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# THE EXPOSITOR'S BIBLE.



EDITED BY THE REV.

**W ROBERTSON NICOLL, M.A., LL.D.,**

***Editor of "The Expositor."***

## THE BOOK OF PROVERBS.

BY

**R. F. HORTON, M.A.**

**London:**

**HODDER AND STOUGHTON,**

**27, PATERNOSTER ROW.**

**MDCCCXC**

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THE [Pg iii]

# BOOK OF PROVERBS.

BY

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**London:**

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**27, PATERNOSTER ROW.**

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[Pg iv]

"Shrewd remarks
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# INTRODUCTION.

[Pg 1]

In attempting to make the book of Proverbs a subject of Expository Lectures and practical sermons it has been necessary to treat the book as a uniform composition, following, chapter by chapter, the order which the compiler has adopted, and bringing the scattered sentences together under subjects which are suggested by certain more striking points in the successive chapters. By this method the great bulk of the matter contained in the book is brought under review, either in the way of exposition or in the way of quotation and allusion, though even in this method many smaller sayings slip through the expositor's meshes. But the grave defect of the method which is thus employed is that it completely obliterates those interesting marks, discernible on the very surface of the book, of the origin and the compilation of the separate parts. This defect the reader can best supply by turning to Professor Cheyne's scholarly work "Job and Solomon; or, The Wisdom of the Old Testament;" but for those who have not time or opportunity to refer to any book besides the one which is in their hands, a brief Introduction to the following Lectures may not be unwelcome.

The Jewish tradition ascribed the Proverbs, or Sayings of the Wise, to Solomon, just as it ascribed the Psalms, or inspired lyrics of the poets, to King David, and we may add, just as it ascribed all the gradual accretions and developments of the Law to Moses. But even a very uncritical reader will observe that the book of Proverbs as we have it is not the work of a single hand; and a critical inquiry into the language and style of the several parts, and also into the social and political conditions which are implied by them, has led scholars to the conclusion that, at the most, a certain number of Solomon's wise sayings are included in the collection, but that he did not in any sense compose the book. In fact, the statement in 1 Kings iv. 32, "He *spake* three thousand proverbs," implies that his utterances were recorded by others, and not written down by himself, and the heading to chap. xxv. of our book suggests that, the "men of Hezekiah" collected the reputed sayings of Solomon from several sources, one of those sources being the collection contained in the previous chapters.[1]

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The opening words, then, of the book—"The Proverbs of Solomon the son of David, King of Israel"—are not to be taken as an assertion that all which follows flowed from Solomon's pen, but rather as a general description and key-note of the subject of the treatise. It is as if the compiler wished to say, 'This is a compendium of those wise sayings current among us, the model and type of which may be found in the proverbs attributed to the wisest of men, King Solomon.' That this is the way in which we must understand the title becomes plain when we find contained in the book a passage described as "the sayings of the wise" (xxiv. 23-34), a chapter distinctly entitled "The Words of Agur," and another paragraph headed "The Words of King Lemuel."

Leaving aside the traditional view of the authorship, which the book itself shows to be misleading, the contents may be briefly delineated and characterized.

The main body of Proverbs is the collection which begins at chap. x., "The Proverbs of Solomon," and ends at xxii. 16. This collection has certain distinct features which mark it off from all that precedes and from all that follows. It is, strictly speaking, a collection of proverbs, that is of brief, pointed sayings,—sometimes containing a similitude, but more generally consisting of a single antithetical moral sentiment,—such as spring into existence and pass current in every society of men. All these proverbs are identical in form: each

is expressed in a distich; the apparent exception in xix. 7 is to be explained by the obvious fact that the third clause is the mutilated fragment of another proverb, which in the LXX. appears complete: ὁ πολλὰ κακοποιῶν τελεσιουργεῖ κακίαν, ὃς δὲ ἐρεθίζει λόγους οὐ σωθήσεται. As the form is the same in all, so the general drift of their teaching is quite uniform; the morality inculcated is of no very lofty type; the motives for right conduct are mainly prudential; there is no sense of mystery or wonder, no tendency to speculation or doubt; "Be good, and you will prosper; be wicked, and you will suffer," is the sum of the whole. A few scattered precepts occur which seem to touch a higher level and to breathe a more spiritual air; and it is possible, as has been suggested, that these were added by the author of chaps. i.-ix., when he revised [Pg 41] and published the compilation. Such a sentiment as xiv. 34 well accords with the utterance of Wisdom in viii. 15, 16. And the series of proverbs which are grouped on the principle of their all containing the name of Jahveh, xv. 33-xvi. 7 (cf. xvi. 20, 33) seems to be closely linked with the opening chapters of the book. Assuming the proverbs of this collection to spring from the same period, and to reflect the social conditions which then prevailed, we should say that it points to a time of comparative simplicity and purity, when the main industry was that of tilling the soil, when the sayings of wise people were valued by an unsophisticated community, when the family life was pure, the wife honoured (xii. 4; xviii. 22; xix. 14), and parental authority maintained, and when the king was still worthy of respect, the immediate and obedient instrument of the Divine government (xxi. 1). The whole collection seems to date from the earlier and happier times of the monarchy.

To this collection is added an appendix (xxii. 17-xxiv. 22), which opens with an exhortation addressed by the teacher to his pupil. The literary form of this appendix falls far behind the style of the main collection. The terse and compact distich occurs rarely; most of the sayings are more cumbrous and elaborate, and in one case there is a brief didactic poem carried through several verses (xxiii. 29-35). As the style of composition shows a decline, so the general conditions which form the background of the sayings are less happy. They seem to indicate a time of growing luxury; gluttony and drunkenness are the subjects of strong invective. It appears that the poor are oppressed by the rich (xxii. 22), and justice is not rightly administered, so that the [Pg 51] innocent are carried away into confinement (xxiv. 11, 12). There is political unrest, too, and the young have to be cautioned against the revolutionary or anarchical spirit (xxiv. 21). We are evidently brought down to a later period in Israel's melancholy history.

Another brief appendix follows (xxiv. 23-34), in which the distich form almost entirely disappears; it is remarkable as containing a little picture (30-34), which, like the much longer passage in vii. 6-27, is presented as the personal observation of the writer.

We now pass on to an entirely new collection, ch. xxv.-xxix., which was made, we are told, in the literary circle at the court of Hezekiah, two hundred and fifty years or thereabouts after the time of Solomon. In this collection there is no uniformity of structure such as distinguished the proverbs of the first collection. Some distichs occur, but as often as not the proverb is drawn out into three, four, and in one case (xxv. 6, 7) five clauses; xxvii. 23-27 forms a brief connected exhortation, which is a considerable departure from the simple structure of the *mashal*, or proverb. The social condition reflected in these chapters is not very attractive; it is clear that the people have had experience of a bad ruler (xxix. 2); we seem to have hints of the many troubled experiences through which the monarchy of Israel passed—the divided rule, the injustice, the incapacity, the oppression (xxviii. 2, 3, 12, 15, 16, 28). There is one proverb which particularly recalls the age of Hezekiah, when the doom of the exile was already being proclaimed by the prophets: "As a bird that wandereth from her nest, so is a man that wandereth from his place" (xxvii. 8). And it is perhaps characteristic of that troubled [Pg 61] time, when the spiritual life was to be deepened by the experience of material suffering and national disaster, that this collection contains a proverb which might be almost the key-note of the New Testament morality (xxv. 21, 22).

The book closes with three quite distinct passages, which can only be regarded as appendices. According to one interpretation of the very difficult words which stand at the head of chaps. xxx. and xxxi., these paragraphs would come from a foreign source; it has been thought that the word translated "oracle" might be the name of the country mentioned in Gen. xxv. 14, Massa. But whether Jakeh and King Lemuel were natives of this shadowy land or not, it is certain that the whole tone and drift of these two sections are alien to the general spirit of the book. There is something enigmatical in their style and artificial in their form, which would suggest a very late period in Israel's literary history. And the closing passage, which describes the virtuous woman, is distinguished by being an alphabetical acrostic, the verses beginning with the successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet, a kind of composition which points to the dawn of Rabbinical methods in

literature. It is impossible to say when or how these curious and interesting additions were made to our book, but scholars have generally recognized them as the product of the exile, if not the post-exile, period.

Now, the two collections which have been described, with their several appendices, were at some favourable point in religious history, possibly in those happy days of Josiah when the Deuteronomic Law was newly promulgated to the joyful nation, brought together, and, as we should say now, edited, with an original introduction by an author who, unknown to us by name, is among the greatest and noblest of Biblical Writers. [Pg 7] The first nine chapters of the book, which form the introduction to the whole, strike a far higher note, appeal to nobler conceptions, and are couched in a much loftier style than the book itself. The writer bases his moral teaching on Divine authority rather than on the utilitarian basis which prevails in most of the proverbs. Writing in a time when the temptations to a lawless and sensual life were strong, appealing to the wealthier and more cultured youth of the nation, he proceeds in sweet and earnest discourse to woo his readers from the paths of vice into the Temple of Wisdom and Virtue. His method of contrasting the "two ways," and exhorting men to shun the one and choose the other, constantly reminds us of the similar appeals in the Book of Deuteronomy; but the touch is more graphic and more vivid; the gifts of the poet are employed in depicting the seven-pillared House of Wisdom and the deadly ways of Folly; and in the wonderful passage which introduces Wisdom appealing to the sons of men, on the ground of the part which she plays in the Creation and by the throne of God, we recognize the voice of a prophet—a prophet, too, who holds one of the highest places in the line of those who foretold the coming of our Lord.

Impossible as it has been in the Lectures to bring out the history and structure of the book, it will greatly help the reader to bear in mind what has just been said; he will thus be prepared for the striking contrast between the glowing beauty of the introduction and the somewhat frigid precepts which occur so frequently among the Proverbs themselves; he will be able to appreciate more fully the point which is from time to time [Pg 8] brought into relief, that much of the teaching contained in the book is crude and imperfect, of value for us only when it has been brought to the standard of our Lord's spirit, corrected by His love and wisdom, or infused with His Divine life. And especially as the reader approaches those strange chapters "The Sayings of Agur" and "The Sayings of King Lemuel" he will be glad to remind himself of the somewhat loose relation in which they stand to the main body of the work.

In few parts of the Scripture is there more need than in this of the ever-present Spirit to interpret and apply the written word, to discriminate and assort, to arrange and to combine, the varied utterances of the ages. Nowhere is it more necessary to distinguish between the inspired speech, which comes to the mind of prophet or poet as a direct oracle of God, and the speech which is the product of human wisdom, human observation, and human common sense, and is only in that secondary sense inspired. In the book of Proverbs there is much which is recorded for us by the wisdom of God, not because it is the expression of God's wisdom, but distinctly because it is the expression of man's wisdom; and among the lessons of the book is the sense of limitation and incompleteness which human wisdom leaves upon the mind.

But under the direction of the Holy Spirit, the reader may not only learn from the Proverbs much practical counsel for the common duties of life; he may have, from time to time, rare and wonderful glimpses into the heights and depths of God.

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# I.

[Pg 9]

## *THE BEGINNING OF WISDOM.*

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge."—PROV. i. 7.

> "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom:
> And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding."—PROV. ix. 10.

(*Cf.* Eccles. i. 14, "To fear the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: and it was created with the faithful in the womb;" also Ps. cxi. 10.)

The book of Proverbs belongs to a group of works in the Hebrew literature the subject of which is Wisdom. It is probably the earliest of them all, and may be regarded as the stem, of which they are the branches. Without attempting to determine the relative ages of these compositions, the ordinary reader can see the points of contact between Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, and a little careful study reveals that the book of Job, though fuller and richer in every respect, belongs to the same order. Outside the canon of Holy Scripture we possess two works which avowedly owe their suggestion and inspiration to our book, viz. "The Wisdom of Jesus the Son of Sirach," commonly called Ecclesiasticus, a genuinely Hebrew product, and "The Wisdom of Solomon," commonly called the Book of Wisdom, of much later origin, and exhibiting that fusion of Hebrew religious conceptions with Greek speculation which prevailed in the Jewish schools of Alexandria.

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Now, the question at once occurs, What are we to understand by the Wisdom which gives a subject and a title to this extensive field of literature? and in what relation does it stand to the Law and the Prophets, which form the great bulk of the Old Testament Scriptures?

Broadly speaking, the Wisdom of the Hebrews covers the whole domain of what we should call Science and Philosophy. It is the consistent effort of the human mind to know, to understand, and to explain all that exists. It is, to use the modern phrase, the search for truth. The "wise men" were not, like Moses and the Prophets, inspired legislators and heralds of God's immediate messages to mankind; but rather, like the wise men among the earlier Greeks, Thales, Solon, Anaximenes, or like the Sophists among the later Greeks, Socrates and his successors, they brought all their faculties to bear in observing the facts of the world and of life, and in seeking to interpret them, and then in the public streets or in appointed schools endeavoured to communicate their knowledge to the young. Nothing was too high for their inquiry: "*That which is* is far off, and exceeding deep; who can find it out?"[2] yet they tried to discover and to explain *that which is*. Nothing was too lowly for their attention; wisdom "reaches from one end to another mightily, and sweetly orders all things."[3] Their purpose finds expression in the words of Ecclesiastes, "I turned about, and my heart was set to know and to search out, and to seek wisdom and the reason of things."[4]

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But by Wisdom is meant not merely the search, but also the discovery; not merely a desire to know, but also a certain body of conceptions ascertained and sufficiently formulated. To the Hebrew mind it would have seemed meaningless to assert that Agnosticism was wisdom. It was saved from this paradoxical conclusion by its firmly rooted faith in God. Mystery might hang over the details, but one thing was plain: the whole universe was an intelligent plan of God; the mind might be baffled in understanding His ways, but that all existence is of His choosing and His ordering was taken as the axiom with which all thought must start. Thus there is a unity in the Hebrew Wisdom; the unity is found in the thought of the Creator; all the facts of the physical world, all the problems of human life, are referred to His mind; objective Wisdom is God's Being, which includes in its circle everything; and subjective wisdom, wisdom in the human mind, consists in becoming acquainted with His Being and all that is contained in it, and meanwhile in constantly admitting that He *is*, and yielding to Him the rightful place in our thought.

But while Wisdom embraces in her wide survey all things in heaven and in earth, there is one part of the vast field which makes a special demand upon human interest. The proper study of mankind is man. Very naturally the earliest subject to occupy human thought was human life, human conduct, human society. Or, to say the same thing in the language of this book, while Wisdom was occupied with the whole creation, she specially rejoiced in the habitable earth, and her delight was with the sons of men.

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Theoretically embracing all subjects of human knowledge and reflection, the Wisdom of the Hebrew literature practically touches but little on what we should now call Science, and even where attention was turned to the facts and laws of the material world, it was mainly in order to borrow similitudes or illustrations for moral and religious purposes. King Solomon "spake of trees, from the cedar that is in Lebanon even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall: he spake also of beasts, and of fowl, and of creeping things, and of fishes."[5] But the Proverbs which have actually come down to us under his name refer almost exclusively to principles of conduct or observation of life, and seldom remind us of the earth, the sea, and the sky, except as the dwelling-place of men, the house covered with paintings for his delight or filled with imagery for his instruction.

But there is a further distinction to be drawn, and in attempting to make it plain we may determine the place of the Proverbs in the general scheme of the inspired writings. Human life is a sufficiently large theme; it includes not only social and political questions, but the searchings and speculations of philosophy, the truths and revelations of religion. From one point of view, therefore, wisdom may be said to embrace the Law and

the Prophets, and in a beautiful passage of Ecclesiasticus[6] the whole covenant of Jehovah with Israel is treated as an emanation of wisdom from the mouth of the Most High. Wisdom was the inspiration of those who shaped the law and built the Holy House, of those who ministered in the courts of the Temple, and of those who were moved by the Holy One to chide the faults of the people, to call them to repentance, to denounce the doom of their sin, and proclaim the glad promise of deliverance. Again, from this large point of view Wisdom could be regarded as the Divine Philosophy, the system of thought and the body of beliefs which would furnish the explanation of life, and would root all the decisions of ethics in eternal principles of truth. And this function of Wisdom is presented with singular beauty and power in the eighth chapter of our book, where, as we shall see, the mouth of Wisdom shows that her concern with men is derived from her relation with the Creator and from her comprehension of His great architectural design in the construction of the world.

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Now, the wisdom which finds expression in the bulk of the Proverbs must be clearly distinguished from wisdom in this exalted sense. It is not the wisdom of the Law and the Prophets; it moves in a much lower plane. It is not the wisdom of chap. viii., a philosophy which harmonizes human life with the laws of nature by constantly connecting both with God.

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The wisdom of the Proverbs differs from the wisdom of the Prophets in this, that it is derived not directly, but mediately from God. No special mind is directed to shape these sayings; they grow up in the common mind of the people, and they derive their inspiration from those general qualities which made the whole nation in the midst of which they had their birth an inspired nation, and gave to all the literature of the nation a peculiar and inimitable tone. The wisdom of the Proverbs differs, too, from the wisdom of these introductory chapters in much the same way; it is a difference which might be expressed by a familiar use of words; it is a distinction between Philosophy and Proverbial Philosophy, a distinction, let us say, between Divine Philosophy and Proverbial Philosophy.

The Proverbs are often shrewd, often edifying, sometimes almost evangelical in their sharp ethical insight; but we shall constantly be reminded that they do not come with the overbearing authority of the prophetic "Thus saith the Lord." And still more shall we be reminded how far they lag behind the standard of life and the principles of conduct which are presented to us in Christ Jesus.

What has just been said seems to be a necessary preliminary to the study of the Proverbs, and it is only by bearing it in mind that we shall be able to appreciate the difference in tone between the nine introductory chapters and the main body of the book; nor should we venture, perhaps, apart from the consideration which has been urged to exercise our critical sense in the study of particular sayings, and to insist at all points on bringing the teaching of the wise men of old to the standard and test of Him who is Himself made unto us Wisdom.

[Pg 15]

But now to turn to our text. We must think of wisdom in the largest possible sense, as including not only ethics, but philosophy, and not only philosophy, but religion; yes, and as embracing in her vast survey the whole field of natural science, when it is said that *the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom*; we must think of knowledge in its fullest and most liberal extent when we read that *the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge*.

In this pregnant truth we may distinguish three ideas: *first*, fear, or, as we should probably say, reverence, is the pre-requisite of all scientific, philosophical, or religious truth; *second*, no real knowledge or wisdom can be attained which does not start with the recognition of God; and then, *thirdly*, the expression is not only "the fear of God," which might refer only to the Being that is presupposed in any intelligent explanation of phenomena, but the "fear of the Lord," *i.e.* of Jahveh, the self-existent One, who has revealed Himself in a special way to men as "I AM WHAT I AM;" and it is therefore hinted that no satisfactory philosophy of human life and history can be constructed which does not build upon the fact of revelation.

We may proceed to dwell upon these three thoughts in order.

1. Most religious people are willing to admit that "the fear of the Lord is a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death."[7] But what is not always observed is that the same attitude is necessary in the intellectual sphere. And yet the truth may be illustrated in a quarter which to some of us may be surprising. It is a notable fact that Modern Science had its origin in two deeply religious minds. Bacon and Descartes were both stirred to their investigation of physical facts by their belief in the Divine Being who was behind them. To mention only our great English thinker, Bacon's *Novum Organum* is the most reverent of works, and no one ever

[Pg 16]

realized more keenly than he that, as Coleridge used to say, "there is no chance of truth at the goal where there is not a childlike humility at the starting-point."

It is sometimes said that this note of reverence is wanting in the great scientific investigators of our day. So far as this is true, it is probable that their conclusions will be vitiated, and we are often impressed by the feeling that the unmannerly self-assertion and overweening self-confidence of many scientific writers augur ill for the truth of their assertions. But, on the other hand, it must be remembered that the greatest men of science in our own, as in all other ages, are distinguished by a singular simplicity, and by a reverence which communicates itself to their readers. What could be more reverent than Darwin's way of studying the coral-insect or the earth-worm? He bestowed on these humble creatures of the ocean and of the earth the most patient and loving observation. And his success in understanding and explaining them was in proportion to the respect which he showed to them. The coral-diver has no reverence for the insect; he is bent only on gain, and he consequently can tell us nothing of the coral reef and its growth. The gardener has no reverence for the worm; he cuts it ruthlessly with his spade, and flings it carelessly aside; accordingly he is not able to tell us of its lowly ministries and of the part it plays in the fertilization of the soil. It was Darwin's reverence which proved to be the beginning of knowledge in these departments of investigation; and if it was only the reverence of the naturalist, the truth is illustrated all the better, for his knowledge of the unseen and the eternal dwindled away, just as his perception of beauty in literature and art declined, in proportion as he suffered his spirit of reverence towards these things to die. [Pg 17]

The gates of Knowledge and Wisdom are closed, and they are opened only to the knock of Reverence. Without reverence, it is true, men may gain what is called worldly knowledge and worldly wisdom; but these are far removed from truth, and experience often shows us how profoundly ignorant and how incurably blind pushing and successful people are, whose knowledge is all turned to delusion, and whose wisdom shifts round into folly, precisely because the great pre-requisite was wanting. The seeker after real knowledge will have little about him which suggests worldly success. He is modest, self-forgetful, possibly shy; he is absorbed in a disinterested pursuit, for he has seen afar the high, white star of Truth; at it he gazes, to it he aspires. Things which only affect him personally make but little impression on him; things which affect the truth move, agitate, excite him. A bright spirit is on ahead, beckoning to him. The colour mounts to his cheek, the nerves thrill, and his soul is filled with rapture, when the form seems to grow clearer and a step is gained in the pursuit. When a discovery is made he almost forgets that he is the discoverer; he will even allow the credit of it to pass over to another, for he would rather rejoice in the truth itself than allow his joy to be tinged with a personal consideration. [Pg 18]

Yes, this modest, self-forgetful, reverent mien is the first condition of winning Truth, who must be approached on bended knee, and recognized with a humble and a prostrate heart. There is no gainsaying the fact that this fear, this reverence, is the beginning of wisdom.

2. We pass now to an assertion bolder than the last, that *there can be no true knowledge or wisdom which does not start from the recognition of God*. This is one of those contentions, not uncommon in the Sacred Writings, which appear at first sight to be arbitrary dogmas, but prove on closer inquiry to be the authoritative statements of reasoned truth. We are face to face, in our day, with an avowedly atheistic philosophy. According to the Scriptures, an atheistic philosophy is not a philosophy at all, but only a folly: "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God." We have thinkers among us who deem it their great mission to get rid of the very idea of God, as one which stands in the way of spiritual, social, and political progress. According to the Scriptures, to remove the idea of God is to destroy the key of knowledge and to make any consistent scheme of thought impossible. Here certainly is a clear and sharp issue.

Now, if this universe of which we form a part is a thought of the Divine mind, a work of the Divine hand, a scene of Divine operations, in which God is realizing, by slow degrees, a vast spiritual purpose, it is self-evident that no attempt to understand the universe can be successful which leaves this, its fundamental idea, out of account; as well might one attempt to understand a picture while refusing to recognize that the artist had any purpose to express in painting it, or indeed that there was any artist at all. So much every one will admit. [Pg 19]

But if the universe is not the work of a Divine mind, or the effect of a Divine will; if it is merely the working of a blind, irrational Force, which realizes no end, because it has no end to realize; if we, the feeble outcome of a long, unthinking evolution, are the first creatures that ever *thought*, and the only creatures who now *think*, in all the universe of Being; it follows that of a universe so irrational there can be no true knowledge for rational beings, and of a scheme of things so unwise there can be no philosophy or wisdom. No person

who reflects can fail to recognize this, and this is the truth which is asserted in the text. It is not necessary to maintain that without admitting God we cannot have knowledge of a certain number of empirical facts; but that does not constitute a philosophy or a wisdom. It is necessary to maintain that without admitting God we cannot have any explanation of our knowledge, or any verification of it; without admitting God our knowledge can never come to any roundness or completeness such as might justify our calling it by the name of Wisdom.

Or to put the matter in a slightly different way: a thinking mind can only conceive the universe as the product of thought; if the universe is not the product of thought it can never be intelligible to a thinking mind, and can therefore never be in a true sense the object of knowledge; to deny that the universe is the product of thought is to deny the possibility of wisdom.

[Page 20] We find, then, that it is not a dogma, but a truth of reason, that knowledge must start with the recognition of God.

3. But now we come to an assertion which is the boldest of all, and for the present we shall have to be content to leave behind many who have readily followed us so far. That we are bound to recognize "the Lord," that is the God of Revelation, and bow down in reverence before Him, as the first condition of true wisdom, is just the truth which multitudes of men who claim to be Theists are now strenuously denying. Must we be content to leave the assertion merely as a dogma enunciated on the authority of Scripture?

Surely they, at any rate, who have made the beginning of wisdom in the fear of the Lord should be able to show that the possession which they have gained is actually wisdom, and does not rest upon an irrational dogma, incapable of proof.

We have already recognized at the outset that the Wisdom of this book is not merely an intellectual account of the reason of things, but also more specifically an explanation of the moral and spiritual life. It may be granted that so far as the Intellect alone claims satisfaction it is enough to posit the bare idea of God as the condition of all rational existence. But when men come to recognize themselves as Spiritual Beings, with conceptions of right and wrong, with strong affections, with soaring aspirations, with ideas which lay hold of Eternity, they find themselves quite incapable of being satisfied with the bare idea of God; the soul within them pants and thirsts for a *living* God. An intellectual love of God might satisfy purely intellectual creatures; but to meet the needs of man as he is, God must be a God that manifests His own personality, and does not [Page 21] leave Himself without a witness to His rational creature. A wisdom, then, that is to truly appraise and rightly guide the life of man must start with the recognition of a God whose peculiar designation is the Self-existent One, and who makes Himself known to man by that name; that is, it must start with the "fear of *the Lord*."[8]

How cogent this necessity is appears directly the alternative is stated. If Reason assures us of a God that made us, a First Cause of our existence and of our being what we are; if Reason also compels us to refer to Him our moral nature, our desire of holiness, and our capacity of love, what could be a greater tax on faith, and even a greater strain on the reason, than to declare that, notwithstanding, God has not revealed Himself as the Lord of our life and the God of our salvation, as the authority of righteousness or the object of our love? When the question is stated in this way it appears that apart from a veritable and trustworthy revelation there can be no wisdom which is capable of really dealing with human life, as the life of spiritual and moral creatures; for a God who does not reveal Himself would be devoid of the highest qualities of the human spirit, and the belief in a God who is inferior to man, a Creator who is less than the creature, could furnish no foundation for an intelligible system of thought.

Our text now stands before us, not as the unsupported deliverance of dogma, but as a condensed utterance [Page 22] of the human reason. We see that starting from the conception of Wisdom as the sum of that which is, and the sufficient explanation of all things, as including therefore not only the laws of nature, but also the laws of human life, both spiritual and moral, we can make no step towards the acquisition of wisdom without a sincere and absolute reverence, a recognition of God as the Author of the universe which we seek to understand, and as the Personal Being, the Self-existent One, who reveals Himself under that significant name "I AM," and declares His will to our waiting hearts. "To whom hath the root of Wisdom been revealed? or who hath known her wise counsels? There is one wise, and greatly to be feared, the Lord sitting upon His throne."[9]

In this way is struck the key-note of the Jewish "Wisdom." It is profoundly true; it is stimulating and helpful. But it may not be out of place to remind ourselves even thus early that the idea on which we have been

dwelling comes short of the higher truth which has been given us in Christ. It hardly entered into the mind of a Hebrew thinker to conceive that "fear of the Lord" might pass into full, whole-hearted, and perfect love. And yet it may be shown that this was the change effected when Christ was of God "made unto us Wisdom;" it is not that the "fear," or reverence, becomes less, but it is that the fear is swallowed up in the larger and more gracious sentiment. For us who have received Christ as our Wisdom, it has become almost a truism that we must love in order to know. We recognize that the causes of things remain hidden from us until our hearts [Pg 23] have been kindled into an ardent love towards the First Cause, God Himself: we find that even our processes of reasoning are faulty until they are touched with the Divine tenderness, and rendered sympathetic by the infusion of a loftier passion. And it is quite in accordance with this fuller truth that both science and philosophy have made genuine progress only in Christian lands and under Christian influences. Where the touch of Christ's hand has been most decisively felt, in Germany, in England, in America, and where consequently Wisdom has attained a nobler, a richer, a more tender significance, there, under fostering powers, which are not the less real because they are not always acknowledged, the great discoveries have been made, the great systems of thought have been framed, and the great counsels of conduct have gradually assumed substance and authority. And from a wide observation of facts we are able to say, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and knowledge;" yes, but the Wisdom of God has led us on from fear to love, and in the Love of the Lord is found the fulfilment of that which trembled into birth through fear.

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# II.

[Pg 24]

## *WISDOM AS THE GUIDE OF CONDUCT.*

> "To deliver thee from the way of the evil man....
> To deliver thee from the strange woman."—Prov. ii. 12*a*-16*a*.

Wisdom is concerned, as we have seen, with the whole universe of fact, with the whole range of thought; she surveys and orders all processes of nature. We might say of her,

> "She doth preserve the stars from wrong,
> And the most ancient heavens by her are fresh and strong."

But while she is occupied in these high things, she is no less attentive to the affairs of human life, and her delight is to order human conduct, not despising even the smallest detail of that which is done by men under the sun. Side by side with physical laws, indeed often intertwined with them, appear the moral laws which issue from the lively oracles of Wisdom. There is not one authority for natural phenomena, and another for mental and moral phenomena. As we should say now, Truth is one: Science is one: Law is one. The laws of the physical order, the laws of the speculative reason, the laws of practical life, form a single system, come from the sole mind of God, and are the impartial interests of Wisdom.

As the great authority on *Conduct*, Wisdom is pictured standing in the places where men congregate, where [Pg 25] the busy hum of human voices and the rush of hurried feet make it necessary for her to lift up her voice in order to gain attention. With words of winsome wooing—"for wisdom shall enter into thy heart, and knowledge shall be pleasant unto thy soul"[10]—or with loud threats and stern declarations of truth—"the backsliding of the simple shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them"[11]—she tries to win us, while we are yet young, to her paths of pleasantness and her ways of peace. Her object is to deliver youth, (1) from the evil man, and (2) from the evil woman, or in the most comprehensive way "to deliver us from evil."

First of all, we may spend a few moments in noting the particular temptations to which men were exposed in the days when these chapters were written.[12] There was a temptation to join a troop of banditti, and to obtain a living by acts of highway robbery which would frequently result in murder; and there was the temptation to the sin which we call specifically Impurity, a temptation which arose not so much from the

existence of a special class of fallen women, as from the shocking looseness and voluptuousness of married women in well-to-do circumstances.

Society under the kings never seems to have reached anything approaching to an ordered security. We cannot point to any period when the mountain roads, even in the neighbourhood of the capital, were not haunted by thieves, who lurked in the rocks or the copses, and fell upon passing travellers, to strip and to rob, and if need be to kill them. When such things are done, when such things are even recounted in sensational literature, there are multitudes of young men who are stirred to a debased ambition; a spurious glory encircles the brow of the adventurer who sets the laws of society at defiance; and without any personal entreaty the foolish youth is disposed to leave the quiet ways of industry for the stimulating excitement and the false glamour of the bandit life. The reckless plottings of the robbers are described in chap. i. 11-14. The character of the men themselves is given in iv. 16, 17: "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." The proverb in xxiv. 15 is addressed to such an one: "Lay not wait, O wicked man, against the habitation of the righteous; spoil not his resting-place."

The rebukes of the prophets—Isaiah, Micah, Jeremiah—may have a wider application, but they seem at any rate to include this highwayman's life. "Your hands are full of blood" is the charge of Isaiah;[13] and again, "Their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed innocent blood; their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity." [14] "They build up Zion with blood," says Micah indignantly.[15] Jeremiah cries with still more vehemence to his generation, "Also in thy skirts is found the blood of the souls of the innocent poor;"[16] and again, "But thine eyes and thine heart are not but for thy covetousness, and for to shed innocent blood, and for oppression, and for violence, to do it."[17]

We are to conceive, then, the young and active men of the day constantly tempted to take these unhallowed paths which seemed to promise wealth; the sinners were always ready to whisper in the ears of those whose life was tedious and unattractive,[18] "Cast in thy lot among us; we will all have one purse." The moral sense of the community was not sufficiently developed to heartily condemn this life of iniquity; as in the eighteenth century among ourselves, so in Israel when this book was written, there existed in the minds of the people at large a lurking admiration for the bold and dashing "gentlemen of the way."

The other special temptation of that day is described in our book with remarkable realism, and there is no false shame in exposing the paths of death into which it leads. In v. 3-20 the subject is treated in the plainest way: "Her latter end is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword. Her feet go down to death; her steps take hold on Sheol." It is taken up again in vi. 24-35: "Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burned? or can one walk upon hot coals, and his feet not be scorched?" The guilty man who has been betrayed by the glitter and beauty, by the honeyed words and the soft entreaties, "shall get wounds and dishonour, and his reproach shall not be wiped away."

In chap. vii. 5-27 a most vivid picture is drawn of the foolish youth seduced into evil; there he is seen going as an ox to the slaughter, as one in fetters, "till an arrow strike through his liver; as a bird hasteth to the snare, and knoweth not that it is for his life." And the Introduction closes with a delineation of Folly, which is obviously meant as a counterpart to the delineation of Wisdom in chap. i. 20, etc.[19] The miserable woman sits at the door of her house, on a seat in the high places of the city; with seductive words she wins the foolish passers-by to enter her doors: "the dead are there; her guests are in the depths of Sheol."

It is a temptation which in many varying forms has always beset human life. No small part of the danger is that this evil, above all others, grows in silence, and yet seems to be aggravated by publicity. The preacher cannot speak plainly about it, and even writers shrink from touching the subject. We can, however, be thankful that the book, which is God's book rather than man's, knows nothing of our false modesty and conventional delicacy: it speaks out not only boldly, but minutely; it is so explicit that no man who with a prayerful heart will meditate upon its teachings need fall into the pitfall—that pitfall which seems to grow even more subtle and more seductive as civilization advances, and as the great cities absorb a larger proportion of the population; or if he fall he can only admit with shame and remorse, "I have hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof. Neither have I obeyed the voice of my teachers, nor inclined mine ear to them that instructed me. I was well-nigh in all evil in the midst of the congregation and assembly."[20]

In the second place, we must try to look at these temptations in the light of our own day, in order that we may listen to the voice of wisdom, not in the antiquarian, but rather in the practical spirit. The second temptation exists amongst us almost unchanged, except that the vast accumulation and concentration of vice in great cities has provided that mournful band of women whom a great moralist has designated the Vestal Virgins of Humanity, consecrated to shame and ruin in order to preserve unsullied the sacred flame of the domestic altar. The result of this terrible development in evil is that the deadly sin has become safer for the sinner, and in certain circles of society has become recognized as at any rate a venial fault, if not an innocent necessity. It is well to read these chapters again with our eye on the modern evil, and to let the voice of Wisdom instruct us that the life is not the less blighted because the body remains unpunished, and vice is not the less vicious because, instead of ruining others for its gratification, it feeds only on those who are already ruined. If the Wisdom of the Old Testament is obscure on this point, the Wisdom of the New Testament gives no uncertain sound. Interpreting the doctrine of our book, as Christians are bound to do, by the light of Christ, we can be left in no doubt that to all forms of impurity applies the one principle which is here applied to a specific form: "He doeth it that would destroy his own soul." "His own iniquities shall take the wicked, and he shall be holden with the cords of his sin."[21]



But with regard to the first of the two temptations, it may be urged that in our settled and ordered society it is no longer felt. We are not tempted to become highwaymen, nor even to embark on the career of a professional thief. We are disposed to skim lightly over the warning, under the impression that it does not in any way apply to us. But stop a moment! Wisdom spoke in the first instance direct to the vice of her day, but she gave to her precepts a more general colouring, which makes it applicable to all time, when she said, "So are the ways of every one that is greedy of gain; it taketh away the life of the owners thereof."[22] The specific form of greediness described in this first chapter may have become obsolete among decent and respectable people; but that greed of gain which showed itself then in a particular form is alive to-day. Dressed in a different garb, it presents temptations of a slightly different order; but the spirit is the same, the issue, the fatal issue, is the same. It is a melancholy fact that in the most progressive and civilized communities the greed of gain, instead of dying out, becomes aggravated, acquires a dominant influence, and sways men as the master passion. The United States, a country so bountiful to her children that a settled peace might be supposed to pervade the life of men who can never be in fear of losing the necessaries, or even the comforts, of life, are inflamed with a fierce and fiery passion. Society is one perpetual turmoil; life is lived at the highest conceivable pressure, because each individual is seeking to gain more and ever more. In our own country, though society is less fluid, and ancient custom checks the action of disturbing forces, the passion for gain becomes every year a more exacting tyranny over the lives of the people. We are engaged in a pitiless warfare, which we dignify by the name of competition; the race is to the swift, and the battle to the strong. It becomes almost a recognized principle that man is at liberty to prey upon his fellow man. The Eternal Law of Wisdom declares that we should treat others as we treat ourselves, and count the interests of others dear as our own; it teaches us that we should show a tender consideration for the weak, and be always ready, at whatever cost, to succour the helpless. But competition says, "No; you must try rather to beat the weak out of the field; you must leave no device untried to reduce the strength of the strong, and to divert into your own hands the grist which was going to your neighbour's mill." This conflict between man and man is untempered by pity, because it is supposed to be unavoidable as death itself. In a community so constituted, where business has fallen into such ways, while the strong may hold their own with a clean hand, the weaker are tempted to make up by cunning what they lack in strength, and the weakest are ground as the nether millstone. The pitilessness of the whole system is appalling, the more so because it is accepted as necessary.





The Bandit life has here emerged in a new form. "Come, let us lay wait for blood," says the Sweater or the Fogger, "let us lurk privily for the innocent without cause; let us swallow them up alive as Sheol, and whole as those that go down into the pit."[23] The Bandit is an outcast from society, and his hand is turned against the rich. The Sweater is an outcast from society, and his hand is turned against the poor. By "laying wait" he is able to demand, from weak men, women, and children, the long hours of the day for unceasing toil, and the bitter hours of the night for hunger and cold, until the gaunt creatures, worn with weariness and despair, find a solace in debauchery or an unhallowed rest in death.



Now, though the temptation to become a sweater may not affect many or any of us, I should like to ask, Are there not certain trades or occupations, into which some of us are tempted to enter, perfectly honeycombed with questionable practices? Under the pretext that it is all "business," are not things done which can only be described as preying upon the innocence or the stupidity of our neighbours? Sometimes the promise is, "We shall find all precious substance, we shall fill our houses with spoil."[24] Sometimes the simple object is to

escape starvation. But there is the miserable temptation to sacrifice probity and honour, to stifle compassion and thought, in order to bring into our own coffers the coveted wealth. And is there not, I ask, a similar temptation lurking in a thousand haunts more or less respectable—a temptation which may be described as the spirit of *gambling*? The essence of all gambling, whether it be called speculative business or gaming, in stock and share markets or in betting clubs and turf rings, is simply the attempt to trade on the supposed ignorance or misfortune of others, and to use superior knowledge or fortune for the purpose, not of helping, but of robbing them. It may be said that we do it in self-defence, and that others would do the same by us; yes, just as the bandit says to the young man, "We do not want to injure the traveller yonder; we want his purse. He will try to shoot you; you only shoot him in self-defence." It is the subtlety of all gambling that constitutes its great danger. It seems to turn on the principle that we may do what we like with our own; it forgets that its object is to get hold of what belongs to others, not by honest work or service rendered, but simply by cunning and deception.

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It is, then, only too easy to recognize, in many varied shapes of so-called business and of so-called pleasure, "the ways of those who are greedy of gain." Wisdom has need to cry aloud in our streets, in the chief place of concourse, in the city, in exchanges and marts. Her warning to the young man must be explicit and solemn: "My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not." The bandit life still has its attractions, though its methods are changed; it plays upon the idle imagination: it promises freedom from laborious and distasteful toil; but it says nothing of the ways of death into which it leads.

Now, in the third place, we come to the protest of Divine Wisdom against these evil ways in which men are tempted to walk. They are, she says, folly of the most egregious kind. There may be an apparent success or a momentary gratification; "precious substance may be amassed, and houses may be filled with spoil;" but the people who are betrayed into these wicked courses "shall be cut off from the land."[25] They "lay wait for their own blood;" greed "taketh away the life of the owner thereof;"[26] and as for the strange woman, that flattereth with her words, "none that go unto her return again."[27]

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It needs but a clear vision or a little wise reflection to see the destructive tendency of Evil. It is the commonest fact of experience that where "vice goes before, vengeance follows after." Why do men not perceive it? There is a kind of fatuity which blinds the eyes. The empty-headed bird sees the net spread out before its eyes;[28] many of its fellows have already been caught; the warning seems obvious enough, but it is all "in vain;" eager to get the bait—the dainty morsel lying there, easily obtainable—the foolish creature approaches, looks, argues that it is swifter and stronger than its predecessors, who were but weaklings! it will wheel down, take the food, and be gone long before the flaps of the net can spring together. In the same way the empty-headed youth, warned by the experience of elders and the tender entreaties of father and mother, assured that these ways of unjust gain are ways of ruin, is yet rash enough to enter the snare in order to secure the coveted morsel. And what is the issue? Setting at nought all the counsel of Wisdom, he would none of her reproof.[29] A momentary success led to wilder infatuation, and convinced him that he was right, and Wisdom was wrong; but his prosperity destroyed him. Soon in the shame of exposure and the misery of remorse he discovers his mistake. Or, worse still, no exposure comes; success continues to his dying day, and he leaves his substance to his heirs; "he eats of the fruits of his own way, and is filled with his own devices,"[30] but none the less he walks in the ways of darkness—in paths that are crooked and perverse—and he is consumed with inward misery. The soul within is hard, and dry, and dead; it is insensible to all feelings except feelings of torture. It is a life so dark and wretched, that when a sudden light is thrown upon its hidden secrets men are filled with astonishment and dismay, that such things could exist underneath that quiet surface.

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Finally, note these two characteristics of the Divine Wisdom: (1) she is found in her fulness only by diligent seekers; and (2) rejected, she turns into the most scornful and implacable foe.

She is to be sought as silver or hidden treasure is sought. The search must be inspired by that eagerness of desire and passion of resolve with which avarice seeks for money. No faculty must be left unemployed: the *ear* is to be inclined to catch the first low sounds of wisdom; the *heart* is to be applied to understand what is heard; the very *voice* is to be lifted up in earnest inquiry. It is a well-known fact that the fear of the Lord and the knowledge of God are not fruits which grow on every wayside bush, to be plucked by every idle passer-by, to be dropped carelessly and trodden underfoot. Without seriousness and devotion, without protracted and unflagging toil, the things of God are not to be attained. You must be up betimes; you must be on your knees early; you must lay open the book of Wisdom, pore over its pages, and diligently turn its leaves, meditating on its sayings day and night. The kingdom of God and His righteousness must be *sought*, yes, and sought

first, sought exclusively, as the one important object of desire. That easy indifference, that lazy optimism—"it will all come right in the end"—that habit of delay in deciding, that inclination to postpone the eternal realities to vanishing shadows, will be your ruin. The time may come when you will call, and there will be no answer, when you will seek diligently, but shall not find. Then in the day of your calamity, when your fear cometh, what a smile of scorn will seem to be on Wisdom's placid brow, and around her eloquent lips! what derision will seem to ring in the well-remembered counsels which you rejected.[31] O tide in the affairs of men! O tide in the affairs of God! We are called to stand by death-beds, to look into anguished eyes which know that it is too late. The bandit of commercial life passes into that penal servitude which only death will end; what agony breaks out and hisses in his remorse! The wretched victim of lust passes from the house of his sin down the path which inclines unto death; how terrible is that visage which just retains smirched traces that purity once was there! The voice rings down the doleful road, "If I had only been wise, if I had given ear, wisdom might have entered even into my heart, knowledge might have been pleasant even to my soul!"

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And wisdom still cries to *us*, "Turn you at my reproof: behold, I will pour out my spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you."

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# III.

[Pg 37]

## *THE EARTHLY REWARDS OF WISDOM.*

PROV. iii. 1-10.

The general teaching of these nine introductory chapters is that the "ways of Wisdom are pleasantness, and all her paths are peace." We are taught to look for the fruit of righteousness in long life and prosperity, for the penalty of sin in premature destruction. "The upright shall dwell in the land, and the perfect shall remain in it. But the wicked shall be cut off from the land, and they that deal treacherously shall be rooted out of it."[32] The foolish "shall eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices. For the backsliding of the simple shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them. But whoso hearkeneth unto Wisdom shall dwell securely, and shall be quiet without fear of evil."[33] "By Wisdom thy days shall be multiplied, and the years of thy life shall be increased. If thou art wise, thou art wise for thyself; and if thou scornest, thou alone shall bear it." The ways of Folly have this legend written over the entrance-gate: "The dead are there; her guests are in the depths of Sheol."[34]

This teaching is summarized in the passage before us. "My son, forget not my law; but let thine heart keep my commandments: for length of days, and years of life, and peace, shall they add to thee. Let not mercy and truth," those primary requirements of wisdom, "forsake thee: bind them about thy neck; write them upon the table of thy heart;" *i.e.* let them be an ornament which strikes the eye of the beholder, but also an inward law which regulates the secret thought. "So shalt thou find favour and good understanding in the sight of God and man;" that is to say, the charm of thy character will conciliate the love of thy fellow creatures and of thy God, while they recognize, and He approves, the spiritual state from which these graces grow. "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not upon thine own understanding:[35] in all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths. 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 first-fruits of all thy increase: so shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy vats shall overflow with new wine."[36]

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The rewards of wisdom, then, are health and long life, the good-will of God and man, prosperity, and abundant earthly possessions. As our Lord would put it, they who leave house, or wife, or brethren, or parents, or children, for the kingdom of God's sake, shall receive manifold more in this time, even of the things which they surrender, in addition to the everlasting life in the time to come.[37]

This is a side of truth which we frequently allow to drop out of sight, in order to emphasize another side which is considered more important. We are accustomed to dwell on the promised joys of the future world as

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if godliness had no promise of the life which now is, and in so doing we take all life and colour from those expected blessings. The true view seems to be, The way of wisdom, the path of the upright, is so full of joy, so crowned with peace; the life of the children of the kingdom is so wisely and bountifully provided for; the inevitable pains and troubles which fall to their share are so transformed; that from this present good we can infer a future better, gathering hints and promises of what we shall be from the realized felicity of what we are.

If we try to estimate the temporal blessings of wisdom we do not thereby deny the larger and more lasting blessings which are to come; while if we ignore these present joyful results we deprive ourselves of the surest evidence for the things which, though hoped for, are not yet seen.

We may, then, with much advantage try to estimate some of the immediate and apprehensible benefits of the life which is lived according to the dictates of heavenly wisdom.

(1) First of all, the right life is a wholesome life—yes, physically healthy. Obedience to the eternal moral laws brings "health to the navel," and that peculiar brightness which is like the freshness of dew.[38] The body is a sacred trust, a temple of the Holy Ghost; to use it ill is to violate the trust and to defile the temple. The [Pg 40] temperance of habit and orderliness of life which Wisdom requires of her children are the first conditions of vitality. They who seek health as the first consideration become valetudinarians and find neither health nor happiness; but they who diligently follow the law of God and the impulse of His Spirit find that health has come to them, as it were, by a side wind. The peace of mind, the cheerfulness of temper, the transfer of all anxiety from the human spirit to the strong Spirit of God, are very favourable to longevity. Insurance societies have made this discovery, and actuaries will tell you that in a very literal way the children of God possess the earth, while the wicked are cut off.

Yet no one thinks of measuring life only by days and years. To live long with the constant feeling that life is not worth living, or to live long with the constant apprehension of death, must be counted as a small and empty life. Now, it is the chief blessedness in the lot of the children of light that each day is a full, rich day, unmarred by recollections, unshadowed by apprehensions. Each day is distinctly worth living; it has its own exquisite lessons of cloud or sunshine, its own beautiful revelations of love, and pity, and hope. Time does not hang heavily on the hands, nor yet is its hurried flight a cause of vain regret; for it has accomplished that for which it was sent, and by staying longer could not accomplish more. And if, after all, God has appointed but a few years for His child's earthly life, that is not to be regretted; the only ground for sorrow would be to [Pg 41] live longer than His wise love had decreed. "If God thy death desires," as St. Genest says to Adrien in Rotrou's tragedy, "life has been long enow."[39]

The life in God is undoubtedly a healthy life, nor is it the less healthy because the outward man has to decay, and mortality has to be swallowed up of life. From the standpoint of the Proverbs this wider application of the truth was not as yet visible. The problem which emerges in the book of Job was not yet solved. But already, as I think we shall see, it was understood that the actual and tangible rewards of righteousness were of incomparable price, and made the prosperity of the wicked look poor and delusive.

(2) But there is a second result of the right life which ordinary observation and common sense may estimate. Wisdom is very uncompromising in her requirement of fair dealing between man and man. She cannot away with those commercial practices which can only be described as devising "evil against thy neighbour," who "dwelleth securely by thee."[40] Her main economic principle is this, that all legitimate trade is the mutual advantage of buyer and seller; where the seller is seeking to dupe the buyer, and the buyer is seeking to rob the seller, trade ceases, and the transaction is the mere inworking of the devil. Wisdom is quite aware that by these ways of the devil wealth may be accumulated; she is not blind to the fact that the overreaching spirit of greed has its rich and splendid reward; but she maintains none the less that "the curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked; but He blesseth the habitation of the righteous."[41]

It is a very impressive experience to enter the house of a great magnate whose wealth has been obtained by [Pg 42] questionable means. The rooms are beautiful; works by the great masters shed their radiance of eternal truth from the walls; the library gleams with the well-bound books of moralists and religious teachers. The sons and daughters of the house are fair and elegant; the smile of prosperity is in every curtained and carpeted room, and seems to beam out of every illuminated window; and yet the sensitive spirit cannot be rid of the idea that "the curse of the Lord is in the house."

On the other hand, the honourable man whose paths have been directed by the Lord, no matter whether he be wealthy or merely in receipt, as the result of a life's labour, of his "daily bread," has a blessing in his house. Men trust him and honour him.[42] His wealth flows as a fertilizing stream, or if it run dry, his friends, who love him for himself, make him feel that it was a good thing to lose it in order to find them. In proportion as the fierce struggle of competition has made the path of fair dealing more difficult, they who walk in it are the more honoured and loved. Nowhere does Wisdom smile more graciously or open her hand to bless more abundantly, than in the later years of a life which has in its earlier days been exposed, and has offered a successful resistance, to the strong temptations of unrighteous gain.

(3) Further, Wisdom commands not only justice, but generosity. She requires her children to yield the first-fruits of all their possessions to the Lord, and to look tenderly upon His poor. "Withhold not good from them [Pg 43] 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."[43] And the teaching of experience is that those who act upon this precept purchase to themselves a good possession. The main value of the Mammon of unrighteousness is, as our Lord says, to make to ourselves friends with it, friends who shall receive us into the everlasting habitations. The money we spend upon our own pleasures, and to promote our own interests, is spent and gone; but the money given with an open hand to those poor children of God, to whom it is strictly due, is not spent at all, but laid up in the most secure of banks. There is no source of joy in this present world to be compared with the loving gratitude of the poor whom you have lovingly helped. Strangely enough, men will spend much to obtain a title which carries no honour with it, forgetting that the same money given to the needy and the suffering purchases the true honour, which gives the noblest title. For we are none of us so stupid as to think that the empty admiration of the crowd is so rich in blessing as the heartfelt love of the few.

But in enumerating these external results of right living we have only touched incidentally upon the deeper truths which lie at the root of it. It is time to look at these.

God is necessarily so much to men, men are necessarily so completely bereft without Him, that clear vision and strong action are utterly impossible apart from a humble dependence upon Him. The beginning of all [Pg 44] wisdom is, as we have seen, in the recognition of God, in personal submission to Him, in diligent obedience to all His directions. This appears, before we reflect, to be a mere truism; when we have reflected, it proves to be a great revelation. We do not at first see what is meant by trusting in the Lord with all our heart; we confuse it with that tepid, conventional relation to God which too frequently passes current for faith. We do not readily apprehend what is implied in acknowledging God in all our ways; we suppose that it only means a general professing and calling ourselves Christians. Consequently, many of us who believe that we trust in the Lord, yet lean habitually and confidently upon our own understanding, and are even proud of doing so; we are wise in our own eyes long after our folly has become apparent to every one else; we resent with a vehemence of righteous indignation any imputation upon the soundness of our judgment. The very tone of mock humility in which we say, "I may be wrong, but——" shows that we are putting a case which seems to us practically impossible. Consequently, while we think that we are acknowledging God in all our ways, He does not direct our paths; indeed, we never gave Him an opportunity. From first to last we directed them ourselves. Let us frankly acknowledge that we do not really believe in God's detailed concern with the affairs of the individual life; that we do not, therefore, commit our way with an absolute surrender into His hand; that we do not think of submitting to His disposal the choice of our profession, the choice of our partner in life, the choice of our place of residence, the choice of our style of living, the choice of our field of public service, the choice of our scale of giving. Let us confess that we settled all these things in implicit and [Pg 45] unquestioning reliance upon our own understanding.

I speak only in wide and fully admitted generalities. If Christians as a whole had really submitted their lives in every detail to God, do you suppose that there would be something like fifty thousand Christian ministers and ten times that number of Christian workers at home, while scarcely a twentieth of that number have gone out from us to labour abroad? If Christians had really submitted their lives to God, would there have been these innumerable wretched marriages—man and wife joined together by no spiritual tie, but by the caprice of fancy or the exigencies of social caste? If Christians had really asked God to guide them, meaning what they said, would all the rich be found in districts together, while all the poor are left to perish in other districts apart? If Christians had really accepted God's direction, would they be living in princely luxury while the heathen world is crying for the bread of life? would they be spending their strength on personal aims while the guidance of social and political affairs is left in the hands of the self-interested? would they be giving such a fragment of their wealth to the direct service of the Kingdom of God?

We may answer very confidently that the life actually being lived by the majority of Christian people is not the result of God directing their paths, but simply comes from leaning on their own understanding. And what a sorrowful result!

But in face of this apostasy of life and practice, we can still joyfully point to the fact that they who do entirely renounce their own judgment, who are small in their own eyes, and who, with their whole heart trusting Him, [Pg 46] acknowledge Him in all their ways, find their lives running over with blessing, and become the means of incalculable good to the world and to themselves. It would not be easy to make plain or even credible, to those who have never trusted in God, how this guidance and direction are given. Not by miraculous signs or visible interpositions, not by voices speaking from heaven, nor even by messages from human lips, but by ways no less distinct and infinitely more authoritative, God guides men with His eye upon them, tells them, "This is the way; walk ye in it," and whispers to them quite intelligibly when they turn to the right hand or the left. With a noble universality of language, this text says nothing of Urim or Thummim, of oracle or seer, of prophet or book: "He shall direct thy paths."[44] That is enough; the method is left open to the wisdom and love of Him who directs. There is something even misleading in saying much about the methods; to set limits to God's revelations, as Gideon did, is unworthy of the faith which has become aware of God as the actual and living Reality, compared with whom all other realities are but shadows. Our Lord did not follow the guidance of His Father by a mechanical method of signs, but by a more intimate and immediate perception of His will. When Jesus promised us the Spirit as an indwelling and abiding presence He clearly intimated that the Christian life should be maintained by the direct action of God upon the several faculties of the mind, stimulating the memory, quickening the perception of truth, as well as working on the conscience and opening the channels of prayer. When we wait for signs we show a defect of faith. True trust in our Heavenly [Pg 47] Father rests in the absolute assurance that He will make the path plain, and leave us in no uncertainty about His will. To doubt that He speaks inwardly and controls us, even when we are unconscious of His control, is to doubt Him altogether.

When a few years have been passed in humble dependence on God, it is then possible to look back and see with astonishing clearness how real and decisive the leadings of the Spirit have been. There were moments when two alternatives were present, and we were tempted to decide on the strength of our own understanding; but thanks be to His name, we committed it to Him. We stepped forward then in the darkness; we deserted the way which seemed most attractive, and entered the narrow path which was shrouded in mist. We knew He was leading us, but we could not see. Now we see, and we cannot speak our praise. Our life, we find, is all a plan of God, and He conceals it from us, as if on purpose to evoke our trust, and to secure that close and personal communion which the uncertainty renders necessary.

Are you suspicious of the Inward Light, as it is called? Does it seem to open up endless possibilities of self-delusion? Are you disgusted with those who follow their own wilful way, and seek a sanction for it by calling it the leading of God? You will find that the error has arisen from not trusting the Lord "with the whole heart," or from not acknowledging Him "in all ways." The eye has not been single, and the darkness therefore has been, as our Lord declares that it would be, dense.[45] The remedy is not to be found in leaning more on [Pg 48] our own understanding, but rather in leaning less. Wisdom calls for a certain absoluteness in all our relations to God, a fearless, unreserved, and constantly renewed submission of heart to Him. Wisdom teaches that in His will is our peace, and that His will is learnt by practical surrender to His ways and commandments.

Now, is it not obvious that while the external results of wisdom are great and marked, this inward result, which is the spring of them all, is more blessed than any? The laws which govern the universe are the laws of God. The Stoic philosophy demanded a life according to Nature. That is not enough, for by Nature is meant God's will for the inanimate or non-moral creation. Where there is freedom of the will, existence must not be "according to Nature," but according to God; that is to say, life must be lived in obedience to God's laws for human life. The inorganic world moves in ordered response to God's will. We, as men, have to choose; we have to discover; we have to interpret. Woe to us if we choose amiss, for then we are undone. Woe to us if we do not understand, but in a brutish way follow the ordinances of death instead of the way of life!

Now, the supreme bliss of the heavenly wisdom is that it leads us into this detailed obedience to the law which is our life; it sets us under the immediate and unbroken control of God. Well may it be said, "Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding. For the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies."[46] [Pg 49] And yet rubies are very precious. I learn that the valley in Burmah where the most perfect rubies in the world are found is situated four thousand five hundred feet above the sea level, in a range of mountainous spurs about

eighty miles due north of Mandalay; but owing to the difficult nature of the intervening ground, the valley can only be reached by a circuitous journey of some two hundred miles, which winds through malarious jungles and over arduous mountain passes. An eminent jewellers' firm is about to explore the Valley of Rubies, though it is quite uncertain whether the stones may not be exhausted. Wisdom is "more precious than *rubies*, and none of the things thou canst desire are to be compared unto her."

To know the secret of the Lord, to walk in this world not guideless, but led by the Lord of life, to approach death itself not fearful, but in the hands of that Infinite Love for whom death does not exist, surely this is worth more than the gold and precious stones which belong only to the earth and are earthy. This wisdom is laden with riches which cannot be computed in earthly treasures; "she is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her: and happy is every one that retaineth her."[47] The creation itself, in its vast and infinite perfections, with all its æonian changes, and all the mysterious ministries which order its details and maintain its activities, comes from that same wisdom which controls the right human life. The man, therefore, who is led in the ways of wisdom, trusting wholly to God, is in harmony with that great universe of which he forms an intelligent part: he may lie down without being afraid; he may walk securely without stumbling; no sudden [Pg 50] fear can assail him; all the creatures of God are his sisters and his brothers; even Sister Death, as St. Francis used to say, is a familiar and a friend to him.

We have been dwelling upon the outward results of Heavenly Wisdom—the health, the prosperity, the friends, the favour with God and man which come to those who possess her. We have been led to seek out the secret of her peace in the humble surrender of the will to its rightful Lord. But there is a caution needed, a truth which has already occurred to the author of this chapter. It is evident that while Wisdom brings in her hand riches and honour,[48] health to the navel, and marrow to the bones,[49] it will not be enough to judge only by appearances. As we have pondered upon the law of Wisdom, we have become aware that there may be an apparent health and prosperity, a bevy of friends, and a loud-sounding fame which are the gift not of Wisdom, but of some other power. It will not do, therefore, to set these outward things before our eyes as the object of desire; it will not do to envy the possessors of them.[50] "The secret of the Lord is with the upright," and it may often be that they to whom His secret has become open will choose the frowns of adversity rather than the smile of prosperity, will choose poverty rather than wealth, will welcome solitude and contumely down in the Valley of Humiliation. For it is an open secret, in the sweet light of wisdom it becomes a self-evident truth, that "whom the Lord loveth He reproveth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth."[51]

There is, then, a certain paradox in the life of wisdom which no ingenuity can avoid. Her ways are ways of [Pg 51] pleasantness, but we may not seek them because they are pleasant, for other ways are pleasant too, or seem to be so for a while. All her paths are peace, but we do not enter them to gain peace, for the peace comes often under the stress of a great conflict or in the endurance of a heavy chastening. A thousand temporal blessings accompany the entrance into the narrow way, but so far from seeking them, it is well-nigh impossible to start on the way unless we lose sight and care of them altogether. The Divine Wisdom gives us these blessings when we no longer set our hearts on them, because while we set our hearts on them they are dangerous to us. Putting the truth in the clearest light which has been given to us, the light of our Lord Jesus Christ, we are called upon to give up everything in order to seek first the Kingdom of Heaven, and when we are absorbed in that as our true object of search everything is given back to us a hundredfold; we are called upon to take up our cross and follow Him, and when we do so He bears the cross for us; we are called upon to take His yoke upon us and to learn of Him, and immediately we take it—not before—we find that it is easy. The wise, loving only wisdom, find that they have inherited glory; the fools, seeking only promotion, find that they have achieved nothing but shame.[52]

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# IV.

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## *EDUCATION: THE CHILD'S THOUGHT OF THE PARENT.*[53]

"Wisdom doth live with children round her knees."

"He taught me, and said unto me," etc.—PROV. iv. 4.

This chapter begins with a charming little piece of autobiography. Unhappily the writer is unknown. That it was not Solomon is plain from the fact that an only son is speaking, and we know from 1 Chron. iii. 5 that Solomon was not an only son of his mother.[54] But the naïveté and beauty of the confession are the same, whoever was the speaker. The grateful memories of a father's teaching and of a mother's tenderness give point and force to the exhortations. "Do I urge upon you, young people, the claims of Wisdom?" the author seems to say. "Well I speak from experience. My parents taught me her wholesome and pleasant ways. Though I was an only son, they did not by a selfish indulgence allow me to be spoiled. They made me bear the yoke in my youth, and now I live to thank them for it."

There is a great temptation to spoil an only child, a temptation which few are able to resist. Parents can deny [Pg 53] themselves everything for their idol, except the pleasure of making the child a despot; they can endure any pain for their despot, except the pain of resisting him and instructing him. And accordingly they have sometimes to experience the shame and anguish of their children's curses, like that Carthaginian mother, of whom it is related that her son, a convicted criminal, passing to execution, requested that he might whisper something to her, and, coming near, bit off her ear, saying that it was his revenge because she had brought him up so badly. Very different are the feelings of our author; he owes much to his parents, and is eager to acknowledge what he owes. God has no kinder gift to give us than a hallowed home, the memory of lessons from the lips of father and mother, the early impressions of virtue and wisdom, the sacred streams which rise from that fountainhead, and that alone, and run freshening and singing and broadening all through our lives. [55]

With this happy example of good home influence before our eyes, we will come to consider briefly two points which are suggested by it: *first*, the importance of these early impressions; *second*, the main features of the discipline presented in the chapter.

I. Not without reason has a great cardinal of the Roman Church said that if he may have the children up to the age of five, he will not mind in whose hand they may be afterwards; for it is almost impossible to exaggerate the permanent effects of those first tendencies impressed on the soul before the intellect is developed, and [Pg 54] while the soft, plastic nature of the child is not yet determined in any particular direction. Things which we learn we can more or less unlearn, but things which are blended with the elements of our composition, made parts of us before we are conscious of our own personality, defy the hand of time and the power of conscious effort to eradicate them.

John Paton, that noble missionary to the New Hebrides, has given us a vivid picture of his early home. It was a plain lowland cottage, with its "but and ben," and between the two a small chamber with a diminutive window shedding diminutive light on the scene. To this room the children saw the father retire oftentimes a day, and shut to the door; they would occasionally hear the pathetic pleadings of the voice that prayed, and they learnt to slip past the door on tiptoe. They got to understand whence came that happy light upon their father's face; they recognized it as a reflection from the Divine presence, in the consciousness of which he lived.

Let a child draw his first breath in a house which possesses a sanctuary like that; let him come to know by his quick childish perceptions that there is in his home a ladder set up from earth to heaven, and that the angels of God go up and down on it; let him feel the Divine atmosphere in his face, the air all suffused with heavenly light, the sweetness and the calm which prevail in a place where a constant communion is maintained,—and in after years he will be aware of voices which call and hands which reach out to him from his childhood, connecting him with heaven, and even the most convincing negations of unbelief will be powerless to shake the faith which is deep as the springs of his life.

We learn to love, not because we are taught to love, but by some contagious influence of example or by some [Pg 55] indescribable attraction of beauty. Our first love to Wisdom, or, to use our modern phrase, Religion, is won from us by living with those that love her. She stole in upon us and captured us without any overpowering arguments; she was beautiful and we felt that those whom we loved were constantly taken and held by her beauty. Just reflect upon this subtle and wonderful truth. If my infancy is spent among those whose main thought is "to get" riches, I acquire imperceptibly the love of money. I cannot rationally explain my love; but it seems to me in after life a truism, that money is the principal thing; I look with blank incredulity upon one

who questions this ingrained truth. But if in infancy I live with those whose love is wholly centred upon Religion, who cherish her with unaffected ardour and respond to her claims with kindling emotion, I may in after life be seduced from her holy ways for awhile, but I am always haunted by the feeling that I have left my first love, I am restless and uneasy until I can win back that "old bride-look of earlier days."

Yes, that old bride-look—for religion may be so presented to the child's heart as to appear for ever the bride elect of the soul, from whose queenly love promotion may be expected, whose sweet embraces bring a dower of honour, whose beautiful fingers twine a chaplet of grace for the head and set a crown of glory on the brow. [56]

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The affections are elicited, and often permanently fixed, before the understanding has come into play. If the child's heart is surrendered to God, and moulded by heavenly wisdom, the man will walk securely; a certain trend will be given to all his thoughts; a certain instinctive desire for righteousness will be engrafted in his nature; and an instinctive aversion will lead him to decline the way of the wicked.[57]

The first thing, then, is to give our children an atmosphere to grow up in; to cultivate their affections, and set their hearts on the things eternal; to make them associate the ideas of wealth and honour, of beauty and glory, not with material possessions, but with the treasures and rewards of Wisdom.

II. But now comes the question, What is to be the definite teaching of the child? for it is an unfailing mark of the parents who themselves are holy that they are impelled to give clear and memorable instruction to their children. And this is where the great and constant difficulty emerges. If the hallowed example would suffice we might count the task comparatively easy. But some day the understanding will begin to assert itself; the desire to question, to criticise, to prove, will awake. And then, unless the truths of the heart have been applied to the conscience in such a way as to satisfy the reason, there may come the desolate time in which, while the habits of practical life remain pure, and the unconscious influence of early training continues to be effective, the mind is shaken by doubt, and the hope of the soul is shrouded in a murky cloud.

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Now the answer to this question may for the Christian be briefly given, Bring your children to Christ, teach them to recognize in Him their Saviour, and to accept Him as their present Lord and gracious Friend. But this all-inclusive answer will not suffer by a little expansion on the lines which are laid down in the chapter before us. When Christ is made unto us Wisdom, the contents of Wisdom are not altered, they are only brought within our reach and made effectual in us. Bringing our children to Christ will not merely consist in teaching them the doctrine of salvation, but it will include showing them in detail what salvation is, and the method of its realization.

The first object in the home life is to enable children to realize what salvation is. It is easy to dilate on an external heaven and hell, but it is not so easy to demonstrate that salvation is an inward state, resulting from a spiritual change.

It is very strange that Judaism should ever have sunk into a formal religion of outward observance, when its own Wisdom was so explicit on this point: "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."[58] The Greek version, which was very generally used in our Lord's time, had a beautiful variation of this last clause: "In order that thy fountains may not fail thee, guard them in the heart." It was after all but a new emphasis on the old teaching of the book of Proverbs when Jesus taught the necessity of heart purity, and when He showed that out of the heart come forth evil thoughts, and all the things which defile a man.[59] Yet this lesson of inwardness has always been the most difficult of all to learn. Christianity itself has always been declining from it and falling into the easier but futile ways of externalism; and even Christian homes have usually failed in their influence on the young chiefly because their religious observances have fallen into formalism, and while the outward conduct has been regulated, the inner springs of action have not been touched.

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All conduct is the outcome of hidden fountains. All words are the expression of thoughts. The first thing and the main thing is that the hidden fountains of thought and feeling be pure. The source of all our trouble is the bitterness of heart, the envious feeling, the sudden outbreak of corrupt desire. A merely outward salvation would be of no avail; a change of place, a magic formula, a conventional pardon, could not touch the root of the mischief. "I wish you would change my heart," said the chief Sekomi to Livingstone, "Give me medicine

to change it, for it is proud, proud and angry, angry always." He would not hear of the New Testament way of changing the heart; he wanted an outward, mechanical way—and that way was not to be found. The child at first thinks in the same way. Heaven is a place to go to, not a state to be in. Hell is an outward punishment to fly from, not an inward condition of the soul. The child has to learn that searching truth which Milton tried to teach, when he described Satan in Paradise,—



"... within him hell
He brings, and round about him, nor from hell
One step, no more than from himself, can fly
By change of place.

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"'Which way I fly is hell,'

cries the miserable being,

'myself am hell;
And in the lowest deep, a lower deep,
Still threatening to devour me, opens wide,
To which the hell I suffer seems a heaven.'"[60]

We are tempted in dealing with children to train them only in outward habits, and to forget the inward sources which are always gathering and forming; hence we often teach them to avoid the lie on the tongue, to put away from them the froward mouth and perverse lips,[61] and yet leave them with the lies in the soul, the deep inward unveracities which are their ruin. We often succeed in bringing them up as respectable and decorous members of society, and yet leave them a prey to secret sins; they are tormented by covetousness which is idolatry, by impurity, and by all kinds of envious and malignant passions.

There is something even ghastly in the very virtues which are sometimes displayed in a highly civilised society like ours. We perceive what appear to be virtues, but we are haunted by an uncomfortable misgiving that they are virtues only in appearance; they seem to have no connection with the heart; they never seem to bubble up from irrepressible fountains; they do not overflow. There is charity, but it is the charity only of the subscription list; there is pity, but it is the pity only of conventional humanitarianism; there is the cold correctness of conduct, or the formal accuracy of speech, but the purity seems to be prudery because it is only a concession to the conventional sentiments of the hour, and the truthfulness seems to be a lie because its very exactness seems to come, not from springs of truth, but only from an artificial habit.



We are frequently bound to notice a religion of a similar kind. It is purely mimetic. It is explained on the same principle as the assimilation of the colours of animals to the colours of their environment. It is the unconscious and hypocritical instinct of self-preservation in a presumably religious society, where not to seem religious would involve a loss of caste. It may be regarded then as the first essential lesson which is to be impressed on the mind of a child,—the lesson coming next after the unconscious influences of example, and before all dogmatic religious teaching,—that righteousness is the condition of salvation, righteousness of the heart; that the outward seeming goes for nothing at all, but that God with a clear and quiet eye gazes down into the hidden depths, and considers whether the fountains there are pure and perennial.

The second thing to be explained and enforced is *singleness of heart*, directness and consistency of aim; by which alone the inward life can be shaped to virtuous ends: "Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee. Make level the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established. Turn not to the right hand nor to the left."[62] As our Lord puts it, If thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. This precept has frequently been given in the interests of worldly wisdom. The boy is told that if he means to get on he must concentrate his thoughts and refuse to let any of the seductions around him divert his attention. Singleness of eye may be the most ruinous of evils—if a man has only a single eye to his own advantage, and pursues nothing but his own pleasure. The precept is given here however in the interests of heavenly wisdom, and there is much to be said for the view that only the truly religious mind can be quite

single-eyed. Selfishness, though it seems to be an undivided aim, is really a manifold of tumultuous and conflicting passions. He only, strictly speaking, has one desire, whose one desire is God. The way of wisdom is after all the only way which has no bifurcations. The man who has a single eye to his own interest may find before long that he has missed the way: he pushes eagerly on, but he flounders ever deeper in the mire; for though he did not turn to the right hand nor to the left, he never all the time removed his foot from evil.[63]

The right life then is a steady progress undiverted by the alluring sights and sounds which appeal to the senses.[64] "Look not round about thee," says Ecclesiasticus,[65] "in the streets of the city, neither wander thou in the solitary places thereof." We are to learn that the way goes through Vanity Fair, but admits of no divergences into its tempting booths or down its alluring alleys; the lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh, the vainglory of life, are not to distract the mind which has but one purpose in view. The path is to be kept level; [66] as we should say, an even tenor is to be preserved; we are to follow the plain unexciting path of duty, the beaten track of sober rightness. For while it is the mark of all unhallowed ways that they plunge up and down from despondency to wild elation, from giddy raptures to heartstricken depression, it is the sure sign of God's hand in our life when the paths are made level.[67] Ah those tempting ways, on which shine the false lights of imagined duty, of refined selfishness, or of gilded sensuality. Surely it is the result of Wisdom, the gift of God's grace, to keep the eyes "looking right on."



But it is time to sum up. Here is a great contrast between those whose early training has been vicious or neglected, and those who have been "taught in the way of wisdom, led in paths of uprightness." It is a contrast which should constantly be present to the eyes of parents with a warning and an encouragement. The unfortunate child whose infancy was passed in the midst of baleful example, whose heart received no instruction from parents' lips, grows up like one stumbling in the dark, and the darkness deepens as he advances; observers cannot tell—he himself cannot tell—what it is at which he stumbles.[68] There is the old ingrained vice which comes out again and again after every attempted reformation; there is the old shuffling habit; there is the old unhallowed set of the thoughts and the tastes; there is the old incurable pharisaism, with its tendency to shift all blame on to other people's shoulders. It is all like the damp in the walls of an ill-built house. In dry weather there are only the stains, but those stains are the prophecy of what will be again when the wet weather returns. The corrupt ways have become a second nature; they are as sleep and food to the wretched creature; to abstain from iniquity creates the restlessness of insomnia; if he has not been spreading an influence of evil and leading others astray, he feels as if he had been deprived of his daily food, and he is consumed with a fiery thirst.[69] Even when such an one is genuinely born again, the old hideous habits will appear like seams in the character; and temptations will send the flush along the tell-tale scars.



On the other hand, the life which starts from the sweet examples of a hallowed home, and all its timely chastisements and discipline, presents a most entrancing history. At first there is much which is difficult to bear, much against which the flesh revolts. The influences of purity are cold like the early dawn, and the young child's spirit shrinks and shivers; but with every step along the levelled road the light broadens and the air becomes warmer,—the dawn shines more and more unto the perfect day.[70] As the character forms, as the habits become fixed, as the power of resistance increases, a settled strength and a lasting peace gladden the life. The rays of heavenly wisdom not only shine on the face, but suffuse the very texture of the being, so that the whole body is full of light. Eventually it begins to appear that truth and purity, pity and charity, have become instinctive. Like a well-disciplined army, they spring at once into the ranks, and are ready for service even on a surprise. The graces of holy living come welling up from those untainted inner springs, and, be the surroundings ever so dry, the fountains fail not. The habit of single-eyed devotion to right avails even where there is no time for reflection; more and more the seductions of the senses lose their point of attack in this disciplined spirit. There is a freedom in the gait, for holiness has ceased to be a toilsome calculation,—the steps of the spiritual man are not straitened. There is a swiftness in all action,—the feet are shod with a joyous and confident preparation, for the fear of stumbling is gone.[71]



With daily growing gratitude and veneration does such an one look back upon the early home of piety and tenderness.

# V.



## *THE WAYS AND ISSUES OF SIN.*

"His own iniquities shall take the wicked,
And he shall be holden with the cords of his sin.
He shall die for lack of instruction;
And in the greatness of his folly he shall go astray."

—PROV. v. 22, 23.

It is the task of Wisdom, or, as we should say, of the Christian teacher,—and a most distasteful task it is,—to lay bare with an unsparing hand (1) the fascinations of sin, and (2) the deadly entanglements in which the sinner involves himself,—"there is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death."[72] It would be pleasanter, no doubt, to avoid the subject, or at least to be content with a general caution and a general denunciation; one is tempted to take refuge in the opinion that to mention evils of a certain kind with any particularity is likely to suggest rather than to suppress, to aggravate rather than to lessen, them. But Wisdom is not afraid of plain speaking; she sees that shame is the first result of the Fall, and behind the modest veil of shame the devil works bravely. There is a frankness and a fulness in the delineations of this chapter and of chapter seven which modern taste would condemn; but the motive cannot [Pg 66] be mistaken. Holiness describes the ways of sin in detail to create a horror and a hatred of them; she describes exactly what is within the tempting doors,—all the glamour, all the softness, all the luxury, all the unhallowed raptures,—and shows distinctly how these chambers are on the incline of death, in order that curiosity, the mother of prurience, may be stifled, and the unwary may be content to remove his way far from the temptress, and to come not nigh the door of her house.[73]

But this, it may be said, is the plea urged by a certain school of modern Realism in Art. Let us depict—such is the argument—in all its hideous literalness the sinful life, and leave it to work its own impressions, and to act as a warning to those who are entering on the seductive but dangerous ways. From this principle—so it may be said—has sprung the school of writers at whose head is M. Zola. Yes, but to counteract vice by depicting it is so hazardous a venture that none can do it successfully who is not fortified in virtue himself, and constantly led, directed, and restrained by the Holy Spirit of God. Just in this point lies the great difference between the realism of the Bible and the realism of the French novel. In the first the didactic purpose is at once declared, and the writer moves with swift precision through the fascinating scene, to lift the curtain and show death beyond; in the last the motive is left doubtful, and the writer moves slowly, observantly, even gloatingly, through the abomination and the filth, without any clear conception of the [Pg 67] Divine Eye which watches, or of the Divine Voice which condemns.[74]

There is a corresponding difference in the effects of the two. Few men could study these chapters in the book of Proverbs without experiencing a healthy revolt against the iniquity which is unveiled; while few men can read the works of modern realism without contracting a certain contamination, without a dimming of the moral sense and a weakening of the purer impulses.

We need not then complain that the powers of imaginative description are summoned to heighten the picture of the temptation, because the same powers are used with constraining effect to paint the results of yielding to it. We need not regret that the Temptress, Mistress Folly, as she is called, is allowed to utter all her blandishments in full, to weave her spells before our eyes, because the voice of Wisdom is in this way made more impressive and convincing. Pulpit invectives against sin often lose half their terrible cogency because we are too prudish to describe the sins which we denounce.

I. *The glamours of sin and the safeguard against them.*—There is no sin which affords so vivid an example [Pg 68] of seductive attraction at the beginning, and of hopeless misery at the end, as that of unlawful love. The illustration which we generally prefer, that drawn from the abuse of alcoholic drinks, occurs later on in the book, at xxiii. 31, 32; but it is not so effectual for the purpose, and we may be thankful that the Divine Wisdom is not checked in its choice of matter by our present-day notions of propriety.

There are two elements in the temptation: there is the smooth and flattering speech, the outpouring of compliment and pretended affection expressed in vii. 15, the subtle and enflaming suggestion that "stolen waters are sweet;"[75] and there is the beauty of form enhanced by artful painting of the eyelids,[76] and by all

those gratifications of the senses which melt the manhood and undermine the resisting power of the victim.[77] In our own time we should have to add still further elements of temptation,—sophistical arguments and oracular utterances of a false science, which encourages men to do for health what appetite bids them do for pleasure.

After all, this is but a type of all temptations to sin. There are weak points in every character; there are places in every life where the descent is singularly easy. A siren voice waylays us with soft words and insinuating arguments; gentle arms are thrown around us, and dazzling visions occupy our eyes; our conscience seems to fade away in a mist of excited feeling; there is a sort of twilight in which shapes are uncertain, and the imagination works mightily with the obscure presentations of the senses. We are taken unawares; the weak point happens to be unguarded; the fatal bypath with its smooth descent is, as it were, sprung upon us. [Page 69]

Now the safeguard against the specific sin before us is presented in a true and whole-hearted marriage.[78] And the safeguard against all sin is equally to be found in the complete and constant preoccupation of the soul with the Divine Love. The author is very far from indulging in allegory,—his thoughts are occupied with a very definite and concrete evil, and a very definite and concrete remedy; but instinctively the Christian ear detects a wider application, and the Christian heart turns to that strange and exigent demand made by its Lord, to hate father and mother, and even all human ties, in order to concentrate on Him an exclusive love and devotion. It is our method to state a general truth and illustrate it with particular instances; it is the method of a more primitive wisdom to dwell upon a particular instance in such a way as to suggest a general truth. Catching, therefore, involuntarily the deeper meanings of such a thought, we notice that escape from the allurements of the strange woman is secured by the inward concentration of a pure wedded love. In the permitted paths of connubial intimacy and tenderness are to be found raptures more sweet and abiding than those which are vainly promised by the ways of sin.

> "Here Love his golden shafts employs, here lights
> His constant lamp, and waves his purple wings,
> Reigns here and revels; not in the bought smile
> Of harlots, loveless, joyless, unendeared."[79]

Forbidding to marry is a device of Satan; anything which tends to degrade or to desecrate marriage bears on its face the mark of the Tempter. It is at our peril that we invade the holy mystery, or brush away from its precincts the radiant dews which reflect the light of God. Nay, even the jest and the playful teasing which the subject sometimes occasions are painfully inappropriate and even offensive. We do ill to smile at the mutual absorption and tender endearments of the young married people; we should do better to pray that their love might grow daily more absorbing and more tender. I would say to brides and bridegrooms: Magnify the meaning of this sacred union of yours; try to understand its Divine symbolism. Labour diligently to keep its mystical passion pure and ardent and strong. Remember that love needs earnest, humble, self-suppressing cultivation, and its bloom is at first easily worn off by negligence or laziness. Husbands, labour hard to make your assiduous and loving care more manifest to your wives as years go by. Wives, desire more to shine in the eyes of your husbands, and to retain their passionate and chivalrous admiration, than you did in the days of courtship. [Page 70]

Where marriage is held honourable,—a sacrament of heavenly significance,—where it begins in a disinterested love, grows in educational discipline, and matures in a complete harmony, an absolute fusion of the wedded souls, you have at once the best security against many of the worst evils which desolate society, and the most exquisite type of the brightest and loveliest spiritual state which is promised to us in the world to come.

Our sacred writings glorify marriage, finding in it more than any other wisdom or religion has found. The Bible, depicting the seductions and fascinations of sin, sets off against them the infinitely sweeter joys and the infinitely more binding fascinations of this condition which was created and appointed in the time of man's innocence, and is still the readiest way of bringing back the Paradise which is lost. [Page 71]

II. *The binding results of sin*.—It is interesting to compare with the teaching of this chapter the doctrine of Karma in that religion of Buddha which was already winning its victorious way in the far East at the time when these introductory chapters were written. The Buddha said in effect to his disciple, "You are in slavery to a tyrant set up by yourself. Your own deeds, words, and thoughts, in the former and present states of being, are your own avengers through a countless series of lives. If you have been a murderer, a thief, a liar, impure,

a drunkard, you must pay the penalty in your next birth, either in one of the hells, or as an unclean animal, or as an evil spirit, or as a demon. You cannot escape, and I am powerless to set you free. Not in the heavens," so says the Dhammapada, "not in the midst of the sea, not if thou hidest thyself in the clefts of the mountains, wilt thou find a place where thou canst escape the force of thy own evil actions."

"His own iniquities shall take the wicked, and he shall be holden with the cords of his sin." This terrible truth is illustrated with mournful emphasis in the sin of the flesh which has been occupying our attention, a sin which can only be described as "taking fire into the bosom or walking upon hot coals," with the inevitable result that the clothes are burnt and the feet are scorched.[80] There are four miseries comparable to four strong cords which bind the unhappy transgressor. First of all, there is the shame. His honour is given to others,[81] and his reproach shall not be wiped away.[82] The jealous rage of the offended husband will accept no ransom, no expiation;[83] with relentless cruelty the avenger will expose to ruin and death the hapless fool who has transgressed against him. Secondly, there is the loss of wealth. The ways of debauchery lead to absolute want, for the debauchee, impelled by his tormenting passions, will part with all his possessions in order to gratify his appetites,[84] until, unnerved and 'feckless,' incapable of any honest work, he is at his wits' end to obtain even the necessaries of life.[85] For the third binding cord of the transgression is the loss of health; the natural powers decay, the flesh and the body are consumed with loathsome disease.[86] Yet this is not the worst. Worse than all the rest is the bitter remorse, the groaning and the despair at the end of the shortened life. "How have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof!"[87] "Going down to the chambers of death," wise too late, the victim of his own sins remembers with unspeakable agony the voice of his teachers, the efforts of those who wished to instruct him.



There is an inevitableness about it all, for life is not lived at a hazard; every path is clearly laid bare from its first step to its last before the eyes of the Lord; the ups and downs which obscure the way for us are all level to Him.[88] Not by chance, therefore, but by the clearest interworking of cause and effect, these fetters of sin grow upon the feet of the sinner, while the ruined soul mourns in the latter days.[89] The reason why Wisdom cries aloud, so urgently, so continually, is that she is uttering eternal truths, laws which hold in the spiritual world as surely as gravitation holds in the natural world; it is that she sees unhappy human beings going astray in the greatness of their folly, dying because they are without the instruction which she offers.[90]



But now, to turn to the large truth which is illustrated here by a particular instance, that our evil actions, forming evil habits, working ill results on us and on others, are themselves the means of our punishment.

> "The gods are just, and of our pleasant vices
> Make instruments to plague us."[91]

We do not rightly conceive God or Judgment or Hell until we recognize that in spiritual and moral things there is a binding law, which is no arbitrary decree of God, but the essential constitution of His universe. *He* does not punish, but sin punishes; *He* does not make hell, but sinners make it. As our Lord puts it, the terrible thing about all sinning is that one may become involved in an eternal sin.[92] It is by an inherent necessity that this results from a sin against the Holy Spirit within us.

We cannot too frequently, or too solemnly, dwell upon this startling fact. It is a fact established, not by a doubtful text or two, nor by a mere *ipse dixit* of authority, but by the widest possible observation of life, by a concurrent witness of all teachers and all true religions. No planetary movement, no recurrence of the seasons, no chemical transformation, no physiological growth, no axiom of mathematics, is established on surer or more irrefutable grounds. Sin itself may even be defined, from an induction of facts, as "the act of a human will which, being contrary to the Divine Will, reacts with inevitable evil upon the agent." Sin is a presumptuous attempt on the part of a human will to disturb the irresistible order of the Divine Will, and can only draw down upon itself those lightnings of the Divine power, which otherwise would have flashed through the heavens beautiful and beneficent.



Let us, then, try to impress upon our minds that, not in the one sin of which we have been speaking only, but in all sins alike, certain bands are being woven, certain cords twisted, certain chains forged, which must one day take and hold the sinner with galling stringency.

Every sin is preparing for us a band of shame to be wound about our brows and tightened to the torture-point. There are many gross and generally condemned actions which when they are exposed bring their immediate penalty. To be discovered in dishonourable dealing, to have our hidden enormities brought into the light of day, to forfeit by feeble vices a fair and dignified position, will load a conscience which is not quite callous with a burden of shame that makes life quite intolerable. But there are many sins which do not entail this scornful censure of our fellows, sins with which *they* have a secret sympathy, for which *they* cherish an ill-disguised admiration,—the more heroic sins of daring ambition, victorious selfishness, or proud defiance of [Page 75] God. None the less these tolerated iniquities are weaving the inevitable band of shame for the brow: we shall not always be called on only to face our fellows, for we are by our creation the sons of God, in whose image we are made, and eventually we must confront the children of Light, must look straight up into the face of God, with these sins—venial as they were thought—set in the light of His countenance. Then will the guilty spirit burn with an indescribable and unbearable shame,—"To hide my head! To bury my eyes that they may not see the rays of the Eternal Light," will be its cry. May we not say with truth that the shame which comes from the judgment of our fellows is the most tolerable of the bands of shame?

Again, every sin is preparing for us a loss of wealth, of the only wealth which is really durable, the treasure in the heavens; every sin is capable of "bringing a man to a piece of bread,"[93] filching from him all the food on which the spirit lives. It is too common a sight to see a young spendthrift who has run through his patrimony in a few years, who must pass through the bankruptcy court, and who has burdened his estate and his name with charges and reproaches from which he can never again shake himself free. But that is only a superficial illustration of a spiritual reality. Every sin is the precursor of spiritual bankruptcy; it is setting one's hand to a bill which, when it comes in, must break the wealthiest signatory.

That little sin of yours, trivial as it seems,—the mere inadvertence, the light-hearted carelessness, the petty [Page 76] spleen, the innocent romancing, the gradual hardening of the heart,—is, if you would see it, like scratching with a pen through and through a writing on a parchment. What is this writing? What is this parchment? It is a title-deed to an inheritance, the inheritance of the saints in light. You are quietly erasing your name from it and blotching its fair characters. When you come to the day of account, you will show your claim, and it will be illegible. "What," you will say, "am I to lose this great possession for this trifling scratch of the pen?" "Even so," says the Inexorable; "it is precisely in this way that the inheritance is lost; not, as a rule, by deliberate and reckless destruction of the mighty treasure, but by the thoughtless triviality, the indolent easifulness. See you, it is the work of your own hand. *His own iniquities shall take the wicked*."

Again, every sin is the gradual undermining of the health, not so much the body's, as the soul's health. Those are, as it were, the slightest sins by which "the flesh and the body are consumed." "Who hath wounds without cause? Who hath redness of eyes?" Who is stricken and hurt and beaten, bitten as if by an adder, stung as if by a serpent?[94] It is the victim of drink, and every feature shows how he is holden by the cords of his sin. But there is one who is drunk with the blood of his fellow-men, and has thriven at the expense of the poor, who yet is temperate, healthy, and strong. The disease of his soul does not come to the light of day. None the less it is there. The sanity of soul which alone can preserve the life in the Eternal World and in the presence of God is fatally disturbed by every sin. A virus enters the spirit; germs obtain a lodgment there. The days [Page 77] pass, the years pass. The respected citizen, portly, rich, and courted, goes at last in a good old age from the scene of his prosperity here,—surely to a fairer home above?

Alas, the soul if it were to come into those fadeless mansions would be found smitten with a leprosy. This is no superficial malady; through and through the whole head is sick, the whole heart faint. Strange that men never noticed it down there in the busy world. But the fact is, *it is the air of heaven which brings out these suppressed disorders*. And the diseased soul whispers, "Take me out of this air, I beseech you, at all costs. I must have change of climate. This atmosphere is intolerable to me. I can only be well out of heaven." "Poor spirit," murmur the angels, "he says the truth; certainly he could not live here."

Finally, the worst chain forged in the furnace of sin is Remorse: for no one can guarantee to the sinner an eternal insensibility; rather it seems quite unavoidable that some day he must awake, and standing shamed before the eyes of his Maker, stripped of all his possessions and hopelessly diseased in soul, must recognize clearly what might have been and now cannot be. Memory will be busy. "Ah! that cursed memory!" he cries. It brings back all the gentle pleadings of his mother in that pure home long ago; it brings back all his father's counsels; it brings back the words which were spoken from the pulpit, and all the conversations with godly friends. He remembers how he wavered—"Shall it be the strait and hallowed road, or shall it be the broad road of destruction?" He remembers all the pleas and counterpleas, and how with open eyes he chose the way [Page 78]

which, as he saw, went down to death. And now? Now it is irrevocable. He said he would take his luck, and he has taken it. He said God would not punish a poor creature like him. God does not punish him. No, there is God making level all his paths now as of old. This punishment is not God's; it is his own. *His own iniquities have taken the wicked; he is held with the cords of his sin.*

Here then is the plain, stern truth,—a law, not of Nature only, but of the Universe. As you look into a fact so solemn, so awful; as the cadence of the chapter closes, do you not seem to perceive with a new clearness how men needed One who could take away the sins of the world, One who could break those cruel bonds which men have made for themselves?

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# VI.

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## *CERTAIN EXAMPLES OF THE BINDING CHARACTER OF OUR OWN ACTIONS.*

"The surety ... the sluggard ... and the worthless person."—PROV. vi. 1, 6, 12.

From the solemn principle announced at the close of the last chapter the teacher passes, almost unconscious of the thought which determines his selection of subjects, to illustrate the truth by three examples,—that of the Surety, that of the Sluggard, that of the Worthless Man. And then, because the horrors of impurity are the most striking and terrible instance of all, this subject, coming up again at v. 20, like the dark ground tone of the picture, finally runs into the long and detailed description of chap. vii.

These three examples are full of interest, partly because of the light they throw on the habits and moral sentiments of the time in which this Introduction was written, but chiefly because of the permanent teaching which is luminous in them all, and especially in the third.

We may spend a few minutes upon the first. The young man finding his neighbour in monetary difficulties, consents in an easy-going way to become his surety; he enters into a solemn pledge with the creditor, probably a Phœnician money-lender, that he will himself be responsible if the debtor is not prepared to pay at the appointed time. He now stands committed; he is like a roe that is caught by the hunter, or a bird that is held by the fowler, in the hand of his neighbour. His peace of mind, and his welfare, depend no longer upon himself, but upon the character, the weakness, the caprice of another. This is a good illustration of the way in which a thoughtless action may weave cruel bands to bind the unwary. Looking at the matter from this point of view, our book strongly and frequently denounces the practice of suretiship. To become surety for another shows that you are void of understanding. So foolish is the action that it is compared to the surrender of one's own garments, and even to the loss of personal freedom. A proverb declares: "He that is surety for a stranger shall smart for it, but he that hateth suretiship is sure."[95]

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If then the young man has immeshed himself in obligations of this kind, he is recommended to spare no pains, not to stand upon a false pride, but to go with all urgency, with frank abasement, to the man for whom he has pledged his credit, and at all costs to get released from the obligation. "Be thou not," says Wisdom, "one of them that strike hands, or of them that are sureties for debts: if thou hast not wherewith to pay, why should he take away thy bed from under thee?"[96]

We feel at once that there is another side to the question. There may be cases in which a true brotherliness will require us to be surety for our friend. "An honest man is surety for his neighbour, but he that is impudent will forsake him," says Ecclesiasticus. And from another point of view an injunction has to be given to one who has persuaded his friend to stand as his surety,—"Forget not the friendship of thy surety, for he hath given his life for thee. A sinner will overthrow the good estate of his surety, and he that is of an unthankful mind will leave him in danger that delivered him." But confining ourselves to the standpoint of the text, we may well raise a note of warning against the whole practice. As Ecclesiasticus himself says, "Suretiship hath undone many of good estate, and shaken them as a wave of the sea: mighty men hath it driven from their houses, so that they wandered among strange nations. A wicked man transgressing the commandments of the Lord shall fall into suretiship."[97]

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We may say perhaps that the truly moral course in these relations with our fellows lies here: if we can afford to be a surety for our neighbour, we can clearly afford to lend him the money ourselves. If we cannot afford to lend it to him, then it is weak and foolish, and may easily become wicked and criminal, to make our peace of mind dependent on the action of a third person, while in all probability it is hurtful to our friend himself, because by consenting to divide the risks with the actual creditor we tend to lessen in the debtor's mind the full realization of his indebtedness, and thus encourage him in shifty courses and unnerve his manly sense of responsibility. The cases in which it is wise as well as kind to become bail for another are so rare that they may practically be ignored in this connection; and when these rare occasions occur they may safely be left to [Pg 82] the arbitrament of other principles of conduct which in the present instance are out of view. Here it is enough to emphasise what a miserable chain thoughtlessness in the matter of suretiship may forge for the thoughtless.

We may now pass to our second illustration, the poverty and ruin which must eventually overtake *the Sluggard*. "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. The face thereof was covered with nettles, and the stone wall thereof was broken down. Then I beheld, and considered well: I saw, and received instruction."[98] And there is the lazy owner of this neglected farm murmuring, "Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep." There seem to be in every community a certain number of people who can only be described as constitutionally incapable: as children they are heavy and phlegmatic; at school they are always playing truant, and exerting themselves, if at all, to escape the irksome necessity of learning anything; when they enter into life for themselves they have no notion of honest effort and steady persistency, but directly their employment becomes distasteful they quit it; and at length, when they end their days in the workhouse, or in those shameful haunts of sin and vice to which sloth so easily leads, they have the melancholy reflection to take with them to the grave that they have proved themselves an encumbrance of the earth, and can be welcomed in no conceivable world. Now the question must force itself upon our attention, Might not these [Pg 83] incapables be rescued if they were taken young enough, and taught by wholesome discipline and a wise education what will be the inevitable issue of their lethargic tendencies? Might not the farm of the sluggard be impressed on their very eyeballs as a perpetual and effective warning?

Leaving this important question to social reformers, we may note how beautifully this book employs the examples of insect life to teach and stimulate human beings. "The ants are a people not strong. Yet they provide their meat in summer.... The locusts have no king. Yet go they forth all of them by bands."[99] "Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise: which having no chief, overseer,[100] or ruler, provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest."[101] By this little touch the book of Proverbs has turned the magnificent fields of modern scientific observation, and all the astonishing revelations of the microscope, into a school of moral and spiritual discipline for human life. Thus the ants swarm in the woods and the fields as if to rebuke the laziness and thriftlessness of man. They work night and day; they store their galleries with food; they capture and nourish aphides, which they use as a kind of domestic cattle. The vast and symmetrical mounds, which they rear as habitations and barns, are, relatively to the size of the builders, three or four times larger than the pyramids. By what mysterious instinct those long lines of labourers march and work in unison; by what half-human impulses they form in serried hosts and [Pg 84] engage in deadly battles prolonged through several days; by what ludicrous freaks they are led to imitate men, spending their lives in pampered luxury, dependent upon slaves, until at last in their helplessness they are mastered by their bondservants in revolt; by what heavenly motive they are stirred to feed and nourish and nurse one another in sickness and trouble,—we need not here enquire, for we are only told to go to the ant in order to learn her ways of ceaseless activity. But in this brief precept we seem to receive a hint of the boundless instruction and warning to be derived from the humbler inhabitants of this earth which man claims as his own.

Let us pass to the *third* illustration of the theme. The surety is the victim of easygoing thoughtlessness, the sluggard is the victim of laziness and incapacity; but now there appears on the scene the thoroughly worthless character, the man of Belial, and after his portrait is drawn in a few touches, his sudden and hopeless ruin is announced in a way which is all the more striking because the connection between the sin and its punishment is left to be guessed rather than explained.[102] The description of this person is wonderfully graphic and instructive, and we must dwell for a moment on the details. We see him, not in repose, but busy going from place to place, and talking a great deal. His lips are shaped continually to lie,—"he walketh with a froward mouth." There is no straightforwardness about him; he is full of hint, suggestion, innuendo; he gives you [Pg 85] always the idea that he has an accomplice in the background; he turns to you and winks in a knowing way; he

has a habit of shuffling with his feet, as if some evil spirit forbade him to stand still; you constantly catch him gesticulating; he points with his thumb over his shoulder, and nods significantly; he is never better pleased than when he can give the impression of knowing a great deal more than he cares to say. He delights to wrap himself in mystery—to smile blandly and then relapse into a look of inscrutability—to frown severely and then assume an air of gentle innocence. He is in the habit of beckoning one into a corner, and making a whispered communication as if he were your particular friend, as if he had taken a fancy to you directly he saw you, and was therefore eager to give you some information which nothing would induce him to divulge to anyone else; if you are foolish enough to share his confidences, he gives you very soon, when others are standing by, a cunning leer, as if to intimate that you and he are old acquaintances, and are in the secret, which the rest do not know.[103]

The fact is that his heart is as deceitful as his lips; he cannot be true on any terms. If some simple and open course occurred to his mind he would shun it instinctively, because it is in devising evil that he lives and moves and has his being. His friendliest approaches fill an honest man with misgiving, his words of affection or admiration send a cold shudder through one's frame. His face is a mask; when it looks fair you suspect villainy; when it looks villainous, and then only, you recognize that it is true. Wherever he goes he makes [Page 86] mischief, he causes divisions; he is the Iago of every play in which he takes a part, the Judas of every society of which he is a member. He manages to sow suspicion in the mind of the least suspicious, and to cast a slur on the character of the most innocent. When he has created discord between friends he is delighted. If he sees them disposed to a reconciliation, he comes forward as a mediator and takes care to exasperate the differences, and to make the breach irreparable. Like Edmund in *King Lear*, he has a genius for setting men at variance, and for so arranging his plots that each party thinks he hears with his own ears and sees with his own eyes the proof of the other's perfidy. But, unlike Edmund, he does the mischief, not for any special good to himself, but for the mere delight of being an agent of evil.

It is this kind of man that is the pest of commerce. He introduces dishonest practices into every business that he touches. He makes it a principle that in selling you are to impose on the customer, avail yourself of his ignorance or prejudice or weakness, and hide everything which might incline him to draw back; while in buying you are to use any fraud or panic or misrepresentation which might induce the seller to lower the price.[104] When he has been in a business for a little while the whole concern becomes tainted, there is a slime over everything; the very atmosphere is fetid.

It is this kind of man that is the bane of every social circle. In his presence, all simplicity and innocence, all charity and forbearance and compassion, seem to wither away. If you are true and straightforward [Page 87] he manages to make you ridiculous; under his evil spell you seem a simpleton. All genial laughter he turns into sardonic smiles and sneers; all kindly expressions he transforms into empty compliments which are not devoid of a hidden venom. He is often very witty, but his wit clings like an eating acid to everything that is good and pure; his tongue will lodge a germ of putrescence in everything which it touches.

It is this kind of man that is the leaven of hypocrisy and malice in the Christian Church; he intrigues and cabals. He sets the people against the minister and stirs up the minister to suspect his people. He undertakes religious work, because it is in that capacity he can do most mischief. He is never better pleased than when he can pose as the champion of orthodoxy, because then he seems to be sheltered and approved by the banner which he is defending.

"*Therefore* shall his calamity come suddenly."[105] It is because the character is so incurably base, so saturated with lies and insincerities, that there can be no gradations or temperings in his punishment. One who is less evil may be proved and tested with slight troubles, if possibly he may be stirred to amendment. But this utterly worthless person is quite unaffected by the smaller trials, the tentative disciplines of life. He cannot be chastised as a son; he can only be broken as a vessel in which there is an intrinsic flaw; or as a building, which has got the plague in its very mortar and plaster.

We are told that in Sierra Leone the white ants will sometimes occupy a house, and eat their way into all the [Page 88] woodwork, until every article in the house is hollow, so that it will collapse into dust directly it is touched. It is so with this deceitful character, so honeycombed, and eaten through, that though for years it may maintain its plausible appearance in the world, few people even suspecting the extent of the inward decay, on a sudden the end will come; there will be one touch of the finger of God, and the whole ill-compacted, worm-devoured thing will crumble into matchwood: "He shall be broken, and that without remedy."

But while we are thus watching this worthless soul overtaken with an inevitable calamity, we are reminded that not only are our eyes upon him, but the Lord also sees him. And to that calm and holy watcher of the poor sinful creature there are six things which appear specially hateful—seven which are an abomination of His soul.[106] Is there not a kind of comfort in the thought that the Lord watches and knows the whole story of that miserable life, not leaving it to us to condemn, but taking upon Himself the whole responsibility? He knows whether there is a reason in nature for these bad hearts; He knows too what power outside of nature can change and redeem them. But at present we want only to mark and consider these seven things which are abominable to God—the seven prominent traits of the character which has just been depicted. We seem to need some spiritual quickening, that we may observe these hateful things not only with our own natural [Page 89] repugnance, but with something of the holy hatred and the inward loathing which they produce in the Divine mind.

1. *Haughty eyes*. "There is a generation, Oh how lofty are their eyes! And their eyelids are lifted up."[107] And to that generation how many of us belong, and what secret admiration do we cherish for it, even when we can honestly disclaim any blood relationship! That haughty air of the great noble; that sense of intrinsic superiority; that graciousness of manner which comes from a feeling that no comparison can possibly be instituted between the great man and his inferiors; that way of surveying the whole earth as if it were one's private estate; or that supreme satisfaction with one's private estate as if it were the whole earth! This lofty pride, when its teeth are drawn so that it cannot materially hurt the rest of mankind, is a subject of mirth to us; but to the Lord it is not, it is hateful and abominable; it ranks with the gross vices and the worst sins; it is the chief crime of Satan.

2. *A lying tongue*, though it "is but for a moment."[108] It is the sure sign of God's intense hatred against lies that they recoil on the head of the liar, and are the harbingers of certain destruction. We dislike lies because of their social inconvenience, and where some social convenience is served by them we connive at them and approve. But God hates the lying tongue, whatever apparent advantage comes from it. If we lie for personal gain He hates it. If we lie from mere weakness, He hates it. If we lie in the name of religion, and in the [Page 90] fashion of the Jesuit, for the welfare of men and the salvation of souls, He hates it none the less. The abomination does not consist in the motive of the lie, but in the lie itself.

3. *Hands that shed innocent blood*. So hateful are they to Him that He could not let David His chosen servant build Him a house because this charge could be laid against the great king. The soldier in the battle-field hewing down the man who is innocent, and the man who in carelessness or greed is wearing the poor, who are dependent on him, down to death, and the man who in a passion rises up and murders his fellow,—these are very hateful to the Lord. There at the beginning of the world's history, in the blood of righteous Abel crying to the Lord, and in the mark set on the guilty brow of Cain, the heart of God was clearly and finally shown. He has not changed. He does not shed innocent blood Himself; He cannot away with them that shed it.

4. Hateful too to Him is *the devising heart*, even where courage or opportunity fails of realizing the device. There are so many more murderers in the world than we see, so many cruel and wicked deeds restrained by the police or by a dominant public sentiment, which yet lie deep in the wicked imaginations of our hearts, and are abominable to God, that we may be thankful if we do not see as He sees, and may wonder at the forbearance of His compassion.

5. *Feet that be swift in running to mischief*. Feet listless in the ways of brotherly service or holy worship, but swift, twinkling with eager haste, when any mischief is toward, are marked by God—and hated.

6. And *a false witness* is abominable to Him, the poisoner of all social life, the destroyer of all justice [Page 91] between man and man. Again and again in this book is censure passed upon this unpardonable crime.[109]

7. Finally, as the blessing of Heaven descends on the peacemaker, so the hatred of God assails the man *who sows discord among brethren*.

Such is the character that God abominates, the character which binds itself with cords of penalty and falls into irretrievable ruin. And then, after this disquisition on some of the vices which destroy the individual life and disturb society, our author turns again to that snaring vice which is so much the more destructive because it comes under the guise, not of hate, but of love. Those other vices after all bear their evil on their faces, but this is veiled and enchanted with a thousand plausible sophistries; it pleads the instincts of nature, the

fascinations of beauty, the faults of the present social state, and even advances the august precepts of science. Surely in a way where such a danger lurks we need a commandment which will shine as a lamp, a law which will be itself a light (ver. 23).

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# VII.

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## *REALISM IN MORAL TEACHING.*

"I looked forth through my lattice; and I beheld."—PROV. vii. 6.

The three chapters which close the introduction of our book (vii.-ix.) present a lively and picturesque contrast between Folly and Wisdom—-Folly more especially in the form of vice; Wisdom more generally in her highest and most universal intention. Folly is throughout concrete, an actual woman, pourtrayed with such correctness of detail that she is felt as a personal force. Wisdom, on the other hand, is only personified; she is an abstract conception; she speaks with human lips in order to carry out the parallel, but she is not a human being, known to the writer. As we shall see in the next Lecture, this high Wisdom never took a human shape until the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ; Folly, unhappily, had become incarnate in myriads of instances; scarcely any city or place where men congregate was, or is, without its melancholy example. It follows from this difference between the two that the picture of Folly is a piece of vigorous realism, while the account of Wisdom is a piece of delicate idealism. Folly is historical, Wisdom is prophetic. In this chapter we are concerned with facts which the author witnessed from the window of his house looking forth through the [Pg 93] lattice.[110] In the next chapter we shall touch on ideas which he had not seen, and could not have seen unless it were in lofty vision looking out through the lattice of the soul. In the present chapter we have an opportunity of noticing the immense value and power of pictorial delineation and concrete images in moral teaching; in the next we shall experience the peculiar fascination and inspiration of beautiful abstract conceptions, of disembodied ideals which, so far as we know at the time, are not capable of actual realization.

It is important to remember this difference in order to understand why Wisdom, the shadowy contrast to that Mistress Folly who was only too concrete and familiar, shaped itself to the writer's mind as a fair and stately woman, a queenly hostess inviting simple ones to her feast; though, as Christians have learnt, the historical embodiment of Wisdom was a man, the Word of God, who of God was made unto us wisdom.

Now before we take our stand at the window and look through the lattice into the street, we must notice the exhortations to the young man to make wisdom and understanding his intimate friends, with which the chapter begins. The law is to be kept as the apple of the eye, which is so sensitive, so tender, and at the same time so surpassingly important, that the lid has to shield it by a quick instinctive movement outrunning thought, and the hand has to be ready at all times to come to its succour. The commandments are to be written on the fingers, like engraved rings, which would serve as instant reminders in unwary moments; the very instruments through which the evil would be done are to be claimed and sealed and inscribed by the [Pg 94] righteousness which can preserve from evil, while in the secret tablets of the heart the holy truths are to be written; so that if, in the business of life, the writing on the fingers may get blurred or effaced, the principles of righteousness may yet be kept like priceless archives stored in the inviolable chambers of the inner man. Wisdom is to be treated as a sister,[111] not as if there were a natural kinship, but on the ground of the beautiful influence which a true sister, a pure woman soul, exercises over a young man's life. It is given to a sister again and again, by unfailing sympathy and by sweet comprehending ways, not teasing nor lecturing, but always believing and hoping and loving, to weave a magical spell of goodness and truth around a brother who is exposed to dangerous temptations; she will "maintain for him a saving intercourse with his true self;" when the fires of more ardent affections are burning low, or extinguished in doubt or disgust, she will be with him like a calm impersonal presence, unobtrusive, unforgotten, the more potent because she makes no show of power. Such a lovely fraternal relation is to be maintained with Wisdom, constant as a tie of blood, firm as a companionship from earliest infancy, yet exalted and enthusiastic in its way, and promising a lifelong attraction and authority.

This blessed kinship with Understanding should save the young man from such a fate as we are now to contemplate.

It is twilight, not yet absolutely dark, but the shuddering horror of the scene seems to quench the doubtful glimmer of evening and to plunge the observer suddenly into midnight.[112] There is a young man coming round the corner of the street. His is no manly walk, but an idle, effeminate saunter—a detail which is not brought out in the English Version.[113] He is a dandy and sadly empty-headed. Now all young men, good and bad alike, pass through a period of dandyism, and it has its uses; but the better the stuff of which the man is made, the more quickly he gets over the crisis, and returns to his senses. This young man is "void of understanding;" his dandyism will be chronic. His is a feeble will and a prurient mind; but his special weakness consists in this, that he thinks he can always resist temptation, and therefore never hesitates to thrust himself in its way. It is as if one were to pride himself on being able to hang on with his fingers to the rim of a well: he is always hanging there, and a touch will send him in. One who is in his own opinion weaker would give the dangerous place a wide berth, and nothing but sheer force would bring him to the edge.

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This young dandy has nothing to say for himself. A tempter need not be at the trouble to bring any sound arguments, or to make the worse appear the better reason; to this poor weakling the worse the reason is the better it will appear. As you see him lolling down the path with his leering look and his infinite self-satisfaction—good-natured, but without any other goodness; not with bad intentions, but with everything else bad—you can foresee that he will be blown over as easily as a pleasure skiff on a stormy ocean; if you have a compassionate heart you mourn over him at once, for you see the inevitable.

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The woman has come out to meet him—like a bird-catcher who has been watching for the unwary bird. Now he should escape at once, for her very attire warns him of her intentions. But this is just his weakness; he delights to place himself in such a position; he would say that it is the proof of his manliness that he can resist. She approaches him with a smirk and a smile, with an open countenance but a closed heart. She utters a sound, moving and pathetic like the murmur of harp-strings;[114] it comes from that inward tumult of passion in the woman's nature which always flutters the heart of a weak youth.[115] She is a wild undisciplined creature; she always hankers after the forbidden; the quiet home ways are insufferable to her; out in the streets, with their excitement, their variety, their suggestions, their possibilities, she forgets, if she does not quiet, her restlessness. The poor woman-nature which, rightly taught and trained, might make the beauty and sweetness of a home, capable of sanctified affections and of self-sacrificing devotion, is here entirely perverted. The passion is poisoned and now poisonous. The energy is diseased. The charms are all spurious. She goes abroad in the blackness of night because in even a faint light her hideousness would appear; under the paint and the finery she is a hag; her eyes are lustreless but for the temporary fire of her corruptions; behind that voice which croons and ripples there is a subdued moan of despair—the jarring of harp-strings which snap and quiver and shudder and are silent for ever. The wise man looks at her with compassionate loathing, God with pity which yearns to save; but this foolish youth is moved by her as only a fool could be moved. His weak understanding is immediately overcome by her flatteries; his polluted heart does not perceive the poison of her heartless endearments.

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She throws her arms round him and kisses him, and he makes no question that it is a tribute to the personal attractions which he has himself often admired in his mirror. She would have him believe that it was he whom she had come out specially to seek, though it would have been just the same whoever had caught her eye; and he, deceived by his own vanity, at once believes her. She has a great deal to say; she does not rely on one inducement, for she does not know with whom she has to do; she pours out therefore all her allurements in succession without stopping to take breath.

First, she holds out the prospect of a good meal. She has abundant meat in the house, which comes from the sacrifice she has just been offering, and it must be eaten by the next day, according to the commandment of the Law.[116] Or if he is not one to be attracted merely by food, she has appeals to his æsthetic side; her furniture is rich and artistic, and her chamber is perfumed with sweet spices. She perceives perhaps by now what a weak, faint-hearted creature, enervated by vice, unmanly and nervous, she has to do with, and she hastens to assure him that his precious skin will be safe. Her goodman is not at home, and his absence will be prolonged; he took money with him for a long journey, and she knows the date of his return. The foolish youth need not fear, therefore, "that jealousy which is the rage of a man;" he will not have to offer gifts and ransom to the implacable husband, because his deed will never be known. How hollow it all sounds, and how

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suspicious; surely one who had a grain of understanding would answer with manly scorn and with kindling indignation. But our poor young fool, who was so confident of himself, yields without a struggle; with her mere talk, playing upon his vanity, she bends him as if he were a water-weed in a stream—her appeals to his self-admiration drive him forth as easily as the goads urge an ox to the slaughter-house.

And now you may watch him going after her to destruction!

Is there not a pathos in the sight of an ox going to the slaughter? The poor dumb creature is lured by the offer of food or driven by the lash of the driver. It enters the slaughter-house as if it were a stall for rest and refreshment; it has no idea that "it is for its life." The butcher knows; the bystanders understand the signs; but it is perfectly insensible, taking a transitory pleasure in the unwonted attentions which are really the portents of death. It is not endeared to us by any special interest or affection; the dull, stupid life has never come into any close connection with ours. It has never been to us like a favourite dog, or a pet bird that has cheered our solitary hours. It gave us no response when we spoke to it or stroked its sleek hide. It was merely an animal. But yet it moves our pity at this supreme moment of its life; we do not like to think of the heavy blow which [Pg 99] will soon lay the great slow-pacing form prostrate and still in death.

Here is an ox going to the slaughter,—but it is a fellow-man, a young man, not meant for ignominious death, capable of a good and noble life. The poor degraded woman who lures him to his ruin has no such motive of serviceableness as the butcher has. By a malign influence she attracts him, an influence even more fatal to herself than to him. And he appears quite insensible,—occupied entirely with reflections on his glossy skin and goodly form; not suspecting that bystanders have any other sentiment than admiration of his attractions and approval of his manliness, he goes quietly, unresistingly, lured rather than driven, to the slaughter-house.

The effect of comparison with dumb animals is heightened by throwing in a more direct comparison with other human beings. Transposing the words, with Delitzsch, as is evidently necessary in order to preserve the parallelism of the similitude, we find this little touch: "He goeth after her straightway, as a fool to the correction of the fetters,"—as if the Teacher would remind us that the fate of the young man, tragic as it is, is yet quite devoid of the noble aspects of tragedy. This clause is a kind of afterthought, a modification. "Did we say that he is like the ox going to the slaughter?—nay, there is a certain dignity in that image, for the ox is innocent of its own doom, and by its death many will benefit; with our pity for it we cannot but mingle a certain gratitude, and we find no room for censure; but this entrapped weakling is after all only a fool, of no service or interest to any one, without any of the dignity of our good domestic cattle; in his corrupt [Pg 100] witless heart is no innocence which should make us mourn. And the punishment he goes to, though it is ruin, is so mean and degrading that it awakes the jeers and scorn of the beholders. As if he were in the village stocks, he will be exposed to eyes which laugh while they despise him. Those who are impure like himself will leer at him; those who are pure will avert their glance with an ill-disguised contempt." There, then, goes the ox to the slaughter; nay, the mere empty-headed fool to the punishment of the fetters, which will keep him out of further mischief, and chain him down to the dumb lifeless creation to which he seems to belong.

But the scorn changes rapidly to pity. Where a fellow-creature is concerned we may not feel contempt beyond that point at which it serves as a rebuke, and a stimulus to better things. When we are disposed to turn away with a scornful smile, we become aware of the suffering which the victim of his own sins will endure. It will be like an arrow striking through the liver. Only a moment, and he will be seized with the sharp pain which follows on indulgence. Oh the nausea and the loathing, when the morning breaks and he sees in all their naked repulsiveness the things which he allowed to fascinate him yester-eve! What a bitter taste is in his mouth; what a ghastly and livid hue is on the cheek which he imagined fair! He is pierced; to miserable physical sufferings is joined a sense of unspeakable degradation, a wretched depression of spirits, a wish to die which is balanced in horrid equilibrium by a fear of death.

And now he will arise and flee out of this loathly house, which seems to be strewn with dead men's bones and [Pg 101] haunted by the moaning spirits of the mighty host which have here gone down into Sheol. But what is this? He cannot flee. He is held like a bird in the snare, which beats its wings and tries to fly in vain; the soft yielding net will rise and fall with its efforts, but will not suffer it to escape. He cannot flee, for if he should escape those fatal doors, before to-morrow's sun sets he will be seized with an overmastering passion, a craving which is like the gnawing of a vulture at the liver; by an impulse which he cannot resist he will be drawn back to that very corner; there will not be again any raptures, real or imagined, only racking and tormenting desires; there will be no fascination of sight or scent or taste; all will appear as it is—revolting; the perfumes will all be rank and sickly, the meat will all be blighted and fly-blown; but none the less he must back; there, poor, miserable, quivering bird, he must render himself, and must take his fill of—loves? no, of

maudlin rapture and burning disgust; solace himself? no, but excite a desire which grows with every satisfaction, which slowly and surely, like that loathsome monster of the seas, slides its clinging suckers around him, and holds him in an embrace more and more deadly until he finally succumbs.

Then he perceives that the fatal step that he took was "for his life," that is, his life was at stake. When he entered into the trap, the die was cast; hope was abandoned as he entered there. The house which appeared so attractive was a mere covered way to hell. The chambers which promised such imagined delights were on an incline which sloped down to death.

Look at him, during that brief passage from his foolish heedlessness to his irretrievable ruin, a Rake's [Pg 102] Progress presented in simple and vivid pictures, which are so terrible because they are so absolutely true.

After gazing for a few minutes upon the story, do we not feel its power? Are there not many who are deaf to all exhortations, who will never attend to the words of Wisdom's mouth, who have a consummate art in stopping their ears to all the nobler appeals of life, who yet will be arrested by this clear presentation of a fact, by the teacher's determination not to blink or underrate any of the attractions and seductions, and by his equal determination not to disguise or diminish any of the frightful results?

We may cherish the sweetness and the purity which reticence will often preserve, but when the sweetness and the purity are lost, reticence will not bring them back, and duty seems to require that we should lay aside our fastidiousness and speak out boldly in order to save the soul of our brother.

But after dwelling on such a picture as this there is a thought which naturally occurs to us; in our hearts a yearning awakes which the book of Proverbs is not capable of meeting. Warnings so terrible, early instilled into the minds of our young men, may by God's grace be effectual in saving them from the decline into those evil ways, and from going astray in the paths of sin. Such warnings ought to be given, although they are painful and difficult to give. But when we have gone wrong through lack of instruction, when a guilty silence has prevented our teachers from cautioning us, while the corrupt habits of society have drawn us insensibly into sin, and a thousand glozening excuses have veiled from our eyes the danger until it is too late, is there nothing left for us but to sink deeper and deeper into the slough, and to issue from it only to emerge in the [Pg 103] chambers of death?

To this question Jesus gives the answer. He alone can give it. Even that personified Wisdom whose lofty and philosophical utterances we shall hear in the next chapter, is not enough. No advice, no counsel, no purity, no sanctity of example can avail. It is useless to upbraid a man with his sins when he is bound hand and foot with them and cannot escape. It is a mockery to point out, what is only too obvious, that without holiness no man can see God, at a moment when the miserable victim of sin can see nothing clearly except the fact that he is without holiness. "The pure in heart shall see God" is an announcement of exquisite beauty, it has a music which is like the music of the spheres, a music at which the doors of heaven seem to swing open; but it is merely a sentence of doom to those who are not pure in heart. Jesus meets the corrupt and ruined nature with the assurance that He has come "to seek and to save that which was lost." And lest a mere assertion should prove ineffectual to the materialised and fallen spirit, Jesus came and presented in the realism of the Cross a picture of Redemption which could strike hearts that are too gross to feel and too deaf to hear. It might be possible to work out ideally the redemption of man in the unseen and spiritual world. But actually, for men whose very sin makes them unspiritual, there seems to be no way of salvation which does not approach them in a tangible form. The horrible corruption and ruin of our physical nature, which is the work of sin, could be met only by the Incarnation, which should work out a redemption through the flesh.

Accordingly, here is a wonder which none can explain, but which none can gainsay. When the victim of [Pg 104] fleshly sin, suffering from the arrow which has pierced his liver, handed over as it seems to despair, is led to gaze upon the Crucified Christ, and to understand the meaning of His bearing our sins in His own body on the tree, he is touched, he is led to repentance, he is created anew, his flesh comes again to him as a little child, he can offer up to God the sacrifice of a contrite heart, and he is cleansed.

This is a fact which has been verified again and again by experience. And they who have marked the power of the Cross can never sufficiently admire the wisdom and the love of God, who works by ways so entirely unlike our ways, and has resources at His command which surpass our conception and baffle our explanation.

If there is a man literally broken down and diseased with sin, enfeebled in will and purpose, tormented by his evil appetite so that he seems like one possessed, the wisest counsels may be without any effect; paint in the most vivid hues the horrible consequences of his sin, but he will remain unmoved; apply the coercion of a

prison and all the punishments which are at the disposal of an earthly judge, and he will return to his vicious life with a gusto increased by his recuperated physical strength; present to him the most touching appeals of wife and children and friends, and while he sheds sentimental tears he will continue to run the downward way. But let him be arrested by the spectacle of Christ crucified for him, let the moving thought of that priceless love and untold suffering stir in his heart, let his eyes be lifted never so faintly to those eyes of [Pg 105] Divine compassion,—and though he seemed to have entered the very precincts of the grave, though the heart within him seemed to have died and the conscience seemed to be seared with a hot iron, you will observe at once the signs of returning animation; a cry will go up from the lips, a sob will convulse the frame, a light of passionate hope will come into the eyes. Christ has touched him. Christ is merciful. Christ is powerful. Christ will save.

Ah, if I speak to one who is bound with the cords of his sin, helplessly fettered and manacled, dead as it were in trespasses, I know there is no other name to mention to you, no other hope to hold out to you. Though I knew all science, I could not effectually help you; though I could command all the springs of human feeling, I could not stir you from your apathy, or satisfy the first cries of your awaking conscience. But it is permitted to me to preach unto you—not abstract Wisdom, but—Jesus, who received that name because He should save His people from their sins.

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# VIII.

[Pg 106]

## *THE FIRST-BORN OF THE CREATOR.*

"Doth not Wisdom cry?"—Prov. viii. 1.

In the last chapter a dark and revolting picture of Vice was drawn. This chapter contains a lovely and living picture of Wisdom. In this contrast, as we have already seen, Vice can be presented as a vicious woman, because it is unhappily only too easy to find such an incarnation in actual experience; Wisdom, on the other hand, cannot be presented as an actual person, but only as a personification, because there was, as yet, no Incarnation of Wisdom; far from it, Solomon, the wisest of men, the framer of many wise proverbs, had been in practical conduct an incarnation of folly rather than of wisdom, had himself become a proverb for a wise and understanding heart in combination with a dark and vicious life. Yet how could the teacher fail to feel that some day there must be an Incarnate Wisdom, a contrast to the Incarnate Vice, a conqueror and destroyer of it? In describing Wisdom personified, and in following out her sweet and high-souled utterance, the teacher unconsciously to himself becomes a prophet, and presents, as we shall see, a faint and wavering image of Him who of God was to be made unto men Wisdom, of Him who was actually to live a concrete [Pg 107] human life embodying the Divine Wisdom as completely as many poor stained human lives have embodied the undivine folly of vice. The description, then, is an adumbration of something as yet not seen or fully understood; we must be careful not to spoil its meaning by representing it as more, and by attempting to press the details in explanation of the being and the work of Christ. We shall do wisely to look at the whole picture as it formed itself before the eye of the writer, and to abstain from introducing into it colours or shades of our own. Our first task must be to follow the movement of the chapter as carefully as possible.

Wisdom, unlike the vicious woman who lurks in the twilight at the corner of the street which contains her lair, stands in the open places; she makes herself as manifest as may be by occupying some elevated position, from which her ringing voice may be heard down the streets and up the cross-ways, and may attract the attention of those who are entering the city gates or the doors of the houses. As her voice is strong and clear, so her words are full and rounded; there is no whispering, no muttering, no dark hint, no subtle incitement to secret pleasures; her tone is breezy and stirring as the dawn; there is something about it which makes one involuntarily think of the open air, and the wide sky, and the great works of God.[117] There is the beauty of goodness in all that she says; there is the charming directness and openness of truth; she abhors tortuous and obscure ways; and if some of her sayings seem paradoxes or enigmas, a little difficult to understand, [Pg 108] that is the fault of the hearer; to a tortuous mind straight things appear crooked; to the ignorant and uninstructed mind the eternal laws of God appear foolishness; but all that she says is plain to one who understands, and

right to those who find knowledge.[118] She walks always in a certain and undeviating course—it is the way of righteousness and judgment—and only those who tread the same path can expect to perceive the meaning of what she says, or to appreciate the soundness of all her counsels.[119] And now she proclaims the grounds on which she demands the attention of men, in a noble appeal, which rises to a passionate eloquence and deepens in spiritual significance as it advances. Roughly speaking, this appeal seems to fall into two parts: from ver. 10 to ver. 21 the obvious advantages of obeying her voice are declared, but at ver. 22 the discourse reaches a higher level, and she claims obedience because of her essential nature and her eternal place in the universe of created things.

In the first part Wisdom solemnly states her own value, as compared with the valuables which men usually covet—silver, and gold, and precious stones. That she is of more account than these, appears from the fact that they are but parts of her gifts. In her train come riches; but they differ from ordinary riches in being durable; her faithful followers obtain substantial wealth, and their treasuries insensibly fill.[120] To riches she adds honour, a crown which worldly riches seldom bring, and, what is better still, the honour which she confers is associated with righteousness, while the spurious honour which is commonly rendered to riches, being conferred without any moral implication, is devoid of any moral appreciation.[121] But after all, she herself is her own best reward; the prosperity which accompanies her seems trivial compared with the desirableness of her own person. Her queenly dwelling is prudence, and at her touch all the charmed regions of knowledge and discovery fly open; they who dwell with her and are admitted to share her secrets find the fruit and the increase of the intellectual life incomparably better than fine gold or choice silver. And what gives to her endowments their peculiar completeness is that she requires a moral culture to go hand in hand with mental development; and leading her disciples to hate evil, and to avoid the arrogance and the pride of the intellect, she rescues knowledge from becoming a mere barren accumulation of facts, and keeps it always in contact with the humanities and with life. Indeed, she finds it one great part of her mighty task to instruct the rulers of men, and to fit them for the fulfilment of their high functions. Her queenly prerogative she shares with all her faithful followers. Since Wisdom is the actual arbiter of human life, the wise man is, as the Stoics would have said, a king; nor can any king be recognized or tolerated who is not wise.[122]

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And all these advantages of wealth and honour, of knowledge, and power, and righteousness, are put within the reach of every one. Wisdom is no churl in loving; she loves all who love her. She does not seek to withdraw herself from men; rather she chooses the places and the ways in which she can best attract them. Queenly as she is, she condescends to woo them. Her invitations are general, even universal. And therefore if any do not find her, it is because they do not seek her; if any do not share in her rich gifts and graces, it is because they will not take the trouble to claim them.[123]

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But now we pass on to the *second* ground of appeal. Wisdom unveils herself, discloses her origin, shows her heart, stands for a moment on her high celestial throne, that she may make her claims upon the sons of men more irresistible. She was the first creation of God.[124] Before the earth issued out of nothingness she was there. In joyous activity, daily full of delight, she was beside God, as an architect, in the forming of the world. She saw the great earth shaped and clothed for the first time in the mantle of its floods, and made musical with the sound of its fountains. She saw the mountains and the hills built up from their foundations. She saw the formation of the dry land, and of the atoms of dust which go to make the ground.[125] She saw the sky spread out as a firm vault to cover the earth; and she saw God when

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> "... in His hand
> He took the golden compasses, prepared
> In God's eternal store, to circumscribe
> This universe and all created things."[126]

She saw the mighty tides of the ocean restricted to their appointed cisterns, and the firm outlines of the land fixed as their impassable barriers.[127] And this very Wisdom, who thus presided over the formation of land, and sea, and sky, is she who still sports with God's fruitful earth—yes, *sports*, for the great characteristic of Wisdom is her exultant cheerfulness, and it must by no means be supposed that the foolish and the wicked have all the gaiety and mirth as their own.[128] This Wisdom is she too who finds her peculiar delight with the sons of men.

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Is it not obvious, then, that men, who are her sons, ought to give ear to her counsels? What could establish a stronger claim for attention than this ancient origin, this honourable part in laying the very foundations of the earth, and this special interest in human life from the beginning? Raised to this high level, where we command so wide a prospect, are we not forced to see that it is our duty, our interest, our joy, to come as humble suitors to the gates of Wisdom, and there to watch, and wait, and seek until we may obtain admission? Must we not search after her, when in finding her we find life and obtain favour of the Lord? Can we not perceive that to miss her is to miss life, to wrong our own souls—to hate her is to love death? Evidently her eagerness to win us is entirely disinterested; though she delights in us, she could easily dispense with us; on the other hand, though we do not delight in her, though we constantly turn a deaf ear to her, and refuse to walk in her ways, she is indispensable to us.

Such a passage as this gives rise to many reflections, and the longer we meditate upon it the more rich and suggestive it appears. Let us try to follow out some of the thoughts which readily present themselves, and especially such as are suggested by the verses which may be described as the poem of creation.

First of all, here is the noble idea which overturns at a touch all mythological speculations about the origin of things—an idea which is in deep harmony with all the best knowledge of our own time—that there is nothing [Ps 104]
fortuitous in the creation of the world; the Creator is not a blind Force, but an Intelligent Being whose first creation is wisdom. He is the origin of a Law by which He means to bind Himself; arbitrariness finds no place in His counsels; accident has no part in His works; in Wisdom hath He formed them all. In all heathen conceptions of creation caprice is supreme, law has no place, blind force works in this way or that, either by the compulsion of a Necessity which is stronger than the gods, or by freaks and whims of the gods which would be contemptible even in men. But here is the clear recognition of the principle that God's Law is a law also to Himself, and that His law is wisdom. He creates the world as an outcome of His own wise and holy design, so that "nothing walks with aimless feet." It is on this theological conception that the possibility of science depends. Until the universe is recognized as an ordered and intelligible system the ordered and intelligent study of it cannot begin. As long as the arbitrary and fortuitous are supposed to hold sway inquiry is paralyzed at its starting-point.

It may, however, be suggested that the doctrine of Evolution, which scientific men are almost unanimous in accepting, is inconsistent with this idea of Creation. By this doctrine our attention is directed to the apparently disordered collision of forces, and the struggle for existence out of which the order and progress of life are educed, and it is hastily assumed that a Wise Intelligence would not work in this way, but would exhibit more economy of resources, more simplicity and directness of method, and more inevitableness of result. But may we not say that the apparent fortuitousness with which the results are achieved is the clearest [Ps 114]
evidence of the wise purpose which orders and directs the process? for about the results there can be no question; order, beauty, fitness everywhere prevail; life emerges from the inorganic, thought from life, morality and religion from thought. The more our attention is called to the apparently accidental steps by which these results are reached, the more persuaded must we become that a great and a wise law was at work, that by the side of the Creator, as a master workman, was Wisdom from the beginning. Such a passage as this, then, prepares the way for all science, and furnishes the true conceptions without which science would be sterile. It takes us at a step out of a pagan into a truly religious mode of thinking; it leads us out of the misty regions of superstition to the luminous threshold of the House of Knowledge. It may be said with truth that many scientific facts which are known to us were not known to the writer; and this may raise a prejudice against our book in those minds which can tolerate no thought except that of the present generation, and appreciate no knowledge which is not, as it were, brought up to date; but the fruitful conception is here, here is the right way of regarding the universe, here the preparation of all science.

And now to advance to another idea which is implied in the passage, the idea that in the very conception of the universe human life was contemplated, and regarded with a peculiar delight by the Wisdom of God. The place which Man occupies in creation has been variously estimated in different religious systems and by different religious thinkers. Sometimes he has been regarded as the centre of all things, the creature for whom [Ps 115]
all things exist. Then a reaction has set in, and he has been treated as a very insignificant and possibly transient phenomenon in the order of things. It is characteristic of the Bible that it presents a balanced view of this question, avoiding extremes in both directions. On the one hand, it very clearly recognizes that man is a part of the creation, that he belongs to it because he springs out of it, and rules over it only in so far as he conforms to it; on the other hand, it clearly insists on that relation between man and his Creator which is hinted at here. Man is always implicitly connected with God by some half-divine mediator. The Wisdom of God watches with an unmoved heart the growth of the physical world, but into her contemplation of mankind

there enters a peculiar delight. There is that in man which can listen to her appeals, can listen and respond. He is capable of rising to the point of view from which she looks out upon the world, and can even see himself in the light in which she sees him. In a word, man, with all his insignificance, has a sublime possibility in him, the possibility of becoming like God; in this he stands quite alone among created things; it is this which gives him his pre-eminence. Thus our passage, while it does not for a moment imply that the material universe was made for the sake of man, or that man in himself can claim a superiority over the other creatures of the earth—and so far takes a view which is very popular with scientific men—yet parts company with the philosophy of materialism in claiming for man a place altogether unique, because he has within him the possibility of being linked to God by means of the Wisdom of God.

And now we may notice another implication of the passage. While Wisdom celebrates her high prerogative as [Pg 116] the first-born of the Creator and the instrument of the creation, and urges upon men as parts of the creation the observance of the Moral Law, she is implicitly teaching the great truth which men have been so slow to grasp, that the law of practical righteousness is of a piece with the very laws of creation. To put it in another form, the rules of right conduct are really the rules of the universe applied to human life. Laws of nature, as they are called, and laws of morality have their origin in one and the same Being, and are interpreted to us by one and the same Wisdom. It would be well for us all if we could understand how far-reaching this great truth is, and an intelligent study of this passage certainly helps us to understand it. None of us, in our wildest moments, think of pitting ourselves against the laws of nature. We do not murmur against the law of gravitation; we scrupulously conform to it so far as we can, knowing that if we do not it will be the worse for us. When heavy seas are breaking, and the spirit of the winds is let loose, we do not venture on the waves in a small, open boat, or if we do, we accept the consequences without complaint. But when we come to deal with the moral law we entertain some idea that it is elastic and uncertain, that its requirements may be complied with or not at pleasure, and that we may violate its eternal principles without any serious loss or injury. But the truth is, the Law is one. The only difference arises from the fact that while the natural laws, applying to inanimate objects or to creatures which enjoy no freedom of moral life, are necessarily obeyed, the moral rules apply to conscious reasoning creatures, who, possessed of freedom, are able to choose whether they will [Pg 117] obey the law or not. Yes, the Law is one, and breaches of the Law are punished inevitably both in the natural and in the moral sphere. This same Wisdom, to which "wickedness is an abomination," and which therefore exhorts the sons of men to walk in the ways of righteousness, is the great principle which ordered the physical universe and stamped upon it those laws of uniformity and inevitableness which Science delights to record and to illustrate.

But when we notice how the Wisdom who is here speaking is at once the mouthpiece of the laws which underlie the whole creation and of the laws which govern the moral life, it is easy to perceive how this passage becomes a foreshadowing of that wonderful Being who of God is made unto us Wisdom as well as Righteousness. Or, to put it in a slightly different way, we are able to perceive how this passage is a faint and imperfect glimpse into the nature and the work of Him whom in New Testament phraseology we call the Son of God—faint and imperfect, because this Wisdom, although represented as speaking, is still only an abstraction, a personification, and her relation both to God and to man is described in very vague and indefinite language; and yet, though faint and imperfect, very true as far as it goes, for it recognizes with wonderful distinctness the three truths which we have just been considering, truths that have become luminous for us in Christ; it recognizes, *firstly*, that the world was the creation of Wisdom, of Reason, or, if we may use the New Testament term, of the Word; it recognizes, *secondly*, that the thought of Man was contained in the very thought of creation, and that man was related in a direct and unique way with the [Pg 118] Creator; *lastly*, it recognizes that goodness lies at the very root of creation, and that therefore natural law when applied to human life is a demand for righteousness.

It is interesting to observe that this glimpse, this adumbration of a great truth, which was only to become quite clear in Christ Jesus our Lord, was advanced a little in clearness and completeness by a book which is not generally considered to be inspired, the so-called book of Wisdom, in a passage which must be quoted. "For she [*i.e.* Wisdom] is a breath of the power of God, and a pure influence flowing from the glory of the Almighty; therefore can no defiled thing fall into her. For she is the brightness of the everlasting light, the unspotted mirror of the power of God, and the image of His goodness. And being but one, she can do all things; and remaining in herself, she maketh all things new; and in all ages entering into holy souls, she maketh them friends of God and prophets. For God loveth none but him that dwelleth with Wisdom. For she is more beautiful than the sun, and above all the order of stars; being compared with the light, she is found before it."[130]

In this passage Wisdom is still a mere impersonation, but the language employed is evidently very near to that which the New Testament applies to Christ. When Philo came to treat of the idea, and wished to describe this intermediate being between God and man, he employed another term; changing the feminine into the masculine, he spoke of it as the Logos. And this expression is adopted by the Fourth Gospel in describing the Eternal Son before He became flesh; the Word of the fuller revelation is the Wisdom of the Proverbs. [Pg 119]

How far Christ recognized in this impersonation of our book a description or representation of Himself it is impossible to say. It is certain that on one occasion, in defending His action against the charges of the Pharisees, He declared, "Wisdom is justified of her children,"[131] a defence which can be most simply explained by supposing that Wisdom stands for Himself. It is certain, too, that He spoke of His own pre-existence,[132] and that the Evangelist assigns to Him in that life before the Incarnation a position not unlike that which is attributed to Wisdom in our passage: "All things were made by Him; and without Him was not anything made that hath been made.... No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him."[133] But whether our Lord expressly acknowledged the forecast of Himself which is contained in the passage or not, we cannot fail to mark with joy and wonder how strikingly all that is best in the utterance and in the delineation of Wisdom is produced, concrete, tangible, real, in Him.

He, like Wisdom in the book of Proverbs, appears in the busy haunts of man, appeals to them, invites them with large, open-armed generosity. *His* voice is to the sons of men. He, like Wisdom, can say with absolute truth, "All the words of My mouth are in righteousness; there is nothing crooked or perverse in them." He too could speak of His teaching as "plain and right," and could with simple literalness declare that His words were more precious than gold, while obedience to Him would cause men "to inherit substance." With what force He might claim that even kings rule by Him we shall only know when the kingdoms of the world have become His in their integrity; but we can see at once how appropriate in His lips is the beautiful saying, "I love them that love Me, and those that seek Me early shall find Me." [Pg 120]

With equal suitability might He, the First-born of all creation, the beginning of the creation of God, use the sublime language which follows. And He too could say that His delight was with the sons of men. Yes, how much that means to us! If His delight had not been with us, how could ours ever have been with Him? What a new meaning irradiates every human being when we realize that with him, with her, is the delight of the Son of God! What a revelation lies in the fact, a revelation of what man was by his origin, made in the image of God, and of what he may be in the last event, brought to "the fulness of the measure of the stature of Christ." We must not speak as if He delights in us because He has redeemed us; no, He redeemed us because He delighted in us. Is not this a ground on which He may appeal to us, "Now therefore, my sons, hearken unto Me; for blessed are they that keep My ways"? And can we not say to Him with a fervour which the cold abstraction of Wisdom could not possibly excite, "We would watch daily at Thy gates, waiting at the posts of Thy doors. For when we find Thee we find life and obtain favour of the Lord. When we sin against Thee we wrong our own souls; when we hate Thee we love death"? [Pg 121]

Yes, in place of this ancient Wisdom, which, stately and lovely as she is, remains always a little intangible and unapproachable, Christ is made unto us Wisdom, and He speaks to us the old words with a deeper meaning, and new words which none but He could ever speak.

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# IX.

[Pg 122]

## *TWO VOICES IN THE HIGH PLACES OF THE CITY.*

CH. IX., VV. 14 WITH 3, AND 16 WITH 4.

After the lengthened contrast between the vicious woman and Wisdom in chaps. vii. and viii., the introduction of the book closes with a little picture which is intended to repeat and sum up all that has gone before. It is a peroration, simple, graphic, and beautiful.

There is a kind of competition between Wisdom and Folly, between Righteousness and Sin, between Virtue and Vice; and the allurements of the two are disposed in an intentional parallelism; the colouring and arrangement are of such a kind that it becomes incredible how any sensible person, or for that matter even the simple himself, could for a moment hesitate between the noble form of Wisdom and the meretricious attractions of Folly. The two voices are heard in the high places of the city; each of them invites the passers-by, especially the simple and unsophisticated—the one into her fair palace, the other into her foul and deadly house. The words of their invitation are very similar: "Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither: as for him that is void of understanding, she saith to him;" but how different is the burden of the two messages! Wisdom offers life, but is silent about enjoyment; Folly offers enjoyment, but says nothing of the death which must surely ensue.[134]



First of all we will give our attention to the Palace of Wisdom and the voices which issue from it, and then we will note for the last time the features and the arts of Mistress Folly.

The Palace of Wisdom is very attractive; well built and well furnished, it rings with the sounds of hospitality; and, with its open colonnades, it seems of itself to invite all passers-by to enter in as guests. It is reared upon seven well-hewn marble pillars, in a quadrangular form, with the entrance side left wide open.[135] This is no shifting tent or tottering hut, but an eternal mansion, that lacks nothing of stability, or completeness, or beauty. Through the spacious doorways may be seen the great courtyard, in which appear the preparations for a perpetual feast. The beasts are killed and dressed; the wine stands in tall flagons ready mixed for drinking; the tables are spread and decked. All is open, generous, large, a contrast to that unhallowed private supper to which the unwary youth was invited by his seducer.[136] There are no secret chambers, no twilight suggestions and insinuations: the broad light shines over all; there is a promise of social joy; it seems that they will be blessed who sit down together at this board. And now the beautiful owner of the palace has sent forth her maidens into the public ways of the city: theirs is a gracious errand; they are not to chide with sour and censorious rebukes, but they are to invite with winning friendliness; they are to offer this rare repast, which is now ready, to all those who are willing to acknowledge their need of it. "Come, eat ye of my bread, and drink of the wine which I have mingled."[137]



We were led to inquire in the last chapter how far our Lord identified Himself with the hypostatic Wisdom who was speaking there, and we were left in some doubt whether He ever consciously admitted the identity; but it is hardly a matter of doubt that this passage was before His mind when He spoke His parable of the Wedding Feast.[138] And the connection is still more apparent when we look at the Greek version of the LXX., and notice that the clause "sent forth her bond-servants" is precisely the same in Prov. ix. 3 and in Matt. xxii. 3. Here, at any rate, Jesus, who describes Himself as "a certain king," quite definitely occupies the place of the ancient Wisdom in the book of Proverbs, and the language which in this passage she employs He, as we shall see, in many slight particulars made His own.



Yes, our Lord, the Wisdom Incarnate, has glorious ideas of hospitality; He keeps open house; His purpose is to call mankind to a great feast; the "bread and the wine" are prepared; the sacrifice which furnishes the meat is slain. His messengers are not commissioned with a mournful or a condemnatory proclamation, but with good tidings which they are to publish in the high places. His word is always, Come. His desire is that men should live, and therefore He calls them into the way of understanding.[139] If a man lacks wisdom, if he recognizes his ignorance, his frailty, his folly, if he is at any rate wise enough to know that he is foolish, well enough to know that he is sick, righteous enough to know that he is sinful, let him approach this noble mansion with its lordly feast. Here is bread which is meat indeed; here is wine which is life-giving, the fruit of the Vine which God has planted.

But now we are to note that the invitation of Wisdom is addressed only to the simple, not to the scorner.[140] She lets the scorner pass by, because a word to him would recoil only in shame on herself, bringing a blush to her queenly face, and would add to the scorner's wickedness by increasing his hatred of her. Her reproof would not benefit him, but it would bring a blot upon herself, it would exhibit her as ineffectual and helpless. The bitter words of a scorner can make wisdom appear foolish, and cover virtue with a confusion which should belong only to vice. "Speak not in the hearing of a fool; for he will despise the wisdom of thy words."[141] Indeed, there is no character so hopeless as that of the scorner; there proceeds from him, as it were, a fierce blast, which blows away all the approaches which goodness makes to him. Reproof cannot come near him;[142] he cannot find wisdom, though he seek it;[143] and as a matter of fact, he never seeks it.[144] If one

attempts to punish him it can only be with the hope that others may benefit by the example; it will have no effect upon him.[145] To be rid of him must be the desire of every wise man, for he is an abomination to all,[146] and with his departure contention disappears.[147] They that scoff at things holy, and scorn the Divine Power, must be left to themselves until the beginnings of wisdom appear in them—the first sense of fear that there is a God who may not be mocked, the first recognition that there is a sanctity which they would do well at all events to reverence. There must be a little wisdom in the heart before a man can enter the Palace of Wisdom; there must be a humbling, a self-mistrust, a diffident misgiving before the scorner will give heed to her invitation.

There is an echo of this solemn truth in more than one saying of the Lord's. He too cautioned His disciples against casting their pearls before swine, lest they should trample the pearls under their feet, and turn to rend those who were foolish enough to offer them such treasure.[148] Men must often be taught in the stern school of Experience, before they can matriculate in the reasonable college of Wisdom. It is not good to give that which is holy to dogs, nor to display the sanctities of religion to those who will only put them to an open shame. Where we follow our own way instead of the Lord's, and insist on offering the treasures of the kingdom to the scorners, we are not acting according to the dictates of Wisdom, we get a blot for that goodness which we so rashly offer, and often are needlessly rent by those whom we meant to save. It is [Pg 127] evident that this is only one side of a truth, and our Lord presented with equal fulness the other side; it was from Him we learnt how the scorner himself, who cannot be won by reproof, can sometimes be won by love; but our Lord thought it worth while to state this side of the truth, and so far to make this utterance of the ancient Wisdom His own.

Again, how constantly He insisted on the mysterious fact that to him that hath shall be given, and from him that hath not shall be taken what he hath, precisely in the spirit of this saying: "Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be yet wiser: teach a righteous man, and he will increase in learning."[149] The entrance into the kingdom, as into the house of Wisdom, is by humility. Except a man turn, and become as a little child, he cannot enter. Wisdom is only justified of her children: until the heart is humble it cannot even begin to be wise; although it may seem to possess a great deal, all must be taken away, and a new beginning must be made—that beginning which is found in the fear of the Lord, and in the knowledge of the Holy One.[150]

The closing words in the invitation of Wisdom are entirely appropriate in the lips of Jesus, and, indeed, only in His lips could they be accepted in their fullest signification. There is a limited sense in which all wisdom is favourable to long life, as we saw in chap. iii., but it is an obvious remark, too, that the wise perish even as the fool; one event happens to them both, and there appears to be no difference. But the Incarnate Wisdom, [Pg 128] Jesus Christ, was able to say with a broad literalness, "By Me thy days shall be multiplied, and the years of thy life shall be increased." With Him the outlook widened; He could speak of a new life, of raising men up at the last day; He could for the first time give a solution to that constant enigma which has puzzled men from the beginning, How is it that Wisdom promises life, and yet often requires that her children should die? how is it that the best and wisest have often chosen death, and so to all appearance have robbed the world of their goodness and their wisdom? He could give the answer in the glorious truth of the Resurrection; and so, in calling men to die for Him, as He often does, He can in the very moment of their death say to them with a fulness of meaning, "By Me thy days shall be multiplied, and the years of thy life shall be increased."

And then how entirely is it in harmony with all His teaching to emphasize to the utmost the individual choice and the individual responsibility. "If thou art wise, thou art wise for thyself: and if thou scornest, thou alone shalt bear it." There can be no progress, indeed no beginning, in the spiritual life, until this attitude of personal isolation is understood. It is the last result of true religion that we live in others; but it is the first that we live in ourselves; and until we have learnt to live in ourselves we can be of no use by living in others. Until the individual soul is dealt with, until it has understood the demands which are made upon it, and met them, it is in no position to take its rightful place as a lively stone in the temple of God, or as a living member in the body of Christ. Yes, realize this searching assurance of Wisdom, let us say, rather, of Christ: if you are [Pg 129] like the wise virgins in the parable, it is for your own everlasting good, you shall enter into the hall with the Bridegroom; but if you are like the foolish virgins, no wisdom of the wise can avail you, no vicarious light will serve for your lamps; for you there must be the personal humiliation and sorrow of the Lord's "I know you not."

If with scornful indifference to your high trust as a servant of the Master you hide your talent, and justify your conduct to yourself by pleading that the Master is a hard man, that scorn must recoil upon your own

head; so far from the enlarged wealth of the others coming to meet your deficiencies, the misused trifle which you still retain will be taken from you and given to them. Men have sometimes favoured the notion that it is possible to spend a life of scornful indifference to God and all His holy commandments, a life of arrogant self-seeking and bitter contempt for all His other creatures, and yet to find oneself at the end entirely purged of one's contempt, and on precisely equal terms with all pious and humble hearts; but against this notion Wisdom loudly exclaims; it is the notion of Folly, and so far from redeeming the folly, it is Folly's worst condemnation; for surely Conscience and Reason, the heart and the head, might tell us that it is false; and all that is sanest and wisest in us concurs in the direct and simple assurance, "If thou scornest, thou alone shalt bear it."

Such is the invitation, and such the warning, of Wisdom; such is the invitation, and such the warning, of Christ. Leave off, ye simple ones, and live. After all, most of us are not scorners, but only very foolish, easily [Pg 131] dazzled with false lights, easily misled with smooth utterances which happen to chime in with our own ignorant prejudices, easily seduced into by-paths which in quiet moments we readily acknowledge to be sinful and hurtful. The scorners are but a few; the simple ones are many. Here is this gracious voice appealing to the simple ones, and with a winsome liberality inviting them to the feast of Wisdom.

At the close of ver. 12 the LXX. give a very interesting addition, which was probably translated from a Hebrew original. It seems to have been before our Lord's mind when He drew the description of the unclean spirit walking through waterless places, seeking rest and finding none.[151] The passage is a figurative delineation of the evils which result from making shams and insincerities the support of life, in place of the unfailing sureness and available strength of wisdom; it may be rendered thus: "He who makes falsehood his support shepherds the winds, and will find himself pursuing birds on the wing; for it means leaving the paths of his own vineyard, and wandering over the borders of his own husbandry; it means walking through a waterless wilderness, over land which is the portion of the thirsty; he gathers in his hands fruitlessness." What a contrast to the spacious halls and the bountiful fare of Wisdom! A life based upon everlasting verities may seem for the time cold and desolate, but it is founded upon a rock, and not a barren rock either, for it sends forth in due course corn, and wine, and oil. The children in that house have bread enough and to spare. But when a man prefers make-believe to reality, and follows the apparently pleasant, instead of the actually [Pg 132] good, what a clutching of winds it is! what a chase after swift-vanishing birds of joy! The wholesome ways, fruitful, responsive to toil, are left far behind; and here soon is the actual desert, without a drop of water to cool the lips, or a single fruit of the earth which a man can eat. The deluded soul consumed his substance with harlots, and he gathers the wind. The ways of vice are terrible; they produce a thirst which they cannot quench; and they fill the imagination with torturing images of well-being which are farther removed from reality by every step we take. Wisdom bids us to make truth our stay, for after all the Truth is the Way and the Life, and there is no other way, no other life.

And now comes the brief closing picture of Folly, to which again the LXX. give a short addition. Folly is loud, empty-headed as her victims, whom she invites to herself, not as Wisdom invites them, to leave off their simplicity, but rather as like to like, that their ignorance may be confirmed into vice, and their simplicity into brutishness. She has had the effrontery to build her house in the most prominent and lofty place of the city, where by good rights only Wisdom should dwell. Her allurements are specially directed to those who seem to be going right on in their wholesome ways, as if she found her chief delight, not in gratifying the vicious, but in making vicious the innocent. Her charms are poor and tawdry enough; seen in the broad sunlight, and with the wholesome air all round her, she would be revolting to every uncorrupted nature; her clamorous voice would sound strident, and her shameless brow would create a blush of shame in others; she naturally therefore seeks to throw a veil over herself and a glamour over her proposals; she suggests that [Pg 133] secrecy and illicitness will lend a charm to what in itself is a sorry delight. It is clandestine, therefore it is to be sweet; it is forbidden, therefore it is to be pleasant. Could anything be more sophistical? That which owes its attraction to the shadows of the night must obviously be intrinsically unattractive. It is an argument fit only for the shades of the lost, and not for those who breathe the sweet air and behold the sun. Her house is indeed haunted with ghosts, and when a man enters her portal he already has his foot in hell. Well may the LXX. add the vehement warning, "Spring away from her clutches; do not linger in the place; let her not have thy name, for thou wilt traverse another's waters; from another's waters hold aloof, from another's fountains do not drink, in order that thou mayest live long, and add to thy years of life."

And now, before leaving this subject, we must briefly remark the great change and advance which Christ has brought into our thought of the relation between the two sexes. This Book of Wisdom is a fair illustration of the contempt in which woman was held by the wise men of Israel. One would suppose that she is the

temptress, and man is the victim. The teacher never dreams of going a step backward, and asking whose fault it was that the temptress fell into her vicious ways. He takes no note of the fact that women are first led astray before they lead others. Nor does he care to inquire how the men of his day ruined their women by refusing to them all mental training, all wholesome interest and occupation, shutting them up in the corrupting [Pg 133] atmosphere of the seraglio, and teaching them to regard the domestic sphere, and that only in its narrowest sense, as the proper limit of their thought and affection. It was reserved for the Great Teacher, the Incarnate Wisdom Himself, to redress this age-long injustice to woman, by sternly holding up to men the mirror of truth in which they might see their own guilty hearts.[152] It was reserved for him to touch the conscience of a city woman who was a sinner, and to bring her from her clamorous and seductive ways to the sweetness of penitential tears, and the rapturous love which forgiveness kindles. It is He, and not the ancient Wisdom, which has turned the current of men's thoughts into juster and kindlier ways on this great question. And thus it is that the great Christian poet represents the archangel correcting the faulty judgment of man.[153] Adam, speaking with the usual virtuous indignation of the stronger sex in contemplation of the soft vision of frail women presented to his eyes, says:—

"O pity and shame, that they, who to live well
Entered so fair, should turn aside to tread
Paths indirect, or in the midway faint!
But still I see the tenour of man's woe
Holds on the same, from woman to begin."

The correction is the correction of Christ, though Michael is the speaker:—

"From man's effeminate slackness it begins,"
Said the angel, "who should better hold his place,
By wisdom and superior gifts received."

Our Lord draws no such pictures as these in the book of Proverbs; they have their value; it is necessary to [Pg 134] warn young men against the seductions which the vices of other men have created in woman's form; but He prefers always to go to the root of the matter; He speaks to men themselves; He bids them restrain the wandering eye, and keep pure the fountains of the heart. To that censorious Wisdom which judges without any perception that woman is more sinned against than sinning He would oppose His severe command to be rid of the beam in one's own eye, before making an attempt to remove the mote from another's. It is in this way that He in so many varied fields of thought and action has turned a half truth into a whole truth by going a little deeper, and unveiling the secrets of the heart; and in this way He has enabled us to use the half truth, setting it in its right relation to the whole.[154]

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# X.

[Pg 135]

## *WEALTH.*

"Treasures of wickedness profit nothing:
But righteousness delivereth from death."—PROV. x. 2.

"O'erweening statesmen have full long relied
On fleets and armies and external wealth;
But from *within* proceeds a Nation's health."

WORDSWORTH.

No moral system is complete which does not treat with clearness and force the subject of wealth. The material possessions of an individual or of a nation are in a certain sense the pre-requisites of all moral life; for until the human being has food to eat he cannot be virtuous, he cannot even live; until he has clothing he

cannot be civilised; and unless he has a moderate assurance of necessaries, and a certain margin of leisure secured from the toil of life, he cannot live well, and there can be no moral development in the full sense of that term. And so with a nation: it must have a sufficient command of the means of subsistence to maintain a considerable number of people who are not engaged in productive labour, before it can make much advance in the noblest qualities of national life, progress in the arts, extension of knowledge, and spiritual cultivation. The production of wealth, therefore, if not strictly speaking a moral question itself, presses closely upon all other moral questions. Wisdom must have something to say about it, because, without it, Wisdom, in a material world like ours, could not exist. [Pg 136]

Wisdom will be called upon to direct the energies which produce wealth, and to determine the feelings with which we are to regard the wealth which is produced.

Moral problems weightier still begin to emerge when the question of Distribution presents itself. Moral considerations lie at the root of this question; and Political Economy, so far as it attempts to deal with it apart from moral considerations, must always be merely a speculative, and not a practical or a fruitful science.

If Production is in a sense the presupposition of all moral and spiritual life, no less certainly correct moral conceptions—may we not even say true spiritual conditions?—are the indispensable means of determining Distribution. For a society in which every individual is striving with all his strength or cunning to procure for himself the largest possible share of the common stock, in which therefore the material possessions gravitate into the hands of the strong and the unscrupulous, while the weak and the honourable are left destitute—such a society, if it ever came into existence, would be a demoralised society. Such a demoralisation is always probable when the means of production have been rapidly and greatly improved, and when the fever of getting has overpowered the sense of righteousness and all the kindlier human feelings. Such a demoralisation is to be averted by securing attention to the abiding moral principles which must govern men's action in the matter of wealth, and by enforcing these principles with such vividness of illustration and such cogency of sanction that they shall be generally accepted and practised.

In our own day this question of the distribution of wealth stands in the front rank of practical questions. [Pg 137] Religious teachers must face it, or else they must forfeit their claim to be the guides and instructors of their generation.

Socialists are grappling with this question not altogether in a religious spirit: they have stepped into a gap which Christians have left empty; they have recognised a great spiritual issue when Christians have seen nothing but a material problem of pounds, shillings, and pence, of supply and demand, of labour and capital. Where Socialism adopts the programme of Revolution, Wisdom cannot give in her adhesion; she knows too well that suffering, impatience, and despair are unsafe, although very pathetic, counsellors; she knows too well that social upheaval does not produce social reconstruction, but a weary entail of fresh upheavals; she has learnt, too, that society is organic, and cannot, like Pelops in the myth, win rejuvenescence by being cut up and cast into the cauldron, but can advance only by a quiet and continuous growth, in which each stage comes naturally and harmoniously out of the stage which preceded. But all Socialism is not revolutionary. And Wisdom cannot withhold her sympathy and her aid where Socialism takes the form of stating, and expounding, and enforcing truer conceptions concerning the distribution of wealth. It is by vigorous and earnest grappling with the moral problem that the way of advance is prepared; every sound lesson therefore in the right way of regarding wealth, and in the use of wealth, is a step in the direction of that social renovation which all earnest men at present desire.

The book of Proverbs presents some very clear and decisive teaching on this question, and it is our task now [Pg 138] to view this teaching, scattered and disconnected though it be, as a whole.

I. The first thing to be noted in the book is its *frank and full recognition that Wealth has its advantages*, and *Poverty has its disadvantages*. There is no quixotic attempt to overlook, as many moral and spiritual systems do, the perfectly obvious facts of life. The extravagance and exaggeration which led St. Francis to choose Poverty as his bride find no more sanction in this Ancient Wisdom than in the sound teaching of our Lord and His Apostles. The rich man's wealth is his strong city,[155] we are told, and as an high wall in his own imagination, while the destruction of the poor is their poverty. The rich man can ransom himself from death if by chance he has fallen into difficulties, though this benefit is to some extent counterbalanced by the reflection that the poor escape the threats of such dangers, as no bandit would care to attack a man with an empty purse and a threadbare cloak.[156] The rich man gains many advantages through his power of making

gifts; it brings him before great men,[157] it procures him universal friendship, such as it is,[158] it enables him to pacify the anger of an adversary,[159] for indeed a gift is as a precious stone in the eyes of him that hath it, whithersoever it turneth it prospereth.[160] Not only does wealth make many friends,[161] it also secures [Pg 139] positions of influence and authority, over those who are poorer, enabling a man to sit in Parliament or to gain the governorship of a colony.[162] It gives even the somewhat questionable advantage of being able to treat others with brusqueness and hauteur.[163]

On the other hand, the poor man has to use entreaties.[163] His poverty separates him from his neighbours, and even incurs his neighbours' hatred.[164] Nay, worse than this, his friends go far from him, his very brethren hate him, if he calls after them they quickly get out of his reach;[165] while the necessity of borrowing from wealthier men keeps him in a position of continual bondage.[166] Indeed, nothing can compensate for being without the necessaries of life: "Better is he that is lightly esteemed, and is his own servant, than he that honoureth himself, and lacketh bread."[167]

Since then Poverty is a legitimate subject of dread, there are urgent exhortations to diligence and thrift, quite in accordance with the excellent apostolic maxim that if a man will not work he shall not eat; while there are forcible statements of the things which tend to poverty, and of the courses which result in comfort and wealth. Thus it is pointed out how slack and listless labour leads to poverty, while industry leads to wealth. [Pg 140] [168] We are reminded that the obstinate refusal to be corrected is a fruitful source of poverty,[169] while the humble and pious mind is rewarded with riches as well as with honour and life.[170] In the house of the wise man are found treasures as well as all needful supplies.[171] Drunkenness and gluttony lead to poverty, and drowsiness clothes a man with rags.[172] And there is a beautiful injunction to engage in an agricultural life, which is the only perennial source of wealth, the only secure foundation of a people's prosperity. As if we were back in patriarchal times, we are thus admonished in the later proverbs of Solomon[173]:—

> "Be thou diligent to know the state of thy flocks,
> And look well to thy herds;
> For riches are not for ever;
> And doth the crown endure unto all generations?
> The hay is carried, and the tender grass showeth itself,
> And the herbs of the mountains are gathered in.
> The lambs are for thy clothing,
> And the goats are the price of the field:
> And there will be goats' milk enough for thy food, for the food of thy household;
> And maintenance for thy maidens."

II. But now, making all allowance for the advantages of wealth, we have to notice *some of its serious drawbacks*. To begin with, it is always insecure. If a man places any dependence upon it, it will fail him; only in his imagination is it a sure defence.[174] "Wilt thou set thine eyes upon it? it is gone. For riches certainly make themselves wings, like an eagle that flieth toward heaven."[175]

But, further, if the wealth has been obtained in any other way than by honest labour it is useless, at any rate [Pg 141] for the owner, and indeed worse than useless for him.[176]

As the text says, treasures of wickedness profit nothing. In the revenues of the wicked is trouble.[177] Got in light and fallacious ways, the money dwindles; only when gathered by labour does it really increase.[178] When it is obtained by falsehood—by the tricks and misrepresentations of trade, for example—it may be likened to a vapour driven to and fro—nay, rather to a mephitic vapour, a deadly exhalation, the snares of death.[179] Worst of all is it to obtain wealth by oppression of the poor; one who does so shall as surely come to want as he who gives money to those who do not need it.[180] In fact, our book contains the striking thought that ill-earned wealth is never gathered for the benefit of the possessor, but only for the benefit of the righteous, and must be useless until it gets into hands which will use it benevolently.[181]

And while there are these serious drawbacks to material possessions, we are further called upon to notice that there is wealth of another kind, wealth consisting in moral or spiritual qualities, compared with which wealth, as it is usually understood, is quite paltry and unsatisfying. When the intrinsic defects of silver and gold have been frankly stated, this earthy treasure is set, as a whole, in comparison with another kind of treasure, and is observed to become pale and dim. Thus "riches profit not in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivereth from death."[182] Indeed it is only the blessing of the Lord which brings riches without drawbacks.[183] In the house of the righteous is much treasure.[184] Better is a little with righteousness than great treasure without right.[185] In the light of these moral considerations the relative positions of the rich and the poor are reversed; it is better to be an honest poor man than a perverse rich man; the little grain of integrity in the heart and life outweighs all the balance at the bank.[186] [Pg 142]

A little wisdom, a little sound understanding, or a little wholesome knowledge is more precious than wealth. How much better is it to get wisdom than gold. Yea, to get understanding is rather to be chosen than silver.[187] There may be gold and abundance of rubies, but the lips of knowledge are a precious jewel.[188]

Nay, there are some things apparently very trifling which will so depreciate material wealth that if a choice is to be made it is well to let the wealth go and to purchase immunity from these trivial troubles. Better is a little with the fear of the Lord than great treasure and trouble therewith. Better is a dinner of herbs where love is than a stalled ox and hatred therewith.[189] Better is a dry morsel and quietness therewith than an house full of feasting with strife.[190] Yes, the good will and affectionate regard of our fellow-men are on the whole far more valuable than a large revenue. A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favour rather than silver and gold.[191] Indeed, when the relations of the rich and the poor are brought up into God's presence our whole conception of the matter is liable to change; we observe the rich and the poor meet together, and the Lord the maker of them all;[192] we observe that any slur cast on the poor or any oppression of them is practically a reproach against the Maker,[193] whilst any act of pity or tenderness to the needy is in effect a service rendered to God; and more and more we get to feel that notwithstanding the rich man's good opinion of himself he presents rather a sorry spectacle in the presence of the wise, even though the wise may be exceedingly poor.[194] [Pg 143]

Taking into account therefore the intrinsic insecurity of wealth, and the terrible flaws in the title which may result from questionable ways of obtaining it, and estimating at a right value the other things which are not usually reckoned as wealth,—goodness, piety, wisdom, knowledge, and love,—we can quite understand that enlightened men might be too busy in life to make money, too occupied with grave purposes and engrossed with noble objects of pursuit to admit the perturbations of mammon into their souls.[195] Making all allowance for the unquestionable advantages of being rich, and the serious inconveniences of being poor, we may yet see reasons for not greatly desiring wealth, nor greatly dreading poverty. [Pg 144]

III. But now we come to the positive counsels which our Teacher would give on the strength of these considerations about money and its acquisition. And first of all we are solemnly cautioned against the fever of money-getting, the passion to get rich, a passion which has the most demoralising effect on its victims, and is indeed an indication of a more or less perverted character. The good man cannot be possessed by it, and if he could he would soon become bad.[196]

These grave warnings of Wisdom are specially needed at the present time in England and America, when the undisguised and the unrestrained pursuit of riches has become more and more recognised as the legitimate end of life, so that few people feel any shame in admitting that this is their aim; and the clear unimpassioned statements of the result, which always follows on the unhallowed passion, receive daily confirmation from the occasional revelations of our domestic, our commercial, and our criminal life. He that is greedy of gain, we are told, troubleth his own house.[197] An inheritance may be gotten hastily at the beginning, but the end thereof shall not be blessed.[198] A faithful man shall abound with blessings, but he that maketh haste to be rich (and consequently cannot by any possibility be faithful) shall not be unpunished.[199] He that hath an evil eye hasteth after riches, and knoweth not that want shall come upon him.[200] "Weary not thyself," therefore, it is said, "to be rich;" which, though it may be the dictate of thine own wisdom,[201] is really unmixed folly, burdened with a load of calamity for the unfortunate seeker, for his house, and for all those who are in any way dependent upon him. [Pg 145]

Again, while we are cautioned not to aim constantly at the increase of our possessions, we are counselled to exercise a generous liberality in the disposal of such things as are ours. Curiously enough, niggardliness in giving is associated with slothfulness in labour, while it is implied that the wish to help others is a constant motive for due diligence in the business of life. "There is that coveteth greedily all the day long, but the righteous giveth and withholdeth not."[202] The law of nature,—the law of life,—is to give out and not merely to receive, and in fulfilling that law we receive unexpected blessings: "There is that scattereth and increaseth yet more, and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, and it tendeth only to want. The liberal [Pg 146] soul shall be made fat; and he that watereth shall be watered also himself."[203] "He that giveth to the poor shall not lack; but he that hideth his eyes shall have many a curse."[204] "He that hath pity on the poor lendeth unto the Lord, and his good deed will He pay him again."[205] "He that hath a bountiful eye shall be blessed; for he giveth of his bread to the poor."[206]

Such a wholesome shunning of the thirst for wealth, and such a generous spirit in aiding others, naturally suggest to the wise man a daily prayer, a request that he may avoid the dangerous extremes, and walk in the happy mean of worldly possessions: "Give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me; lest I be full and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord? or lest I be poor and steal, and use profanely the name of my God."[207] It is a request not easy to make with perfect sincerity; there are not many who, like Emerson's grandfather, venture to pray that neither they nor their descendants may ever be rich; while there have been not a few who in a "show of wisdom in will-worship and humility and severity to the body" have sought for an unnecessary and an unwholesome poverty. But it is a wise request; it finds an echo in the prayer which our Lord taught His disciples, and constantly appears inwoven in the apostolic teaching. And if the individual is to desire such things for himself, he must naturally desire that such may be the lot of his fellow-creatures, and he must make it the aim of his efforts after social reform to indefinitely [Pg 147] increase the number of those who occupy this happy middle position, and have neither riches nor poverty.

And now we have followed the lines of teaching contained in this book on the subject of wealth, and it is impossible to miss the wisdom, the moderation, the inspiration of such counsels. We cannot fail to see that if these principles were recognised universally, and very generally practised; if they were ingrained in the constitution of our children, so as to become the instinctive motives and guides of action; the serious social troubles which arise from the unsatisfactory distribution of wealth would rapidly disappear. Happy would that society be in which all men were aiming, not at riches, but merely at a modest competency, dreading the one extreme as much as the other; in which the production of wealth were constantly moderated and controlled by the conviction that wealth gotten by vanity is as the snares of death; in which all who had become the owners of wealth were ready to give and glad to distribute, counting a wise benevolence, which in giving to the needy really lends to the Lord, the best investment in the world.

If these neglected principles are hitherto very faintly recognised, we must recollect that they have never been seriously preached. Although they were theoretically taught, and practically lived out, in the words and the life of Jesus Christ, they have never been fully incorporated into Christianity. The mediæval Church fell into the perilous doctrines of the Ebionites, and glorified poverty in theory while in practice it became an engine of unparalleled rapacity. Protestantism has generally been too much occupied with the great principle of [Pg 148] Justification by Faith to pay much attention to such a writing as the Epistle of St. James, which Luther described as "a letter of straw"; and thus, while we all believe that we are saved by faith in Christ Jesus, it seldom occurs to us that such a faith must include the most exact and literal obedience to His teachings. Christian men unblushingly serve Mammon, and yet hope that they are serving God too, because they believe on Him whom God sent—though He whom God sent expressly declared that the two services could not be combined. Christian men make it the effort of a lifetime to become rich, although Christ declared that it was easier for a camel to enter the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven; and when they hear that Christ required an intending follower to sell all that he had and give to the poor, they explain it away, and maintain that He does not require such a sacrifice from them, but simply asks them to believe in the Atonement.

In this way Christians have made their religion incredible, and even ridiculous, to many of the most earnest spirits of our time. When Christ is made unto them Wisdom as well as Redemption, they will see that the principles of Wisdom which concern wealth are obligatory upon them, just because they profess to believe in Christ.

# XI.

[Pg 149]

## *GOODNESS.*

"The righteousness of the upright shall deliver them."—PROV. xi. 6.

"An unjust man is the abomination of the righteous, and he who goes right in his way is the abomination of the wicked."—PROV. xxix. 27.

The book of Proverbs abounds with sayings which have the sound of truisms, sayings which repeat, with innumerable variations and shades of colouring, that wickedness is an evil, hateful to God and to men, and that righteousness is a blessing not only to the righteous themselves, but to all with whom they are connected. We are disposed to say, Surely no reasonable person can question such an obvious truth; but on reflection we remember that the truth was not perceived by the great religions of antiquity, is not recognised now by the vast majority of the human race, and even where it is theoretically admitted without question is too frequently forgotten in the hurry and the pressure of practical life. There is good reason therefore why the truism, as we are inclined to call it, should be thrown into the form of maxims which will find a hold in the memory, and readily occur to the mind on occasions of trial. And as we pass in review what Proverbial Religion has to say upon the subject, we shall perhaps be surprised to find how imperfectly we have apprehended the supreme [Pg 150] importance of goodness, and how insidiously teachings, which were originally meant to enforce it, have usurped its place and treated it with contumely. It will begin to dawn upon us that the truth is a truism, not because it is carried out in practice, but only because no one has the hardihood to question it; and perhaps we shall receive some impulse towards transforming the conviction which we cannot dispute into a mode of conduct which we cannot decline.

To begin with, our book is most unflinching in its assertions that, notwithstanding all appearances to the contrary, *wickedness is a mistake*, a source of perpetual weakness and insecurity, always in the long run producing ruin and death; while *righteousness is in itself a perpetual blessing*, and is weighted with beautiful and unexpected fruits. The very reiteration becomes most impressive.

The hope of the righteous shall be gladness; but the expectation of the wicked shall perish.[208] The righteous shall never be removed, but the wicked shall not dwell in the land.[209] The house of the wicked shall be overthrown, but the tent of the upright shall flourish.[210] The wicked earneth deceitful wages, but he that soweth righteousness hath a sure reward.[211] A man shall not be established by wickedness, while the root of the righteous shall never be moved.[212] The wicked really falls by his own wickedness, and is swept away by his own violence.[213] He sows iniquity and reaps calamity.[214] His crooked way, his malignant thoughts, the [Pg 151] hatred against his neighbour, the guile in his heart, and the flood of evil things which comes out of his lips, have one issue—destruction.[215] When he comes to die, his expectation perishes, all the hope of iniquity ends in disappointment.[216] His lamp goes out not to be relit.[217] Meanwhile, the light of the righteous man rejoices, because he attains unto life as surely as the wicked works towards death.[218]

It is true that the appearance of things is different. Hand joins in hand to promote evil.[219] Men follow out what seems right in their own hearts, evil as they are.[220] Success seems to attend them, and one is tempted to envy the sinners, and to fret at their ways.[221] But the envy is misplaced; the evil man does not go unpunished; the wicked are overthrown and are not.[222] The way which seemed right in a man's eyes proves to be the way of death.[223] A righteous man falleth seven times and riseth up again; but the wicked are overthrown by calamity,[224] and the righteous are obliged to look upon their fall.[225]

On the other hand, goodness is its own continual reward. While treacherous men are destroyed by their perverseness, the upright are guided by their own integrity.[226] While the sinner is overthrown by his wickedness, righteousness guardeth him that is upright in the way.[227] If the righteous gets into trouble he is [Pg 152] delivered, while the wicked falls into his place:[228] there is a kind of substitution; a ransom is paid to enable

the righteous to escape, and the ransom is the person of the wicked.[229] Not only does the righteous come out of trouble,[230] but, strictly speaking, no mischief really happens to him; it is only the wicked that is filled with evil.[231] The righteous eats to the satisfying of his own soul, but the belly of the wicked shall want.[232] The good man walks on a highway and so preserves his soul.[233] Mercy and truth shine upon him because he devises good.[234] He only followed after righteousness and mercy, but he found life, righteousness, and honour.[235] His heart is flooded with joy, he actually sings as he journeys on.[236] He seems like a tree in the green leaf, a tree of life, the fruits of which cannot fail to be attractive; so that he unconsciously wins favour.[237] The fruit does not fail, because the root is alive.[238] And if in actual life this blessedness of the good man does not appear, if by reason of the evil in the world the righteous seem to be punished, and the noble to be smitten,[239] that only creates a conviction that the fruit will grow in another life; for when we have [Pg 153] closely observed the inseparable connection between goodness and blessedness, we cannot avoid the conviction that "the righteous hath hope in his death."[240] Yes, practical goodness is the source of perpetual blessing, and it cannot be altogether hidden. Even a child maketh himself known by his doings, whether his work be pure and right.[241] To the good we must assign the supremacy; the evil must bow before them and wait at their gates.[242] And it is easy to understand why it appears so incongruous—so abnormal, like a troubled fountain and a corrupted spring, when the righteous give way to the wicked.[243]

Nor is the blessing of goodness at all limited to the good man himself. It falls on his children too. A just man that walketh in his integrity, blessed are his children after him.[244] It reaches even to the third generation. A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children.[245] The righteous is a guide to his neighbour also.[246] He is a joy to his sovereign; he that loveth pureness of heart, for the grace of his lips the king shall be his friend.[247] His character and his well-being are a matter of public, even of national concern, for there is [Pg 154] something winning in him; he acts as a saving influence upon those who are around him.[248] Therefore, when the righteous increase the people rejoice,[249] when they triumph there is great glory.[250] When it goeth well with the righteous the city rejoiceth, just as when the wicked perish there is shouting. By the blessing of the upright the city is exalted, just as it is overthrown by the mouth of the wicked.[251] Yes, righteousness exalteth a nation, while sin is a reproach to the whole people.[252]

It is the grand public interest to see the wicked perish in order that the righteous may increase:[253] for the way of the wicked causes other people to err.[254] His lips are like a scorching fire;[255] his presence brings a general atmosphere of contempt, ignominy, and shame.[256] When the wicked rise men hide themselves,[257] when they bear rule the people sigh.[258] Well may the national feeling be severe on all those who encourage the wicked in any way. He that saith unto the wicked, Thou art righteous, peoples shall curse him, nations shall abhor him; but to them that rebuke him shall be delight, and a good blessing shall come upon them.[259] It is a sure sign that one is forsaking the law when one ceases to contend with the wicked and begins to praise them.[260]

Blessing to himself, blessing to his children, his neighbours, his country, is the beautiful reward of the good man; ruin to himself, a spreading contagion of evil to others, and general execration, is the lot of the wicked. [Pg 155] Well may the former be bold as a lion, and well may the latter flee when no man pursues, for conscience makes cowards of us all.[261]

But at present we have not touched on the chief blessedness of the good, and the chief curse of the evil, on that which is really the spring and fountain-head of all. It is the great fact that *God is with the righteous and against the wicked*, that He judges men according to their integrity or perverseness, and accepts them or rejects them simply upon that principle. By looking at this lofty truth we get all our conceptions on the subject cleared. The perverse *in heart* are an abomination to the Lord; such as are perfect in their way are His delight.[262] A good man shall obtain favour of the Lord, but a man of wicked devices will He condemn.[263] Evil devices are an abomination to the Lord,[264] and so is the wicked, but He loveth the righteous.[265] To justify the wicked or to condemn the righteous is equally abominable to Him.[266] He considers the house of the wicked, how the wicked are overthrown to their ruin.[267] He overthrows the words of the treacherous

man, while His eyes preserve him that hath knowledge.[268] He weighs the heart and keeps the soul and renders to every man according to his work.[269] Thus His way is a stronghold to the upright, but a destruction to the workers of iniquity.[270] He does not regard prayer so much as righteousness; he that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer is an abomination.[271] Sacrifice goes for nothing [Pg 156] in His sight if the life is not holy. To do justice and judgment is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice.[272] The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination: how much more when he bringeth it with a wicked mind?[273] Yes, it is an abomination to the Lord, just as the prayer of the upright is His delight. The Lord is far from the wicked, but He heareth the prayer of the righteous.[274] When the foolish sinner offers a sin-offering instead of relinquishing his sin, the very offering mocks him, for it is only the righteous who find favour with the Lord.[275]

It is this solemn truth, the truth of God's own way of regarding goodness and wickedness, which makes earnestness on the subject essential. If goodness were only pleasing to man, if sin were only an offence against creatures like ourselves, ordinary prudence would require us to be good and to avoid evil, but higher sanction would be wanting. When, however, the matter is taken up into the Divine presence, and we begin to understand that the Supreme Ruler of all things loves righteousness and hates iniquity, visits the one with favour and the other with reprobation, quite a new sanction is introduced. The wicked man, who makes light of evil, to whom it is as a sport, appears to be nothing short of an absolute fool.[276] In God's presence it is not difficult to perceive that goodness is wisdom, the only wisdom, the perfect wisdom.

But now it may occur to some of us that it is surely nothing very wonderful to lay this stress upon the close [Pg 157] connection between goodness and God-pleasing. Is it not, we are inclined to say, the most obvious and unquestioned of facts that God requires goodness at our hands, and is angry with the wicked every day? It is not very wonderful to us, because Revelation has made it familiar, but none the less it is a truth of Revelation, and if we were to ask in what the Inspiration of this book consists, no simpler and truer answer could be given than that it teaches, as we have just seen, the alliance of God with righteousness and the abhorrence in which He holds wickedness.

Yes, a truism, but it was a discovery which the world was very slow to make, and it is still a principle on which the world is very unwilling to act.

The main characteristic of all heathen religions is that their gods do not demand righteousness, but certain outward and formal observances; sacrifices must be offered to them, their vindictive temper must be propitiated, their anger averted; if the dues of the gods are paid, the stipulated quantity of corn and wine and oil, the tithes, the firstfruits, the animals for the altar, the tribute for the temple, then the worshipper who has thus discharged his obligations may feel himself free to follow out his own tastes and inclinations. In the Roman religion, for example, every dealing with the gods was a strictly legal contract; the Roman general agreed with Jupiter or with Mars that if the battle should be won a temple should be built. It was not necessary that the cause should be right, or that the general should be good; the sacrifice of the wicked, though offered with an evil intent, was as valid as the sacrifice of the good. In either case the same amount of [Pg 158] marble and stone, of silver and gold, would come to the god.

In the Eastern religions not only were goodness and righteousness dissociated from the idea of the gods, but evil of the grossest kinds was definitely associated with them. The Phœnician deities, like those of the Hindoos, were actually worshipped with rites of murder and lust. Every vice had its patron god or goddess, and it was forgotten by priest and people that goodness could be the way of pleasing God, or moral evil a cause of offence to Him.

Even in Israel, where the teaching of Revelation was current in the proverbs of the people, the practice generally followed the heathen conceptions. All the burning protests of the inspired prophets could not avail to convince the Israelite that what God required was not sacrifice and offering, but to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with Him. Again and again we find that the high places were frequented and the ritual supported by men who were sensual, unjust, and cruel. The Sabbath Day was kept, the feasts were duly observed, the priests were handsomely maintained, and there, it was supposed, the legitimate claims of Jehovah ceased. What more could He desire?

This is surely the most impressive proof that the Truth which is under consideration is far from being obvious. Israel himself, the chosen channel for communicating this truth to the world, was so slow to

understand and to grasp it, that his religious observances were constantly degenerating into lifeless ceremonies devoid of all moral significance, and his religious teachers were mainly occupied in denouncing his conduct as wholly inconsistent with the truth. [Pg 159]

So far from treating the truth as a truism, our Lord in all His teaching laboured to bring it out in greater clearness, and to set it in the forefront of His message to men. He made it the very keynote of the Gospel that not every one who says, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of His Father in heaven. He painted with exquisite simplicity and clearness the right life, the conduct which God requires of us, and then likened every one who practised this life to a man who builds his house on a rock, and every one who does not practise it to a man who builds his house on the sand. He declared, in the spirit of all that we have just read from the book of Proverbs, that teachers were to be judged by their fruits, and that God would estimate our lives not by what we professed to do, but by what we did; and He took up the very language of the book in declaring that every man should be judged according to his works.[277] In every word He spoke He made it plain that goodness is what God loves, and that wickedness is what He judges and destroys. In the same way every one of the Apostles insists on this truth with a new earnestness. St. John more especially reiterates it, in words which sound even more like a truism than the sayings of this book: "He that doeth righteousness is righteous even as He is righteous;" and, "If ye know that He is righteous, ye know that every one also that doeth righteousness is begotten of Him."[278]

The Gospel itself is accompanied by a new and more earnest assertion of this cardinal truth, that God loves goodness, and that He judges men according to their works. And even now, after many centuries of Christian faith, and notwithstanding all the teachings of the Bible and the witness of the Spirit, it is very difficult for many of us to understand that religion is goodness, and religion without goodness is impiety of the worst kind. It is supposed by some, in face of all the accumulated truth and wisdom of the ages which have passed since this book was written, that God's last and highest message is a dispensation from practical righteousness—that the Gospel of Grace means God's willingness to accept men because they believe, apart from the actual goodness to which all faith is calculated to lead; as if the Gospel were an announcement that God had entirely changed His nature, and that all the best and noblest teachings of His Spirit in the past were set aside by His final revelation. Behind some figment or other, some perverted notion of imputed righteousness, men try to hide their guilty countenance, and to persuade themselves that now, in virtue of the Cross, they can see God without holiness, without purity of heart. Heaven has been treated as a place where men can enter who work abomination and make a lie; and in order to secure a full acceptance for our dogma we try to depreciate goodness as if it were a thing of little worth, and even come to look with some suspicion on those who are only good—only moral, I think we call it—and do not hold our own views of speculative truth. Meanwhile religious teachers "tell the wicked they are righteous," and earn the curse of the nation, because they thereby enable men to be hard and cruel and unjust and selfish and proud and contemptuous, and yet to esteem themselves as justified by faith. Others "justify the wicked," accepting a verbal profession in place of a virtuous practice; and that, as we have seen, is abominable to the Lord. [Pg 160] [Pg 161]

Justification by faith loses all its meaning and all its value unless it is fully admitted that *to be just* is the great end and aim of religion. Salvation becomes a delusion unless it is perceived that it means righteousness. Heaven, and the saints' everlasting rest, become worthless and misleading ideas unless we recognise that it is the abode of goodness, and that saints are not, as we sometimes seem to imply, bad people regarded as holy by a legal fiction, but people who are made good and are actually holy.

Strong as the language of our book is upon the subject, it is not possible to bring out in mere proverbial sayings the eternal necessity of this great truth. Goodness and blessedness are actually identical, the reverse and the obverse sides of the same coin. If a man is made good he is made blessed; but if he is made blessed to all appearance, and not good, the blessedness proves to be an illusion. It could not possibly avail to be justified by faith, unless we were made just by faith; a sore body is not healed by covering it up, a dead man is not quickened by a smiling mask. There have been many people who counted themselves the elect, and made no question that they were saved, though they remained all the time inwardly wicked; they were miserable, sour, discontented, censorious, a burden to themselves, an eyesore to others; they were persuaded that they would be happy in heaven, and they supposed that their constant wretchedness was due to their being pilgrims in a strange land; but the fact was they would be more wretched still in heaven, for nowhere is evil such a curse as in a place where good prevails; their misery arose from their own wicked hearts, and in the next world, their hearts still being wicked, their misery must continue and increase. [Pg 162]

May God grant us a clear vision in this matter, that we may see the due relation of things! Goodness is the principal thing—for it faith itself and all religion exists. God is goodness—man is evil; what God means by saving us is to make us good like Himself. That we must be saved by faith means that we must be made good by faith, not that we must take faith in place of goodness. That righteousness is imputed to us by the goodness of God means that the goodness of Christ is reckoned as ours for the purpose of making us good, not in order to spare us the necessity of being good. And in this way, and this only, we must estimate one another. What a man believes in his heart we can never fully know; but whether he is good or not is a matter plain as the day. It is easy to bandy words of reproach, to call men unbelievers, sceptics, atheists; but there is only one wise way of speaking and thinking. If we see goodness, let us thank God, for there, be sure, His Spirit is;[279] if we see the lovely graces which shine in our Lord Jesus Christ gleaming, however fitfully, in our fellow-men, let us recognise Christ there. And where we see wickedness, let no consideration of outward Christian profession or orthodoxy of belief restrain us from fully recognising that it is evil, or from courageously contending against it.

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# XII.



## *THE TONGUE.*

"A man shall be satisfied with good by the fruit of his MOUTH: and the doings of a man's hands shall be rendered unto him."—PROV. xii. 14.

"In the transgression of the LIPS is a snare to an evil man: but the righteous shall come out of trouble."—PROV. xii. 13.

"A fool's vexation is PRESENTLY KNOWN: but a prudent man concealeth shame."—PROV. xii. 16.

"He that uttereth truth SHOWETH FORTH righteousness, but a false witness deceit."—PROV. xii. 17.

"The LIP of truth shall be established for ever: but a lying TONGUE is but for a moment."—PROV. xii. 19.

"Lying LIPS are an abomination unto the Lord: but they that deal truly are His delight."—PROV. xii. 22.

"There is that SPEAKETH rashly like the piercings of a sword: but the TONGUE of the wise is health."—PROV. xii. 18.

"A prudent man CONCEALETH knowledge: but the heart of fools proclaimeth foolishness."—PROV. xii. 23.

"The WORDS of the wicked are a lying in wait for blood: but the MOUTH of the upright shall deliver them."—PROV. xii. 6.

"Heaviness in the heart of a man maketh it stoop; but a good WORD maketh it glad."—PROV. xii. 25.

There is nothing which seems more insubstantial than speech, a mere vibration in the atmosphere which touches the nerves of hearing and then dies away. There is no organ which seems smaller and less considerable than the tongue; a little member which is not even seen, and, physically speaking, soft and weak. But the word which issues out of the lips is the greatest power in human life. That "soft tongue breaketh the bone."[280] Words will change the currents of life: look for instance at a great orator addressing his audience; how miraculous must it seem to a deaf man watching the speaker that the quiet opening of a mouth should be able to produce such powerful effects upon the faces, the movements, the conduct of the listeners!

We are coming to consider the importance of this diminutive organ, the ill uses and the good uses to which it may be turned, and the consequent necessity of fitly directly and restraining it.

On the use of the tongue depend the issues of a man's own life. It may be regarded as a tree which bears fruits of different kinds, and such fruits as his tongue bears a man must eat. If his words have been good, then he shall be satisfied with good by the fruit of his mouth.[281] "A man's belly shall be filled with the fruit of his mouth, with the increase of his lips shall he be satisfied."[282] The fruits which grow on this tongue-tree are death and life—the tongue produces them—and he that loves the tree shall according to his love eat the one fruit or the other; if he loves death-bearing speech he shall eat death; if he loves life-bearing speech he shall eat life.[283] So deadly may be the fruit of the tongue that the mouth of the fool is regarded as a present destruction.[284] So wholesome may be the fruit of the tongue that the tongue of the wise may be actually denominated health.[285]

In the case of the fool it is always very obvious how powerfully the tongue affects the condition of the [Pg 165] speaker. His lips are always coming into strife, and his mouth is always calling for stripes. It is his destruction, and his lips are the snare of his soul.[286] In the transgression of the lips always lies the snare for the evil man: ultimately all men are in effect condemned out of their own mouths.[287] The tongue proves to be a rod for the back of the proud and foolish owner of it, while the good man's tongue is a constant life-preserver.[288] As an old proverb says, a fool's tongue is always long enough to cut his own throat. On the other hand, where the tongue is wisely used it always brings back joy to the speaker in the end.[289] Thus whoever keeps his mouth and his tongue keeps his soul from troubles,[290] but the man who does not take the pains to hear, but gives his testimony falsely, shall perish.[291] While the use of the tongue thus recoils on the speaker for good or for evil, it has a wide influence also on others. "He that hath a perverse tongue falleth into mischief,"[292] but when speech is good, and such as it ought to be, "the words of a man's mouth are like deep waters, a gushing brook, a well of wisdom."[293]

Thus it is of vast and obvious importance how we use our tongue. If our speech is gracious we shall win the friendship of the king,[294] and it is a pleasant thing if we "keep the words of the wise within us and if they be established together upon our lips."[295] It is better for us to be poor than perverse or untruthful in our speech.[296] Our teacher, especially our Divine Lord, will rejoice inwardly and deeply "when our lips speak right [Pg 166] things."[297]

We are now cautioned against some of the evil purposes to which the tongue may be turned, and as all the heads of evil are passed in review we realize why St. James spoke of the tongue as "the world of iniquity" (iii. 6); and how profound was our Lord's teaching that out of the mouth proceed the things which defile a man (Matt. xv. 18).

First of all, the tongue is a fruitful source of *Quarrelling* and discord. A fool cannot hide his vexation, but must immediately blurt it out with the tongue.[298] When he is angry he must utter it all at once,[299] though a wise man would keep it back and still it, so concealing shame. No one is more certain to come to grief than "he who provokes with words."[300] These irritating taunts and threats are like coals to hot embers, and wood to fire;[301] in their absence the contention would quickly die out. It is therefore the wise counsel of Agur to one who has done foolishly in exalting himself, or has even entertained for a moment the arrogant or [Pg 167] quarrelsome thought, "Hand on thy mouth!" for speech under such circumstances produces strife as surely as churning produces butter from milk, or a blow on the nose blood.[302] Rash, inconsiderate, angry words are like the piercings of a sword.[303] If only our wrathful spirit made us immediately dumb, anger would never go far, it would die out as a conflagration dies when there is no wind to fan the flames.

But again, the tongue is the instrument of *Lying*; one of its worst disservices to man is that when it is well balanced, so that it easily wags, it often betrays him into untruths which his heart never contemplated nor even approved. It is the tongue which by false witness so often condemns the innocent.[304] A worthless witness mocketh at judgment; and the mouth of the wicked swalloweth iniquity.[305] And though such a witness shall not in the long run go unpunished, nor shall the liar escape,[306] yet, as experience shows, he may have brought ruin or calamity on others before vengeance falls upon him. The false witness shall perish,

[307] but often not before he has like a mace or a hammer bruised and like a sword or a sharp arrow pierced his unfortunate neighbour.[308] It is the tongue which glozes over the purposes of hate, and lulls the victim into a false security; the fervent lips and the wicked heart are like a silver lining spread over an earthen vessel to make it look like silver; the hatred is cunningly concealed, the seven abominations in the heart are hidden; the pit which is being dug and the stone which is to overwhelm the innocent are kept secret by the facile talk [Pg 168] and flatteries of the tongue; the more the tongue lies in its guileful machinations the more the heart hates the victims of its spite.[309] A righteous man hates lying, but the wicked, by his lies, brings disgrace and shame. [310] The lie often appears to prosper for a moment,[311] but happily it is an abomination to the Lord,[312] and in His righteous ordering of events he makes the falsehood which was as bread, and sweet to the lips, into gravel which breaks the teeth in the mouth.[313] The curse which is causeless is frustrated, and so also is the empty lie; it wanders without rest, without limit, like a sparrow or a swallow.[314]

Closely allied to lying is *Flattery*; and to this vile use the tongue is often put. Flattery is always a mistake. It does not attain its end in winning the favour of the flattered; for in the long run "he that rebuketh a man shall find more favour than he that flattereth with the tongue."[315] If it is believed, as often unfortunately it is, it proves to be a net spread in the path, which may trip up, and may even capture and destroy, the unwary walker.[316]

Another evil use of the tongue is for *Whispering and tale-bearing*. "He that goeth about as a tale-bearer revealeth secrets"—he is not to be trusted, it is better to have nothing to do with him. Disclosing the secret of another is a sure way of incurring reproach and lasting infamy. Such a habit is a fruitful source of rage and indignation, it brings black wrath to the countenance of him whose secret has been published, just as [Pg 169] wind spreads the rain clouds over the sky.[317] The temptation to tattling is great; the business of a gossip brings an immediate reward; for the corrupt heart of man delights in scandal as an epicure in tit-bits: "The words of a whisperer are as dainty morsels which go down into the chamber of the belly."[318] But what mischief they do! They separate bosom friends, sowing suspicion and distrust.[319] Where there is already a little misunderstanding, the whisperer supplies wood to the fire and keeps it burning; apart from him it would soon die out.[320] But if he thinks there is any prospect of a reconciliation he will be constantly harping on the matter; one who seeks love would try to hide the transgression, but the scandalmonger is a foe to love and the unfailing author of enmity.[321]

But there is *Mischief*, more deliberate and more malignant still, which the tongue is employed to plot, to plan and to execute. "With his mouth the godless man destroyeth his neighbour."[322] "The words of the wicked are a lying in wait for blood."[323] "The mouth of the wicked poureth out evil things,"[324] blasphemies, obscenities, curses, imprecations. "A froward man scattereth abroad strife."[325] He deceives, and in bitter raillery declares that he was only jesting; he is like a madman casting firebrands, arrows, and death.[326] [Pg 170] We know what it is to hear a man pouring out foul, abusive, and impious language, until the very atmosphere seems enflamed with firebrands, and arrows fly hither and thither through the horrified air. We know, too, what it is to hear the smooth and well-turned speech of the hypocrite and the impostor, which seems to oppress the heart with a sense of decomposition; righteousness, truth, and joy seem to wither away, and in the choking suffocation of deceit and fraud life itself seems as if it must expire.

It is a relief to turn from those worst uses of the tongue to the more pardonable vices of *Rashness* and *Inopportuneness* of speech. Yet these too are evil enough in their way. To pass a judgment before we are in possession of the facts, and before we have taken the pains to carefully investigate and consider them, is a sign of folly and a source of shame.[327] So impressed is our teacher with the danger of ill-considered speech that he says, "Seest thou a man that is hasty in his words? there is more hope of a fool than of him."[328] And even where the utterance of the tongue is in itself good it may be rendered evil by its untimeliness; religious talk itself may be so introduced as to hinder the cause of religion; pearls may be cast before swine: "Speak not in the hearing of a fool, for he will despise the wisdom of thy words."[329] There must be some preparation of spirit before we can wisely introduce Divine and heavenly things, and circumstances must not be chosen which will tend to make the Divine things seem mean and contemptible. It may be good to rebuke [Pg 171] an evildoer, or to admonish a friend; but if the opportunity is not fitting, we may make the evildoer more evil, —we may alienate our friend without improving him.

Considering then what mischief may be done with the tongue, it is not to be wondered at that we are cautioned against *excessive speech*. "In the multitude of words there wanteth not transgression, but he that refraineth his lips doeth wisely."[330] "He that guardeth his mouth keepeth his life; who opens wide his lips gets destruction, and a fool spreadeth out folly."[331] "In all labour is profit, the talk of the lips tends only to poverty."[332] "Wisdom rests in the heart of the understanding, but even in the inward part of fools all is blabbed."[333] "In the fool are no lips of knowledge" because he is always talking.[334] "The tongue of the wise uttereth knowledge aright, but the mouth of fools poureth out folly."[335] "A fool hath no delight in understanding, but only that his heart may reveal itself."[336] One who is always pouring out talk is sure to be pouring out folly. The wise man, feeling that all his words must be tested and weighed, is not able to talk very much. When your money is all in copper, you may afford to throw it about, but when it is all in gold you have to be cautious. A Christian feels that for every idle word he utters he will have to give account, and as none of his words are to be idle they must be comparatively few; the word that kindles wrath, the lie, the whisper, the slander, can therefore find no place on his lips.

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This brings us to the *Good and beautiful uses of the tongue*, those uses which justify us in calling the tongue of the wise Health.[337] First of all the tongue has the gracious power of soothing and restraining anger. It is the readiest instrument of peace-making. Gentleness of speech allays great offences,[338] and by preventing quarrels, disarming wrath, and healing the wounds of the spirit, it maintains its claim to be a tree of life.[339] If in the tumult of passion, when fiery charges are made and grievous provocations are uttered, the tongue can be held in firm restraint, and made to give a soft answer, the storm will subside, the angry assailant will retire abashed,[340] and the flaming arrows will be quenched in the buckler of meekness which opposes them. Nor is the tongue only defensive in such cases. The pleasant words, spoken out of a kindly and gentle nature, have a purifying effect;[341] they cleanse away the defilements out of which the evil passions sprang; they purge the diseased humours which produce the irritations of life; they supply a sweet food to the poor hearts of men, who are often contentious because they are hungry for sympathy and love. Pleasant words are as a honeycomb, sweet to the soul, health to the bones.[342] They must be true words, or they will not in the end be pleasant, for, as we have seen, the sweet bread of falsehood turns to gravel in the mouth. But what a different world this would become if we all spoke as many pleasant words as we honestly could, and were not so painfully afraid of showing what tenderness and pity and healing actually exist in our hearts! For another beautiful use of the tongue is to comfort the mourners, of whom there are always so many in the world. "Heaviness in the heart of a man maketh it stoop." There are these stooping, bowed-down hearts everywhere around us. We wish that we could remove the cause of sorrow, that we could effectually change the conditions which seem unfavourable to joy; but being unable to do this, we often stand aloof and remain silent, because we shrink from giving words without deeds, pity without relief. We forget that when the heart is heavy it is just "a good word that maketh it glad."[343] Yes, a word of genuine sympathy, a word from the heart,—and in trouble no other word can be called good,—will often do more to revive the drooping spirit than the grosser gifts of material wealth. A coin kindly given, a present dictated by a heart-felt love, may come as a spiritual blessing; on the other hand, money given without love is worthless, and seldom earns so much as gratitude, while a word in season, how good it is![344] It is better than silver and gold; the discouraged and despondent heart seems to be touched with the delicate finger of hope, and to rise from the ashes and the dust with a new purpose and a new life. It must, of course, be in season. "As vinegar upon nitre so is he that sings songs to a sad heart."[345] But the seasonable word, spoken just at the right moment and just in the right tone, brief and simple, but comprehending and penetrating, will often make the sad heart sing a song for itself.

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Great stress is to be laid on this seasonableness of speech, whether the speech be for comfort or reproof. A word fitly spoken, or to preserve the image implied in the original, a word that runs on its wheels in the just and inevitable groove, is compared to a beautiful ornament consisting of golden apples set in an appropriate framework of silver filigree.[346] In such an ornament the golden apples torn from their suitable foil would lose half their beauty, and the silver setting without the apples would only suggest a void and a missing. It is in the combination that the artistic value is to be found. In the same way, the wisest utterance spoken foolishly[347] jars upon the hearers, and misses the mark, while a very simple saying, a platitude in itself, may by its setting become lovely and worthy. The best sermon in a social gathering will seem out of place, but how often can the Christian man by some almost unobserved remark correct unseasonable levity, rebuke

unhallowed conversation, and lead the minds of the company to nobler thoughts. The timely word is better than the best sermon in such a case.

The use of the tongue in *Reproof* is frequently referred to in these proverbs. "A wise reprover upon an obedient ear" is compared to "an earring of gold, an ornament of fine gold."[348] And rebuke is, as we have seen, preferred before flattery.[349] But how wise we must be before our tongue can fitly discharge this function! How humble must the heart be before it can instruct the tongue to speak at once with firmness and tenderness, without a touch of the Pharisee in its tone, to the erring brother or the offending stranger! A rebuke which springs not from love but from vanity, not from self-forgetfulness but from self-righteousness, will not be like an earring of gold, but rather like an ornament of miserable tinsel chafing the ear, the cause of gangrene, a disfigurement as well as an injury. But if we live in close communion with Christ, and daily receive His stern but tender rebukes into our own souls, it is possible that we may be employed by Him to deliver timely rebukes to our fellow-men.

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There are two other noble uses of the tongue to which reference is constantly made in our book; the *Instruction of the ignorant*, and the *Championship of the distressed*. With regard to the first, we are told that "the lips of the wise disperse knowledge," while of course the heart of the foolish not being right cannot possibly impart rightness to others.[350] It is only the wise in heart that can claim the title of prudent, but where that wisdom is "the sweetness of the lips increaseth learning."[351] "The heart of the wise instructeth his mouth and addeth learning to his lips."[352] The lips of knowledge are compared to a precious vessel which is more valuable than gold or rubies.[353] To teach well requires earnest preparation, "the heart of the righteous studieth to answer."[354] But when the right answer to the pupil is discovered and given it is beautifully compared to a kiss on the lips.[355]

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But never is the tongue more divinely employed than in using its knowledge or its pleadings to deliver those who are in danger or distress. "Through knowledge the righteous may often be delivered."[356] The mouth of the upright will deliver those against whom the wicked are plotting.[357] It is a great prerogative of wise lips that they are able to preserve not themselves only but others.[358] The true and faithful witness delivers souls.[359] It is this which gives to power its one great attraction for the good man. The ruler, the judge, the person of social consideration or of large means is in the enviable position of being able to "open his mouth for the dumb, in the cause of all such as are left desolate, to judge rightly and minister judgment to the poor and needy."[360]

The Press—that great fourth estate—which represents for us the more extended use of the tongue in modern times, illustrates in the most vivid way the service which can be rendered where speech is fit, and also the injury that can be done where it is rash, imprudent, dishonest, interested, or unjust.

After thus reviewing some of the good uses of the tongue, and observing how they depend on the state of the heart,[361] we cannot help again laying stress on the need of a wise self-control in all that we say. He that refraineth his lips doeth wisely. A man of understanding holdeth his peace.[362] "He that spareth his words hath knowledge."[363] "Even a fool when he holdeth his peace is counted wise, when he shutteth his lips he is prudent."[364] If only the uninstructed and foolish person has sense enough to perceive that wisdom is too high for him he will not open his mouth in the gate,[365] and so in listening he may learn. "Of thine unspoken word thou art master," says an Indian proverb, "but thy spoken word is master of thee." We are to be swift to hear, but slow to speak: we are to ponder all that we hear, for it is only the simple that believes every word, the prudent man looks well to his going.[366] As St. James says, summing up all the teaching that we have reviewed, "If any man thinketh himself to be religious, while he bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his heart, this man's religion is vain."[367]

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And now there is only one other point to be noticed, but it is one of vast importance. As we realize the immense power of the tongue and the great issues which depend on its right or wrong employment, as we sum up all the evil which its tiny unobserved movements can accomplish, and all the rich blessings which it is, under right supervision, capable of producing; and as from personal experience we recognise how difficult it is to bridle the unruly member, how difficult it is to check the double fountain so that it shall send forth sweet waters only, and no bitter, we may be awed into an almost absolute silence, and be inclined to put away

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the talent of speech which our Lord has given to us, not daring to use it lest in using we should abuse it. But here is the answer to our misgiving: the plans and preparations of our hearts belong to us, but the answer of the tongue is from the Lord.[368] This most uncontrollable organ of the body can be put under our Lord's control. He is able to give us "a mouth and wisdom," and to make our words not our own but the utterance of His Holy Spirit. There may be "an ocean round our words which overflows and drowns them," the encircling influences of God, turning even our faultiest speech to good account, neutralising all our falterings and blunderings, and silencing our follies and perversities.

Shall we not put our lips under our Lord's control, that the answer of our tongue may be from Him? While we seek daily to subject our hearts to Him, shall we not in a peculiar and a direct manner subject our tongues, to Him? for while a subjected heart may keep the mouth from speaking evil, if the tongue is to speak well and to be employed for all its noble uses it must be immediately moved by God, our lips must be touched with a coal from the altar, our speech must be chastened and purified, inspired and impelled, by Him.

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# XIII.

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## *PRIDE AND HUMILITY.*

"A wise son heareth his father's instruction, but a scorner heareth not rebuke."—Prov. xiii. 1.

"Poverty and shame shall be to him that refuseth correction, but he that regardeth reproof shall be honoured."—Prov. xiii. 18.

"By pride cometh only contention, but with the well advised is wisdom."—Prov. xiii. 10.

"Whoso despiseth the word bringeth destruction on himself; but he that feareth the commandment shall be rewarded."—Prov. xiii. 13.

This last proverb appears in another form, as, "He that giveth heed unto the word shall find good, and whoso trusteth in the Lord happy is he."—Prov. xvi. 20.

By a proud man we mean one who esteems himself better than others; by a humble man we mean one who counts others better than himself. The proud man is so convinced of his intrinsic superiority that if appearances are against him, if others obtain more recognition, honour, wealth than he, the fault seems to him to lie in the evil constitution of the world, which cannot recognize merit; for his own intrinsic superiority is the axiom which is always to be taken for granted; "his neighbours therefore find no favour in his eyes, and he even desires their calamity and ruin," in order, as he would put it, that every one may be set in his due place.[369] Meanwhile he is always boasting of possessions, dignities, and gifts which do not yet, but some day will, appear to the public eye. He is like clouds which overcast the sky, and wind which frets the earth, without bringing any wholesome rain.[370] If, on the other hand, appearances are with him, if wealth, dignity, and honour fall to his share, he is affably convinced of his own supreme excellence; the proof of his own conviction is written large in his broad acres, his swelling dividends, and his ever-increasing troops of flatterers and friends; and he moves smoothly on to—what?—strange to say, little as he thinks it, to destruction, for "Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall."[371] If he only knew he would say, "Better is it to be of a lowly spirit with the meek than to divide the spoil with the proud;"[371] for "before destruction the heart of man is haughty, and before honour goeth humility."[372] The event shows, if not in this world, yet the more surely in the next, that it is well to "let another man praise thee, and not thine own mouth; a stranger, and not thine own lips."[373]

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When our eyes are open to see things as they are, we are no longer in the least impressed by the "proud and haughty man whose name is scorner working in the arrogance of pride."[374] We may not live to see it, but we

are quite persuaded that "a man's pride shall bring him low, but he that is of a lowly spirit shall obtain honour."[375] "Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit? There is more hope of a fool than of him."[376]

Now what are the evil effects of pride, and what are the blessings that follow on humility?

*First of all*, pride cuts a man off from all the salutary effects of reproof, rebuke, criticism, and counsel, [Pg 181] without which it is not possible for any of us to become wise. "A wise son" is the result of "a father's correction," says the text, and such a son makes his father glad;[377] but the pride in a child's heart will often prevent him from receiving even the correction of a father, and will lead him to despise his mother. And if the parents have not firmness and wisdom enough to overcome this childish resistance, it will grow with years, and prove more and more disastrous. "He is in the way of life that heedeth correction, but he that forsaketh reproof erreth."[378] If he had loved reproof he would have acquired knowledge, but hating it he becomes brutish.[379] It is evident then that this pride is folly. He is a fool that despises his father's correction, but he that regardeth reproof getteth prudence.[380] He that refuseth correction despiseth his own soul, but he that hearkeneth to reproof getteth understanding.[381]

When we are grown up, and no longer under the tutelage of parents who love us, pride is still more likely to harden our hearts against criticism and counsel. The word of warning falls on the proud ear in vain, just because it is the word of warning, and often does the wilful heart mourn as it suffers the penalty of its stubbornness.[382] A man who refuses correction is a synonym for poverty and shame.[383] These words [Pg 182] which we in our pride despise might be an incalculable benefit to us. Even the most witless criticism may be useful to a humble mind, even the most unjust attacks may lead us to wholesome self-searching, and to a more careful removal of possible offences. While if the criticism is fair, and prompted by a kind heart, or if the rebuke is administered by one whose wisdom and justice we respect, it is likely to do us far more good than praise and approval. "A rebuke entereth deeper into one that hath understanding than a hundred stripes into a fool."[384] "Better is open rebuke than love that is hid."[385] If we were wise we should value this plain and honest speaking much more than the insipid flattery which is often dictated by interested motives.[386] In fact, praise is a very questionable benefit; it is of no use at all unless we carefully test it, and try it, and accept it with the greatest caution, for only a small part of it is pure metal, most of it is mere dross;[387] and praise that is not deserved is the most dangerous and deleterious of delights. But rebuke and criticism cannot do us much harm. Many great and noble men have been ruined by admiration and popularity, who might have [Pg 183] thriven, growing greater and nobler, in the fiercest and most relentless criticism. Donatello, the great Florentine sculptor, went at one time of his life to Padua, where he was received with the utmost enthusiasm, and loaded with approbation and honours. But soon he declared his intention of returning to Florence, on the ground that the sharp assaults and the cutting criticisms which always assailed him in his native city were much more favourable to his art than the atmosphere of admiration and eulogy. In this way he thought that he would be stimulated to greater efforts, and ultimately attain to a surer reputation. In the same spirit the greatest of modern art critics has told us how valuable to him were the criticisms which his humble Italian servant made on his drawings. Certainly, "with those who allow themselves to be advised is wisdom."[388] "He that trusteth in his own heart," and cannot receive the advice of others, "is a fool; but whoso walketh wisely he shall be delivered," sometimes perhaps by the humble suggestions of very simple people.[389]

Yes, "with the lowly is wisdom:"[390] they "hearken to counsel,"[391] and in doing so they get the advantage of many other wits, while the proud man is confined strictly to his own, and however great his capacity may be, it is hardly probable that he will sum up all human wisdom in himself. The lowly gives heed to the word, no matter who speaks it, and finds good;[392] he abides among the wise, because he is always ready to learn; consequently, he becomes wise, and eventually he gets the honour which he deserves.[393] It is in this way [Pg 184] that people of lowly station and very moderate abilities often come to the front. "A servant that deals wisely has rule over a son that causes shame, and has part in the inheritance among the brethren."[394] To a crafty son no good shall be, but to a servant who is wise his actions shall prosper and his way be made straight.[395] The consciousness of not being clever, and a wise diffidence in our own judgment, will often make us very thankful to learn from others and save us from the follies of wilfulness; and thus very much to their own astonishment the humble find that they have outdistanced their more brilliant competitors in the race, and, walking in their humility, unexpectedly light upon recognition and admiration, honour and love.

This first point, then, becomes very clear in the light of experience. One of the most injurious effects of Pride is to cut off its miserable victim from all the vast help and service which rebuke and criticism can render to the humble. One of the sweetest results of a genuine humility is that it brings us to the feet of all wise teachers; it multiplies lessons for us in all the objects which surround us; it enables us to learn even from those who seem to be too captious to teach, or too malevolent to be even wise. The humble mind has all the wisdom of the ages as its possession, and all the folly of fools as an invaluable warning.

*Secondly*, by pride comes nothing but strife,[396] and he loveth transgression that loveth strife; he that raiseth high his gate, *i.e.*, builds a lofty house, seeketh destruction.[397] It is the pride of monarchs and nations which produces war; the sense of personal dignity which is always sudden and quick in quarrel; the feeling of swollen self-importance which is afraid to make peace lest it should suffer in the eyes of men. And in the affairs of private life our pride, rather than our sense of right, usually creates, fosters, and embitters divisions, alienations, and quarrels. "I am perfectly innocent," says Pride; "I bear no resentment, but it would be absurd for me to make the first advances; when those advances are made, I am willing to forgive and to forget." "I think I am innocent," says Humility, "but then I may have been very provoking, and I may have given offence without knowing it; in any case, I may as well make an offer of apology; if I fail, I fail."

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Nor is this the only way in which strife grows out of pride, for "by pride comes *nothing but* strife." All the foolish extravagances of social competition are to be traced to the same source. One man "raises high his gate," builds a fine house, and furnishes it in the best way. He flatters himself that his "little place" is tolerably comfortable, and he speaks with some contemptuous pity of all his neighbours' houses. Immediately all his neighbours enviously strive to excel him, and pride vies with pride, heartburnings are many and bitter. Then there comes on the scene one who in wealth and ostentation of wealth exceeds them all, and the first man is now racked with envy, strains every nerve to outdo the insolent intruder, suffers his debts to far exceed his assets, and soon incurs the inevitable crash. That is how pride works in one very obvious department of social life. But it is the same in every other department. Who can calculate the miseries which are produced by the grotesque assumptions of poor mortals to be superior to their fellow-mortals? Parents will mar their children's lives by refusing their consent to marriages with those who, for some perfectly artificial reason, are held to be beneath them; or will still more fatally ruin their children's happiness by insisting on alliances with those who are held to be above them. Those who prosper in the world will heartlessly turn their backs on relations who have not prospered. Men who earn their living in one particular way, or in no particular way, will loftily contemn those who earn their living in another particular way. Those who dress in the fashion will look in another direction when they pass people who do not dress in the fashion, though they may be under deep obligations to these slighted friends. This is all the work of pride. Then there are the sneers, the taunts, the sarcasms, the proud man's scorn, like "a rod in the mouth" indeed,[398] which falls with cutting cruelty on many tender backs and gentle faces. The overbearing temper of one who "bears himself insolently and is confident"[399] will sometimes take all the sweetness out of life for some delicate woman, or shrinking child, or humble dependent, bruising the poor spirit, rending the terrified heart, unnerving and paralysing the weaker and more helpless nature.

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From first to last this haughty spirit is a curse and a torment to everyone, and not least to itself. It is like a cold and biting wind. It is like an erosive acid. It produces more sorrows than the north wind produces icicles. It mars more lives than anyone but God is able to count. It breaks the hearts of the humble, it excites the passions of the wrathful, it corrupts the conduct of the weak. It ruins children, it poisons social life, it inflames differences, and plunges great nations into war.

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If it were permitted to enter heaven, it would turn heaven into hell, it would range the hosts of heaven in envious cliques and mutually scornful castes, it would make the meek spirit sigh for earth, where there was at least the hope of death, and would turn the very presence and power of God into a constant object of envy and an incentive to rebellion. It is obvious, then, that pride cannot enter heaven, and the proud man, if he is to enter, must humble himself as a little child.

*Third*—and this leads us to contemplate the worst result of Pride and the loveliest outcome of Humility—"Every one that is proud of heart is an abomination to the Lord; though hand join in hand he shall not be unpunished."[400] "The Lord will root up the house of the proud; but He will establish the border of the widow."[401] In a word, Pride is hateful to God, who resists the proud and gives grace to the humble. The proud man, whether he knows it or not, comes into direct conflict with God: he may not intend it, but he is pitting himself against the Omnipotent. That hardening of the face is a sign of evil, just as the patient humble

ordering of the way is a sign of righteousness.[402] In that high look and proud heart there seems to be something dignified, flashing, and luminous; it is undoubtedly much admired by men. By God it is not [Pg 188] admired; it is regarded merely as the lamp of the wicked, and as sin.[403] The light, such as it is, comes from hell; it is the same light that burned on the faces of the apostate angels "o'erwhelmed with floods and whirlwinds of tempestuous fire." The proud man dares the thunderbolts of God. He scorns men whom he sees, and in doing so he scorns God whom he has not seen; the men whom he consciously scorns cannot, but the God whom he unwittingly scorns will, take vengeance upon him. He has hardened his heart, he has grown great in his own eyes, he has despised the creatures made in God's image; he will suddenly be cut off, and that without remedy.

On the other hand, by humility men learn to know and to fear the Lord.[404] God reveals Himself to the humble heart, not as a King of Terrors, but kind and good, with healing in His wings, leading the contrite spirit to implicit trust in Himself, and "whoso trusteth in the Lord, happy is he."[405] When we realize this we cannot wonder that so few people seem to know God; men are too proud; they think of themselves more highly than they ought to think, and consequently they do not think at all of Him; they receive honour one of another, and eagerly desire such honour, and consequently they cannot believe in Him, for to believe in Him implies the desire of no honour except such as comes from Him.

It is a strange truth that God should dwell in a human heart at all, but it is almost self-evident that if He is to [Pg 189] dwell in any human heart it must be in one which has been emptied of all pride, one which has, as it were, thrown down all the barriers of self-importance, and laid itself open to the incoming Spirit. If we cling to ever so little of our natural egotism; if we dwell on any imagined excellence, purity, or power of our own; if we are conscious of any elation, any springing sense of merit, which would set us, in our own judgment, on some equality with God,—how could the High and Lofty One that inhabiteth Eternity enter in? That thought of vanity would seek to divide our nature with Him, would enter into negotiations for a joint occupation, and the insulted Spirit of God would depart.

If in ordinary human affairs "before destruction the heart of man is haughty, and before honour goeth humility;"[406] if even in our dealings with one another happiness and success and prosperity depend on the cultivation of a modest spirit, how much more when we come to deal with God must haughtiness appear the presage of destruction, and humility the only way of approach to Him!

It is not possible to think too humbly of yourself, it is not possible to be too lowly, you cannot abase yourself too much in His Holy Presence. Your only attitude is that of Moses when he took off his shoes because the place he stood on was holy ground; or that of Isaiah when he cried out that he was "a man of unclean lips." To those who know you your humiliations may sound excessive,—as we are told the disciples of St. Francis [Pg 190] remonstrated with him for his self-depreciation[407]—but not to God or to your own heart. And He, if He has set His love upon you, and purposes to make you a temple for His indwelling, will use method after method of humbling you to prepare for His entrance. Again and again you will say, Surely now I am low enough, am I not humbled in the dust? But His hand will still be upon you, and He will show you heads of pride which have yet to be levelled down. In the last humbling you will find that there is rising within you a certain pride in the humility itself. That also will He subdue. And some day, if you are willing, you shall be lowly enough for the Most High to dwell in, humble enough to offer a perpetual incense of praise.

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# XIV.

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## *THE INWARD UNAPPROACHABLE LIFE.*

"The heart knoweth its own bitterness, and a stranger doth not intermeddle with its joy."—PROV. xiv. 10.

"Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful, and the end of mirth is heaviness."—PROV. xiv. 13.

"Yes! in the sea of life enisled,
With echoing straits between us thrown,
Dotting the shoreless watery wild,
We mortal millions live *alone*.
The islands feel the enclasping flow,
And then their endless bounds they know."

MATTHEW ARNOLD.

We know each other's appearance, it is true, but there for the most part our mutual knowledge ceases. Some of us unveil nothing of ourselves to anyone; some of us unveil a little to all; some a good deal to a few; but none of us can unveil all even to the most intimate friend. It is possible to live on terms of complete confidence and even close intimacy with a person for many years, to become thoroughly acquainted with his habits, his turns of expression, his modes of thought, to be able to say with a certain infallibility what course he will take in such and such circumstances—and yet to find by some chance uplifting of a curtain in his life that he cherished feelings which you never even suspected, suffered pains of which you had seen no trace, and enjoyed pleasures which never came to any outward expression. [Pg 103]

How true this is we realize at once if we turn inwards and review all the thoughts which chase each other through our brain, and all the emotions which throb in our heart for a single day, and then deduct those which are known to any human being, known or even suspected; the sum total we find is hardly affected at all. We are quite startled to discover how absolutely alone we live, how impossible it is for a stranger, or even for an intimate friend, to meddle with more than a fragment of our inner life. This is not because we have any wish to conceal, but rather because we are not able to reveal, our silent unseen selves; it is not because others would not like to know, but because they have not the instruments to investigate, that within us which we on our part are quite helpless to express.

For instance, "the desire accomplished is sweet to the soul,"[408] yet no one can know how sweet but he who cherished the desire. When a man has laboured for many years to secure an adequate maintenance for his family, and at length finds himself in easy circumstances, with his children growing up around him well and happy, no one besides himself can in the least gauge the sense of satisfaction, contentment, and gratitude which animates his heart, because no one can realize without actual experience the long and anxious days, the sickening fears, the blighted hopes, the rigorous sacrifices, through which he passed to attain his end. Or, when an artist has been toiling for many years to realize upon canvas a vision of beauty which floats before the inward eye, and at last succeeds, by some happy combination of colours, or by some dexterous sweep of the brush, or by some half-inspired harmony of form and composition, in actually bodying forth to the senses that which has haunted his imagination, it is hopeless for any one else to understand the thrilling joy, the light-hearted ecstasy, which are hidden rather than expressed by the quiet flush on the cheek and the sparkling glance of the eye. [Pg 103]

The mystical joy of a love which has just won an answering love; the deep-toned joy of the mother in the dawning life of her child; the joy of the poet who feels all the beauty of the earth and the sky pulsing through his nerves and raising his heart to quick intuitions and melodious numbers; the joy of the student, when the luminous outlines of truth begin to shape themselves before his mind in connected form and startling beauty; the joy of one who has toiled for the restoration of lost souls, and sees the fallen and degraded awaking to a new life, cleansed, radiant and strong; the joy of the martyr of humanity, whose dying moments are lit with visions, and who hears through the mysterious silences of death the voices of those who will one day call him blessed,—joys like these may be described in words, but they who experience them know that the words are, relatively speaking, meaningless, and they who do not experience them can form no conception of them. "When the desire cometh it is a tree of life,"[409] which suddenly springs up in the garden of the heart, puts forth its jubilant leaves of healing, flashes with white wings of scented blossom, and droops with its full offering of golden fruit, as if by magic, and we are surprised ourselves that those around us do not see the wonder, do not smell the perfume, do not taste the fruit: we alone can sit under its branches, we alone can catch the murmur of the wind, the music of achievement, in its leaves. [Pg 104]

But this thought becomes very pathetic when we think of the heart's bitterness, which the heart alone can know,—the hope deferred which makes it sick,[410] the broken spirit which dries up the bones,[411] the spirit which for so long bore a man's infirmity, and then at last broke because it could bear no more, and became itself intolerable.[412] The circumstances of a man's life do not give us any clue to his sorrows; the rich have

troubles which to the poor would seem incredible, and the poor have troubles which their poverty does not explain. There are little constitutional ailments, defects in the blood, slight deformities, unobserved disabilities, which fill the heart with a bitterness untold and unimaginable. There are crosses of the affections, disappointments of the ambitions; there are frets of the family, worries of business; there are the haunting Furies of past indiscretions, the pitiless reminders of half-forgotten pledges. There are weary doubts and misgivings, suspicions and fears, which poison all inward peace, and take light out of the eye and elasticity out of the step. These things the heart knows, but no one else knows.

[Pg 195] What adds to the pathos is that these sorrows are often covered with laughter as with a veil, and no one suspects that the end of all this apparently spontaneous mirth is to be heaviness.[413] The bright talker, the merry jester, the singer of the gay song, goes home when the party separates, and on his threshold he meets the veiled sorrow of his life, and plunges into the chilly shadow in which his days are spent.

The bitterness which surges in our brother's heart would probably be unintelligible to us if he revealed it; but he will not reveal it, he cannot. He will tell us some of his troubles, many of them, but the bitterness he must keep to himself.

How strange it seems! Here are men and women around us who are unfathomable; the heart is a kind of infinite; we skim the surface, we cannot sound the depths. Here is a merry heart which makes a cheerful countenance, but here is a countenance unclouded and smiling which covers a spirit quite broken.[414] Here is a cheerful heart which enjoys a continual feast,[415] and finds in its own merriment a medicine for its troubles;[416] but we cannot find the secret of the cheerfulness, or catch the tone of the merriment, any more than we can comprehend what it is which is making all the days of the afflicted evil.[417]

We are confined as it were to the superficial effects, the lights and shadows which cross the face, and the feelings which express themselves in the tones of the voice. We can guess a little of what lies underneath, but our guesses are as often wrong as right. The index is disconnected, perhaps purposely, from the reality. Sometimes we know that a heart is bitter, but do not even surmise the cause; more often it is bitter and we do [Pg 196] not know it. We are veiled to one another; we know our own troubles, we feel our own joys, that is all we can say.

And yet the strangest thing of all is that we hunger for sympathy; we all want to see that light in the eyes of our friends which rejoices the heart, and to hear those good things which make the bones fat.[418] Our joy is eager to disclose itself, and often shrinks back appalled to find that our companions did not understand it, but mistook it for an affectation or an illusion. Our sorrow yearns for comprehension, and is constantly doubled in quantity and intensity by finding that it cannot explain itself or become intelligible to others. This rigid and necessary isolation of the human heart, along with such a deep-rooted desire for sympathy, is one of the most perplexing paradoxes of our nature; and though we know well that it is a fact, we are constantly re-discovering it with a fresh surprise. Forgetting it, we assume that every one will know how we need sympathy, though we have never hung out the signals of distress, and have even presented a most repellent front to all advances; forgetting it, we give expression to our joy, singing songs to heavy hearts, and disturbing others by unseasonable mirth, as if no icy channels separated us from our neighbours' hearts, making our gladness seem frigid and our merriment discordant before it reaches their ears. Yes the paradox forces itself on our attention again; human hearts are isolated, alone, without adequate communication, and essentially uncommunicative, yet all of them eagerly desiring to be understood, to be searched, to be fused. [Pg 197] Is it a paradox which admits of any explanation? Let us see.

It has been very truly said, "Man is only partially understood, or pitied, or loved by man; but for the fulness of these things he must go to some far-off country." In proportion as we are conscious of being misunderstood, and of being quite unable to satisfy our longing for sympathy and comprehension at human fountains, we are impelled by a spiritual instinct to ask for God; the thought arises in us that He, though He be very far off, must, as our Creator, understand us; and as this thought takes possession of the heart a tremulous hope awakes that perhaps He is not very far off. There lie before us now some beautiful sayings which are partly the expression of this human conviction, and seem partly to be inspired by the Divine response to it. "If thou sayest, Behold, we knew not this man; doth not He that weigheth the heart consider, and he that keepeth the soul, doth not He know?"[419] "The hearing ear, and the seeing eye, the Lord hath made even both of them."[420] How obvious is the inference that the Maker of the ear and the eye hears those silent things which escape the ear itself, and sees those recesses of the human heart which the human eye is

never able to search! "The eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping watch upon the evil and the good." [421] "Sheol and Abaddon are before the Lord: how much more then the hearts of the children of men."[422] He sees in the heart what the heart itself does not see. "All the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes; but the Lord weigheth the spirits."[423] In fact, the spirit of man itself, the consciousness which clears into self-consciousness, and becomes in moral matters conscience, this "spirit, is the lamp of the Lord, searching all the innermost parts of the belly,"[424] so that a "man's goings are of the Lord;" and he is often moved by this indwelling spirit and guided by this mysterious lamp in a way which "he can hardly understand."[425]

[Ps 198]

This intimacy of knowledge is not without its most solemn, and even terrible, side. It means of course that the Lord knows "the thoughts of the righteous which are just, and the counsels of the wicked which are deceit." [426] It means that out of His minute and infallible knowledge He will render to every man according to his works, judging with faultless accuracy according to that "desire of a man which is the measure of his kindness," recognizing the "wish of the poor man," which, though he has not power to perform it, is more valuable than the boasted performances of those who never act up to their power of service.[427] It means that "the Lord trieth the hearts just as the fining pot tries the silver, and the furnace the gold."[428] It means that in thought of such a searching eye, such a comprehensive understanding on the part of the Holy One, none of us can ever say, "I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin."[429]

[Ps 199]

All this it means, and there must be some terror in the thought; but the terror, as we begin to understand, becomes our greatest comfort; for He who thus understands us is the Holy One. Terrible would it be to be searched and known in this minute way by one who was not holy, by one who was morally indifferent, by one who took a curious interest in studying the pathology of the conscience, or by one who had a malignant delight in cherishing vices and rewarding evil thoughts. Though we sometimes desire human sympathy in our corrupt passions and unhallowed desires, and are eager for our confederates in sin to understand our pleasures and our pains,—and out of this desire, it may be observed, comes much of our base literature, and all of our joining with a company to do evil,—yet after all we only desire this confederacy on the understanding that we can reveal as little, and conceal as much, as we like; we should no longer be eager to share our feelings if we understood that in the first contact our whole heart would be laid bare, and all the intricacies of our mind would be explored. We must desire that He who is to search us through and through should be holy, and even though He be strict to mark iniquity, should be one who tries the heart in order to purify it. And when we are awakened and understand, we learn to rejoice exceedingly that He who comes with His lamp to search the inmost recesses of our nature is He who can by no means tolerate iniquity, or pass over transgression, but must burn as a mighty fire wherever He finds the fuel of sin to burn.

[Ps 200]

Have we not found a solution of the paradox? The human heart is isolated; it longs for sympathy, but cannot obtain it; it seems to depend for its happiness on being comprehended, but no fellow-creature can comprehend it; it knows its own bitterness, which no one else can know; it broods over its own joys, but no one can share them. Then it makes discovery of the truth that God can give it what it requires, that He fully understands, that He can enter into all these silent thoughts and unobserved emotions, that He can offer an unfailing sympathy and a faultless comprehension. In its need the lonely heart takes refuge in Him, and makes no murmur that His coming requires the searching, the chastisement, and the purging of sin.

No human being needs to be misunderstood or to suffer under the sense of misunderstanding. Let him turn at once to God. It is childish to murmur against our fellows, who only treat us as we treat them; they do not comprehend us, neither do we comprehend them; they do not give us, as we think, our due, neither do we give them theirs; but God comprehends both them and us, and He gives to them and to us accurately what is due.

[Ps 201]

No human being is compelled to bear his bitterness alone, for though he cannot tell it or explain to his fellows, he can tell it, and he need not explain it, to God. Is the bitterness an outcome of sin, as most of our bitterness is? Is it the bitterness of a wounded egotism, or of a remorseful conscience, or of spiritual despondency? Or is it the bitterness which springs from the cravings of an unsatisfied heart, the thirst for self-completeness, the longing for a perfect love? In either case God is perfectly able and willing to meet the need. He delights to turn His knowledge of our nature to the purpose of cleansing and transforming the sinful heart: "By His knowledge shall My righteous servant justify many," He says. He is ready, too, to shed abroad His own rich love in our hearts, leaving no room for the hankering desire, and creating the peace of a complete fulfilment.

No human being need imagine that he is unappreciated; his fellow-men may not want him, but God does. "The Lord hath made every thing for His own purpose, yea, even the wicked for the day of evil."[430] He apprehends all that is good in your heart, and will not suffer a grain of pure gold to be lost; while He sees too every particle of evil, and will not suffer it to continue. He knows where the will is set upon righteousness, where the desire is turned towards Him, and will delicately encourage the will, and bountifully satisfy the desire. He sees, too, when the will is hardened against Him, and the desire is set upon iniquity, and He is mercifully resolved to visit the corrupt will and the evil desire with "eternal destruction from the face of the Lord, and from the glory of His might,"—mercifully, I say, for no torture could be more terrible and hopeless than for the evil man to live eternally in the presence of God.

Finally, no human being need be without a sharer of his joy: and that is a great consideration, for joy unshared quickly dies, and is from the beginning haunted by a vague sense of a shadow that is falling upon it. [Pg 202] In the heart of the Eternal dwells eternal joy. All loveliness, all sweetness, all goodness, all truth, are the objects of His happy contemplation; therefore every really joyful heart has an immediate sympathiser in God; and prayer is quite as much the means by which we share our gladness as the vehicle by which we convey our sorrows to the Divine heart. Is it not beautiful to think of all those timid and retiring human spirits, who cherish sweet ecstasies, and feel glowing exultations, and are frequently caught up in heavenly raptures, which the shy countenance and stammering tongue never could record? They feel their hearts melt with joy in the prospect of broad skies and sunlit fields, in the sound of morning birds and rushing streams; they hear great choirs of happy spirits chanting perpetually in heaven and in earth, and on every side of their obscure way open vistas of inspired vision. No stranger meddles with their joy, or even knows of it. God is not a stranger; to Him they tell it all, with Him they share it, and their joy is part of the joy of the Eternal.

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# XV.

[Pg 203]

## *A PASSIONATE DISPOSITION.*

> "A soft answer turneth away wrath: but a grievous word stirreth up anger." In the LXX. there is another clause inserted at the beginning, Ὀργὴ ἀπόλλυσι καὶ φρονίμους, ἀπόκρισις δὲ ὑποπίπτουσα ἀποστρέφει θυμόν, λόγος δὲ λυπηρὸς ἐγείρει ὀργάς."—Prov. xv. 1.
>
> "A meek tongue is a tree of life: but perverseness therein is a breaking of the spirit."—Prov. xv. 4.
>
> "A wrathful man stirreth up contention: but he that is slow to anger appeaseth strife."—Prov. xv. 18.

Bad temper causes more suffering than the modified severity with which we judge it would imply. It is in a home what toothache is in the body: the pain is insufferable and yet it is not treated as serious. A passionate man or woman spreads a pervading sense of irritation in the house or in the workshop, and all the other occupants of the place are as if they dwelt in a country subject to earthquakes; life for them is divided between anxiety to avoid the explosion and a painful effort to repair its devastations. We are not severe enough on these faults of temper in ourselves or in others; we are too prone to excuse them on the ground of temperament, as if we were no more responsible for outbreaks of passion than for the colour of our hair or the tone of our complexion. It will, therefore, do us good to see what the Wise Man says on the subject.

First of all, we have several proverbs which remind us how irritating an angry disposition is: it is the constant [Pg 204] occasion of strife; it grows itself by each fresh annoyance that it gives, so that it quickly becomes ungovernable, and thus "the wrathful man aboundeth in transgression."[431] A fierce ungovernable temper will set a whole city in a flame,[432] and lead to disasters of national and even world-wide extent. However peaceful and happy a community may be, if a choleric man enters it, signs of combustion will soon begin to appear. There are always hot embers which wise men are earnestly trying to damp down,[432] there are trivial irritations, petty annoyances, incipient envies, which are only too easily inflamed; the cool spirit and the

conciliatory word and the ingenious diversion of thought will keep the embers choked until the heat dies away, but "as coals to hot embers, and wood to fire, so is a contentious man to inflame strife."[433]

We may well be cautioned to give such an inflammatory character a wide berth; "Make no friendship with a man that is given to anger; and with a wrathful man thou shalt not go: lest thou learn his ways, and get a snare to thy soul."[434] Even a sweet temper may be chafed into peevishness by constant irritations; with passionate people the gentlest become passionate in self-defence. When this unbridled, ill-disciplined nature approaches, we should avoid it as if it were a bear robbed of her whelps, for such is this fool in his folly.[435]

This leads us to notice that anger and folly are very closely allied. The passionate nature is constantly [Pg 205] betrayed into actions which sober wisdom must condemn,—"He that is soon angry will deal foolishly.... He that is slow to anger is of great understanding: but he that is hasty of spirit exalteth folly."[436] Any one with a grain of sense will put a check upon his rising temper; his discretion makes him slow to anger, and he never feels to have won such true glory as when he bridles his wrath and passes by an offence without a sign of annoyance or resentment.[437] You may almost be sure that a man is wise if you find that he has a cool spirit.[438] When you see a person who cautiously avoids the ground where strife is apt to be excited, and builds his house on a spot where contention is impossible, you instinctively respect him, for you know it betokens wisdom; but when you see a man always getting involved in quarrels, always showing his teeth,[439] you rightly conclude that he is a fool.[440] "A fool uttereth all his anger: but a wise man keepeth it back and stilleth it."[441] If we are naturally irritable or splenetic, wisdom will incline us to avoid occasions which [Pg 206] excite us, and to keep a watchful guard over our spirits where the occasions are inevitable. If we neglect such precautions we shall justly be counted fools, and the consequent outbreaks of passion will lead us into fresh exhibitions of folly, and more completely justify the harsh judgment which has been passed upon us.

But not the least sign of the folly which is inherent in passion is the shocking effect which it has upon those who give way to it. As the LXX. version says at the beginning of this chapter, "Anger destroys even the wise." And one whose spirit is without restraint is forcibly compared to a city that is broken down and has no wall;[442] every foe can go up and possess it, every thoughtless child can fling a firebrand into it; the barest word, hint, smirk, shrug of the shoulders, any unintentional slight or reflection, nay, even silence itself, will suddenly set the powder-train on fire, and the consequent explosion will be more destructive to the city itself than to those who are outside. "A man of great wrath shall bear the penalty," and, poor fellow, perhaps it is best that he should, for if you deliver him from the consequence of his passion, that will only encourage him in further outbreaks, and so he will become worse, and your deliverance will be an endless task.[443]

Our great King Henry II. was subject to fits of uncontrollable passion, in which he would roll on the floor and bite the dust, impotent with rage; and all the sorrows of his life and reign, falling heavily upon him in his [Pg 207] later years, were occasioned by this unhappy temper. At the present time we are told that the Chinese frequently indulge in fits of passionate wrath, which react terribly upon their health and make them physically ill. The wrathful man does mischief to many, but his wrath is like an old arquebus, which, when it is fired, hurts the bearer almost as much as the enemy. It may fail to hit the mark, but it is sure to knock down the marksman.

Probably here the plea will be urged that we cannot help our temper, and it may be said, the suffering which it brings upon us is the best proof that it is an infirmity rather than a vice. Now this excuse cannot be allowed to pass; a certain good bishop on one occasion hearing it urged, in extenuation of a man's conduct, that he had such an unfortunate temper, exclaimed, "Temper, why temper is nine-tenths of Christianity!" If we are not to be blamed for bad temper, then there is no fault or defect or vice which we cannot shift off our own shoulders and lay to the charge of our constitution. But our constitution is no excuse for sin; the most that can be urged is that if we are constitutionally inclined to any particular sin we must seek for a special strength to fortify us against it. If in building a city an ancient engineer had one side more exposed than the rest, protected by no natural escarpments of rock or bends of the river, there he would concentrate all his skill to make the wall impregnable. If you find that one of your bodily organs betrays a tendency to disease, you are careful to avoid the exposure, or the strain, or the derangement, which would unfavourably affect it. If your lungs are delicate you shun fogs and chills; if your heart is feeble you are careful to avoid any sudden excitement; if your eyes [Pg 208] are weak you notice very particularly by what light you read, and are sensitive to the least weariness in those delicate instruments. In the same way, if your special infirmity lies in the temper; if you are easily provoked, or apt to fall into sullenness; if a sudden annoyance excites an uncontrollable passion in your mind, or drops

into your heart seeds of bitterness which rapidly grow and become ineradicable; you have your work cut out for you; your daily task will be to avoid the things which produce such ill effects, and to cultivate the habits which lessen the virulent action of these irritant poisons. Few of us realize how wonderfully our constitution is subjected to our own control, and how much we ourselves have to do with the making of it.

You know, we will suppose, that you are easily entangled in a quarrel; you must then prepare yourself before you go out into the business of the day,—"Go not forth hastily to strive, lest.... What wilt thou do in the end, when thy neighbour hath put thee to shame?"[444] This realization of what will probably result from your hasty temper will act as a check upon it, and you will be inclined, if you have any ground of offence against your neighbour, to go quietly and debate it with him alone.[445] Or if the contention has been sprung upon you unawares, take care that over the floodgates of your passion has been written this wholesome warning, "The beginning of strife is as when one letteth out water: therefore leave off contention, before there be any setting of the teeth."[446] Knowing your danger you must summon to your aid all the heroism of your nature, [Pg 209] and remember that this is the time and the occasion to exercise it. Others have to win their spurs on the battlefield; this is your battlefield, and here your spurs are to be won. Others have to win kingdoms or capture cities; here is the kingdom where you are to reign, this is the city which you are to take. "He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city."[447]

Get at some grand root principle like this: "Hatred stirreth up strifes: but love covereth all transgressions."[448] Ah, yes, if you are disposed to be angry with men, fill your spirit with love to them; that will soothe your irritable nerves, and will flow over their transgressions so that they cease to annoy you because you cease to see them; when we are fervent in love to one another, the love covers a multitude of sins.[449] Where love comes into the soul we are more anxious to convert those who offend us than to be angry with them.[450] Love saves us from the self-vaunting which exposes us to the annoyances, and provokes the attacks, of the malignant;[451] and it enables us to bear all things, almost without a ruffle or a perturbation. Strange to say, passionate temperaments are often very affectionate; let them cultivate the love in themselves, and it will be the destruction of the evil temper. And where the evil passion comes from a true moroseness, then the fruit can only be destroyed with the root, and the root can only be destroyed when love is shed abroad in the heart.

Or possibly your anger is not of the passionate kind, but rather stern and resentful, arising from an [Pg 210] exaggerated sense of self-importance. A meek[452] heart is not wrathful, and it is the life of the flesh; but where meekness fails, envy enters as rottenness of the bones, and with envy, hatred and malice.[453] A meek[452] tongue not only checks wrath in itself, but soothes it in others; it is a tree of life, just as perverseness in it is a breaking of the spirit.[454] If you thought less of yourself, you would not so frequently feel your dignity offended; you would not require this weapon of wrath always at hand to leap forth and avenge your outraged pride. From the meek heart vengeance dies away. "Say not thou, I will recompense evil: wait on the Lord, and He shall save thee."[455] You are sudden and quick in quarrel, because you think of yourself more highly than you ought to think; and because others do not share your opinion of yourself, you must summon all your artillery of wrath to make them bend the stubborn knee and offer you the due tribute of deference or admiration. For if bad temper comes often from constitutional infirmities which must be carefully watched and controlled, it comes just as frequently from that subtle enemy of our souls, Pride.

But now we come to the important question, How are our evil passions to be cured? And we must frankly admit that our book has no suggestions to offer. Its tendency is to regard our disposition as fixed, our temperament as irreversible, our character as unchangeable. It points out with crystalline clearness [Pg 211] the mischief of wrath and the merit of meekness, but it never so much as entertains the possibility that the wrathful man might become meek, the passionate man patient and gentle.

We have in our analysis of the evil observed that in order to avoid it we must be vigilant to mark and control the first risings of passion; we have noted too that if we were truly loving, anger would die away, and if we were truly humble, the resentments which stir our anger would have nothing to feed upon. But the main difficulty is, how are we to become watchful, since it is the special characteristic of a hasty temper that it overpowers our sentinels before it assaults the city? And how are we to become loving and humble? It is only throwing the difficulty back a step or two, and showing us how insuperable it is, to say that we must become good in one direction in order to escape the evil which lies in another direction. It does not help the Ethiopian

to become a European to tell him that Europeans have white skins instead of black; nor can a leopard change his kind because he learns that his spots are his distinctive mark.

There must be a deeper message than that of the Proverbs to solve this practical difficulty; though we may well feel that the book is invaluable in setting before us how greatly we need a deeper message. No infirmity of human nature proves more forcibly than the one with which we are dealing that "some thing out of Nature" must come in if a change is to be effected. "We must be born again;" it is only a regenerate heart which will have the impulse and the ability to watch against the eruption of a passionate disposition. It is only a regenerate heart which can love in such a way that irritations cease to fret, or that can be humble enough to escape the exasperations of wounded pride. Many of us think lightly of these particular faults, and scarcely designate ill-temper a sin at all; but however we may regard it, the wrathful disposition requires nothing less than Christ, and Him crucified, to cure it, and God deemed it worth while to send His only-begotten Son in order to effect the cure. In Christ Jesus are forces, moral and spiritual, strong enough to control the most uncontrollable rage and to soothe the most irritable temper; and as we can point to no other power which is sufficient for such a change, so few things manifest so strikingly the blessed presence of Christ in the heart as the softened and gentle temper, the removal of all those explosive elements which before He entered were constantly causing trouble and suffering and alarm. [Pg 212]

Here is an example taken from a country where the knowledge of the Gospel is comparatively recent. A Japanese gentleman living at Fujioka, who was much addicted to the use of *sáke*, a strong intoxicant, which produced the worst results on his temper, was led through reading a tract on the subject to renounce the evil habit, and to accept Jesus Christ as his Saviour. In proportion as the Divine power mastered him he became a new creature. One day his wife had been careless about some silkworms' eggs, which had become partially destroyed, and she trembled with fear that he would become enraged when he discovered it, and punish her severely, as he had done before. But to her great astonishment, when he found out what had happened he remained perfectly calm, and then said, "We can distribute them among our poor neighbours, and so they will have a larger crop. Thus it will perhaps be better than if we had sold them and taken all the money ourselves." His wife was so impressed with this change of character that she said, "This is the result of Christianity; I want to become a Christian too." She sought and found, and her whole family sought and found. And not only so, but the neighbours were struck by this "living epistle," and shortly afterwards when the missionary went to Fujioka there were ten persons awaiting baptism. At the present time a good Christian Church is growing up in the place.[456] [Pg 213]

Where the Lord Jesus Christ reigns evil passions subside and die away. "Learn of Me: for I am meek and lowly of heart." "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth." One who is born again, one whose life is hidden with Christ in God, is necessarily meek, meek as the Lord Himself: not, as we well know, devoid of noble anger or fiery indignation, for indeed it is only the meek heart from which all personal pretensions have been eradicated, and to which no personal feeling can be attributed, that is able to pour out vials of wrath, undeterred and unquenchable, upon all that is base and mean, impure and false, corrupt and cruel; but meek in this beautiful sense, that it never takes offence, never suspects evil, never resents any wrong except moral wrong that is done to others, or spiritual wrong done to God. All the tinder on which angry passions feed has been removed by the Cross of Christ, and therefore the only wrath which can be entertained is such wrath as God feels,—the deep intense glow of consuming indignation against sin. [Pg 214]

For our evil tempers, then, our passion, our wrath, our sullen pride, our fretful irritability, our outbreaks of sarcasm, our malignant sneers, there is only one possible cure; we must bring the heart, out of which all the evil comes, to Jesus Christ, that He may create it anew; we must accept our failures as evidence of an imperfect surrender, and come afresh with a more insistent cry, and a more perfect faith, that He may reign in our hearts as undisputed Lord, checking, subduing, warring down, every evil motion there.

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[Pg 215]

# XVI.

## *A JUST BALANCE.*

"A just balance and scales are the Lord's: all the weights of the bag are His work."—Prov. xvi. 11.

"A false balance is an abomination to the Lord: but a just weight is His delight."—Prov. xi. 1.

"Divers weights, and divers measures, both of them alike are an abomination to the Lord."—Prov. xx. 10.

"Divers weights are an abomination to the Lord; and a false balance is not good."—Prov. xx. 23.

The sixteenth chapter opens—and we may annex to it the last verse of chap. xv.—with a series of sayings which are grouped together on the principle that the name of the Lord occurs in each. There is no obvious connection between the successive verses, and some of them have been already touched on in previous lectures, but it will be worth while to glance at the series as a whole.

The Lord's presence must be recognised and reverenced before we can make any progress in wisdom, and in His presence we must humble ourselves before we can expect any honour.[457] We are entirely dependent upon Him; although our hearts may form plans, we cannot utter anything aright unless He controls our tongue.[458] However self-satisfied we may be with our own ways, however convinced we may be of our own [Pg 216] innocence, He weighs our spirit, and will often find a guilt which our conceit ignores, an impurity which our vanity would hide.[459] We should do well, therefore, to commit all our works to Him, in order that He may revise and correct our purposes and establish those which are good.[460] We cannot think too much of His all-inclusive wisdom and knowledge; everything lies in His hands and is designed for His ends; even the wicked who rebel against Him—men like Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar, Judas, Elymas—must in their inevitable punishment glorify His righteousness and truth.[461] For punishment is absolutely sure; the proud are an abomination to Him, and though they combine to oppose His will and to escape the penalty, it will be quite in vain.[462] On the other hand, where He sees mercy and truth He will purge iniquity, and when men fear Him they will depart from evil.[463] When His smile is upon them and He approves their ways, He will make their path plain, pacifying their enemies, and making their hearts glad.[464] He will guide them, even directing their steps, in such a manner that their own imperfect counsels shall turn to a happy and successful issue.[465] "Whoso trusteth in the Lord, happy is he."[466] Indeed we cannot exaggerate the minute observation of the Lord; no detail escapes His eye, no event is beyond His control; even what is generally called Chance is but another name for His unmarked and unknown direction; the very lot—that lot which settles contentions and [Pg 217] separates the strong[467]—cast into the lap is actually disposed by Him;[468] much more, therefore, are the deliberate transactions of commerce—those subtle bonds of the cash nexus which twine man to man and nation to nation—under His constant inspection and a subject of His most interested concern,—"a just balance and scales are the Lord's: all the weights of the bag are His work."

It is, then, as part of the Lord's watchful activity and direct, detailed connection with all the affairs of human life, that He is interested in our business and trade. We may notice at once that this is very characteristic of the Old Testament religion. In the Deuteronomic Law it was written: "Thou shalt not have in thy bag divers weights, a great and a small. Thou shalt not have in thine house divers measures, a great and a small. A perfect and a just weight shalt thou have; a perfect and just measure shalt thou have: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee. For all that do such things, even all that do unrighteously, are an abomination unto the Lord thy God."[469] Again, in the Levitical Law we find: "Ye shall [Pg 218] do no unrighteousness in judgment, in meteyard, in weight, or in measure. Just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hin, shall ye have: I am the Lord your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt."[470]

The Israelite was encouraged to think that all the work in which he engaged was ordained by, and therefore under the observation of, his God. "Hate not laborious work, neither husbandry which the Most High hath ordained," says Ecclesiasticus.[471] And there is a striking passage in Isaiah where the operations of agriculture are described in detail, and all are attributed to God, who instructs the husbandman aright and teaches him. It all comes from the "Lord of hosts, which is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in wisdom."[472]

But at present we are concerned only with trade as a department of industrial life, and especially with the actual chaffering of exchange, the barter of goods for goods, the weights and measures which settle the quantities, and the rules which must govern all such transactions. We should gather that the commercial fraud of those primitive times took this comparatively simple form: the merchant would have, let us say, a half shekel which came a little short of the regulation weight; or he would have a cubit measure (1 ft. 9 in.) half an inch under a cubit; or he would have a vessel professing to hold a *hin* (*i.e*. a little more than a gallon), but actually holding a little less than a gallon; or he would have a dry measure, marked as an *ephah* (*i.e*. about three pecks), but incapable of holding the ostensible quantity. In an ordinary way he would use these [Page 219] inadequate measures, and thus nibble a little from every article which he sold to a customer. But in the event of a purchaser presenting himself who had a fuller knowledge or might conceivably act as an inspector and report the fraud to the judge, there would be a just half shekel weight in the bag, a full cubit rule hidden behind the counter, a *hin* or an *ephah* measure of legal dimensions within easy reach. You may smile at such primitive methods of deception, but it requires many generations for a civilized society to elaborate commercial fraud on the large scale.

Now passing at once to our own times and bringing the truth of our text to illuminate them, I should like to say a little to people engaged in business, whether as employers or employed, whether the business is wholesale or retail. And let me assure you that I am not going to attempt a detailed examination and criticism of your business concerns. Such an attempt would be grossly impertinent, and might well expose me, not only to your indignation, but to your ridicule. No, I do not believe that it is the part of the preacher to meddle with matters which he does not understand; he only discredits his message by affecting an omniscience which he cannot possibly possess. I have no doubt that the youth who has been in a warehouse or behind the counter for six months already knows more of commercial habits, of trade practices, of the temptations and difficulties which practically press upon people in business, than I know, or am likely to know if I live to twice my present age. I shall not therefore insult you by attempting to point out evils and expose abuses, to denounce particular frauds, and to hold up any special people or classes of people to moral reprobation. My [Page 220] task is quite different; it is this:—I am to remind you, first, that God possesses that omniscience to which I can lay no claim, and therefore is intimately acquainted with all the transactions of your bank, your warehouse, your office, your counter, your workshop; and, secondly, that He regards with intense satisfaction all fair dealing, and with vindictive indignation every fraud, and trick, and lie. And on the strength of this I am to ask you very earnestly to review your lives and your practices in the light of His judgment, and to consider how you may bring all your doings in business into conformity with His will.

Perhaps you will let me, as a man speaking to his fellow-men, as a Christian, I hope, speaking to his fellow-Christians, expand these three points a little.

*First*. We are all of us tempted to think that a considerable proportion of our life is too insignificant to attract the particular attention of God. We can understand that He takes notice of our entrance into, and our exit from, the world, but we think that between the two limits He leaves us to "devise our own ways." Or possibly we can recognise His interest in the crises of our life, but are inclined to question His minute care of the common and monotonous routine. He marks what business we enter, but, when we are in it, lets us alone. He is interested in our marriage, but, when we are married, leaves husband and wife to adjust their own relations. Or He marks a large business transaction in which there is room for a really gigantic fraud, but cannot pay any attention to a minute sale over the counter, the trivial adulteration of a common article, the ingenious subterfuge for disposing of a damaged or useless stock. Is not this our unspoken but implicit mode of [Page 221] reasoning? And could anything be more illogical? The Divine Power which could create this infinitely diversified universe must be able to mark every tiniest detail of the tiniest object in it. Great and small are relative terms, and have no significance to Him. Naturalists tell us that in the scale of living creatures, arranged according to size, the common beetle occupies the middle point, the smallest living creature being as much smaller as the largest is larger than it. And yet the microscope, so far from showing that God takes less care with the infinitesimal creations of His hand, rather inclines us to say that the smaller the creature is, the more delicate adjustment, the more exquisite proportions, the more brilliant hues, does it display. Our Lord brought home to us this minuteness of the Divine Mind, this infinite power of embracing the veriest trifles of the creation in His thought and care, by assuring us that not a sparrow falls without His notice and that the hairs of our heads are all numbered.

There is then no logical resting-place, when we are thinking of the Mind of God. If He knows us at all, He knows all about us. If He marks what we consider the important things in our life, He marks equally what we consider the unimportant things. The whole life, with every detail from birth to death, is accurately

photographed in the light of His omniscience; and as the exposed plate of the camera receives many details which escape the observation of our eyes, so the smallest and least observed transaction in the daily business, every figure entered truly or falsely in the ledger, every coin dropped justly or dishonestly into the till, every bale, every packet, every thread, every pin, which changes hands in the market, passes at once into the observant and comprehending mind of God.[473] [Pg 230]

*Second*. But in this exhaustive and detailed knowledge of the way in which you are conducting your business, His warm approval follows everything that is honest and just, His vehement censure lights on all that is dishonest or unjust. It may come as a great comfort to you to know that a little business matter which cost you a considerable struggle the other day was duly noted and recorded by the Lord. I was not present at the time, nor did any one who was near you in the least surmise what was passing. But you suddenly recognised the possibility of making a large profit by simply adopting a very slight subterfuge; what made the case peculiarly difficult was that neighbouring and rival firms to your certain knowledge did the like every day; the innocent faces of wife and children at home seem to urge you, for what a difference would this sum of money make to their comfort and welfare in the coming year! you weighed the little trick over and over again, and set it now in this light, now in that, until at last the black began to seem grey, and the grey almost white. After all, was it a subterfuge? was it not merely a quite legitimate reserve, an even laudable commercial prudence? And then, as you wavered, some clear light of truth fell upon your mind; you saw distinctly what was the right course, and very quietly you took it; the prospect of gain was surrendered, you saw the advantage pass over to your rival; he availed himself of it, and went to church next Sunday just the same. Sometimes you have wondered whether after all you were not too scrupulous. [Pg 231]

Now all *that* God knows; it is His delight; He has recorded it already in His Book, and also in your own moral nature, which is the stronger and the better for it.

On the other hand, it must be a subject of some concern to many that the same all-observing, all-recording Mind regards with hatred all the sharp practices by which in business we deceive and defraud one another. I suppose there is a way of making up books which would pass any accountant in London, and yet would not pass the audit of God. I suppose there are gains which to the average commercial conscience of to-day appear fair enough, and yet to the One who weighs the spirits of men seem to be quite illicit. There must be men who made their money long ago in certain ways best known to themselves, and are now living in great comfort; but all the time in the books of God a terrible record stands against them, and as the eye of God falls upon those pages, the moan of the ruined, the cry of the fatherless and the widow, and the horrified entreaties of the helpless come up into His ear.

We have no reason for thinking that the unjust balance has become any less abominable to the Lord because the eager and relentless competition of modern industrial life has multiplied, while it has refined, the methods of fraud, and has created a condition of things in which, as so many people urge, questionable practices have become actually necessary for one who would keep his head above water. We have no reason to think that God regards it as at all essential that any of us should keep his head above water. The warm and honourable reception given to Lazarus in heaven, when his head had gone under the waters on earth, might lead us to think that what we call failures here may possibly be regarded as grand successes there. But we have every reason to think that double dealing, no matter what may be the plea, is abominable in the sight of the Lord. [Pg 234]

It is in vain to point to the great prosperity which has fallen to the lot of some whose dishonourable practices have been notorious. It is beyond a doubt that knavery may be successful in its way and a clever rogue may outdistance an honest dullard. The proverb "Honesty is the best policy" is not, as some people seem to think, in the Bible; honesty may or may not be the best policy, according to the object which you have in view. If your object is simply to amass wealth, the saying will read, "Honesty is the best policy; and where it is not, be dishonest." God does not judge in the least by worldly prosperity. From the parable just alluded to one would conclude that it is, in heaven, a certain presumption against a man; there may yet prove to be truth in the hard saying, "He that dies rich is damned." If God hates these questionable practices which are said to exist in modern trade, and if He enters them all in His black books, they who prosper by employing them are none the less failures: their ruin is sure; their remorse will be as inevitable as their recovery will be impossible.

*Third*. I come therefore now to urge upon all of you that you should order all your business ways as in the sight of God, and concern yourselves chiefly with the thought how they may be in conformity with His holy Will. Do not be content with estimating your conduct by the judgment which other men would pass upon it. While such an estimate might reveal many things which would not pass muster, it is doubtful whether their [Pg 235]

problematical censure will afford an adequate motive for reform, and it is sure to overlook many of the evils which they are bound to wink at, because their own hands are not clean. Do not be content even with estimating your conduct by the standard of your own unaided conscience. Your conscience may at any given time be in a degraded state; in order to keep it quiet you may have brought it down to the level of your conduct. A thief's conscience seldom troubles him unless his theft is unsuccessful, in which case it reproaches him for not being more careful and more skilful. You may, like St. Paul, know nothing against yourself and yet not be thereby justified. For doubtless most of the evil practices of our time represent a conscience that has been stupefied with sophistry and deadened with selfishness, so that the worst culprits are the first to put on an air of injured innocence, and those who are least guilty suffer most just because the conscience is still sensitive and has not yet been seared with the usual hot iron.

No, the only safe and effectual method is to bring all your business habits, all the practices of the counter and the counting-house, under the searching eye of the All-seeing One. Unless you realize that He sees and knows, and unless you humbly submit everything to His judgment, you are sure to go wrong; your standard [Pg 226] will insensibly fall, and you will insensibly fall away even from the fallen standard. It is said that peculiar difficulties beset you in the present day; it is said that it was never so hard to be straightforward and aboveboard in commercial dealings; it is said that the insane Moloch of competition imperatively demands the blood of our youth, and even makes assaults on the established virtues of maturity. It may be so, though we are generally inclined to exaggerate the peculiar temptations of our own time in comparison with those of a former age; but if it is so, then there is all the more urgent a necessity that you should bring your affairs to God's judgment, seek diligently to understand His will, and then ask Him for a peculiar strength to enable you to overcome these peculiar temptations. You will not alter His judgment of your conduct by attempting to ignore it. But by seeking to understand it, and by laying your heart open to be influenced by it, you will find that your conduct is perceptibly altered and apparent impossibilities are overcome, because "by the fear of the Lord men depart from evil."[474]

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# XVII.

[Pg 227]

## *FRIENDSHIP.*

> "A friend loveth at all times, and as a brother is born for adversity."—PROV. xvii. 17. (This rendering, based upon the margin of the R.V., yields a much better sense than the loosely connected, "And a brother is born for adversity.")

One of the most striking contrasts between the ancient and the modern world is in the place which is given to Friendship by moralists and religious teachers. In Aristotle's famous treatise on Ethics two books out of nine are devoted to the moral bearings of Friendship, and these books form the climax of the work, and are the natural transition to the work on Politics, or the science of the State. This central position given to the subject by the greatest and most systematic teacher of antiquity, compared with the very subordinate part which friendship plays in Christian ethics, is calculated to make us reflect and enquire. Is not the explanation probably this? Our Lord gave a great new commandment to His disciples, that they should love one another; and though Christian men have as yet but imperfectly understood what He meant, or carried out what they have understood, an ideal was created which far transcended that lower relationship of antiquity. Greek friendship was to be merged in Christian love. The meaning of such a change will appear if we remember [Pg 228] two characteristics of mere friendship, on which Aristotle dwells. One is that it is necessarily based upon selfishness; springing from a wish to realize oneself in the life of another, fed by the benefit or pleasure derived from the mutual intercourse, it lies under the necessary limitation that we shall not wish for our friend a good which would remove him from us, or an improvement which would raise him too far above us. For the second point is that friendship can only exist between equals, and the best friendship is that between good men who stand upon the same level of virtue. Christian love, on the other hand, springs from a complete abnegation of Self. It seeks nothing: it gives all. So far from laying stress upon the equality of conditions, it is never better pleased than when it can raise another to a position of excellence far surpassing its own, and instead of seeking its highest satisfaction in intercourse with its spiritual peers,—the good, the

great, the saintly,—it attains its apotheosis when it is allowed to embrace the weak, the sinful, the fallen, and to lavish all its Divine resources upon those who may never be able to repay it even with gratitude.

It is obvious, then, that friendship is on a lower plane than Christian love, and it marks a great advance in ideal ethics when the lesser star pales in presence of the greater; but it may be urged with truth that friendship still has its place in life, and deserves a more careful attention than it receives. In the individual, as in the race, friendship may be a prelude and a practice of the nobler and wider relation. And there is this further reason for trying to understand the nature of friendship, that it is more than once in the Bible used as a type and a figure of the relationship which may exist between the soul and its God. [Pg 229]

We will proceed then to examine some of the characteristics of friendship referred to in the book of Proverbs.

Friends, according to the original sense of the Hebrew word, are those who delight in one another's companionship; either they are useful to one another because each possesses gifts which the other has not, or they are agreeable to one another because they have certain tastes in common. Thus there may of course be a friendship in evil, in vice, in destructive practices; thieves may enter into a league to carry out their antisocial designs, and may be very true to one another; vicious men may find a bond of friendship in the common indulgence of their vices; and in this way friendship, so called, may be a means of ruining the friends. "There are friends for mutual shattering," just as "there is a lover that cleaves more than a brother."[475] There may also be an interested comradeship which is entirely hypocritical; such a friendship is usually marked by a loud and ostentatious demonstration: "He that blesseth his friend with a loud voice, rising early in the morning, it shall be counted a curse to him."[476] But, in the main, friendship implies a certain amount of goodness; for it is in itself a virtue. The suspicious, malignant nature of evil men speedily snaps the ties which bind them together for a time; and where honour exists among thieves it affords a strong presumption [Pg 230] that the thieves are the product of a wrong social state, rather than of a naturally evil disposition.

We may then practically, in thinking of friendship, confine our attention to that which exists between well-meaning people, and tends on the whole to bless, to strengthen, and to improve them. We may come to look at some of the uses and the delights of friendship. "As in water face answers to face, so in the heart man answers to man."[477] In the heart of our friend we see our own character reflected just as gazing into a still pool we see the reflection of our own face. It is in the frank and sympathetic intercourse of friendship that we really get to know ourselves, and to realize what is in us. We unfold to one another, we discover our similarities and mark our differences. Points which remained unobserved in our own hearts are immediately detected and understood when we see them also in our friends; faculties which remained unused are brought into play to supplement the discovered defects in our friend's nature. We hardly guess what a fund of happy humour is in us until we are encouraged to display it by observing how its flashes light up the face we love. Our capacities of sympathy and tenderness remain undeveloped until we wish eagerly to comfort our friend in a sudden sorrow. In a true friendship we find that we are living a life which is doubled in all its faculties of enjoyment and of service;[478] we quite shudder to think what cold, apathetic, undeveloped creatures we should have been but for that genial touch which unfolded us, and warmed our hearts into genuine feeling [Pg 231] while it brought our minds into active play. This intellectual value of friendship is brought out in the happy saying: "Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend."[479] A friendless person has a lack-lustre face; his talk has a dull edge; his emotions a poor and feeble flow. That delightful readiness of thought and expression which makes all the charm of social intercourse, the easy tact which rubs off the angles and smooths all the relations of life, the bright coruscations which seem like sunlight playing over summer seas, are usually the result of close and intimate communion with congenial friends. Reading may make a learned man, and without hard study few people can accomplish much permanent good in the world, but reading does not necessarily make a really social man, one who brings his fellow-creatures together in happy and helpful relationships; that beautiful faculty is only acquired by the fostering and stimulating influences of heart companionships. When we have real friends, though they be only a few, we diffuse a friendly feeling amongst others, wherever we go. Possibly also in the simile of the iron lies a reminder of the discipline which friendship gives to character, a discipline which is not always unaccompanied by pain. Friends "rub each other's angles down," and sometimes the friction is a little distressing to both sides. The blades are sharpened, by a few imperceptible filings being ground off each of their edges. The use of friendship depends very largely on its frankness, just as its sweetness depends upon mutual consideration. [Pg 232] When the frankness hurts we have to remind ourselves of the wholesome truth that the soft speaking is not always a token of love, and the hard sayings of our friend may be uttered at a great personal cost, for our good rather than his. "Faithful are the wounds of a friend: but the kisses of an enemy are profuse."[480]

If, however, friendship ripens through many years of kindly growth, or if a swift elective affinity forestalls at once the fruit of years, all the pain of mutual counsel and correction disappears, and may be changed into a joy very sweet to the soul. "Ointment and perfume rejoice the heart: so doth the sweetness of a man's friend that cometh of soul counsel."[481] It is a very beautiful condition of things which is referred to in this proverb. Two people have learnt thoroughly to understand one another, and have become in a certain sense one. Each recognises the service that the other renders, and welcomes the advice or even the rebuke which is made possible by their relationship. The interchange of affection is naturally sweet, but as sweet, or even sometimes sweeter, is the delicate aroma which arises when one sees a fault in the other, and with a tenderness begotten of affection, and a humility which trembles to presume, speaks gently but frankly to his friend. Never do the eyes more eagerly respond to one another, never is the hand-clasp so firm and hearty, as after such a passage between true friends.

But the decisive test and the most beautiful proof of real friendship will be found in the day of adversity. A friend is never known till needed.[482] When calamity falls upon us, false friends make excuses and go; lip-friends relapse into silence; but we begin then for the first time to find out who is a friend indeed. Then it appears that the true friend is entirely unchanged by the changed aspect of affairs; it seems as if he had been born into a brotherhood with us for this express occasion. There is no wish to cry off; he seems even to press the brotherly tie in a way which we should not have presumed to expect, and thus he contrives to lighten the oppressive burden of obligation for the favour that he confers on us, by making it appear that he was bound to act as he does by a necessity of kinship. This seems to be the meaning of our text. Such a friend, if he be near at hand and in constant contact with us, is of more service than our own brother;[483] and when through his timely aid or effectual comfort we have come out of the furnace, and our tears are dried, we say constantly to ourselves that we doubt whether our own brother would have clung to us so faithfully, would have borne with our querulous murmurs so patiently, or relieved our necessities so delicately and so liberally. [484]



If you have such a friend as this, your own or your father's, take care to retain him; do not alienate him by negligence or a deficient consideration. Put yourself out of the way to show that you appreciate and value him; do not allow a false reserve or a foolish shyness to check your expression of gratitude. A friendship is a delicate growth; and even when it has become robust, it can easily be blighted. The results of years may be lost in a few days. And if a root of bitterness springs up, if a division occurs, it may be quite impossible by every effort in your power to heal the breach or to pluck up that obstinate root. "A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city: and such contentions are like the bars of a castle."[485] The closer the intimacy had been, the tenderer the friendship, so much the sterner will be these bars, so much the more inexpugnable the castle. For it will be felt, if such protestations, such interchange of affection, such mutual delights, could have been deceptive, mere hypocrisies or delusions, what hope can there be that the same things broken and patched up again can be of any worth? A difference with a chance acquaintance is easily removed; further knowledge may improve our opinion of one another, and even if we separate we have no deep resentment. But a difference between true friends may quickly become irreparable. They feel that there is no more to know; they have seen the best and that has proved disappointing. The resentment springs from a sense of abused confidence and injured love.



If you have real friends then, take pains to keep them. Watch carefully for the small beginnings of a rupture and hasten to heal it. Think no effort is wasted, and no apology or explanation is too humiliating, which may avert that great calamity,—the loss of a true soul-comrade; one whom you have learnt to honour with the name and dignity of friend.

> "The friends thou hast, and their adoption tried,"

says our wise poet,

> "Grapple them to thy soul with hooks of steel."



Such a friendship as we have been considering, rare and beautiful as it is, forms a noble stepping-stone to the loftier relationship of Christian love. In tone and quality it is almost the same; it differs only in its range and in its motive. What one man feels to another in an ideal friendship, the Christian is called upon, according to his capacity and opportunity, to feel to man as man, to all his fellow-creatures. We cannot of course fulfil all the offices of friendship to every one, and we are not as Christians required to abate one jot of our love to

those who are our friends by affinity and by choice. But where the heart is truly Christian it will become more expansive, and it will be conscious of the powerful claims which weakness, misery, solitude, or even moral failings, make upon its friendship; it will shrink from the selfishness inherent in all affections which are merely selective and exclusive; it will earnestly desire to feel an affection which is inclusive and quite unselfish. Where is to be found the motive for such an enlarged spirit of friendship? Whence is to come the impulse to such a self-surrender?

Surely such a motive and such an impulse are to be discovered only in that relation of friendship which God Himself deigns to sustain towards the human soul. Jehoshaphat in his prayer appeals to God on the ground that He had given the land to "Abraham His friend for ever."[486] And we read of Moses that "the Lord spake unto him face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend."[487] But in this position of one who is called the father of the faithful, and of one who was the leader of his people, we cannot but recognise a promise and a [Page 236] foreshadowing of a relation with God which was meant to become more general. The whole tendency of the Gospel is to put every believer in our Lord Jesus Christ on a spiritual level with the most favoured and richly endowed of a former dispensation. And since the Incarnate Son lived on earth, and called the simple peasants of Galilee to be, not His servants, but His friends, if they did whatsoever He commanded them,[488] we may without presumption—nay, we must if we would not grieve Him by unbelief—accept the mysteriously dignified position of God's friends. The feeblest and the poorest, as well as the strongest and most gifted, believing in Jesus Christ, in proportion as he heartily accepts the authority and obeys the commandment of his Lord, is a friend of God. It is a very unequal friendship, as we must all feel. He has all the strength, all the wisdom, all the goodness, all the gifts; but the sense of inequality is removed by His own gracious friendliness: He attaches such importance to a heartfelt love that He is willing to accept that as the fair equivalent of all that He does and gives to us; and He remedies the terrible inferiority of His friends by realizing His own life in them and merging their imperfection in His perfectness, their limitations in His infinity.

Now, shall we venture to assume that you and God are friends; that the beautiful relation which we have examined, the delight in mutual companionship, the interchange of thought and feeling, the quick and quickening response of love and comprehension, exist between you and Him? Come and read some of these [Page 237] sayings again and apply them to Him. You may gaze into the heart of God, and as face answers to face in a quiet pool, you may find yourself in Him,—a larger self, a truer self, a holier self, than you could ever find in any human fellowship, or than you had ever dared to imagine. This familiar intercourse with God, which has its roots in a profound reverence and its fruits in an unutterable joy, is the new creation of a human soul. A man will be known by his friends, and most assuredly he will be known, if his Friend and most constant Companion is God. He will regard that status as his highest title and distinction, just as Lord Brooks was so proud of knowing Sir Philip Sydney that he wished his epitaph to be "Here lies Sir Philip Sydney's friend."

Again, in this close fellowship with God, in His warnings and encouragements and chastisements, even in the "faithful wounds" that He inflicts, does not the heart perceive His sweetness as an ointment and perfume? Does not the quiet place where these passages of tender friendship between your soul and God occur become redolent with a precious fragrance, as of incense or of fresh flowers?

And then the deep meaning which the friendship of God brings into our text, "A friend loveth at all times, and as a brother"—yes, our Divine Brother, the Lord Jesus Christ—"is born for adversity;" or into that other saying, "There is a lover that cleaves more than a brother"! Let us have no loud pharisaical ways in blessing our Friend,[489] but let no effort seem too exacting to retain unbroken this priceless blessing of the Divine Communion!

Now, where the soul counts God its nearest and dearest Friend,—the Friend of whom nothing in life or death [Page 238] can rob it,—this effect follows by a beautiful necessity: the chief and all-inclusive friendship being secured, we are at leisure from ourselves to soothe and sympathise, we are able to extend our thoughts and our ministries of love to all around us, and to reflect in our relations with men that exquisite relation which God has deigned to establish with us. Our own private friendships then produce no exclusiveness, but rather they become the types of our feelings to others, and the ever-springing fountainhead of friendly thoughts and courteous deeds; while these private friendships and our wider relations alike are all brought up into the lofty and purifying friendship which we hold with our God and He with us.

# XVIII.



## *THE EVIL OF ISOLATION.*

> "He that separates himself follows after his own desire, but against all sound wisdom he shows his teeth."—PROV. xviii. 1.

From the value of friendship there is a natural and easy transition to the evil of isolation. We must try to fathom the profound meaning which is hidden under this simple but striking proverb. To begin with, what are we to understand by "one that separates himself"? This same word occurs in 2 Sam. i. 23 concerning Saul and Jonathan, that "in their death they were not separated." Theirs was a togetherness which accompanied them to the grave. On the other hand, there are people who shun all togetherness in their lives,—they are voluntarily, deliberately separated from their kind, and they seem for the first time to blend with their fellows when their undistinguished dust mixes with the dust of others in the common grave. We are to think of a person who has no ties with any of his fellow-creatures, who has broken such ties as bound him to them, or is of that morbid and unnatural humour that makes all intercourse with others distasteful. We are to think more especially of one who chooses this life of solitariness in order to follow out his own desire rather than from any necessity [Pg 240] of circumstance or disposition; one who finds his pleasure in ignoring mankind, and wishes for intercourse with them only that he may vent his spleen against them; in a word, we are to think of a Misanthrope.

We must be careful in catching the precise idea, because there are men who shut themselves off from their kind, rightly or wrongly, in order to seek the common welfare. A student or an inventor, sometimes even a teacher or a preacher, will find the solitude of the study or the laboratory the only condition on which he can accomplish the work to which he is called. The loss of domestic life or of social pleasures, the withdrawal from all the "kindly ways of men," may be a positive pain to him, a cross which he bears for the direct good of those whose company he forswears, or for the cause of Truth, in whose service alone it is possible to permanently benefit his fellows. Such a "separation" as this—painful, difficult, unrewarded—we must exclude from the intention of our text, although possibly our text might convey a warning even to these benevolent eremites, that unless the heart is kept warm by human sympathies, unless the mind is kept in touch with the common cares and joys of our kind, the value of even intellectual work will be considerably diminished, while the worker himself must inevitably and perhaps needlessly suffer. But, on the whole, we must except these nobler instances of isolation, if we would feel the full force of the judgment which is pronounced in the text.

The misanthrope is one who has no faith in his fellows, and shrinks into himself to escape them; who pursues his own private ends, avoiding all unnecessary speech with those who are around him, living alone, dying [Pg 241] unobserved, except for the mischief which consciously or unconsciously he does to those who survive him. Such an one is aptly described as showing his teeth[490] in an angry snarl against all the approaches of a true wisdom.

Shakespeare might have had this proverb before him in that grim delineation of Richard the Third, who boasts that he has neither pity, love, nor fear. He was, he had been told, born with teeth in his mouth.

> "And so I was," he exclaims; "which plainly signified
> That I should snarl, and bite, and play the dog."

And then he explains his terrible character in these significant lines:—

> "I have no brother, I am like no brother:
> And this word Love, which greybeards call divine,
> Be resident in *men like one another*,
> And not in me; *I am myself alone*."[491]

Yes, Love can only exist among men who are like one another; and no more damning indictment can be brought against a human being than this, that he is *himself alone*.

The truth is that every man is not only a "self," a personality, but he is a very complex being made up of many relations with other men. He is a son, a brother, a friend, a father, a citizen. Suppose him to be stripped

of all sonship, brotherhood, friendship, fatherhood, and citizenship; there is left, not a *man*, but a mere *self*, and that is his hideous condemnation. In the same way, a woman that is neither daughter, nor sister, nor wife, nor friend, nor ministrant, does not deserve the grand name of woman; she is a mere *self*, a point of exigent and querulous desires. The most appalling discovery in a great city is that multitudes have become mere *selves*,—hungry, hollow, ravening, thirsty, shrivelled selves. The father and mother are dead, or left far away, probably never known; no one is brother to them, they are brothers to no one. Friend has no significance to their understanding, or means only one who, from most interested motives, ministers to their craving appetites; they are not citizens of London, nor of any other city; they are not Englishmen, though they were born in England, nor have they any other nationality,—hideous, clamorous, esurient selves, nothing more. An old Greek saying declared that one who lives alone is either a god or a wild beast;[492] while, as we have already seen, there are a few of the isolated ones who are isolated from noble and even Divine motives, the vast majority are in this condition because they have fallen from the level of humanity into the roving and predatory state of wild animals, that seek their meat by night and lurk in a lonely lair by day.

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The "sound wisdom" against which the isolated rage is nothing less than the kindly law which makes us men, and ordains that we should not live to ourselves alone, but should fulfil our noble part as members one of another. The Social Instinct is one of two or three striking characteristics which mark us out as human: a man by himself is only an animal, and a very poor animal too; in size he is far beneath the greatest of the creatures that inhabit land and sea; he is not as swift as the winged denizens of the air; his strength in proportion to his bulk is debility compared with that of the tiniest insects. His distinction in the creation, and his excelling dignity, are derived from the social relations which make him in combination strong, in the intercourse of speech and thought, wise, and in the loving response of heart to heart, noble. If by some unhappy accident a human being wanders early from his place into the forests, is suckled by wild beasts, and grows up among them, the result is an animal inconceivably repulsive, fierce, cunning, and ugly; vulpine, but without the wolf's agile grace; bearish, but without the bear's slow-pacing dignity.

The "sound wisdom" is the wisdom of the Creator, who from the beginning determined that it is not good for men to live alone, and marked His conception of the unity which should bind them together by the gift of the woman to the man, to be bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh.

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It becomes therefore a necessity to every wise human being to recognise, to maintain, and to cultivate all those wholesome relationships which make us truly human. "As a bird that wandereth from her nest, so is a man that wandereth from his place."[493] Sometimes when a great ship is far off in mid-ocean, a tired land-bird will fall panting and exhausted upon the deck: the wings can beat no longer; the eyes glaze; and the eager wanderer fails and dies. The true bird-life is the life of the woods, of the toilsomely-woven nest, of the mate and the brood and the fledglings. In the same way on those ocean steamers—ay, and in many a weary bye-path and lonely desert of the earth—may be found men who have broken away from the ties which formed their strength and their truer being, and now fall, faint and purposeless, to languish and to die. For true human life is the life of our fellows, of the diligent laborious housebuilding, of the home, of the young, of the rising nestlings which are to form the next link in the long chain of the generations.

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Neighbourliness is the larger part of life; we are not to go to our distant "brother's house in the day of our calamity, for better is a neighbour that is near than a brother far off."[494] Our life is rich and true and helpful just in proportion as we are entwined with those who live around us in bonds of mutual respect and consideration, of reciprocal helpfulness and service, of intimate and intelligent friendship.

It is hardly necessary to say that there is neighbourliness *and* neighbourliness. Our relation to our neighbours may be that of mere busybodies, tattlers, and whisperers; it may be devoid of tact and consideration: there is need therefore of a warning to "hold back thy foot from thy neighbour's house; lest he be sated with thee, and hate thee."[495] But this possible abuse does not affect the broad and salutary principle: we are meant to live in one another; our nature can realize itself, and accomplish its mission, only in generous and noble relations with those who are about us. The home is at the foundation of all; a good son or daughter will generally make a good man or woman; good brothers will prove good citizens, good sisters good ministrants and teachers to the poor and the ignorant; good fathers will be the best rulers in Church and State. The home will be the preparation for the larger life of the town, or the social circle, or the state. And thus from the cradle to the grave no man should live alone, but every one should be a member of a larger body, holding a definite place in a system or organism, depending on others, with others depending on him. Nerves should run through the body politic, motor nerves and sensory nerves; the joys and pains of a community should be shared, the

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activities of a community should be united. No one should live to himself; all should live, and rejoice to live, in the great co-operative society of the world, in which personal interests are mutual interests and the gains of each are the gains of all.

But we can hardly probe to the depths of this Proverbial Philosophy without becoming aware that we are touching on an idea which is the mainspring of Christianity on its earthly and visible side. We seem to have detected in all the preceding discussion echoes, however faint, of the Apostolic teaching which gave practical shape and body to the work of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The relation of Christ, as the Son of God, to the human race as a whole, immediately opened up the possibility of a world-wide society in which all nations, all classes, all castes, all degrees, all individualities, should be not so much merged as distinctly articulated and recognised in a complete and complex whole. The kingdom of heaven, while borrowing its terminology from earthly kingdoms, was unlike any one of them [Page 246] because it was to include them all. Into that kingdom all the peoples, nations, and languages should pass.

The Catholic Church, as the first attempt to realize this grand idea, presented for a time a certain faint and wavering reflection of the image in the heavens. The fault of seeking the unity of the race in a priesthood instead of in the people was of course a fatal one to its own ultimate success, but at least one great service was rendered to humanity; the idea became familiar of a Unity, in which the narrower unities of the family, the social circle, and the nation were to find their completion. And when the intelligence and the faith of men broke with the Catholic Church, it was not a breach with the Catholic idea, but merely a transition to a nobler and a more living realization of the idea. At present the idea is daily clearing and assuming vaster proportions; humanity is seen to be one; the Great Father presides over a family which may be sundered, but cannot be really parted; over a race which is divided, but not actually separated.

Strange and rapturous have been the emotions of men as they have entered into the realization of this idea, and the thrill of their vast fellowship has passed through their hearts. Sometimes they have turned away in bitterness of revolt from the Christian Church, which with harsh dogmatisms and fierce anathemas, with cruel exclusiveness and sectarian narrowness, seems rather to check than to further the sublime thought of the One Father, of whom all the family is named in heaven and in earth. But whatever justification there may be for complaint against the Church, we cannot afford to turn our thoughts from the Son of Man, who has redeemed [Page 247] the race to which we belong, and who, as the Divine Power, is alone able to carry out in effect the great conception which He has given us in thought.

And now I am going to ask you for a moment to consider how the text reads in the light of the work and the presence and the person of Jesus Christ, who has come to gather together in one those that are scattered abroad.

The person of Christ is the link which binds all men together; the presence of Christ is the guarantee of the union; the work of Christ, which consists in the removal of sin, is the main condition of a heart-unity for all mankind. When therefore you put your trust in Christ and your sinful nature is subdued, you are incorporated into a body of which He is the head, and you must pass out of the narrow self-life into the broad Christ-life; you can no longer live for yourself alone, because as the member of a body you exist only in relation to all the other members. "But," it is said, "am I not to seek my own salvation, and then to work it out with fear and trembling? am I not to withdraw from the world, and to labour hard to make my calling and election sure?" In a certain sense, the answer to that question is, Yes. But then it is only in a certain sense; for you make sure of your own salvation precisely in proportion as you are really incorporated into Christ, and are made a genuine member of the body: as St. John says, "We know that we are passed from death unto life *because we love the brethren*," and "if we walk in the light we *have fellowship one with another*, and the blood of Jesus Christ [Page 248] cleanseth us from all sin." We work out our salvation therefore only by losing the self in others; we withdraw from the world and make our calling sure, just as our thoughts become identified with God's thoughts, and as our lives are passed in cheerful and victorious service.

If, then, on the ground of our humanity we are cautioned against separating ourselves, because by so doing we set our teeth against all sound wisdom, on the ground of our Christianity we must be warned not to separate ourselves, because that means to harden our hearts against the faith itself. When we say to ourselves, "We will live our Christian life alone," that is equivalent to saying, "We will not live the Christian life at all." We do not know what the life in heaven may be,—though from the casual glimpses we obtain of it, we should say that it is a great social gathering, at which we shall sit down with Abraham and all the saints of God, a kind of marriage festivity to celebrate the union of the Lord with His bride,—but it is plain that the

Christian life, as it is revealed to us here, *must be the life of a community*, for it is likened to a vine, from which all dead branches are cut off, and plainly all cut-off branches are dead.

"But," say many people amongst us, "we put our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; we trust to Him; why should you impose any further conditions?" Do they put their faith in Him? Does not faith imply obedience? Did He not require His disciples to be united in a fellowship, and did He not give His body and His blood as a symbol of this fellowship, and command them to take the symbols in remembrance of Him until He comes? Are these isolated believers obeying Him, or are they not cutting at the root of His glorious purpose of human [Pg 249] fellowship in the Divine Head? And if they are thus breaking His expressed commandment, has He not warned them that He will say, "I never knew you, depart from Me," although they have taught in His name, and even cast out devils and done many wonderful works?

And in thus reminding you of our Lord's thought, I am not speaking only of what we call the fellowship of the Church; for there are many who are merely nominal members of the Church, and though their names are enrolled they "separate themselves" and live the life of unhallowed isolation, just as they did before they professedly entered into the Christian society. This is a larger question than that of Church membership; Church membership derives its vast importance from being a part of this larger question. Will you, therefore, let me close with a personal appeal addressed to each one of you?

You know that the Son of Man would make men one; you know that He calls His disciples into a holy family of mutual love and service, so that men may know that they are His, and may recognise Him because they love one another. Are you venturing to disregard His commandment and to frustrate His will by separating yourself for your own desire? have you fallen out of all relations with His family, so that the sonship, the brotherhood, the friendship, the fatherhood, the citizenship, of the heavenly kingdom are as good as meaningless to you? If so, may I say in the words of the text, you are setting "your teeth against all sound wisdom"?

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# XIX.

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## *HUMAN FREEDOM.*

"The foolishness of man subverteth his way;
And his heart fretteth against the Lord."—PROV. xix. 3.

There is such a valuable expansion and commentary on this proverb in the book of Ecclesiasticus that it seems worth while to quote it in full: "Say not, it is through the Lord that I fell away, for the things He hates thou shalt not do. Say not, it is He that caused me to err, for He has no use for a sinful man. Every abomination the Lord hates, neither is it lovely to those that fear Him. He Himself at the outset made Man, and left him in the power of his own control, that, if thou wilt, thou shouldst keep His commandments, and to do faithfully what is pleasing to Him. He set fire and water before thee, that thou shouldst stretch out thy hand to which thou wilt. In front of men is life and death, and whichever a man pleases shall be given to him. Because wide is the wisdom of the Lord; He is mighty in power, beholding all things; and His eyes are upon them that fear Him, and He Himself will take note of every work of man. He never enjoined any one to do wickedly, and He never gave to any one licence to sin."[496]

It is our constant tendency to claim whatever good we do as our own doing, and to charge whatever evil we [Pg 251] do on causes which are beyond our control,—on heredity, on circumstances of our birth and upbringing, or even on God. The Scriptures, on the other hand, regard all our good deeds as the work which God works within us, when our will is given to Him, while all our evil is ascribed to our own foolish and corrupt will, for which we are, and shall be, held responsible. This is certainly a very remarkable contrast, and we shall do well to take account of it. It is not necessary to run into any extreme statement, to deny the effects either of taints in the blood which we receive from our parents, or of early surroundings and education, or even the enormous influence which other people exercise over us in later life; but when all allowance is made for these

recognised facts, the contention of the text is that what really subverts our lives is our own folly,—and not uncontrollable circumstances,—and our folly is due, not to our misfortune, but to our fault.

Now we will not attempt to deal with all the modifications and reservations and refinements which ingenuity might offer to this doctrine; however charity may require us to make allowance for others on the ground of disadvantages, it is questionable whether we help them, and it is certain that we weaken ourselves, by turning attention constantly from the central fact to the surrounding circumstances; we will therefore try to steadily look at this truth of Individual Responsibility, and lay it to heart. When we have acquitted ourselves of blame, and have obtained a discharge in the forum of our own conscience, it will be time to seek other causes of our guilt, and to "fret against the Lord."

[Pg 252] But before we turn inwards and appeal to our own consciousness, may we not observe how absurd it is that the Lord should be charged with responsibility for our sins? What do we know of the Lord except that He hates and abominates sin? It is as the Hater of sin that He is revealed to us in ever-clearer forms from the first page of revelation to the last. But more, the most powerful proof that we possess of His existence is to be found in the voice of conscience within us; we instinctively identify Him with that stern monitor that denounces so vigorously and unsparingly all our offences against holiness. The God of revelation is from the first declared to be "He who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children." The God of conscience is by the very nature of the case identified with the uncompromising sentence against evil; is it not then obviously inconsistent to lay our sins to the charge of God? We are more assured of His Holiness than of His omnipotence; we cannot therefore bring His omnipotence to impeach His holiness. We see Him as the Avenger of sin before we see Him in any other capacity; we cannot therefore bring any subsequent vision of Him to discredit the first. It is surely the dictate of plain common sense, as St. James says, that "God cannot be tempted with evil, and He Himself tempteth no man: but each man is tempted, when he is drawn away by his own lust, and enticed. Then the lust, when it hath conceived, beareth sin: and the sin, when it is full grown, bringeth forth death."[497]

[Pg 253] Now our actual responsibility for our own sins, and the troubles which result from them, will perhaps come out in the clear light of conscience, if we regard our conduct in the following way. We must make an appeal to consciousness. There are actions which, consciousness tells us, rest entirely on our own choice, and concerning which no sophistry, however ingenious, can furnish an adequate exculpation. There was in these cases, as we well remember, the plain offer of an alternative "Fire or Water, Life or Death." We knew at the time that we were equally able to take either of them; we felt no compulsion; there was, it is true, a great tumult of conflicting motives, but when the motives were balanced and the resulting verdict was declared, we were perfectly conscious that we could, if we chose, reverse the verdict and give our judgment against it. Our first deviations from truth, from purity, from charity, come up before us as we reflect; the struggle which went on survives vividly in memory; and when we yielded to the evil power we were conscious at the time, as we remember still, that our will was to blame. As the lie glided from the lips, as the unhallowed thought was allowed to pass into act, as the rein was thrown on the neck of the evil passion, we knew that we were doing wrong, we felt that by an adequate exercise of the will we could do right. Cast your eye back on the steps by which your character was formed, on the gradual destruction of your finer feelings, on the steady decline of your spiritual instincts, on the slow deadening and searing of your moral sense. Do you not remember how deliberately you submitted to the fascinations of that dangerous friend, whom your conscience entirely disapproved? how wilfully you opened and perused the pages of that foul book, which swept over your soul [Pg 254] like a mud-torrent and left its slimy sediment there ever after? how you consciously avoided the influence of good people, made every excuse to escape the prayer, the reading, the sermon, which was to you a conscience-stirring influence, an appeal of God to the soul?

As you retrace those fatal steps, you will be surprised to discover how entirely your own master you were at the time, although the evil deeds done then have forged a chain which limits your freedom now. If at any of those critical moments some one had said to you, Are you free to do just which of the two things you please? you would have replied at once, Why, of course I am. Indeed, if there had been any compulsion to evil, you would have rebelled against it and resisted it. It was really the complete liberty, the sense of power, the delight in following your own desire, that determined your choice. The evil companion persuaded, your conscience dissuaded, neither compelled; when the balance hung even you threw the weight of your will into the scale. The book lay open; curiosity, prurience, impurity, bade you read; your best conviction shamed you and called you away: when the two forces pulled even, you deliberately gave *your* support to the evil force. The solemn voice of prayer and worship called you, moving you with mystical power, waking strange desires and hopes and aspirations; the half-mocking voice of the earth was also in your ear, tempting, luring,

exciting, and when the sounds were about balanced, you raised up your own voice for the one and gave it the predominance.

Or if now in the bondage of evil you can no longer realize that you were once free, you can look at others who are now where you were then; notice even when you try to tempt your younger companions into evil, how the blush of shame, the furtive glance, the sudden collapse of resistance, plainly proves that the action is one consciously determined by an evil choice; notice how your first blasphemies, your first devil-born doubts, suggestions, and innuendoes, bring the pained expression to the face, and raise a conflict which the will has to decide. In this appeal to consciousness or to observation we must be scrupulously honest with ourselves; we must take infinite pains not to garble the evidence to suit a foregone conclusion or to excuse an accomplished fall. I think we may say that when men are honest with themselves, and in proportion as they are pure and innocent, and not yet bound hand and foot by the bondage of their own sins, they know that they have been free, that in the face of all circumstances they still stood uncommitted; that if they yielded to temptation it was their own "foolishness that subverted their way." [Pg 255]

But now we may pass from these inward moral decisions which have determined our character and made us what we are, to the ordinary actions which form the greater part of our everyday conduct. Here again we are generally inclined to take credit for every course which has a happy issue, and for every unfortunate decision to cast the blame on others. We are reminded, however, that our misfortunes are generally the result of our own folly; we are too impatient, too hasty, too impetuous, too self-willed. "Desire without knowledge is not good, and he that hasteth with his feet misseth the way."[498] If we look back upon our mistakes in life, it is surprising to see how many were due to our own headstrong determination to follow our own way, and our complete disregard of the prudent counsels which our wiser friends ventured to offer us. "The way of the foolish is right in his own eyes: but he that is wise hearkeneth unto counsel."[499] "Where there is no counsel, purposes are disappointed: but in the multitude of counsellors they are established."[500] "Hear counsel," is the command of this chapter, "and receive instruction, that thou mayest be wise in thy latter end."[501] "Every purpose is established by counsel,"—affairs of state, whether civil[502] or military,[503]—and so by counsel a man is made strong and is able to carry out the warfare of his own personal life.[504] It is well for us therefore not only to accept counsel which is proffered to us, but to be at pains to get it, for it often lies, like the waters of a well, deep down in a man's mind, and requires some patience and skill in order to elicit it.[505] [Pg 256]

Our false steps are due to a rash precipitancy which prevents us from looking at the question on all its sides, and learning the views of those who have had experience and know. The calamities which befell us were foreseen by many onlookers, and were even foretold by our friends, but we could accept no advice, no warning. And while therefore it is perfectly true that our own judgment was not sufficient to ward off the evil or prevent the *faux pas*, we are none the less to blame, our own foolishness has none the less subverted our way, for it was our own fault that we refused to be advised, it was our own incredible folly that made us form so wrong an idea of our wisdom. [Pg 257]

Suppose then that in our retrospect of life and in the estimation of our errors, we mark off all those sins for which our conscience duly charges us with direct responsibility, and all those blunders which might have been avoided if we had wisely submitted to more prudent judgments than our own, what is there that remains? Can we point out any group of actions or any kind of errors which are yet unaccounted for, and may possibly be charged on some other person or thing than ourselves? Is there yet some opening by which we may escape responsibility? Are there any effectual and valid excuses that we can successfully urge?

Now it appears that all these possible excuses are netted and completely removed—and every avenue of escape is finally blocked—by this broad consideration; God is at hand as the wisest of Counsellors, and we might by simple appeal to Him, and by reverently obeying His commandments, avoid all the evils and the dangers to which we are exposed. So far from being able to excuse ourselves and to lay the blame on God, it is our chief and all-inclusive fault, it is the clearest mark of our foolishness, that we do not resort to Him for help, but constantly follow our own devices; that we do not rely upon His goodness, but idly fret against Him and all His ordinances. "There are many devices in a man's heart," but over against these feeble, fluctuating, and inconsistent ideas of ours is "the counsel of the Lord, which shall stand."[506] "The fear of the Lord tendeth to life: and he that hath it shall abide satisfied; he shall not be visited with evil."[507] There is a way of life, there is a plain commandment, a law of God's appointing: "He that keepeth the commandment keepeth his soul: but he that is careless of his ways shall die."[508] It is simply our own carelessness that is our ruin; if [Pg 258]

we would pay the slightest heed, if there were one grain of seriousness in us, we should be wise, we should get understanding, and so find good in the salvation of the soul;[509] we should not, as we so often do, "hear instruction, only to err from the words of knowledge."[510]

We may wonder at the strong conviction with which this truth was urged even under the Jewish law; it may seem to us that the requirements then were so great, and the details so numerous, and the revelation so uncertain, that a man could scarcely be held responsible if he missed the way of life through inadvertence or defective knowledge. Yet even then the path was plain, and if a man missed it he had but himself and his own folly to blame. But how much more plain and sure is everything made for us! Our Lord has not only declared the way, but He is the Way; He has not only given us a commandment to keep, but He has Himself kept it, and offers to the believing soul the powers of an inward life, by which the yoke of obedience becomes easy, and the burden of service is made light. He has become "the end of the law to every one that believeth." He has made His offer of Himself not only general, but universal, so that no human being can say that he is excluded, or murmur that he is not able to "keep his soul." His word is gone out into all the world, and even [Page 259] they who have not heard it, being without a law are yet a law unto themselves, and are responsible by virtue of that self-witness which God has given everywhere in Nature, in Society, and in the conscience of man, how can we sufficiently emphasize our own responsibility, to whom God has spoken in the latter days by His own Son! Surely "whoso despiseth the word bringeth destruction on himself."[511]

If even in that old and darker dispensation the light was so clear that it was chargeable to a man's own folly when he disobeyed,—and "judgments were prepared for scorners, and stripes for the backs of fools,"[512]—what must come upon us who have the clearer light if we wilfully and foolishly disobey? The counsel of the Lord stands sure: "There is no wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against the Lord."[513] No authority of wise men, no sneers of wits, no devices of the clever, can in the least avail to set aside His mighty ordinance or to excuse us for disregarding it. "The horse is prepared against the day of battle: but victory is of the Lord."[514] There can be no evasion, no escape. He Himself, by His own invincible power, will bring home to the hearts of the rebellious the evil of their rebellion, and will send the cruel messenger against them.[515]

Does it not behove us to remember and to consider? to remember our offences, to consider our guilt and the Lord's power? Here is a way of life marked out before you, and there is the way of death; here is the water held out to you, and there is the fire; and you may choose. The way of life is in the Gospel of God's dear Son; [Page 260] you know that its precepts are perfect, converting the soul, and that Christ Himself is holy, such an one as the earth never bore before or since; you know too that this Holy One came to give His life a ransom for many, that He invited all to come unto Him, and promised to all who came everlasting life. You know that He did give His life a ransom,—as the Good Shepherd He gave Himself for the sheep, and then took again the life which He laid down. You know that He ever liveth to make intercession for us, and that His saving power was not exercised for the last time years and years ago, but this very day, probably just at the moment that I am now speaking to you. The way is plain, and the choice is free; the truth shines, and you can open your eyes to it; the life is offered, and you can accept it. What pretext can you give for not choosing Christ, for not coming to the truth, for not accepting the life?

Is it not clear to you that if you refuse Him that speaketh, and your way is thus subverted,—as indeed it must be,—it is your own folly that is to blame? You fret against the Lord now, and you charge Him foolishly, but some day you will see clearly that this is all a blind and a subterfuge; you will admit that the choice was open to you, and you chose amiss; that life and death were offered to you, and you preferred death.

If any question might be entertained about those who have only the light of conscience to guide them, and have not heard of the direct relation of succour and support which God is ready to give to those who depend upon Him, there can be no doubt of the complete freedom of every human being, who hears the message of [Page 261] the Gospel, to accept it. You may put it aside, you may decline to accept it on the ground of disinclination, or because you consider the historical evidence insufficient, but you will be the first to admit that in doing so you exercise your discretion and consciously choose the course which you take.

Nay, leaving all metaphysical discussion about the freedom of the will, I put it to you simply, Can you not, if you choose, come to Christ now?

Oh, hear counsel and receive instruction: is not the Spirit pleading with you, counselling, teaching, warning you? Do not harden your heart, do not turn away. Attend to Christ now, admit Him now, that you may be wise

in your latter end.[516]

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# XX.

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## *IDLENESS.*

> "After the autumn gathering the slothful does not plough; he asks in the harvest, and there is nothing."—PROV. xx. 4.

We have already in the sixth lecture caught a glimpse of the sluggard, and in the ninth we have seen in passing that diligence in work is enjoined by the teacher; but we must give a more concentrated attention to this subject if we would realize the stress which this book of Wisdom lays on work as the grand condition of life in this earnest world. They who will not work have no place in an order of things which is maintained by work, and in which the toil itself is the great discipline of character and the preparation of joy. It is no churlish or envious spirit which pronounces a doom on the idle, but it is the very necessity of the case; that idleness which in moments of excessive strain we so eagerly covet is, if it is accepted as the regular and continuous state of the soul, a more ruinous and miserable curse than the hardest labour. By a law which we all break at our peril, we are required to have an honest end and a strenuous occupation in our life; and we are further required to labour diligently for the end, and to spare no pains to achieve it. We have many faculties lying dormant, and we must wake them into activity; we have many gifts half used or not used at all; we must turn them all to account, if we would be wholesome, happy, and in the true sense successful.

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First of all, let us look at the portrait of the sluggard as it is delineated in some of these proverbial sayings. We see him in bed, at the board, in the house, out of doors. He will not get up in the morning; he turns from side to side, just like a door which swings backwards and forwards on its hinges, but of course never gets any further.[517] "Yet a little sleep," he says, "a little slumber, a little folding of the hands in sleep."[518] Or when at last he has brought himself to get up and to sit down to table, he is too lethargic even to eat: "He buries his hand in the dish, and will not so much as bring it to his mouth again;"[519] or if he raises the morsel to his lips, he does it with an air of indescribable languor and weariness.[520] Then the time comes for him to go out to his daily duties. But he has a number of ingenious, though utterly absurd, excuses why he should not leave the house: "There is a lion in the streets," he says, "a lion in the way;"[521] "There is a lion without; I shall be murdered in the streets."[522] When he is told that this is a delusion, he is prepared to argue the matter, and to show that his fear is well grounded; he is quite scornful of all the people who assure him to the contrary, because they have been out and seen for themselves: "The sluggard is wiser in his own eyes than seven men that can render a reason."[523] And when at length he is launched on the business of the day, arriving late, his wits gone wool-gathering, his will as inactive as his mind is inattentive, he drags through every duty with the air of one who is walking "through a hedge of thorns."[524] Where another person would proceed with easy alacrity, he seems held back by invisible obstacles; his garments are always getting caught in the briars; there is not impetus enough to carry him over the slightest difficulty; and after frequent and somnolent pauses, the end of the day finds him more weary than the busiest, though he has nothing to show but futile efforts and abortive results.

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That is a complete picture of the sluggard. We do not of course see him fully developed very often; but we recognise at once the several tendencies in our own characters—the slothfulness, the listlessness, the idle procrastination, the inertia—which may, if unresisted and unconquered, gradually bring us nearer to this finished portrait.

The result of this sluggishness must now be sketched. "Love not sleep," we are told, "lest thou come to poverty; open thine eyes, and thou shalt be satisfied with bread."[525] The means of subsistence in this world are the result of labour; toilers win them from the reluctant earth and sea; the only condition on which we can partake in them is that we should toil, either directly in producing the means of subsistence, or indirectly in

doing for the producers helpful service for which they are willing to exchange the fruits of their labour. One who sleeps away the golden hours of work, cast by slothfulness into a deep sleep, has no claim whatever on the earth or the community for daily food; he shall suffer hunger.[526] And if by craft or chance he is able to get his bread without any service rendered to the workers, he shall suffer from a soul-hunger more terrible than starvation—the unutterable ennui, weariness, disgust, and self-loathing which an idle and useless life inevitably produces.

As the text reminds us, there is an alternation of seasons. There is a time to plough, when the earth has yielded her full autumn fruits; there is a time to sow; there is a harvest. If a man is too lazy to plough at the right time and to sow at the right time, his fields will of course give him no crops: "Slothfulness catcheth not his prey."[527] Nor must we think that God in any grudging spirit has ordered this law of the seasons. The appetite which forces us to labour, because "our mouth craves it of us,"[528] the apparent rigour with which nature requires us to be up betimes and not to let the opportunity slip, and the threat of poverty which hangs over our heads if we neglect her requirements, are all parts of a beneficent law,—the law that by work itself our life is sweetened and our spirit is developed. They are not to be congratulated who, escaping the spur of appetite, and liberated by the toil of others from the rigorous edicts of nature which require the laborious ploughing and sowing, are enabled to eat the bread of idleness. The hardest worker, worn to the bone and ill-remunerated, is really more enviable than they. The abundance of food is a poor equivalent for the loss of discipline which the desire of food was designed to exact through honest and earnest work. Men come to us and say in effect, "Behold after the autumn gathering we did not plough, and we asked in harvest, and got all that our hearts desired," and we are constrained to pity rather than to congratulate them. It is not good for men to slip through the laws of God and nature thus, for their chastisement is heavier in the end than in the beginning.

The truth of this appears when we remember that a worse result of slothfulness than poverty is the spiritual rust, decay, and degradation which slothfulness itself implies: "The desire of the slothful killeth him, for his hands refuse to labour;"[529] "He also that is slack in his work is brother to him that is a destroyer."[530] It is indeed a strange illusion which makes man desire idleness. Idleness is ruin; the soul rusts away like the sword in *Hudibras*, which—

> "... ate into itself, for lack
> Of something else to hew and hack."

It is death, it is deadly; the idle soul slowly dies, and spreads destruction around it. It is the same with a country. Idleness is its ruin: whether it be that the generosity of nature removes the necessity of work, as in the South Seas, where the missionaries find one of their chief difficulties in the absolute laziness resulting from the softness of the climate and the fertility of the soil; or that the vast accumulations of wealth procure idleness for its possessors, and enforce idleness on thousands of the unfortunate unemployed,—the melancholy result ensues in the enervation of manhood and the corruption of womanhood. On the other hand, as Thucydides observed in the case of Attica, a rigorous climate and a niggardly soil, eliciting all the energies of the people in order to improve their condition or even to live, have been found favourable to the development of a noble nationality. Slackness of work, from whatever cause it may arise, brings its victims into this sorrowful kinship with the destroyer.

It may be noted that the idle, whether they be rich or poor, are denominated "vain persons," and sensible people are cautioned solemnly to avoid their society, as their emptiness is contagious, and the habits which are quickly acquired in their company lead straight to ruin: "He that tilleth his land shall have plenty of bread, but he that followeth after vain persons is void of understanding;"[531] "He that followeth after vain persons shall have poverty enough."[532]

The truth which is here enforced receives ample illustration in our own society. Two centuries ago Daniel Defoe defined the English as the "most lazy diligent nation" in the world. Hard work is common; idleness is equally common. Our people are on the whole highly gifted, and produce rapidly when they give their attention to their work; but we seem to have a strange vein of dissoluteness and laziness running through us, and consequently the worst and most shameful idleness is often found amongst the best workmen, who through their own bad habits have missed their opportunities, and become a burden to themselves and to the community. In no country is the leisured class, of those who do nothing at all, or pass their aimless days in a round of engagements which are only strenuous idleness, so large; in no country is the unemployed or the

pauper class so ruinously great in proportion to the population. Hence this curious paradox: the foreigner hears that England is the richest and the most industrious country in the world; he comes to our shores expecting to see cities of gold and fields teeming with produce. On his arrival he becomes aware of a degrading poverty such as cannot be matched in the poorest country on earth; he finds a vast population of the unemployed rich lounging in the streets and the parks, and of the unemployed poor hanging about the doors of the innumerable drink-shops, and infesting every highway and byway of the country. He finds the land of the agricultural districts often lying idle and unproductive; those who till it untaught, ill-fed, and discontented; those who possess it discontented, though well fed and instructed. Our subject does not lead us to inquire into the deeper causes of these anomalies, but it leads us to this observation: we are a "lazy diligent nation" because we have not yet learned, or have forgotten, that the thing most to be dreaded is not poverty, but idleness; and the thing most to be desired is not wealth, but strenuous, earnest, and useful toil. Our desperate and eager work is not for the work's sake, but in order to get rich; our ambition is to be idle rather than to be employed, to be raised above the necessity of labour which is our health by the possession of wealth which is our ruin. We have cherished the fatal and foolish error that work was degrading, and have ranked those highest who did the least. "Where no oxen are," we have said in our fastidious way, "the crib is [Pg 269] clean," forgetting the other side of the matter, that "much increase is by the strength of the ox."[533] Thus we have ignorantly despised the workers who make us rich, looking down upon trade, upon business, and more than all upon manual labour; and have with strange fatuity admired most those who were most useless, whose peculiar boast would be that they never did a day's work in their lives.

Happily now there are signs of a revolution in our thought. We are beginning to see that work is good, not for what it earns, but for the occupation and the training which it gives to the body and the mind; and that idleness is an evil, not only where work is a necessity, and the appetite craves it of us, but everywhere and under all circumstances. In useful employment we find our life; in the sluggard's life we see our death.

We must observe then the good effects which result from honest and earnest toil. But, first, we cannot help noticing what an important place is here given to agriculture. This is not accidental to the time in which the book was written. It is an eternal principle. Out of the soil comes our wealth; by the soil therefore we live; and accordingly God has ordained that in the tilling of the ground man shall find his wholesomest, sweetest, and most strengthening employment—that no community shall inwardly flourish when its agricultural life declines; and that therefore the happiest and soundest society will be that in which the largest proportional number are engaged in producing the fruits of the earth, and are directly and vitally attached to their mother [Pg 270] soil. "He that tilleth his land shall have plenty of bread."[534] When a nation is in the case of the sluggard, when you pass by its fields and its vineyards and see them grown over with thorns and nettles and its stone walls broken down, you will find Pauperism coming as a robber, and Want, gaunt and hideous, stalking through the land like an armed man.[535] "Be thou diligent," therefore we are told, "to know the state of thy flocks, and look well to thy herds"—(take care that no foolish pride or negligence prevent you from seeing that the agricultural life is properly maintained, for it is the only sure basis of prosperity); "riches are not for ever, and even the government of kings does not endure to all generations." But in the sweet ordinances of nature the great Giver provides His unfailing wealth: "The hay is carried, and immediately the tender grass begins to grow again, and even the barren mountains yield their herbs for ingathering. The lambs appear every spring with their wool for our clothing, and the field will maintain goats equal in value to its own price. And from these miraculous sources of eternal reproduction our food and our maintenance are to be drawn." [536]

Thus at the foundation of all industries is the agricultural industry. At the root of all social and economical questions is the land question. When you wish to commend diligence and to discourage idleness in a nation that is "lazy diligent," the first thing is to inquire into the condition or the use of the land. The land is God's gift to a people. English land is God's gift to the English people. If it is misapplied, ill-used, neglected, or [Pg 271] it does not produce its full tale of wealth; if it does not support its full burden of living creatures, and give employment to its full number of hands, we are flying in the face of God's ordinances; we must not expect to prosper; His gracious will is frustrated, and we must have the shame and sorrow of seeing our million of paupers, and our second million of enforced idlers, and our myriads of lazy cumberers of the ground, and our whole population disorganized and unsettled, torn with the frenzy of insane work, or gangrened with the corruption of destroying idleness. For the gifts of God are without repentance, and the abuse of His gifts is without remedy.

But turning now to the good effects which result from honest and earnest toil, we are taught to distinguish three more particularly—plenty, power, and personal worth.

*First*, Plenty. "The soul of the sluggard desireth and hath nothing, but the soul of the diligent shall be made fat."[537] Nor must we think that diligence is only manual; it is also mental. It implies thought, forethought, planning, arranging. We have a contrast drawn between the really diligent man, whose prudence foresees, and whose reflection orders his work for the best ends, and the fussy, unreflecting activity of one who is always busy, but never accomplishes anything. It is only the diligence of the first kind that leads to the desired end; the diligence of mere restlessness is not much better than idleness. We learn that "the thoughts of the diligent tend only to plenteousness, but every one that is hasty hasteth only to want."[538] Effectual labour implies [Pg 272] thought; only a wise man, with all his faculties brought into full and harmonious play, can work with any good result, or can thriftily use the fruits of his labour; a foolish, thoughtless, witless person may work hard and earn a good deal of money, but it is gone even faster than it came. Thus "there is precious treasure and oil in the dwelling of *the wise*, but a foolish man swalloweth it up."[539] There are exceptions, no doubt; but the general rule is borne out by experience, that they who honestly and earnestly use the gifts of mind and body which God has given them, obtain the things which are needful in this life, if not to overflowing, yet in sufficiency; and where means fail we generally have to admit that our own industry or prudence was at fault.

Then, *secondly*, it is industry rather than genius which commends us to our fellow-men, and leads us to positions of influence and power: "Seest thou a man diligent in his business? he shall stand before kings, he shall not stand before mean men;"[540] "The hand of the diligent shall bear rule, but the slothful shall be put under task-work."[541] It is this golden faculty of persistence, concentration, diligence, which makes every great ruler and leader of men, and raises even the very ordinary person out of the drudgery of mere task-work into the dignity of large and noble and delightful toil.

For, *thirdly*, it is diligence, the capacity of taking pains, that gives to a man his actual worth, making him compact and strong and serviceable: "The precious substance of men is to be diligent."[542] It is the quality [Pg 273] itself which is all important. The greatest gifts are of little worth, unless there is this guarantee of the conscientious and intelligent employment of them. While if the gifts with which God has endowed us are of the simplest order, if we can only use a spade or a saw or a broom effectively, that faculty diligently exercised is our value to the world; and a great value it is—greater than the value of high genius which is erratic, unbridled, undirected, and uncertain. Of every man or woman in this world the highest praise which can be uttered is that which underlies the commendation of the good wife: "She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness."[543] There is the epitome of all trustworthy and honourable character.

We have been dwelling all this time on a simple virtue of a very mundane type. But all that has been said may be immediately raised to a higher plane by one observation. Our Lord and Master was diligent about His Father's business, and has left on record this saying: "I must work the works of Him that sent Me while it is called to-day; for the night cometh, in which no one can work." As each one of us comes under His influence and passes into His faith and obedience, the joyful seriousness of our life-work deepens; it is lit by the rich glow of a sunset glory. We want to do diligently what our hand finds to do—to do it earnestly as unto the Lord. By patient and industrious exercise of every faculty which He has given us, we wish to be prepared for any task which He may appoint here or hereafter. Some of us He only apprentices in this world, and [Pg 274] according to the faithfulness with which we discharge our humble and unnoticed duties will be the service to which He will one day appoint us. Others are called out of apprenticeship into the rough and eager work of the journeyman, and His eye is always upon us as He tries us to find whether we may ever be appointed over one, or five, or ten cities. A few supreme souls have been called even on earth to shape, to create, to control; a Paul, an Augustine, a Luther, can work with an emancipated hand. But the law is one all through the workshops, the fields, the vineyards of our Lord. The diligent shall stand before Him, and the slothful shall be shamed. He that does not plough will not reap. Wasted opportunities vanish for ever, and leave only their doleful record in the emasculated and nerveless soul.

# XXI.

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## *WINE.*

"He that loveth pleasure shall be a poor man:
He that loveth wine and oil shall not be rich."

PROV. xxi. 17.

The Septuagint translation has an interesting addition to the proverb in xii. 11. After "He that tilleth his land shall have plenty of bread, but he that followeth after vain persons is void of understanding," it adds, "He who is sweet in pastimes of wine-drinking shall leave dishonour in his strongholds." Drinking is the natural opposite of hard and honest work. When the love of it takes possession of a man he is sure to become a useless and unproductive member of society. A drunken people are in the end an incapable people; their wealth declines, their industries pass over to soberer rivals, their qualities of brain and muscle gradually disappear. This is partly owing to the deterioration of mind and body which results from the excessive use of stimulants; but it is still more due to a wider cause: drinking in all its branches is indulged in as a pleasure. Why do we not admit it? why do we always try to present it in another light, saying that it is for health's sake, by a doctor's orders; or for work's sake, by a proved necessity? Is it not that we are secretly conscious of [Pg 276] taking the drink because we like it? We know it is a self-indulgence, and we are a little ashamed of it; and as self-indulgence is always fatal in the long run to all the habits and activities which men very properly honour, we should dearly like to screen it under a decent pretext which might preserve our self-respect. We know quite well that "he that loveth pleasure shall be a poor man; he that loveth wine and oil shall not be rich."[544] Drinking is after all only a pronounced symptom of a large vice—self-indulgence.

A great step is taken when we have learnt to quietly and candidly face this fact: we drink, as a society, as a nation,—each of us drinks in public or in private,—simply because it is pleasant. It is a habit governed by one supreme and absolute law—*we like it*. We know quite well that alcohol is not a food; that is proved by the most irrefragable scientific evidence; and if in alcoholic drinks there are certain nutritive elements, we could if we chose secure the benefit of them without any admixture of alcohol. We know that in many cases the alcohol is actually deleterious, that it produces specific and very terrible diseases, that it lowers the tone of the whole system and makes us liable to all kinds of secondary troubles. We may urge that alcohol is a medicine, and a useful medicine; but it is not as a medicine we use it. If a doctor prescribes castor-oil, or quinine, we throw aside the medicine on the first opportunity, often before it has done its work. Alcohol is the only medicine which we continue to take for a lifetime because the doctor prescribed it for a month. Would it [Pg 277] not be better then to clear our minds of cant, and to set the whole matter on its right basis? Intoxicants are drunk as a form, as the most universal form, of self-indulgence. In some mysterious way, for some mysterious reasons which we cannot fathom, they gratify an instinctive appetite, they are naturally and generally attractive, they exercise a spell over the physical system. If the taste is, as some people say, acquired, it was acquired by mankind in prehistoric times, and is part of our inherited constitution as men. For instance, Mr. Gaule, a police-court missionary in Birmingham, relates a recent experience, one out of many in his fourteen years of labour. A young married woman, twenty-eight years of age, died a shocking death from drinking. Up to the age of twenty-six she had been a teetotaller, and did not know what the taste of drink was. She was a leading member of the Gospel Temperance Mission, and sang the solos at the meetings. Then she was taken ill, the doctor ordered brandy, and it proved like the first taste of blood to a tame tiger. She could never again be kept from it, and at last it killed her. The craving there must have been in the very blood.

We have a taste for these intoxicants, latent or realized. The stimulating influence is pleasant, the narcotic influence is pleasant. The immediate effect on the body is pleasant, the immediate effect on the mind is pleasant. Drink produces a sense of great self-satisfaction, promotes a flow of conversation and a feeling of good fellowship; it quickens at first several of our mental faculties; it excites the imagination, and carries its devotee far away from the actual, which is painful and harassing, into a kind of ideal world, which is cheerful [Pg 278] and agreeable. So powerful is its temporary influence that in the "words of King Lemuel" there is positively a recommendation to "give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto the bitter in soul; let him drink and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more."[545] An injunction which must not of course be mistaken for a Divine precept, but only for a reminder of the fact—a fact which may be observed without any moral judgment being passed upon it—that while men who require all their mental and moral

faculties to be in full activity[546] must eschew the use of intoxicating drinks, the dying, the despairing, the very poor and miserable, may find a certain relief in drinking. Men who are in the enjoyment of health, and wish to discharge effectively the day's duties, have no excuse for the employment of an agent which only serves to lull the mind into forgetfulness and to reduce the pain of consciousness to the lowest possible point.

Strange to say, while men are thus naturally inclined to use intoxicants, nature has been most lavish in pandering to their tastes. There are trees in tropical climates which have but to be gashed, and an intoxicating juice flows out ready at once for use. Almost every natural juice ferments if it is left alone. The palm-tree, the potato-plant, the sugar-cane, beet-root, the cereals, as well as the grape, yield readily these intoxicating drinks, at a surprisingly low cost. Very little human labour is needed, very simple apparatus will suffice, so that a very few enterprising firms can deluge a whole continent with fiery intoxicants.

We drink because we like it,—not for our good, as we pretend, but for our pleasure, as we are half ashamed [Pg 279] to confess. The taste is natural to us,—natural to savages, natural to civilised men, natural, so far as we know, to men of all climates and all races. And nature has made it singularly easy to gratify the taste.

Now one might almost suppose that the conclusion to be drawn would be, "Let us drink, let us take this element as a good gift of God." And that was the feeling of more primitive times. In the Vedas, for instance, Indra is praised as reeling with the intoxicating Soma which his worshippers have offered to him; drunkenness is regarded as a kind of inspiration. But no; as wisdom asserts herself, and demands a hearing, she more and more decisively classes this taste for intoxicants with certain other tastes which are natural to us, but none the less dangerous; and she treats the bountiful provision which nature has made for the gratification of the taste as one of those innumerable temptations with which men in this present life are surrounded,—in conflict with which they prove their manhood,—by victory over which they acquire strength of moral principle and consistency in virtue.

As the reason within gathers power and authority, and as her clear light is replenished by the revelation of Divine Wisdom, all the spurious attractions of drinking are weakened, the glamour is destroyed, and the truth is recognised that "wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler, and whosoever erreth thereby is not wise;"[547] more and more it appears that the power of wine is the power of the animal within us, and that the [Pg 280] widespread influence of it is a sign that the animal within us dies slowly; we learn to measure the growth of reason by the degree of mastery which has been obtained over the low appetite; and we understand that striking antithesis of the New Testament religion, "Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess, but be filled with the Spirit."

The way then in which we are brought to look at the drink question is this: here is a powerful natural temptation, a seduction which nature herself offers to the body, a foe which always has a traitor in collusion with it inside the assaulted citadel. This enemy is ingenious in its argumentation: it approaches usually under the guise of a friend; it says—and not without truth—that it comes to give pleasure to poor harassed and toilworn mortals; it persuades them that it is a wholesome food, and when that contention is shattered it would have them believe that it is a medicine. When it has gained an entrance into the fortress, by fair means or foul, it at first proceeds very doucely, and seems to justify its presence by numberless obvious benefits. Sometimes it will successfully hide all the evil it is working, as if its purpose were to beguile new victims and to acquire a more unbounded sway over the old.

As religious men, as spiritual beings, whom God claims to become His children, we are called upon to face this subtle, powerful, and all-persuasive foe. We are to do our best to understand its ways—we look to science to help us and to teach us. We are then to take every weapon within our reach to resist its approach,—argument, persuasion, entreaty; we are to lose no opportunity of unveiling the tactics of the foe, and rousing those who are imperilled to a sense of their danger; then as Christian citizens we are bound to use all the [Pg 281] influence we possess to hold this terrible natural temptation within the straitest limits, and to fortify all the powers of resistance in our fellow-men to the highest possible degree.

In such a crusade against the enemy of our race, few things are more effectual than a vivid and accurate delineation of the effects which drink produces—such a delineation, for instance, as that which is given in chap. xxiii. 29-35. Let us proceed to examine this remarkable passage.

"Whose is Oh? whose is woe?" asks the Teacher. Who is it whose constant and appropriate language is that of lamentation—the piteous cry of pain, the agonised exclamation of remorse? "Whose are contentions?" Who is it that lives in an atmosphere of perpetual strife and loud quarrellings? "Whose is groaning?"—that

sustained sigh of desponding and irremediable misery. "Whose are causeless wounds?"—not only the bruise and the gash which result from furious sparrings or unforeseen falls, but also wounds of the spirit, self-loathing, and shame, the thought of what might have been, the realization of a ruined home, and of suffering wife and little ones, and the conviction that the evil can now never be undone. "Whose is the darkling of the eyes?"[548] Who is it whose eyes have that horrible inflamed, lack-lustre look, which is the exact opposite of the light and clearness and sparkle proper to the human eye? [Pg 282]

The answer to these questions is given in a sentence, "Theirs who tarry over the wine, theirs who go to try the mixture." It is not of course suggested that all who drink wine, nor even all who take it habitually, fall into the horrible condition which has just been described; this condition is the result of lingering over the drink, spending hours in tippling, devoting time and thought to tasting various brands and samples, becoming a connoisseur of strong beverages, allowing the subject to occupy an appreciable proportion of one's time. It is not the use, but the abuse, of the thing which in this passage is reprobated. But now we are reminded of the great difficulty which occurs in distinguishing between the use and the abuse. There is no sharply-defined limit. There is no mechanical monitor which at once reminds us, "Here use ceases and abuse begins." Almost the only rule that can be given is, that whenever the cup seems in the least degree attractive, then danger is near and it is necessary to abstain. "Look not on wine when it reddens, when it gives its gleam in the cup; it goes down so smoothly!" It is the peculiarity of this substance that it can only be taken safely when it has comparatively no attractions, when it is taken under orders, and as it were against the grain. If it is really pleasant to us, we can never tell where the pleasantness melts into a dangerous fascination, where the colour [Pg 283] and the sparkle and the agreeable tingle which make it pass so easily down the throat have become the lure and the spell of a poisonous reptile. For this pleasant indulgence, which seems to be perfectly innocent, what is the issue of it? "Its end—like a serpent it bites, and like a basilisk it stings." One evil result of it is that it rouses into perilous activity the dormant passions; even pure men and women under this potent influence become impure. The eyes which are excited with wine will turn readily to loose and degraded women.[549] The fall which might have been easily avoided in a state of sobriety will be inevitable when the reason is silenced, the will enfeebled, and the desire inflamed by this seductive poison.

Another evil effect is that the sense of truth entirely disappears. What a misleading maxim is that of the Romans, *In vino veritas!* While it is a fact that the intoxicated man will blab many things which were best kept concealed, there is nothing which deteriorates truthfulness so rapidly as the use of alcohol. The drinker becomes crafty and deceitful and untrustworthy. The miserable brain is haunted with chimæras, the imperious appetite suggests all kinds of subterfuges and evasions, the very "heart speaks frauds." Yes, nothing could be more accurate than this: the effect of drink is not so much to make the lips lie, as to make the inner man essentially insincere and deceptive. No man admits that he is a drunkard, even to his own heart; long after all [Pg 284] his friends know it, and are beginning to despair of him, even when he has had several attacks of *delirium tremens* and is a confirmed dipsomaniac, the most he will allow is that he has sometimes taken a little more than is good for him, but so very little seems to upset him. Ah, "thine heart shall utter froward things," *i.e.*, frauds. Every one who has had any dealings with the miserable victims of drink will sorrowfully confirm this statement.

The insecurity of the habit is incredible. It leads to the destruction of every faculty which God has mercifully given us to protect us from danger and guide us through life. The ready perception of things is marred, the quick rallying of the attention is delayed, the exercise of the understanding is prevented, the will is paralysed, the conscience dies. "Thou shalt be as he who lieth down in the heart of the sea,"—as one in a calenture who strides into the merciless waves under the impression that he is walking on flowery meadows. Thou shalt be "as he that goeth to bed on the mast's head,"—where the position is precarious even if the sea be perfectly calm, but becomes sure destruction if the winds awake and the ship begins to climb large billows and to plunge down into their unquiet troughs.

And then, worst of all, when there is a temporary recovery from this abominable state of drunkenness, and the feeble wails of repentance begin to be heard, what can be more disconnected—more futile—more abject —more irrational than his words? "They have smitten me," he says; "I have not been sick,"—as if forsooth he were the victim of some violence offered to him by others, instead of being the author of his own stripes; as if he were quite right and well, and the disease were not deep in his own passion-haunted heart. "They have [Pg 285] stricken me," he continues to whine, "I have not known it." Footpads have attacked him, he would have us believe, and that is the explanation of his begrimed and blood-smeared face, his torn clothes, and his empty pockets. "When shall I awake?" he mutters, as the swimming sensation in the head, and the unsteady stagger in his step, remind him that he is not quite himself. And then—is it possible? Yes, his next remark is, "I will

seek it again." I will go and get another drink. His miserable mind, the victim and the mint of lies, having persuaded him that all the mischief came from some cause other than himself, and had nothing to do with the one degrading habit which really produced it, he proposes at once to seek the very agent which is his undoing, to heal his intoxication by getting drunk again.[550]

This vivid and forcible picture of the miserable sufferings, the contemptible vices, and the helpless bondage which result from intoxicating drinks, is all the more impressive because there is no attempt made to enforce total abstinence as a principle. If however it is duly considered and understood, it is very likely to produce total abstinence as a practice, just as the object lesson of the drunken helot led every Spartan youth to turn with unspeakable loathing from the embruting vice. Modest minds, observing how the mighty are fallen, how this one cause has ruined the strongest, the best, and the most attractive of their fellow-creatures, insidiously leading them on, mocking them, and luring them into dangerous and poisonous marshes, will be inclined to say, as Daniel said, "I will abstain; I may be safe or I may not; if I am safe all I gain is a certain amount of animal pleasure; if I am not, what I lose is health, honour, wealth, even life itself,—not the body only, but the soul too." The gain from the use of these things is very measurable and insignificant; the loss from their abuse is immeasurable, and the passage from use to abuse escapes at once our observation and control.

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But, after all, wisdom urges temperance in drinking only as a part of a much larger principle. If temperance in drinking stands alone and unconnected with this larger principle, it is a blessing of a very doubtful kind, so doubtful indeed that the pharisaism, the intolerance, the dogmatism, which are able to subsist with "Temperance" in the limited sense, have often been the most serious hindrance to temperance in its larger and nobler meaning.

It is the desire of pleasure which is at the root of the mischief: "He that loveth pleasure shall be a poor man." Men are "lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God."[551] The appetites which are natural to us hold undisputed sway, they are fleshly; the great spiritual appetites, which are supernatural, are quite feeble and inoperative. Men ask for that which is pleasant, and even when they become religious it is only to obtain pleasure, a greater and a more lasting pleasure; thus there is an intemperance, which we call fanaticism, even in religious beliefs and in religious practices. But what men need is that the desire of God, for His own sake, should be so inflamed in them as to burn up all other desires. And this desire can only be created by His Holy Spirit. The competing and manifold desires of pleasure can only be mastered and expelled when that great, absorbing, and embracing desire of God has been securely settled in the human heart by the Holy Spirit. True temperance is really one of the ninefold fruits of the Spirit, and is of little value, a mere spurious product, unless it is accompanied by love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, and meekness. Such passages as we have been considering in the book of Proverbs may give us a wholesome horror and hatred of drunkenness, and may even lead us to a prudential temperance—they may even make us as sober as pious Mohammedans or Buddhists; but if we are to become really temperate a higher power must intervene, we must be "born of the Spirit." Is it not remarkable how nothing short of the highest remedy—the new birth—is effectual for curing even the slightest of human infirmities and sins?

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# XXII.

## *THE TREATMENT OF THE POOR.*

"The rich and the needy meet together; the Lord is the maker of them all."—Prov. xxii. 2.

"He that hath a bountiful eye shall be blessed, for he giveth of his bread to the poor."—Prov. xxii. 9.

"He that oppresseth the poor, it is for his increase; he that giveth to the rich, it is for want."—Prov. xxii. 16.

"Rob not the poor because he is poor, neither oppress the humble in the gate, for the Lord will plead their cause and despoil of life those that despoil them."—Prov. xxii. 22, 23.

If we would understand and lay to heart the very striking lessons of this book on the treatment of the poor, it will be well for us to observe that there are four words in the Hebrew original which are rendered by our English words "poor" or "needy." These words we will try to discriminate and to use with more exactness in the present lecture, that we may not miss any of the teaching by the blur and obscurity of careless language. *First*, there is a word (דָּל) for which we will reserve our English word "poor"; it signifies a person who is weak and uninfluential, but not necessarily destitute or even in want. The "poor" are those who form the vast majority of every society, and are sometimes described by the word "masses." *Secondly*, there is a word (רָשׁ) which may be rendered "needy." It covers those who are in actual want, people who through bereavement[Pg 289] or infirmity, or unavoidable calamity are unable to secure a sufficiency of the necessaries of life. *Thirdly*, there is a word (עָנִי) which we may perhaps render by "humble," for though it more literally describes the afflicted and sad, it contains within it a hint of moral commendation which suggests a transition from the idea of simple weakness and helplessness to that of patient and humble dependence on God. *Lastly*, there is a word (אֶבְיוֹן) which we will render "destitute." If we keep these notions—"poor," "needy," "humble," "destitute"—distinct, and yet combined, to form one conception, we shall find that the proverbs before us refer to that large section of mankind who are in a worldly and material sense considered the least fortunate; those to whom it is a lifelong effort merely to live; those who have no margin of security on which to fall back in case of disaster or sickness; those who are engaged in precarious employments or in casual labour; those who may keep their heads above water by diligence and unremitting exertions, but may at any time go under; those who owing to this constant pressure of the elementary needs have but little leisure to cultivate their faculties, and little opportunity to maintain their rights. We are to think of the large class of persons who in more primitive times are slaves, who in feudal times are serfs, who in modern times are called the proletariate; those in whose interest the laws of society have not hitherto been framed, because they have not until quite recently been admitted to any substantial share in the work of legislation; those who have always found it peculiarly difficult to secure justice, because justice is a costly commodity, and they have no means to spare,[Pg 290] since "the destruction of the poor is precisely their poverty."[552] We are not to think of the idle and the vicious, who are so often classed with the poor, because they, like the poor, are without means,—we must rigorously exclude these, for they are not in the mind of the writer when he gives us these golden precepts. We must remember that it is part of our peculiar English system, the result of our boasted Poor Law, to discredit the very word poverty, by refusing to discriminate between the poor in the scriptural sense, who are honourable and even noble, and the pauper in the modern sense, who is almost always the scum of a corrupt social order, in four cases out of five a drunkard, and in the fifth case the product of some one else's moral failings. It requires quite an effort for us to see and realize what the Scriptures mean by the poor. We have to slip away from all the wretched associations of the Poor House, the Poor Law, and the Guardians. We have to bring before our minds a class which in a wholesome state of society would be a small, numerable minority, but in our own unwholesome state of society are a large and well-nigh innumerable majority,—not only the destitute and the actually needy, but all the people who have no land on which to live, no house which they can call their own, no reserve fund, no possibility of a reserve fund, against the unavoidable calamities and chances of life, the people who are trodden down—who tread each other down—in the race of competition; all those, too, who, according to the godless dogma of the day, must go to the wall because they are weak,[Pg 291] and must give up the idea of surviving because only the fittest must expect to survive. There rise up before our imagination the toiling millions of Europe—of England—worn, pale, despondent, apathetic, and resigned; or bitter, desperate, and resentful; not destitute, though they include the destitute; not needy, though they include the needy; but poor, without strength except in combination, and often when combined without light or leading.

I. Now the first thing we have to observe is that *the poor*, in the sense we have tried to define, are a special concern to the Lord. "Rob not the poor," says the text, "because he is poor, neither oppress the humble in the gate, for the Lord will plead their cause, and despoil of life those that despoil them." "Remove not the ancient landmark, and enter not into the fields of the fatherless; for their Redeemer is strong, He shall plead their cause against thee."[553] "The Lord will establish the border of the widow."[554] So intimate is the connection between the Lord and His poor creatures that "he that oppresseth the poor reproacheth his Maker, but he that hath mercy on the destitute honoureth Him."[555] "Whoso mocketh the needy reproacheth his Maker, and he that is glad at calamity shall not be unpunished."[556] On the other hand, "He that hath pity on the poor lendeth unto the Lord, and his good deed will He pay him again."[557]

Not, of course, that there is any favouritism with God, not that He has an interest in a man because of his[Pg 292] means or lack of means; but just because of His large and comprehensive impartiality. "The needy man and

the oppressor meet together; the Lord lighteneth the eyes of them both."[558] "The rich and the needy meet together, the Lord is the Maker of them all."[559] His special interest in the poor arises only from their special need, from the mute cry which goes up to Him, from the appeal to Him as their only friend, deliverer, and protector: just as His lesser interest in the rich arises from their self-satisfied independence of Him, from their infatuated trust in themselves, and from their conviction that already all things belong to them. We should make a mistake if we supposed that the Lord recognises any class distinctions, or that He valued a man because he is poor, just as we value a man because he is rich. The truth rather is that He absolutely ignores the class distinctions, regarding the mingled mass of human beings, rich and poor, oppressor and oppressed, as on a plane of dead equality, and then distinguishing between them on a totally different principle,—on a moral, a spiritual principle; and, if there is any preference, it is on the ground of certain valuable moral effects which poverty sometimes produces that He takes the poor into His peculiar and tender care, honouring them with so close a friendship that service to them becomes service to Him.

This is certainly good news to the masses. "You are undistinguished, and unobserved,"—the voice of wisdom seems to say,—"In this world, with its false distinctions and perverted ideals, you feel at a constant [Pg 293] disadvantage. You dare hardly claim the rights of your manhood and your womanhood. This great personage, possessing half a city, drawing as much unearned money every day as you can earn by unremitting toil in fifteen or twenty years, seems to overshadow and to dwarf you. And there are these multitudes of easy, comfortable, resplendent persons who live in large mansions and dress in costly garments, while you and your family live in a couple of precarious rooms at a weekly rental, and find it all you can do to get clean and decent clothes for your backs. These moneyed people are held in much estimation; you, so far as you know, are held in none. Their doings—births, marriages, deaths—create quite a stir in the world; you slip into the world, through it, and out of it, without attracting any attention. But be assured things wear a different appearance from the standpoint of God. Realize how you and your fellow-men appear to Him, and you at once recover self-respect, and hold up your head in His presence as a man. That simple truth which the Ayrshire peasant sang[560] you may take as God's truth, as His revelation; it is the way in which He habitually thinks of you."

How the scales seem to fall away from one's eyes directly we are enabled to see men and things as God sees [Pg 294] them! The sacred worth of humanity shines far brighter than any of its tinsel trappings. We learn to estimate ourselves aright, undisturbed and unabashed by the false estimates which are current in the world. Our true distinction is that we are men, that we belong to a race which was made in the image of God, was dear to His heart, and is redeemed by His love. The equality we claim for men is not a levelling down—it is quite the reverse; it is raising them up to the higher level which they have deserted and forgotten; it is teaching them to live as men, distinguished not by their accidental circumstances or possessions, but by their manhood itself. It is giving men self-respect instead of self-esteem, teaching them not to vaunt themselves as one against another, but to claim their high and honourable title, one and all, as the sons of God.

II. But now it follows that, if the Lord Himself espouses the cause of the poor, and even identifies Himself with them, ill-treatment of them, injustice to them, or even a wilful neglect of them and disregard of their interests, must be a sin, and a very terrible sin. "He that despiseth his neighbour sinneth; but he that hath pity on the humble, happy is he."[561]

In the East to this day the proverb, "He that withholdeth corn, the people shall curse him; but blessing shall be upon the head of him that selleth it,"[562] has its full significance. But even in the West, where the name of [Pg 295] Christ is borne by the nations, it is a common thing for one or two greedy and selfish capitalists to form a "corner"—as the commercial slang of the day denominates it—in some article of industry, *i.e.*, to secure all the raw material in the market, and to hold it until a famine price can be demanded. Meanwhile, the mills are idle, the looms are silent, the workpeople are unemployed, and their families suffer. Our moral sense is not yet sufficiently cultivated to condemn this hideous selfishness as severely as it deserves, and to regard the perpetrators of it as enemies of the human race. "The people curse" them, that is all. But as we have seen that the cause of the wage-earners is the cause of the Lord, we may rest quite confident that He to whom vengeance belongs enters every action of the kind in His unerasable accounts, and reserves the inevitable punishment for these "oppressors of the poor."

There is another evil of modern industrial life which is alluded to in the Proverbs before us. No oppression of [Pg 296] the poor is more terrible than that which is exercised by those who themselves are needy. The system which results from necessity of this kind is termed "sweating." The hungry contractor undertakes the job at the

lowest possible price, and secures his profit by getting hungrier and weaker creatures than himself to do the work at a price lower than possible, literally at starvation wages. What force, then, to modern ears is there in the saying, "A needy man that oppresseth the poor is like a sweeping rain which leaveth no food"![563]

The Divine oversight of these industrial abuses is not, as we sometimes suppose, pretermitted. Wisdom and Justice and Love hold the reins, and though the rapacity and cupidity of men seem to have a wide range, they are inevitably pulled up in the end, if not in this partial and transient life, yet in that long Eternity through which the Eternal will work out His purposes. As He Himself sides with the poor and pities them, and turns with indignation against their oppressors, it follows necessarily that "he that augments his substance by usury and increase gathereth it for him that pities the poor."[564] In fact, the merciful and pitiful nature has all the forces that rule the universe on its side, notwithstanding appearances to the contrary: "The merciful man doeth good to his own soul, but he that is cruel troubleth his own flesh."[565]

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It is the strange paradox of all selfishness that the selfish man is really quite blind to his own true interests. He most conscientiously lives for himself, and seeks his own good, but the good he sought proves to be his evil, and of all his innumerable foes he finds at last that he himself is the worst. The selfish man is always coming to want, while the unselfish man whose whole thought has been for others is richly provided for. "He that giveth unto the needy shall not lack, but he that hideth his eyes shall have many a curse."[566] "There is that scattereth and increaseth yet more, and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth only to want."[567]

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"He that hideth his eyes shall have many a curse!" Yes, nothing is more striking than this truth, that not only positive oppression of the poor, but mere indifference to their state, mere neglect of their sufferings, involves us in sin. There are many who can honestly say that they have not deliberately wronged their fellow-men, and will on that ground plead innocent; but that is not enough. We are as members one of another responsible in a degree for all the injustice and cruelty which are practised in the society to which we belong. If we are drawing an income from invested money, we are responsible for the cruel exactions of excessive work, for the heartless disregard of life and limb, and for the constant under-payment of the workers which makes the dividends so princely.[568] Nay, when we buy and use the cheap goods, which are cheap because they have been made at the cost of health and happiness and life to our brothers and our sisters, their blood is upon our heads, though we choose to forget it. For listen—"Whoso stoppeth ears at the cry of the poor," whoso tries to ignore that there is a labour question, and that the cry for increased or even regular wages, and for tolerable homes, and wholesome conditions of work, is a reality, and in form of unions, or strikes, or low wails of despair, is addressed to us all—"he shall cry and shall not be heard."[569] Such is the inexorable law of God. And again: "Deliver those that are carried away unto death,"—those who are sacrificing the sweetness of life, the sap of the bones, the health of the marrow, to the ruthless exigencies of the industrial machine; "and those tottering to slaughter see thou hold back,"—not leaving them to "dree their own sad weird," helpless and unregarded. "If thou say, Behold we knew not this man,"—how could we make ourselves acquainted with all the toiling masses of the city by whose labour we lived and were maintained in comfort?—"Doth not He that weigheth the hearts consider it; and He that keepeth thy soul, doth not He know it, and shall not He render to every man according to his work?"[570] That is to say, if we plead, "When saw we Thee ahungred, or athirst, or sick and in prison, and came not to Thee?" our Lord will say, "Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to Me." And we "shall go away" into everlasting punishment, while the righteous go into life eternal.

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III. For it follows, from the whole consideration of this subject, that those who make their life a ministry to the poor obtain a blessing,—yes, the only true and permanent blessing that life is capable of yielding. "He that hath a bountiful eye shall be blessed; for he giveth of his bread to the poor."[571] The very form of the saying is significant. Does it not imply: "It is obvious that to give our bread to the poor is a blessing to ourselves, so obvious that it needs only to be stated to be admitted, and therefore, as the bountiful eye, the philanthropic observation, the readiness to see suffering and to search out the sufferers, necessarily leads to this generous distribution, it must be a blessing to its possessor." Indeed, this is a true test of righteousness, as the Lord teaches in the parable just quoted. It is "the righteous that takes knowledge of the cause of the poor, while the wicked understands not to know it."[572] A religion which takes no knowledge of the masses is a false religion; a Church and a Ministry which "understand not to know" the condition of the people and the needs of the poor are not Christ's Church and Christ's Ministry, but flagrantly apostate; and nothing is plainer

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than this—that from such a Church and Ministry He will accept no orthodoxy of belief or valiant defence of the creed in lieu of obedience to all His plain and unmistakable commandments.

If we look at governments, the test is practically the same. "The king that faithfully judgeth the poor, his throne shall be established for ever."[573] And it is because the Messianic King, alone of all sovereigns and governments, rightly and fully understands and maintains the cause of the poor, that He alone of sovereigns shall be established for ever, and of the increase of His government there shall be no end. And for the flagrant neglect of this vital question on the part of all governing persons and assemblies, that King will call to account those pompous and wordy magnates who have borne the sword in vain, considering all interests rather than those of the poor, whom they were specially appointed to judge; and of the needy, to whose succour they were peculiarly bound to run.

And what holds in the state holds in the family. The virtuous woman, and head of the household—she whom God can approve and welcome into everlasting habitations—is emphatically not she who is always striving for social aggrandisement, always seeking for her children wealthy settlements and spurious honours; but is one who "spreadeth out her hand to the poor, yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy."[574] [Pg 302]

Well may we try to take God's view of this question, to understand what He means by the poor, and how He regards them, and how He expects us to treat them. For this, if it is not the secret and the centre of all true religious life, is at least the infallible test of whether our religious life is true or not. By our treatment of His poor, the Son of Man, who is to judge the world, declares that we shall be judged. "By that we shall be condemned or by that we shall be acquitted."

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# XXIII.

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## *EDUCATION: THE PARENT'S THOUGHT OF THE CHILD.*

> "Train up a child according to his way, and even when he is old he will not depart from it."—Prov. xxii. 6.
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> "Withhold not correction from the child; if thou beat him with the rod he shall not die. Thou shalt beat him with the rod and shalt deliver his soul from Sheol."—Prov. xxiii. 13, 14.

In Lecture IV. we examined two of the main principles which should be inculcated on children in a Christian home. In the present lecture we approach the question of education again. It is necessary for us to examine two features of parental training on which the book of Proverbs lays repeated stress. First, the need of method in bringing up the young; and second, the way of punishing their delinquencies.

In the first we have an eternal principle, which applies and must apply as long as human nature endures, a principle which is even emphasized by the demands of our Christian faith. In the second we have a principle which is so modified and altered by the Christian spirit, that unless we make the largest allowance for the change, it may be, as it often has been, misleading and hurtful in a high degree. If we could trace out all the dark cruelties and injustice, the vindictiveness, the stupidity of parents, guardians, and teachers, who have [Pg 304] sheltered themselves under the authority of the text, "Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him,"[575] we might read with a new application our Saviour's stern censure of accepting the letter of Scripture in place of coming to Him and learning of Him who is meek and lowly of heart.[576]

But our first duty is to understand the wholesome and eternally valid teaching that is here given us about education. "Train up a child in the way he should go." We gain a good deal in vividness if we go back to the meaning of the word which is rendered "train." Derived from a noun which signifies the palate and the inner part of the mouth, its literal meaning is "to put into the mouth." The metaphor suggested is that of feeding an infant. Every parent recognises the necessity of giving to the helpless children suitable nourishment. At first the mother feeds the babe at the breast. After the weaning she still feeds it with food carefully chosen and

prepared. As the child grows older she changes the food, but she does not relax her care; and the father admits the responsibility of procuring the necessary diet for his little one, a responsibility which does not cease until the child is fully grown, fully formed, and fully able to provide for himself. Here is the suitable analogy for mental, moral, and spiritual teaching. The parents must feed their child with morsels suitable to his age, with the "milk of the word" at first, afterwards with strong meat. It all requires infinite care and forethought and wisdom, for there is a certain way of development, a certain ideal which the child must realize, and if the training is to be on the lines of that development, according to that "way," if it is to achieve that ideal, the teaching must all be accurately adapted to the age or stage of development, and to the particular character and disposition of the child. If the preliminary work of the parents is wisely done, if the influence exercised by them while their child is still entirely in their hands is exactly what it ought to be, there is no fear for the rest of life—"when he is old he will not depart from it." A great master of modern literature, who wandered through many ways of thought far from the opinions and faith of his parents, when in his old age he sat down to write the reminiscences of his life, discovered that the original bent given to his mind by his peasant parents had remained unexhausted to the end.[577] Many beliefs currently held had faded and grown dim, much of the historical foundation of his religion had crumbled away, but there was a truth which he had learned from his mother's lips and had seen exemplified in his father's life, and it returned to him in its full force, and remained unsubmerged in the tides of doubt, unaffected by the breath of change, it even acquired a fresh hold upon him in the decline of his days:—The chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy Him for ever.



It is a good illustration of the unrivalled power of the parents over a man's life. "The Lord hath given the father honour over the children, and hath confirmed the authority of the mother over the sons," says Ecclesiasticus.[578] It is a rare opportunity which is given to parents. No sphere of influence which they may acquire can be like it; it may be wider, but it can never be so intense or so decisive. A father who abdicates the throne on which God has set him, who foregoes the honour which God has given him, or turns it into dishonour, must one day answer for his base renunciation before the Eternal Father. A mother who uses the authority over her sons which God has given her, merely to gratify her own vanity and selfishness, and to retain a love which she has ceased to deserve; or one who wantonly throws away the authority because its exercise makes large demands upon the spirit, has much to answer for at the Divine judgment-seat. Parental powers are so absolute, parental possibilities are so great, parental joys are so rare and wonderful, that they must of necessity be balanced by corresponding disadvantages in case of failure. "He that begetteth a fool doeth it to his sorrow, and the father of a fool hath no joy."[579] "A foolish son is a grief to his father, and bitterness to her that bare him."[580] It must therefore constantly press upon all wise parents, how are they to act, what methods are they to adopt, in order to rightly discharge their duties, and to win that precious reward of "a wise son"?[581] "My son, if thy heart be wise, my heart shall be glad, even mine, yea, my reins shall rejoice when thy lips speak right things." "The father of the righteous shall greatly rejoice, and he that begetteth a wise child shall have joy of him."[582]



The answer which is constantly suggested by the book of Proverbs, and especially by our text, is this:—A successful parent will be one who makes the training of the children a constant and religious study. It is the last subject in the world to be left to haphazard. From the first a clear aim must be kept in view. "Is my great object that this boy shall be a true, a noble, a God-fearing man, serving his day and generation in the way God shall appoint? Is this object purged of all meaner thought? Can I renounce the idea of worldly success for him, and be indifferent to wealth and reputation, to comfort and ease for him?" When this question is satisfactorily settled, then comes a second, How is the aim to be realized? Is not the parent at once driven to God with the cry, "Who is sufficient for these things?" A mistake may be so fatal, and it is so hard to clearly see, to rightly judge, to firmly act, that nothing can avail but the direct teaching, inspiration, and power of the Spirit of God. Happy are the father and the mother who have been forced in their helplessness to seek that Divine help from the very first!



If we only knew it, all education is useless apart from the Spirit of God. "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." And liberty is just what is most needed. Mechanical schemes, cut-and-dried precepts, are quite insufficient. Moving in the liberty of the Spirit you have insight and adaptiveness; at once you perceive that each child is a separate study, and must be approached in a different way. One is sanguine and over-confident, and he must constantly be humbled; another is diffident and desponding, and must be encouraged with the bright word of sympathy, spoken at the right moment. "I see it all, my child; I know what a fight it is in which you are engaged."[583] One is a born sceptic, and would know the reason why; he must be met with

patient and comprehending arguments according to his mental powers. Another has no speculative instincts, and questions have to be raised, doubts suggested, in order to save him from drifting into the easy-going acceptance of everything which he is told. One seems naturally inclined to be religious, and must be carefully watched lest the sensitiveness should become morbid, and a dominant thought should lead to mania, melancholy, or a possible reaction. Another seems to have no religious instinct, and the opportunity must be sought for awaking the sense of need, rousing the conscience, opening the eyes to God.

But again, in proportion as parents are led by the Spirit, and make their sacred charge a matter of constant and beseeching prayer, they will in their own person and conduct represent God to the children, and so supplement all the possible defects of the express training and discipline. If the command "Be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long"[584] is to have any weight with a child, he must live with those who themselves are in the fear of the Lord all the day long. A man must live near to God if he is to make God real to his children. A mother must hold very real converse with her Lord if His reality is to become obvious to her little ones. "As a child," says one,[585] "I always had a feeling that God and Jesus were such particular friends of mamma's, and were honoured more than words could tell." If such an impression is to be created, depend upon it God and Jesus must *be* particular friends of yours. No talk, however pious, can create that impression unless the hallowed friendship actually exists.



Again, led by the Spirit, we are filled with Divine love; and no training of children can have any valuable or permanent effect which does not issue from, which is not guided by, and does not result in, love. For love is the Divine educator. It is this which accounts for the frequently observed anomaly that children who seem to have inferior home advantages and very inadequate education turn out better than others for whom no labour or expense or care seems to be grudged. If love is not there, all the efforts will fail. Love is the only atmosphere in which the spirits of little children can grow. Without it the wisest precepts only choke, and the best-prepared knowledge proves innutritious. It must be a large love, a wise love, an inclusive love, such as God alone can shed abroad in the heart. Love of that kind is very frequently found in "huts where poor men lie," and consequently the children issuing out of them have been better trained than those whose parents have handed them over to loveless tutors or underlings.

And this may perhaps fitly lead us to consider the other point which is before us—the prominence which is, in the Proverbs, given to chastisement. "He that spareth his rod hateth his son, but he that loveth him, chasteneth him betimes."[586] "Chasten thy son, seeing there is hope, and set not thy heart on his destruction."[587] "Stripes that wound are a cleansing of evil, strokes of the recesses of the belly."[588] "Withhold not correction from the child; when thou beatest him with a rod he shall not die. Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from Sheol."[589] "The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself causeth shame to his mother."[590] "Correct thy son and he shall give thee rest, yea, he shall give delight unto thy soul."[591]



Corporal punishment seems to the Christian, and to the common sense of a society which is the product of the Christian spirit, degrading, brutalising, and essentially futile! It can only have even a modicum of good effect where it is inflicted by a loving hand, and in a loving spirit, without a trace of temper or cruelty, and obviously costing more to inflict than to bear. But even with all these conditions granted it is a most unsatisfactory method of punishment; it arouses vindictive feelings and savage passions. A whipped boy is almost sure to bully the next creature weaker than himself that he encounters; and acting only as a deterrent, it never reaches the conscience, or creates a sense of revolt from the sin for the sin's sake, which is the object of all wise, or at least of all paternal, punishment. We can only, therefore, set aside the precept to use the rod as one which was in harmony with darker and harder times before the Saviour of the world had come to reveal the inner life and to teach us how we are to deal with those mysterious and wonderful beings, our fellow-creatures.

But with this modification, and substituting "wise and merciful punishments" for "rod and stripes," these teachings remain of permanent validity. Our Heavenly Father chastens His children; by most gracious punishments He brings home to them the sense of sin, and leads them to repentance and amendment.[592] And earthly parents, in proportion as they are led by the Spirit and filled with love, will correct their children, not for their own pleasure, but for their children's good. The truth which underlies these apparently harsh injunctions is this: Love inflicts punishments, nor are any punishments so severe as those which Love inflicts; and only the punishments which Love inflicts are able to reform and to save the character of the delinquent.

We all of us know that weak and sentimental nature—too common among modern parents—which shrinks from inflicting pain under all circumstances. Seizing on the ill-understood doctrine that Love is the sovereign power in life and in education, it pleads in the name of Love that the offender may be spared, that he may escape the due penalty of his fault. That is not a love like God's love: and if you are careful to observe, it has not the remedial or saving effect which the love of God has. "He that declines to punish his child hates him; he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes." In the poor child's heart so much foolishness is bound up, so much wilfulness and temper, so much vanity and pride, so much sensuality and selfishness, so much unwholesome craving for amusement, it is so natural to the child to make pleasure the be-all and the end-all of life, that, if all this foolishness is to be driven away, there must be much sharp discipline and painful [Pg 312] correction. The Divine method of punishment seems to be to let men eat of the fruit of their doings until they loathe it. They rebelliously call out for meat in the wilderness, and it turns into a satiety, a bitterness, and a plague, while it is between their teeth. Is it possible that parents too, under the guidance of the Spirit, may chasten their children in the same way, bringing home to the wilful the painful effects of wilfulness, to the vain the ridiculous effects of vanity, to the selfish the disastrous issue of selfishness, to the sensual the ruin and the misery of sensuality? Might not the most effectual punishment for every fault be an enforced quiet in which the culprit is confronted with the inevitable outcome of the sin? Does not even the hardest heart begin to melt, does not the dullest conscience begin to grow sensitive, when the sure results of evil are aptly pourtrayed before the mind? What pride would have courage to grow if it had a glimpse of the hard, dry, loveless, unloved, heart which is its inevitable fruit? What young man would venture to take the first downward steps in impurity if he had ever formed a conception of the devastation of brain and heart and life which must ensue?

The rod cannot open the eyes; it can but set the cunning intellect to work to find a way of enjoying the sin and escaping the rod. But the opening of the eyes—at which all true punishment must aim—reveals a rod which is bound up with the sin, sure as the sin itself. It is the parents' solemn task—and many an inward sorrow must it cost—to bring home to his child's heart these truths of experience which the child cannot at present know. Wise penalties and "reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself causeth shame to his [Pg 313] mother."[593]

There is a voice, the voice of Divine Wisdom, which speaks continually to every parent, to every teacher of youth: "Incline thine ear," it says, "and hear the words of the wise, and apply thy heart unto my knowledge"—without attention and application this heavenly wisdom cannot be known. "For it is a pleasant thing," so the voice continues, "if thou keep these words within thee, if they be established together upon thy lips. That thy trust may be in the Lord,"—without whom the best-meant efforts will fail,—"I have made them known to thee this day, even to thee. Have not I written to thee excellent things of counsels and knowledge, to make thee know the certainty of the words of truth, that thou mayest carry back words of truth to them," those helpless and ignorant children whose needs "send thee" to me for instruction?[594]

The failures are numerous, disastrous, heart-breaking, but they are unnecessary. Your children are holy; they belong to the Saviour in whom you yourselves believe. Grasp that truth; go to Him in sublime faith. "Lord, it is not with Thee to save a part, to choose this one and save that. Thou wilt glorify Thyself in every one."[595] Surrender yourself to Him that He may use you to exhibit His Divine graces and saving love to the children. Live with Him daily, that the glory of the communion may not pass away from your face, or appear only by fits and starts—and so train up your child according to his way; and when he is old he will not depart from it.

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# XXIV.

[Pg 314]

## *FORGIVING.*

> "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."—Prov. xxiv. 28, 29.

"Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth, and let not thy heart be glad when he is overthrown, lest the Lord see it and it displease Him, and He turn away His wrath from him."—PROV. xxiv. 17, 18.

"He that is glad at calamity shall not be unpunished."—PROV. xvii. 5.

"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."—PROV. xxv. 21, 22.

There is no subject on which the teaching of the Proverbs more strikingly anticipates the morality of the New Testament than that of forgiveness to our enemies. Our Lord Jesus Christ could take some of these sayings and incorporate them unchanged into the law of His kingdom, for indeed it is not possible to surpass the power and beauty and truth of the command to feed those who have injured us if they are hungry, to give them drink when they are thirsty, and in this Divine way to kindle in them repentance for the injury which they have done. This is the high-water mark of moral excellence. No better state can be desired. When a human spirit is habitually in this tender and forgiving mood, it is already united with the Father of spirits, and lives. [Ps. 315]

It is almost superfluous to point out that even the saints of the Old Testament fall very far short of the lofty standard which is here set before us. The Psalmist, for example, is thinking of coals of a quite different sort when he exclaims: "As for the head of those that compass me about, let the mischief of their own lips cover them. Let burning coals fall upon them; let them be cast into the fire; into deep pits that they rise not up again."[596] That is the old elemental hate of human nature, the passionate, indignant appeal to a righteous God against those who have been guilty of a wrong or an injury. Even Jeremiah, one of the latest, and certainly not the least holy, of the prophets could cry out concerning his enemies: "Yet, Lord, Thou knowest all their counsel against me to slay me; forgive not their iniquity, neither blot out their sin from Thy sight; but let them be overthrown before Thee; deal Thou with them in the time of Thine anger."[597] Words painfully natural, words echoed by many a persecuted man of God, but yet quite inconsistent with the teaching of the Saviour in the Sermon on the Mount, the teaching already foreshadowed in this beautiful proverb.

But it may not be superfluous to notice that the Proverbs themselves, even those which stand at the head of this chapter, do not all touch the high-water mark of xxv. 21. Thus, for example, the motive which is suggested in xxiv. 18 for not rejoicing in the fall of an enemy is none of the highest. The idea seems to be, if you see your enemy undergoing punishment, if calamity is falling upon him from the Lord, then do not [Ps. 316] indulge in any insolent exultation, lest the Lord should be offended with you, and, in order to chastise your malignity, should cease to plague and trouble him. In such a view of the question, God is still regarded as a Nemesis that will resent any unseemly rejoicing in the calamity of another;[598] in proportion therefore as you wish to see your enemy punished, you must abstain from that joy in his punishment which would lead to its diminution. From a precept of that kind there is a vast moral stride to the simple prohibition of retaliation, announced without any reason given or suggested in xxiv. 29—"Say not, I will do so to him as he hath done to me, I will render to the man according to his work." And from this again there is an incalculable stride to the positive spirit of love, which, not content with simply abstaining from vindictiveness, actually turns the tables, and repays good for evil, looking with quiet assurance to the Lord, and the Lord alone, for recognition and reward. Our wonder is occasioned not because all the Proverbs do not reach the moral altitude of this one, but rather that this one should be so high. When an ideal is set up far in advance of the general practice and even of the general thoughts of the time, we can ascribe it only to the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

It needs no proof that forgiveness is better than revenge. We all know that—

"Revenge, at first though sweet,
Bitter ere long back on itself recoils."[599]

We all know that the immediate effect of forgiving our enemy is a sweet flow of tenderness in the soul, which [Ps. 317] surpasses in delight all the imagined joys of vindictiveness; and that the next effect is to soften and win the foe himself; the scornful look relents, the tears of passion give place to those of penitence, the moved heart is eager to make amends. We all know that nothing more powerfully affects our fellow-men than the exhibition of this placable temper.[600] We all know that in forgiving we share God's prerogative, and come into harmony with His Spirit.

Yet here is the melancholy fact that notwithstanding this proverbial truth, taken up into the teaching of our Saviour, and echoed in the writings of His Apostles,[601] even in a Christian society, forgiveness is almost as rare as it was in the days of King Solomon. Men are not ashamed—even professing Christians are not ashamed—to say about their enemies, "I will do so to him as he has done to me, I will render to the man according to his work." We even have a lurking admiration for such retaliatory conduct, calling it spirited, and we still are inclined to contemn one who acts on the Christly principle as weak or visionary. Still the old bad delight in seeing evil fall on the head of our enemies glows in our hearts; still the act of vengeance is performed, the bitter retort is given, the abusive letter is written, with the old sense of unhallowed pride and triumph. How is this? Ah, the simple truth is that it is a small matter to get right principles recognised, the whole difficulty lies in getting them practised. We need a power which can successfully contend against the storm of passion and self-will, in those terrible moments when all the calm lights of reason are quenched by the blinding surf of passion, and all the gentle voices of goodness are drowned by its roaring waves. [Pg 318]

Sometimes we hear it said that the moral teaching of Christ is not original, but that all His precepts may be found in the words and writings of ancient sages, just as His teaching about forgiveness is anticipated by the proverb. Yes, but His claim does not rest upon His teaching, but upon the Divine and supernatural power which He has at His command to carry out His doctrines in the conduct of His disciples. This is the point which we must realize if this sweet and beautiful ideal is to be worked out in our lives. We have but touched the fringe of the question when we have conned His words, or shaped conceptions of what a life would be passed in conformity to them. The centre of Christian doctrine is *power*, the power of Christ, the fountain of living waters opened in the heart, the grafting of the withering branches upon a living stock, the indwelling of Christ Himself, as the spring and principle of every holy action, and the effectual restraint on all our ungovernable passions.

But before looking more closely at this, we ought to pay some attention to the constant motive which our Lord, even in His teaching, presents for the practice of a forgiving disposition. He always bases the duty of forgiveness on the need which we have of God's forgiveness; He teaches us to pray, "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us;" and in the moving story of the unmerciful servant, who demanded the full payment from his fellow-servant just when his lord had pitifully remitted his own debt, He tells us that forgiveness of our enemies is an indispensable condition of our being forgiven by God. "His lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due. So shall also My Heavenly Father do unto you, if ye forgive not every one his brother from your hearts."[602] It is not therefore only, as it is sometimes stated, that we ought to be moved to pity by remembering what God has done for us. No, there is a much sterner thought in our Lord's mind; it is that if we do not forgive we shall not and cannot be forgiven. The forgiving spirit manifested to our fellow-men is that without which it is vain for us to come near and to ask God for pardon. If we have come, and are just about to offer our prayer, and if we then remember that we have aught against a brother, we must go first and be reconciled to him, before our prayer can be so much as heard. [Pg 319]

Here is certainly a motive of a very powerful kind. Which of us would dare to cherish the bitter thought, or proceed with our plan of vengeance, if we remembered and realized that our vindictiveness would make our own pardon at the hands of God impossible? Which of the countless deeds of retaliation that stain with blood the pages of history would have been perpetrated, and which of the perpetrators would not have tremblingly relinquished all thought of reprisals, if they had seen that in those savage acts of vengeance they were not, as they supposed, executing lawful justice, but actually cutting off their own hope of pardon before the throne of God? [Pg 320]

If we avenge ourselves, if society is constantly torn by the quarrels and the mutual recriminations of hostile men whose one thought is to give as good as they have got, it can only be because we do not believe, or do not realize, this solemn teaching of the Lord. He seems a faint and doubtful voice compared with the loud tumult of passion within; His authority seems weak and ineffectual compared with the mighty domination of the evil disposition. Powerful, therefore, as the motive is to which He constantly appeals, if He had left us nothing but His teaching on the subject we should not be materially better off than they who listened with attention to the teaching of the wise authors of these ancient Proverbs. What more has He left us?

It is His prerogative to give to those who believe in Him a changed heart. How much is meant by that, which only the changed heart can know! Outwardly we seem much alike; outwardly there is little sign of an inward transformation; but far as the east is from the west is the unregenerate heart from the regenerate, the Christless heart from one which He has taken in His hands, and by His great redemption created anew. Now

without stopping to follow the processes of faith by which this mighty change is effected, let us simply mark the characteristics of the change so far as it affects the matter in hand.

The first and most radical result of the New Birth is that God takes the place which Self has occupied. All the thoughts which have clustered about your own being now turn to His Being, as stray fragments of iron turn to the magnet. Consequently, all the emotions and passions which are stimulated by self-love give place to those which are stimulated by the love of God. It is as if the pipes of your aqueduct had been changed at the fountain head, disconnected from the malarious waters of the marsh, and connected with the pure and sparkling water of the hills. God's ways of regarding men, God's feelings towards men, His yearning over them, His pity for them, flow into the changed heart, and so preoccupy it that resentment, hatred, and malice are washed out like the sour dregs in a cup which is rinsed in a running stream. [Pg 321]

There is the man who did you the wrong—very cruel and unpardonable it was!—but, as all personal elements are quite out of the question, you regard him just as if you were not the injured being. You see him only as God sees him; you trace all the malignant workings of his mind; you know how the fire of his hate is a fire which burns the heart that entertains it. You see clearly how tormenting those revengeful passions are, how the poor soul mastered by them is diseased, how the very action in which it is triumphing now must become one day a source of bitter regret and implacable self-reproach; you soon begin to regard the ill deed as a shocking wound inflicted on the doer of it, and the wells of pity are opened. As if this enemy of yours had been quite innocent of all ill-will, and had been overtaken by some terrible calamity, your one instinctive thought is to help him and relieve him. Out of the fulness of your heart, without any sense of being magnanimous, or any thought of a further end,—simply for the pity of it,—you come to proffer him bread for his hunger and water in his thirst. [Pg 322]

Yes, it is in the atmosphere of pity that personal resentment dies away, and it is only by the power of the Son of Man that the heart can be filled with a pity large enough to pardon all the sins of our kind.

It is this thought—though without any definite statement of the means by which it is produced—that finds expression in Whittier's touching lines:—

"My heart was heavy, for its trust had been
Abused, its kindness answered with foul wrong;
So turning gloomily from my fellow-men,
One summer Sabbath day I strolled among
The green mounds of the village burying-place;
Where pondering how all human love and hate
Find one sad level; and how, soon or late,
Wronged and wrongdoer, each with meekened face,
And cold hands folded over a still heart,
Pass the green threshold of a common grave,
Whither all footsteps tend, whence none depart,
Awed for myself, and pitying my race,
Our common sorrow, like a mighty wave,
Swept all my pride away, and, trembling, I forgave."

Yes, one who is touched by the spirit of the Son of Man finds too much to pity in the great sorrowing world, and in its fleeting and uncertain life, to cherish vengeful feelings. Himself redeemed by the untold love of His Father, by the undeserved and freely offered pardon in Christ Jesus his Lord, he can feel for his enemies nothing but forbearance and love; if they too are Christians, he longs to win them back to the peace and joy from which their evil passion must have driven them; and if they are not, his eyes must fill with tears as he remembers how brief is their apparent triumph, how unsubstantial their gleam of joy. The desire to save them immediately masters the transitory wish to punish them. The pity of men, for the sake of the Son of Man, wins the day. [Pg 323]

And now we may just glance at the effect which the Christly conduct has upon the offender, and the reward which God has attached to its exercise.

It is one of the most beautiful traces of God's likeness in even bad men, a characteristic to which there is no parallel in the animal creation, that though passion awakes passion, wrath wrath, and vengeance revenge—so that savages pass their whole time in an unbroken series of blood feuds, the hideous retaliation bandied from

tribe to tribe and from man to man, generation after generation—the spirit of meekness, proceeding not from cowardice, but from love, disarms passion, soothes wrath, and changes vengeance into reconciliation. The gleam of forgiveness in the eye of the injured is so obviously the light of God that the wrongdoer is cowed and softened before it. It kindles a fire in his spirit, his heart melts, his uplifted hand falls, his angry voice grows tender. When men are so dehumanised as to be insensible to this softening effect, when they interpret the gentleness as weakness, and are moved by the forgiving spirit simply to further injury and more shameless wrong, then we may know that they are possessed,—they are no longer men,—they are passing into the category of the lost spirits, whom the forbearance of God Himself leads not to repentance but only to added sin.

But if you have ever by the sweet spirit of Christ so mastered your natural impulse as to return good for evil lovingly and whole-heartedly, and if you have seen the regenerating effect in the beautiful subjugation of your foe and his transformation into a friend, it is not necessary to say much of the reward which God has in [Pg 324] store for you. Do you not already possess it?

Yet the reward is certainly greater than you are able at once to apprehend. For what a secret is this which you possess, the secret of turning even the malignity of foes into the sweetest affection, the secret which lay in the heart of God as the spring and the means of man's redemption.[603] The highest reward that God can give to His creatures is to make them partakers of His nature as He has made them in His own image. When we share in a Divine attribute we enter so far into the Divine bliss; and in proportion as this attribute seems removed from our common human nature, our spirit must exult to find that it has been really appropriated. What further reward, then, can he who avenges not himself desire? The pulse of the Divine heart beats in him; the tides of the Divine life flow through him. He is like God—God who opposes to man's ingratitude the ocean of His pardoning love; he is conscious of that which is the fountain of joy in the Divine Being; surely a man must be satisfied when he awakes in God's likeness! And that satisfaction comes to every one who has heaped coals of fire on his enemy's head by feeding him in his hunger, and giving him water when athirst. Say not, "I will do so to him as he has done to me, I will render to the man according to his work." Love your enemies; pray for them which despitefully use you.

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# XXV.

[Pg 325]

## *THE KING.*

> "It is the glory of God to conceal a thing, but the glory of *kings* is to search out a matter.
>
> The heaven for height and the earth for depth, and the heart of *kings* is unsearchable.
>
> Take away the dross from the silver, and there cometh forth a vessel for the finer;
>
> Take away the wicked from before the *king*, and his throne shall be established in righteousness.
>
> Put not thyself forward in the presence of the *king*, and stand not in the presence of great men:
>
> Far better is it that it be said unto thee, Come up hither, than that thou shouldest be put lower in the presence of the *prince* whom thine eyes have seen."—PROV. xxv. 2-7.

It will be remembered that in the book of Samuel there are two accounts of the monarchy and its origin lying side by side,—different, and to all appearance irreconcilable. One set of passages seems to imply that the king was appointed by God's holy purpose to fulfil the objects of His government. But another set of passages seems to represent the outcry for a king as a rebellion against the sovereignty of the Lord, and the appointment of a king as a punishment for the people's sin. It is in agreement with the first idea that provision is made in the Law for a monarchical government; but it is in agreement with the second idea that the actual [Pg 326] kings prove to be for the most part incompetent and faithless rulers, "who do evil in the sight of the Lord," and that even the best of them fall into gross sins, or are at any rate guilty of grave errors. Thus David stumbled into a miry pit; Jehoshaphat experienced defeat in his alliance with Ahab; Josiah was slain at the

battle of Megiddo; Uzziah was smitten with leprosy; and Hezekiah committed an imprudence which incidentally brought the great calamity upon his country. So it is all through.

Now the only satisfactory explanation that this twofold aspect of the kingship seems to admit of is one which goes deep down into the prophetic and inspired character of Israel and its history. The king in his ideal aspect is throughout a type and a foreshadowing of the Anointed One that was to come; and the actual failure of all the kings to realize the ideal, to govern wisely, to establish righteousness, or even to observe the moral law in their own persons, necessarily threw men's thoughts forward to Him who should sit upon the throne of David, and carry out in ways not yet realized or even conceived the noble and exalted ideas which clustered round the theocratic throne. Many hasty critics have been swift to see and to censure the ignoble failures of the men who sat upon the thrones of Judah and Israel; some critics have developed with sufficient clearness the noble ideal which always underlay the monarchy even in the moments of its deepest decline. But comparatively few have seen the significance of this contrast between the ideal and the actual; and consequently only a few have perceived with what a prolonged and emphatic voice the whole story of the Kings spoke of Christ.

The contrast just pointed out in the historic books appears with equal distinctness in this book of Wisdom. The [IPg 337] proverbial sayings about the king exhibit the twofold thought; and the reconciliation is only found when we have realized the Kingship of Christ and can bring that idea to explain the ancient forecast. Thus the study of the things concerning the king is to the thoughtful reader of the Proverbs a study of the things concerning Christ. The ideal elements speak of Him; the actual shortcomings cry out for Him.

First we will review what is said to the glory and honour of the king. He comes before us as the embodiment of righteousness.[604] "It is an abomination to kings to commit wickedness, for the throne is established by righteousness. Righteous lips are the delight of kings, and they love him that speaketh right."[605] "A king that sitteth on the throne of judgment winnoweth away all evil with his eyes.... A wise king winnoweth the wicked and bringeth the threshing wheel over them."[606] As he purges the wicked, so he encourages the righteous: "He that loveth pureness of heart hath grace on his lips, the king shall be his friend."[607] There is a great severity in his government: "The wrath of a king is as messengers of death; and a wise man will pacify [IIPg 338] it."[608] "The king's wrath is as the roaring of a lion."[609] On the other hand, his mercy is one with his severity: "His favour is as dew upon the grass."[609] "In the light of the king's countenance is life, and his favour is as a cloud of the latter rain."[610] "Mercy and truth preserve the king, and his throne is upholden by mercy."[611] The fact is that his government is a viceroyalty. He is the human instrument of the Divine Will. "The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord; as the watercourses"—which the farmer directs and leads over his fields according to his purpose—"he turneth it whithersoever he will."[612] Thus the king expresses precisely "the Lord's favour towards a servant that dealeth wisely, and the Lord's wrath against him that causeth shame."[613] The king manifests the Lord's spirit in dealing with the subject, judging the cause of the poor as the Lord does. "The king that judgeth faithfully the poor, his throne shall be established for ever."[614] He is, in a word, a manifestation—a revelation—of God Himself. "The glory of God is to conceal a thing," *i.e.*, to be unsearchable and unknowable, "and the glory of kings is to search a matter out;" the king, searching the deep things of God, and becoming the interpreter of the Divine will to men, is Himself in the place of God to us. "The heaven for height and the earth for depth, and the heart of kings there is no searching." Reflecting the righteousness, the mercy, the power of God, his throne is bathed in the celestial light. "Take away dross from the silver, and there cometh forth a vessel for the finer; take away evil men [IIIPg 339] before the king, and his throne shall be fixed in justice."[615]

In the presence of such a sovereign the subject may well abase himself, even the greatest and wisest may count himself small. "Glorify not thyself before a king, and in the place of the great do not stand. For better is it that it be said to thee, Come up hither, than that thou shouldest be put lower in the presence of a prince whom thine eyes have seen."[616]

Rebellion against such a sovereign is the merest infatuation. "Against him there is no rising up."[617] "The terror of the king is as the roaring of a lion, he that provoketh him to anger sinneth against his own life."[618] "My son, fear thou the Lord and the king, and meddle not with them who are given to change; for their calamity shall rise suddenly; and who knoweth the destruction of them both."[619]

It is evident that in all this we have an ideal picture. No king that ever sat on an earthly throne, no David or Hezekiah, no Antoninus or Trajan, no Charlemagne or St. Louis, no Alfred or Edward the First, ever in the faintest degree approached the fulfilment of the ideal. The divinity which hedged them was of quite a different kind from this open vision of God, this human mediatorship, this absolute subjection to the Divine will. And when we leave the select class of great and good kings, and look at the ordinary type of the strong and capable ruler, Saul or Ahab, Alexander or Cæsar, Constantine or Diocletian, Clovis or Rollo, William the Conqueror or Henry II., Louis XIV. or Frederick the Great, the Czar Peter or Napoleon, we see at once that we have passed into a region of thought and action where the description of the Proverbs becomes unreal and visionary. [Pg 330]

There is but one way of explaining the language before us. *It points to Christ*. In Him alone is it or can it be realized. He is the only sovereign that has any union with God which is at all like identity. He is the only Ruler who blends with absolute infallibility severity and mercy. Of what other king could it be said that "purity of heart" secures His friendship? What other king has made it his first and supreme object to judge faithfully the poor? What other government but His has sought its security in that essential duty and its fulfilment? It is Christ alone whose favour descends on the heart like dew on the grass, or as a cloud of the latter rain. His is the only rule against which rebellion is more than a political crime, and becomes an actual sin. Of Him alone can it be said with any breadth of meaning or certainty of fulfilment, "Let no falsehood from the tongue be spoken to the King, and no falsehood shall go out of his mouth. A sword is the king's tongue, and that not of flesh."[620] It is only a king absolutely righteous and absolutely merciful that can ever bear down with effective force upon lies and liars. It is only He that would see in lying the prime sin, the incurable disease, the unpardonable treason.

The King is Christ. Before He came there was in the line of His foreshadowing a typical Divine right of kings. But since His coming all such kingships have been anachronisms. The appeal which used to be made to the Old Testament to support that famous political dogma was indeed its surest refutation and condemnation. For all that is said there of the indefeasible prerogative, coupled as it is with an infallibility of judgment, a perfect moral goodness, and an irresistible power, applied and could apply only to Christ. Where absolute monarchy is not Christship it becomes, as so many familiar passages in the Old Testament show, a tyranny and an oppression, a cause of national corruption and decay. [Pg 331]

Now this leads us, in the second place, to notice how the actual failure and consequent mischief of the kingship are reflected in the proverbs, and especially those later proverbs which date from the decline and fall of the monarchy. We have only to glance over the books of Samuel and Kings to see what kind of men the occupants of the throne were; few of them show any marked ability, most of them by their folly and stupidity lead their people with hurried strides towards the threatened catastrophe. So far from acting as vicegerents of the Lord, it is their special characteristic that they are the authors of the prevailing religious apostasy. Even the more favourable exceptions, the kings who in the main did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, had not spiritual energy enough to purify the worship and restore the allegiance of their people to the Lord. Now it would be some insolent and witless tyrant who would desolate the country and drive his subjects into revolt. "A raging lion, a ravening bear, a wicked ruler over a poor people. O prince, that lackest understanding and art a great oppressor, he that hateth rapine shall prolong his days."[621] Now it would be a headstrong prince who would scorn all counsel, and, refusing to be advised, would himself retire from the helm of the state. "Where no wise steering is, the people falleth; but in the multitude of counsellors there is safety."[622] Setting aside the maxim, "Every purpose is established by counsel, and by wise guidance make thou war,"[623] his purposes would be disappointed.[624] Now the earth would be burdened and tremble with the portent of a servant as king,[625] one who as a servant might be excellent, but once on the throne would reveal all the weaknesses and vices which are essentially servile.[626] Now a liar would occupy the throne, and lying lips ill become a prince.[627] And now, owing to the weakness and folly of the prince, the state would fall into pieces and be torn with wildly contending factions: "For the transgression of a land many are the princes thereof, but by a man of understanding and knowledge right will be prolonged."[628] Under the rule of the wicked, population disappears.[629] And while "in the multitude of people is the king's glory, in the want of people is the destruction of the prince."[630] Under the tyrant's sway "the people sigh."[631] Their persons are insecure, and their property is taken from them in the form of forced gifts or benevolences.[632] And as the king, such are his servants; his readiness to hearken to falsehood renders them all wicked.[633] The atmosphere of the court becomes corrupt: all truth, sincerity, purity disappear. The courtier is afraid to speak his mind, lest [Pg 332] [Pg 333]

jealous listeners should report the words to the monarch's suspicious ear. The very freedom of social life disappears, and the table of the king becomes a trap to the unwary. "When thou sittest to eat with a ruler, consider diligently him that is before thee, and put a knife to thy throat if thou be a man given to appetite; be not desirous of his dainties, seeing they are deceitful meat."[634]

Here is the complete and absolute corruption of the Divine royalty. The description holds true age after age; suggested by the decline of the monarchy in Israel, it applies accurately to the Imperial government at Rome, and it might have been written to describe the character and the government of the Stuarts in England. Strong in what they supposed to be their Divine Right, they became liars and hearkened to falsehood; their servants became wicked; their government perished from its own inherent rottenness. The description holds too of the French monarchy from the time of Louis XIV. to its fall. And it would seem, as indeed we may confidently believe, that the slow and imperceptible decay of the faith in the divine right of kings has been in God's hands [Pg 334] a long preparation for the reign of Him whose right it is to reign, Jesus Christ, the true King of men.

But there is still one other characteristic cause of the perverted kingship, to which attention is drawn in xxxi. 2-8: "Give not thy strength unto women, nor thy ways to that which destroyeth kings. It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine, nor for princes to say, Where is strong drink? Lest they drink and forget the law, and pervert the judgment of any that is afflicted." These fleshly vices are peculiarly common and peculiarly ruinous to kings, preventing them from pleading "the cause of such as are left desolate," and from "ministering judgment to the poor and needy."[635] It is in realizing the private life of kings, and in observing how seldom they have practised temperance, chastity, self-control, and how readily their contemporaries and even posterity have dispensed them from these primary obligations, that we plainly recognise the broad divergence between the facts of earthly monarchies and the description of the heavenly monarchy, and thus are prepared to recognise with gratitude and awe the sole sovereignty of Christ. The cry of the Florentines under the temporary excitement created by Savonarola's preaching was, "Jesus is our King, only Jesus." That is the constant and ever-swelling cry of human hearts. The types and shadows fall away; through the forms the spirit becomes apparent. It is Christ that claims and wins and enchains our loyalty. We are His subjects, He is our absolute Lord; we have no king but Jesus.

There is in every human heart a loyalty which seeks for a fitting object; if it finds no lawful king, it will [Pg 335] attach itself to a pretender. What pathos there is in the sacrifice which men have made, and in the deeds which they have dared, for Pretenders who have had no claim upon their devotion or allegiance! "Show me my rightful sovereign," seems to be the implicit demand of us all. And the answer has been given, "Behold, your king cometh unto you," in the lowly person, but commanding majesty, of Jesus. Many have accepted this and have cried, "Blessed is the king that cometh in the name of the Lord."[636]

Shall we not bring our loyalty to Him, recognising the One whom prophets and wise men foretold, and acknowledging in His sway the authority which all other governments, even the best of them, lack? Let no false shame or fear restrain our homage; let not the sneers of those over whom "other lords have dominion" keep our knees from bending, and our tongues from confessing, "The fear of man bringeth a snare; but whoso putteth his trust in the Lord shall be safe. Many seek the ruler's favour,"—their whole thought is to stand well with the powers that be, and to secure the recognition of the Pretender who happens at any given moment to be directing the affairs of the world,—"but a man's judgment cometh from the Lord," his rightful King,[637] and to stand right with Him is all that need concern us. How well the King of men understood that because He came in humility—His birthplace a manger, His throne a fishing-boat or a wayside well, riding not in chariots of state, "but on an ass, and the foal of an ass;" because His appeal would be, not to the eye, but to [Pg 336] the heart; not to the outward, but the inward; not to the temporal, but to the eternal,—men, with their perverted and misapplied loyalties, would reject Him and be ashamed to confess Him. False kingships have dazzled our eyes, and hidden from us the grandeur of a Sovereign who is among us as one that serveth. From the touch of His humiliation we shrink.

But if the heart recognises and owns its lawful Sovereign; if, captivated by His indescribable beauty and bowed before His indisputable authority, it seeks only in profound obeisance and absolute surrender, to worship and adore and serve, how royal is His treatment, how unstinted are His largesses. "Come up hither," He says, bringing the soul higher and higher, into fuller vision, into more buoyant life, into more effectual service. The evil ruler, we saw, made all his servants wicked. Christ, as King, makes all His servants holy, dwelling in them, and subduing their hearts to Himself in ever truer devotion; He through them carries out His vast designs of love in those portions of His dominion where rebels still rise up against Him, and where

poor deluded hearts still fretfully cry, "We will not have this Man to rule over us." "In the multitude of people is the king's glory." May God hasten the time when all peoples and tongues shall bow down to and worship our King!

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# XXVI.

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## *THE FOOL.*

"As snow in summer, and as rain in harvest, so honour is not seemly for a fool....

A whip for the horse, a bridle for the ass, and a rod for the back of fools.

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.

He that sendeth a message by the hand of a fool cutteth off his own feet, and drinketh in damage.

The legs of the lame hang loose: so is a parable in the mouth of fools.

As a bag of gems in a heap of stones, so is he that giveth honour to a fool.

As a thorn that goeth up into the hand of a drunkard, so is a parable in the mouth of fools.

As an archer that woundeth all, so is he that hireth the fool and he that hireth them that pass by.

As a dog that returneth to his vomit, so is a fool that repeateth his folly.

Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit? there is more hope of a fool than of him."—PROV. xxvi. 1, 3-12.

This passage points out certain characteristics of the fool, a term which occurs so frequently in the book of Proverbs that we must try to conceive clearly what is to be understood by it. The difficulty of forming a distinct conception arises from the fact that there are three different words, with different shades of meaning, all rendered by the one English expression, fool or folly. For want of carefully distinguishing these delicate varieties of the original, some of the proverbs appear in English tautological and almost meaningless. We must try then to separate and to understand these several terms.

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The Hebrew word which most frequently occurs in the book to designate fool, אֱוִיל, together with its derivative, which is the usual word for folly, אִוֶּלֶת, signifies weakness. We are to think of that ignorant, inconsiderate, sanguine, and self-confident temper which eschews counsel, which will have its own way, which declines to be governed by reason, which forms fond expectations and baseless hopes, and which is always sure that everything will turn out according to its wish, though it takes no means to secure the desired result. Perhaps the simplest way of describing the habit of mind and the type of character intended by the Hebrew is to use the word *infatuation*. This would not do as a translation in all the passages where it occurs, but it will serve to point out the underlying idea.

The word which comes next in frequency, כְּסִיל,—the word used uniformly throughout the particular passage before us,—has at its root the notion of grossness, the dull and heavy habit of one whose heart has waxed fat, whose ears are slow to hear, and whose higher perceptions and nobler aspirations have succumbed to the sensual and earthly nature. We have to think of moral, as well as mental, stupidity, of insensibility to all that is true and good and pure. The fool in this sense is such a dullard that he commits wickedness without perceiving it,[638] and utters slanders almost unconsciously;[639] he does not know when to be silent;[640] whatever is in him quickly appears,[641] but when it is known it is very worthless;[642] nor has he the sense to get wisdom, even when the opportunity is in his hand;[643] his best advantages are quickly wasted and he is

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none the better.[644] Perhaps the English word which best fits the several suggestions of the Hebrew one is *senseless*.

The third term, נָבָל, occurs only four times in the book. It is derived from a verb signifying to fade and wither. It describes the inward shrinking and shrivelling of a depraved nature, the witlessness which results from wickedness. It contains in itself a severer censure than the other two. Thus "He that begetteth a *senseless* man (כְּסִיל) doeth it to his sorrow, but the father of the *bad fool* (נָבָל) hath no joy."[645] In the one case there is trouble enough, in the other there is nothing but trouble. Thus it is one of the four things for which the earth trembles when a man of this kind is filled with meat.[646] This third character is sketched for us in the person of Nabal, whose name, as Abigail says, is simply the Hebrew word for fool in its worst sense, which fits exactly to its bearer. But dismissing this type of folly which is almost synonymous with consummate wickedness, of which indeed it is the outcome, we may turn to the distinction we have drawn between infatuation and senselessness in order to explain and understand some of the Proverbs in which the words occur.

First of all we may notice how difficult it is to get rid of the folly of infatuation: "Though thou shouldest bray [Pg 340] a person possessed of it in a mortar with a pestle among bruised corn, yet will it not depart from him."[647] "It is bound up in the heart of a child,"[648] and the whole object of education is to get it out; but if childhood passes into manhood, and the childish wilfulness, self-confidence, and irrationality are not expelled, the case is well-nigh hopeless. Correction is practically useless; "He must be a thorough fool," it has been said, "who can learn nothing from his own folly;" but that is precisely the condition of the infatuated people we are considering; the only correction of their infatuation is a further increase of it.[649] The reason is practically choked; the connection between cause and effect is lost: thus every ill consequence of the rash act or of the vicious habit is regarded as a misfortune instead of a fault. The wretched victim of his own folly reviles fortune, nature, men, and even God, and will not recognise that his worst enemy is himself. Thus, while the wise are always learning and growing rich from experience, "the infatuation of senseless men is infatuation still."[650] It is this which makes them so hopeless to deal with; their vexation being quite irrational, and always refusing to recognise the obvious facts, is worse than a heavy stone or the piled-up overweight [Pg 341] of sand for others to bear.[651] If a wise man has a case with such a person, the ill-judged fury and the misplaced laughter alike make it impossible to arrive at any sound settlement.[652]

The untrained, undisciplined nature, which thus declines the guidance of reason and is unteachable because of its obstinate self-confidence, is constantly falling into sin. Indeed, strictly speaking, its whole attitude is sinful, its every thought is sin.[653] For reason is God's gift, and to slight it is to slight Him. He requires of us a readiness to be taught, and an openness to the lessons which are forced upon us by Nature, by experience, by our own human hearts. This flighty, feather-brained, inconsequential mode of thinking and living, the wilful neglect of all the means by which we might grow wiser, and the confident assurance that, whatever happens, we are not accountable for it, are all an offence against God, a failure to be what we ought to be, a missing of the mark, a neglect of the law, which is, in a word, sin.

But now let us look at the fool in the *second* signification, which occurs in this twenty-sixth chapter so frequently,—the man who has become spiritually gross and insensible, unaware of Divine truths and consequently obtuse to human duties. We may take the proverbs in the order in which they occur. "As snow in summer, and as rain in harvest, so honour is not seemly for a fool." It is a melancholy fact that the kind of person here referred to is too often found in positions of honour among men. Men rise to distinction in an artificial order of society, not by wisdom, but by the accident of birth and opportunity; and not unfrequently [Pg 342] the ill-placed honour itself leads to that insensibility which is so severely censured. The crass dulness, the perversity of judgment, the unfeeling severity, often displayed by prominent and distinguished persons, are no matter of surprise, and will not be, until human society learns to bring its honours only to the wise and the good. "Delicate living is not seemly for such persons."[654] It is precisely the comfort, the dignity, the exaltation, which prove their ruin. Now it is true that we cannot always trace the effects of this misplaced honour, but we are reminded that it is out of the course of Nature's eternal laws, incongruous as snow in summer, hurtful as rain in harvest. Consequently the due penalty must inevitably come. According to one reading of ver. 2, this penalty which overtakes the exalted fool is thus described:[655] "As the sparrow in her wandering, and the swallow in her flying, so a gratuitous curse shall come upon him." In any case ver. 3 states clearly enough what will eventually happen: "A whip for the horse, a bridle for the ass, and a rod for

the back of fools." It is not, of course, that this penalty can be remedial, but Nature herself prepares a "rod for the back of him that is void of understanding;"[656] "As judgments are prepared for scorners, so are stripes for the back of fools."[657] Nor must we only understand this of fools that attain to unnatural honour: there are many dullards and insensates who are not made such by the stupidity of misdirected admiration, but by their own moral delinquencies; and as surely as the sparrow after flitting about all day returns to her nest in the dusk, or as the swallow in the long summer flight arrives at her appointed place, the punishment of folly will find out the delinquent. It may be long delayed, but an awakening comes at last; the man who hardened his heart, who turned away from the pleadings of God and mocked at His judgments, who chose the vanishing things of time and scorned the large fruition of eternity, discovers his incredible stupidity, and the lash of remorse falls all the more heavily because it is left in the hand of conscience alone.[658] We must never lose sight of the fact that by the fool is not meant the simple or the short-witted; there is in this folly of the proverbs a moral cause and a moral responsibility which involve a moral censure; the senseless of whom we are speaking are they whose "heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest haply they should perceive with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart."[659]

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We are in the main obliged to leave the insensate to God and their conscience, because it is well-nigh impossible for us to deal with them. They are intractable and even savage as wild animals. "Let a bear robbed of her whelps meet a man, rather than a fool in his infatuation."[660] They are irritated with any suggestion of spiritual things, indignant with any hint of their own case and its responsibilities. If, on the one hand, you try to approach them on their own ground, to realize their motives and work upon the base ideas which alone influence such minds, you seem to lose all power over them by coming down to their level. "Answer not a fool according to his infatuation, lest thou also be like him."[661] If, on the other hand, you feel bound to convict him of his folly, and to humble him to a sense of his position, you are obliged to use the language which will be intelligible to him. "Answer a fool according to his infatuation, lest he be wise in his own eyes."[662] I recollect one Sunday afternoon passing by a large village public-house, and it chanced that a little group of street preachers were doing their best to make known the Gospel to the idlers who were sitting on the benches outside. Going up to interest the men in what was being said, I was confronted by the landlord, who was in a state of almost frenzied indignation. He denounced the preachers as hypocrites and scoundrels, who lived on the honest earnings of those whom he saw around him. Every attempt to bring him to reason, to show that the men in question spent their money on drink and not on the preachers, to secure a patient hearing for the gracious message, was met only with violent abuse directed against myself. The man was precisely what is meant in these verses by a fool, one in whom all spiritual vision was blinded by greed and sensuality, in whom the plainest dictates of common sense and human courtesy were silenced; to answer him in his own vein was the only way of exposing his folly, and yet to answer him in such a way was to come down to his own level. What could be done except to leave him to the judgments which are prepared for scorners and to the stripes which await the back of fools? A fool uttereth all his anger, and facing the torrent of angry words it is impossible to effectually carry home to him any wholesome truth.[663]

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We have seen how the kind of man that we are describing is in an utterly false position when any dignity or honour is attributed to him; indeed, to give such honour is much the same as binding a stone in a sling to be immediately slung out again, probably to some one's injury;[664] but he is almost equally useless in a subordinate position. If, for instance, he is employed as a messenger, he is too dull to rightly conceive or correctly report the message. He will almost certainly colour it with his own fancies, if he does not pervert it to his own ends. To receive and to deliver any message accurately requires a certain truthfulness in perception and in speech of which this unfortunate creature is entirely devoid. Thus any one who employs him in this capacity might as well cut off his own feet, as he drinks damage to himself.[665]

It is the awful punishment which comes to us all, when we allow our heart to wax gross, that wisdom itself becomes folly in our lips, and truth herself becomes error. Thus if we know a proverb, or a text, or a doctrine, we are sure to give it a lame application, so that, instead of supporting what we wish to enforce, it hangs down helpless like a cripple's legs.[666] In this way the insensate corruptness of the Mediæval Church tried to justify the abuse of giving great ecclesiastical preferments to young children by quoting the text, "Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise." Sometimes the result of this culpable stupidity is far more disastrous; it is like "a thorn which runs up into a drunkard's hand," visiting with terrible condemnation those who have misused and perverted the truth,[667] as when Torquemada and the

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administrators of the Inquisition based their diabolical conduct on the gracious words of the Lord, "Compel them to come in." No, the fool's heart can give no wholesome message; it will turn the very message of the Gospel into a curse and a blight, and by its dull and revolting insensibility it will libel God to man, suggesting that the Infinite Father, the Eternal God, is altogether such an one as these who profess to speak in His name.

The offence of the fool then cannot be condoned on the ground that he is only an enemy to himself. It is his master that he wrongs. As the proverb says, "A master produces all things, but a fool's wages and hirer too pass away."[668] The fool loses what he earns himself: that is true, but he undoes his employer also. One is our Master, even Christ; He hires us for service in His vineyard; when we suffer our heart to wax dull, even [Pg 347] when we grow unspiritual, unresponsive, and insensate, it is not only that we lose our reward, but we crucify the Son of God afresh and put Him to an open shame.

And the worst, the most mournful, feature about this fool's condition is that it tends to a perpetual self-repetition: "As a dog that returneth to his vomit, so a fool is always repeating his folly."[669] Every hardening of the heart prepares for a fresh hardening, every refusal of truth will lead to another refusal. Last Sunday you managed to evade the message which God sent you: that makes it much easier to evade the message He sends you to-day. Next Sunday you will be almost totally indifferent. Soon you will get out of reach altogether of His word, saying it does you no good. Then you will deny that it is His word or His message. You pass from folly to folly, from infatuation to infatuation, until at last you can with a grave face accept the monstrous self-contradiction of materialism, or wallow unresisting in the slime of a tormenting sensuality. "As the dog returns to his vomit"!

It must be owned that the condition of the fool seems sufficiently sad, and the gloom is deepened by the fact that our book knows nothing of a way by which the fool may become wise. The Proverbs uniformly regard the foolish and the wise as generically distinct; between the two classes there is a great gulf fixed. There is the fool, trusting in his own heart, incurring stripes, not profiting by them, always the same incorrigible and hopeless creature; and there is the wise man, always delivered, learning from experience, becoming better [Pg 348] and better.[670] The only suggestion of hope is a comparative one: "Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit? there is more hope of a fool than of him."[671] But there is no tone of confidence about this assurance, because, as we have repeatedly seen, the case of the proud or conceited man is regarded as practically desperate.

No, for comfort and hope in this matter we have to turn away from the Ancient Wisdom to the revealed Wisdom, Christ Jesus. It is He and He alone who practically forbids us to be hopeless about any one. A noble Roman in the time of the Punic Wars received an honourable recognition from the Senate because he had not in the darkest times despaired of the Republic. That is the kind of debt that we owe to the Saviour. He has not despaired of any human being; He will not let us despair. It is His peculiar power, tried and proved again and again, to turn the fool into the wise man. Observing the threefold distinction which is hidden under the word we have been examining, Christ is able to arouse the weak, fond, infatuated soul to a sense of its need. Could there be a better instance than that of the woman at the well,—a foolish creature living in conscious sin, yet full of specious religious talk? Did He not awake in her the thirst for the living water, and satisfy the craving which He had excited? Christ is able to transform the dull and heavy soul, that has suffered itself to be mastered by greed and petrified by selfishness. Was not this what He did to Zaccheus the publican? And even [Pg 349] with that worst kind of fool, whose heart is withered up within him by reason of sin, and who has learnt to say in his heart that there is no God,[672] the Lord is not helpless. We do not see such an one in the pages of the New Testament, because the folly of Atheism was not among the follies of those times. But in our own day it is an experience by no means uncommon; when an avowed infidel comes under the power of the Gospel, Christ enters into him with the overwhelming conviction that there is a God; Christ shows him how it is sin which has thus obscured the elementary conviction of the human spirit; and, by the direct power of Christ, his heart comes to him again as that of a little child, while in the rapturous joy of believing he lays aside the folly which made him doubt along with the sin which made him unwilling to believe.

# XXVII.

## *LIVING DAY BY DAY.*

> "Boast not thyself of to-morrow, for thou knowest not what a day will bring forth."—PROV. xxvii. 1.
>
> "The grave and destruction are never satisfied; and the eyes of men are never satisfied;" and LXX. adds, "An abomination to the Lord is he who sets his eye, and undisciplined men uncontrolled in tongue."—PROV. xxvii. 20.
>
> "Whoso keepeth the fig tree shall eat the fruit thereof, so he that waits on his Lord eats of the honour."—PROV. xxvii. 18.

Here is a wholesome lesson for us. We are to trust no future, however pleasant; we are to dwell in no past, however honourable. Life consists of a present, given to us day by day; this is our whole wealth; squandered, it cannot be recovered; neglected, it withers as a leaf. Titus, the Roman Emperor, would say in the evening, when he had omitted his duties or failed in his purposes, *Perdidi diem*, "I have lost a day;"—yes, that lost day is lost for ever; other days may come, but not that one; the duties of that day may be performed afterwards or by other hands, but still the day is lost, because it passed away empty. The thief which cheats us of our days, and beggars us of our wealth, is the specious thought that to-morrow belongs to us. The illusion is as old as the world, but is to-day as fresh and powerful as ever. We have to shake ourselves free of a spell, and awake out of a dream, to see that when to-morrow comes it is already to-day. [Pg 351]

We only begin to live in any true and satisfactory sense when we have learnt to take each day by itself, and to use it as if it were our last, and indeed as if it were our all; dismissing the thought of to-morrow as a mere phantom which for ever evades our grasp. Life is a mosaic, a large work shaping on the wall or in the dome of some vast cathedral which eye hath not yet seen; and it can only be effectually wrought if, with minute and concentrated care, the little piece of coloured glass which we call To-day is duly fixed into its bedding and fitted exactly to its immediate neighbours. "Why do you work with such intensity?" the great artist was once asked; "Because I work for eternity," was the answer. And that is why each day is of such importance; that is why each day demands all our thought and care: eternity is made up of days, and the present day is all of eternity that we can ever possess.

It is well for us then each morning to take the day fresh from God's hands, and at once to throw our whole soul into it, and to live it with a pure intensity, a sense of solemn and joyful responsibility.

> "Oh, Day, if I squander a wavelet of thee,
> A mite of my twelve-hours' treasure,
> The least of thy gazes or glances
> (Be they grants thou art bound to or gifts above measure),
> One of thy choices or one of thy chances
> (Be they tasks God imposed thee or freaks of thy pleasure),—
> My Day, if I squander such labour or leisure,
> Then shame fall on Asolo, mischief on me."[673]

But it may be said, Is not this the life of a mere butterfly? Is it not the mark of a prudent man to work with his eye on the future,—"Prepare thy work without, and make it ready for thee in the field, and afterwards build thine house"?[674] Is it not just what we have to complain of in the foolish man that he ignores to-morrow, —"A prudent man seeth the evil and hideth himself, but the simple pass on and suffer for it"?[675] [Pg 352]

Here is an apparent contradiction which requires reflection. And the difficulty increases when we remember that most worthy works are the labour of years: an architect lays his plans for a great building which he can hardly hope to see finished in his own lifetime; an author spends days and months and years in the preparation of materials, and must depend on the uncertain future for a time to shape them into a book; a statesman, in proportion as he is wise, avoids what is called a hand-to-mouth policy, and lays his plans with his eye on distant possibilities, well knowing that his immediate actions are liable to misunderstanding, and may prove to be a complete failure unless the opportunity is accorded him of realizing his far-reaching

schemes. And, in the same way, youth is spent in education which derives all its value from the expected years of manhood, and all the days of a good life are necessarily a preparation for that which is to come after: we must study in order that we may teach; we must train ourselves for duties which will come upon us, as we may reasonably suppose, in some distant future. Yet our to-morrow is unknown; we are not to boast ourselves of it; we cannot tell what a day may bring forth, and must therefore live only in to-day.

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Now the solution of this difficulty leads us to one of the profoundest of all spiritual truths. It is this: No life can be worth anything at all apart from the Eternal God, and faith in Him. Life cannot be really lived if it is merely "a measure of sliding sand" taken "from under the feet of the years." Our swift days cannot be effectually and wisely used unless we are linked with Him who embraces in Himself the past, the present, and the future. Our work, whatever it may be, cannot be rightly done unless we are, and know ourselves to be, in the great Taskmaster's sight. The proper use of each day can only be made if we are confident that our times are in His hands; only in this quiet assurance can we have composure and detachment of spirit enough to give our whole strength to the duty in hand. We must be sure that the Master-Artist knows the whole mosaic, and is ordering all the parts, before we can surrender ourselves to the task of putting to-day's piece into its place; we must have complete faith in the Architect who is designing the whole structure, before we can have our mind at leisure from itself to chip our block of stone or to carve our tiny gurgoyle. We can only live in the present, making the most of that which is really ours, on condition that we have God as our Future, relieving us of all anxious care, and assuring to us just strength for to-day.

Thus our text has an implied contrast, which we may draw out in this way: "Boast not thyself of to-morrow, for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth;" but boast thyself in God all the day long,[676] for thou knowest that He will bring forth righteousness, wisdom, and love continually.

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Now let us follow out some of the consequences of this spiritual attitude. Examine the condition of these restless human hearts all around us without God. They are all toiling for to-morrow. Here is one making money, as it is called; he is looking forward to laying aside so many thousands this year; in a few more years he hopes to realize a round sum which will relieve him from the necessity of toil and of further money-making. His eye is set upon that goal. At last he reaches it. Now his desire should be satisfied, but no, "Sheol and Abaddon are never satisfied, and the eyes of man are never satisfied."[677] He does not stay a night at the desired goal; he is off before sunset; all the strain and the fret must be faced over again. Or look at the boundless ambition which possesses godless men; honours achieved only whet their appetite for more. We need not assume that the ambition is unworthy; all we have to notice is its insatiability; in politics, in literature, in art, in social distinction, it is like Sheol and Abaddon,—a maw that ever opens; a gulf that can swallow anything and everything, yet never be filled. The LXX. addition[678] seems to regard this uncontrolled desire as the mark of deficient culture; and, spiritually speaking, no doubt it is. Men without God are always uncultured; they have not found the centre of their being, they have not procured the key-stone to their accumulated knowledge, and it is in consequence, not an arch through which they can travel to any goal, but a confused pile which blocks the way. These desperate strivings and loud-tongued, undisciplined desires are an abomination to the Lord, because they mar His mighty plan and introduce disorder where He intended order, discord where He intended harmony, deformity where He intended beauty. They are the work of egoism instead of theism.

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It is needless to dwell upon the heart-sores and the disappointments which fall to the lot of the people whom we are thinking of. What ghastly mockery the morrows on which they counted prove to be! In some lonely and rocky island, girdled by the moaning of the dreary seas, and cut off from all the interests which gave to life its excitement, egotism ends its days. Or it is on some restless couch, surrounded by all the outward trappings of wealth and power, that the dying spirit cries, "My kingdom for an inch of time!" The man who by his brilliant genius has drawn all his generation after him passes, bearing "through Europe the pageant of his bleeding heart," to a hopeless grave. The woman who has achieved the end of her ambition, ruling the courts of fashion, the acknowledged queen of salons, ends her days with a sense of frustration, cynical in her contempt for the world which was foolish enough to follow and admire her.

But, on the other hand, here is one who boasts himself in God.

> "Lord, it belongs not to my care,"

is the language of his spirit,

"Whether I die or live;
To love and serve Thee is my share,
And that Thy grace must give."

The first thing that strikes you in him in his perfect peace. His mind is stayed on God. The future has no [Pg 356] terrors for him, nor has it any joys. God is all in all to him, and God is his now. His treasure is in possession, and moth and rust do not corrupt it, nor can thieves break through or steal. To say that he is contented seems too mild a term for so positive and joyous a calm. But in contrast with the discontent which prevails everywhere outside of God, it is worth while to dilate on this passive virtue of contentment. That endless worry about little things has ceased: he is not annoyed because some one fails to recognise him; he is not affected by the malicious or scandalous things which are said about him; he is not anxious for human recognition, and is therefore never distressed because others are more courted than he is; he knows nothing of that malignant passion of jealousy which is worse than the cruelty of wrath and the flooding of anger;[679] he does not want wealth and he does not dread poverty. He says:—

"Some have too much, yet still do crave;
I little have, and seek no more:
They are but poor though much they have,
And I am rich with little store:
They poor, I rich; they beg, I give;
They lack, I leave; they pine, I live."[680]

When we have entered into this Divine content and are made by our absolute trust in God free from care for the future, it is wonderful how quick we become to see good in apparent evils. To the world this is so incredible that it suspects insincerity, but there is nothing more sincere and more real. A poor child who was [Pg 357] blind found the greatest blessing in the affliction, saying, "You see, I can give more to the Missionary Society than the other children, because I can knit in the dark, and have not to spend money on candles." You go to one of God's children expecting to find him broken down and rebellious under some great and undeserved calamity, but you find that he has discovered a blessing in the loss before you get there, and is actually rejoicing, or at any rate he is replying to all provocations, "The Lord gave and the Lord took away; blessed be the name of the Lord." He is afflicted, but you cannot think of him as afflicted, for "all the days of the afflicted are evil, but he that is of a cheerful spirit hath a continual feast."[681]

Yes, it is that illusive and imaginary morrow that robs us of our peace; it is the misgiving, the anxious care, the dark foreboding. But when we put God our Father in place of the morrow, and know that He comprehends and sees all that we have need of, the peace which passes all understanding settles down upon our spirit, and steals into our eyes, and breathes on our lips, and men perceive even in us why our Father is called "the God of Peace."

The *second* thing which strikes us in those who have learnt to make their boast in God rather than in the morrow is the service which they render to their fellows. This is not only because they are able to turn their undivided attention to the duty which lies nearest, and to do with all their heart what their hand finds to do, but the very spirit of serenity in which they live is a constant help and blessing to all who are around them. [Pg 358] It may have been given to you to come into contact with such a soul; in his presence your restlessness dies away, it seems as if your burning brow had been touched with a soothing hand; perhaps "with half-open eyes you were treading the borderland dim 'twixt vice and virtue," and that quiet spirit seemed like a clear shaft of the dawn revealing where you trod; perhaps you were heart-broken with a great sorrow, and the restfulness and confidence of that strong soul gave you an indefinable consolation, hope broke into your heart, and even joy. In receiving that help from what the man *was* rather than from what he gave, you became aware that this was the highest service that any human being can render to another. It is a great thing to succour the physical and material sufferings of men; it is a greater to bring them clear truths and to give them some stimulus and guidance in the intellectual life; but it is greatest of all to communicate spiritual sustenance and power, for that means to bring souls into actual and conscious contact with God.

One of the noblest examples of this service to humanity is furnished in the life and the writings of St. Paul. His personal presence became the new creation of that ancient heathen civilisation, and countless individual souls were, through the inner life which he presented, brought to a complete change and made new creatures in Christ. His writings have been, ever since he died, a constant source of life and strength to many

generations of men. He has been misunderstood, "the ignorant and unstedfast have wrested" what he wrote, but none the less he has been to the Church a perpetual regenerator, and, as a great writer[682] of our own day has declared, "The doctrine of Paul will arise out of the tomb where for centuries it has lain covered; it will edify the Church of the future; it will have the consent of happier generations, the applause of less superstitious ages." Now what is the secret of this power? It is given in his own words, "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."[683] He was able to fling himself with that passionate temerity into the present duty, he was able to preach the word with that victorious vigour in season and out of season, just because the whole burden of the unknown future was rolled away from him, and he, more than any man that ever lived, understood what it is to live just for to-day.

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Every Christian may possess the same secret; it is the open secret of the Sermon on the Mount; as our gracious Lord told us, we may be as the lilies of the field and as the birds of the air, without anxiety or misgiving, knowing that our Heavenly Father cares for us. It is not given to us all to be great philanthropists, great reformers, great preachers, but it is put within the reach of all to render to others the sweet service of abiding always in trustful and loving submission to God's will, and of shedding upon all the light of our peace.

And this leads us to notice one *last feature* of this true spiritual life. It has an honour of its own, though it is not an earthly honour; it has a reward, though it is not a material reward. "Whoso keepeth the fig tree shall eat the fruit thereof, and he that waiteth on his master eats of the honour."[684] That is a saying which can only apply in a very modified degree to earthly service and human masters. How many loyal servants of kings have been deserted by their lords at the critical moment, and left to eat the fruit of disgrace and ignominy! But the saying applies in its fulness to our Master Christ and His service. Think of the Christian life under this simple figure; it is like the careful cultivation of the fruit tree. He is the Vine. Our sole concern is to keep in touch with Him, to sit at His feet, to watch for His fruit, to see that no other concern disturbs the quiet relation of perfect loyalty and devotion to Him. Our aim is not to do our own business or seek our own ends, but to be sure that we are always awake to His purposes and obedient to the demands which He makes upon us. It is not ours to reason why, but it is ours to do at all costs whatsoever He bids us do to-day. We have nothing to do with to-morrow; we have no responsibility for the fruit, for no fruit-bearing power lies in us. All we have to do is to keep the fig tree. Now when we abide in this concentrated and whole-hearted devotion to our Master,—when for us to live is Christ,—then honour comes to us unsought, but not unwelcome. The fruit of service is to the taste of the true servant the highest honour that he can imagine. We need no apocalyptic vision to assure us. His word is enough, confirmed as it is by a constant and growing experience. The servants of our Lord already stand before Him, holding in their hands the talents which they have gained for Him; already they hear His gracious "Well done," and the sound of it is more musical in their ears than all the acclamations of their fellow-creatures. This is their honour; what could they have more? they are counted one with Christ; they shared His travail, and now they share His satisfaction and His joy.

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And thus those who make their boast in God, and do not boast of the morrow, find that the morrow itself becomes clear to them in the light of His countenance; they do in a sense know what it will bring forth: it will bring forth what they desire, for it will bring forth their Father's will; it will bring forth the victory and the glory of Christ. "Henceforth ye shall see Him coming in the clouds of heaven." Is not that enough? When our hearts have learnt to hanker only after God's will, to desire only Christ's victory, they may boast themselves even of to-morrow; for to-morrow holds in its bosom an assurance of blessing and joy.

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# XXVIII.

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## *AN ASPECT OF ATONEMENT.*

"He that hideth (מְכַסֶּה) his transgressions shall not prosper; but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall obtain mercy."—Prov. xxviii. 13.

"Happy is the man that feareth alway; but he that hardeneth his heart shall fall into mischief."—PROV. xxviii. 14.

"The fear of the Lord tendeth to life, and he that hath it shall abide satisfied. He shall not be visited with evil."—PROV. xix. 23.

"By mercy and truth iniquity is atoned for, and by the fear of the Lord men depart from evil."—PROV. xvi. 6.

The Hebrew word (כָּפַר) which is used for the idea of atonement is one which originally signifies *to cover*. Sin is a hideous sore, a shocking deformity, which must be hidden from the eyes of men, and much more from the holy eyes of God. Thus the Old Testament speaks about a Robe of Righteousness which is to be thrown over the ulcerated and leprous body of sin. Apart from this covering, the disease is seen working out its sure and terrible results. "A man that is laden with the blood of any person shall flee unto the pit: let no man stay him,"[685] and though blood-guiltiness appears to us the worst of sins, all sin is alike in its issue; every sinner may be seen by seeing eyes "fleeing unto the pit," and no man can stay him or deliver him. Or, to vary the [Page 364] image, the sinful man is exposed to the violence of justice, which beats like a storm upon all unprotected heads; he needs to be covered; he needs some shelter, some hiding-place, or he must be swept away.

But the objection which immediately occurs to us is this: what is the use of covering sin if the sin itself remains? The disease is not cured because a decent garment is drawn over the suffering part; indeed, it is not hard to conceive a case in which the covering might aggravate the mischief. If the idea of covering is to be of any service, it must be cleared from all misconception; there is a kind of hiding which may be ruinous, a garment which may drive the disease inward and hasten its deadly operation, a covert from the storm which may crush and stifle the person whom it professes to protect. "He that *covereth* his transgressions," in that way, "shall not prosper." Every attempt to conceal from God or from man or from oneself that one is diseased with sin is ineffectual: every lame excuse which seeks to palliate the guilt; every hypocritical pretence that the thing done has not been done, or that it is not what men usually suppose it to be; every ingenious argumentation which seeks to represent sin as something other than sin, as a mere defect or taint in the blood, as a hereditary and unavoidable weakness, as an aberration of the mind for which one is not responsible, or as a merely conventional and artificial offence,—all such attempts at hiding must be failures, "covering" of that kind can be no atonement. Quite the reverse; this trifling with conscience, this deluded self-righteousness, is the worst possible aggravation of the sin. Hidden in that way, though it be, as it were, in the bowels of the [Page 364] earth, sin becomes a poisonous gas, more noxious for confinement, and liable to break out in awful and devastating explosions.

The covering of sin[686] which is spoken of in xvi. 6 is of a very different and of a quite particular kind. Combining this verse with the others at the head of the chapter, we may observe that every effectual "covering" of sin in God's sight involves three elements,—confession, forsaking, and a changed practice.

*First*, there is confession. This appears on the face of it to be a paradox: the only way of covering sin is to uncover it. But it is strictly true. We must make a clean breast of it; we must acknowledge its full extent and enormity; we must spare the patient ear of God no detail of our guilt. The foul, explosive gases must be let out into the open, since every attempt to confine them increases their destructive power. The running sore must be exposed to the Physician's eye, since every rag put over it to hide it becomes steeped in its defiling tides. It is true, confession is a painful and a weary task: it is like removing a heap of dust and refuse by spadefuls,—each bit as it is disturbed fills the atmosphere with choking particles and noisome smells; worse and worse is revealed the farther we go. We came to confess a single fault, and we found that it was but a [Page 365] broken sherd lying on the foul and pestilential heap. Confession leads to confession, discovery to discovery. It is terribly humiliating. "Am I then so bad as this?" is the horrified cry as each candid admission shows only more and worse that must be admitted. True confession can never be made into a priest's ear,—to men we can only confess the wrongs which we have done to men; but true confession is the awful tale of what we have done to God, against whom only we have sinned and done evil in His sight. It is sometimes urged that confession to a priest gives the penitent relief: possibly, but it is a false relief; since the eye of the priest is not omniscient, the sinner confesses only what he chooses, brings the broken sherd, and receives absolution for that in lieu of removing the whole heap of abominations that underlie. When we have gone as far as we can in laying ourselves bare to man, there remain vast untraversed tracts of our life and our mind which are reserved; "Private road" is written on all the approaches, and trespassers are invariably prosecuted. It is only to God that a real confession can be made, because we know that to Him all is necessarily evident; with Him

no subterfuges avail; He traverses those untraversed tracts; there are no private roads from which He is excluded; He knoweth our thoughts afar off.

The first step in the "covering" of sin is to realize this. If our sins are to be really covered they must first be laid bare; we must frankly own that all things are open to Him with whom we have to do; we must get away from the priests and into the hands of the High Priest; we must abjure the confessional and bring God Himself into the secret places of our hearts to search us and try us and see if there be any evil way in us. The [Ps. 361] reserve, and the veilings, which every individual cannot but maintain between himself and all other individuals, must be torn away, in full and absolute confession to God Himself.

*Secondly*. There is a confession, especially that fostered by the habit of confessing to priests, which is unaccompanied by any forsaking of the evil, or any departing from iniquity in general. Many times have men gone to their priests to receive absolution beforehand for the sin which they intended to commit; or they have postponed their confession to their deathbeds, when there will be, as they suppose, no further sins to turn from. Confession of that kind is devoid of all significance; it covers no sins, it really only aggravates them. No confession is of the least avail—and indeed no real confession can be made to God at all—unless the heart turns away from the evil which is confessed, and actually departs at once, so far as it knows and is able, from all iniquity.

The glib language of confession has been and is a deadly snare to multitudes. How easy it is to say, or even to musically chant, "We have done that we ought not to have done; we have left undone that which we ought to have done." There is no pain in such a confession if we once distinctly admit that it is a normal and natural state of mind for us to be in, and that as we say it to-day, so we shall say it to-morrow, and again the next day to the end. But real confession is so painful, and even heart-rending, because it is only of value when we begin from that moment onwards "to do what we ought to do, and to leave undone what we ought not to do." It is well for us, perhaps, to confess not so much sin in the abstract as our own particular transgressions. Sin [Ps. 367] is too shadowy a monster for us to definitely avoid and forsake; like death, its kinsman,—Death of whom Milton says:—

> "What *seemed* his head
> The *likeness* of a kingly crown had on,"—

Sin is formless, vague, impalpable. But our own individual transgressions can be fixed and defined; bringing ourselves to the test of the Law, we can say particularly, "This practice of mine is condemned, this habit of mine is sinful, this point of my character is evil, this reticence, this indolence, this reluctance, in confessing Christ and in serving His cause, is all wrong;" and then we can definitely turn our back on the practice or the habit, we can distinctly get rid of the blot in our character, we can fly this guilty silence, rouse ourselves from our selfish indolence. "We live to grow less like what we have been;" and it is this act of the will, this resolute purpose, this loathing what once you loved, and turning towards that which once you ignored,—it is, in a word, the twin process of repentance and conversion, that constitutes the second act in this "covering" of sin. Not, of course, that in a moment the tyranny of old habits can be broken, or the virtue of new activities acquired; but "the forsaking" and "the departing from" are instantaneous exertions of the will. Zaccheus, directly the Lord speaks to him, stands forth, and breaks with his sins, renounces his extortions, resolving to make amends for the past, and enters on a new line of conduct, promising to give the half of his goods to the poor. That is the essential seal of every true confession: "Whoso confesseth and forsaketh" his transgressions. [Ps. 368]

*Thirdly*. This has led us to see that the confession of sins and the conversion from them must issue in a positive practice of mercy and truth, in order to make the process of which we are speaking complete: "By mercy and truth iniquity is atoned for."

It is this part of the "covering" which is so easily, so frequently, and so fatally overlooked. It is supposed that sins can be hidden without being removed, and that the covering of what is called imputed righteousness will serve instead of the covering of actual righteousness. To argue against this view theoretically is at the present day happily quite superfluous; but it is still necessary to contend against its subtle practical effects. There is no verity more wholesome and more needed than the one contained in this proverb. Sin may be summed up in two clauses: it is the Want of Mercy and it is the Want of Truth. All our illconduct to our fellow-men comes from the cruelty and hardness of our selfish nature. Lust and greed and ambition are the outcome of pitilessness; we injure the weak and ruin the helpless, and trample on our competitors, and stamp out the poor; our eye does not pity. Again, all our offence against God is insincerity or wilful lying. We are false to ourselves, we are false to one another, and so we become false to the unseen verities, and false to God. When

a human spirit denies the spiritual world and the spiritual Cause which can alone account for it, is it not what Plato used to call "a lie in the soul"? It is the deep inward and vital contradiction of consciousness; it is equivalent to saying, "I am not I," or, "That which is, is not."

[Ps 369] Now when we have lived in sin, without mercy or without truth, or without both; when our life up to a certain point has been a flagrant selfishness of absolute indifference to our fellows, or a flagrant lie denying Him in whom we live and move and have our being; or when, as is so often the fact, the selfishness and the falseness have gone together, an inextricable and mutually dependent pair of evils, there can be no real covering of the sin, unless selfishness gives place to mercy and falsehood to truth. No verbal confession can possibly avail, no turning from the past iniquities, however genuine for the time, can have any permanent significance, unless the change is a reality, an obvious, living, and working fact. If a man supposes that he has become religious, but remains cruel and selfish, pitiless, unmerciful to his fellow-men, depend upon it that man's religion is vain; the atonement in which he trusts is a fiction, and avails no more than the hecatombs which Carthage offered to Melcarth availed to gain a victory over Rome. If a man counts himself saved, but remains radically untrue, false in his speech, insincere in his professions, careless in his thought about God, unjust in his opinions about men and the world, he is certainly under a lamentable delusion. Though he has, as he thinks, believed, he has not believed to the saving of his soul; though he has undergone a change, he has changed from one lie to another, and is in no way better off. It is by mercy and truth that iniquity can be covered.

[Ps 370] Now it will be generally admitted that we do not take the course which has just been described unless we have the fear of God before our eyes. Nothing but the thought of His holiness and the awe which it inspires, and in some cases even, nothing but the absolute terror of Him who can by no means clear the guilty, moves the heart of man to confession, turns him away from his sins, or inclines him to mercy and truth. When the fear of God is removed from men's eyes they not only continue in sin, but they quickly come to believe that they have no sins to confess; for indeed when God is put out of the question that is in a certain sense true. It is a mere fact of observation, confirmed now by many changing experiences of humanity, that it is "by the fear of the Lord men depart from iniquity;" and it is very significant to notice how many of those who have entirely put away the fear of the Lord from their own eyes have strongly advocated keeping it before the eyes of others as the most convenient and economical police resource.[687] Many fervent free-thinkers are thankful that their opinions are only held by a minority, and have no wish to see the whole of society committed to the cult which they would have us believe is all that their own religious nature requires.

But supposing that any one of us is led into the position of confession and conversion and amendment which is described in these Proverbs: what follows? That person, says the text, "shall obtain mercy." The gracious Father immediately, unconditionally, and absolutely pardons. This is the burden of the Old Testament, and it is certainly not repealed by the New. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins." [Ps 371] "Repent, and be converted," said St. Peter to the crowd at Pentecost, "that your sins may be blotted out." The New Testament is indeed on this point the louder and the clearer echo of the Old. The New Testament explains that saying which sounds so strange in the mouth of a perfectly just and Holy God, "I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgressions for Mine own sake."[688] Human theologies have imagined obstacles in the way, but God never admitted them for a moment. Clear as the truth that the soul which sins should die, was the promise that the soul which turned from its sin, and did that which is righteous in the eyes of the Lord, should live. No earthly father, frankly and unconditionally forgiving his penitent, sobbing child, could be so prompt, so eager as God. While the prodigal is yet a great way off the Father runs to meet him, and hides all his broken confessions in the rush of His embrace.

But we hesitate to admit and rejoice in this grand truth because of an uneasy fear that it is ignoring what is called the Atonement of Christ. It is a very proper hesitation, so long as we settle it within ourselves that these sweet and beautiful utterances of the Old Testament cannot possibly be limited or reversed by that Gospel which came to give effect and fulfilment to them. Is not the solution of any difficulty that has occurred to us to be found here? The sacrifice and the work of Christ create in the human soul those conditions which we have been considering. He came to give repentance unto Israel. It is His patient love in bearing all our infirmities and sins, His mysterious self-offering on the Cross, that can effectually bring us to [Ps 372] confession, conversion, and amendment. Our hearts may have been hard as the nether millstone, but at the Cross they are broken and melted. No stern denunciation of sin has ever moved our stubbornness; but as we realize what sin did to Him, when He became sin for us, the fear of the Lord falls upon us, we tremble, and cry, What shall we do to be saved? Then again, it is His perfect holiness, the beauty of those "stainless years He passed beneath the Syrian blue," which wakes in us the hankering desire for purity and goodness, and

makes us turn with a genuine disgust from the sins which must seem so loathsome in His sight. His "neither do I condemn thee; go, and sin no more," gives us a more burning hatred of sin than all the self-righteous censures and condemnations of the Pharisees. It is in the pages of the Gospels that we have first understood what concrete goodness is; it has risen upon our night like a clear, liquid star, and the passion of it has entered into our souls. And then, finally, it is the Risen Lord, unto whom all power is given in heaven and in earth, that can really transform our nature, flood our heart with love, and fill our mind with truth, so that, in the language of the proverb, mercy and truth may atone for iniquity.

Is it not because Christ by His coming, by His living, by His dying, by His risen power, produces in the believer repentance and confession of sins, conversion and departing from sin, regeneration and actual holiness, that we say He has covered our sins? What meaning can be attached to Atonement apart from its effects? And in what other way, we may ask, could He really give us such a covering or atonement, than by [Pg 373] creating in us a clean heart and renewing a right spirit within us? Sometimes, by a not unnatural confusion of language, we speak of the sacrificial death of our Lord as if it, apart from the effects produced in the believing heart, were in itself the Atonement. But that is not the language of the New Testament, which employs the idea of reconciliation[689] where the Old Testament would employ the idea of atoning; and clearly there can be no reconciliation accomplished between man and God until, not only God is reconciled to man, but man also is reconciled to God. And it is when we come to observe more accurately the language of the New Testament that this statement of the Proverbs is seen to be no contradiction, but an anticipation, of it. Only the regenerate soul, that in which the graces of the Christ-life, mercy and truth, have been implanted by Christ, is really reconciled with God, *i.e.*, effectually atoned. And though the framer of the proverb had but a dim conception of the way in which the Son of God would come to regenerate human hearts and make them in harmony with the Father, yet he saw clearly what Christians have too often overlooked, and expressed tersely what theology has too often obscured, that every effectual Atonement must include in itself the actual, moral regeneration of the sinner. And further, whoever wrote the verse which stands at the head of [Pg 374] our chapter understood what many preachers of the Gospel have left in perplexing obscurity, that God would necessarily, from His very nature, provide the offering and the sacrifice on the ground of which every repentant soul that turns to Him could be immediately and freely forgiven.

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# XXIX.

[Pg 375]

## *THE NEED OF REVELATION.*

> "Where no vision is, a people casts off restraint, but he that keepeth the law is happy."—PROV. xxix. 18.

The form of the proverb shows that we are not to treat the vision and the law as opposite, but rather as complementary terms. Visions are, it is true, especially the mark of the prophets, and the law is often confined in a special sense to the Pentateuch; but there is a much wider usage of the words, according to which the two together express, with tolerable completeness, what we mean by *Revelation*. The vision means a perception of God and His ways, and is quite as applicable to Moses as to Isaiah; and, on the other hand, the law covers all the distinct and articulate instruction which God gives to His people in any of His ways of self-communication. "Come ye," says Isaiah,[690] "and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths: for out of Zion shall go forth *the law*, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem;" where the whole context shows that, not the Mosaic Law, but rather a new and particular declaration of the Lord's will, is referred to.

But while the vision and the law are not to be treated as opposites, it is possible to distinguish between them. [Pg 376] The vision is the actual contact between God and the human spirit, which is the necessary condition of any direct revelation; the law is the recorded result of such a revelation, either passed from mouth to mouth by tradition, or written permanently in a book.

We may then a little amplify the proverb for the sake of exposition: "Where there is no living revelation, no perceived contact between man and God, there the bonds which hold society together are relaxed or broken; but he that holds by the revelation that has been given, obeying the law, so far as it has been presented to him, happy is he."

Man has need of a revelation; that is the assertion. Society, as an ordered and happy body of men in which each person is rightly subordinated to the whole, and in which law, as distinct from individual caprice, prevails, requires a revealed law. The light of nature is good, but it is not sufficient. The common sense of mankind is powerful, but not powerful enough. In the absence of a real and valid declaration of God's will times must come when the elemental passions of human nature will break out with unrestrained violence, the teachings of morality will be disputed, their authority will be denied, and their yoke will be broken; the links which hold the state and the community together will snap, and the slow growths of ages may disappear in a moment. It is not difficult to show the truth of this assertion from experience. Every people that emerges from barbarism has a vision and a law; a certain revelation which forms the foundation, the sanction, the bond of its corporate existence. When you can point to a tribe or a group of tribes that know nothing of God, and [Pg 377] therefore have no idea of revelation, you at once assure us that the people are sunk in a hopeless savagery. We are, it is true, inclined to deny the term revelation to those systems of religion which lie outside of the Bible, but it is difficult to justify such a contraction of view. God has not left Himself anywhere without a witness. The more closely we examine the multitudinous religions of the earth, the more clearly does it appear that each of them had at its origin a definite, however limited, revelation. The idea of One all-powerful, good, and wise, God is found at the beginning of each faith that can be traced back far enough, and the actual condition of heathen systems always suggests a decline from a higher and a purer religion. We may say, then, with much plausibility, that no lasting and beneficial form of human society has ever existed apart from a vision and a law.

But leaving the wide field of comparative religions, do we not see an illustration of the truth of the text in the European countries which are more subject to our observation? In proportion as a people loses its faith in revelation it falls into decay. This was made manifest in the experience of the French Revolution. When the Jacobins had emancipated themselves from the idea of God, and had come out into the clear light of reason, so terribly did they "cast off restraint" that their own leader, Robespierre, endeavoured with a feverish haste to restore the recognition of God, assuming himself the position of high pontiff to the Supreme Being. The nearest approach that the world has probably ever seen to a government founded on Atheism was this government of the French Revolution, and a more striking commentary on this text could hardly be desired. [Pg 378]

But the need of a revelation can be apprehended, apart from all appeals to history, by simply studying the nature of the spirit of man. Man must have an object of worship, and that object must be such as to command his worship. Auguste Comte thought to satisfy this need of the heart by suggesting Humanity as the *Grand Être*, but Humanity was and is nothing but an abstraction. Feeling this himself, he recommended the worship of woman, and he prostrated his heart before Clotilde de Vaux; but sacred and beautiful as a man's love of a woman may be, it is no substitute for worship. We must have quite another than ourselves and our own kind, if our hearts are to find their rest. We must have an Almighty, an Infinite; we must have one who is Love. Until his spirit is worshipping, man cannot realize himself, or attain the height of his intended stature.

Again, man must have an assurance of his own immortality. While he believes himself to be mortal, a creature of a day, and that an uncertain day, it is impossible for him to rise much above the level of other ephemeral things. His pursuits must be limited, and his aims must be confined. His affections must be chilled by the shadow of death, and in proportion as he has nobly striven and tenderly loved, his later years must be plunged in hopeless gloom, because his efforts have been ineffectual and his beloved have gone from him. No juggling with terms; no half-poetic raptures about "the choir invisible," can meet the mighty craving of the human heart. Man must be immortal, or he is not man. "He thinks he was not made to die."

But to meet these demands of the spirit what, apart from revelation, can avail? That metaphysics is futile [Pg 379] practically all men are agreed. Only the philosopher can follow the dialectics which are to prove the existence of God and the immortality of the soul. And even the philosopher seems to grow pale and wizened in the process of his demonstration, and wins at last a vantage-ground of cold conviction, to find that there is no comfort there. But can science offer the assurance which philosophy was unable to give? Let us listen to the conclusion of a scientific writer on this subject, one who has lost his hold on revelation and can realize a little of what he has lost.

"The highest and most consoling beliefs of the human mind," he says, "are to a great extent bound up with the Christian religion. If we ask ourselves frankly how much, apart from this religion, would remain of faith in a God, and in a future state of existence, the answer must be, very little. Science traces everything back to primeval atoms and germs, and there it leaves us. How came these atoms and energies there, from which this wonderful universe of worlds has been evolved by inevitable laws? What are they in their essence, and what do they mean? The only answer is, It is unknowable. It is "behind the veil," and may be anything. Spirit may be matter, matter may be spirit. We have no faculties by which we can even form a conception, from any discoveries of the telescope or microscope, from any experiments in the laboratory, or from any facts susceptible of real human knowledge, of what may be the first cause underlying all these phenomena.

"In like manner we can already, to a great extent, and probably in a short time shall be able to the fullest extent to trace the whole development of life from the lowest to the highest; from protoplasm, through monera, infusoria, mollusca, vertebrata, fish, reptile and mammal, up to [Pg 380] man; and the individual man from the microscopic egg, through the various stages of its evolution up to birth, childhood, maturity, decline, and death. We can trace also the development of the human race through enormous periods of time, from the modest beginnings up to its present level of civilisation, and show how arts, languages, morals, and religions have been evolved gradually by human laws from primitive elements, many of which are common in their ultimate form to man and the animal creation.

"But here also science stops. Science can give no account of how these germs and nucleated cells, endowed with these marvellous capacities for evolution, came into existence, or got their intrinsic powers. Nor can science enable us to form the remotest conception of what will become of life, consciousness, and conscience, when the material conditions with which they are always associated, while within human experience, have been dissolved by death, and no longer exist. We know as little, in the way of accurate and demonstrable knowledge, of our condition after death as we do of our existence—if we had an existence—before birth."[691]

Science frankly confesses that she can tell us nothing of the things which it most concerns us to know. On those things she is no farther advanced than she was in the days of Aristotle. Never do we feel how much men need a revelation so vividly as when we have grasped the first principles of such a great scientific thinker as Mr. Herbert Spencer, and realize how far he is able to take us and how soon he has to leave us. How does it meet the craving of the soul for God to show us the slow stages by which man became a living [Pg 381] soul? As well might you try to satisfy the musician's ear by telling him how his art had grown from the primitive tom-tom of the savage. How can it help the life to be lived wisely, lovingly, and well, in the midst of the uncertainty of the world, and confronted by the certainty of death, to be told that our physical structure is united by a thousand immediate links with that of other mammals. Such a fact is insignificant; the supreme fact is that we are not like other mammals in the most important respects; we have hearts that long and yearn, minds which enquire and question—*they* have not; we want God, our heart and our flesh crieth out for the living God, and we demand an eternal life—*they* do not.

How can science pretend that what she does not know is not knowledge, while she has to confess that she does not know precisely the things which it most concerns us as men to know? How can the spirit of man be content with the husks which she gives him to eat, when his whole nature craves the kernel? What probability is there that a man will close his eyes to the sun because another person, very clever and industrious, has shut himself up in a dark cellar, and tries to persuade him that his candle is all the light he may legitimately use, and what cannot be seen by his candle is not real?

No, science may not prove revelation, but she proves our need of it. She does her utmost, she widens her borders, she is more earnest, more accurate, more informed, more efficacious than ever; but she shows that what man most wants she cannot give,—she bids him go elsewhere.

But now it may be said: It is one thing to prove that man needs a revelation, and another to show that a [Pg 382] revelation has been given. That is perfectly true, and this is not the place to adduce all the evidence which might prove that revelation is a reality; but what an advance we have made on the cold, self-satisfied deism of the eighteenth century, which maintained that the light of nature was enough, and revelation was quite

superfluous, when the truest and most candid voices of science are declaring with such growing clearness that for the knowledge which revelation professes to give, revelation, and revelation alone, will suffice!

We Christians believe that we have a revelation, and we find that it suffices. It gives us precisely those assurances about God and about the soul without which we falter, grow bewildered, and begin to despond. We have a vision and a law. Our Bible is the record of the ever-widening, ever-clearing vision of God. The power and authority of the vision seem to be the more convincing, just because we are permitted to see the process of its development. Here we are able to stand with the seer and see, not the long æonian stages of creation which science has been painfully tracking out in these later days, but the supreme fact, which science professes herself unable to see, that God was the Author of it all. Here we are able to see the first imperfect conception of God which came in vision and in thought to the patriarch or sheikh in the earliest dawn of civilisation. Here we can observe the conceptions clearing, through Moses, through the Psalmists, through the Prophets, until at last we have a vision of God in the person of His Son, who is the brightness of the Father's glory, the express image of His countenance. We see that He, the unseen Creator, is Love. [Pg 383]

Our Bible, too, is the record of a law,—a law of human conduct, the will of God as applied to earthly life. At first the law is confined to a few primitive practices and outward observances; then it grows in perplexity and multiplication of details; and only after a long course of discipline, of effort and apparent failure, of teaching and deliberate disobedience, is the law laid bare to its very roots, and presented in the simplified and self-evidencing form of the Sermon on the Mount and the apostolic precepts.

It is not necessary to start with any particular theory about the Bible, any more than it is necessary to know the substance of the sun before we can warm ourselves in his beams. It is not necessary to look for scientific accuracy in the histories and treatises through which the vision and the law are communicated to us. We know that the vessels are earthen, and the presupposition all through is that the light was only growing from the glimmer of the dawn up to the perfect day. But we know, we are persuaded, that here, to seeing eyes and humble hearts, is the revelation of God and of His will.

Nor is it only in the Bible that God speaks to us. There have been times in the history of Christendom—such times as the middle of the eighteenth century—when though the Bible was in men's hands, it seemed to be almost a dead letter. "There was no vision, and the people cast off restraint." It is by living men and women to whom He grants visions and reveals truths, that God maintains the purity and power of His revelation to us. He came in vision to Fox and the early Friends, to Zinzendorf and the early Moravians, to Wesley and the [Pg 384] early Methodists. Seldom does a generation pass but some seers are sent to make the Word of God a living influence to their age. The vision is not always unmixed with human error, and when it ceases to be living it may become obstructive, a cause of paralysis rather than of progress. But Augustine and Jerome, Benedict and Leo, Francis and Dominic, Luther and Calvin, Ignatius Loyola and Xavier, Fénélon and Madame Guyon, Jonathan Edwards and Channing, Robertson and Maurice, Erskine and MacLeod Campbell, are but examples of God's method all down the Christian ages. The vision comes pure and fresh as if straight from the presence of God. Traditionalism crumbles away. Doubt retreats like a phantom of the night. Mighty moral revolutions and spiritual awakenings are accomplished by the means of His chosen ones. And it should be our desire and our joy to recognise and welcome these seers of God.

"He that keepeth the law, happy is he." It is a mournful thing to be without a revelation, and to grope in darkness at midday; to hold one's mind in melancholy suspense, uncertain about God, about His will, about the life eternal. But it is better to have no revelation than to have it and disregard it. Honest doubt is full of necessary sorrow, but to believe and not to obey is the road to inevitable ruin.[692] "He that keepeth"—yes, he [Pg 385] that looks into revelation, not for curiosity, but for a law by which to live; who listens to the wise precepts, not in order to exclaim, "How wise they are!" but in order to act on them.

There are many professing Christians who are constantly plunged in gloom. Unbelievers may point the finger at them, and say, "They believe in God, in salvation, and in heaven, but see what an effect it has on them. Do they really believe?" Oh, yes, they really believe, but they do not obey; and no amount of faith brings any lasting happiness apart from obedience. The law requires us to love God, to love men; it requires us to abstain from all appearance of evil, to touch not the unclean thing; it bids us love not the world, it tells us how impossible the double service of God and mammon is. Now though we believe it all it can give us nothing but pain unless we live up to it. If there is a vision and we shut our eyes to it, if there is a law and we turn away from it, woe unto us! But if we receive the vision, if we loyally and earnestly keep the law, the world cannot fathom the depth of our peace, nor rise to the height of our joy.

# XXX.

[Pg 386]

## *THE WORDS OF AGUR.*

The rendering of the first verse of this chapter is very uncertain. Without attempting to discuss the many conjectural emendations, we must briefly indicate the view which is here taken. A slight alteration in the pointing (לְאִיתִי אֵל instead of the Masoretic reading לְאִיתִיאֵל) changes the proper name Ithiel into a significant verb; and another slight change (וָאֵכָל for וְאֻכָל) gives us another verb in the place of Ucal. To remove the difficulty of the word "oracle," a difficulty which arises from the fact that the chapter which follows is not a prophetic utterance of the kind to which that word might be applied, it is necessary, with Grätz, to make a more serious change, and to read הַמּשֵׁל for הַמַּשָּׂא. And to explain the word הַגֶּבֶר, which occurs in a similar connection in Numb. xxiv. 3, 15, and 2 Sam. xxiii. 1, we must suppose that some relative clause defining the nature of "the man" has been dropped. The great uncertainty of the text is witnessed by the LXX., who place this passage after xxiv. 23, and give a rendering which has very little resemblance to our present Hebrew text. It is highly probable, both from the subject matter and from the numerical arrangements, which are thoroughly Rabbinical, that this chapter and chap. xxxi. are of late origin, and represent the last phase of the proverbial literature of Israel in the days after the return from the Exile. If this be so, the obscurity and uncertainty are characteristic of an artificial period of literature, and of a decay in literary taste. Adopting, then, the alterations which have been mentioned, we obtain the following result:—

"The words of Agur the son of Jakeh, the proverb-writer:

The utterance of the man [who has questioned and thought]: I have wearied after God, I have wearied after God, and am faint, for I am too stupid for a man, and am without reason, and I have not learned wisdom, nor have I knowledge of the All Holy," etc.

This chapter is full of curious interest. It is a collection of sayings which are apparently connected only by the circumstance that they were attributed to one person, Agur, the son of Jakeh. Whoever Agur was, he had a [Pg 387] certain marked individuality; he combined meditation on lofty questions of theology with a sound theory of practical life. He was able to give valuable admonitions about conduct. But his characteristic delight was to group together in quatrains visible illustrations of selected qualities or ideas.

It may be well for us to glance at these picturesque groups, and then to return to the more philosophical and religious sentiments with which the chapter opens.

"Slander not a servant to his master," says Agur, "lest the servant curse thee, and thou be held guilty." Even underlings have their rights; the Lord makes their cause His own, and a curse from them falls with as much weight on a slanderer as the words of more influential people. It is one of the surest tests of a man's character to see how he treats servants; if he is uniformly courteous, considerate, just, and generous in his treatment of them, we may safely infer that he is a noble character; if he is haughty, domineering, revengeful, and malicious to them, we need not attach much importance to his pleasing manners and plausible services to those whom he considers his equals.

Now follow two of these singular quatrains. There are four kinds of men pointed out, and held up, not to our abhorrence, that is unnecessary, but simply to our observation: the unfilial, the self-righteous, the haughty, and the rapacious who devour the poor and the needy. It is not necessary to say anything about these persons. Their doom is stamped on their brows; to name them is to condemn them; to describe them is to write out their sentence.

Again, there are four things which like the bloodsucking horse-leech are always insatiable. The vampire has [Pg 388] her daughters in the earth; it is, as Professor Cheyne says, "a quasi-mythical expression." These daughters are two, nay, they are three, nay, they are four; and they are, as it were, the representatives of all creation:[693] Sheol, the invisible world, which draws into itself the countless generations of the dead; the generative

principle, which never wearies of producing new generations of the living; the earth, which is for ever absorbing the cadent waters of heaven; and the fire, which will consume all the fuel that is given to it.

Now follows a further comment upon unfilial conduct: the eye is regarded as the instrument by which a son shows his feelings to his parents; he has not perhaps gone the length of uttering a curse against them, still less of raising his hand to ill-treat them, but his eye flashes derision upon his father, and by its haughty obstinacy declares that it will not obey his mother. The offending member shall be picked out by the clamorous ravens, and eaten by the young of the soaring eagle.

Next we have four more quatrains. First, there are the four wonders which baffle Agur's understanding; wonders which are comprehensible only to God, as the Vedic hymn says,—

> "The path of ships across the sea,
> The soaring eagle's flight he knows."

The wonder seems to be in the reality and power of impalpable things. How little of all that passes in the [Pg 389] universe is open to observation, or leaves a track behind. The eagle mounts through the air as if he marched on a solid beaten road; the serpent, without limbs, glides over the smooth rock where feet would slip, and leaves no trace behind; the ship ploughs the deep, and over trackless waters follows her track which is invisible; a man and a maid meet, swift glances pass, hearts blend, and that is done which can never be undone; or on the evil side, the bad woman follows her illicit and hidden courses, while to all appearance she is a faithful wife and mother.

Secondly, there are four human conditions which are intolerable to society, viz., an essentially servile spirit put into the place of authority; a fool who, instead of being corrected, is confirmed in his folly by prosperity; a marriage where the wife is hated; and a slave girl in the position which Hagar occupied with relation to Sarah her mistress.

Thirdly, there are four kinds of animals which illustrate that size is not necessarily greatness, and that it is possible to be insignificant and yet wise. The tiny ants are a model of intelligent mutual cooperation and prudent thrift. The little jerboas seem helpless enough, but they are sensible in the choice of their homes, for they dwell securely in rocky fastnesses. The locusts seem as weak and inoffensive as insects can be, yet they form a mighty army, ordered in battle array; "they run like mighty men; they climb the wall like men of war; and they march every one in his ways, and they break not their ranks."[694] The lizard seems but a plebeian [Pg 390] creature; you can seize it with your hands; it is defenceless and devoid of natural capabilities; and yet with its swift crawlings and tireless dartings it will find its way into kings' palaces, where greater and stronger creatures cannot enter.

Lastly, there are four things which impress one with their stateliness of motion; the lion, the creature that is girt in the loins, whether a war-horse or a greyhound, the he-goat, and—surely with a little touch of satire—the king when his army is with him.

Then the collection of Agur's sayings ends with a wise and picturesque word of counsel to exercise a strong restraint over our rising passions.

But now we may turn back to the passage with which the chapter opens. Here is the cry of one who has sought to find out God. It is an old and a mournful cry. Many have emitted it from the beginning; many utter it now. But few have spoken with more pathetic humility, few have made us feel with so much force the solemnity and the difficulty of the question as this unknown Agur. We see a brow wrinkled with thought, eyes dimmed with long and close observation; it is not the boor or the sot that makes this humiliating confession; it is the earnest thinker, the eager enquirer. He has meditated on the wonderful facts of the physical world; he has watched the great trees sway under the touch of the invisible wind, and the waves rise up in their might, lashing the shores, but vainly essaying to pass their appointed boundaries; he has considered the vast expanse of the earth, and enquired, on what foundations does it rest, and where are its limits? He cannot question the "eternal power and divinity" which can alone account for this ordered universe. He has not, like many [Pg 391] thinkers ancient and modern, "dropped a plummet down the broad deep universe, and cried, No God." He knows that there is a God; there must be an Intelligence able to conceive, coupled with a power able to realize, this mighty mechanism. But who is it? What is His name or His Son's name? Here are the footsteps of the Creator, but where is the Creator Himself? Here are the signs of His working on every hand. There is an invisible power that ascends and descends on the earth by staircases unseen. Who is He? These careering

winds, before which we are powerless, obey some control; sometimes they are "upgathered like sleeping flowers;" who is it that holds them then? These great waters sway to and fro, or they pour in ceaseless currents from their fountains, or they gather in the quiet hollows of the hills; but who is it that appoints the ocean, and the river, and the lake? Who feeds them all, and restrains them all? Whose is the garment which holds them as a woman carries a pitcher lashed to her back in the fold of her dress? The earth is no phantom, no mirage, it is solid and established; but who gave to matter its reality, and in the ceaseless flux of the atoms fixed the abiding forms, and ordered the appropriate relations? Ah! what is His name? Has He a son? Is man, for instance, His son? Or does the idea of the Eternal and Invisible God imply also an Eternal Son, a Being one with Him, yet separable, the object of His love, the instrument of His working, the beginning of His creation? Who is He? That He is holy seems an inevitable conclusion from the fact that we know what holiness is, and recognise its sovereignty. For how, in thinking of the mighty Being who made all things, dare [Ps 3921]
I give Him a lower attribute than that which I can give to my fellow-men? How dare I withhold from Him that which I know of the Highest and the Best? But though I know that He is holy, the All Holy One I do not know. My weak and sinful nature has glimpses of Him, but no steady visions. I lose Him in the confused welter of things. I catch the gleam of His face in the hues of the rainbow and in the glow of the eternal hills; but I lose it when I strive to follow among the angry gatherings of the stormclouds, in the threatening crash of the thunder, the roar of the avalanche, and the rent ruins of the earthquake.

And the man, considering all things, questioning, seeking, exclaims, "I am weary and faint." The splendours of God haunt his imagination, the sanctities of God fill his conscience with awe, the thoughts of God lie as presuppositions behind all his thinking. But he has not understanding; baffled and foiled and helpless, he says that he is too brutish to be a man. Surely a *man* would know God; surely he must be but one of the soulless creatures, dust of the dust, for he has not the knowledge of the Holy One.

To this impetuous hail of questions an answer comes. For indeed in the fact that the questions are put already the answer lies. In the humble cry that he is too stupid to be a man is already the clearest proof that he is raised incalculably above the brute.

But who is it that offers the answer in vv. 5-9? It would seem as if Agur himself has suggested the question—a question borrowed probably from some noble heathen thinker; and now he proceeds to meet the wild and despairing outcry with the results of his own reflection. He does not attempt the answer on the lines of natural [Ps 3931]
religion. His answer in effect is this: You cannot know God, you cannot by searching find Him unless He reveals Himself; His revelation must come as an articulate and intelligible word. As the Psalm says—for it seems to be a quotation from Psalm xviii. 30—"Every word of God is tried: He is a shield unto them that trust in Him." Agur appeals to a written revelation, a revelation which is complete and rounded, and to which no further addition may be made (ver. 6). It was probably the time when Ezra the scribe had gathered together the Law and the Psalms and the Prophets, and had formed the first scriptural canon. Since then a great deal has been added to the canon, these words of Agur among the rest, but the assertion remains essentially true. Our knowledge of God depends on His self-revelation, and the method of that revelation is to speak, through the lips of God-possessed men, words which are tried by experience and proved by the living faith of those who trust in God. "I am that I am" has spoken to men, and to Him, the Eternally-existent, have they ascribed the visible universe. "The God of Israel" has spoken to men, and they have learnt therefore to trace His hand in history and in the development of human affairs. The Holy One has in prophets and poets spoken to men, and they have become aware that all goodness comes from Him, and all evil is hateful to Him. And lastly, His Son has spoken to men, and has declared Him in a way that never could have been dreamed, has shown them the Father, has revealed that new unutterable Name.

The answer to the great cry of the human heart, the wearied, fainting human heart, is given only in revelation, [Ps 3941]
in the tried word of God, and completely only in the Word of God that was made flesh. The proof of that revelation is furnished to all those who trust in the God so revealed, for He becomes a shield to them; they abide under the shadow of His realized presence. It is not possible to add unto the words of God; our speculations lead us farther, but they only lead us into error; and by them we incur His reproof, and our fictions become disastrously exposed. The answer to philosophy is in revelation, and they who do not accept the revealed answer are left asking eternally the same weary and hopeless question, "What is his name, and what is his son's name?"

And now, with a quaint and practical homeliness which is very suggestive, Agur notices two conditions, which he has evidently observed to be necessary if we are to find the answer which revelation gives to the enquiry of the human heart after God. First of all we must be rid of vanity and lies. How true this is! We may

hold the Bible in our hands, but while our hearts are void of seriousness and sincerity we can find nothing in it, certainly no word of God. A vain person and an untruthful person can receive no genuine revelation; they may believe, or think that they believe, the current religious dogmas, and they may be able to give a verbal answer to the question which we have been considering, but they cannot have the knowledge of the Holy One. More than half the godlessness of men is due simply to want of earnestness; they are triflers on the earth, they are painted bubbles, which burst if any solid thing touches them; they are drifting vapours and exhalations, which pass away and leave not a wrack behind. But there are many men who are serious enough [Pg 395] in their search for knowledge, and yet are vitiated through and through by a radical want of truthfulness. They are prepared for facts, but only facts of a certain sort. They want to know God, but only on condition that He shall not be supernatural. They want to study the truths of the spiritual world, but only on condition that the spiritual shall be material. O remove far from me vanities and lies!

Then there is a second condition desirable for the due appreciation of religious truth, a social and economical condition. Agur might have known our modern world with its terrible extremes of wealth and poverty. He perceived how hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of heaven; and, on the other hand, how probable it is that hungry men will be seduced into stealing and betrayed into blasphemy. That there is much truth in this view we may easily satisfy ourselves by considering the wealthy classes in England, whose question, urged through all their pomp and ceremonial of heartless worship, is practically, "Who is the Lord?" and by then looking at the eight hundred thousand paupers of England, amongst whom religion is practically unknown except as a device for securing food.

And when we have duly weighed this saying of Agur's, we may come to see that among all the pressing religious and spiritual problems of our day, this also must be entertained and solved, How to secure a more equable distribution of wealth, so that the extremes of wealth and poverty should disappear, and all should be fed with the food that is needful for them.

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# XXXI.

[Pg 396]

## *A GOOD WOMAN.*

"O woman-hearts, that keep the days of old
In living memory, can *you* stand back
When Christ calls? Shall the heavenly Master lack
The serving love, which is your life's fine gold?

"Do you forget the hand which placed the crown
Of happy freedom on the woman's head,
And took her from the dying and the dead,
Lifting the wounded soul long trodden down?

"Do you forget who bade the morning break,
And snapped the fetters of the iron years?
The Saviour calls for service: from your fears
Rise girt with faith, and work for His dear sake!

"And He will touch the trembling lips with fire,—
O let us hasten, lest we come too late!
And all shall work; if some must 'stand and wait,'
Be theirs that wrestling prayer that will not tire."

R. O.

The last chapter of the book of Proverbs consists of two distinct compositions, and the only connection between them is to be found in their date. The words of King Lemuel, "a saying which his mother taught

him,"[695] and the description of a good woman,[696] must both be referred to a very late epoch of Hebrew literature. The former contains several Aramaic words[697] and expressions which connect it with the period of the exile; and the latter is an alphabetical acrostic, *i.e.*, the verses begin with the successive letters of the alphabet; and this artificial mode of composition, which appears also in some of the Psalms, is sufficient of itself to indicate the last period of the literature, when the Rabbinical methods were coming into use.

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About the words of Lemuel, of whom it may be observed we know nothing at all, enough has been said in previous lectures. We need here only notice that the mother's influence in the education of her son, even though that son is to be a king, comes very suitably as the introduction to the beautiful description of the good woman with which the chapter closes. It is said that the mother of George III. brought him up with the constantly-repeated admonition, "George, be a king," and that to this early training was due that exalted notion of the prerogative and that obstinate assertion of his will which occasioned the calamities of his reign. Kings have usually been more ready to imbibe such lessons than moral teaching from their mothers; but whatever may be the actual result, we all feel that a woman is never more nobly occupied than in warning her son against the seductions of pleasure, and in giving to him a high sense of duty. It is from a mother's lips we should all learn to espouse the cause of the helpless and the miserable, and to bear an open heart for the poor and needy.[698]

But now before coming to examine in detail the poem of the virtuous woman, let us briefly recall what the book hitherto has taught us on the subject of womanhood. It began with solemn and oft-repeated warnings against the "strange woman," and echoes of that mournful theme have accompanied us throughout: the strange woman is a deep ditch, a narrow pit; he that is abhorred of the Lord shall fall therein.[699] And even where the woman's nature is not corrupted by impurity we are several times reminded how she may destroy the peace of man's life by certain faults of temper. If she is contentious and fretful she can make the house utterly unbearable; it will be better to live in a corner of the housetop or in a desert land, exposed to the continual downpour of the autumn rains, than to be assailed by her tongue.[700] The attempt to restrain her is like trying to grasp the wind, or to seize an object which is smeared with oil.[701] We are reminded too how incongruously sometimes great beauty of person is combined with inward faults. "As a jewel of gold in a swine's snout, so is a fair woman which is without discretion."[702]

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But we must distinctly understand that these severe strictures on woman corrupted and woman imperfect are only so many witnesses to her value and importance. The place she fills in life is so supreme that if she fails in her duty human life as a whole is a failure. In her hands lie the issues of life for mankind. "The wisdom of woman builds her house, and the folly of woman plucks it down with her hands."[703] What the homes of a nation are, the nation is; and it is woman's high and beautiful function to make the homes, and within her power lies the terrible capacity for marring them. She, much more than the king, is the fountain of honour.[704] The honour she gives and the honour she commands will decide the whole tone of society. Pure, true, and strong, she makes men worship purity, truth, and strength. Corrupt, false, and vain, she blights and blasts the ideal of man, lowers all his aspirations, excites his evil passions to a frenzy of iniquity, degrades his soul to a level below the brutes.

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The condition of woman is the touchstone of a civilised society.

Again, there is a sense in which woman is an interpreter and revealer of God to the human race. She has religious intuitions and spiritual susceptibilities in which the other sex is usually deficient. Most religious systems in the world's history have overlooked her, and have suffered accordingly. The religion of Jesus Christ recognised her, claimed for her her rightful place, and to this day does much of its best work in the world through her gracious ministrations, through her unquestioning faith, through her unquenchable love. It is as a foreshadowing of this religious significance which Christ was to give to womanhood that the Proverbs recognise the beautiful direct relation between God and the possession of a good wife. "Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of the Lord."[705] Wealth, as it is ordinarily understood, is of the earth,—it can be derived from ancestors by inheritance, or it can be earned by toil of hand and brain,—but every wife worthy of the name is far above all wealth: she cannot be earned or inherited; she comes, as the mother of mankind came, direct from the hand of the Lord.[706] The marriage tie is a thought of God's heart. He Himself has arranged the exquisite blending of life with life and spirit with spirit; He has fitted man to woman and woman to man, so that the perfect man is not the man alone, the perfect woman is not the woman

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alone, but the man and woman one flesh, mystically united, the completeness each of the other; not two, but a single whole.

We may now examine in detail this connected description of the virtuous woman, whose value is not to be measured by material wealth, and who yet, from a merely material point of view, is a source of wealth to those who are fortunate enough to call her theirs.

She is a wife. The modern conception of a woman as an independent person, standing alone, engaged in her own business or profession, and complete in her isolated life, is not to be looked for in the book of Proverbs. It is the creation of accidental circumstances. However necessary it may be in a country where the women are largely in excess of the men, it cannot be regarded as final or satisfactory. In the beginning it was not so, neither will it be so in the end. If men and women are to abide in strength and to develop the many sides of their nature, they must be united. It is not good for man to be alone; nor is it good for woman to be alone. There are some passages in the New Testament which seem to invalidate this truth. The advocates of celibacy [Page 401] appeal to the example of Christ and to the express words of St. Paul. But the New Testament, as our Lord Himself expressly declares, does not abrogate the eternal law which was from the beginning. And if He Himself abstained from marriage, and if St. Paul seems to approve of such an abstention, we must seek for the explanation in certain exceptional and temporary circumstances; for it is precisely to Christ Himself in the first instance, and to His great Apostle in the second, that we owe our loftiest and grandest conceptions of marriage. There was no room for a personal marriage in the life of Him who was to be the Bridegroom of His Church; and St. Paul distinctly implies that the pressing troubles and anxieties of his own life, and the constant wearing labours which were required of the Gentile Apostle, formed the reason why it was better for him, and for such as he, to remain single.

At any rate the virtuous woman of the Proverbs is a wife: and the first thing to observe is the part she plays in relation to her husband. She is his stay and confidence: "The heart of her husband trusteth in her." She is his natural confidante and counsellor; her advice is more valuable than that of much cleverer people, because it is so absolutely disinterested; the hearts are in such vital contact that the merely intellectual communications have a quality all their own. One may often observe in an ideal marriage, though the husband seems to be the stronger and the more self-reliant, the wife is really the pillar of strength; if death removes her, he is forlorn and bereft and helpless; the gradual work of the years has led him to depend on her more and more, to draw [Page 402] from her his best inspirations, and to turn instinctively to her for advice and direction.

"She doeth him good, and not evil, all the days of her life."[707] It is not only when she comes as a young bride into his house, bright with youth, encircled with the glamour of early love,—then, it is true, the thought of her nerves his endeavours and quickens his eager steps as he turns homeward in the evening,—it is not only while her fresh charms last, and her womanly beauty acts as a spell on him, while the desire to retain her love disciplines and strengthens whatever is good in his character; but right through to the end of her life, when she has grown old, when the golden hair is grey, and the blooming cheeks are wrinkled, and the upright form is bent,—when other people see nothing beautiful about her except the beauty of old age and decay, he sees in her the sweet bride of earlier years, to him the eyes appear unchanged and the voice thrills him with happy memories; she ministers to him still and does him good; not now with the swift alacrity of foot and the deft movement of the hand, but with the dear, loyal heart, with the love which the years have mellowed and the trust which the changing circumstances of life have tested and confirmed.

It is this strong, sweet core of life in the home which gives the man dignity and honour in public. She is a crown to her husband.[708] His influence in the life of his town or of his country is not always directly traced to its true source. But it is that woman's noble sway over him, it is the constant spur and chastening of her [Page 403] love, which gives him the weighty voice and the grave authority in the counsels of the nation. "Her husband is known in the gates, when he sitteth among the elders of the land."[709] He can make but a poor return to her for all her quiet unobtrusive and self-sacrificing help year after year and on to the end, but he can at least repay her with growing reverence and loyalty; he can tell her, as it were with the impassioned lips of a lover, what he owes to her; when her children rise up and call her blessed, he can praise her, saying, "Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all."[710] Indeed it will be his growing conviction that of all the daughters of woman there is none equal to his wife. Her charms have grown upon him, her character has ripened before his eyes, her love has become at once stronger and more precious every year. It is no flattery, no idle compliment of courting-days, no soft word to win the coy heart of the maiden, but it is his own deep and sincere feeling; it is said to her who is his and has been his for years, and in whose assured

possession he finds his greatest peace: "I do not question that other women are good and true, but I am sure that you are better than all." And so she is. Every true wife is the best wife.

The next point in the virtuous woman to which our attention is drawn is her unflagging industry. Her husband "shall have no lack of gain."[711] In addition to all those treasures of mutual love and spiritual converse, all those invaluable services of counsel and guidance, of criticism and encouragement, she is a positive source of wealth to him. She is the house-manager. If he earns the bread in the first instance, it is in her hands that it seems to be miraculously multiplied. If he brings home the money which is enough for their wants, it is she who turns the silver into gold and makes the modest means appear great wealth. The fact is her hands are always busy. The spindle, the distaff, the loom, are within her reach and are constantly plied. While she unravels the knotted cares of her husband in the evening with her bright and cheery talk, while she encourages him in all his plans and heartens him for all his duties, her busy fingers are making clothes for the children, repairing, adapting, improving, or else are skilfully constructing ornaments and decorations for the household, turning the poor room into a palace, making the walls beam with beauty and the hearts of all within laugh for joy.

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There is something quite magical and impressive in woman's economy: "She is like the merchant ships; she bringeth her food from afar."[712] No one knows how it is done. The table is well spread, the food is daintily served, on infinitesimal means. She finds out by the quick intuitions of love how to get the things which the loved ones like, and by many a little sacrifice unperceived she produces effects which startle them all. She has a secret of doing and getting which no one knows but she. Early passers-by have seen a light in the house long before the day dawns; she has been up preparing the breakfast for the household, and mapping out the work for all, so that no hours may be wasted and no one in the family may be idle.[713] Her boundless economies produce astonishing results. One morning she has to announce to the husband and the children that she has managed to put together a little sum which will purchase the freehold of their house and garden.[714] Her husband exclaims, Why, how has it been done? Where has the money come from out of our little income? She smiles significantly and will not tell; but the tears moisten his eyes as he looks into her face and reads the story of self-denials, and managings, and toils, which have issued in this surprise. And the children look up with a sense of awe and wonder. They feel that there is something of the supernatural about mother; and perhaps they are right.

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She has all the delicacy and even weakness of a woman, but the life of constant activity and cheerful toil preserves her health and increases her strength. Idle women, who lounge their days away in constant murmurings over their ailments, speak contemptuously about her,—"She has the strength of a horse," they say, "and can bear anything." They do not know, they do not wish to know, that she is the author of her own strength. It is her own indomitable will, her own loving heart, which girds her loins with strength and makes strong her arms.[715] There are others who carp at her on different grounds; they do not understand how one with her husband's income can keep so comfortable a household or dress her children as she does. Those cushions of tapestry, that clothing of fine linen and purple, are an offence to her critics. "How she does it I am sure I don't know," says one, implying that there is something quite uncanny and disreputable about it. "She works like a slave," says another, with the tone of scorn that one would employ for a slave. But that is the truth: "She perceiveth that her merchandise is profitable: her lamp goeth not out by night."[716] She is indeed indefatigable. She actually makes garments which she can sell, girdles for the merchants,[717] in addition to looking well to the ways of her household. Certainly she does not eat the bread of idleness.[718]

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She can, however, very easily bear the contemptuous criticisms of others. The practical results of her life are sufficiently satisfying to make her a little independent. She has secured herself and her household against the contingencies which harass other housewives. The approach of winter has no alarms for her: all the children and servants are warmly and sufficiently clad.[719] The uncertain future has no terrors for her: she has made ample provision for it, and can regard the unknown chances with a smile of confidence.[720] And indeed, whatever detractors may say behind her back, it is not easy for any one to say anything severe in her presence. For the same loving, earnest, diligent ways which have made her household comfortable and secure have clothed her with garments better than scarlet and linen. "Strength and dignity are her clothing,"—robes so gracious and beautiful that criticism is silenced in her presence, while the hearts of all good and honest people are drawn out to her.

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But here is another characteristic of the virtuous woman. Economy and generosity go hand in hand. Frugal livers and hard workers are always the largest givers. This woman, whose toil late at night and early in the morning has enriched and blessed her own, is ready to help those who are less fortunate. "She spreadeth out her hand to the poor; yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy."[721] Most women are naturally pitiful and shrink from the sight of suffering; but while idle and self-indulgent women try to avoid the painful sight, and turn their flow of pity into the channels of vapid sentimentality, the good woman trains her sense of pity by coming into contact with those who deserve it, and only seeks to avoid the sight of suffering by trying everywhere and always to relieve it.

Among all the noble and Christlike offices of woman this is the one which most strikingly connects her with the human life of our Lord. It is her function to excite and to cherish the quality of compassion in the human heart, and by her trained skill and intuitive tact to make the ministrations of the community to the poor truly charitable instead of dangerously demoralizing. Man is apt to relieve the poor by the laws of political economy, without emotion and by measure: he makes a Poor Law which produces the evil it pretends to relieve; he degrades the lovely word Charity into a badge of shame and a wanton insult to humanity. It is woman that "spreads out her palm and reacheth forth her hand" to the poor, bringing her heart into the work, giving, not doles of money, but the helpfulness of a sister's love, the tenderness of a mother's solicitude, the awakening touch of a daughter's care. And the hand which is thus held out to the poor is precisely the hand which has been laid on the distaff and the spindle; not the lazy hand or the useless hand, but the hand which is supple with toil, dexterous with acquired skill.

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There are two reflections which must have occurred to us in following this description of the good woman. Her portrait has risen before our eyes, and we ask, Is she beautiful? We have watched her activities, their mode and their result, and we wonder whether she is religious. "Favour is deceitful and beauty is vain, but a woman that feareth the Lord she shall be praised."[722] That this woman has a beauty of her own seems clear, and that she fears the Lord is a fair inference to make. It is idle to declaim against the charms of personal beauty; we may call it deceitful and vain, but it will not cease to be attractive. Men will not be reasoned or ridiculed out of that instinctive homage which they pay to a lovely face; the witchery of bright eyes and arch looks, the winsomeness of sweet contours and delicate hues, will last, we may surmise, as long as the sun and moon endure; and why should we dishonour God by supposing that He did not make the beauty which attracts and the attraction which the beauty excites? But it is not impossible to open men's eyes to the beauty of a less transient and more satisfying kind which lies in the character and conduct of women. If mothers accustom their sons to see those sterling attractions which permanently secure the affection and the devotion of a husband, the young men will not be content with superficial beauties and vanishing charms in the women whom they choose.

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And is not the beauty of woman—such beauty as we have been contemplating—the result of fearing the Lord? Is it possible, apart from a living faith in a living God, to maintain that lovely wifeliness, that self-sacrificing, diligent love, that overflow of pity to the poor and needy, which constitute grace and loveliness of character? Has any one succeeded in even depicting an imaginary woman devoid of religion and yet complete and beautiful? We have already noticed how suited the woman's nature is to receive religious impressions and to communicate religious influences; we may now notice, in concluding, that this very characteristic renders a woman without God even more imperfect and unsatisfying than a man without God. She is naturally inclined to cling to a person rather than to an idea, to follow a person rather than a theory. The only Person to whom she can cling with absolutely good and hallowing results is God; the only Person whom she can follow and minister to without detriment to her womanhood and with gain to her spirit is Christ. A godless woman makes a sore shipwreck of life, whether she becomes sensual and depraved, or ambitious and domineering, or bitter and cynical, or vain and conventional. In her ruin there is always a power as of a fallen angel, and she can drag others with her in her fall.

If a man is wise then in choosing for himself a wife, the first thing he will demand is that she shall be one that fears the Lord, one who shall be able to lead him and help him in that which is his truest life, and to maintain for him a saving intercourse with the world of spiritual realities. He may be assured that in her love to God he has the best guarantee of her love to him, and that if she does not fear and love God the main sanction for their wedded happiness will be wanting.

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Finally, where the woman who has been described is actually found in real life it is for us to recognise her and to reward her. Let society take note of her: "Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her works praise her in the gates." The great Greek historian said that woman's highest praise consisted in not being mentioned

at all. That is not the teaching of Revelation. Woman's best work is often done in silence and without observation, but her highest praise is when the seeds sown in silence have grown into flowers of loveliness and fruit that is sweet to the taste, and the whole community is forced to yield her the honour which is her due, exalting, with heartfelt admiration and with deep gratitude to God, the Wife, the Mother, the Ministrant to the Poor.

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## FOOTNOTES:

[1] *Cf.* xxv. 24 (xxi. 9), xxvi. 22 (xviii. 8), xxvii. 12 (xxii. 3), xxvii. 13 (xx. 16), xxvi. 13 (xxii. 13), xxvi. 15 (xix. 24), xxviii. 6 (xix. 1), xxviii. 19 (xii. 11), xxix. 13 (xxii. 2); to which add xxvii. 15 (xix. 13), xxvii. 21 (xvii. 3), xxix. 22 (xv. 18).

[2] Eccl. vii. 24.

[3] Wisdom viii. 1.

[4] Eccl. vii. 25.

[5] 1 Kings iv. 33.

[6] In this passage Wisdom is represented saying—

"I from the mouth of the Highest came forth, and as vapour I veiled the earth;
I in the heights pitched my tent, my throne in a pillar of cloud;
I alone circled the ring of heaven, and walked in the depths of abysses;
In the waves of the sea, and in all the earth, and in every people and race I obtained a possession;
With all these I sought a rest (saying), In whose inheritance shall I settle?
Then came to me the command of the Creator of all; my Creator pitched my tent; and He said,
In Jacob pitch thy tent, in Israel find thine inheritance.
Before the world was, in the beginning He created me, and while the world lasts I shall not fail:
In the holy tent before Him I offered service, and thus in Sion I was planted;
In the beloved city He likewise made me rest, and in Israel is my power;
And I took root in a people that is glorified, in a portion of the Lord His inheritance."—ECCLES. xxiv. 3.

[7] Prov. xiv. 27.

[8] It may be well to remind the reader who is too familiar with the name "the Lord" to consider its significance; that "the Lord" is the English translation of that peculiar name, Jahveh, by which God revealed Himself to Moses, and the term Jahveh seems to convey one of two ideas, existence or the cause of existence, according to the vowel-pointing of the consonants יהוה.

[9] Eccles. i. 6, 8.

[10] Prov. ii. 10.

[11] Prov. i. 32.

[12] We may remind ourselves that, according to the most probable conjecture, this introduction to Solomon's Proverbs (chaps, i.-ix.) dates from the reign of Josiah (640-609 B.C.).

[13] Isa. i. 15.

[14] Isa. lix. 7.

[15] Micah iii. 10.

[16] Jer. ii. 34.

[17] Jer. xxii. 17.

[18] Prov. i. 14. Compare the proverb, xvi. 29, "A man of violence enticeth his neighbour, and leadeth him in a way that is not good."

[19] Prov. ix. 13-18.

[20] Prov. v. 12-14.

[21] Prov. vi. 32 and v. 22.

[22] Prov. i. 19.

[23] A dog-chain sold in London at one shilling and threepence was found to have cost, for materials twopence, for labour three-farthings. (Evidence before Lord Dunraven's Commission on the Sweating System).

[24] See Prov. i. 13.

[25] Prov. ii. 22.

[26] Prov. i. 19.

[27] Prov. ii. 19.

[28] Prov. i. 17.

[29] Prov. i. 25.

[30] Prov. i. 31, 32.

[31] Prov. i. 24-31.

[32] Prov. ii. 21, 22.

[33] Prov. i. 31-33.

[34] Prov. ix. 12, 18.

[35] *Cf.* xxviii. 26, "He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool: but whoso walketh wisely, he shall be delivered."

[36] Prov. iii. 1-10.

[37] Luke xviii. 29, 30.

[38] The Hebrew word שִׁקּוּי in iii. 8*b* is the same as that which is translated "my drink" in Hosea ii. 6. The LXX. render it "marrow," but it means the moisture which in a natural and healthy state keeps the bones supple, as opposed to the dryness which is produced by senility or disease.

[39] *Si ton Dieu veut ta mort, c'est déjà trop vécu.*

[40] Prov. iii. 29.

[41] Prov. iii. 33.

[42] *Cf.* xii. 8, "A man shall be commended according to his wisdom: but he that is of a perverse heart, shall be despised."

[43] Prov. iii. 27, 28.

[44] Prov. iii. 6.

[45] Matt. vi. 22.

[46] Prov. iii. 13-15.

[47] Prov. iii. 18.

[48] Prov. iii. 16.

[49] Prov. iii. 8.

[50] Prov. iii. 31.

[51] Prov. iii. 12.

[52] Prov. iii. 35.

[53] This subject, which occupies so large a part of the book, is further treated in Lect. XXIII.

[54] It is noteworthy that the LXX. in ver. 2 seek to maintain the Solomonic authorship by deliberately altering the words.

[55] *Cf.* the beautiful family picture of the linked and mutually blessed generations in the proverb, "Children's children are the crown of old men; and the glory of children are their fathers" (xvii. 6).

[56] Prov. iv. 8, 9.

[57] Prov. iv. 14.

[58] Prov. iv. 20-23.

[59] Matt. xv. 19.

[60] *Paradise Lost*, iv. 20, etc., and 75. *Cf.* also ix. 120:—

> "And the more I see
> Pleasures about me, so much more I feel
> Torment within me, as from hateful siege
> Of contraries. All good to me becomes
> Bane, and in heaven much worse would be my state."

[61] Prov. iv. 24.

[62] Prov. iv. 25-27.

[63] Prov. iv. 27.

[64] *Cf.* xvii. 24, "Wisdom is before the face of him that hath understanding; but the eyes of a fool are in the ends of the earth."

[65] Eccles. ix. 7.

[66] Prov. iv. 26.

[67] Prov. v. 21.

[68] Prov. iv. 19.

[69] Prov. iv. 16, 17.

[70] Prov. iv. 18, margin.

[71] Prov. iv. 12.

[72] Prov. xiv. 12.

[73] Prov. v. 8.

[74] The Laureate has touched with stern satire on this debased modern Realism:—

"Author, atheist, essayist, novelist, realist, rhymester, play your part,
Paint the mortal shame of Nature with the living hues of Art.
Rip your brothers' vices open, strip your own foul passions bare,
Down with Reticence, down with Reverence—forward—naked—let them stare!
Feed the budding rose of boyhood with the drainage of your sewer,
Send the drain into the fountain lest the stream should issue pure.
Set the maiden fancies wallowing in the troughs of Zolaism,
Forward, forward,—aye and backward, downward too into the abysm!"

—*The new Locksley Hall*.

[75] Prov. ix. 17.

[76] Prov. vi. 25.

[77] Prov. vii. 16, 17.

[78] Prov. v. 15-19.

[79] *Paradise Lost*.

[80] Prov. vi. 27, 28.

[81] Prov. v. 9.

[82] Prov. vi. 33.

[83] Prov. vi. 34, 35.

[84] Prov. v. 10.

[85] Prov. vi. 26.

[86] Prov. v. 11.

[87] Prov. v. 12-14.

[88] Prov. v. 21.

[89] It is, if we may say so, a maxim of modern science that "A sin without punishment is as impossible, as complete a contradiction in terms, as a cause without an effect" (W. R. Gregg).

[90] Prov. v. 23.

[91] *King Lear.*

[92] Mark iii. 26.

[93] Prov. vi. 26.

[94] Prov. xxiii. 29, 32.

[95] See Prov. xvii. 18, xx. 16, repeated in xxvii. 13, and especially xi. 15.

[96] Prov. xxii. 26, 27.

[97] Eccles. xxix. 14, 16, 17, 18, 19.

[98] Prov. xxiv. 30-34; see for a fuller treatment of the subject Lecture XX.

[99] Prov. xxx. 25-27.

[100] It is the word used in Exod. v. 6 of those who directed the tasks of the Israelites in Egypt.

[101] Prov. vi. 6-8.

[102] Prov. vi. 12-15.

[103] *Cf*. the proverb xvi. 30—"He that shutteth his eyes, it is to devise froward things: he that compresseth his lips bringeth evil to pass."

[104] *Cf*. Prov. xx. 14: "It is naught, it is naught, saith the buyer: but when he is gone his way, then he boasteth."

[105] It is probably assumed that warnings and corrections have been given him in vain—*cf*. Prov. xxix. 1: "He that being often reproved hardeneth his neck shall suddenly be broken, and that without remedy."

[106] Prov. vi. 16-19.

[107] Prov. xxx. 13. See Lecture XIII. for the teaching of the Proverbs on Pride.

[108] Prov. xii. 19.

[109] See Prov. xii. 17; xiv. 5, 25; xix. 5, 9. A crime, it may be remembered, which would be much more common and much more fatal in a primitive state of society, where on the one hand legal procedure was less cautious and less searching, and on the other hand the inward sanctions of truth which Christianity has brought home to the modern conscience were but feebly perceived.

[110] Prov. vii. 6.

[111] Prov. vii. 4.

[112] Prov. vii. 9.

[113] Prov. vii. 8. The term צָעַד describes a special kind of motion, *e.g*., the slow pacing of the oxen that bare the ark (2 Sam. vi. 15), or the imagined efforts of idols to move (Jer. x. 5); it is therefore unfortunate to render it by the generic word "go." The affected dignity and sauntering insouciance of a dandy are immediately suggested by it, and the shade of meaning is fairly well preserved in the English "saunter."

[114] This is the meaning of the word translated 'clamorous.'

[115] So says the Greek version of ver. 10: ἢ ποιεῖ νέων ἐξίπτασθαι καρδίας.

[116] See Lev. vii. 16.

[117] Prov. viii. 1-6.

[118] Prov. viii. 7-9.

[119] Prov. viii. 20.

[120] Prov. viii. 8, 9.

[121] Prov. viii. 18.

[122] Prov. viii. 10-16.

[123] Prov. viii. 17.

[124] Prov. viii. 22. There is unfortunately an ambiguity in the word קָנָה. It may mean either "to possess" or "to create." *Cf*. Gen. xiv. 19, 22, where it is impossible to decide between "Possessor of the earth" and "Maker of the earth." That the word might be rendered "got" in this passage is evident from iv. 7, where it is

employed; on the other hand, the LXX. renders ἔκτισε, and the author of Ecclesiasticus evidently took it in this sense; *cf.* i. 4, "Wisdom hath been created before all things, and the understanding of prudence from everlasting." In Gen. iv. it is rendered "gotten," but it is quite possible that the joyful mother called her son קַיִן with the feeling that she had created him with the help of the Lord.

[125] Prov. viii. 26.

[126] Milton, *Paradise Lost*, vii. 225.

[127] Prov. viii. 29. It is hardly necessary to point out that the language betrays a complete ignorance of those facts with which astronomy and geology have made us familiar. The author puts into the lips of Wisdom the scientific conceptions of his own time, when the earth was regarded as a flat surface, covered by a solid circular vault, in which the sun, and moon, and stars were fixed. The "circle upon the flood" is probably the apparent circle which is suggested to the observer by the horizon. No one had as yet dreamed that the mountains were thrown up by, not settled in, the surface of the earth, nor was it dreamed that the bounds of the sea are far from being settled, but subject to gradual variations, and even to cataclysmal changes. It may be observed, however, that the voyage of the *Challenger* seems to have established beyond question that the great outlines of land and ocean have remained approximately the same from the beginning. Ocean islands are of volcanic origin or the work of the coral-insect; but the great continents and all contained within the fringe of a thousand-fathom depth from their shores have remained practically unaltered despite the numerous partial upheavals or submergences.

A passage so full of spiritual and moral significance, and yet so entirely untouched by what are to us the elementary conclusions of science, should furnish a valuable criterion in estimating what we are to understand by the Inspiration of such a book as this.

[128] *Cf.* x. 23.

[130] Wisdom vii. 25-29. The book of Wisdom, a work of the second century B.C., at one time had a place in the canon, and owes its exclusion, in all probability, to the fact that it was written in Greek; as there was no Hebrew original, it was evident that Solomon was not the author. But the use which the Epistle to the Hebrews makes of the passage quoted in the text may suggest how very unnecessary the exclusion from the canon was.

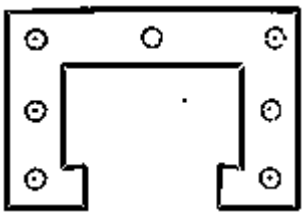
[131] Luke vii. 35; Matt. xi. 19.

[132] John viii. 58.

[133] John i. 3, 18.

[134] *Cf.* for this contrast between the two xxiii. 26-28, where Wisdom speaks, and expressly warns against her rival.

[135] The arrangement of the house is that of an open courtyard, surrounded with apartments, the general roof supported on the pillars thus.



[136] Prov. vii. 14.

[137] Prov. ix. 5.

[138] Matt. xxii. 1, *et seq*.

[139] Prov. ix. 6.

[140] Prov. ix. 7.

[141] Prov. xxiii. 9.

[142] Prov. xiii. 1.

[143] Prov. xiv. 6.

[144] Prov. xv. 12.

[145] Prov. xix. 25.

[146] Prov. xxiv. 9.

[147] Prov. xxii. 10.

[148] Matt. vii. 6.

[149] Prov. ix. 9. *Cf*. xviii. 15, "The heart of the prudent getteth knowledge; and the ear of the wise seeketh knowledge."

[150] Prov. ix. 10.

[151] Matt. xii. 43.

[152] See John viii. 1 *et seq*.

[153] Milton, *Paradise Lost*, xi. 650 etc.

[154] The fuller teaching of the book on the subject of Woman will be found in Lect. XXXI.

[155] Prov. x. 15; xviii. 11.

[156] Prov. xiii. 8.

[157] Prov. xviii. 16.

[158] Prov. xix. 6; xiv. 20.

[159] Prov. xxi. 14.

[160] Prov. xvii. 8. More literally: "A precious stone is the gift in the eyes of him who gets possession of it, whithersoever he turneth he deals wisely." That is to say, the man who receives the gift, whether a judge or a witness or an opponent, is as it were retained for the giver, and induced to use his best faculties in behalf of his retainer.

[161] Prov. xix. 4: "Wealth addeth many friends, but the poor—his companion separates from him."

[162] Prov. xxii. 17.

[163] Prov. xviii. 23.

[164] Prov. xiv. 20; xix. 4.

[165] Prov. xix. 7. The sense of the Authorised Version is here retained, but it will be seen in Lecture XII. that there is good reason for treating the third clause of the verse as a mutilated fragment of another proverb: see p. 166.

[166] Prov. xxii. 7.

[167] Prov. xii. 9. This reading is obtained by following the LXX., whose translation ὁ δουλεύων ἑαυτῷ shows that they pointed וְעֹבֵד לוֹ. *Cf.* Eccles. x. 27: "Better is he that laboureth and aboundeth in all things than he that boasteth himself and lacketh bread."

[168] Prov. x. 4.

[169] Prov. xiii. 18.

[170] Prov. xxii. 4.

[171] Prov. xxi. 20.

[172] Prov. xxiii. 21.

[173] Prov. xxvii. 23-27.

[174] Prov. xi. 28.

[175] Prov. xxiii. 5 (marg.).

[176] *Cf.* the Turkish proverb: "Of riches lawfully gained the devil takes half, of riches unlawfully gained he takes the whole and the owner too."

[177] Prov. xv. 6, *cf.* xiv. 24, "A crown of the wise is their riches, but the folly of fools, (though they be rich, remains nothing but) folly."

[178] Prov. xiii. 11.

[179] Prov. xxi. 6. It is evident from their translation ἐπὶ παγίδας θανάτου that the LXX. read מוֹקְשֵׁי־מָוֶת as in Psalm xviii. 6, and this gives a very graphic and striking sense, while the received text of the Hebrew, מְבַקְשֵׁי־מָוֶת, is hardly intelligible.

[180] Prov. xxii. 16.

[181] Prov. xiii. 22; xxviii. 8.

[182] Prov. xi. 4.

[183] Prov. x. 22.

[184] Prov. xv. 6.

[185] Prov. xvi. 8.

[186] Prov. xix. 1. The parallelism in this verse is not so complete as in xxviii. 6. The Peshitto reads, "than he who is perverse in his lips and is rich," but it is better to retain the text and understand: There is a poor man walking in his integrity, and everyone thinks that he is to be commiserated; but he is much better off than the fool with perverse lips, though no one thinks of commiserating this last.

[187] Prov. xvi. 16.

[188] Prov. xx. 15.

[189] Prov. xv. 16, 17.

[190] Prov. xvii. 1.

[191] Prov. xxii. 1. This proverb is inscribed in the cupola which lights the Manchester Exchange. It is a good skylight, but apparently too high up for the busy merchants on the floor of the Exchange to see without more effort than is to be expected of them.

[192] Prov. xxii. 2.

[193] Prov. xiv. 31; xvii. 5.

[194] Prov. xxviii. 11. Cf. an interesting addition to xvii. 6 in the LXX.— τοῦ πιστοῦ ὅλος ὁ κόσμος τῶν χρημάτων τοῦ δὲ ἀπίστου οὐδὲ ὀβολός. The faithful man owns the whole world of possessions, the unfaithful owns not a farthing.

[195] It is said of Agassiz that he excused himself from engaging in a profitable lecturing tour on the ground that he had not time to make money.

[196] *Cf*. the saying of Sirach: "Winnow not with every wind and go not into every way, for so doth the sinner that hath a double tongue." (Eccles. v. 9).

[197] Prov. xv. 27.

[198] Prov. xx. 21.

[199] Prov. xxviii. 20.

[200] Prov. xxviii. 22.

[201] Prov. xxiii. 4.

[202] Prov. xxi. 26.

[203] Prov. xi. 24, 25.

[204] Prov. xxviii. 27.

[205] Prov. xix. 17.

[206] Prov. xxii. 9.

[207] Prov. xxx. 8, 9.

[208] Prov. x. 28.

[209] Prov. x. 30.

[210] Prov. xiv. 11. Cf. Prov. xii. 7: "Overthrow the wicked; and they are not (*i.e*., there is no rising again for them), but the house of the righteous shall stand."

[211] Prov. xi. 18.

[212] Prov. xiii. 3.

[213] Prov. xi. 5, 6; xxi. 7.

[214] Prov. xxii. 8.

[215] Prov. xxi. 7, 8, 10, 15; xxvi. 24, 26; xv. 28.

[216] Prov. xi. 7.

[217] Prov. xiii. 9; xxiv. 20.

[218] Prov. xi. 19.

[219] Prov. xi. 21.

[220] Prov. xiv. 12; xvi. 5, 25; xxi. 2.

[221] Prov. xxiii. 17, 18; xxiv. 1, 19.

[222] Prov. xii. 7.

[223] Prov. xiv. 12; xvi. 25.

[224] Prov. xxiv. 15, 16.

[225] Prov. xxix. 16.

[226] Prov. xi. 3.

[227] Prov. xiii. 6. Cf. Prov. xiv. 14: "The backslider in heart shall be sated from his own ways, and the good man from himself." Though probably we ought to read, with Nowack, מִמַּעֲלָלָיו, which would give a completer parallelism: "The backslider shall be sated from his own ways, and the good man from his own doings."

[228] Prov. xi. 8. Cf. Prov. xxviii. 18.

[229] Prov. xxi. 18.

[230] Prov. xii. 13.

[231] Prov. xii. 21.

[232] Prov. xiii. 25.

[233] Prov. xvi. 17; xix. 16.

[234] Prov. xiv. 22.

[235] Prov. xxi. 21.

[236] Prov. xxi. 15; xxix. 6. Unless, with Delitzsch, we are to read בְּפָשַׁע for בְּפֶשַׁע, and יָרוּץ for יָרוֹן, which would give: "In the steps of a bad man lie snares, but the righteous runs and rejoices."

[237] Prov. xi. 27, 30.

[238] Prov. xii. 12.

[239] Prov. xvii. 26: "To punish the righteous is not good, nor to smite the noble for their uprightness."

[240] Prov. xiv. 32.

[241] Prov. xx. 11.

[242] Prov. xiv. 19.

[243] Prov. xxv. 26.

[244] Prov. xiv. 26: "In the fear of the Lord is strong confidence: and his children shall have a place of refuge." So Prov. xx. 7: "A just man that walketh in his integrity: blessed are his children after him."

[245] Prov. xiii. 22.

[246] Prov. xii. 26.

[247] Prov. xxii. 11. Cf. Prov. xvi. 13.

[248] Prov. xi. 31.

[249] Prov. xxix. 2.

[250] Prov. xxviii. 12.

[251] Prov. xi. 10, 11.

[252] Prov. xiv. 34.

[253] Prov. xxviii. 28.

[254] Prov. xii. 26.

[255] Prov. xvi. 27.

[256] Prov. xviii. 3.

[257] Prov. xxviii. 28.

[258] Prov. xxix. 2.

[259] Prov. xxiv. 24, 25.

[260] Prov. xxviii. 4.

[261] Prov. xxviii. 1.

[262] Prov. xi. 20.

[263] Prov. xii. 2.

[264] Prov. xv. 26.

[265] Prov. xv. 9.

[266] Prov. xvii. 15, 26; xviii. 5.

[267] Prov. xxi. 12, where "one that is righteous" seems to mean God Himself; see the margin of R.V.

[268] Prov. xxii. 12.

[269] Prov. xxiv. 12.

[270] Prov. x. 29.

[271] Prov. xxviii. 9.

[272] Prov. xxi. 3.

[273] Prov. xxi. 27.

[274] Prov. xv. 8, 29.

[275] Prov. xiv. 9. This seems to be the meaning of this difficult verse, which should be translated: The sin-offering mocks fools, but among the righteous is favour.

[276] Prov. x. 23.

[277] Matt. xvi. 27.

[278] 1 John iii. 7, 10; ii. 29.

[279] "If ye know that He is righteous," says St. John, "ye know that every one also that doeth righteousness is begotten of Him." (1 John ii. 29).

[280] Prov. xxv. 15.

[281] Prov. xiii. 2.

[282] Prov. xviii. 20.

[283] Prov. xviii. 21.

[284] Prov. x. 14.

[285] Prov. xii. 18.

[286] Prov. xviii. 6, 7.

[287] Prov. xii. 13.

[288] Prov. xiv. 3.

[289] Prov. xv. 23.

[290] Prov. xxi. 23.

[291] Prov. xxi. 28.

[292] Prov. xvii. 20.

[293] Prov. xviii. 4.

[294] Prov. xxii. 11.

[295] Prov. xxii. 18.

[296] Prov. xix. 1, 22.

[297] Prov. xxiii. 16.

[298] Prov. xii. 16.

[299] Prov. xxix. 11.

[300] Prov. xix. 7. All the Proverbs in this selection are in the form of a distich. This affords a fair presumption that this verse with its three clauses is mutilated; and the presumption is confirmed by the fact that the third clause adds nothing of value, even if it be intelligible at all, to the sense. There is good reason, therefore, for believing that this third clause is the half of a distich which has not been preserved in its integrity; all the more because the LXX. have a complete proverb which runs thus: ὁ πολλὰ κακοποιῶν τελεσιουργεῖ κακίαν, ὃς δὲ ἐρεθίζει λόγους οὐ σωθήσεται. "He that does much evil is a craftsman of iniquity, and he that uses provoking words shall not escape." Perhaps in the Hebrew text which was before the Greek translators מְנַדֵּף appeared instead of מְרַדֵּף, and לֹא הָיָה instead of לֹא־הֶמָּה.

[301] Prov. xxvi. 21.

[302] Prov. xxx. 32, 33.

[303] Prov. xii. 18.

[304] Prov. xii. 17.

[305] Prov. xix. 28.

[306] Prov. xix. 5, rep. ver. 9.

[307] Prov. xxi. 28.

[308] Prov. xxv. 18.

[309] Prov. xxvi. 23-28.

[310] Prov. xiii. 5.

[311] Prov. xii. 19.

[312] Prov. xii. 22.

[313] Prov. xx. 17.

[314] Prov. xxvi. 2.

[315] Prov. xxviii. 23.

[316] Prov. xxix. 5.

[317] Prov. xi. 13 and xx. 19; xxv. 2, 23. *Cf.* "Whoso discovereth secrets loseth his credit and shall never find friend to his mind" (Eccles. xxvii. 16).

[318] Prov. xviii. 8, rep. xxvi. 22.

[319] Prov. xvi. 28.

[320] Prov. xxvi. 20.

[321] Prov. xvii. 9.

[322] Prov. xi. 9.

[323] Prov. xii. 6.

[324] Prov. xv. 28.

[325] Prov. xvi. 28.

[326] Prov. xxvi. 18, 19.

[327] Prov. xviii. 13.

[328] Prov. xxix. 20.

[329] Prov. xxiii. 9.

[330] Prov. x. 19.

[331] Prov. xiii. 3, 16.

[332] Prov. xiv. 23.

[333] Prov. xiv. 33.

[334] Prov. xiv. 7. There is a quaint and pertinent passage in Lyly's Euphues:—"We may see the cunning and curious work of Nature, which hath barred and hedged nothing in so strongly as the tongue, with two rowes of teeth, and therewith two lips, besides she hath placed it farre from the heart, that it should not utter that which the heart had conceived; this also should cause us to be silent, seeinge those that use much talke, though they speake truly, are never beleeved."

[335] Prov. xv. 2.

[336] Prov. xviii. 2.

[337] Prov. xii. 18.

[338] Eccl. x. 4.

[339] Prov. xv. 4. מַרְפֵּא is best rendered here and in Eccl. x. 4 by "gentleness." It is just that quality of humility and submission and tranquillity which our Lord blessed as meekness.

[340] Prov. xv. 1.

[341] Prov. xv. 26.

[342] Prov. xvi. 24.

[343] Prov. xii. 25.

[344] Prov. xv. 23.

[345] Prov. xxv. 20.

[346] Prov. xxv. 11.

[347] *Cf*. Eccles. xx. 20: "A wise sentence shall be rejected when it cometh out of a fool's mouth, for he will not speak it in due season."

[348] Prov. xxv. 12.

[349] Prov. xxviii. 23.

[350] Prov. xv. 7.

[351] Prov. xvi. 21.

[352] Prov. xvi. 23.

[353] Prov. xx. 15.

[354] Prov. xv. 28.

[355] Prov. xxiv. 26.

[356] Prov. xi. 9.

[357] Prov. xii. 6.

[358] Prov. xiv. 3.

[359] Prov. xiv. 5, 25.

[360] Prov. xxxi. 8, 9.

[361] Note the intimate connection between conduct and speech in such a proverb as xvii. 4. When we do evil we are always ready to listen to evil talk, when we talk deceitfully we are preparing to go on to worse deeds of evil, to listen to tongues of destruction. Note, too, how in xii. 5 the thoughts and the counsels of the heart come before the words and the mouth in v. 6.

[362] Prov. xi. 12.

[363] Prov. xvii. 27.

[364] Prov. xvii. 28. *Cf*. the old Norse proverb:—

> "An unwise man when he comes among the people
> Had best be silent: no one knows
> That he nothing knows unless he talks too much."

[365] Prov. xxiv. 7.

[366] Prov. xiv. 15.

[367] James i. 26.

[368] Prov. xvi. 1.

[369] Prov. xxi. 10.

[370] Prov. xxv. 14.

[371] Prov. xvi. 18, 19.

[372] Prov. xviii. 12.

[373] Prov. xxvii. 2.

[374] Prov. xxi. 24.

[375] Prov. xxix. 23.

[376] Prov. xxvi. 12.

[377] Prov. xiii. 1; xv. 20.

[378] Prov. x. 17.

[379] Prov. xii. 1.

[380] Prov. xv. 8.

[381] Prov. xv. 32.

[382] Prov. xiii. 13 should be translated: "Whoso despiseth the word (*sc*. of warning and rebuke) shall be under a pledge to it (*i.e*. he has contracted an obligation to the word by hearing it, and in case of disobedience will have to redeem this implicit pledge by suffering and remorse), but he that feareth the commandment shall be rewarded."

[383] Prov. xiii. 17.

[384] Prov. xvii. 10.

[385] Prov. xxvii. 5.

[386] Prov. xxviii. 23.

[387] Prov. xxvii. 21: "The fining pot is for silver and the furnace for gold, and a man for the mouth of his praise." This somewhat obscure aphorism is most simply explained thus:—A man should make his conscience a kind of furnace, in which he tries all the laudatory things which are said of him, accepting only the refined and pure metal which results from such a test, and rejecting the dross. This is simpler than, with Delitzsch, to explain, "a man is tested by the praise which is bestowed upon him as silver and gold are tested in the fire."

[388] Prov. xiii. 10.

[389] Prov. xxviii. 26.

[390] Prov. xi. 2.

[391] Prov. xii. 15*b*.

[392] Prov. xvi. 20.

[393] Prov. xv. 31, 33.

[394] Prov. xvii. 2.

[395] This is an addition of the LXX. to xiii. 13, and may represent an original Hebrew text. For the idea cp. Eccles. x. 25, "Unto the servant that is wise shall they that are free do service."

[396] Prov. xiii. 10.

[397] Prov. xvii. 19.

[398] Prov. xiv. 3.

[399] Prov. xiv. 16.

[400] Prov. xvi. 5.

[401] Prov. xv. 25.

[402] Prov. xxi. 29.

[403] Prov. xxi. 4.

[404] Prov. xxii. 4. The probable rendering is, "The outcome of humility is the fear of the Lord, riches, honour, and life."

[405] Prov. xvi. 20.

[406] Prov. xviii. 12.

[407] The answer of the saint was very characteristic. Could he really believe that he was so vile as he said, when he compared himself with others who were obviously worse? "Ah," he said, "it is when I recount all God's exceptional mercies to me that I seem to myself the worst of men, for others have not had such favours at His hands."

[408] Prov. xiii. 19.

[409] Prov. xiii. 12.

[410] Prov. xiii. 12.

[411] Prov. xvii. 22.

[412] Prov. xviii. 14.

[413] Prov. xiv. 13.

[414] Prov. xv. 13.

[415] Prov. xv. 15*b*.

[416] Prov. xvii. 22.

[417] Prov. xv. 15.

[418] Prov. xv. 30.

[419] Prov. xxiv. 12, marginal reading.

[420] Prov. xx. 12.

[421] Prov. xv. 3.

[422] Prov. xv. 11.

[423] Prov. xvi. 2, rep. xxi. 2.

[424] Prov. xx. 27.

[425] Prov. xx. 24.

[426] Prov. xii. 5.

[427] Prov. xix. 22.

[428] Prov. xvii. 3.

[429] Prov. xx. 9.

[430] Prov. xvi. 4. This strange saying, interpreted in the light of the Gospel, cannot mean that wicked people are actually made in order to exhibit the righteousness and judgment of God in their punishment on the day of wrath,

though that was probably the thought in the mind of the writer. But it reminds us of the truth that every human being is a direct concern of the Maker, who has His own wise purpose to fulfil in even the most inconsiderable and apparently abortive life.

[431] Prov. xxix. 22.

[432] Prov. xxix. 8.

[433] Prov. xxvi. 21.

[434] Prov. xxii. 24.

[435] Prov. xvii. 12.

[436] Prov. xiv. 17, 29.

[437] Prov. xix. 11. "When Lanfranc was prior of Bec he ventured to oppose Duke William's Flemish marriage. In a wild burst of wrath William bade his men burn a manor house of Bec and drive out Lanfranc from Norman ground. He came to see the work done, and found Lanfranc hobbling on a lame horse towards the frontier. He angrily bad him hasten, and Lanfranc replied by a cool promise to go faster out of his land if he would give him a better steed. 'You are the first criminal that ever asked gifts from his judge,' retorted William, but a burst of laughter told that the wrath had gone, and William and Lanfranc drew together again."—Green's *Conquest of England*, p. 551.

[438] Prov. xvii. 27.

[439] This word הִתְנַלָּע, which only occurs here (xx. 3) and in xvii. 14 and xviii. 1, would seem from the cognate root in Arab. and Syr. to mean "setting the teeth together," which is a much more vivid and specific idea than quarrelling.

[440] Prov. xx. 3.

[441] Prov. xxix. 11.

[442] Prov. xxv. 28.

[443] Prov. xix. 19.

[444] Prov. xxv. 8.

[445] Prov. xxv. 9.

[446] Prov. xvii. 14. *See* note 4, p. 205.

[447] Prov. xvi. 32.

[448] Prov. x. 12.

[449] 1 Peter iv. 8.

[450] James v. 20.

[451] 1 Cor. xiii. 4.

[452] This meaning of מַרְפֵּא, as was observed in Lecture XII., p. 172, seems to yield the best sense in these two passages (cp. xii. 18; xiii. 17), as in Eccl. x. 4, "gentleness allayeth great offences," which is a good commentary on our text.

[453] Prov. xiv. 30.

[454] Prov. xv. 4.

[455] Prov. xx. 22.

[456] *Missionary Review of the World*, Feb. 1889, p. 143.

[457] Prov. xv. 33.

[458] Prov. xvi. 1.

[459] Prov. xvi. 2.

[460] Prov. xvi. 3.

[461] Prov. xvi. 4. *See* note, p. 201.

[462] Prov. xvi. 5.

[463] Prov. xvi. 6.

[464] Prov. xvi. 7.

[465] Prov. xvi. 9. *Cf*. Prov. xix. 21: "There are many devices in a man's heart; but the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand."

[466] Prov. xvi. 20.

[467] Prov. xviii. 18. John Paton, the missionary to the New Hebrides, uncertain whether to go back to Scotland and plead for more missionaries, and receiving no light from human counsel, says, "After many prayers and wrestlings and tears, I went alone before the Lord, and on my knees cast lots with a solemn appeal to God, and the answer came 'Go home.' In my heart I believe that ... the Lord condescended to decide for me the path of duty, otherwise unknown; and I believe it the more truly now, in view of the aftercome of thirty years of service to Christ that flowed out of the steps then deliberately and devoutly taken." See the *Autobiography*, Second Part (Hodder and Stoughton, 1889).

[468] Prov. xvi. 33.

[469] Deut. xxv. 13-16.

[470] Lev. xix. 33, 36.

[471] Eccles. vii. 15.

[472] Isa. xxviii. 23-29.

[473] It seems impossible that a general and perfect morality in business can ever be attained apart from this apprehension of an Omniscient Mind weighing and judging, as well as accurately observing, everything done even in secret. In mediæval Europe, when this faith was practically unquestioned, there was a certain honesty and sincerity in handicrafts and in general dealing, until the Church made the fatal blunder of granting indulgences for men's peccadilloes, and professing to exonerate them from the consequences of the truth which she herself in theory held.

[474] Prov. xvi. 6.

[475] Prov. xviii. 24. This sense is obtained by what appears a necessary change in the text; we must read יֵשׁ for אִישׁ. A similar error occurs 2 Sam. xiv. 19 and Micah vi. 10.

[476] Prov. xxvii. 14.

[477] Prov. xxvii. 19.

[478] "Sorrows by being communicated grow less and joys greater."—Bacon.

[479] Prov. xxvii. 17.

[480] Prov. xxvii. 6.

[481] Prov. xxvii. 9.

[482] "Amicus certus in re incerta cernitur."—CICERO.

[483] Prov. xxvii. 10.

[484] Prov. xviii. 24.

[485] Prov. xviii. 19.

[486] 2 Chron. xx. 7.

[487] Exod. xxxiii. 11.

[488] John xv. 14.

[489] Prov. xxvii. 14.

[490] See note on הִתְנַלָּע in Lecture XV., p. 205.

[491] *III. King Henry VI.*, Act v., Sc. 6.

[492] ἢ θεὸς ἢ θήριον.

[493] Prov. xxvii. 8.

[494] Prov. xxvii. 10.

[495] Prov. xxv. 17.

[496] Eccles. xv. 11-20.

[497] James i. 13-15.

[498] Prov. xix. 2.

[499] Prov. xii. 15.

[500] Prov. xv. 22.

[501] Prov. xix. 20.

[502] Prov. xi. 14.

[503] Prov. xx. 18.

[504] Prov. xxiv. 5, 6.

[505] Prov. xx. 5.

[506] Prov. xix. 21.

[507] Prov. xix. 23.

[508] Prov. xix. 16.

[509] Prov. xix. 8.

[510] Prov. xix. 27.

[511] Prov. xiii. 13.

[512] Prov. xix. 29.

[513] Prov. xxi. 30.

[514] Prov. xxi. 31.

[515] Prov. xvii. 11.

[516] Prov. xix. 20.

[517] Prov. xxvi. 14.

[518] Prov. xxiv. 34.

[519] Prov. xix. 24.

[520] Prov. xxvi. 15.

[521] Prov. xxvi. 13.

[522] Prov. xxii. 13.

[523] Prov. xxvi. 16.

[524] Prov. xv. 19.

[525] Prov. xx. 13.

[526] Prov. xix. 15.

[527] Prov. xii. 27.

[528] Prov. xvi. 26.

[529] Prov. xxi. 25.

[530] Prov. xviii. 9.

[531] Prov. xii. 11.

[532] Prov. xxviii. 19.

[533] Prov. xiv. 4.

[534] Prov. xxviii. 19.

[535] Prov. xxiv. 30-34.

[536] Prov. xxvii. 23-27.

[537] Prov. xiii. 4.

[538] Prov. xxi. 5.

[539] Prov. xxi. 20.

[540] Prov. xxii. 29.

[541] Prov. xii. 24.

[542] Prov. xii. 27.

[543] Prov. xxxi. 27.

[544] Prov. xxi. 17.

[545] Prov. xxxi. 6, 7.

[546] Prov. xxxi. 4, 5.

[547] Prov. xx. 1.

[548] The difficulty of the word חַכְלִלוּת, which means "dimming," is that in the only other place where it occurs (Gen. xlix. 12: "His eyes shall be red with wine, and his teeth white with milk") the redness is evidently regarded as an

advantageous attribute. But perhaps the explanation is to be sought in the fact that the immediate effect of wine upon the eye is to darken it in one sense, and the ultimate effect is to darken it in another. In the first moment of excitement the pupil of the drinker's eye dilates and flashes with a darkling fire; but it is not long before the eye becomes heavy, dim, watery, and maudlin. It is in this last sense that we must understand the word here.

[549] Prov. xxiii. 33. זָרוֹת must, as in xxii. 14, be rendered "strange women" (Bertheau). The alternative rendering, "the strange, or the rare" (Nowack) is logically inadmissible, because the verse is obviously describing the moral effects of drink, and no one can say that to see strange or rare visions is a moral effect to be specially deprecated.

[550] "The primary discomforts of an act of drunkenness," says Dr. G. W. Balfour, "are readily removed for the time by a repetition of the cause. Thus what has been an act may readily become a habit, all the more readily that each repetition more and more enfeebles both the will and the judgment."—Art. "Drunkenness" in *Encycl. Brit.*

[551] 2 Tim. iii. 4—φιλήδονοι μᾶλλον ἢ φιλόθεοι, pleasure-loving rather than God-loving; which means, not that men place pleasure before them consciously as a substitute for God, but only that the instinctive desire of pleasure has not been mastered by the love of God.

[552] Prov. x. 15.

[553] Prov. xxiii. 10, 11.

[554] Prov. xv. 25.

[555] Prov. xiv. 31.

[556] Prov. xvii. 5.

[557] Prov. xix. 17.

[558] Prov. xix. 13.

[559] Prov. xxii. 2.

[560]

> "What though on hamely fare we dine,
> Wear hoddin-grey, and a' that;
> Gie fools their silks and knaves their wine,
> A man's a man for a' that.
> For a' that and a' that,
> Their tinsel show and a' that,
> The honest man, tho' e'er sae poor,
> Is king o' men for a' that."

[561] Prov. xiv. 21.

[562] Prov. xi. 26. The following description of Persia, in the *Missionary Review of the World*, October, 1889, p. 782, aptly illustrates the practices against which the text inveighs:—"The sole end for which the Persian Government exists is the collection of the revenue, the fleecing of the people. Large portions of the land, confiscated from time to time, belong to the Sovereign, and are farmed out on terms well-nigh ruinous to the tenant. Even where property belongs to the subject, it is taxed to the last degree as a starting-point, while the successions of sub-rulers and collectors make still further drains upon the moiety that must save the labourer's family from absolute want. The whole burden of taxation thus comes

really upon the labouring class. Added to this extortion is the constant uncertainty as to whether the planter will be permitted to reap his crop at all. Downright robbery of fields or households by the retainers of petty chiefs is of frequent occurrence, and the poor are liable any day to be deprived of their very last resource. Agriculture and other industries so discouraged and paralysed barely sustain the lives of the people at the best, and when drought is added thousands must perish." In times of scarcity, "The king sets the example—*locks up his granaries, and withholds every kernel of wheat except at famine prices*. Every nabob and landowner who has a stock on hand follows this example. Rapacity and cupidity rule; money is coined out of the sufferings of the poor."

[563] Prov. xxviii. 3. Oddly enough the commentators, who seem never to have heard of "sweating," propose to read for רָשׁ, either עָשִׁיר = rich, or רֹאשׁ = רֹשׁ = head, for the head of the State; an example of conjectural emendation which may well make us cautious of the mere scholar's method of treating the sacred text.

"The cruellest landlords, receiving 10, 20, and 30 per cent. from detestable habitations (in London), are nearly connected by birth and circumstance to those they oppress" (*Lecture delivered at Essex Hall*, November 18th, 1889, *by Thomas Locke Worthington*).

[564] Prov. xxviii. 8. The difficult verse Proverbs xxii. 16 should find a place here, "He that oppresses the poor to increase for him, he that gives to the rich only for need," but it is impossible to accurately determine its meaning. If the rendering of the English Bible is correct, we may interpret the proverb as a statement of the folly of oppression which leads to want as inevitably as the more obvious folly of giving to the rich. But possibly Nowack is right in an interpretation which gives quite another turn to the saying, and makes it not a condemnation of the oppressor, but a suggestion of the advantage which may be gained from the oppression by the oppressed. "He who oppresses the poor—it turns to his (viz., the poor man's) gain," because it calls out all his energy and endurance, "while he who gives to the rich—it turns only to want," because it still further enervates and unfits him for the duties of life. This is not very satisfactory, and is decidedly far-fetched; but it is better than Delitzsch's suggestion, which strips the proverb of all moral significance, viz., "He that oppresses the poor, it is at any rate for his own gain; but he who gives to the rich, it is only to get want." The conclusion from this would be, that it is better to oppress the poor than to give to the rich, a sentiment quite out of harmony with the ethical teaching of the Proverbs. In a case like this we can only suppose that the saying has reached us in a mutilated form.

[565] Prov. xi. 17.

[566] Prov. xxviii. 27.

[567] Prov. xi. 24.

[568] Can the shareholders of the G. W. R., for instance, hold themselves free from responsibility in the case referred to in the following paragraph from the *Journal of the People's Palace*? "The *Saturday Review*, always trustworthy and read-worthy on subjects of law, calls attention to a case which concerns a great many. It is a case in which the decision is most unfortunate to the interests of all working men. One Membery was employed at Paddington to shunt trunks: he was taken on by a contractor, but his real employers were the G.W.R. The trucks were drawn by a horse, and the horse ought to have had a boy to hitch on or off at a moment's notice: but the contractor refused to supply boys. Membery in vain asked for one, pointing out the great dangers to which he was exposed. He complained on the very day of the accident by which he was knocked down and injured seriously. He sued the Company; he won his case with damages; the Company, being a rich body, appealed. Now, considering the vexation, the anxiety, and the expense of carrying on such a case, a Company which appeals

ought in justice to have the damages doubled if it loses. The Company lost. They appealed to the Lords, still on the principle of being rich and their opponent poor. This time the Company won. The Lords have ruled that the Company did not employ Membery, and that he was not obliged to work without a boy: he might have refused to work at all. Indeed! Then, if he refused to work, what about the children at home? A more mischievous doctrine was never upheld. Why, there are thousands and thousands of men and women who work daily under ineffectual protest,—who work at trades unwholesome, for wages inefficient, and for excessive hours; yet they work because they must—because they must. Membery worked without a boy, knowing that he would some day be run over and perhaps killed, because he must: he had no choice. When all the Trade Unions are merged into one immense Trade Union, it will not be the wages alone that will be determined, but the cases of such unfortunate men as Membery."

[569] Prov. xxi. 13.

[570] Prov. xxiv. 11, 12.

[571] Prov. xxii. 9.

[572] Prov. xxix. 7.

[573] Prov. xxix. 14. Has William II. of Germany been considering this text? If so, it is full of promise for the prosperity of Germany and of Europe? (International Labour Conference, March 1890.)

[574] Prov. xxxi. 30.

[575] Prov. xxii. 15.

[576] John v. 39.

[577] "I am the eldest child, born in 1795, December 4th, and trace deeply in myself the character of both parents, also the upbringing and example of both."—*Carlyle's Reminiscences*, vol. i., p. 54.

[578] Eccles. xxx. 2.

[579] Prov. xvii. 21.

[580] Prov. xvii. 25, xix. 13, 26.

[581] Prov. xv. 20. *Cf.* x. 1, xxvii. 11, xxix. 3.

[582] Prov. xxiii. 15, 16, 24.

[583] See that invaluable little book, "The Education of a Christian Home," edited by Ella S. Armitage.

[584] Prov. xxiii. 17.

[585] "The Education of a Christian Home."

[586] Prov. xiii. 24.

[587] Prov. xix. 18.

[588] Prov. xx. 30.

[589] Prov. xxiii. 13, 14.

[590] Prov. xxix. 15.

[591] Prov. xxix. 17.

[592] Lev. xxvi. 41: "If then their uncircumcised heart be humbled, and they then accept of the punishment of their iniquity, then will I remember My covenant with Jacob."

[593] Prov. xxix. 15.

[594] Prov. xxiii. 17-21.

[595] "The Education of a Christian Home."

[596] Psalm cxl. 9, 10.

[597] Jer. xviii. 23.

[598] Prov. xvii. 5*b*.

[599] *Paradise Lost*, ix., 171.

[600] Burke said of Pitt after his fall, that the manner in which he made his own justification, without impeaching the conduct of his colleagues or taking any measure that might seem to arise from disgust or opposition, set a seal upon his character. (Lecky, "England in the Eighteenth Century," vol. iii., 61.)

[601] See Rom. xii. 20.

[602] Matt. xviii. 35.

[603] *Cf*. the proverb, "When a man's ways please the Lord He maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him" (Prov. xvi. 7).

[604] It will be observed that, speaking generally, the early proverbs present the more favourable side of the kingship, and the later proverbs suggest a period of decline (see Introduction). Possibly the same test may serve to distinguish the passages in Deuteronomy and the book of Samuel; the brighter thought that the king was originally intended by God may come from the early days when the kings still promised well, and the darker thought which crosses the optimistic picture may emanate from the period when their failure and decline were unmistakable.

[605] Prov. xvi. 12, 13.

[606] Prov. xx. 8, 26.

[607] Prov. xxii. 11.

[608] Prov. xvi. 14.

[609] Prov. xix. 12.

[610] Prov. xvi. 15.

[611] Prov. xx. 28.

[612] Prov. xxi. 1.

[613] Prov. xiv. 35.

[614] Prov. xxix. 14.

[615] Prov. xxv. 2-5.

[616] Prov. xxv. 6, 7.

[617] Prov. xxx. 31.

[618] Prov. xx. 2.

[619] Prov. xxiv. 21, 22.

[620] The LXX. of xxiv. 23, which adds a passage not appropriate to Christ, "Whosoever is delivered up to him shall be crushed. For if his temper be exasperated, he consumes men, sinews and all, and crunches their bones, and burns them up as a flame, so that they are uneatable to the young of eagles."

[621] Prov. xxviii. 15, 16.

[622] Prov. xi. 15. The image from steering survives in our own governor (gubernator).

[623] Prov. xx. 18.

[624] Prov. xv. 22.

[625] See 1 Kings xvi. 7.

[626] Prov. xxx. 22.

[627] Prov. xvii. 7.

[628] Prov. xxviii. 2.

[629] Prov. xxviii. 12.

[630] Prov. xiv. 28.

[631] Prov. xxix. 2.

[632] Prov. xxix. 4.

[633] Prov. xxix. 12. *Cf*. Ecclesiasticus x. 2: "As the judge of the people is himself, so are his officers; and what manner of man the ruler of the city is, such are they also that dwell therein."

[634] Prov. xxiii. 1-3. *Cf*. the Eastern adage, "Dainties of a king burn the lips." It was a common occurrence at the court of Pope Alexander VI. to invite an obnoxious person to the Papal table and there dispose of him by means of poisoned food.

[635] Prov. xxxi. 8, 9.

[636] Luke xix. 38.

[637] Prov. xxix. 25, 26.

[638] Prov. x. 23.

[639] Prov. x. 18.

[640] Prov. xii. 23.

[641] Prov. xiv. 33.

[642] Prov. xiv. 7.

[643] Prov. xvii. 16.

[644] Prov. xxi. 20.

[645] Prov. xvii. 21.

[646] Prov. xxx. 22.

[647] Prov. xxvii. 22.

[648] Prov. xxii. 15.

[649] Prov. xvi. 22.

[650] Prov. xiv. 24. This seems simpler than supposing that the clause אִוֶּלֶת אִוֶּלֶת כְּמִילִים contains a play upon the possible double meaning of אִוֶּלֶת, which, though it yields an excellent sense,—"the power of fools is only folly," *i.e.*, when they have power they turn it only to a foolish account (*cf.* xxvi. 1),—must be regarded as very obscure, especially seeing that we have no positive instance of אִוֶּלֶת as a derivative of אוּל in the sense of "power."

[651] Prov. xxvii. 3.

[652] Prov. xxix. 9.

[653] Prov. xxiv. 9.

[654] Prov. xix. 10.

[655] This is reading לוֹ for לֹא, a constant source of confusion and interchange in Hebrew MSS.

[656] Prov. x. 13.

[657] Prov. xix. 29.

[658]

> "Quos divi conscia facti
> Mens habet attonitos et surdo verbere cædit,
> Occultum quatiente animo tortore flagellum."
> —Juv., *Sat.*, xiii., 193.

[659] Matt. xiii. 15.

[660] Prov. xvii. 12.

[661] Prov. xxvi. 4.

[662] Prov. xxvi. 5.

[663] Prov. xxix. 11.

[664] Prov. xxvi. 8.

[665] Prov. xxvi. 6.

[666] Prov. xxvi. 7.

[667] Prov. xxvi. 9.

[668] Prov. xxvi. 10. This rendering Delitzsch obtained by altering the vowel points in the first שֹׂכֵר into שָׂכַר, and the sense is good, if a little far-fetched. On the other hand, the received reading gives a plain though a somewhat insipid meaning: "Much produces all,"—whoever has a little and uses it well quickly gets more,—"but he that hires a fool is as he who hires passers by," *i.e.* the employment of a fool is a barren undertaking which practically leads to nothing.

[669] Prov. xxvi. 11.

[670] Prov. xxviii. 26; *cf.* ix. 8 and xxiii. 9.

[671] Prov. xxvi. 12.

[672] נָבָל, Psalm xiv. 1.

[673] Browning, *Pippa Passes*.

[674] Prov. xxiv. 27.

[675] Prov. xxii. 3; xxvii. 12.

[676] Psalm xliv. 8.

[677] Prov. xxvii. 20.

[678] See heading of chapter.

[679] Prov. xxvii. 4.

[680] Sir Edward Dyer (*b*. 1540).

[681] Prov. xv. 15.

[682] Matthew Arnold.

[683] Phil. i. 21.

[684] Prov. xxvii. 18.

[685] Prov. xxviii. 17.

[686] It may be necessary to point out to the reader that in approaching the subject of atonement from the standpoint of the book of Proverbs, and merely in the expository treatment of the passages before us, the so-called objective ground of atonement in the sacrifice of Christ does not come into view, but its necessity becomes manifest as each step in the exposition reveals how impossible it would be for us, apart from the work of our Lord Jesus Christ, to realize those conditions which are here laid down as indispensable to pardon and acceptance with God.

[687] Voltaire rose once from the table at Ferney, where some atheists were discussing their views. He said he could not let his servants hear this talk, for they would rob and murder him if that was true.

[688] Isa. xliii. 25.

[689] See Rom. v. 11. This is the only place in the New Testament where even in the Authorised Version the word "atonement" occurs. But the contention of the text is not one of words, but of facts. Whatever terms are used, the Gospels and the Epistles all agree in identifying the salvation of God with an actual and practical righteousness wrought out by the Holy Spirit in the lives of those who believe in Christ as their Saviour.

[690] Isa. ii. 3.

[691] "Modern Science and Modern Thought" (pp. 289, 290), by S. Laing. Chapman & Hall: 1890.

[692] *Cf*. Prov. xxviii. 4, 9:—

> "They that forsake the law praise the wicked:
> But such as keep the law contend with them.
> He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law
> Even his prayer is an abomination."

[693] *Cf*. the Sanscrit Hitopadesa, "Fire is never satisfied with fuel, nor the ocean with rivers, nor death with all creatures, nor bright-eyed women with men;" also the Arabic proverb, "Three things are of three never full, women's womb of man, wood of fire, and earth of rain."

[694] Joel ii. 7.

[695] Prov. xxxi. 1-9.

[696] Prov. xxxi. 10-31.

[697] *E.g.*, בַּר ver. 2 and מְלָכִין ver. 3: *cf.* the strange expressions כָּל־בְּנֵי־עֹנִי and כָּל־ בְּנֵי הַלּוֹף in vv. 5, 8.

[698] Prov. xxxi. 8, 9.

[699] Prov. xxii. 14, xxiii. 27.

[700] Prov. xix. 13, xxi. 9, xxv. 24, xxi. 19, xxvii. 15.

[701] Prov. xxvii. 16.

[702] Prov. xi. 22.

[703] Prov. xiv. 1.

[704] Prov. xi. 16.

[705] Prov. xviii. 22.

[706] Prov. xix. 14. In the LXX. this clause is beautifully rendered παρὰ δὲ κυρίου ἁρμόζεται γυνὴ ἀνδρί. By the Lord's ordinance woman and man are dovetailed together in a complete harmony. The thought is well expanded in Ecclesiasticus (xxvi. 1-3): "Blessed is the man that has a virtuous wife, for thereby his life is doubled. A woman made for a man rejoices her husband, and he shall fulfil the years of his life in peace. A virtuous wife is a good portion, in the portion of them that fear the Lord shall she be given."

[707] Prov. xxxi. 12.

[708] Prov. xii. 4.

[709] Prov. xxxi. 23.

[710] Prov. xxxi. 29.

[711] Prov. xxxi. 11.

[712] Prov. xxxi. 14.

[713] Prov. xxxi. 15.

[714] Prov. xxxi. 16.

[715] Prov. xxxi. 17.

[716] Prov. xxxi. 18.

[717] Prov. xxxi. 24.

[718] Prov. xxxi. 27.

[719] Prov. xxxi. 21.

[720] Prov. xxxi. 25.

[721] Prov. xxxi. 20.

[722] Prov. xxxi. 30.

## Transcriber's Notes

- Obvious punctuation and spelling errors have been fixed throughout.
- Inconsistent hyphenation has been left as in the original text.
- Footnote 129: There is no anchor for this footnote, left as in the original text.
- Footnote 163, 371, 432, 452 and 609: There are 2 anchors for the same footnote, left as in the original text.

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