therefore, that inward self is greater than all outward great things, and there is something in you that requires a keener and more delicious sweetness than any the hand can gather. It is difficult to make men believe this doctrine. We have had rich men amongst us who

have preached it to us. The richest man in Europe was asked, "How does it feel to be a millionaire?" He replied, "It just feels as though you could pay twenty shillings in the pound." That was a man who retained his sanity; who kept his head upon his shoulders and his eyes in his head. But there have been men whose wealth has become their poverty, and whose riches have crushed them into the dust, in which they have spent their whole life.

Apply the principle to gaiety. The young life says it will be gay; it will not mope, it will not whine, it will see life, it will see the world, it will whirl through all the giddy dance, and will always be happy, with a new scene every day, with new surroundings week by week and month by month. To-morrow shall be as this day, and more abundant. A brighter light shall make the face brighter still. That is the poetry; what is the reality? The young life returns from the evening toils and enjoyments weary, sated—and, oh that continual headache! At first a headache only. The gas was too hot, the air was oppressive. It will be better to-morrow night. The next night comes, and, lo! on the following morning there is a twinge of heart-ache. Did that come of the gas, of the hot air, of the late hours? The headache might come from such causes, but this is a heart-ache. What do heart-aches come from? And do they come to young lives? Have they no pity upon the young, and fair, and happy ones? None. It is not in gaiety to make you glad. Hast thou found gaiety? "Eat so much as is sufficient for thee, lest thou be filled therewith, and vomit it." I would allow some liberty. I am not an ascetic monk who would seek to shut you up in a hermitage or cell far away from all society. I like to see you glad. I fear to see the first wrinkle on the young, smooth flesh. I call it an enemy. I say, Could not this dear face have been spared the ripping and wrinkling of old time and care? I would have you enjoy life. Hast thou found enjoyment? Eat so much of it as is sufficient for thee, but know when to stop; be master of the occasion. Say to the tempter: No more; so far you are a friend and helper, but if you come one step further than this you become a foe and deadly enemy; go back till I call thee again. By all the faint hearts, by all the dreary lives, by all the blighted

hopes, by all the wrinkled faces, by all the bent backs of those who have gone to find heaven in gaiety, I adjure you to eat only so much as is sufficient for you, lest you be filled therewith, and vomit it. What is the true meaning of these words? Eating and drinking in excess incapacitates the mind for realising the conception of immortality. Eating and drinking have only one day more, to-morrow we die! You can eat and drink until the poetry is killed in your soul. We have known young, fresh lives, full of dream and vision, take gradually to the eating of honey, and the drinking of wine, and the sating of animal appetite, until the eyes lost their speculation, until the head became distenanted of all great thoughts, and until the tongue once eloquent stammered and babbled, and only half told its foolish tale. Eating and drinking do not stop therefore, you see, at the body; they assail the mind. They go on until they bring down the daring wing or fancy, and the angel that is in the man is killed by the over-feeding of his body.

Let me ask one question; pray answer as frankly as I inquire. There is a man who has much cattle, which he feeds with the very finest food that money can buy and care gather together. His cattle live, so to say, in a state of daily luxury, but that same man starves his little children in the house. What do you say about him? That is my question. Let reason answer; let good feeling reply. I have stated the case in its naked simplicity. What is he? I will call him a base man—will you? Yes. I will denounce him as immoral—will you? Very well; that is precisely what you are doing if you are feeding your animal nature, and drinking yourself into a state of debauchery, and neglecting to feed the mind that makes you a man, and the sensibilities which distinguish you from the beasts of the field. Apply your own logic. But here comes the supreme difficulty. Men may have opinion without having faith. Men may give you a sound answer in the abstract, yet lack that peculiar something that turns opinion into courage, and sanctifies courage until it becomes faith. There can be no controversy as to whether over-indulgence is good or bad. Bad for body and soul, bad for the family, bad for society. That is your opinion, but no man is saved by his opinions. Remember that your opinion is contra-

dicted by your conduct. Opinion is to be passed through a process until it becomes faith. This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. An opinion may be expressed by a nod of the head. An opinion may be indicated by the uplifting of a hand, but it is in faith alone to answer temptation, to overcome the enemy, and to crush the serpent's head. Let me assume—shall I do so?—that some poor soul goes with me word for word, and says, "Would God I could turn my opinions into faith, what a different man I would be, and what a large life would open before me." So far, good; not an angel in heaven but will help you. It is not easy to go from opinion to faith. It is not easy to set the tempting honey and the tempting wine aside, and to say, No more. Any preacher that trifled with my temptations would be no preacher to me. I must hear one who acknowledges that mine is a difficult task, that mine is one of the subtlest diabolisms that ever tried to wreck a human life. It is easy for a man who never had any temptation to deliver a lecture to show you what to do. But we are talking to one another with the masonry of a common understanding. We are not talking metaphysics that lie millions of miles away from practical experience. But we are agreed that ours is a hard task, and we are agreed to ask God to overcome the enemy. Is that so? Then a beginning must be made; the final word must be spoken. When you speak that word you will create history upon earth and history in heaven. But it is hard. You will do it some day? That is an aggravation of your case. To postpone the fight is the success of the enemy. Now we are all in the same condemnation. The preacher is not a fine man and you inferior clay. We are all in the same position, there is no escape, we are in the same awful depravity; and if there be one voice only speaking, it is not a voice that speaks of itself, but takes up into its tones the thunder and the music of God's judgments and Christ's Gospel.

Then, with regard to others, I may say, How does God graciously conduct us into a conception of the greatness of human nature. He finds honey for us, and says, "See if it be in sweetness to satisfy?" And we eat the honey over-much until we know the agonies of satiety. We say, "No more of that. It is

sweet in the beginning, but it is as poison in the end. Never more will we touch that sweetness." God says to us, "Is it in wine to inspire?" And we take the wine, and the centres of nervous power are touched and titillated, and we begin to see figures in the air, and our voice acquires a new boldness, and we plunge into the conversation with suggestions that in our soberer moments we dare not have uttered. And we say, "This is the panacea, this is the true friend that will get us out of the darkness, and lead us up to the heights of true enjoyment." And we get more, and a cloud forms upon the mind; and more—and gradually we stumble in our speech; and more—and we lose our identity, and become worse than the beasts that perish; and we find that in wine is exhilaration, not inspiration; that whilst it gives with one hand, it takes away with the other, and it steals the senses which it at first excited. We find that it is not in wine to make the heart of man permanently glad. Thus, God sends us gold to make us rich. And we dig for it, and smelt it, and purify it, and make it into ornaments, and wear it; and at first we are as pleased with it as a child with a new toy, but at last we find that it can really do very little for us. It can only be changed at one counter. "Now," says God by his providence, "you see what you are, by seeing that sweetness cannot satisfy you, wine cannot inspire you, money cannot enrich you." Why? Because you are born in the image and likeness of God. It is the divinity that stirs within you; you cannot satisfy the divinity within you with honey, or wine, or gaiety. Who can satisfy the hunger of the soul with the grass of the earth? What is the argument? We are more than mortal; we know it though we cannot explain it. What we can explain is, of necessity, finite, and, in all probability, superficial. There is no other answer to the uprising of the soul in its noblest moods.

What, then, are you going to do? because you have very little time to do it in, whatever it is. And it gets shorter. You never knew an old man say that the years were so much longer than they used to be when he was a boy. Old men say that time flies. Men of experience say that their life is as a vapour that cometh for a little while and then vanisheth away. Old pilgrims, bending over their staves, tell royal Pharaohs that few

and evil have been the days of their servants. So, whatever we are going to do, we must do at once. "Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation." What say you? Who is on the Lord's side? I know what a battle you will have to fight. You say, if it were not for many complications which you cannot explain, you would do all that is now suggested. The case is a difficult one, but there have been others in circumstances quite as bad as yours who, by the help of the grace of God, have done the thing which I want you to do. The best way to do a thing is to do it; explanation will follow in due time. They that do the will shall know of the doctrine. Now, what are you going to do? This is business; this is not pleasure. This is not a transient interview having no purport and no use; it is business. What are you going to do? Do not live the fool's life, or you will die the fool's death. I know there are others who say, "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die." But you do not die to-morrow! If I were certain that you would die like dumb, driven cattle to-morrow, even then I should exhort you to be true and honourable and charitable, because virtue brings its own reward every day. But you do not die to-morrow. To die to live! The rich man died, and in hell he opened his eyes. We do not die to-morrow. We are not dogs; we have not been dogs in our life, therefore we shall not be dogs in our death. Moreover, the reasoning is false that says, "Eat and drink, for to-morrow we die." You do not live to yourself; you have your wife, your children, your friends, and they go down when you go down. You cannot say a bad word in your family without that bad word falling scorchingly upon the youngest life in your house. You could not die in the ditch like a forsaken dog without that sweet little child of yours coming one day to hold down its head in unutterable shame, because of a father who murdered his own life, and insulted every instinct that gives nobleness to human nature. The case is not limited by your own personality. Fifty years hence men may sometimes have to blush for you. By the greatness of the case, by its far-stretching issues, by its intrinsic importance, I adjure you to look to Christ, who came to save just such as you. If you are lost, he came for you; if you are dead, he is the resurrection and the life; if you are leprous, so that no man dare touch you, he dare,

he is your friend, your Saviour. His great heart-door stands open night and day, and he waits to be gracious. Come now. You have seen the world, and it is a lie; you have eaten its honey, and it brings sickness; you have drunk its wine, and it brings madness; you have tried its gaiety, and it brings sadness, and under the purple robe is an aching heart. "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

NOTE.

"The diet of eastern nations has been in all ages light and simple. As compared with our own habits, the chief points of contrast are the small amount of animal food consumed, the variety of articles used as accompaniments to bread, the substitution of milk in various forms for our liquors, and the combination of what we should deem heterogeneous elements in the same dish, or the same meal. The chief point of agreement is the large consumption of bread, the importance of which in the eyes of the Hebrew is testified by the use of the term *lechem* (originally food of any kind) specifically for bread, as well as by the expression 'staff of bread' (Lev. xxvi. 26; Ps. cv. 16; Ez. iv. 16, xiv. 13). . . . An important article of food was honey, whether the natural product of the bee (1 Sam. xiv. 25; Matt. iii. 4), which abounds in most parts of Arabia (Burckhardt, *Arabia*, i. 54), or the other natural and artificial productions included under that head, especially the *dibs* of the Syrians and Arabians, *i.e.*, grape juice boiled down to the state of the Roman *defrutum*, which is still extensively used in the East (Russell, i. 82); the latter is supposed to be referred to in Gen. xliii. 11 and Ez. xxvii. 17. The importance of honey, as a substitute for sugar, is obvious; it was both used in certain kinds of cake (though prohibited in the case of meat offerings, Lev. ii. 11), as in the pastry of the Arabs (Burckhardt, *Arabia*, i. 54), and was also eaten in its natural state either by itself (1 Sam. xiv. 27; 2 Sam. xvii. 29; 1 Kings xiv. 3), or in conjunction with other things, even with fish (Luke xxiv. 42). 'Butter and honey' is an expression for rich diet (Isa. vii. 15, 22); such a mixture is popular among the Arabs (Burckhardt, *Arabia*, i. 54). 'Milk and honey' are similarly coupled together, not only frequently by the sacred writers, as expressive of the richness of the promised land, but also by the Greek poets (cf. Callim. *Hymn. in Iov.* 48; Hom. *Od.* xx. 68). Too much honey was deemed unwholesome (Prov. xxv. 27). With regard to oil, it does not appear to have been used to the extent we might have anticipated; the modern Arabs only employ it in frying fish (Burckhardt, *Arabia*, i. 54), but for all other purposes butter is substituted: among the Hebrews it was deemed an expensive luxury (Prov. xxi. 17), to be reserved for festive occasions (1 Chr. xii. 40); it was chiefly used in certain kinds of cake (Lev. ii. 5 ff.; 1 Kings xvii. 12). 'Oil and honey' are mentioned in conjunction with bread in Ez. xvi. 13, 19. The Syrians, especially the Jews, eat oil and honey (*dibs*) mixed together (Russell, i. 80). Eggs are not often noticed, but were evidently known as articles of food (Isa. x. 14, lix. 5; Luke xi. 12), and are reckoned by Jerome (*In Epitaph. Paul.* i. 176) among the delicacies of the table."—SMITH'S *Dictionary of the Bible*.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we cannot understand our life: it is full of mystery; so bright, so dark: now one long day, full of music and light and joy; and then suddenly a great gloom of midnight, in which we can see nothing, hear nothing, feel nothing, but pressure and despair. Yet we love to live. Even in our poverty and loss and pain and dreariness, there is a wondrous magic, a marvellous fascination in the very act of living. What is this life but a spark of thine own duration, a hint of what is meant by Eternity, a revelation of the beginning of Immortality? All life is thy gift,—perilous gift! gracious gift! so difficult to be finite, so hard to be incomplete; so trying to see heights we cannot reach, and breadths upon which we cannot lay our little hands. Yet thou hast filled us with a strange spirit of ambition: we would know what is behind everything, above it, and below it; we want to read all the writing thou hast written upon the broad heavens, and we can hardly spell one word of it; yet the whole seems to mean—God is light, God is love, God reigneth. These lessons are enough for us to know now. They are the first lessons; all the detail and meaning, and furthest, deepest, grandest music must come by-and-by. Help us to believe this, to live in this noble hope, and to wait for it with all patience, industry, and resignation. We bless thee for all the comforts of life. Thou dost give unto us our health, and friends, and opportunities of progress, and our highest faculties; thou dost feed the inspiration of the soul by continued breathings from heaven, and thou dost promise to our expanding capacity larger thoughts, bounties now undreamed of as to their wealth and continuity. We bless thee for all the religious feeling which makes us lift up ourselves from the dust and set our whole being towards the light of heaven. We are not beasts that perish; thou art not a potter who having made a beautiful vase will dash it to the ground and set his foot upon the pieces; thou dost not mean us to complete the contemptible journey from dust to dust—too small a circle for the capacities and powers and aspirations with which thou hast enriched and ennobled us. This is not thy meaning. Thy purpose is other than this, whatever it may be, and however impossible to us to set it out in words. We feel the most of our religion: we feel our immortality. We would not have it explained; for then it would be a thing measurable and namable in equivalent terms: we would feel it, grope after it, have an inexpressible assurance of it, and touch all life's duties and sorrows with its peculiar—with its heavenly dignity. Thou dost visit us in various ways, to chasten our life, too educate our spirit, and to bring us to thy meaning of manhood. The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord. Help the bereaved to bear the stroke; give them light even in dark-

ness, and in the dreariest of all silence may they hear a voice speaking to the heart. Thou dost take away, and none can hinder; thou dost close the ear to our appeal, and on tired eyes there softly lies the stillest of all slumbers. This is thy doing, and man may but weep, and wonder, and then resign himself, and say, It is well: it is better with those who have gone than with those who have remained, for they have gone forward to coronation, and we abide to plough and sow, in all winds and weathers, in all tumults and uproars; to continue life's little business and to be stung by life's keen pains. Give all who suffer the nobler view, the further outlook, the larger life that abolishes death. Whilst we live may we live well, wisely, simply, trustfully; and may ours be the blessedness of those servants who are found waiting when their Lord cometh. Fill us with thy Spirit—Spirit of truth, light, liberty, and justice; make us rich with heaven's own goodness, make us strong men, and yet do thou cover all our strength with the beauty of tenderness; may our words be wise and firm, and yet may the tone in which we speak indicate the gentle heart, the loving spirit, the sympathising Soul. We bless thee for thy Son. O wondrous word! that God should have a son! we would see the Son: he may be like the Father; we cannot see the Father, we would therefore see his Son, for surely he will represent him, he will turn the speech of the Father into our mother tongue, and we may be able here and there to catch a word, and understand it, and to trust to such word for the larger revelation which is yet to come. We thank thee for the Cross. Once we did not understand it; it was to us grim and ghastly, full of all horrible feeling and suggestion; but now we see in it a new shape, a new thought,—the very heart of God; the mystery of redemption by blood, and the mystery of joy through sorrow, and the mystery of mysteries, life through death. Now there is no death to those who see the Cross and cling to it and trust to it; the bitterness of death is passed, and when death itself shall come it will be but a momentary shadow, fleeting before some invisible but mighty spirit. The Lord come to us day by day, for the day would be blank which brought no God. Give us strength and courage. May we abide in the sanctuary of great principles, and stand for ever in the temple of truth, and know that all kingdoms, tyrannies, oppressions, wrongs, must go down: for there is one coming who is the Son of man. Amen.

Chapter xxv. 16-28.

THE LAW CONCERNING EXCESS, ETC.

“Hast thou found honey? eat so much as is sufficient for thee, lest thou be filled therewith, and vomit it”* (ver. 16).

THERE is no denying that there are many sweet things in the world which may be partaken of to a limited extent. Properly used, they are agreeable to the palate, and men have a right to use them and to be thankful for them. All excess is

* See note, *ante*, p. 358.

an abomination. All excess brings its own punishment with it. We lose the very things we have gained when we indulge in exaggeration. We are not permitted to retain so much of the honey as was good for us after we have eaten to excess, for then we actually vomit all that we have appropriated. This law of excess has a bearing upon all the relations of life. If we express ourselves in terms of exaggeration we deplete the original compliment of its value. If we set too high a price upon any article we have to sell, we prevent ourselves doing a legitimate business. We are, therefore, to be wise in our use of words, reasonable in our determination of values, and considerate in the institution of claims. We are prone to think that if we ask much we may get less, but still may get more than if we had asked little. Thus words are used for gambling purposes, as mere tests and experiments, instead of being used as instruments for the clear and definite expression of thought and desire. Who can cleanse the tongue until the heart be made clean? Who can teach a man the right use of words to his fellow-man until he has been taught the right use of words to God? When a man can ask petitions at the throne of grace with moderation and reasonableness he will be able to turn round and speak to society in terms that are unmarred by excess or exaggeration. Say to the young: Certainly there is pleasure in many a worldly enjoyment; certainly there is enjoyment to be found in many things that are not usually brought within Christian definition as belonging to the higher manhood: but a man may eat too much bread, he may drink too much water, he may surfeit himself with honey; he may go too far even in legitimate directions; and having gone thus far, he has gained no advantage, but has actually lost the advantage with which he started. Moderation is enjoyment: temperance is the true delight: self-control is real power. Nothing is done by violence, overreaching, exaggeration: everything that is worth accomplishing can be accomplished by moderation of desire and by moderation of action.

“Withdraw thy foot from thy neighbour's house; lest he be weary of thee, and so hate thee” (ver. 17).

A maxim that is not properly understood and applied. This maxim is founded upon a deep philosophy. Even man may know too much of his fellow-man, and thus may fail in knowing

him as he ought to be known. Men should only see each other occasionally. This is true of friend and friend, pastor and people, doctor and patient; in fact, it is true all through and through the relations of life. Intermissions of fellowship prepare for the keener enjoyment of society. Without solitude or opportunity of retirement life would become intolerable. It is the holiday that makes work pleasant. After men have retired from work for a while they resume it with renewed zest; when a friend has been absent from our side he returns with the greater interest to report what he has seen and heard and felt. Thus by separation is union established: thus by abstention from intercourse is conversation stimulated and enriched. There is only one house which we cannot too frequently attend; there is only one Friend from whom we need never withdraw; there is only one exercise that never palls upon the man who enjoys it: let us come boldly to the throne of grace, let us pray without ceasing, let us walk with God, let us never withdraw from the light of his countenance. Who can exhaust the Infinite? Who can remain too long with the Eternal? Here we have room for completest fellowship, here we have opportunity for the satisfaction of our highest desires. The human is limited, the social is bounded on every side, but the religious recedes like the horizon and heightens like the summer heavens.

“If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink: for thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head, and the Lord shall reward thee”* (vers. 21, 22).

Once more we come upon the gospel before the time. This is the very last result of Christian teaching and spiritual refinement. “Thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head”: that is to say, thou shalt make him burn with self-reproach, when he thinks of the wrong which he has done thee in the days that are gone. Resentment only feeds resentment. He who is skilful in retaliation is skilful in awakening the mind of others to retaliation of a still keener sort. We are to kill our enemies with kindness; we are to perform the miracle of meeting hostility with complacency, injustice with forbearance; being smitten on the one cheek we are to turn the other also. It is true that these are mere ideals,

* See note, *post*, p. 381.

simply because we ourselves have not attained them ; we may have made them ideals only by not attempting to realise them. The religion of Jesus Christ is full of ideals which are impossible of realisation, still they are evermore appealing to us, calling us upward, and bidding us welcome to loftier regions. We can never overtake our own prayers ; if we could do so we should have no need to pray. When we prayed last we but prepared the pedestal on which we are to stand the next time we pray, so that we may reach to some higher height, and ask more boldly for greater things. The text brings before us the operation of practical Christianity. It may be said there is no evangelical doctrine in this text ; this is a doctrine of works, this is a doctrine of legality ; nothing is said about the Holy Spirit, nothing is said about the work of Christ, nothing is said about justification by faith ;—all that is literally true, but is spiritually and substantially false, for no man can work the miracle of this text except God be with him. It is the operation of the Holy Spirit alone that can make this state of things possible : it is through the Cross of Christ alone that a man can be so crucified as to put himself in this relation to his enemy. Let those who will be theoretical Christians, wordy and controversial theologians ; but he who would be a real Christian, and who would properly represent Christ to the world, will humbly and continually endeavour by his power to manifest these supreme graces, these glorious attributes of character. To actions like these there is no argumentative reply. The mere word-splitter is left behind in conscious dumbness when he beholds a meekness so sublime, a beneficence so unselfish, a self-control so perfect ; he can answer arguments, he can bandy words, he is skilled in retort and defence ; but he cannot answer an attitude of prayer, an attitude of heroic suffering, a temper of charity ; he has no reply to the generous hand that is stretched out in gifts to the enemy. Here the humblest Christian wins the proudest triumphs ; here the child of God shows that the age of miracles is not gone, but is only beginning.

“A righteous man falling down before the wicked is as a troubled fountain, and a corrupt spring” (ver. 26).

In the tenth chapter the mouth of the righteous was described as “a well of life,” whence issued living streams for the guidance

and encouragement of souls ; in this text it is supposed that a righteous man may yield to the pressure put upon him by the wickedness of his age, and through fear or hope of favour he may permit himself to be corrupted thereby : in the latter case, instead of being a well of life or a fountain of delight, he would become as a stagnant pool charged with poison, no longer affording refreshment to pilgrims, but shedding an evil influence, and bringing destruction upon those who stoop down to quench their thirst by the use of such waters. The possible deprivation of character is the subject of this reference. We are not to suppose that it is impossible for the righteous to be tempted successfully. Everywhere are we cautioned against this delusion. In the New Testament we have the exhortation, "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." No man out of heaven is perfectly secured against subtle and energetic temptations. When a man is threatened by poverty, by loss of position, by forfeiture of all those luxuries which constitute civilised life in its most tempting aspects, it is not easy for him to resist certain temptations ; but it is in such hours that character is really tested ; it is in such crises that men show of what quality they are. It is nothing to resist temptations which do not appeal to our intensest passions ; it is not to the credit of water that it does not take fire when a torch is thrown upon it ; to some men temptation is as a spark of fire thrown upon a magazine of powder. There is nothing so corrupt as corrupted goodness ; in such an instance we have not simply corruption, but we have purity itself dissolved and dissipated in all manner of iniquity : if the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness ! When wisdom is turned into the servant of folly, how profound and revolting is the servility ! Even so, when the righteous yield to the allurements of the wicked and become the children of disobedience, the very excellence of their former character adds aggravation to their present evil-mindedness.

"He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls" (ver. 28).

Self-control is one of the last results of true education. Silence may be mightier than passion. Looking upon the meek and forbearing man, we might, from a superficial view, accuse him of timidity ; whereas in reality his forbearance is a proof of his

strength. When a city is broken down and without walls, it is exposed to the attacks of the enemy from every quarter; it is without defence and without security; it offers an easy prey even to the feeblest assailants. Precisely so is it with him who hath no rule over his own spirit: he is excited by the smallest consequences; he is drawn away by the meanest allurements; he takes fire on the smallest provocation; he is the victim of his own passionateness; losing self-control, he loses what little wisdom he has gathered from experience, and so he becomes a prey of the enemy, and is brought into complete destruction. No man can control his own spirit as a mere act of discipline. Up to a given point this may be possible, and no doubt great success of a limited kind has been thus attained; but by control we must understand complete sovereignty, so that the man shall in all his passions and impulses be the willing servant of his own reason and conscience. Such a miracle can only be wrought in the human heart by the Holy Spirit; this is in very deed a conquest of grace: and this is the very seal of Heaven, attesting the reality of our divine sonship. How easy it is to return evil for evil, to indulge the spirit of retort and resentment; to yield to the poor philosophy of "giving as good as is sent," of returning a Roland for an Oliver, and of standing upon the perilous ground of "dignity"! On the other hand, how poor and feeble a thing it seems to be to hear without speaking, to receive indignities without vengeance, to suffer wrong without inflicting reprisals! Yet this is the very acme and crown of Christian discipline,—the very perfectness of character as formed by fellowship with Christ. When men have no control over their own spirit, they prove that their passion is stronger than their reason, that their self-love overmasters their understanding, and that their so-called sensitiveness, which is but a longer word for vanity, is of more consequence to them than is the proof of the indwelling and all-ruling spirit of justice and gentleness.

Chapter xxvi.

OBSERVATIONS ABOUT FOOLS,* ETC.

“As the bird by wandering, as the swallow by flying, so the curse causeless shall not come” (ver. 2).

SMALL birds, such as sparrows, are made for wandering, and the swallow is formed for flying, going where it pleases, and yet in both instances the flying amounting to little or nothing: so the curse causeless—that is to say, a curse spoken without reason—shall not come to any deadly effect; that is to say, it shall not reach the object towards which it was directed, it shall be but as a passing shadow and not as a crushing burden. Seed thrown upon stones does not come to fruition; so the curse that is misspent, or misdirected, or that is not deserved, shall come to nothing in the latter end, it shall simply wither away, or prove its own worthlessness and emptiness. Contempt often fails of reaching its mark. When contempt is directed against a holy man it does that man no harm, but it does harm to its own author. We thus see how strong a man may be in character, and how impregnable is the fortress of integrity. Men are really not injured from the outside by the bolts of vengeance, by the shafts of satire, by the sneers of contempt, or by the detractions of envy; men are only injured by themselves, by their own want of faithfulness, by their inconstancy, by their hypocrisy, by their disregard of spiritual culture. The curse causeless shall never reach its destination; it may seem to be well-directed and to fly with terrific energy, but it shall never smite the target of an upright and honourable heart. Thus is God the confidence of his people: thus is truth its own castle of defence, its own inviolable sanctuary, placed upon the mountains which never can be climbed by evil men, and settled upon rocks which never can yield to the poor assaults of malignant enmity. **Be strong**

* See note *post*, page 405.

in yourselves, and then you will be strong in society. If your own heart condemn you not, no external condemnation can ever really hinder you.

“Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest thou also be like unto him. Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit” (vers. 4, 5).

Do not descend to the level of the fool by disputing or arguing with him as if upon equal terms. Both the directions are thoroughly consistent one with the other. We must discriminate even amongst fools. Some fools are to be answered sharply, cuttingly, in their own language, or in language they can understand, lest they grow in impertinence and become strong in self-assertion or self-applause. On the other hand, the answer is to be given from a high level, so that it shall fall upon the fool, and not be spoken to him as if the interlocutors were standing upon common ground. Fools must be made to feel their folly, either by significant silence on the part of the wise, or by such a use of contempt as shall humble where it cannot instruct. Here, however, we are dealing with edged instruments, and therefore should use them with the greatest care. Unquestionably, there is a strong temptation to wither the fool, to crush him with a retort, to overwhelm him with a humiliation, and to extract a kind of victory from an encounter with his weakness. Sometimes, however, it is better to be silent than to be eloquent; to be forbearing than to be resentful; every man must consider the particular circumstances and direct his policy accordingly. We are never to lose dignity in our intercourse with men. We may be humble without being servile; we may condescend without prostration; we may teach others the truth as if we were representing not ourselves but the very God of truth. It is impossible to limit the action of the fool. The worst fools are they who may be strong in intellect, but who are wanting in the finer sensitiveness, in the keener sympathy, in the cultured taste, which distinguishes with an exact discrimination the difference between one act and another, where indeed there may seem to be but little difference. We have seen that a word spoken in season is precious as a gospel, and now we are to learn that a word spoken out of season, or spoken under the wrong impulse,

may be an insult to the very faculty and genius of speech, as well as a degradation of the spirit of morality.

“The legs of the lame are not equal: so is a parable in the mouth of fools” (ver. 7).

The legs of the lame hang loosely, and so are useless. The legs themselves are there, but being poorly hung they cannot be turned to use. Read: The legs hang down from a lame man;—or, The legs of a lame man are loose, and therefore are of no service to him: so is a parable in the mouth of fools. It is a beautiful parable, well conceived, well expressed, wanting in nothing that can give literary dignity or moral pertinence, and yet as used by a fool it becomes worthless, it is without point, without effect, without real benefit or service. What is true of the private fool is true also of the public fool; that is to say, of the man who preaches a grand gospel but does so without himself having any vital relation to it, without having turned that gospel into experience and illustrated it by example. Such a man has no right to have the parable of the gospel entrusted to him, and certainly he has no right to entrust it to himself. There is always to be a distinct relation between the speaker and the speech, between the faculty and the use to which it is put. When things are out of place they may become not only worthless but mischievous. Seed is to be sown in the ground; it is not to be thrown into the air, or to be laid upon marble slabs, or to be cast into iron furnaces; in all these instances it would be thrown away. Right words, wise parables, eternal gospels, are not to be entrusted to loose lips, to misdirected faculties, to foolish expositors: great gospels are to be entrusted to great hearts, and it is evermore to be felt that the speaker of the gospel is a man who has himself realised the gospel; where there is this harmony between the speaker and the speech the words will be simple, clear, and mighty.

“As he that bindeth a stone in a sling, so is he that giveth honour to a fool” (ver. 8).

The idea is that the stone is soon gone from the sling, is thrown away, and is seen no more, and is perhaps lost for ever: “so is he that giveth honour to a fool;” the fool cannot retain the honour, or he throws it away, or it becomes useless to him; it

is as a jewel mislaid, or as gold misspent : give honour only to those who can use it and turn it to greater honour. Do not give even one talent to a man who will fold it in a napkin and lay it aside. Give to him that hath, and he will increase more and more, by reason of industry, and the wise application of his faculties. You cannot make a fool a wise man by any external gift. The crown does not make the king. The hat of Aristotle would not make a fool into a philosopher. We are only made great and rich by that which is internal, that which is part of ourselves, part of the very substance of the soul. So true education is an interior work, and culture wrought by the Divine Spirit, an estate of mind and feeling brought about by continual communion with heaven. By "a fool" we are not always to understand a man of poor intellect, a man of mean mind, or a man who has not had external advantages of an intellectual kind : we are often to understand the withered heart, the moral fool, the depraved nature, the man who mistakes moral distinctions and confounds right and wrong, up and down, true and false, always making mistakes as to which is which, and never acting with that moral certainty which comes of identification with the spirit of truth.

"As a thorn goeth up into the hand of a drunkard, so is a parable in the mouth of fools. The great God that formed all things both rewardeth the fool, and rewardeth transgressors. As a dog returneth to his vomit, so a fool returneth to his folly. Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit? there is more hope of a fool than of him" (vers. 9-12).

Thus the "fool" has no friend in the Book of Proverbs. Everywhere he is kicked from one position to another ; being welcome nowhere, being despised everywhere. A master produces everything by his own care and oversight—that is to say, he himself sees that it is properly done ; but the fool hires others to do his work, he hires passers-by—that is to say, he will accept the help of any person that comes casually in his way, without inquiring whether that person is skilled or not, and so the work is badly done. The fool is indolent ; he does not form the right conception of work ; he looks upon work as drudgery, and as involving the degradation of the worker ; he does not see that work is a divine vocation, and that the very meanest form of work may become religious and sacramental when handled in

the right spirit. Fools return to their folly, though they know it to be folly; yea, seven times will the fool go back again upon ways which he knows will lead to destruction. The fool thus contracts and establishes what may be termed a second nature, and as the leopard cannot change his spots, neither can the fool change his life; yea, even if for a while he seems to have become a better man, yet as a dog returneth to his vomit a fool returneth to his folly. Yet there is a man who is even more contemptible than the fool, and that is the man who is wise in his own conceit: the Wise Man does not fear to say that there is more hope of a fool than of him. The Pharisees had conceit of themselves; they called themselves righteous, and prided themselves upon being the very elect of heaven; others prided themselves upon being the children of Abraham, or of having Abraham to their father; but the publicans and the harlots returned to God, whilst the self-righteous were excluded from the opening kingdom of heaven; Pharisees and lawyers and mighty men of learning, who imagined themselves to be the favourites of God, actually rejected the counsel of God against themselves, supposing that by reason of their intellectual strength and their historical fame they had no need of an enlarged revelation. We are only right so long as we are truly humble. Progress is impossible where docility of spirit has ceased. Except we be converted and become as little children—docile, simple, obedient, trustful—we cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven.

“The slothful man saith, There is a lion in the way; a lion is in the streets. As the door turneth upon his hinges, so doth the slothful upon his bed. The slothful hideth his hand in his bosom; it grieveth him to bring it again to his mouth. The sluggard is wiser in his own conceit than seven men that can render a reason” (vers. 13-16).

As the fool has no friends in the Book of Proverbs, so the sluggard or the slothful man is everywhere encountered with contempt and disgust. Creation has no room for sluggards. The whole economy of life is constructed, as we know it, for the proper exercise of our faculties, for the development of industry, for the completion of beneficent service. Every man should be up early in the morning and take advantage of the dawn; every man should have a distinct plan in life, and should patiently and gratefully realise that plan, line by line; to be without a policy

of life is to be without sufficient inspiration and impulse, is to be the sport of every chance, and is to be the prey of every temptation. Sluggishness increases in a man. The spirit of slothfulness is to be fought against as men would fight against a beast of prey: it lulls the senses: it takes away the very strength which it professedly conserves; it destroys the man whom it appears to bless. We are only safe in being faithful, active, devoted to some worthy cause. Every day should have its own plan, every morning should come as a bright opportunity, and every night should find us once more at the altar of praise, thanking God for a day's work well done. It will be difficult for a slothful man to become energetic in middle life. Slothfulness should be early extinguished. We do not act kindly to a child by doing everything for him; on the contrary, we act foolishly and cruelly towards the child himself. Self-help should be one of the earliest lessons taught to children. Every child should be his own servant; every life should learn the great rule of obedience, that it may come gradually and sensibly into the great blessing of rulership. He who cannot serve cannot rule. "The sluggard is wiser in his own conceit than seven men that can render a reason;" the word "seven" is to be regarded here as expressive of a round number or a perfect number: the sluggard multiplies his own minority into an overwhelming majority: he says, Do I not know my own nature best? do I not understand my own constitution better than any other man can understand it? do I not know how much sleep I require? ought not I to be the best judge of when I should lie down and when I should rise again? who are they that oppose their judgment to my consciousness? Thus the proud fool talks to his own destruction, and apparently argues his way down into worthlessness and oblivion.

"He that passeth by, and meddleth with strife belonging not to him, is like one that taketh a dog by the ears. As a mad man who casteth fire-brands, arrows, and death, so is the man that deceiveth his neighbour, and saith, Am not I in sport? Where no wood is, there the fire goeth out: so where there is no tale-bearer the strife ceaseth. As coals are to burning coals, and wood to fire; so is a contentious man to kindle strife" (vers. 17-21).

The fate of the fool and of the sluggard is carried still further, and is made to include all meddlers, all madmen, all deceivers, and all tale-bearers. Men are thus classified in order that their

several infirmities and criminalities may be the more clearly discriminated. But in reality they all belong to one class: as before God, they are fools, mentally and morally; they will wither away under the operation of Divine law. We are not to be excited with strife: that is the true rendering of "meddling" with it; we are not to undertake quarrelling or to take revenge on our own account, nor are we to mix up ourselves in the disputes of other persons, especially where those disputes are beyond our comprehension as to their origin and purpose. By this exhortation we are not to understand that we are to let iniquity go without condemnation, or wrong to pass by as if it had our approval; on the contrary, every weak man belongs to every strong man; every child has a right to look to every older man as to a father in the time of persecution, unjust suffering, or any manner of neglect that can be avoided, or under any condition that may be ameliorated. We are not to see a strong man oppressing a weak man, and to pass by, saying that the strife does not belong to us. The reference is not to those strifes which involve solemn moral issues, but to those excitements and contentions which are of a purely personal kind, and which cannot be settled by external interference. But when external interference is called for it must be impartial, it must be directed by a spirit of fair play to both parties: we must not take up casually with one cause as against another, but must always be identified with the cause which we have carefully and thoroughly proved to be true and righteous. Mad men cast about firebrands, arrows, and death; and often excuse themselves by the frivolous inquiry, "Am not I in sport?" We answer, No; there can be no sport in the use of such weapons or implements. We must fix definite limits to the exercise even of personal rights. No man has a right to throw his lighted torch upon his neighbour's wood house; no man has a right to send a letter, "private and confidential," in which he confesses murder or reveals the possible perpetration of a desperate plot. There is always a higher law to be consulted in such matters. Our conventional regulations and customs are permissible within strictly defined limits; but we must not subordinate the higher law to the lower. Where one of the laws must give way it is the smaller that must yield, and not the greater. How easy it is to utter censorious criticism;

how easy to excite a suspicion; how easy to rouse a spirit of jealousy! Then, when we see the evil results which our folly has wrought, we fall back upon the frivolous inquiry, "Am not I in sport?"* Again and again we must answer: No; there is no sport in attacking character, in ruining reputation, in undermining social standing: there is a limit to sport, and the wise man will know it and observe it; as for the fool, he should not be believed even when he is speaking the truth; the truth may be believed, but the fool himself may be rejected and discredited.

This chapter ends with a very solemn warning, to which all men would do well to take heed—"Whoso diggeth a pit shall fall therein." We are fond of digging pits for other men; we lay snares for their feet: we say we will test their honesty, we will test their strength or character, we will see what their pledges are worth; so we put temptations in their way, and behold, we who set the snare fall into it, and we who dig the pit are engulfed in its depths. We are not called upon thus to test one another merely for the sake of testing. Where there is any just suspicion, or where there is any rational doubt of the integrity of a man, it may be well to test our feeling without bringing the man himself under immediate accusation. But work of this kind should be done with infinite delicacy. God is watching us. We think we will surprise our foe, or even our suspected friend; and behold, we ourselves become the victims of our own cleverness. Be frank, be upright, be just, and then be fearless. If thou hast aught against thy brother, go and tell him between thee and him alone. Truly "honesty is the best policy," not in the mean sense of being the wisest calculation, but in the sense of being akin to the method of God, the Spirit of Christ, and the way in which the affairs of the universe are administered. Suspicious men often imagine themselves to be clever men; they fail to draw a proper distinction between prudence and suspicion: prudence in the case of such men becomes narrowness of mind, and not philosophy of conception; it is a little, nibbling, frivolous, pedantic prudence:

* "The teacher cuts off the plea men are so ready to make for themselves when they have hurt their neighbour by their lies, that they 'did not mean mischief,' that they were 'only in fun.' Such jesting is like that of the madman flinging firebrands or arrows."—*The Speaker's Commentary.*

it is a self-defeating calculation of events, because it is uninspired by the spirit of benevolence and hopefulness. God is against thee, thou poor withered heart, man of suspicions and jealousies, man in whom there is no holy, burning, purifying love. He that seeketh his life shall lose it: he that loseth his life for Christ's sake shall find it. It is better to trust and to be deceived than to be suspicious and to be narrowly and temporarily successful. Let us proceed upon the conviction that "men would be better if we better deemed them," and if, alas! we are disappointed in this conviction, then let us betake ourselves to such remedies as may be available. Meanwhile Jesus Christ evermore stands before us as our example, our inspiration, and our authority. Blessed are they who accustom themselves to his yoke, and who carry his burden as a delight.

NOTE.

"If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink: for thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head, and the Lord shall reward thee" (Proverbs, chap. xxv., vers. 21, 22). "The precept here has the special interest of having been reproduced by St. Paul (Rom. xii. 20). But it has also a special difficulty. While the first clause rises to the level of the teaching which bids us 'love our enemies and do good to them that hate us,' the second seems at first sight to suggest a motive incompatible with a true charity. We are told to feed our enemy when he is hungry, because in so doing we shall 'heap coals of fire on his head,'—*i.e.* in order to inflict on him the sharpest pain, or even draw down on him the divine judgment (comp. 'coals of fire' in Psalm cxl. 10). Benevolence in such a case seems only a far-sighted calculating malignity. The explanation given by many commentators, and in part adopted by Augustine ('De Doctr. Christ.' iii. 16), that the sense of shame will make the recipient of undeserved and unexpected bounty glow with blushes till his face is like the red-hot charcoal, and his heart is hot as with the burning and passionate complaints of penitence, though it avoids the ethical difficulty, is hardly satisfactory. The use made of the words 'coals of fire' in Lev. xvi. 12, seems to the present writer to suggest a better interpretation. The high-priest on the day of atonement was to take his censer, to fill it with 'coals of fire,' and then to put the incense thereon for a sweet-smelling savour. So it is here. The first emotion caused by the good we do may be one of burning shame, but the shame will do its work and the heart also will burn, and prayer and confession and thanksgiving will rise as incense to the throne of God. Thus, as in the words which St. Paul adds to the proverb, 'we shall overcome evil with good.'—*The Speaker's Commentary.*

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, do thou grant unto us the hearing ear and the understanding heart, that not one word of all thy law may be lost upon us. Open thou our eyes that we may behold wondrous things out of thy law; open our understanding that we may understand the Scriptures; may the Holy Spirit who inspired the writers inspire the readers also, that they may know the meaning of God's law and God's love. May thy Book be no dead-letter to us, may it reveal the living spirit, and bring us into harmony with all thy purposes. To this end we pray thee for a double portion of the Holy Spirit. Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth. May we lose nothing of the music of thy voice, may every tone find the heart; may every appeal draw forth our strength, and constrain our loving obedience; then shall our life be bright, the days shall come laden with blessings from on high, and the night shall breathe a benediction upon the toil of the day. We would live and move and have our being in God; we would test everything by the scales of the sanctuary: we would try the spirits whether they be of God, we would know whether we are honest by the spirit of the Cross. We would be crucified with Christ that we may be buried with him and raised with him in his resurrection; and we would show that we are risen with Christ by setting our affections on things above, by always seeking the higher life, the wider liberty, the deeper, purer love. May our whole life testify to our heart's sincerity and to the desire of our spirit for the very perfectness of God. We put ourselves into thy hand: lead us, and we shall not stumble; direct us, and we shall not miss the end, but shall find ourselves at last in the city of God. Help us to carry our load bravely, in the very strength of Christ, and by the energy of the Holy Ghost; may we not quail or tremble or show that we have lost our eternal hope, but steadfastly, bravely, lovingly may we carry on the struggle and bear the burden, and may we accept our destiny, believing that God is working in all things, and that his whole purpose is love. Deliver us from evil, establish us in all goodness and in the love of truth; and do this in the power of Christ and for the sake of Christ. He died for us; his Cross is our answer, our surety, our refuge. At that Cross we desire to leave every prayer. Amen.

Chapter xxvii. 1.

“Boast not thyself of to-morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.”

THE UNCERTAINTY OF TO-MORROW.

WHAT is "to-morrow"? Who can define it? Who can be certain as to its contents, or even as to its duration? Days are not counted by the hours that are within them, but by the work to which those hours are consecrated, or by the pain by which they are made memorable, or by the hopes which shine from them as new glories in life. Holy Scripture is very sensitive about our treatment of to-morrow. For example, in this case it is not to be boasted about—that is to say, it is not to be pledged or mortgaged to our ambition: it is not to be treated as private property, as if we had a right to dispose of it: it does not in any sense belong to us: therefore we have no rights in it; we have to receive it as a gift and to use it in the spirit of faithful stewardship. There must be no vaunting as to time: we are simply to live according to the will of God, and to take our moments one by one as precious gifts to be used for the glory of the Giver. On the other hand, whilst we are not to boast about to-morrow, Jesus Christ is particularly emphatic in warning us not to be anxious about it. If we may not triumph in the light that is coming, neither are we to permit ourselves to be devoured by a canker in view of the possible obligations and burdens of the coming day. Observe, therefore, how strict are the exclusions: first, boasting is excluded; secondly, anxiety is excluded. We have seen in many instances how men have inflicted pain upon themselves by an unwise use of the time called "to-morrow." One man said he had much goods laid up for many years; therefore he would take his ease, eat, drink, and be merry; but God said unto him, "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose things shall those be, which thou hast provided?" We can lay up the goods, but we cannot lay up the years; we can build the barn, but we cannot with certainty build the future; we should therefore understand by what limitations we are bound, and should work within those limitations with all thankfulness and energy.

By "to-morrow" we are not to understand literally the next twenty-four hours; we are rather to understand the future in general,—it may be a day, or a week; it may be a year, or ten

years. We fix within our own minds periods within which divine providences are to culminate, or within which warnings are to fructify, and because we have made a miscalculation we think that providence itself has been guilty of negligence. "If that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; and shall begin to smite his fellow-servants, and to eat and drink with the drunken; the lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of, and shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." It is impossible to be too careful in defining what we may regard as "delay" on the part of God. We do not understand the word; we presume to be God ourselves when we thus lay bounds to the divine movement: a thousand years are in God's sight but as yesterday when it is passed, or as a watch in the night. With God there is no time in our sense of the term. Until we rid the mind of the sophism that we can calculate and reckon justly, we shall be continually disappointing ourselves by fixing periods of fruition, and times for realisation of good or of evil. "Watch, therefore: for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh." Ignorance is as certain as knowledge. To know that we are ignorant may be the beginning of wisdom.

A wonderful part has been played by "to-morrow" in human life. It is not ours, as we have said, and yet we could not do without it; we have never seen it, yet it is necessary to us; but for the future, the past would be a great mockery, as but for the harvest the seedtime would be a period of toil and fretfulness. We may say that posterity has done nothing for us, but we thus speak ignorantly, for it is posterity that operates upon our thought like an inspiration, now stirring it with holy ambition, now chastening it with wise fear, now enriching it with abundant hope. What we are going to be to-morrow! To what triumph we are coming on the third day! We promise ourselves wondrous things in a year, in a century; then we shall see all mystery cleared up, then we shall prove how sagacious have been our foresight and our arrangements in respect of all the necessities of life. Within proper bounds, this action of the

future is to be welcomed as an inspiration, but because of its preciousness we must beware lest it become a temptation. Men may put off until to-morrow what they ought to do to-day ; then is to-morrow perverted and wasted, being no longer an inspiration, but the refuge of indolence and folly. The true preparation for to-morrow is a wise use of the present. He who prays well to-day shall sing well to-morrow. The only way in which earnest men can provide for to-morrow is by looking well to the immediate duty. Rest assured that if we are faithful to-day we shall not be left without comfort to-morrow. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof, and sufficient unto the day is the joy thereof. God has made great promises to faithfulness, and he has not reserved his heaven as the only blessing, the blessing of an undefined and indefinable future ; he promises a present heaven of satisfaction, consolation, and blessedness of every quality and degree : even now, night by night, we may hear the sweet voice of approbation saying, "Well done, good and faithful servant." There is a sense in which the days are singular ; that is to say, they are separate one from another, and within the limits of each is the judgment-seat set up, and men are tried as for good or evil behaviour ; in another sense all the days are brought together into one solemn totality, and are treated under the designation of "life," and upon the whole period of the existence is the divine judgment pronounced. Whether in the one case or in the other, whether in singularised days or in totalised life, the solemn rule holds good that the only way to prepare for the future is to take earnest heed to the present.

If we do not know what a "day" may bring forth, how can we know the universe ? We must reason from the little to the great. As a matter of fact, we cannot tell what may happen within the next few moments ; we live in the excitement of uncertainty, unless we live in the repose of faith. Such being the case, we may reason upward from the little to the vast, and may wisely say to ourselves, If we cannot tell what a day may bring forth, what do we know of what is hidden in the depths of eternity, in the counsels of the Infinite, in the whole purpose of the living God ? Ought we not to be humble, docile, expectant ? If we knew to-morrow and the next day, if we could read the volume

of the next half-century, if we could with certainty forecast the occurrences of the next hundred years, we might encourage ourselves in the belief that we could comprehend more perfectly the decree and purpose of God, we might presume upon our knowledge, and carry it to a point involving a species of divinity : but we are beaten back at the very first : we cannot see through the next door that is shut upon us ; we cannot see beyond the walls of our own retreat : so therefore we are taught humility, whether we will accept the lesson or not ; we are bowed down in our frailty, we are made consciously ashamed of our ignorance, and how boastful soever our temper, we are obliged to confess that we cannot tell with certainty what will occur on the morrow.

Out of this lesson should come an instruction larger than itself. The result of this realisation of fact should be the cultivation of a right spirit in regard to time and development, and the whole mystery of futurity. Ours should be a spirit of dependence ; we should say, If the Lord will, we will do this or that. We should take nothing into our own hands as if by prescriptive and inalienable right ; we should remember that our breath is in our nostrils, that we are as a wind that cometh for a little time, and then vanisheth away. Again and again we should remind ourselves that we all do fade as a leaf, and that we have nothing that we have not received ; out of this abasement comes legitimate and final exaltation ; without a consciousness of such abasement we see nothing as it really is, our hearts are perverted by ingratitude, and we exclude the light from the whole area and scope of our life. Whilst we are in a state of abasement it by no means follows that we are in a state of despair ; on the contrary, we are exhorted to hope continually in God, and to be assured that he who made yesterday his tabernacle will not leave to-morrow like a vacant temple. A right reading of the past will rekindle the lamp of hope. How has God dealt with us ? What was his care of us in six troubles ? When the night was long, how fared it with us ? Did any star gleam through the gloom ? Did any whispered song assail us in the darkness ? Was any friend raised up to us as if with suddenness ? Recalling all the holy past, we will sing of the goodness of the Lord whilst we have our **breath**, and to-morrow shall be as this day, and more

abundant, not because of our wisdom and foresight, but because of the infinite loving-kindness of the Lord. Living in this spirit, the future has no burden for us, no sting, no cloud of judgment. Come with it what may, the Lord himself will bring it with his own hand, and delivered by that hand even the trials shall be blessings, even chastisement shall be for the purification of our souls. To live in this spirit is to escape the solitude and desolation of conscious orphanhood, and to live in the very smile and within the very embrace of God.

Whether we are nominally religious or not, we are confronted by the unknown, the incalculable. Close the Bible, yet we cannot shut out the mystery of to-morrow; renounce all metaphysical religion, yet there is a practical religion which we cannot escape, the religion which comes of superstition, uncertainty, mingled hope and fear, the struggle of various sentiments: all this dis-ennobles our vaunting ambition, and brings us to the lowest levels of humiliation. The proudest man is bound to acknowledge that he is as ignorant as the meanest creature of the secret which to-morrow will reveal. It might be supposed that if we closed the Bible, and abandoned the sanctuary, we should escape all mystery, and should be enabled to enjoy a land all light and all simplicity. Facts are against this false theory. Without a Bible, without a conscious spirituality, without a religious reading of life present and to come, there remain a thousand mysteries, dark, troublous, tormenting, charged with the very spirit of fear, animated by the very spirit of mockery. He who has no religion may have no faith, but he has infinite credulity: he who believes on the living God and regards himself as a little child, created that he might be developed, instructed, and perfected in wisdom and goodness, may have little credulity, but he has living faith; he will hear the word, "Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him, and he shall bring it to pass," not as an idle sentiment, but as a profound and practical philosophy. The Christian has no "to-morrow" as a fear: he has an everlasting to-morrow as to the hope of growth, progress, and advancement in all capability and faculty for divine service. Woe to the man who has so used his yesterday as to have no hope of to-morrow! Blessed be the man who so uses the present as to divest the future of all terrors!

Chapter xxvii. 2-22.

SELF-BOASTING, ETC.

“Let another man praise thee, and not thine own mouth ; a stranger, and not thine own lips” (ver. 2).

SELF-BOASTING is always a source of weakness as well as a revelation of vanity. In vanity there is no substance ; it is idle breath, it is foolish vapour. When a man is left to praise himself it is evident that he has lived an inverted life, not a life full of blessedness and comfort in relation to other men. The sun does not praise himself, but under his splendour and warmth men look up and say how pleasing a thing it is for the eyes to behold the light. “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.” On the other hand, we must beware of a very common and perilous deceit. There is a sense in which every man ought to be able to praise himself ; otherwise the applause of the public will be felt by him to be a mockery and a lie. Our own heart should not condemn us. The Psalmist was wont to glory in his integrity, and to point to it as his refuge in the time of misunderstanding. We are forbidden to publish our own praise, to commend ourselves with a loud voice : we are not forbidden to vindicate our honour when it is assailed, or to defend our action when it is called in question. Whilst we are forbidden to use the language of vanity, we are exhorted to use the language of honest confession when we have been consciously wrong : “Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed.” We cannot command the praise of the world, but we can deserve it. We should be careful not to live for the minor commendation, for the mere word of flattery ; we should not covet the incense of false compliment, but should so live that the solidity of our work will attract attention and justify commendation. He in very deed

is a foolish man who lives in order that he may be praised. We are not so much admonished by this verse not to care for the praise of men as to quench within ourselves the spirit of vanity. When a man is vain he is weak, because he supposes there is no farther cause for diligence and action on his own part, for he has accomplished that which he had purposed in his heart. Nothing is done whilst anything remains to be accomplished. Let us not reckon up the past with a view to settling down to an ignominious rest, but let us constantly reckon it that we may observe its shortcomings and hasten to repair its omissions.

“Open rebuke is better than secret love. Faithful are the wounds of a friend ; but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful ” (vers. 5, 6).

By “secret love” we are to understand the love that never discloses itself in positive kindness ; a love that is professed, but never realised ; a sentiment that never attains the dignity of practice. Such love never comes even in the form of open rebuke ; it is indolent love ; if it is love at all it is so lost in languor as to be absolutely without sacred or happy effect. No friend loves to wound another, yet he believes that in rebuke there may be honour, and in chastisement there may be a purification of friendship. “The kisses of an enemy are deceitful” ; that is to say, they are plentiful, they are showered upon their object, and yet there is nothing in them of real meaning or of substantial value ; they are not the seals of genuine affection, they are the empty compliments by which vanity relieves itself or displays its folly. There should be more frankness in human intercourse. Men should speak to one another in the clearness and simplicity of earnestness. In a true life there is no room for falsehood. A look may be false, so may a smile, so may a kiss, so may an embrace, so may a compliment ; it requires the very Spirit of God to search the heart and the life, in order to dislodge the enemy, so ghostly is his form, so subtle is his operation. Let us pray mightily to Heaven, saying, “Search me, and try me, and see if there be any evil way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.” Great care is needful of course in the administration of “wounds.” If thy brother should trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone. Sometimes we are called to the exercise of open rebuke ; thus—“Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may

fear." The Apostle Paul gave examples of this faithful wounding:—"When Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed"; "When I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said—" The Psalmist agrees with the proverbist in this desire for honest and timely rebuke—"Let the righteous smite me; it shall be a kindness: and let him reprove me; it shall be an excellent oil, which shall not break my head." We cannot read of the kisses of an enemy without remembering the most treacherous kiss ever planted on the human cheek: "He that betrayed him gave them a sign, saying, Whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is he: hold him fast. And forthwith he came to Jesus, and said, Hail, master; and kissed him." Many men prefer the kisses of an enemy to the wounds of a friend: this is because they themselves are indolent, vain, self-seeking; they do not inquire into motives; it is enough for them to have the immediate and transient blessing. A friend is not necessarily friendly because he delights in wounding another. In proportion as his friendship is large and wise will he feel the delicacy of even hinting at a rebuke. He will rebuke himself more than he will rebuke another. So clearly and tenderly will this be the case that in rebuking another he will approach the unwelcome and uncongenial task with a timidity and misgiving that will add to the blessing he is about to administer. Let there be nothing boisterous, blatant, violent, ostentatious about a rebuke; let it be given rather as if a preparation for approval, with a self-restraint which will increase its pungency, and with a religiousness that will elevate its dignity.

"Thine own friend, and thy father's friend, forsake not; neither go into thy brother's house in the day of thy calamity: for better is a neighbour that is near than a brother far off" (ver. 10).

By "near" we are to understand near in feeling, and by "far off" we are to understand far off in feeling. Men should not treat the relations of life with frivolity. One generation after another should but contribute a succession of reasons why old friendships should be consolidated and perfected. Friends are the most precious treasures. One may not necessarily feel this with equal acuteness at all times, yet there come periods in life when we naturally look around for the friend who can pray, or

advise, or interpret us from our own point of view, or speak the word of light, or pay the price of ransom. Jesus Christ recognised the continuity and faithfulness of those who had been with him in his sorrow; said he, "Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations." Fickleness in friendship proves that the friendship is but superficial. Have confidence in the man, and do not always be exposing that confidence to the test of incidental experiments, as if you could only trust your friend one act at a time, saying within yourselves, Although he has been faithful up to this point, he may be faithless ever after. We are not to have confidence in the separate actions of a man, but in the man himself; then when the separate actions are mysterious, indistinct, even ambiguous, we are to have such confidence in the man himself as to relieve ourselves of all anxiety regarding special actions or peculiar incidents. Do not make a mere convenience of your brother's house by going into it only in the day of calamity. We should visit our friends in sunshine as well as in darkness. Some friends are never known to us except when their hands are empty; then they discover us, importune us, and endeavour to shame or coerce us into sympathy and co-operation. In the sunshine we need friendship, the friendship that will keep us from presumption, or vanity, or idolatry; in the darkness we need friendship, the friendship that will keep us from despair, from bitterness of spirit, from complaining against God. Sometimes a neighbour is nearer than a brother: the neighbour sees us in our proper relations, in the right atmosphere and surrounding; he is not embittered by resentful memories, nor is he plied by selfish considerations: he is enabled to take a large and impartial view of our circumstances and purposes. "Give a portion to seven, and also to eight; for thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth": "He that hath friends must show himself friendly": "There is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother."

"Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend" (ver. 17).

Wit provokes wit; laughter excites laughter: man was made for man. He who separates himself from his own kind deprives himself of stimulus and inspiration: for the right quickening and highest utility of life friction is indispensable. History is full of

instances in which mutual help has been of the greatest advantage. The whole Bible exhorts men to think of one another in weakness and misfortune. "They helped every one his neighbour; and every one said to his brother, Be of good courage." Sometimes all we want is the encouraging word, the one stimulating sentence. It is not enough to say, "Be ye warmed and filled," because there may be actual bodily hunger; but it is sometimes enough to say, "Be of good courage," for all that was needed was a stimulus of faculties ready for action but disinclined because of fear. The human voice has in it a mystery of sympathy: an exhortation may be an inspiration. There are religious circumstances under which conference becomes essential to encouragement and progress—"They that feared the Lord spake often one to another: and the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name." All wisdom is not with any one saint: let each contribute what he can to the general stock of wealth: sometimes the little child will supply the one jewel that was wanting; sometimes the feeblest member of the company will through his very feebleness utter the most expressive and pathetic prayer of all. We are to remember, too, that sometimes men fall down and require to be assisted to their feet. "For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up." So whilst there is a place for solitariness in the religious life, there is also a large place for companionship. We cannot tell which of us shall fall. No man must say that he alone is safe and that he himself goes out to help up others. He himself may be the first to fall. If he think contrariwise let him take heed, for in his very boasting there is danger. The strongest of us needs to be helped sometimes, and how often it happens that the weakest can help the strongest. The Apostle Paul continually recognises his indebtedness to those who were, according to the judgment of this world, weak and poor and even contemptible. There is a great apostolic exhortation to which we should take heed—"Let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works." We are necessary to one another; we are one another's complements. What one man lacks another man has: therefore we should in this highest,

broadest sense have all things in common, so that the poor intellect shall avail itself of the treasures of the greatest mind, and the least of the world's saints may count upon the protection of the most honourable sons in the household of God. Christianity is not a divisive but a uniting force. There is nothing of contempt in all its holy and benevolent spirit. No man is excluded from its hospitality because of his littleness, his frailty, his poverty. We are not Christ's if we have not the spirit of the Master, and that spirit was one of all-inclusive benevolence, a spirit that could never be satisfied whilst one soul was lacking from the household. In this way of mutual encouragement and mutual inspiration we may be doing good unconsciously. We never know where the light of a smile may fall; we know not how a word of praise or commendation may be borne by the wind in many directions, so that it may fall upon hearts needing just such a gospel, and may descend upon lives that were withering for want of refreshment. Christianity is a great humanising and consolidating power; it makes the whole world one sphere of beneficent labour; it constitutes all mankind into one trustful and beneficent society.

“Though thou shouldest bray a fool* in a mortar among wheat with a pestle, yet will not his foolishness depart from him” (ver. 22).

Thus again is the fool encountered with the contempt of the wise man. By “the fool” we are not to understand a man of weak mind so much as a man of weak character, a man who is foolish in his heart, vain and self-conceited in spirit, boasting as if he knew much whilst he knows nothing, and holding himself up as a scholar highly educated and fully equipped when in very deed he has not begun to learn the very elements of true wisdom. “Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil.” The fool receives chastisement without knowing the meaning of it. The Lord pleads with such, and pleads without avail. “Why should ye be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more: the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint.” But for the testimony of history and the corroboration of experience, we should think it impossible that a man should receive divine

* See note, *post*, p. 405.

correction without instantly kissing the rod that administered it, and obeying the wisdom it was meant to inculcate. Yet from the earliest times prophets and apostles have mourned that divine correction has been thrown away,—“Thou hast stricken them, but they have not grieved; thou hast consumed them, but they have refused to receive correction: they have made their faces harder than a rock; they have refused to return.” A tremendous power this on the part of man. The very iniquity of the soul in a sense proves the soul's greatness. Men think they can outlive the divine thunderstorm. Souls imagine they can outlive the very punishment of hell. How lofty is the ambition, how ineffable the presumption of man! Even God himself would seem to be left without resource in the matter of those who pass through his corrections with a disobedient heart. The Lord himself knows not what more to do. He asks in parable what more he can do for his vineyard than he has done. The conflict must be left to the exposition and arbitrament of time. It would seem as if eternity itself could scarcely conquer the obduracy of the soul. “The fifth angel poured out his vial upon the seat of the beast; and his kingdom was full of darkness; and they gnawed their tongues for pain, and blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and repented not of their deeds.” Over this tragedy we must draw the veil. We cannot bear to look upon such agony. Why will men be stricken any more? Why will the potsherd fight against its maker? Why will the puny arms of flesh stretch themselves out against the lightnings of heaven? Our God is a consuming fire. It is impossible that God can be overthrown in the tremendous conflict. That man is not overthrown in the first instance is a circumstance to be referred to the compassion of the forbearing God. His mercy endureth for ever.

Chapter xxviii.

THE FLIGHT OF THE WICKED, ETC.

“The wicked flee when no man pursueth : but the righteous are bold as a lion” (ver. 1).

SUCH flight is not so irrational as it may at first sight seem to be. Even here there is a deep philosophy. When wicked men flee, they suppose themselves to be fleeing from pursuers, and by so much they are acting in many cases irrationally ; but in reality they are attempting the impossible task of fleeing from themselves. When a man is in a position of innocence he considers it impossible that any man can attack him. Such is the mystery of an innocent character ; it is without suspicion, without fear, without apprehension of any kind ; being good and true itself, it cannot imagine that others can be of a different quality ; or if it admits the difference in theory it can never bring itself to suppose that such contrary quality can array itself in a hostile attitude against goodness. A blessed provision is this ministry of fear in the life of the bad man. He knows he ought to be pursued, and for that reason he cannot divest himself of the thought that he is being followed. Every rustling leaf is a pursuing avenger ; every unusual noise is the assurance of impending judgment. All this is but a translation of the man's inward state into outward and concrete form. Wickedness condemns itself ; wickedness sentences itself to its own proper doom. If one might so say, this is the only consolation which lost souls can have, namely, that in being lost they are suffering the just reward of their deeds. This sense of justice done may help to mitigate what otherwise would be intolerable even in human prisons. What is said of the righteous is the necessary counterpart of the affirmation regarding the wicked. The righteous man is at one with God, and therefore he fears no controversy. To be in one's place in the great system of things is to be lifted above fear. When the soul wanders from God it

is without friends and without reasonable hope; it lives in tumultuous excitement; it exists in the intoxication of its vanities. The great lesson therefore is that men should avoid that which is wicked and cleave to that which is good. Such advice is supported by all the experience of mankind. It is important to notice that this is not a theological vagary, but a real and solemn fact in actual life. If wickedness were a theological term only, it might be left amongst unintelligible metaphysics, in reference to which strong-minded and practical men might not concern themselves. Wickedness, however, is not only metaphysical, having a profound and solemn spiritual aspect; it is a fact in life, a fruitful tree, whose quality can be at any moment tested, and having been tested the unanimous verdict of the world is that it is poisonous and deadly. But are righteous men in very deed as bold as lions? For a detailed answer to this inquiry we must look very much to the individual constitution of the men. Even some righteous souls have been wanting in courage. They may be courageous in great trials and straits, but in some instances they have failed to bear their testimony with sufficient emphasis in the presence of overruling and hostile forces. We shall know what men are when we see them under the cloud of the final judgment; an opening heaven and an opening hell will soon disclose the real quality of all souls. Until then, boasting is vain, and timidity may be misunderstood; men are what they are in the presence of the final test. The righteous can afford to wait.

“Evil men understand not judgment: but they that seek the Lord understand all things” (ver. 5).

Evil men do not understand what is right. How can they? Being wrong themselves, how can they appreciate right in others, or right in its own essence? “The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man.” The effect of evil-doing upon the mind is to destroy the original power of understanding. It is in this direction that the divine complaint runs in the prophecies of Jeremiah—“My people is foolish, they have not known me; they are sottish children, and they have none understanding:

they are wise to do evil, but to do good they have no knowledge." On the other hand, "They that seek the Lord understand all things": their whole intellectual level is heightened, their mental perceptions are quickened, their moral stature is elevated, and they are invested with a sensitive sympathy which knows things afar off, and can discern between qualities, however finely they may be shaded into one another. "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself." Not only are the good to be blessed with what are known as distinctively spiritual blessings; they are to receive mental illumination, they are to be intellectually strengthened, their natural sagacity is to be enlarged and quickened into a truer and keener penetration—"The meek will he guide in judgment: and the meek will he teach his way." All knowledge does not come through the medium of formal learning, as, for example, by attending school, by reading books, and by passing critical examinations; there is a spiritual genius, a high, keen, responsive sympathy, which overpasses all the mere processes of intellectual acquirement and realises its results without toilsome labour. We have a right to expect divine inspiration, if we be in Christ, and if our souls be hidden in the Eternal God as in an inviolable refuge. If we live and move and have our being in God, we have a right to expect that every idea will bear the divine stamp, and that every aspiration will be but a return of the divine breathing—"But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things. . . . The anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him." Here is a standard by which we may measure not morals only, but the highest form of intellectual life. Whatever is immoral is also intellectually untrue. There is no atheistic genius. What may appear to be such is only limited to letters, forms, mechanical forecasts; it does not penetrate moral revelations and realities, it does not predict with truthfulness and precision moral qualities and issues. A good character is the basis of a great mind. It has not been uncustomary to elevate mind at the expense of morals, that is, to describe men as being intellectually great but morally feeble: there is of course a certain

limited sense in which this distinction is valid ; but in all higher senses, in all inclusive meanings, it is impossible to have a really brilliant mind apart from a really brilliant heart. The Apostle Paul describes the distinction in the Epistle to the Ephesians (iv. 18), where he speaks thus : " Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart." Christian men should avoid all compliments to the head at the expense of the heart. Christian men are called upon to look first at moral conditions, and secondly at intellectual conditions. We are only just to the law of God in proportion as we elevate character above acquisition. On Christian men a great responsibility in this direction necessarily rests. On the other hand, the man whose heart is right can never neglect the culture of his mind. The very fact that his heart is right with God will lead him to quicken every faculty and power he possesses that he may the more perfectly comprehend the divine economy, and the more certainly know the purpose of God in all things outward and inward. The divine light fills the whole nature : it pours its glory on the mind and on the heart alike, and drives away all darkness from every recess of our complicated nature. " God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

" He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination " (ver. 9).

This is a confirmation of chapter xv. 8—" The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord : but the prayer of the upright is his delight." Here we have wicked men offering sacrifice as if they were religious, and as if they could separate character from ceremony. It is easy to conceive how wicked men would be only too glad to compound for their sins by paying for any number of sacrifices. God will not allow such a method of escape from moral responsibility. We cannot pay our way out of evil ; we cannot ceremonialise ourselves into a state of righteousness before God. The sacrifice itself may be that which is literally prescribed in the law ; it may be costly, it may be offered with great ostentation, but being offered by wicked hands it is worthless and abominable. A great doctrine is laid down

in this text. If men will not obey they cannot pray. The idea is that men persuade themselves that they can escape the obligations of the law, and make up for all such neglect by lengthening their prayers. The judgment of the divine word is against this mischievous misapprehension of duty. If we will not do the law we may offer our prayers, but they will fall back upon us unanswered, they will indeed increase our condemnation. Who can refuse to listen to a book thus bold in its distinctions, thus inclusive in its moral claims, thus lofty and holy in its judicial tone? The book exalts the law, for that is divine and eternal; and only on the basis of obedience can prayer be associated with any rational hope of reply. Men have said unto God, "Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways." On the other hand, men have professed to have done many mighty works in the name of Christ, and on that ground they have claimed to be admitted into the heavenly kingdom. But Jesus Christ inquires for obedience, insists upon obedience, magnifies obedience; he has no blessing for the disobedient soul, he has nothing but anger for those who set aside the statutes and commandments of God. The great law of the Old Testament and of the New, and of the eternal and unwritten Testament, is, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." Here is a ground of accusation against the professing but unreal Christian. His prayers are not to be counted as amongst his merits or deserts; he is a disobedient man, he has turned away his ear from hearing the law, and is listening only to fables and tales and fictions, meant to excite and gratify his fancy; from the solemn, profound eternal law he has averted his ear, and therefore, though he pray with mighty eloquence, in his eloquence there will be nothing persuasive or availing: across his prayer God will write as with a finger of light the word "abominable," and will return the prayer to the empty heart that pretended to offer it. Glorious is this testimony: a continual inspiration is this blessed assurance: if we have not received answers to our prayers let us go back and search our hearts diligently, for it may be we shall discover that the reason of our having had no answer is to be found in the fact that we turned away our ear from hearing the law. The reason of unanswered prayer is not in God, but in man.

“He that tilleth his land shall have plenty of bread : but he that followeth after vain persons shall have poverty enough” (ver. 19).

Land was given to be tilled. Land will do nothing for us except in reply to our own labour. We cannot leave even land to itself, trusting to nature to give us what we require for the satisfaction of our hunger and the clothing of our nakedness. Land is to be subdued, to be brought, as it were, into a state of obedience; it is to be tilled according to divine law, and is to be cultivated in a deeply religious spirit. When men look upon the tillage of the land as so much drudgery, the land will seem to feel the contempt or neglect of those who cultivate it for merely selfish purposes. All work should be looked upon as religious and sacramental. There is no drudgery in work. It is true that work may be so treated as to become drudgery, and service may be degraded into servility, and industry may be debased into the labour of captivity: good men will reason from the other point, and say with thankfulness that the ground was cursed for man's sake, that work is part of the great education of life, that without industry prayer is impossible, and that without attention success of the highest kind never can be attained. Life should be a continual call, not only upon the imagination but upon the reason; not only upon the reason but upon the conscience; and every day should be regarded as an opportunity for increasing not only the wealth of the hand but the better wealth of the soul. The great law of cause and effect, of reward and punishment, operates here again, as we have seen it in innumerable instances. Industry means plenty, indolence means “poverty enough.” We cannot be following both after vain persons and after our own proper work. We must choose between the two, and the earlier in life men make their choice the better for themselves. At some point in life discipline must take effect; it is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth; if he will not bear it then, he will certainly be called upon to bear it afterwards. Vain persons will do nothing for us in the day of poverty; we shall cry unto them, but they will not heed; we shall supplicate them as with the solemnity and energy of prayer, and they will mock our intercessions. Vain persons and vain customs lead to vain issues. Why will not men consider this, and thoroughly believe it, so as to escape the lure and the snare spread for their captivity and overthrow?

“He that is of a proud heart stirreth up strife : but he that putteth his trust in the Lord shall be made fat. He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool : but whoso walketh wisely, he shall be delivered” (vers. 25, 26).

The proud heart is always stirring up strife by struggling for pre-eminence, and the proud heart is often rewarded only with vexation and disappointment. Pride comes to no good in any sense or in any way. Pride of heart beclouds the intellect, turns aside the integrity of the understanding, and perverts even plain facts. From beginning to end the spirit of the Bible is against pride; not one word is ever said in its favour or commendation. On the other hand, humility is continually exalted, and meekness of soul is every day rewarded with some larger view of heaven. The proud man can never be contented. When he rises it is only to some pedestal from which he can see further wealth yet to be coveted, and further territory yet to be unrighteously claimed. When we trust in our own hearts we live in wicked isolation. We are not here in the presence of that self-dependence which comes as the result of a large reading of history and a large comparison of facts; we are not in the presence of real self-dependence, but in the presence and under the dominion of false pride. We are called upon to walk in wisdom, and to remember that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Those who put their trust in God will not find in themselves an answer to the enigmas and mysteries of life, but will continually turn to heaven that the key may be given to them wherewith to unlock the stubborn gate. “O Lord of hosts, blessed is the man that trusteth in thee”: “Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is.” All history has testified to the vanity of the heart trusting in itself. “When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof.” Peter trusted in his own heart when he said with loud boastfulness, “Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended. Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee.” We are not large enough to be self-complete. Everything within us testifies that our completeness is in another, and not in ourselves, yea, is in the Creator and not in the creature. “See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise.”

Chapter xxix.

A STIFFNECKED PEOPLE, ETC.

“He, that being often reprovèd hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy” (ver. 1).

MEN hardened their necks against the yoke of God, which is described by Jesus Christ in Matt. xi. 29, 30. Those who thus harden their necks shall be destroyed; that is to say, shall be shattered or dashed to pieces like a potter's vessel that cannot be put together again. This shattering shall be final—“without remedy.” Nothing more can be done for the man than has been done by the process of frequent and affectionate reproof. By “reproof” we are to understand warning, expostulation, remonstrance, a process of pointing out to men the consequence of the actions which they are performing so heedlessly. In ancient times the Lord said, “I have seen this people, and, behold, it is a stiffnecked people.” We read of the children of Israel that they continually hardened themselves against their Maker, yea, and defied him as if it were to his face. “They mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against his people, till there was no remedy.” It is complained again that “they obeyed not, neither inclined their ear, but made their neck stiff, that they might not hear, nor receive instruction.” We have the same term used in the New Testament; for example, by Stephen when he exclaimed, “Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye.” We cannot safely dispense with the element of warning in any great process of human education. The warning voice may indeed be despised as the voice of croaking and complaining; it may be charged as being wanting in encouragement and stimulus, but in reality the warning voice is only such that it may become a voice of encouragement. It is no

pleasure to the apostle to warn or threaten or denounce. But he is bound to do this, because he is appointed of God as a watchman, and the blood of the people will be required at the watchman's hand, if so be he has fallen asleep or has been unfaithful to his vocation. God will take away the heavy yoke when we have taken away hardness of heart from before him. Ere our first tear has fully fallen God will relieve us from the charge of the heavy yoke. "Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off." Prestige, ancestry, old and established advantages shall go for nothing in the day of the divine wrath, when God comes to judge those who have scorned his counsel and rejected his messengers.

"When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice: but when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn" (ver. 2).

So the voice of the people is here the voice of God. There is a spirit in man, and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth him understanding. Righteousness in authority is no mere or barren sentiment; it is a tree most fruitful in happy consequences. Everybody knows when the government is in the hands of wicked men, for a blight seems to fall upon society, and all things young and lovely and musical flee away as from a threatening shadow. Men cannot govern in wickedness and yet have a really happy nation. When righteousness is at the head of things, all the flowing streams carry health and pleasure whithersoever they go. "Righteousness exalteth a nation." Throughout the whole scope of human history, the same sacred and solemn testimony is borne. "When it goeth well with the righteous, the city rejoiceth: and when the wicked perish, there is shouting." Men have confidence in legitimate enterprise and speculation when virtue is at the head of affairs: let an honest nation propose a loan, and instantly the whole world is eager to take it up, not because the interest is great, or the promises are splendid, but because whatever is offered will certainly be forthcoming with punctuality and exactness. When wicked men perish there is indeed shouting, the shouting of joy and gratitude, as there would be when a poison-tree is cut down, or as when a beast of prey is slain, or as when a great danger is averted. "When righteous

men do rejoice, there is great glory : but when the wicked rise, a man is hidden. . . . When the wicked rise, men hide themselves : but when they perish, the righteous increase." Illustrations of the rule of wickedness and the rule of righteousness will be found in the Book of Esther :—"Mordecai went out from the presence of the king in royal apparel of blue and white, and with a great crown of gold, and with a garment of fine linen and purple"; "The city of Shushan rejoiced and was glad"; "But when the king and Haman sat down to drink, the city Shushan was perplexed." If, therefore, only for economical reasons, men should always vote for any government that best represents the most virtuous sentiments of the nation. Do not trust to brilliant statesmanship, but to brilliant character. Where the one cannot be had except at the expense of the other, let us make a point of electing to stand by integrity, uprightness, solid and unselfish patriotism. The nation does not want brilliant wickedness; better infinitely that it should have conscience, righteousness, fearless integrity. What is true of the nation is true of the family; what is true of the family is true of the individual man. Let your character be strong, large, generous; if possible, cultivate your mind to a corresponding degree of enlargement, but if the one must suffer neglect, see to it that you do not neglect the culture of your moral affections and sentiments. Why? Not only because of what these affections and sentiments are in themselves, but because, as we have already said, it is impossible to cultivate with pious industry the moral nature without at the same time attending with carefulness to the excitement and satisfaction of the intellectual faculties. It is, alas! possible to be very careful about intellectual culture and to be wholly indifferent to moral development; but it is, happily, impossible to be anxious about moral development and to be indifferent to intellectual expansion and culture. Therefore for every reason let men be anxious about their moral education, for in the end there shall arise from such attentiveness great results of a personal, social, political, and intellectual kind.

' If a wise man contendeth with a foolish man, whether he rage or laugh, there is no rest" (ver. 9).

Wise men should therefore leave the strife before it is begun. Whether the wise man treat the fool with haughty disdain, or

with good nature, the result will be the same, that is to say, the fool will not cease from his strife or folly. Everything is thrown away upon the fool.* Possibly the sense may be that the fool himself rages and laughs: it is impossible for him to listen judiciously to any arguments that may be offered: he laughs without reason and he denounces without reason; his laughter is madness: in short, he is a fool, a dull stupid person, headstrong in his own way, lying quite beyond the line of reasoning or persuasion. Always let a fool alone.

“The poor and the deceitful man meet together: the Lord lighteneth both their eyes” (ver. 13).

The rich and the poor meet together, but the Lord is the maker of them both. We see the Lord both in men and in their circumstances. It is practical atheism to regard God as the Creator of the man and as having nothing to do with the man's surroundings. “The Lord lighteneth both their eyes,” that is to say, each of them, whether rich or poor, oppressor or oppressed, owes his life to the living God, and from that living God each shall receive due judgment in the end. Whatever may be said of the circumstances of each as to their origin or explanation, it is certain that the life of each is derived from heaven, and an account of it is due to the divine Giver.

“Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he” (ver. 18).

By “vision” understand revelation. Where the connection between the natural and the supernatural is cut off, destruction is the necessary consequence. The word “perish,” however, does not etymologically in this case mean destruction; a more literal rendering would be: Where there is no revelation the people run wild; that is to say, each man is a law unto himself;

* “The fool of Scripture is not an idiot, but an absurd person; not one who does not reason at all, but one who reasons wrong; also any one whose conduct is not regulated by the dictates of reason and religion. Foolishness, therefore, is not a condition of privation, but a condition of wrong action in the intellectual or sentient being, or in both (2 Sam. xiii. 12, 13; Psalm xxxviii. 5). In the Proverbs, however, ‘foolishness’ appears to be sometimes used for lack of understanding, although more generally for perverseness of will.”—KITTO'S *Cyclopædia of Biblical Literature*.

individual conscience is magnified above general sentiment, and being unduly magnified it becomes a source of trouble rather than a symbol of the divine judgment. Even conscience may be perverted. When conscience inspires a prejudice the result is mature and mischievous pharisaism. Men must live upon the supernatural because they themselves are more than merely natural: they have aspirations that lift themselves above the heavens; they have stirrings and impulses of heart which can only be satisfactorily interpreted by religious explanations. The divine vision is given in some sort to every man. Every man's conscience ought to be accepted as a revelation of God. But here we cannot too frequently insist that conscience itself is exposed to perversion. Saul thought that he was doing good when he was doing evil: he was under the impression that he was obeying God when he was destroying the disciples of Christ. Our personal impressions should be rectified by a profound study of human nature and of human history, and should especially be rectified by lofty and continual communion with heaven.

“A man's pride shall bring him low: but honour shall uphold the humble in spirit” (ver. 23).

The lowly in spirit shall lay hold upon honour. “He that exalteth himself shall be abased.” Continually is pride brought to the dust. Unless men really understand the measure of their strength, and the number of their days, they will become the victims of false impression, and will addict themselves to mischievous pursuits. The Psalmist seemed to grasp the occasion when he said, “Behold, thou hast made my days as an handbreadth; and mine age is as nothing before thee: verily every man at his best state is altogether vanity.” The Lord has promised to look with special graciousness towards the man who is poor and of a contrite heart, and who trembles at the divine word. God's grace is promised for the revival of the spirit of the humble, and the sustenance of the heart of the contrite ones. It is curious to observe how some men are soon brought to destruction by an improvement in their circumstances. They have not moral ballast enough to enable them to bear with dignity continual accession of fortune; they miscalculate; they suppose that their riches will abide for ever; they think that he

who is rich is strong ; out of all these sophisms there comes moral looseness, and from moral looseness there soon comes a general overthrow of the spirit and even of the surrounding circumstances. Sad it is to observe how good fortune becomes misfortune ; the very goodness of God as seen in the bountifulness of his providence is turned to the disadvantage and ruin of the man who does not receive that goodness in the right spirit. Be sure that God who made us knows how much honour or wealth we can sustain ; when he draws the line and says, "Hitherto shall fortune come, and no farther," he knows that any addition to what we already possess would destroy our equilibrium, and cause us, it may be, to plunge into some infinite chasm. What have we that we have not received ? If we have genius, the light is not of our own kindling ; if we have great practical power, we hold it as a trust ; if we have wealth, we should remember the words, "The Lord thy God giveth thee power to get wealth." Humility is the salvation of character. Humility, however, cannot be put on ; it cannot be arranged for, or be made matter of calculation, as who should say, See how I succeeded in humbling myself, or in clothing myself with the beautiful garments of modesty. Humility is the result of divine action in the soul. To have seen God is to have been cleansed from all vanity ; to have been near the king is to turn our eyes with contempt upon all the circumstance and fading glory of this transient world.

Chapter xxx.

THE PRAYER OF AGUR.

WITH the twenty-ninth chapter the Proverbs of Solomon come to a conclusion. The remaining portion of the book may be regarded as an appendix divisible into three parts:— (1) The words of Agur the son of Jakeh; (2) The words of King Lemuel, giving the prophecy which his mother taught him; and, lastly, the praise of a good wife. The words of Agur are, according to the best authorities, to be traced to some unknown sage whose utterances were of a kindred quality with those of Solomon himself. The wisdom of foreign nations was held in high estimation by the Jews, in proof of which refer to 1 Kings iv. 30, 31: "And Solomon's wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the children of the east country, and all the wisdom of Egypt. For he was wiser than all men; . . . and his fame was in all nations round about." Although he was wiser, yet his wisdom may have been of the same quality. One mountain is higher than another, but both are mountains. The Book of Job is considered to be of an undoubted foreign origin, being probably the work of some Arabian author. It is a mistake to suppose that the Bible ignores wisdom that is not within its own limits. The Bible looks upon all men as divine creations, and upon every man as probably possessing some portion of the secret of the Almighty. The excellence of the Bible is found in the fact that whilst it contains, either in germ or in explicit statement, all the wisdom of the ages, it adds to that wisdom some revelation of its own, or a peculiar accent of delivery, or a special charm, or a unique expression; for a long time it may be on the same level with other sacred writings, but suddenly it separates itself from them and assumes a lofty and unapproachable dignity of thought and expression. It has been charged upon the Bible that it contains many things which are to be found in other sacred books. As well charge it

with being printed in the same type as the Koran, or the works of Confucius. The alphabets may be the same, the type may be identical, many of the words may be mere repetitions, and yet there may be a speciality which gives unique distinctiveness to Bible words and Bible thoughts. The right reader of human history will find that the nations are made of one blood, and that the voice of humanity, when undisturbed by unreasoning passion, or perverted by unholy prejudice, is in reality one and the same. The unity of human nature is everywhere attested when life comes to critical points and is called upon to express its most urgent and poignant necessities. The word "prophecy," in the first verse, is a term which is constantly employed to express the action of "utterance": the prophecy is the message which a prophet bore or carried to his hearers, and is often one of gloom rather than of joyous import. By prophecy we are not always to understand prediction, but teaching, exposition, the highest and deepest philosophy. Probably Agur belonged to North Arabia, and it is supposed that Lemuel might be king of the same Arab tribe. Ithiel and Ucal were probably disciples of Agur: the one name means "God with me"; the other name means "I am strong." There have been not a few mystical and fanciful interpretations of these terms. We should beware of all such interpretations, for they minister to vanity rather than to instruction. When Agur says in the second verse, "Surely I am more brutish than any man, and have not the understanding of a man," he feels so contemptible in his own estimation as to realise that he can scarcely be the handiwork of God. He feels as if he were unworthy of a Creator so lofty and wise. Self-contempt may be the beginning of true wisdom. Here is a rebuke to that pride which brings destruction, and to that haughtiness which precedes a fall. Every man should know exactly how little he is, how frail, in some aspects and senses how worthless, and out of this self-abasement will come a correct conception of the possibilities of life and destiny of the soul. We must not begin too high. Children of the dust should begin where God himself began them: they did not begin as divine, and then proceed to incarnation; they began as dust, and then received the divine breath. The contrary was the process with our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ: he was in the form of God, and thought it not robbery

to be equal with God; yet he took upon him the form of a servant. The first Adam is of the earth earthy; the second Adam is of the Lord from heaven. Notice the contrastive point of origin: men began as dust and grew up into divinity: Jesus Christ began as Lord of life and took upon him the seed of Abraham. Yet there was a meeting-point, and that meeting point is at once a mystery and a revelation: great is the mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh; yet we behold his glory, the glory as of the Only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. We understand him though he came from above and we ourselves came from beneath. We have all one Father.

From this low and proper self-estimation Agur sends forth certain great questions which have troubled and divided the intellect of men in all ages.

“Who hath ascended up into heaven, or descended? who hath gathered the wind in his fists? who hath bound the waters in a garment? who hath established all the ends of the earth? what is his name, and what is his son's name, if thou canst tell?” (ver. 4).

Agur cannot grasp the grand idea of the divine existence: he sees partial glories; sections and phases of truth gleam upon him with sudden and startling brightness; but the totality of things is beyond him: he cries out mightily after that which is lacking, if haply he may discover it and rejoice in its personal possession. The questions bring out the littleness of the creature as compared with the majesty of the Creator. Agur wants to hear of some one who has been through all the sanctuary of God, who has taken the dimensions of the Lord's temple, and comprehended all the reason and poetry of the divine administration. Is he not here unconsciously crying out for the living Christ? It would be fanciful on our part to say that he was doing so, yet who can tell exactly all the meaning of his own prayer? Is not God behind every prayer as well as above it? Is he not the author of prayer as well as of the answers to prayer? Hitherto we have been too much inclined to think of God only as the answerer of prayer, and not as its inspirer: we should place God at both ends of the prayer; at the end which expresses necessity, and at the end which expresses fulness and gratitude. Agur still feels that the universe is to be comprehended; at

present it is to his mind an infinite and unknown quantity, yet he is persuaded that there must be someone who holds the key of the infinite dominion. We have said that in all ages religious questions have troubled men. We read in another book, "Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? It is as high as heaven; what canst thou do? deeper than hell; what canst thou know? The measure thereof is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea." Then the inquiry comes down from above as well as rises from beneath. God himself turns this very ignorance on the part of man into a reason why man should worship, inquire, and prostrate himself in the abasement of adoration—"Gird up now thy loins like a man; for I will demand of thee, and answer thou me. Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding. Who hath laid the measures thereof, if thou knowest? or who hath stretched the line upon it?" What is true of the physical universe is true of that larger creation which Christians recognise as the spiritual origin of life and progress; specially is it true of the wondrous fulness of the grace and goodness of God. The mightiest mind that ever consecrated its powers to the Christian cause exclaimed in wonder, "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!" Jesus Christ himself assures the Church that only One has ever seen the length and breadth, the depth and height of the universe of God. "And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven." What has man seen of the universe? Yet how pompously and loudly he talks about his acquisitions of knowledge, about his scientific attainments, and about his right to formulate conclusions, and establish dogmas of orthodoxy and heterodoxy! We are but of yesterday, and know nothing. Tomorrow, as we have often said, is the secret of time, which the wisest man can only guess at and cannot fully reveal and determine. Thus are we beaten back in our highest ambition, and are taught that we are only wise when we are religious; only most philosophical when we are most trustful and obedient.

Agur lays down an estimate of the divine word which the

ages in all their multifold experience have only confirmed and if possible enlarged.

“Every word of God is pure : he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him. Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar” (vers. 5, 6).

The glories of the divine word are here compared with the glories of nature, and a supreme excellency is assigned to the revelation of God. “Every word of God is pure,”—that is, it has been tried, tested, proved, and ascertained to be good, not by speculation, but in the fire of experience. By “pure” we are to understand gold that has been purged of dross. Not only is every word pure in the sense of holiness, but every word is pure in the sense of having been tried and severely tested. Nothing is left to conjecture or to speculation : the word of God stands upon the rock of human experience. The Psalmist says, “The words of the Lord are pure words,” and then he proceeds to explain what is meant by the word pure, saying, “as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times.” Then again, when the Psalmist extols the divine word, he gives after every tribute to its excellence a reference to human experience ; he says, for example—“The statutes of the Lord are right,” and his proof is, “rejoicing the heart” : he continues, “The commandment of the Lord is pure,” and his reason for saying so is, “enlightening the eyes” : he continues, “The fear of the Lord is clean,” and the reason he assigns is, “enduring for ever.” So we have not only high philosophy but simple experience ; we can begin with the philosophy, or we can begin with the experience ; but at whatever point we begin we reach the conclusion that “The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.” Agur gives as a reference to human experience this statement in the fifth verse, “He is a shield unto them that put their trust in him.” That is a statement which can be tested ; we can refer to our religious life, to the providence of God as seen in our own history. We must not confine our attention to this day or to that day, but take in a sufficient breadth of time, and doing so we shall be able to draw a just conclusion as to the government of God seen within the circle of our own going. “O Israel, trust thou in the Lord : he is their help and their shield. O house of Aaron, trust in the Lord : he is their help

and their shield. Ye that fear the Lord, trust in the Lord : he is their help and their shield." God is very jealous lest any should add to his words,—not by way of explaining their meaning, which is legitimate, but in the way of supplying supposed omissions, or adding something that is of another grade and quality. The flower is not added to the root ; it comes out of the root as its natural and final expression. So the word of the Lord in its terse expressions may be expanded into volumes and libraries, and yet nothing may be added in the sense which is forbidden. When men add their own fancies or their own inventions to the divine testimony they are guilty of felony ; the addition is but so much subtraction, for it perverts the meaning, it lessens the force, it modifies or destroys the original authority. "Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you." Speaking of his own book, John says that he received this message : "If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book : and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book."

Having surveyed himself, and the universe, and the spiritual revelation of God, Agur seems to concentrate his thoughts upon two practical points. After all, this is what we ourselves must do. We can look at our own nature until we are filled with contempt ; we can look upon the universe until we are overwhelmed and filled with dismay, giving up in despair the thought of ever knowing the boundless creation of omnipotence : and we can look upon the divine word until we see that the word of God is infinitely greater than his works : after all this survey and study we have to come back to one or two practical things, and rest upon these, assured that from these alone can we move on with any security and hope of larger studies and wider investigations.

"Two things have I required of thee ; deny me them not before I die : remove far from me vanity and lies : give me neither poverty nor riches ; feed me with food convenient for me : 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 in vain" (vers. 7-9).

This is practical piety. May it be with us as it was with Agur. When we return from our vast contemplations may it be to take up a policy of actual conduct, of simple piety, looking well to the issue of our own actions, and putting ourselves trustingly and lovingly under the inspiration of God. Let the Lord be our purse-keeper; let us put the key of our door into God's hands; yea, let us give ourselves over to him wholly, that he may control our uprising and our down-sitting, our going out and our coming in. Agur would have "food convenient for" him; that is, literally, "bread of my portion": just the simple daily appointment: the little quantity needed from sunrise to sundown: Agur would thus be as a child at home, not asking for anything great or grand, but simply that life might be sustained, that life itself might be turned to the highest and holiest purposes. "Godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content." The apostle himself learned this lesson, saying, "I have learned in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content." The word "learned" is the keyword of the whole expression. It did not come naturally, it was not an instinct or an intuition; it was a matter of simple, real experience. Many things may have been tried, many promises may have been tested, many courses may have been experimented upon, but the upshot of the whole is the divine learning, the sacred lore, that contentment is the true ambition, and that contentment is the beginning of real riches. If we are eager or impetuous, or determined to be wealthy, we shall fall into many an abyss. "They that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition." Agur was thus a Christian before the time. He represented in his own spirit and conduct the teaching of the Apostle Paul and the teaching of the Apostle John. "The love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows." Agur seems to have anticipated all this, and to have desired that he might be preserved from such disaster. "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." Such is the testimony of the Apostle John. When Jeshurun waxed fat he kicked; when he was covered with fatness he forsook God, and lightly esteemed the Rock of his salvation. When the people of God were led into a rich pasture they were filled, and their heart was exalted; and in the day of their exaltation God said, "Therefore have they forgotten me." We cannot amend Agur's prayer. It is not easily offered with the whole consent of the mind and heart. The words themselves are often repeated, but how few there are who realise how far-reaching is their meaning, how complete is the trust in divine providence which they express. Judge me, O my Father; thou knowest my capacity, my power of resisting temptation, my weakness, and my strength; thou knowest how soon I should be overthrown and victimised and destroyed; thou knowest whether I was intended to be a trustee of great power and wealth, or but a humble doorkeeper in thy great creation: only teach me what thy will is, and help me to express it in love, obedience, and joyous hopefulness. Then shall I grow in grace, and be prepared for larger duties and heavier responsibilities.

"There is a generation that curseth their father, and doth not bless their mother. There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes, and yet is not washed from their filthiness. There is a generation, O how lofty are their eyes! and their eyelids are lifted up. There is a generation, whose teeth are as swords, and their jaw teeth as knives, to devour the poor from off the earth, and the needy from among men" (vers. 11-14).

These four generations are but one. This is Agur's view of the age in which he lived, or it may be his summary of human nature as it had come under his own observation. It is noticeable that the same characteristics are pointed out by the Apostle Paul in 2 Tim. iii. Have there ever been any other generations within all the boundaries of time? Has the world ever been lacking in unfilial souls? How many men are there whose own self-estimate is admirable, and whose filthiness is obvious to all observers! Who has not seen the generation whose eyes are lofty, and whose eyelids are lifted up? and who has not seen all the three generations represented in the fourth, whose teeth are as swords, and their jaw teeth as knives, to devour the poor from

off the earth, and the needy from among men? Self-conceit is at the centre of all the evil character which is here depicted. The men who curse their father and their mother do so in the loftiness of their self-complacency. Whenever eyes are lofty, and eyelids are lifted up, we may be perfectly sure that the teeth are as swords, and the jaw teeth as knives. Impious piety is the very vilest kind of religion. Hypocrisy is as cruel as it is deceitful. Evil men put on the garments of religion, but carry the swords or daggers of vengeance underneath the Christian velvet. The Bible will always have reality, as we have seen again and again. Pretence, profession, ostentation cannot receive the smallest degree of allowance from Bible teaching. Simplicity, true-heartedness, frankness, reality of purpose, these are everywhere commended in the sacred volume. The spiritual claims of the Bible are largely sustained by its direct and healthy criticism of the manners of society. The Bible does not look upwards only, as if lost in religious rapture; it looks abroad, on the right hand and on the left, and with penetrating criticism delineates every speciality of human character. The generations of men are familiar to it; human nature is not an unknown quantity that is talked about in mystical language; it is rather the positive reality that is fully comprehended and wisely estimated, and is dealt with from high religious altitudes. We can belong to any of these four generations if we please. We can be unfilial; we can be pure in our own eyes; we can lift up our eyelids in impious mockery to heaven; we can sharpen our teeth as swords, and our jaw teeth as knives; all this evil distinction is open to us; but inasmuch as its history is bad, in and out, without one single redeeming feature, let us rather abhor that which evil and cleave to that which is good. The opposite characteristics of these verses may be repeated in our lives with complete and happy success: we can be filial, we can cleanse ourselves from all iniquity, we can look down upon the earth in pity and in love, we can fill our mouths with gracious words, sweet promises inspired by the divinely purified heart. Evil is never portrayed that it may be copied; it is always delineated that it may alarm and shock and repel men; showing them how awful a thing it is to depart from the spirit of purity, and import discord into the music of divine purpose and administration.

Chapter xxx. 24-28.

“There be four things which are little upon the earth, but they are exceeding wise: The ants are a people not strong, yet they prepare their meat in the summer; the conies are but a feeble folk, yet make they their houses in the rocks; the locusts have no king, yet go they forth all of them by bands; the spider taketh hold with her hands, and is in kings’ palaces.”

LITTLE BUT WISE.

THESE words distinctly teach that wisdom is not measurable by physical magnitude. The large man may be a little man. The little body may shelter a great soul. The elephantine and prodigious body may hardly have a soul at all. These things are perfectly well known, yet we require to be reminded of them with some frequency, because so many appeals are addressed to our senses. We are not called upon to admire mere bigness, bulk, surface, and weight. The same terms do not always mean the same thing. Sometimes little is not merely little. Sometimes greatness is greatness *minus*. Some pounds have sixteen ounces in them, others have only twelve. Butchers and silver-smiths do not reckon by the same arithmetical tables. In a prosperous condition of society, a single diamond may be worth more money than all the beasts in a cattle market; but in times of famine one lamb will be more precious than all the diamonds in kings’ houses. Value varies according to circumstances. He is the wise man who knows the one thing whose value never changes, which overbalances and reduces to insignificance the pomp of unintelligent creation. If we lay hold of these things and estimate values correctly, it will help in the adjustment of social relations and in the appreciation of those virtues which ought ever to be uppermost in a true condition of society. We are called upon to remember that wisdom, and wisdom alone, is the true standard of measurement; that the humblest life is greater than the sublimest art, and that one spark of intellect is infinitely more precious than the most crushing animal strength.

It is possible to be little and yet to be exceeding wise. Let us gather round these little wise creatures and learn what we may from them. "Ask now the beasts, and they shall teach thee; and the fowls of the air, and they shall tell thee." He makes a wise use of nature who regards it as a book of divine instruction. Everything has its lesson. Everywhere we find the signature, the autograph of God, and he will never deny his own handwriting. God hath set his tabernacle in the dewdrop as surely as in the sun. Man can no more create the meanest polyp than he could create the greatest world. We are surrounded by instructors; we are in a great schoolhouse; it is full of letters, lessons, illustrations, and appeals. If, then, we be found fools after all, how bitter, how terrible must be our condemnation! Blame not the savage in the lonely forest for his ignorance of letters; but the man who has had every opportunity of attaining scholarship, and after all remains in ignorance, rightly deserves concentrated bitterness of human contempt. Let us beware of setting up precedents and inaugurating analogies and instituting seats of judgment; because God will gather them all together one day, and his great white throne will be the more terrible for the precedents we ourselves have perpetrated.

"The ants are a people not strong, yet they prepare their meat in the summer." This is forecast. Some people seem to have no forecast; they are never quite sure how many two and two will make. They seem to have no power of turning the past into the prophet of the future. They bury the past, and act upon this advice, "Let the dead past bury its dead." But there is a past that is not dead, and we must not impose upon that living, instructive, interpretative prophetic past the duty of burying itself. Yesterday is the key which opens to-morrow, so far as great principles and fundamental conditions of life and service are concerned. The ants gather their meat in the summer; that is, they know the time of their opportunity, and they make the best of it. We ourselves have a little proverb which may match the text: "Make hay while the sun shines." And there is another like unto it: "Strike the iron while it is hot." What if you geniuses in hay, and philosophers in iron, be found at last to be fools in the soul, and madmen about your standing with God!

“If the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!”

Every man has a summer. It is quite true, indeed, that some summers are very short; but every man has a summer: only one summer. Man has but one boyhood, as the day has but one dawn. Life has but one summer, as hath the rolling year. Yet, to some men, an hour has more than sixty minutes in it, and to other men all the clocks in Christendom could never teach the value of time. There are men who never have time to do anything, they are always going to think about how this thing or that might be approached and come round upon and looked at; and whilst they are engaged in this serene and philosophical exercise, the whole thing passes beyond their reach, beyond their influence. There is one thing for which men ought to find time, and that is to prepare for the future. Do you say you have not opportunity? How then are you spending your time? In business, in strife after position, trying to get daily bread honestly? All this up to a given point is perfectly right, perfectly defensible. But see! You had better set fire to your shop; you had better go without bread, than lose the opportunity of knowing God, laying hold upon him, and following hard after him. The life is more than meat. If anything is to be saved out of the fire, it is not the decoration, the luxury, the toy,—it is the child! The life first, and then if you can get anything afterwards by all means get it; but do, in the name of common sense, be as reasonable and as sensible in spiritual things as you are in things that are temporal. Summer is quickly going with some of us, but if one moment remains a great deal may be done in it. It is marvellous how the very greatest things we read of have been done, as it were, instantaneously. It is wonderful what creative force there is in one word, what determining might there is in one resolution, how in one moment a man may change the current of his life and the point of his destiny. “Now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.” It is a point of time; it is one effort of the heart; it is one gasp of the soul, and then—what? Eternity! Heaven! There may have been long processes, but the climacteric deed is often expressed by a word. Some of you have had time enough to get to the height of your aspirations, to get

through your processes of thinking and considering and calculating ; but if you have had this time and have abused it, from this moment your life is not an ascension, it is an anti-climax.

“The conies are but a feeble folk, yet they make their houses in the rocks.” The tenant is weak, the habitation is strong. Here is a puny, a very feeble folk, going up towards the great rock-house. There is something very pathetic, very beautiful in that,—in weakness seeking the granite, in feebleness hiding itself in some pavilion of rock. There is a law of compensation. In the universe there is a law of what we may term complement, a law which makes up to men, somehow, the thing that is wanting. Man must always look out of himself for this complementary quantity. God provides the rock for the conies, and God provides a rock for all weakness. What if the conies should attempt to say, “We are a feeble folk, but we are just as God has made us ; so we shall stop out here in summer and in winter. We shall take things just as they fall out ; we did not make ourselves, and therefore we have no reason to look after anything ?” “Why,” you would say, “the conies are a very feeble folk indeed,—feeble in their intellect, feeble in their common sense, as well as feeble in their physical faculties.” A man may say, “I am not equal to this or that ; I am insufficient ; there are points when I feel myself utterly unequal to the task that is before me. I cannot reach my ideals ; my prayers outstrip me ; I cannot follow after them, except at immense distances. Life is too much for me ; I must succumb.” Is there any provision made for this state of things by the great Creator, the merciful Redeemer, and the gentle Father of mankind ? There is a Rock provided for all weakness. The Rock of Ages is the only rock in which all man’s weaknesses can be hidden. That is the only power by which a man’s feebleness can be defended. It is indeed a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence. But we are distinctly told that it is laid in Sion by God himself, and that it is elect, tried, precious, and sure. There is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved, but the name of Jesus Christ. Those who have known this a long while will make a joyful noise unto the rock of their salvation. They will say, “The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my sure abiding

place." Does any man indulge in a spirit of complaint? Then I have to teach that man that every one of us has a compensation. If we have not one thing we have another. You have no money; but you have good health. Your circumstances are very gloomy; but you have a most hopeful disposition. You are sleepless by reason of adversity; but you have the hearing ear which hears the song of the nightingale. You have no estates; but you have the poetic eye, which gives you proprietorship in all the sunny landscape. You have no acquaintances; but you find fellowship in a thousand noble thoughts. You are blind; but there is sunshine in your soul. So, you never met a man anywhere who was in a grumbling, censorious, reproachful temper, but that you could find in that man some compensation, and could point out in him some little bright spot that he had overlooked. Everywhere we find the seal of God's goodness,—the stamp of his tender and enduring mercy. Let everything that hath breath say, His mercy endureth for ever.

"The locusts have no king, yet go they forth all of them by bands,"—a very beautiful and practical republic. They have no king, but every one of them has a little bit of kingliness in himself. You cannot have a grand republic without kingliness, and you cannot have a great state if you only have a king in it. Here we find combination,—not lonely wandering, solitary flying, every one studying to do a little for himself; we find co-operation,—going together, moving in bands. We have seen a chain as it lay upon the grass, and found it was tethering an animal some yards off. Which of the links holds that cow? Not the first link, nor the second, nor the third, nor the fiftieth. Not one of the links, but all the links on the chain are doing so. And what is the chain? Only a series of links; and so links and chain, chain and links, are all doing the work. That is how it must be in business, in families, in churches, in governments, in all great confederacies of life.

We witness a copious and gracious shower for the refreshing of the parched earth: the flowers drink in the blessing, and the earth looks young again. What did it? Catch one of the drops, and say, Are you doing this? No. Which drop did it? No

drop did it—the shower did it! So it must be in our great Christian agencies. There is no one man can do all. God hath not appointed men so to do. He hath called us to unity, to co-operation, to banding ourselves together, to finding in each other the complement of ourselves. Every man has a sphere. Though we may have a republic, it will not mean that one is as good as another. One man is not as good as another, and one man is not as much of a man as another: he may require a larger coat, but a very small accommodation will do for his soul. It may be so, or it may not be so; and if we were all equal this moment, before the clock went round once we should all be sixes and sevens,—and mainly, it is to be feared, sixes.

“The spider taketh hold with her hands, and is in kings’ palaces.” Does this mean skill: this skill will have its reward. Does it mean patience in working out elaborate and beautiful results: then here is progress—getting into kings’ houses, into high places, into palatial position. Every man is set upon an ascending line of human life. We never find God calling a man downwards, diminishing the volume of his manhood, checking his good aspirations, putting him low in the scale of his being. All the divine movement is an upward movement. We are not always to be children, we are to be men. We are not to be content with the point of conversion, we are to grow in grace. We are not to be satisfied with being branches in the vine, we are to bring forth much fruit. We are not to see how little we can do, we are to be always abounding in the work of the Lord.

Here then is a test of growth and the standard of manhood. Here is a reward of industry and skill and patience. In all labour there is profit. You do not see all the results of your work, your patience, your attention to culture, to duty, to service. You do not know the rewards of your tranquil trust, your uncomplaining pain and suffering. There is profit in the thing itself; there is not always a marketable profit,—something that can be set up and ticketed at a fair price. But there is in the soul, in the man himself, such growth and strength, such refinement, such tenderness, such majesty as nothing else could have wrought in him.

The whole study becomes an argument. If God has given such wisdom to insects, how much more will he give to men? They cannot ask for any more: we are urged to speak to him to give us further supplies. "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not." Then if we are not wise, whose blame is it? It is not God's blame. He waits to communicate, he loves to give. An ungiving God! That would be a monstrosity of paganism,—a degradation of mythology itself. We are called to asking, to prayer, to pleading, that the volume of our being may be increased, that our spiritual graces may be multiplied, and that all that is divine in us may be enhanced and confirmed. No man can be wise without this union with God. He may have devoured whole libraries, but he is not wise. If God so commends the right use of instinct, how will he complain of the abuse of reason! Men are sent to the ants to learn diligence. They are sent to the conies to learn that there is a way which terminates in a great rock. They are sent to the locusts to learn how littles, when combined, may become mighty, sufficient for all the duty and obligation of the day. What if it be found at the last that all the lower orders and ranks of creation have been obedient, dutiful, loyal,—and that man only has wounded the great heart? "The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib; but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider." God has had no trouble with his great constellations,—they never mutinied against him; he has had no trouble with his forests,—no rebel host ever banded themselves there. Where has his sorrow lain? His own child, his beloved one, in whom he has written in fairest lines the perfectness of his own beauty, that child has lifted his puny fist and smitten him, not in the face only, but on his heart of love, which only can be forgiven by the shedding of sacrificial blood. We are all verily guilty in this matter; God be merciful unto us sinners!

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we will not think of our own days, which are a handful, but of the years of the right hand of the Most High. We are in time, but we do not belong to it; it is too short, too small, too tantalising, to cover all our need and satisfy all our desire. We are the children of eternity, we are pilgrims walking towards heaven, we are heirs of immortality through Jesus Christ our Saviour, our elder Brother, our true and eternal Adam. Prevent us from setting our affections upon the things that are slipping away, and fix the thought of our hearts upon the days that abide, the sunshine that never fades, the summer that never yields to encroaching winter. We bless thee for thoughts higher than time, wider than space, nobler than sense; we thank thee for yearnings towards eternity, for longings and desires and upliftings of soul that indicate that we are redeemed, not with corruptible things such as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of the Son of God. For every elevating thought we thank thee, as for one of the best of thy blessings. Accept our thanksgivings for our bread and our water, the couch on which we find sleep, and the roof that shelters us from the storm; but these are things of nought compared with the holy desires, the lofty aspirations, the yearnings full of pain but full of joy with which thou dost enrich the soul. May we live in the higher realities; may the world always be under our feet; when we use it, may we use it as a master, and not submit to it as a slave; and in all things may we show that we abide in God. Feed our souls upon the Bread of Life; put away from us everything that would degrade the soul, and contract the scope and outlook of our being. May the soul be master, may the mind be on the throne, may the heart rule the hand, and tell it like one in authority what to do and what to let alone. Thus would we be our best selves, our true selves; men as thou didst see us in eternity. Wherein we have done wrong in the past, thy mercy is greater than our sin; the blood of Jesus Christ is the answer of God to our iniquity and wickedness and helplessness, the Cross is God's reply to human stupor and human wonder. O sweet Cross of Jesus, glory of the universe, talk to us, and tell us thy great gospel. Let the days and the years come and go; they make no impression upon eternity; eternity did not begin, eternity cannot end: we are moving towards that infinite sanctuary where we shall have opportunity to study thy word more deeply, to love thee without distraction of desire or thought. Grant unto us that independence of all things earthly which comes from the indwelling sovereignty and sanctified power of the Holy Ghost; then our poverty shall be wealth, our wealth shall be but a means of usefulness, and all our life shall be an ascending sacrifice, which is our reasonable service. Help us to bear the remainder of thy discipline with nobleness of soul, with hopeful-

ness of spirit; turn our tears into jewels, and lift up our souls when they are bowed down. Do thou carry the load when it is too heavy for us; shelter us from the wind when its coldness is cruel, and bring us to our desired haven over life's rough sea; there shall we praise thee in eternal song. God's will be done; God's name be glorified; may Christ be formed in our hearts the hope of glory. Amen.

Chapter xxxi.

THE PERFECT WOMAN.

THIS chapter contains the words of King Lemuel, and a full portrait of a good wife. The word "Lemuel" may be regarded as meaning "dedicated to God." The words of the mother are here quoted. We have seen that mothers were regarded with great veneration in the East. The mothers of kings were treated with great distinction, and were known as "queen-mothers." We have seen that they were not always good women; on the contrary, some of them seem to have been inspired by the very spirit of evil. The mothers of Jewish kings are constantly mentioned in the Bible. It has been noticed as characteristic of Oriental courtesy that the mother of the Khedive ranks before his principal wife. It would seem then as if mothers were the orators of their families,—teaching, exhorting, and stimulating them with many words of kindness and wisdom. The mother was indeed the schoolmistress of her family, the governess in the best sense, not looking merely after their bodily health and social comforts, but after the training and culture of their noblest nature. The style of Lemuel's mother is peculiar. She begins her exhortation by a thrice-repeated question: "What, my son? and what, the son of my womb? and what, the son of my vows?"—meaning, What shall I say? what words shall I choose? how shall I best acquit myself of a very serious responsibility towards my child?

Lemuel was the son of his mother's vows. He may have been given, like Samuel, in answer to her prayers. She took a highly religious view of his personality, character, and destiny, and in this noble spirit she addressed to him certain noble moral exhortations. She would, for example, have him abstain from wine and strong drink, lest he should forget the law, and pervert the judgment of any or the afflicted. Observe how the control of

a personal habit is based upon a grand moral reason. The principal concern of the mother was that the law should be remembered, and that judgment should be kept from perversion. Coming to her son in this relation, she came with infinite advantage, because it was to be assumed that as a king he was anxious to maintain the law and sustain the dignity and pureness of judgment. Lemuel's mother was wise in recognising that strong drink might be given to the man who was ready to perish, and wine might be administered to those that were of heavy hearts. It has been supposed that out of a merciful remembrance of this passage the pious ladies of Jerusalem were accustomed to provide a medicated drink for criminals condemned to be crucified. It is supposed further that this kind of preparation was offered to our Lord. It was not given to increase his pain, but to mitigate it. Probably the drink had some deadening effect upon the pain of the sufferer. Jesus Christ declined to have his agony assuaged by any such human invention. He would bear the anguish in every pang, and with a cloudless mind would pass through all the tragedy of his sacrifice. Lemuel's mother was thus anxious that her son's body and mind should be kept healthy and clear. Every evil thought takes so much force out of the brain; every passionate desire seems to diminish the immortality of man,—that is to say, it takes out of him some degree of his vital power, lessens his manliness, nobility, and moral majesty. Surely a man may think an evil thought and be none the worse? Far from it: no evil thought can pass through the mind without leaving the mind poorer and weaker for its passage. The mind is, so to say, constituted with awful delicacy: it is sensitive beyond all we know of sensitiveness in material things; a shadow passing over it brings with it a deadly chill; one wandering thought wrecks the integrity and spoils the beauty of the mind. Thus many men deplete themselves inwardly whilst apparently living respectable lives. The depletion is not to be found in overt act, in outward and visible criminality: in such cases the iniquity is rolled under the tongue as a sweet morsel; the heart keeps silence in its festival of darkness; the soul and the devil commune in whispers, but not the less deadly is the effect of that whispered communion. Coming from it, man is enfeebled in prayer, bewildered in mind,

beclouded in hope; a general sense of loss settles upon all the faculties of manhood, and night displaces day. Is there not room then for the exhortation of the moralist or the pious minister of God? Is he a fanatic who warns the young man to watch the rising of passion, to take care of the wandering of desire, to abstain from wines and strong drink? Such exhortation is not fanaticism: it is based on the highest psychology and physiology; for the good man sees that every thought that is not lifted upwards must drag the mind in a wrong direction, and every passion that strays away in illicit directions carries the mind with it into captivity.

The king's mother now advances in her pleas and arguments. Sweetly she says,—

“Open thy mouth for the dumb in the cause of all such as are appointed to destruction. Open thy mouth, judge righteously, and plead the cause of the poor and needy” (vers. 8, 9).

Observe, Lemuel is a king, and yet his mother invests him with the functions of an advocate. He is to be more than dignified; he is to be human, sympathetic, fraternal. He is no king who as an ivory deity sits upon a gilded throne at an immeasurable distance from the daily experience of his subjects: he is the true king who mingles with the people, who is the subject of his own nation, and who lives not for himself but for the public weal. The “dumb” are those who on account of timidity or ignorance cannot state their own case to advantage, cannot argue it with cogency and eloquence, and who for want of the power to put their case aright may be misjudged and even doomed. The Bible is in thorough consonancy with itself in all these exhortations. This is no solitary instance in which the dumb are entrusted to the eloquent, and in which the poor are placed under the fraternal patronage of the wealthy,—“Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment: thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty: but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbour” (Lev. xix. 15). Thus in the very earliest pages of the Bible we find a tender regard for the poor.

The seventy-second Psalm is full of music regarding One who is to come and reign over the earth. We are anxious to know the attributes of the King who is to have dominion from sea to

sea; the very greatness of his dominion interests us in his moral character; if such dominion be not associated with the highest moral graces it will of necessity be an infinite disaster. What, then, is said of him who is to handle the universal sceptre? These are some of his characteristics: "He shall deliver the needy when he crieth; the poor also, and him that hath no helper. He shall spare the poor and needy, and shall save the souls of the needy. He shall redeem their soul from deceit and violence: and precious shall their blood be in his sight." Ought not the poor to reverence a book filled with such exhortations and predictions? Is the Bible wholly given over to metaphysical disquisition, to the discussion of words, and to the illumination of mystical points? No better answer can be given than is found in Psalm lxxxii. 3, 4: "Defend the poor and fatherless: do justice to the afflicted and needy. Deliver the poor and needy: rid them out of the hand of the wicked."

Thus the moral qualifications of men are put above all merely intellectual and ceremonial dignities. The greater the intellect the more mischievous the ministry, if it be not balanced by a noble and sympathetic heart. If we cannot all be great we can all be good, and the time will come when goodness will be discovered to be the true and abiding greatness.

Next follows a full-length portrait of a virtuous woman or wife. It has been noticed that this is written in the form of an acrostic, the twenty-two verses composing it each commencing with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet. This may have been done, as in the case of several of the Psalms which are of a didactic character (for example, xxv., xxxiv., xxxvii., cxix.), to render it more easy for committal to memory. Such is the opinion of a writer in Bishop Ellicott's Commentary, and the same authority points out that the ninth Psalm is cast in the same form. The tenth verse opens with an ominous question,—“Who can find a virtuous woman?” Some have supposed this woman to be a symbolical or mystical character, representing in human outline the Law, the Church, or the Holy Spirit. There is no need to refer to such figurative representation. Womanhood, as we understand it, may be represented in all the features which are here so graphically

depicted. "Who can find a virtuous woman?" is an interrogation not to be understood as denying the existence of such; the question is used for the purpose of magnifying the price of the ideal and perfect womanhood,—“Her price is far above rubies. The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil.” Whatever he earns by industry she will multiply by economy. His capital shall bring a rich interest by reason of the carefulness of his wife. She is a working woman; she does not live in luxury and indolence: contrariwise, “she seeketh wool, and flax, and worketh willingly with her hands,”—that is, with the pleasure or willingness of her hands, as if her hands caught the inspiration of her heart, and her labour ceased to be a toil, and became a pleasure and a most profitable delight. “She is like the merchants’ ships; she bringeth her food from afar:” she is always looking out for chances, for advantages of a legitimate kind; if necessary she will not consider distance any disadvantage in order that she may live economically, or turn to the best use such property as may be entrusted to her.

“She riseth also while it is yet night, and giveth meat to her household, and a portion to her maidens” (ver. 15).

She believes in generous hospitality; she knows that a household cannot be sustained upon a starvation policy; she says in effect that if she would get she must first give, if she would have her ground bring forth abundantly she must be generous to the ground itself.

“She considereth a field, and buyeth it: with the fruit of her hands she planteth a vineyard” (ver. 16).

Her eyes are constantly open so that she may see what to let or sell, what is to be bought or sold or exchanged. She knows that life is founded upon principles of business, and she acquaints herself with those principles that she may bring them to happy commercial application. When she buys a field or plants a vineyard, it is with her own savings. She counts her money, and reckons how much land it represents, into what property it can be transformed, so that her whole life is a wise calculation and an industrious service; she is healthy because she is energetic. Indolence never brings pleasure; indolence brings weariness, sense of tediousness, oppressiveness, and a desire to kill time:

industry, thriftiness, wise expenditure of strength,—these make time go happily, these fill the days with fruits and luxuries of heaven. The good woman “stretcheth out her hand to the poor:” she is more than a mere business woman or money-maker; she is a friend and sister to the poor; she has something for those who have nothing; she is a treasure-house on behalf of the necessitous; the more she has the more the poor have.

“She stretcheth out her hand to the poor; yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy” (ver. 20).

Saying in effect, These are my children, or sisters, or brothers, part of my household, and God has given me bread to eat that I may hand it to those who have none. The virtuous wife “is not afraid of the snow for her household: for all her household are clothed with scarlet. She maketh herself coverings of tapestry; her clothing is of silk and purple.” Snow was not uncommon in Palestine and the neighbouring country, and its coming was prepared for by the wise and sagacious mother. Scarlet is a colour which suggests warmth and comfort and preparedness for all the inclemency of a changeful clime. This mother was not a summer flower only, beautiful in the sunshine and fragrant in the west wind: she was strong, wise, comprehensive in her calculations and judgments; every season of the year was duly and amply provided for.

“Her husband is known in the gates, when he sitteth among the elders of the land” (ver. 23).

When he goes out to the place of concourse, when he stands in the sphere of judgment, when he assembles with the elders of the city, he is remarked upon, he is regarded as one who represents loving household care and sympathy. The consequence of all this prearrangement is that the virtuous woman rejoiceth in the time to come,—that is to say, she smiles at the coming day, she has no fear of the future; by having used the present well she is provided well for the time that is to come; so she is not cankered with care, overwhelmed with anxiety, or harried to death by all the obligations which crowd upon an active and responsible life: her prevision, her sagacity, her preparedness, conspire to make her calm and hopeful in the presence of all future time. This virtuous woman has as the very basis on which she stands a true religious veneration,—“A woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be

praised." Without the fear of the Lord there can be no true regard for society, in the family or in the state. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom."

So closes the Book of Proverbs. In the first chapter we found father and mother advising a listening son; now we find a woman drawn in full-length with the skill of heaven and the feeling of love. Such a woman is the mother of the world. Evermore will the world need such a mother, to nurse it in sickness and comfort it in all the darkness of sorrow. The Bible recognises the beauty, the dignity, and the worth of women beyond all other books. Would you see a true woman: she is here drawn at full length. What feature is wanting? What hue is lacking? By this standard may women measure themselves; in this mirror may women see themselves; this is the ideal woman, therefore the real woman, not as seen in any one individual, but as totalised in the womanhood of the world.

"Within the home she rules with quiet might,
By virtue of her perfect womanhood;
A child in years, but with all grace and good
Enshrined in her truth-flashing orbs of light.
A woman strong and firm to do the right,
Who with the old-time martyrs might have stood,
Yet full of sympathy with ev'ry mood,
In times of trouble cheery still and bright;
O queen of maidens! it must surely be,
If ought that to perfection cometh near
Can e'er be found in this imperfect life,
You, perfect daughter, will but disappear
To shine as perfect mother, perfect wife." *

In her "Spanish Gipsy," George Eliot speaks of a woman in terms full of Bible inspiration:—

"A woman mixed of such fine elements
That were all virtue and religion dead
She'd make them newly, being what she was."

"A woman's affection is often the cause of a woman's wit.

* G. Weatherly.

"It was a beautiful turn given by a great lady who, being asked where her husband was, when he lay concealed for being deeply concerned in a conspiracy, resolutely answered, 'She had hid him.' This confession drew her before the king, who told her nothing but her discovering where her lord was concealed could save her from the torture. 'And will that do?' said the lady. 'Yes,' said the king, 'I give you my word for it.' 'Then,' said she, 'I have hid him in my heart, where you'll find him.'"

Few writers have had greater power of expression than Ralph Waldo Emerson, and even he rose to an unusual eloquence when he discoursed upon the moral glories of womanhood. Speaking of women he says, "They are more delicate than men—delicate as iodine to light—and thus more impressionable. They are the best index of the coming hour." Quoting Coleridge, he says, "Take their first advice, not their second." Coleridge once applied to a lady for her judgment; when she gave him her opinion, she added, "I think so, because——" "Pardon me, madam," he said, "leave me to find out the reasons for myself." Continuing, Emerson says, "In this sense, as more delicate mercuries of the imponderable and immaterial influences, what they say and think is the shadow of coming events. . . . Men remark figure; women always catch the expression. They inspire by a look, and pass with us not so much by what they say or do, as by their presence. They learn so fast, and convey the result so fast, as to outrun the logic of their slow brother and make his acquisitions poor. 'Tis their mood and tone that is important. Does their mind misgive them, or are they firm and cheerful? 'Tis a true report that things are going ill or well. And any remarkable opinion or movement shared by woman will be the first sign of revolution."

Emerson attributes high influence to the silent ministry of women. Without saying much they may do much,

and even when they say much their action may far transcend the eloquence of their mere words. The philosopher says, "Women are, by their conversation and their social influence, the civilisers of mankind. . . . They finish society, manners, language ; form and ceremony are their realm. They embellish trifles. . . . Their genius delights in ceremonies, in forms, in decorating life with manners, with proprieties, order, and grace. They are, in their nature, mere relative ; the circumstance must always be fit ; out of place they lose half their weight—out of place they are disfranchised. Position, Wren said, is essential to the perfecting of beauty,—a fine building is lost in a dark lane ; a statue should stand in the air. Much more true is it of woman."

But what will avail all eloquent description ? The portrait of a true woman is drawn, not to be admired, but to be reproduced in living character. It will be a grievous mistake to suppose that nothing that is less than heroic is to be attempted either by men or women. We deceive ourselves when we think that if some great occasion would arise we should be equal to the sublime opportunity, but it is not worth our while to attend to daily tasks and little services and small occasions. Here the rule holds good as elsewhere, "He that is faithful in little is faithful also in much." Every man or woman can find a sphere of usefulness if disposed to find it. What a school may the house become ; what a church of the living God is the family ; within the four walls of a home what battles may be fought, what victories may be won ! Each should consider what he can do to contribute towards the general weal. A gracious word, a tender look, an assurance of sympathy, how far these go, and what miracles they work ! How they abide in the memory ; how they enable the soul to sing in the night-time ; how full they are of divine encouragement. We are to look, in many things, towards the ideal, and not to content ourselves with a cold estimate of the actual.

Nor are we to mock the actual by its shortcoming in view of the ideal. It is enough for us that we strive towards the right mark, that we press in the prescribed direction, that we feel after God with all the determination of inspired energy. A man who so acts will feel more than any of his critics can feel how far he fails in attaining the object he has in view ; but there is reward in the strenuous endeavour. Heaven itself begins in this purposed industry,—this industry that has about it the sacredness of a consecration and a sacrifice. The Bible is full of ideal characters, and it is not afraid to show actual character in some of its completest humiliations. The two pictures are bound in the sacred volume. We have moral loftiness that is apparently unapproachable ; we have degradation that shocks the very first sensations of morality ; we have exhortations that encourage the weakest of us to attempt the greatest things that have ever taxed human energies. In the ideal we are to see what we may become : in the actual we see what we have to avoid. In all these struggles after the higher life our only safety is in companionship with Jesus Christ. He will sympathise with us in our failures ; he will know when we set out with a high purpose, and when we have been faithful in a wise resolution, and according to our inward thought will he abundantly reward us at the last. He never complains of any man who does his best. Of one poor woman he said, “ She hath done what she could.” That is the spirit in which he will judge us. At last he will surprise us by finding beauty where we have seen none, and by rewarding excellences where we ourselves have been bowed down in a spirit of dejection. Let us not judge ourselves, and let us not judge other men. One is our judge, and his criticism will be full of grace and truth. Blessed is that heart which can say, Lord, have me always in thy keeping : mould me, inspire me, and complete thy purpose in me, giving me contentment and enriching me with hope.

PAGAN PROVERBS.

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THERE are more proverbs than those which are written in the Bible. But who shall say where God's Bible either begins or ends? We always make a mistake when we shut up God between any four corners. He does not live within that square, he does not visit it. When we make a place for him and say, "Here only shalt thou abide," we may be quite sure he will not accept our partial and bigoted hospitality. God is in all the world; in every human heart that has opened itself to the best influences God has written his name. It was not one man, but Man, that God made in his image and likeness. We shall do the Bible no dishonour by recognising all that is Biblical outside of it. The Bible is not a book only; it is the beginning of books; it is the root out of which all true and progressive literature grows. Some are surprised to find wisdom outside what is distinctively known as the Church. You will find piety everywhere. There is no need for us to repress our surprise, for surprise itself may be an element in religious stimulus and education. No man who was not trained out of himself could look upon a flower in the middle of a great wilderness of snow without being struck by its beauty and without recognising that beauty audibly and thankfully. It should be so when we meet with wise sayings in literature that we have not baptised. If I wanted to establish the unity of man as a doctrine or a fact, I am not sure that I should base my argument upon physiology. All these 'ologies are more or less to be suspected. They are little inventions of little men. They are too clever to be true. Truth is never clever. Cleverness is too small a cage for truth to live in or to sing in; it must have an open firmament of heaven. I should rather refer to the common experience of man: what have men

felt, deduced, proved by experience, in every quarter of the world, and in every century of time? Let us hear voices and witnesses from east and west, from north and south, and if there be aught of strong concurrence in the testimony, we shall find in that concurrence an irrefragable proof of the unity of the human race. Great unities are not to be established upon grammatical bases; that is to say, upon words that are discovered as being related to some other words that came from beyond some far-away rivers. Here again we are exposed to the temptation of mere moral agility or cleverness. Unities of the great sort that abide and do good are to be proved by moral experiences: the heart must testify; and if we listen to the heart-testimony from every quarter under heaven, and if that testimony prove to be an unbroken witness, rely upon it there is unity, sympathetic and indestructible.

Hear the Hindu: he, too, has his book of proverbs. He says, "The sugar-cane is sweeter knot after knot." What a Bible upon the development of character is there! The Hindu found that out for himself by experience, by the study of human nature, by taking in a large scope and a distinct purpose of life. Said he, "The sugar-cane is sweeter knot after knot:" the further it grows, the more it grows; the more perfectly it is developed, the sweeter it becomes. It needs no great sagacity to see the practical applications of so beautiful a fact in nature. The one application that may be fixed upon is this, that men as they grow older should grow sweeter. There should be more of real affection in them: their speech should be no longer aspersive, acerb, vinegar-like; it should be charitable, gracious, of the nature of hopeful blessing. When we come away from the older men we should say, They improve with keeping: how very exasperating they used to be; how they could smite and tear and rend in early days, and now all that is aggressive is taken out of their voices, and their whole utterance is like a piece of solemn music. If we are growing bitterer as we grow older I know not who planted us; God can hardly be held responsible for such an irony: but if we are growing sweeter, gentler, purer, fuller of the love that would redeem the world, God is in us of a truth; whether we belong to any sect or no sect, we belong to God.

The Teluguan says about that same sugar-cane, "Because the sugar-cane is sweet you are not to chew it down to the roots." That is a great temptation all the world over. When a man has found honey he is likely to gorge himself with it. Our Book of Proverbs, Solomon's apothegms, supply the same great doctrine: "Hast thou found honey? eat so much as is sufficient for thee,"—eat enough only, and stop there. But who can arrest himself when he has once begun to taste sweetness? who can set it down and say, No more; I will come again to thee, I will not feed myself to satiety; I will take a little honey to-day and a little more to-morrow, and even though there be sweetness in the taste, that sweetness is an allurements: get thee behind me! to-morrow I may make some use of thee; meanwhile thou hast placed before me a temptation to lose the true uses of nature, and to abase and carry into licence what was meant as sweet and profitable liberty?

Has China anything to say? China says, "When a tree is blown down, it shows that the branches are longer than the roots." It would be difficult to pack more wisdom into a smaller compass than that. Wherever there is great display, there is sure to be a downfall. Be sure about your roots; let the roots go miles into the earth if you like, and then the winds will be gentle to the branches even in rocking them, and what is lost will be comparatively small: the tree itself will abide. We live in our roots, not in our branches. What is your soul? not, What is your talk? What is your quality? not, What is your pretension or profession? How many men there are who are all branch! What shall become of them? Ask the wind. Will the wind blow them down? If it has nothing better to do it may; the wind will despise them, and bestow only odd moments on them. "I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself [all branch] like a green bay tree. Yet he passed away, and, lo, he was not; yea, I sought him, but he could not be found."

Has Africa anything to say about the tree; poor Africa, night-ridden Africa, land of darkness and slavery and barbarism,—has God stooped down and written anything in the dust of Africa? Africa says, "He who tries to shake the trunk of a tree shakes only

himself." That is good for Africa ; it is good for the whole world to learn. You cannot shake down a really well-grown man. You can tear at him, but you are tearing yourselves, you are not tearing the man. You can make no impression upon a grand massive character ; it abides after all your inquests and searchings and shakings and malignant assaults. You have sometimes seen people trying to shake a great tree : it was the people who perspired, not the tree. Grand old tree, hospitable old tree ; the birds of the air built their nests in it, and there found habitation and security. Is there anything more pitiable than to see a number of hellhounds trying to shake down a noble character ? They cannot do it ; the laughter of the world will follow their futile attempts, and men who trusted them will trust them no more. There is a spirit in man that rises and says at a given point, You have done enough of this ; you are no longer critics, you are persecutors ; you are no longer honourable opponents, you are malignant conspirators : shake on if you like, you are only shaking yourselves.

Has Russia anything to say to testify to the commonwealth of nations, the unity of man ? We should be glad to hear the hoarse voice of Russia,—cruel Russia, awful Russia, the leprous spot of civilisation, the problem of history. Even Russia has something to say : " The devil comes to us whilst crossing the fields." Solomon might have written that ; it could be put into the Bible without the Bible feeling that any interpolation of an inharmonious character had been made into its texture and web. What is the meaning ? The meaning is that the devil seizes us unawares. A man is walking quietly through the meadows : he does not meet the devil face to face ; the devil comes to him from the right hand, from the left, takes cross-courses, and falls upon him unexpectedly, so that the traveller who thought of praying suddenly begins to doubt the very God to whom he was about to pray, so that the soul that was just making a new and tender vow turns to barbarism and forswears the altar of the universe. If the devil sent us notice that he would tempt us the day after to-morrow, we might be prepared for him : he gives no notice, he sleeps not, slumbers not ; he is almost God in watchfulness. It is when we sleep that he is most vigilant ; when we

can no longer protect ourselves he is heaviest upon us. Let the young man know that the devil may not meet him on the broad thoroughfare, but may come out of some side street, arrest him, and damn him before he is aware.

Sometimes the wisdom of the world has run into little rhymes, couplets that children can remember. It would be well to have a Children's Bible ; the great book of God run off into couplets that children could sing to themselves, or say as if repeating music. We have some such proverb as this, "Wide will wear, but tight will tear." What a world of human experience! Not relating to garments only, though true in that department, but relating to discipline. Severity outdoes itself: tyranny grows no men. Relating to creed and orthodoxy, so that if we have liberty we have power of wearing, room to grow in ; but if we are tightly bound, straitlaced, if we are chained about, foot and leg and neck, our manhood is insulted, dishonoured, or disowned. Trust people if you would get the best out of them. Afford liberty at home if you would make a home of it. You may be so severe as to kill your children without meaning it. Many a murder is done by wicked disciplinarians. They do not know what they are doing ; the iron is entering into the young soul, and there will be resentment by-and-by, or a bitter and destructive recollection. So it is with the churches. We have settled everything, so that men have nothing to do but to accept us, bow to our papal command, and find in blind obedience their only liberty. That will not do ; that is not the way of God. The Lord gives us scope, room, liberty, opportunity ; he says, "Occupy till I come." Every man should make his own theology. Believe me, if there are any theologians at all, you could count every one of them on the fingers of one hand without counting the thumb. What you have to do is to believe in the theology of love, growth, obedience to the Spirit of God, loyalty to the genius of the Christ. Beware of men who have "views," and especially of men who have "clear" views. I never knew any of them do any good in the world. Let your view be that what we have done is nothing as compared to what we have yet to do ; what we have is nothing to what has yet to be revealed: we know in part, we teach in part, but when that which is perfect is come, then that which is

in part shall be done away, and the speck shall be forgotten in the infinite. This will be more than speculation, it will be discipline; the man who lives in this spirit controls himself, is animated by the spirit of hope, is always looking for the securing of greater spiritual riches, and is a man who will encourage even dull scholars to persevere because the music is on the next page. He will say, I remember the page you are reading is very hard; I remember when I was just there, and I thought I should surrender because the words were all so long and ugly and unmanageable and unpronounceable; but I will tell you what I discovered, that when I turned over I went, as it were, into a garden of flowers, I went into a paradise of beauty, I went into a house of living trust; now struggle on, fight out that very last line down there, and the moment you turn over you will be in liberty and in joy. "Wide will wear; tight will tear."

Some good sweet old souls have said in their quaint homely way this little bit of rhyme,—

"Be still, and have thy will."

It was some old granny that made that: I hear her very voice in it. It was no panoplied warrior that having got a sword wanted to use it that made this little wise rhyme. It was a mother talking over her knitting to some young impetuous souls, and she said to the most ardent of them, "Be still, and have thy will." This is Biblical. "Be still, and know that I am God;" "Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord." Do everything by doing nothing. There is a wise self-suppression; there is a time to wait, to stand, to watch, to be passive. Fuming wins no prizes; wrath works no righteousness: patience wins, calmness conquers. Some of you might have had more of your own way at home if you had not been so clamorous; it was because you were so noisy that they would not let you have what you wanted. If you had said nothing they would have heard you; if you had been perfectly quiet you would have awed them into gracious surprise, so that they would have come to you and said, "Can we do anything for you?" But you clamoured, and made so much noise, and made yourself so intolerable a nuisance, that you got nothing, and that was exactly what you deserved. We must have the

patience of faith, the calmness of trust, the serenity of perfect conviction in the righteousness and tenderness of God.

And has Spain anything to say,—proud, vain, fiery Spain? Has it no word of wisdom? A curious word; yet it has worked its way into the proverbs of the world, and should be quoted: it is, if not divine, most sadly human: "Let that which is lost be for God." The tale on which this is founded is a tale in a sentence. A man makes his will in Spain, and after having allotted everything, he says, "There is a cow, but that cow was lost; if it be found it is for so and so, but if it is never found it is for God." Did I say that proverb was Spanish? It is literally, but it is not merely Spanish morally, suggestively, in all its wider meanings. We have left God thousands of lost cows, he may have them all; if we find them we will bring them home, but if we do not find them the Lord may have them. We have made over all our bad debts to him, but as to the actual money we have in hand, that is another matter. We are indeed fearfully and wonderfully made. A member of Parliament said to a friend of mine some time ago, that he could not respond to his appeal because that very day he had had nineteen similar applications. My friend said, "It you treated them all as you treat me you might have had nine hundred and been none the worse for it." We are fearfully and wonderfully made. We have a gift of evasion; the heart is deceitful above all things: it is here and there; it is there when we want it, it is here when we have little occasion for it; it doubles upon itself, forgets its mother tongue, has no memory for names, events, obligations; can assume a look of stupor when righteousness makes its appeal.

Let me recur to our opening sentence: it is in such experiences that we discover a marvellous unity in human nature. The nations now cited may not have heard of one another at the time of the creation of these proverbs; the nations represented by these apothegms may have had no literature in common, no intercommunion as between one another; each nation may have been left to work out its own practical philosophy; and yet when all the books are brought together the language is one, the testimony is one. Men could not have thought so, and come to such

community of conclusion, without there being a secret behind all, explaining the action of the human mind, and claiming the unity of the human race. There has been light everywhere. Every man has his own gleam. God hath not left himself without witness anywhere. If a man will not have the proverbs of the Bible we ask him to write down his own proverbs, What have you found out in life? and it will be curious to watch how he, it may be in plainer language, writes what China has written, and Spain and Africa and Russia and old Jerusalem. We want men to write their own Bibles if they are not content with the Bible that is written. We beseech them to keep an abundance of blank paper with them and plenty of pens and ink, and write down what they find in life. Keep a diary; sum up your experience, and let us read your writing. The nations have never agreed upon any really comprehensive philosophy of life without lying upon the very lines of the Bible.

What then is the difference between the Biblical proverbs and the proverbs of philosophy and of common experience? Largely this, that in the Bible we find the great religious element,—every proverb trying to lift itself up into a higher philosophy; every aphorism struggling to express some kindred and developed truth; every witty, quaint, wise, experimental saying indicating that it is only beginning to say what it wants to tell: and largely this also, that the motive is Christian, the motive is profoundly spiritual; and the proverb never says, Rest in me. Every Biblical proverb says, I am but a vestibule; the temple is beyond: I am but a hint; what I came from you will see if you proceed along the line of this indication. And thus we are brought face to face with him who spake as never man spake. All the beatitudes are proverbs. We may not think of them as such, but they are all based on human experience. We have again and again asserted that the proverbs of Solomon are not simply sharply-cut sayings, but they are the verdicts of history, the testimonies of experience, they are the award of long-continued, ardent, urgent, comprehensive thinking. So the beatitudes are the upper side of the best experience. "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God;" change the grammar, Blessed are the pure in heart: for they must see God,—they have seen God, they alone see

God. Blessed are the meek : for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are the merciful : for they shall obtain mercy ; Blessed are the peacemakers : for they shall be called the children of God ; Blessed are men who look anything but blessed ; Blessed be they who are persecuted, torn limb from limb, for righteousness' sake : it is a successful rending, it is the violence that precedes the ineffable calm.

One of two things I challenge all men to : accept these Biblical proverbs, or provide better. Do not spend your time in contradicting the Bible, but in writing another. Then we shall examine what are its riches, what are its motives, how much space does it touch. Is it the little invention of a little mind ? or is it the mystery of love, the mystery of light ? Some men have made up their minds to keep the old Bible until the new one is written. I always advise men who come for my counsel not to resign their present chair until they know where they are going to sit down. Any fool can resign. It ministers to immediate vanity,—“I shall resign!”—more fool thou. Do not resign the old Bible until you have examined the new one. Do examine it, read it right through, prove all things, test them, probe them, and then hold fast to that which is good and true. We are simply waiting for the new proverbs. Meanwhile, the old ones are very quaint, wonderfully profound, far-reaching in their suggestions, and not without comfort to the souls that are looking for the further coming of the kingdom of God.

II.

WE have endeavoured to show that the unity of human nature is not proved exclusively by what are called ethnic arguments or race illustrations ; that the unity of humanity is established by community of sentiment. In the previous discourse, we tried to escape morality, common-sense, prudence, and the like ; and we went all round the world and found no rest for the sole of our foot : the genius of right, the genius of common-sense, found us in every language and in every land. We said, Whither shall I go from thy presence ? whither shall I flee from thine obligations, O thou subtle imperious law,—law of right, law of truth, law of practical philosophy ? And we could find no escape. We went to

Spain, to Italy, to Russia, to Africa, and there the genius looked upon us and said, This is none other than the house of God. When men who have never seen one another or heard of one another come to the same conclusions of a practical kind concerning the scope, the uses, and the destiny of life, the argument of a united race, come whence it may, is established and cannot be shaken.

It has been difficult to do justice to Italy in this matter, for the Italian proverbs, taken as a whole, are bad. It needed some searching to find in Italy, fair beautiful Italy, in danger of exhausting itself in the poetry of its own name, proverbs that go right down into eternal morality. There are plenty of proverbs about the uses of poison and dagger, but to find in Italy, garden of the world, real, simple, frank morality, or sense of right, in its proverbs, has not been easy. Still Italy is not without proofs that the spirit of right has been operating even amid all its fantasies and sentiments and schemes of living.

The Italian proverb says, "Friends tie their purses with a spider's web." That is more befitting what we have heard of Italy. There is a sweetness in that sentence. What is the meaning of it? That what one friend has belongs to the other, as between friends purses are not tied with iron chains; while there is real friendship there is real sympathy, real helpfulness, as brother might love brother, and loving heart help heart that was loved. Verily this is a strong and searching test of friendship; it may easily be presumed upon; it offers continual and serious temptation to nefarious natures. Man might make an investment of friendship, but even this is not to spoil the music or the poetry of the proverb. Is there nothing in our book the Bible to compare with this for sweet and dewy loveliness? "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ." "We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak." "Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away." "Whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?" That is not ethical neatness, that is not epigrammatic power: in

such sentences there is the roll of eternal music, because the swell of infinite love. The Bible likes to stand shoulder to shoulder with all the findings of the extra-mural world; the Bible is never ashamed to wait until the world has stated all its philosophies and moralities and theories, and then it says, Compare us fairly, justly, and the God that answereth by fire let him be God. Still, let us do justice to pagan thought, and to what is more or less of the nature of barbaric progress, and in the spirit of this just concession we will recognise the beauty of the Italian proverb, "Friends tie their purses with a spider's web," so that there is no difficulty in opening them when a needy friend, a trusted comrade, requires some practical expression of sympathy and helpfulness.

Italy can be almost religious in its proverbs, notwithstanding the presence of the Pope. Even in Italy there are some little glints of a true religion. That true religion, however, is tinged with what the Holy Father would call heresy. What would the world be without good healthy heresy,—that singular genius that asks questions, that tries theological weights and balances; that spirit that will not be laid until honest questions are honestly handled? Take this as a specimen of Italian progress, "With the Gospel one becomes a heretic." What is the meaning of that Italian proverb? It is that as soon as the common people are trusted with the Bible itself they dispute priest and prelate and pope, they put away from them all intermediary ministries that assert their necessity as the medium through which God can be approached. As soon as the people get the Bible they leave oppressive authority; they read for themselves; they say, "Here is the Master, let us listen to him:" and when the priest would say, "Now I must explain all this to you, or you cannot understand it," they say, "Get thee behind me! I will speak face to face with the Master himself." That is the heresy we want. We want to put down all arbitrary and foolish authority and interpretation, and we want to hear only the man who will tell us that as a brother man he has discovered such and such phases or aspects of truth, and he wants us in a kindred spirit to look at them, and see whether they commend themselves to our best imagination and our most solid understanding. We want fellow-

students. The more we have of such comradeship the better. Let every man be a Biblical annotator. Do not stop him even when he is pouring forth his rude ignorance: he will chasten himself by listening to his own folly; he will be the better for having that folly replied to by an experience larger than his own, and by a wisdom compared with which his little knowledge is but as a rill to an ocean. Every heart can find something in Christ that no other heart can find. But these peculiar findings may set him at heretical angles, and indicate on their part alien positions. No matter. In God's kingdom there is room enough for individuality. God's great sovereignty can roll all eccentricity into globular completeness and restfulness. Do not be eccentric merely for the sake of being eccentric; do not play that little trick of heresy; do not suppose that you are marked out as a genius because you hate the Pope or the priest or the minister; do not believe that you are necessarily the very incarnation of wisdom because you do not read the Bible: be honest; read the book right through for yourself, and whatsoever you find there that is likely to lift up the life and open the hand in generous beneficence, interpret for yourself, and apply with fearless modesty.

Italy shall give us one more, for we have been so suspicious of Italy with its powder of succession and with its hidden dagger that we owe Italy something. Let us hear her sweet voice in one other statement, then she shall sit down: "For an honest man half his wits are enough: the whole are too little for a knave." Illustrations of this we have seen. When a man is thoroughly honest we may examine him and cross-examine him from sunrise to sunset, and he may contradict himself in fifty particulars, but he will come right at last. We can easily detect an honest contradiction, and trace it to lapse of memory, momentary infirmity of intellectual sight. Candour cannot be put down. The cross-examiner is only a great cross-examiner and a marvellously skilful man when he has to crush a rotten egg. He knows the case, and it does not require an infinite genius to expose a man that can be proved to be bad in every hair of his head and in every bone of his body and in every drop of his blood. That man cannot tell the truth; when he gets right it is

by chance, and he is sorry for it. No man is as surprised as the rogue is when he has told the truth. He begs to be forgiven. He loves the lie, but with all his wit and keenness and shrewdness he cannot escape. The universe is against him; there is not a little star that twinkles in all the night that will afford him shelter from the deserved tempest. "Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished." "Be sure your sin will find you out." When the evangelists and apostles make their statements they apparently contradict one another in many matters of detail, but it is the contradiction of downright honesty, the candour that has suffered through crucifixion rather than tell a lie. So, as time passes on, as history is evolved, as ancient story is better understood, as old manners and customs come up, everything helps to reinstate the men who have for a moment been suspected. The universe is on the side of truth. Geometry and honesty go together. There is a spirit in the universe that brings out judgment like light, and righteousness like noonday, however deep may have been the momentary obscuration. Let us not deny to ourselves that there is nothing easier than to bring men under suspicion. Any villain can accuse you of committing any crime he may choose to name. It is not easy to repel the charge. When you deny it, people say, "Of course; what could you expect?" They judge you by themselves. When your wife stands up and states her utter disbelief in the infamous imputation, they say, "What could you expect? it is all in the family: what else could the poor creature say?" They judge her by themselves. If you are resentful they say, "Let the galled jade wince: if he were really true he would be much quieter than he is." If you are profoundly quiet, silent, restful, they say, "Why didn't he come out then, and say so?" Do not trouble yourselves about such people: they are tormented by an evil genius, and hell itself cannot disinfect their impurity. There should be room in a healthy civilisation for the charity which rightly considers the nature of mistake, contradiction, imperfection of statement, and the like. Be honest, and you cannot long be puzzled; have a clear brain, a self-releasing, self-commending heart, and no man can do you permanent harm: the enemy may strike at your reputation, but he cannot injure your character. Italy, thou hast well said, "For an honest man half his wits are

enough : but the whole are too little for a knave." He breaks down somewhere ; the very cleverness he has displayed in the maintenance of his imposition is but an aggravation of the violence with which an honest community justly treats him. Distinguish always, however, between that which is mistaken and that which is malicious. If you want to find a verdict against a man, the witness who can tell the most lies is the witness you want ; and you will gladly secure him : you want your victim to be wrong. On the other hand, if your spirit be honest, fearless, chivalrous, just, you will instantaneously take the position that every man is innocent until he is proved guilty, and all your mental action will move in that sacred and magnanimous direction. We are glad, therefore, to have found in Italy some proverbs that must have grown in the garden of honesty.

We have said nothing yet about Scotland. Have we in this roughly outlined argument cited one instance from Scotland's wit and practical genius ? Take instances now : "A crow is no whiter for being washed." Who will say that Scotland is out in the cold in the matter of real pith and honest wisdom and downright good experience ? Poor crow ! we tried to wash it, and it is as black as ever. That is true. There are some men that never can be washed clean, morally, spiritually, internally, by any skill of human hands. Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots ? then may they who are accustomed to do evil do that which is good and sweet and right. O thou poor black bird, why dost thou try to wash thyself white ? It cannot be done. The washing must be done in the heart. Make the heart right, and the external manners will be right also ; make the tree good, and the fruit will be good. Why do men pay so much attention to outsides ? why are we anxious to appear to be what we are not ? Why not sit down in the school of Christ and learn of him that by the miracle of the Holy Ghost working in us there is no man so foul that he may not be made fit companion for an angel ? The worst need not despair. But there must be no self-washing, self-trimming, self-adaptation, self-handling ; there must be direct, immediate, complete surrender. Say, Almighty Spirit of the living God, create in me a clean heart ; regenerate me : I fall into the hands of grace.

Has Scotland another proverb as good as that? It has a thousand proverbs quite as good. Here is one of them: "Better keep the devil out than have to turn him out." Are the English quick enough to see the meaning of that? Take it in the English form: "Prevention is better than cure." So, saith the Scotch wit, it is better to keep the devil out than have to turn him out. The devil is a proverbist; he says when he gets in, "Possession is nine points of the law,"—and when was the devil short of law? Keep him out! That is the motto. The devil of envy, the devil of covetousness, the devil of selfishness, the devil of jealousy, the devil of self-indulgence, the devil of prejudice,—keep him out; shut the door, shut the window, and even at great momentary inconvenience shut up the chimney, for if there is one inlet into your house he will avail himself of it. Watch him; resist him, and he will flee from you; be vigilant, be sober, for your adversary the devil goeth about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. He is an early riser, and at night he is as young and strong as he was in the morning. He looks for your unguarded hours. O Lord, how dreadful is life. It is wanted by two worlds; thou, O Christ, dost want the soul, and the devil wants it, and the poor soul is torn to pieces: sweet Saviour, see to it that the soul be not won from thy keeping; into thy hands we commend our spirits. Do not toy with the devil; do not hobnob with him on the threshold. There are those, I am told, who come to the back door and appeal to it, and the moment it is opened they put in their foot—quite accidentally—so that the servant cannot close it again. There could be no intention in that, but there the huckster talks, tells his lies or tells his truth, pleads his case and offers his wares, and when the busy maid would bid him go, and shut the door in his face, there is the foot. The devil works just so. You should have a transparent pane of glass in your door, so that you can see him from the inside and shake your head at him. I have been obliged to do that at home,—just one little pane, and the money and the time that one pane saves abundantly compensates for the expenditure incurred. But what is thus simply domestic should be largely and intensely spiritual. Look ahead, be vigilant; do not open the door or the black foot will be there. And oh, what a tongue the enemy has! how seductive, how honeyed in tone, how musical!

How he can drop into the minor key so dear to the heart in certain moods of softness and expectancy! But once let him get in, and who can turn the devil out?

Scotland shall give us one more, and thus be equal to Italy in number: "A thread will tie an honest man better than a rope will do a rogue." Are there rogues then out of Italy? Does Scotland as well as England know something about the ways of a rogue? Why, if we wanted to establish the real unity of the race, the rogue would do it. You need not go further than the rogue. He speaks all languages; he was born in every zone, under every sky, in every season of the year. The honest man feels restraint, and responds to it; the rogue feels the restraint, and defies it. A word is enough from an honest man; an oath will do nothing in the case of a thief or a rogue. If a man will not speak the truth without an oath, no oath that religious imagination ever conceived can make him speak the truth. Do not suppose that you have your friend or your partner or your companion safe because he has sworn a thousand oaths, or attested his friendship by a thousand protestations. A thread is enough where the heart is sound. Brethren, we may know the right, and not do it. Proverb-making is not proverb-keeping. Are we wiser than the pagans? We shall never be kept right by proverbs, though they may help us in many a moment of danger and difficulty. Only one thing can keep us right, and that is the living Spirit of the Eternal God. Have in you the spirit of wisdom, the spirit of truth, the spirit of honesty, and though you be not wise in the world's philosophy there shall be about you and all your conduct a sagacity which the wisest cannot gainsay. Pray that ye may become the temples of God the Holy Ghost. Amen.

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