OLD GROANS AND NEW SONGS

by F.C. Jennings

Jennings's extensive commentary on Ecclesiastes exploring the book's themes of vanity and futility in human pursuits 'under the sun,' contrasting Solomon's despair with the ultimate satisfaction found only in Christ.

17 Chapters

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Chapter 0

Old Groans And New Songs

PREFACE.

The chief object of a word of preface to the following notes is that the reader may not expect from them more, or other, than is intended. They are the result of meditations -- not so much of a critical as a devotional character -- on the book, in the regular course of private morning readings of the Scriptures -- meditations which were jotted down at the time, and the refreshment and blessing derived from which, I desired to share with my fellow-believers. Some salient point of each chapter has been taken and used as illustrative of what is conceived as the purpose of the book. As month by month passed, however, the subject opened up to such a degree that at the end, one felt as if there were a distinct need entirely to re-write the earlier chapters. It is, however, sent forth in the same shape as originally written; the reader then may accompany the writer, and share with him the delight at the ever-new beauties in the landscape that each turn of the road, as it were, unexpectedly laid out before him. There is one point, however, that it may be well to look at here a little more closely and carefully than has been done in the body of the book, both on account of its importance and of the strong attack that the ecclesiastical infidelity of the day has made upon it: I refer to its authorship. To commence with the strongest position of the attack on the Solomon authorship -- necessarily the strongest, for it is directly in the field of verbal criticism -- it is argued that because a large number of words are found in this book, found elsewhere alone in the post-exilian writers, (as Daniel or Nehemiah,) therefore the author of the book must surely be post-exilian too. It would be unedifying, and is happily unnecessary, to review this in detail -- with a literature so very limited as are the Hebrew writings cotemporary with Solomon: these few, dealing with other subjects, other ideas, necessitating therefore another character of words, it takes no scholar to see that any argument derived from this must necessarily be taken with the greatest caution. Nay, like all arguments of infidelity, it is a sword easily turned against the user. As surely as the valleys lie hid in shadow long after the mountain-tops are shining in the morning sun, so surely must we expect evidences of so elevated a personality as the wise king of Israel, to show a fuller acquaintance with the language of his neighbors; and employ, when they best suited him, words from such vocabularies -- words which would not come into general use for many a long day; indeed until sorrow, captivity, and shame, had done the same work for the mass, under the chastening Hand of God, as abundant natural gifts had done for our wise and glorious author. Thus the argument of Zoeckler -- "the numerous Aramaisms (words of Syriac origin) in the book are among the surest signs of its post-exile origin" -- is really turned against himself. Were such Aramaisms altogether lacking, we might well question whether the writer were indeed that widely-read, eminently literary, gloriously intellectual individual of whom it is said, "his wisdom excelled the children of the East country and all the wisdom of Egypt, for he was wiser than all men." Surely, that Solomon shows he was acquainted with words other than his own Hebrew, and made use of such words when they best suited his purpose, is only what common-sense would naturally look for. There is no proof whatever that the words themselves were of late date. Christian scholars have examined them one by one as carefully, and certainly at least as conscientiously, as their opponents; and show us, in result, that the words, although not familiar in the Hebrew vernacular, were in widely-current use either in the neighboring Persian or in that

family of languages -- Syriac and Chaldaic -- of which Hebrew was but a member. The verdict of impartiality must certainly be "not proven," if indeed it be not stronger than that, to the attempt to deny to Solomon the authorship of Ecclesiastes based on the words used. The next method of argument is one in which we shall feel ourselves more at home, inasmuch as it is not so much a question of scholarship, but ordinary intelligent discernment. Time and space forbid that I attempt here a full or detailed exhibit of the sentences, thoughts, ideas in the book itself which are taken as being quite impossible to King Solomon. I will, however, attempt to give a representative few that may stand for all. In the body of the book I have touched, in passing, on the argument deduced from the words in the first chapter, "I was king;" so need only to ask my readers' attention to it there. That "he says of himself that he was wiser and richer than all before him in Jerusalem points, under enlightened exposition, clearly to an author different to the historical Solomon." Indeed! If my readers can appreciate the force of such an argument, they do more than can I. That the writer should seek that his words should have the full force, his experiences have the full weight that could only attach to one in every way gifted to test all things to their uttermost, is taken as clear proof, "under unbiased exposition," that the only one who was exactly thus gifted was not the author! The claim to freedom from bias is in almost ludicrous harmony with such reasoning. Again, "that also which is said -- chap. vii.10 -- of the depravity of the times accords little with the age of Solomon, the most brilliant and prosperous of Israelitish history." Another lovely example of rationalistic "freedom from bias"! For what is this that is said of the "depravity of the times" so inconsistent with the glory of Solomon's reign in chap. vii.10? "Say not thou, What is the cause that the former days were better than these? For thou dost not inquire wisely concerning this." And this is proof of the "depravity of the times"! -- not proof, mark, of just that very thing that is the heart and soul of the book: the weary, unsatisfied, empty heart of poor man looking backward or forward for the satisfaction that the present always fails to give "under the sun," and which he, who was wiser than all who came before him, Solomon, warns his readers against! Oh, poor blind rationalism! missing all the beauties of God's Word in its own exceeding cleverness, or -- folly! How would the present application of such reasoning sound! The Victorian era is certainly one of the most "brilliant and prosperous of" English "history"; hence no one can ever speak now of "the good old times." Such language is simply impossible; we never hear it! So if some astute reasoner of the future comes across such allusion in any writings, it will be clear proof that the author was post-Victorian! Far more so if, as here, such writer rebukes this tendency! "Altogether unkingly sound the complaints in chap. iii.17 ('I said in my heart God shall judge the righteous and the wicked; for there is a time there for every purpose and for every work'); iv.; x.5-7 (let my reader refer for himself to these), concerning unjust judges," etc. "These are all lamentations and complaints natural enough in a suffering and oppressed subject; but not in a monarch called and authorized to abolish evil." It is most difficult to deal seriously with what, if the writer were not so very learned, we should call nonsense unworthy of a child. Look at the verse to which he refers, and which I have quoted in full; and extract from it, if your "biased" judgment will permit, an "unkingly complaint" in any word of it! And it is at such formidable arguments as this that some of us have been trembling, fearing lest the very foundations must give way under the attack! A little familiarity is all that is needed to beget a wholesome contempt. Here is one more interesting illustration of the "unbiased," "scientific" reasoning of rationalism. The object is, you know, to "determine exactly the epoch and writer of the book;" and this is how it must be done. "According to chaps, v.1, and ix.2, the temple worship was assiduously practised, but without a living piety of

heart, and in a hypocritical and self-justifying manner; the complaints in this regard remind us vividly of similar ones of the prophet Malachi -- chap. i.6, etc." What then is the basis for all this verbiage about the temple worship? Here it is: "Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil." This sentence shows that it is impossible that Solomon wrote the book: there were no "fools" in his time, who were more ready to give a careless sacrifice than to hearken: all fools only come into existence after the exile, in the days of Malachi! And this is "higher criticism"! Enough as to this line. We will now ask our learned friends, since Solomon has been so conclusively proved not to have written it, Who did? And when was it written? Ah, now we may listen to a very medley of answers! -- for opinions here are almost as numerous as the critics themselves. United in the one assurance that Solomon could not have written it, they are united in nothing else. One is assured it was Hezekiah, another is confident it was Zerubbabel, a third is convinced it was Jesus the son of Joiada -- and so on. "All opinions," as Dr. Lewis says, "are held with equal confidence, and yet in every way are opposed to each other. Once set it loose from the Solomon time, and there is no other place where it can be securely anchored." This brings us then to the positive assertion that from the evident purpose of the book, the divine purpose, no other than Solomon could be its author. He must be of a nation taken out of the darkness and abominations of heathendom; -- there was only one such nation, -- he must then be an Israelite. He must live at an epoch when that nation is at the summit of its prosperity; -- it never regained that epoch, -- he must then have lived when Solomon lived. He must, in his own person, by his riches, honor, wisdom, learning, freedom from external political fears, perfect capacity to drink of whatever cup this world can put into his hand to the full -- represent the very top-stone of that glorious time; and not one amongst all the sons of men answers to all this but Solomon the son of David, king in Jerusalem.To Him who is "greater than Solomon" -- to Him who is "above the sun" -- to Him whom it is the divine purpose of the book to highly exalt above all -- would I commit this feeblest effort to show that purpose, and, as His condescending grace permits, further it. F. C. J.

Chapter 2

CHAPTER I. Perhaps there is no book within the whole canon of Scripture so perplexing and anomalous

Perhaps there is no book within the whole canon of Scripture so perplexing and anomalous, at first sight, as that entitled "Ecclesiastes." Its terrible hopelessness, its bold expression of those difficulties with which man is surrounded on every side, the apparent fruitlessness of its quest after good, the unsatisfactory character, from a Christian standpoint, of its conclusion: all these points have made it, at one and the same time, an enigma to the superficial student of the Word, and the arsenal whence a far more superficial infidelity has sought to draw weapons for its warfare against clear revelation. And yet here it is, embedded in the very heart of those Scriptures which we are told were "given by inspiration of God, and which are profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." Then with this precious assurance of its "profitableness" deeply fixed in our hearts by a living faith, and in absolute dependence on that blessed One who is the one perfect Teacher, let us consider the book. First, then, let us seek to get all the light we can from all the exterior marks it bears before seeking to interpret its contents. For our primary care with regard to this, as indeed with regard to every book in the Bible, must be to discover, if possible, what is the object of the book, -- from what standpoint does the writer approach his subject. And first we find it in that group of books through which the voice of man is prominent -- Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Canticles. In these is heard the music of man's soul; often -- nay, mostly -- giving sorrowful and striking evidence of discord, in wail and groan, in tear and sigh; and yet again, in response evidently to the touch of some Master hand, that knows it well, -- a tender, gracious, compassionate touch, -- rising into a song of sweetest harmony that speaks eloquently of its possibilities, and bears along on its chords the promise and hope of a complete restoration. But we shall search our book in vain for any such expression of joy. No song brightens its pages; no praise is heard amid its exercises. And yet perfectly assured we may be that, listened to aright, it shall speak forth the praise of God's beloved Son; looked at in a right light, it shall set off His beauty. If "He turns the wrath of man to praise Him," surely we may expect no less from man's sorrows and ignorance. This, then, we may take it, is the object of the book, to show forth by its dark background the glory of the Lord, to bring into glorious relief against the black cloud of man's need and ignorance the bright light of a perfect, holy, revelation; to let man tell out, in the person of his greatest and wisest, when he, too, is at the summit of his greatness, with the full advantage of his matured wisdom, the solemn questions of his inmost being; and show that greatness to be of no avail in solving them, -- that wisdom foiled in the search for their answers. This, then, we will conclude, is the purpose of the book and the standpoint from which the writer speaks, and we shall find its contents confirm this in every particular. It has been well said that as regards each book in holy writ the "key hangs by the door," -- that is, that the first few sentences will give the gist of the whole. And, indeed, pre-eminently is such the case here. The first verse gives us who the writer is; the second, the beginning and ending of his search. And therein lies the key of the whole; for the writer is the son of David, the man exalted by Jehovah to highest earthly glory. Through rejection

and flight, through battle and conflict, had the Lord brought David to this excellence of glory and power. All this his "son" entered into in its perfection and at once. For it is that one of his sons who speaks who is king, and in Jerusalem, the city of God's choice, the beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth. Such is the story of verse 1. Nothing could possibly go beyond the glory that is compassed by these few words. For consider them, and you will see that they ascribe "wisdom, and honor, and riches, and power" to him of whom they are spoken; but it is human wisdom and earthly power, all "under the sun." And now listen to the "song" that should surely accompany this ascription; note the joy of a heart fully and completely satisfied now that the pinnacle of human greatness is attained. Here it is: "Vanity of vanities," saith the Preacher, "vanity of vanities; all is vanity!" The word hahvehl is always translated, as here, "vanity." It is sometimes applied to "idols," as Deut. xxxii.21, and would give the idea of emptiness -- nothingness. What a striking contrast! Man has here all that Nature can possibly give; and his poor heart, far from singing, is empty still, and utters its sad bitter groan of disappointment. Now turn and contemplate that other scene, where the true Son of David, only now a "Lamb as it had been slain," is the center of every circle, the object of every heart. Tears are dried at the mention of His name, and song after song bursts forth, till the whole universe of bliss pours forth its joy, relieves its surcharged heart in praise. "Vanity of vanities," saith the Preacher. That is the old groan. "Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof, for Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed to God by Thy blood, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation, and hast made them kings and priests, and they shall reign over the earth." That is the new song. Oh, blessed contrast! Does it not make Him who Himself has replaced the groan by the song precious? Has it, then, no value? And this is just the purpose of the whole book, to furnish such striking contrasts whereby the "new" is set off in its glories against the dark background of the "old," -- rest against labor, hope against despair, song against groan; and so the third verse puts this very explicitly, -- "What profit hath a man of all his labor which he taketh under the sun?" The wisest and the greatest of men is seeking for an answer to this question. And this verse is too important in its bearing on the whole book to permit our passing it without looking at that significant word "profit" a little closer. And here one feels the advantage of those helps that a gracious God has put into our hands in these days of special attack upon His revelation, whereby even the unlearned may, by a little diligence, arrive at the exact shade of the meaning of a word. The word "profit," then, is, in the Hebrew, yithrohn, and is found in this exact form only in this book, where it is translated "profit," as here, or "excellency," as in chap. ii.13. The Septuagint translates it into a Greek one, meaning "advantage," or perhaps more literally, "that which remains over and above." In Eph. iii.20 it is rendered "exceeding abundantly above." Hence we gather that our word intends to convey to us the question, "After life is over, after man has given his labor, his time, his powers, and his talents, what has he received in exchange that shall satisfy him for all that he has lost? Do the pleasures obtained during life fully compensate for what is spent in obtaining them? Do they satisfy? and do they remain to him as "profit" over and above that expenditure? In a word, what "under the sun" can satisfy the longing, thirsting, hungering heart of man, so that he can say, "My heart is filled to overflowing, its restless longings are stilled, I have found a food that satisfies its hunger, a water that quenches its thirst"? A question all-important, surely, and it will be well worth listening to the experience of this seeker, who is fitted far above his fellows for finding this satisfactory good, if it can be found "under the sun." First, then, the Preacher, like a good workman, takes account of what material he has to work with. "Have I," he says, "any thing that others have not had, or can I hope to find any thing

that has not been before?" At once he is struck with that "law of circuit" that is stamped on every thing: generation follows generation; but no new earth, that remains ever the same; the sun wheels ceaselessly in its one course; the winds circle from point to point, but whirl about to their starting-place; the waters, too, follow the same law, and keep up one unbroken circuit. Where can rest be found in such a scene? Whilst there is unceasing change, nothing is new; it is but a repetition of what has been before, and which again soon passes, leaving the heart empty and hungry still. Again, then, let us use this dark background to throw forward another scene. See, even now, "above the sun" Him who is the Head and perfect Exponent of the creation called the new. Is there any law of constant unsatisfying circuit in Him? Nay, indeed, every sight we get of Him is new; each revelation of Himself perfectly satisfies, and yet awakens appetite for further views. "No pause, no change those pleasures

Shall ever seek to know;

The draught that lulls our thirsting

But wakes that thirst anew." Or, again, look at that blessed "law of circuit" spoken of in another way by one who has indeed been enlightened by a light "above the sun" in every sense of the word, in 2 Cor. ix. It is not the circling of winds or waters, but of "grace" direct from the blessed God Himself. Mark the perfection stamped upon it both by its being a complete circle -- never ending, but returning again to its Source, -- and by the numerical stamp of perfection upon it in its seven distinct parts (or movements) as shown by the sevenfold recurrence of the word "all," or "every," both coming from the same Greek word. 1. "God is able to make all grace abound unto you." There is an inexhaustible source. We may come and come and come again, and never find that fountain lowered by all our drafts upon it. Sooner, far sooner, should the ocean be emptied by a teacup than infinite "power" and "love" be impoverished by all that His saints could draw from Him. All grace. 2. "That ye always." There is no moment when this circle of blessing need stop flowing. It is ever available. No moment -- by day or night, in the quiet of the closet or in the activities of the day's duties, when in communion with friends or in the company of foes, -- when that grace is not available. At all times.3. "Having all sufficiency" -- perfect competence to meet just the present emergency. A sufficiency, let us mark, absolutely independent of Nature's resources, -- a sufficiency beautifully illustrated by "unlearned and ignorant" Peter and John in the presence of the learned Sanhedrim. Let us rejoice and praise God as we trace these three glorious links in this endless chain of blessing. All sufficiency.4. "In all things" (or "in every way"). It is no matter from what side the demand may come, this precious grace is there to meet it. Is it to deal with another troubled anxious soul, where human wisdom avails nothing? Divine wisdom and tact shall be supplied. Courage if danger presents itself, or "all long-suffering with joyfulness" if afflictions tear the heart. In all things.5. "May abound to every good work." Now filled to the brim, and still connected with an inexhaustible supply, the vessel must overflow, and that on every side. No effort, no toil, no weariness, no drawing by mechanical means from a deep well; but the grace-filled heart, abiding (and that is the only condition) in complete dependence upon its God, naturally overflows on every side -- to all good work.6. "Being enriched in every thing" (we omit the parenthesis, although full of its own divine beauty), (or, "in every way"). This is in some sort a repetition of No.5, but goes as far beyond it as the word "enriched" is fuller than the word "sufficient." The latter fills the vessel, as we have said, up to the brim; the former adds another drop, and over it flows. In view of these "exceeding great and precious promises," we may say, --

"Oh wherefore should we do ourselves this wrong,

Or others, that we are not always strong?"since we may be enriched in all things.7. "To all bountifulness." This stream of grace is never to stagnate, or it will lose all its character of blessing, as the manna hoarded for a second day "bred worms, and stank." Thus every single Christian becomes a living channel of blessing to all around, and the circle is now completed, by once more returning to the point whence it started, "Which causeth through us thanksgiving to God," and closes with no weary wail of "All things are full of labor," but joyful songs resound on every side, and at every motion of this circle of blessing ascends "thanksgiving to God." For just exactly the same full measure is seen in the thanksgiving ascending at the end as in the grace descending in the beginning. There it "abounded," filling the vessel full till it overflowed in the same measure, "abounding" in blessings to others who needed, and these forthwith pass on the stream in "abounding" thanksgiving to God. The apostle himself, as if he could not suffer himself to be excluded from the circle of blessing, adds his own note at the close with "Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift." And shall we not, too, dear brother or sister now reading these lines, let our feeble voice be heard in this sweet harmony of praise? Has not this contrast between the new song and the old groan, again we may ask, great value?Having, then, seen in these first few verses the purpose of the book and the standpoint of the writer, we may accompany him in the details of his search. First he repeats, what is of the greatest importance for us to remember (v.12), "I, the Preacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem." He would not have us forget that, should he fail in his search for perfect satisfaction, it will not be because he is not fully qualified both by his abilities and his position to succeed. But Infidelity, and its kinsman Rationalism, raise a joyful shout over this verse; for to disconnect the books of the Bible from the writers whose name they bear is a long step toward overthrowing the authority of those books altogether. If the believer's long-settled confidence can be proved vain in one point, and that so important a point, there is good "hope" of eventually overthrowing it altogether. So, with extravagant protestations of loyalty to the Scriptures, they, Joablike, "kiss" and "stab" simultaneously, wonderfully manifesting in word and work that dual form of the evil one, who, our Lord tells us, was both "liar and murderer from the beginning." And many thousand professing Christians are like Amasa of old, their ear is well pleased with the fair sound of "Art thou in health, my brother?" and they, too, take "no heed to the sword" in the inquirer's hand. Judas, too, in his day, illustrates strongly that same diabolical compound of "deceit and violence," only the enemy finds no unwary Amasa in Jesus the Lord. "Betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss" tears the vail from him at once; and in the same way the feeblest believer who abides in Him, is led of that same spirit; and "good words and fair speeches" do not deceive, nor can betrayal be hidden behind the warmest protestations of affection. But to return: "How could," cries this sapient infidelity, which today has given itself the modest name of "Higher Criticism," -- "how could Solomon say, 'I was king,' when he never ceased to be that?" Ah! one fears if that same Lord were to speak once more as of old, He would again say, "O fools and blind!" For is it not meet that the writer who is about to give recital of his experiences should first tell us what his position was at the very time of those experiences? That at the very time of all these exercises, disappointments, and groanings, he was still the highest monarch on earth, king over an undivided Israel, in Jerusalem, with all the resources and glories that accompany this high station, pre-eminently fitting him to speak with authority, and compelling us to listen with the profoundest respect and attention.Yes, this glorious monarch "gives his heart" -- that is, applies himself with singleness of purpose "to seek and search out by wisdom

concerning all things that are done under heaven." No path that gives the slightest promise of leading to happiness shall be untrodden; no pleasure shall be denied, no toil be shirked that shall give any hope of satisfaction or rest. "This sore travail hath God given to the sons of men to be exercised therewith." That is, the heart of man hungers and thirsts, and he must search till he does find something to satisfy; and if, alas! he fail to find it in "time," if he only drinks here of waters whereof he "that drinks shall thirst again," eternity shall find him thirsting still, and crying for one drop of water to cool his tongue. But then with what bitter despair Ecclesiastes records all these searchings! "I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit," or rather, "pursuit of the wind." Exactly seven times he uses this term, "pursuit of the wind," expressing perfect, complete, despairing failure in his quest. He finds things all wrong, but he has no power of righting them; "that which is crooked cannot be made straight, and that which is wanting cannot be numbered." But perhaps we may get the secret of his failure in his next words. He takes a companion or counselor in his search. Again exactly seven times he takes counsel with this companion, "his own heart," -- "I communed with my own heart." That is the level of the book; the writer's resources are all within himself; no light from without save that which nature gives; no taking hold on another; no hand clasped by another. He and his heart are alone. Ah! that is dangerous as well as dreary work to take counsel with one's own heart. "Fool" and "lawless one" come to their foolish and wicked conclusions there (Ps. xiv.1); and what else than "folly" could be expected in hearkening to that which is "deceitful above all things" -- what else than lawlessness in taking counsel with that which is "desperately wicked"?Take not, then, for thy counselor "thine own heart," when divine love has placed infinite wisdom and knowledge at the disposal of lowly faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, "who of God is made unto us wisdom," and "in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."But does our Preacher find the rest he desires in the path of his own wisdom? Not at all. "For in much wisdom is much grief, and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow." "Grief and sorrow" ever growing, ever increasing, the further he treads that attractive and comparatively elevated path of human wisdom. Nor has Solomon been a lonely traveler along that road. Thousands of the more refined of Adam's sons have chosen it; but none have gone beyond "the king," and none have discovered anything in it, but added "grief and sorrow" -- sorrowful groan! But the youngest of God's family has his feet, too, on a path of "knowledge," and he may press along that path without the slightest fear of "grief or sorrow" resulting from added knowledge. Nay, a new song shall be in his mouth, "Grace and peace shall be multiplied through the knowledge of God and Jesus our Lord." (2 Pet. i.2). Blessed contrast! "Sorrow and grief" multiplied through growth in human wisdom: "Grace and peace" multiplied through growth in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord!My beloved reader, I pray you meditate a little on this striking and precious contrast. Here is Solomon in all his glory, with a brighter halo of human wisdom round his head than ever had any of the children of men. Turn to 1 Kings iv.29: -- "And God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding exceeding much, and largeness of heart, even as the sand that is on the sea shore.And Solomon's wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the children of the east country, and all the wisdom of Egypt.For he was wiser than all men; than Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman, and Chalcol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol: and his fame was in all nations round about.And he spake three thousand proverbs: and his songs were a thousand and five. And he spake of trees, from the cedar tree 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.And there came of all people to hear the wisdom of Solomon, from all kings of

the earth, which had heard of his wisdom."Is it not a magnificent ascription of abounding wisdom? What field has it not capacity to explore? Philosophy in its depths -- poetry in its beauties -- botany and zoology in their wonders. Do we envy him? Then listen to what his poor heart was groaning all that time: "In much wisdom is much grief, and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow"! Now turn to our portion above the sun -- "the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord": infinitely higher, deeper, lovelier, and more wondrous than the fields explored by Solomon, in constant unfoldings of riches of wisdom; and each new unfolding bringing its own sweet measure of "grace and peace." Have not the lines fallen to us in pleasant places? Have we not a goodly heritage? Take the feeblest of the saints of God of today, and had Solomon in all his glory a lot like one of these?

Chapter 3

CHAPTER II. The wise man, having found that wisdom brought with it but increased sorrow

The wise man, having found that wisdom brought with it but increased sorrow, turns to the other side -- to all those pleasures that the flesh, as we speak, enjoys. Still, he gives us, as in chap. i., the result of his search before he describes it: "I said in my heart, 'Go to now; I will prove thee [that is, I will see if I cannot satisfy thee,] with mirth; therefore enjoy pleasure:' and behold, this also is vanity. I said of laughter, 'it is mad;' and of mirth, 'what doeth it?'" For he now has tried wine, the occupation of laying out of vinyards, gardens, parks, the forming of lakes, and the building of houses, all filled without stint, with every thing that sense could crave, or the soul of man could enjoy. The resources at his command are practically limitless, and so he works on and rejoices in the labor, apparently with the idea that now the craving within can be satisfied, now he is on the road to rest. Soon he will look round on the result of all his work, and be able to say, "All is very good; I can now rest in the full enjoyment of my labor and be satisfied." But when he does reach the end, when every pleasure tried, every beauty of surrounding created, and he expects to eat the fruit of his work, instantly his mouth is filled with rottenness and decay. "Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labor that I had labored to do; and, behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit; and there was no profit under the sun." Thus he groans again, -- a groan that has been echoed and re-echoed all down the ages from every heart that has tried to fill the same void by the same means. Ah! wise and glorious Preacher, it is a large place thou art seeking to fill. "Free and boundless its desires." Deeper, wider, broader than the whole world, which is at thy disposal to fill it. And thou mayest well say, "What can the man do that cometh after the king?" for thou hadst the whole world and the glory of it at thy command in thy day, and did it enable thee to fill those "free and boundless desires"? No, indeed. After all is cast into that hungry pit, yawning and empty it is still. Look well on this picture, my soul; ponder it in the secret place of God's presence, and ask Him to write it indelibly on thy heart that thou forget it not. Then turn and listen to this sweet voice: "If any man thirst" (and what man does not?) "let him come unto Me, and drink. He that believeth on Me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water." Thirst not only quenched, but water to spare for other thirsting ones, -- the void not only filled, but running over with a constant flow of blessing. Who can express the glories of that contrast? Pause, beloved reader: turn your eyes from the page, and dwell on it in thy spirit a little. What a difference between "no profit under the sun" and "never thirst"! -- a difference entirely due simply to coming to Him -- Jesus. Not a coming once and then departing from Him once more to try again the muddy, stagnant pools of this world: no, but to pitch our tents by the palm-trees and the springing wells of Christ's presence, and so to drink and drink and drink again of Him, the Rock that follows His people. But is this possible? Is this not mere imaginative ecstasy, whilst practically such a state is not possible? No, indeed; for see that man, with all the same hungry longings of Solomon or any other child of Adam; having no wealth, outcast, and a wanderer without a home, but who has found something that has enabled him to say, "I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: everywhere, and in

all things, I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ, who strengtheneth me." (Phil. iv.11-13.) What, then, is the necessary logical deduction from two such pictures but this: The Lord Jesus infinitely surpasses all the world in filling the hungry heart of man. Look, oh my reader, whether thou be sinner or saint, to Him -- to Him alone. This, then, brings us to the twelfth verse of chapter two, which already, thus early in the book, seems to be a summing up of his experiences. "I turned myself to behold wisdom, and madness, and folly:" that is I looked "full face," or carefully considered, these three things that I had now tested; and whilst each gave me only disappointment and bitterness as to meeting my deepest needs, yet "I saw that there was a profit in wisdom over folly, as light is profitable over darkness." This then is within the power of human reason to determine. The philosophy of the best of the heathen brought them to exactly the same conclusion. Socrates and Solomon, with many another worthy name, are here in perfect accord, and testify together that "the wise man's eyes are in his head, but the fool walketh in darkness." Not that men prefer wisdom to folly; on the contrary; still even human reason gives this judgment: for the wise man walks at least as a man, intelligently; the spirit, the intelligence, having its place. But how much further can reason discern as to the comparative worth of wisdom or folly? The former certainly morally elevates a man now; but here comes an awful shadow across reason's path: "but I myself perceived also that one event happeneth to them all. Then said I in my heart, as it happeneth to the fool, so it happeneth even to me: and why was I then more wise? Then I said in my heart, that this also is vanity." Ah! in this book in which poor man at his highest is allowed to give voice to his deepest questions, in which all the chaos, and darkness, the "without form and void" state of his poor, distracted, disjointed being is seen; death is indeed the King of Terrors, upsetting all his reasonings, and bringing the wisdom and folly, between which he had so carefully discriminated, to one level in a moment. But here, death is looked upon in relation to the "works" of which he has been speaking. Wisdom cannot guarantee its possessor the enjoyment of the fruits of his labors. Death comes to him as swiftly and as surely as to the fool, and a common oblivion shall, after a little, swallow the memory of each, with their works. This thought the Preacher dwells upon, and as he regards it on every side, again and again he groans, "This also is vanity." (vv. 19, 21, 23.) "Therefore I hated life, yea, all my labor which I took under the sun," and "therefore I went about to cause my heart to despair of all my labor which I took under the sun." For what is there in the labor itself? Nothing that satisfies by itself. It is only the anticipation of final satisfaction and enjoyment that can make up for the loss of quiet and ease now; prove that to be a vain hope, and the mere labor and planning night and day are indeed "empty vanity." Thus much for labor "under the sun," with self for its object, and death for its limit. Now for the contrast again in its refreshing beauty of the "new" as against the "old" "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know your labor is not in vain in the Lord." (1 Cor. xv.58.) "All my labor vanity" is the "groan" of the old, "for death with its terrors cuts me off from my labor and I leave it to a fool." "No labor in vain" is the song of victory of the new, for resurrection with its glories but introduces me to the precious fruit of those labors, to be enjoyed forever. Oh my brethren, let us cherish this precious word, "not in vain;" let us be indeed "persuaded" of it, and "embrace" it, not giving up our glorious heritage, and going back, as the Christian world largely is in this day, to the mere human wisdom that Solomon the king possessed above all, and which only led then, as it must now and ever, to the groan of "vanity!" But "not in vain" is ours. No little one refreshed with even a cup of cold water but that soon the fruit of even that little labor of love shall

meet its sweetest recompense in the smile, the approval, the praise of our Lord Jesus; and that shall make our hearts full to overflowing with bliss; as we there echo and re-echo our own word: it was indeed, "not in vain." The chapter closes with the recognition that, apart from God, it is not in the power of man to get any enjoyment from his labor. Our translation of verse 24 seems quite out of harmony with the Preacher's previous experiences, and the verse would better read (as in Dr. Taylor Lewis' metrical version): "The good is not in man that he should eat and drink And find his soul's enjoyment in his toil;

This, too, I saw, is only from the hands of God."

CHAPTER III. Chapter three may be paraphrased, I think, somewhat in this way

Chapter three may be paraphrased, I think, somewhat in this way: Yes, life itself emphasizes the truth that nothing is at one stay here; -- all moves. There is naught abiding, like the winds and waters that he has noted in chapter one; man's life is but a wheel that turns: death follows birth, and all the experiences between are but ever varying shades of good and evil, evil and good. (Let us bear in mind this is not faith's view, but simply that of human wisdom. Faith sings a song amidst the whirl of life: "With mercy and with judgment,

My web of time He wove;

And aye the dews of sorrow

Were lustred with His love.") But then if nothing thus rests as it is, it becomes a necessary deduction that, if wisdom has collected, and labored, and built, folly will follow to possess and scatter, what profit then in toiling? For he sees that this constant travail is of God who, in wisdom inscrutable, and not to be penetrated by human reasoning, would have men exercised by these constant changes, whilst their hearts can be really satisfied with no one of these things, beautiful as each may be in its time. So boundless are its desires that he says, "Eternity" has been placed in that heart of man, and naught in all these "time-changes" can fill it. Still he can see nothing better for man, than that he should make the best of the present, for he cannot alter or change what God does or purposes, and everything he sees, speaks of His purpose to a constant "round," a recurrence of that which is past (as verse 15 should probably read.) But still man's reason can make one more step now, one further deduction from the law of circuit, as soon as God, even though He be known only by nature's light, is introduced; and that is, the present wrong and injustice so evident here, must in some "time" in God's purposes, be righted; God Himself being the Judge. This seems to be a gleam of real light, similar to the conclusion of the whole book. Yes, further, this constant change -- is there no reason for it? Has God no purpose in it? Surely to teach men the very lesson of their own mortality: that there is naught abiding -- men and beasts are, as far as unaided human wisdom can see, on one level exactly as to that awful exit from this scene. It is true there may be -- and there are strong grounds for inferring that there is -- a wide difference between the spirit of man, and the spirit of beasts, although the bodies of each are formed of, and return to the dust; but who can tell this absolutely? Who has seen and told what is on the other side of that dread portal? None. So then, again says the wise Preacher, my wisdom sees only good in enjoying the present, for the future is shrouded in an impenetrable cloud, and none can pierce it. Precious beyond expression becomes the glorious bright beam of divine revelation, as against this dense and awful darkness of man's ignorance on such a question. How deep and terrible the groan here, "For all is vanity." Yet the pitch-dark background shall serve to throw into glorious relief, the glory of that light that is not from reason, or nature; but from Him who is the Father of Lights. Yes, He bids us look on this picture of the wisest of men, tracing man and beast to one end and standing before that awful door through which each has disappeared, confessing

his absolute inability to determine if there be any difference between them. Death surely triumphs here. It is true that there may be a possible distinction between the "breath," or vital principle of each; but this uncertainty only adds to the mystery, and increases a thousand fold the agonizing need for light. God be thanked that He has given it. The darkest problem that has faced mankind all through the weary ages, has been triumphantly solved; and the sweetest songs of faith ever resound about the empty tomb of the Lord Jesus -- nay rather, about the glorious person of that risen Christ Himself, for He is Himself the leader of the Joy. "In the midst of the congregation will I praise Thee." So then, in sharp and blessed contrast to the wise man and his groaning, let us lift our eyes up and ever up, past the tombs and graves of earth; yea, past thrones and principalities, and powers in the heavens; up and still up, even to the "throne of the Majesty on High" itself; and look on One sitting even there, a Man -- oh mark it well, for He has been of woman born -- a Man, -- for of that very One it was once said, "Is not this the carpenter?" -- now crowned with glory and honor; and listen, for He speaks: "I am He that liveth, and was dead, and behold I am alive for evermore." Consider Him! And whilst we look and listen, how does that word of the Preacher sound, "A man hath no pre-eminence above a beast!" And this is our portion, beloved reader. He might indeed have had all the glory of that place, without the agony of the garden, without the suffering and shame of the cross, had He been content to enjoy it alone. But no -- He must have His own with Him; and now death has been abolished as to its terror and power, so that the groan of old is replaced by the triumphant challenge: "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" (1 Cor. xv.55.) The resurrection of Jesus not only makes possible -- not only makes probable -- but absolutely assures the glorious triumphant resurrection of His own who have fallen asleep: "Christ the firstfruits, afterward they are Christ's at His coming." But further, is this "falling asleep" of the saint to separate him, for a time, from the conscious enjoyment of his Saviour's love? Is the trysting of the saved one with his Saviour to be interrupted for awhile by death? Is his song "Not all things else are half so dear

As is His blissful presence here" to be silenced by death? Then were he a strangely conquered foe, and not stingless, if for one hour he could separate us from the enjoyed love of Christ. But no, "blessed be the Victor's name," not for a moment. "Death is ours" and "absent from the body" is only "present with the Lord." So that we may answer the Preacher's word, "A man hath no pre-eminence above a beast," with the challenge, To which of the beasts said He at any time, "This day shalt thou be with Me in paradise"? Let the Preacher groan, "all is vanity;" the groan is in perfect -- if sorrowful -- harmony with the darkness and ignorance of human reason; but "singing" alone accords with light; "Joy cometh in the morning," and if we but receive it, we have in "Jesus Risen" light enough for perpetual, unending, song.

CHAPTER IV. But we must follow our Preacher, who can only turn away with bitterness from this

But we must follow our Preacher, who can only turn away with bitterness from this closed door of Death, once more to take note of what is "under the sun." And sad and sorrowful it is to him to mark that the world is filled with oppression. He has already, in the previous chapter, noted that "wickedness was there in the place of judgment and iniquity in the place of righteousness," and the natural consequence of this is oppression. Wherever men have power they use it to bring forth tears; therefore far better, cries Solomon, to be out of such a scene altogether; yea, better still, never to have come into it at all. Have we no sympathy with the Preacher here? Does he not give expression to one sad "touch of nature that makes the whole world kin"? Do we not recognize that he, too, was traveling through exactly the same scene as we find ourselves to be in? That tears were raining on this crust of earth in that far-off time, exactly as they are to-day? Yes, indeed, it was a tear-soaked earth he trod, as well as we. But then that other man was also in the same scene exactly, who said, too, that it was certainly "far better" to be out of it; but -- precious contrast! that was because of the loveliness and sweet attraction of One known outside of it; whilst the very needs of others in the scene -- those "tears," in a way, of which the wise man speaks, and which he knew no way of stopping -- alone kept him in it, and made him consent to stay. For Paul had "heard a sweeter story" than Solomon had ever in his wisdom conceived; had "found a truer gain" than all Solomon's wealth could give him; and his most blessed business it was to proclaim a glad tidings that should dry the tears of the oppressed, give them a peace that no oppressor could take away, a liberty outside all the chains of earth -- a spring of joy that tyranny was powerless to affect. Now let us, by the grace and loving kindness of our God, consider this a little closer, my readers. We have concluded that we find this book included in the inspired volume for this very purpose, to exalt all "the new" by its blessed contrast with "the old." We may too, if we will, look around on all the sorrows and tears of this sad earth, and groan "better would it be to be dead and out of it; yea, better never to have been born at all." And a wise groan, according to human wisdom, this would be. But when such wisdom has attained to its full, it finds itself far short of the very "foolishness of God"; for, on the other hand we may, if we will, praise God with joyful heart that we are at least in the only place in the whole universe, where tears can be dried, and gladness be made to take their place. For is there oppression, and consequent weeping, in heaven? Surely not. Tears there are, in plenty, in hell; for did not He who is Love say, "there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth"? But, alas! those tears can be dried -- never. But here Love can have its own way, and mourning ones may learn a secret that shall surely gild their tears with a rainbow glory of light, and the oppressed and distressed, the persecuted and afflicted, may triumphantly sing, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors, through Him that loved us." Ah, is there not, too, a peculiar beauty in those words "more than conquerors"? What can be more than a conqueror? A ship driven out of its course by the tempest, with anchor dragging or cable parted, is no "conqueror" at all, but the reverse. That ship riding out the gale,

holding fast to its anchorage, is truly a conqueror; but that is all. But the vessel being driven by the very tempest to the haven where it would be, is better off still, and thus "more than conqueror." So it is with the saint now; the tempest drives him the closer to Him who is indeed his desired haven, and thus he is more than conqueror. Is not, then, this earth a unique place? -- this life a wonderful time? A few years (possibly a few hours) more, and we shall be out of the scene of sorrow and evil forever; nor can we then prove the power of the love of Christ to lift above the sorrow either ourselves or others. O my soul, art thou redeeming the time -- "ransoming from loss" (as it might literally be worded) the precious opportunities that are around thee on every side, "because the days are evil"? The very fact that the days are evil -- that thou art in the place of tears -- gives thee the "opportunities." When the days cease to be evil, those special opportunities, whatever may be the service of the redeemed, will be gone forever. But the Preacher still continues his search "under the sun," and turns from oppression and tears to regard what is, on the surface at least, a comparatively happy lot -- "right work," by which a man has attained to prosperity and pre-eminence. But as he looks closer at a case which, at first sight, seems to promise real satisfaction, he sees that there is a bitter sting connected with it, -- a sting that at once robs it of all its attraction, and makes void all its promise of true rest, -- for "for this a man is envied of his neighbor." His success is only cause of bitter jealousy, and makes him the object not of love, but of envy, to all about him. Success, then, and a position of pre-eminence above one's competitors, gained by skillful toil, is rather to be avoided as vanity and pursuit of the wind, -- a grasping at an empty nothingness. Is the opposite extreme of perfect idleness any better? No; for plainly the idler is a fool who "eateth his own flesh"; that is, necessarily brings ruin upon himself. So human wisdom here closes the meditation with -- what human wisdom always does take refuge in -- the "golden mean," as it is called, "better a single handful with quiet rest, than both hands filled only by wearying toil and vexation of spirit." And true enough this is, as every man who has tested things at all in this world will confirm. Accumulation brings with it only disappointment and added care, -- everything is permeated with a common poison; and here the wisdom of the old is, in one sense, in full harmony with the higher wisdom of the new, which says "godliness, with contentment, is great gain," and "having food and raiment, let us be therewith content." If we look "above the sun," however, there is a scene where no sting lurks in all that attracts, as here. Where God Himself approves the desires of His people for more of their own, and says to them with gracious encouragement, "covet earnestly the best gifts." Yes; but mark the root-difference between the two: the skillful, or right labor, that appears at first so desirable to the Preacher, is only for the worker's own advantage, -- it exalts him above his fellows, where he becomes a mark for their bitter envy; but these "gifts" that are to be coveted are as far removed from this as the poles. In that higher scene, the more a gift exalts "self," the less is that gift. The "best" -- those which God calls "best" -- are those that awake no envy in others; but bring their happy owner lower and ever lower to the feet of his brethren to serve them, to build them up. The Corinthians themselves had the lesser gifts in the more showy "tongues," and "knowledge"; but one family amongst them had the greater, -- "the household of Stephanas," for it had addicted itself to the service of the saints. But let us not leave this theme till we have sought to set our hearts a-singing by a sight of Him who is, and ever shall be, the source as well as the theme of all our songs. We but recently traced Him in His glorious upward path till we found Him resting on the throne of the Majesty on high. But "he that ascended, what is it but that he also descended?" So, beloved readers, though it may be a happily familiar theme to many, it will be none the less refreshing to look at that "right work" of our

blessed Lord Jesus, "who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God." That is the glorious platform -- as we might, in our human way of speaking, say -- upon which He had abode all through the ages of the past. He looks above -- there is none, there is nothing higher. He looks on the same plane as Himself -- He is equal with God. There is His blessed, glorious place, at the highest pinnacle of infinite glory, nothing to be desired, nothing to be grasped at. He moves; and every heart that belongs to that new creation awakens into praise (oh, how different to the "envy" of the old!) as He takes His first step and makes Himself of no reputation. And as in our previous paper we followed Him in His glorious upward path, so here we may trace His no less glorious and most blessed path down and ever lower down, past Godhead to "no reputation"; past authority to service; past angels, who are servants, to men; past all the thrones and dignities of men to the manger at Bethlehem and the lowest walk of poverty, till He who, but now, was indeed rich is become poor; nay, says of Himself that He has not where to lay His head. No "golden mean" of the "handful with quietness" here! Yes, and far lower still, past that portion of the righteous man, endless life, -- down, down to the humiliation of death; and then one more step to a death -- not of honor, and respect, and the peace, that we are told marks the perfect man and the upright, but the death of lowest shame, the criminal slave's death, the cross! Seven distinct steps of perfect humiliation! Oh, consider Him there, beloved! Mocked of all His foes, forsaken of all His friends! The very refuse of the earth, the thieves that earth says are too vile for her, heaping their indignities upon Him. "Behold the man," spat upon, stricken, and numbered with transgressors; and, as we gaze, let us together listen to that divine voice, "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus," for that is our "right work," and there is no fear of a man being "envied of his neighbor" for right work of that kind. But time and space would fail us to take up in detail all these precious contrasts. All Solomon's searches "under the sun" tell but one story: There is nought in all the world that can satisfy the heart of man. The next verse furnishes another striking illustration of this. He sees a solitary one, absolutely alone, without kith or kin dependent on him, and yet he toils on, "bereaving his soul of good" as unceasingly as when he first started in life. Every energy is still strained in the race for those riches that satisfy not at all. "Vanity" is the Preacher's commentary on the scene. This naturally leads to the conclusion that solitude, at least, is no blessing; for man was made for companionship and mutual dependence, and in this is safety. (Verses 9 to 12.) Verses 13 to the end are difficult, as they stand in our authorized version; but they speak, I think, of the striking and extraordinary vicissitudes that are so constant "under the sun." There is no lot abiding. The king on his throne, "old and foolish," changes places with the youth who may even step from the humiliation of prison and chains to the highest dignity: then "better is the poor and wise youth than the old and foolish king." But wider still the Preacher looks, and marks the stately march of the present generation with the next that shall follow it; yea, there is no end of the succession of surging generations, each boastful of itself, and taking no joy in -- that is, making little account of -- that which has gone before. Each, in its turn, like a broken wave, making way for its successor. Boastful pride, broken in death, but still followed by another equally boastful, or more so, which, in its turn, is humbled also in the silence of the grave. It is the same story of human changes as "the youth" and "the king," only a wider range is taken; but "vanity" is the appropriate groan that accompanies the whole meditation. In this I follow Dr. Lewis's version: -- Better the child, though he be poor, if wise,

Than an old and foolish king, who heeds no longer warning; For out of bondage came the one to reign --

The other, in a kingdom born, yet suffers poverty.

I saw the living all, that walked in pride beneath the sun, I saw the second birth that in their place shall stand. No end to all the people that have gone before;

And they who still succeed, in them shall find no joy. This, too, is vanity, -- a chasing of the wind.

CHAPTER V. With the opening of this chapter we come to quite a different theme.

With the opening of this chapter we come to quite a different theme. Like a fever-tossed patient, Ecclesiastes has turned from side to side for relief and rest; but each new change of posture has only brought him face to face with some other evil "under the sun" that has again and again pressed from him the bitter groan of "Vanity." But now, for a moment, he takes his eyes from the disappointments, the evil workings, and the sorrows, that everywhere prevail in that scene, and lifts them up to see how near his wisdom, or human reason, can bring him to God. Ah, poor bruised and wounded spirit! Everywhere it has met with rebuff; but now, like a caged bird which has long beaten its wings against its bars, at length turns to the open door, so now Ecclesiastes seems at least to have his face in the right direction, -- God and approach to Him is his theme, -- how far will his natural reason permit his walking in it? Will it carry him on to the highest rest and freedom at last? This, it strikes me, is just the point of view of these first seven verses. Their meaning is, as a whole, quite clear and simple. "Keep thy foot," -- that is, permit no hasty step telling of slight realization of the majesty of Him who is approached. Nor let spirit be less reverently checked than body. "Be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools." Few be thy words, and none uttered thoughtlessly, for "God is in heaven and thou upon earth," and many words, under such an infinite discrepancy in position, bespeak a fool as surely as a dream bespeaks overcrowded waking hours. Oh fear, then, to utter one syllable thoughtlessly or without meaning, for One listens to whom a vow once uttered must be paid, for not lightly canst thou retract the spoken vow with the excuse "It was unintentional, -- it was not seriously meant." His Messenger or Angel is not so deceived; and quickly wilt thou find, in thy wrecked work and purposes astray, that it is God thou hast angered by thy light speech. Then avoid the many words which, as idle dreams, are but vanity; but rather "fear thou God." After weighing the many conflicting views as to verses 6 and 7, the context has led me to the above as the sense of the words. Nor can there be the slightest question as to the general bearing of the speaker's argument. Its central thought, both in position and importance, is found in "God is in heaven and thou upon earth, therefore let thy words be few," -- its weighty conclusion, "Fear thou God." Now, my beloved readers, there is a picture here well worth looking at attentively. Regard him: noble in every sense of the word, -- with clearest intellect, with the loftiest elevation of thought, with an absolutely true conception of the existence of God. Who amongst men, let thought sweep as wide as it will amongst the children of Adam, can go or has gone, beyond him? What can man's mind conceive, he may ask, as well as man's hand do, that cometh after the King? Yea, let our minds go over all the combined wisdom of all the ages amongst the wise of the world, and where will you find a loftier, purer, truer conception of God, and the becoming attitude of the creature in approaching Him than here? For he is not a heathen, as we speak, this Solomon. He has all that man, as man, could possibly have; and that surely includes the knowledge of the existence of God, -- His power eternal, and His Godhead, as Romans i. clearly shows. The heathen themselves have lapsed from that knowledge. "When they knew God" is the intensely significant word of Scripture. This is, indeed, diametrically contrary to

the teaching of modern science -- that the barbarous and debased tribes of earth are only in a less developed condition -- are on the way upward from the lowest forms of life, from the protoplasm whence all sprang, and have already passed in their upward course the ape, whose likeness they still, however, more closely bear! Oh, the folly of earth's wisdom! The pitiful meanness and littleness of the greatest of modern scientific minds that have "come after the King" contrasted even with the grand simple sublimity of the knowledge of Ecclesiastes. For this Preacher would not be a proper representative man were he in debased heathen ignorance. He could not show us faithfully and truly how far even unaided human reason could go in its recognition of, and approach to, God, if he had lost the knowledge of God. Low, indeed, is the level of man's highest, when in this state, as the Greeks show us; for whilst they, as distinct from the Jews, made wisdom the very object of their search, downward ever do they sink in their struggles, like a drowning man, till they reach a foul, impure, diabolical mythology. Their gods are as the stars for multitude. Nor are they able to conceive of these except as influenced by the same passions as themselves. Is there any reverence in approach to such? Not at all. Low, sensual, earthly depravity marked ever that approach. That is the level of the lapsed fallen wisdom of earth's wise. How does it compare with Solomon's? We may almost say as earth to heaven, -- hardly that, -- rather as hell to earth. Solomon, then, clearly shows us the highest possible conception of the creature's approach to his Creator. This is as far as man could have attained, let him be at the summit of real wisdom. His reason would have given him nothing beyond this. It tells him that man is a creature, and it is but the most simple and necessary consequence of this that his approach to his Creator should be with all the reverence and humility that is alone consistent with such a relationship. But high indeed as, in one point of view, this is, yet how low in another, for is one heart-throb stilled? One tormenting doubt removed? One fear quieted? One deep question answered? One sin-shackle loosened? Not one. The distance between them is still the distance between earth and heaven. "God is in heaven, and thou upon earth." Nor can the highest, purest, best of human reason, as in this wise and glorious king, bridge over that distance one span! "Fear thou God" is the sweetest comfort he can give, -- the clearest counsel he can offer. Consider him again, I say, my brethren, in all his nobility, in all his elevation, in all his bitter disappointment and incompetency. And now, my heart, prepare for joy, as thou turnest to thy own blessed portion. For how rich, how precious, how closely to be cherished is that which has gone so far beyond all possible human conception, -- that wondrous revelation by which this long, long distance 'twixt earth and heaven has been spanned completely. And in whom? JESUS, The Greater than Solomon. We have well considered the less, -- let us turn to the Greater. And where is that second Man to be found? Afar off on earth, with God in heaven? No, indeed. "For when He had by Himself purged our sins He sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high"; and "seeing, then, that we have a great high priest, that is passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession." Oh, let us consider Him together, my brethren. In holiest Light our Representative sits. He who but now was weighted with our guilt, and made sin for us, is in that Light ineffable, unapproachable. Where, then, are the sins? Where, then, the sin? Gone for all eternity! Nor does His position vary at all with all the varying states, failings, coldness, worldliness, of His people here. With holy calm, His work that has perfected them forever perfectly finished, He sits, and their position is thus maintained unchanging. Clearly, and without the shadow of the faintest mist to dim, the infinite searching Light of God falls on Him, but sees nought there that is not in completest harmony with Itself. Oh, wondrous conception! Oh, grandeur of thought beyond all the possibility of man's highest mind! No

longer can it be said at least to one Man, woman-born though He be, "God is in heaven, and thou upon earth"; for He, of the Seed of Abraham, of the house of David, is Himself in highest heaven. But one step further with me, my brethren. We are in Him, there; and that is our place, too. The earthward trend of thought -- the letting slip our own precious truth -- has introduced a "tongue" into Christendom that ought to be foreign to the Saint of heaven. No "place of worship" should the Christian know -- nay, can he really know -- short of heaven itself. For, listen: "Having, therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way which He hath consecrated for us through the vail, -- that is to say, His flesh, -- and having a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near," etc. We too, then, beloved, are not upon earth as to our worship, (let it be mixed with faith in us that hear). Israel's "place of worship" was where her high priest stood, and our place of worship is where our great High Priest sits. Jesus our Lord sowed the seed of this precious truth when he answered the poor sinful woman of Samaria, "The hour cometh when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for the Father seeketh such to worship Him." But, then, are not "words to be few"? Good and wise it was for Solomon so to speak; "few words" become the far-off place of the creature on earth before the glorious Majesty of the Creator in heaven. But if infinite wisdom and love have rent the vail and made a new and living way into the Holiest, does He now say "few words"? Better, far better, than that; for with the changed position all is changed, and not too often can His gracious ear "hear the voice of His beloved"; and, lest shrinking unbelief should still hesitate and doubt, He says plainly "In everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God." For He has shown Himself fully, now that vail is down, -- all that He is, is revealed to faith; and a Heart we find -- with reverence and adoring love be it spoken -- filled with tenderest solicitude for His people. Letting them have cares only that they may have His sympathy in a way that would not otherwise be possible; and thus again He invites "casting all your care upon Him, for He careth for you." Nor is there a hint in the holiest, of weariness on God's part in listening to His people, nor once does He say "enough; now cease thy prayers and supplications." How could He so speak who says "Pray without ceasing"? Then if, as assuredly we have seen, Solomon shows us the highest limit of human thought, reason, or conception, if we go even one step beyond, we have exceeded human thought, reason, or conception; (and in these New Testament truths how far beyond have we gone?) And what does that mean but that we are on holy ground indeed, listening to a voice that is distinctly the voice of God, -- the God who speaks to us, as He says, in order "that our joy may be full." But the Preacher continues to give, in verses 8 and 9, such counsel as he can to meet the discordant state of things everywhere apparent. "When thou seest violent oppression exercised by those in authority," he says, "marvel not; think it not strange, as though some strange thing were happening; thou art only looking on a weed-plant that everywhere flourishes 'under the sun,' and still thou mayest remember that these oppressors themselves, high though they be, have superiors above them: yea in the ever-ascending scale of ranks and orders thou mayest have to go to the Highest -- God Himself; but the same truth hold good, and He shall yet call powers and governors to answer for the exercise of their authorities. This for thy comfort, if thou lookest up; but, on the other hand, look down, and thou shalt see that which goes far to humble the highest; for even the king himself is as dependent as any on the field whence man's food comes." True, indeed, all this; but cold is the comfort, small cause for singing it gives. Our own dear apostle seems to have dropped for a moment from his higher vantage-ground

to the level of Solomon's wisdom when smarting under "oppression and the violent perverting of judgment," he cried to the high priest, "God [the higher than the highest] shall smite thee, thou whited wall." But we hear no joyful singing from him in connection with that indignant protest. On the contrary, the beloved and faithful servant regrets it the next moment, with "I wist not, brethren." Not so in the silent suffering of "violent oppression" at Philippi. There he and his companion have surely comfort beyond any that Solomon can offer, and the overflowing joy of their hearts comes from no spring that rises in this sad desert scene. Never before had prisoners in that dismal jail heard aught but groans of suffering coming from that inner prison, from the bruised and wounded prisoners whose feet were made fast in the stocks; but the Spirit of God notes, with sweet and simple pathos, "the prisoners heard them"; and oh, how mighty the testimony to that which is "above the sun" was that singing! It came from the Christian's proper portion, -- your portion and mine, dear fellow-redeemed one, -- for Jesus, our Lord Jesus, our Saviour Jesus, is the alone fountain of a joy that can fill a human heart until it gives forth "songs in the night," even in one of earth's foul abodes of suffering and oppression. He is the portion of the youngest, feeblest believer. Rich treasure! Let us beware lest any spoil us of that treasure, for we can only "sing" as we enjoy it. But once more let us listen to what the highest, purest attainment of the wisdom of man can give. And now he speaks of wealth and the abundance of earthly prosperity which he, of all men, had so fully tested. "He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver, nor he that loveth abundance, with increase"; and again there is the sorrowful groan, "This is also vanity." "If goods increase," he continues, "the household necessary to care for them increases proportionately, and the owner gets no further satisfaction from them than their sight affords. Nay, he who toils has a distinct advantage over the wealthy, who is denied the quiet repose the former enjoys." Carefully the Preacher has watched the miser heaping up ever, and robbing himself of all natural enjoyment, until some disaster -- "evil travail" -- sweeps away in a moment his accumulations, and his son is left a pauper. And such, at least, is every man he marks, be he never so wealthy, when the end comes. Inexorable Death is, sooner or later, the "evil travail" that strips him as naked as he came; and then, though he has spent his life in selfish self-denial, filling his dark days with vexation, sickness, and irritation, he is snatched from all, and, poor indeed, departs. Such the sad story of Solomon's experience; but not more sad than true, nor confined by any means to Scripture. World-wide it is. Nor is divine revelation necessary to tell poor man that silver, nor gold, nor abundance of any kind, can satisfy the heart. Hear the very heathen cry "semper avarus eget" -- "the miser ever needs"; or "Avarum irritat non satiat pecunia" -- "the wealth of the miser satisfies not, but irritates." But more weighty and far-reaching is the word of revelation going far beyond the negation of the king. "They that desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and hurtful lusts, such as drown men in destruction and perdition, for the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil, which some reaching after have been led astray from the faith, and have pierced themselves through with many sorrows." But let us pass to the last three verses of the chapter. The Preacher here says, in effect, "Now attend carefully to what I tell thee of the result of all my experience in this way. I have discerned a good that I can really call comely or fair. It is for a man to have the means at his command for enjoyment, and the power to enjoy those means. This combination is distinctly the 'gift of God.' From such an one all the evils that make up life pass off without eating deep into his being. A cheerful spirit takes him off from the present evil as soon as it is past. He does not think on it much; for the joy of heart within, to which God responds, enables him to meet and over-ride those waves of life and forget them."This is in

perfect conformity with the whole scope of our book: and it is surely a mistake that the evangelical doctors and commentators make when they seek to extract truth from Solomon's writings that is never to be attained apart from God's revelation. On the other hand, a large school of German rationalists see here nothing beyond the teaching of the Epicure: "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die." Rather does it show the high-water mark of human reason, wisdom, and experience, -- having much in common with the philosophy of the world, but going far beyond it; and then, at its highest, uttering some wail of dissatisfaction and disappointment, whilst the majestic height of divine revelation towers above it into the very heavens, taking him who receives it far above the clouds and mists of earth's speculations and questionings into the clear sunlight of eternal divine truth.So here Solomon -- and let us not forget none have ever gone, or can ever go, beyond him -- gives us the result of his searchings along the special line of the power of riches to give enjoyment. His whole experience again and again has contradicted this. Look at the 12th verse of this very chapter. "The sleep of the laboring man is sweet, but the abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep." No, no. In some way to get joy, he confesses he must have God. He combines in these verses these two ideas -- "Joy" and "God." Look at them. See how they recur: four times the name of God, thrice a word for joy. Now this raises Solomon far far above the malarial swamps of mere epicureanism, which excluded God entirely. It shows how perfect the harmony throughout the whole book. It is again, let us recall it, the high-water mark of human reason, intelligence, and experience. He reasons thus: (1) I have proved the vanity and unsatisfactory character of all created things in themselves, and yet can see no good beyond getting enjoyment from them. (2) The power, therefore, for enjoyment cannot be from the things themselves. It must be from God. He must give it. (3) This assumes that there must be some kind of accord between God and the heart, for God is the spring, and not the circumstances without. So far the power of human reason. High it is, indeed; but how unsatisfactory, at its highest. Consider all that it leaves unsaid. Suppose this were where you and I were, my reader, what should we learn of the way of attaining to this "good that is fair"? Shall we ask Ecclesiastes one single question that surely needs clear answer in order to attain it?I am a sinner: conscience, with more or less power, constantly accuses. How can this awful matter of my guilt in the sight of that God, the confessed and only source of thy "good," be settled? Surely this is absolutely necessary to know ere I can enjoy thy "good that is fair." Nay, more: were a voice to speak from heaven, telling me that all the past were blotted out up to this moment, I am well assured that I could not maintain this condition for the next moment. Sin would well up from the nature within, and leave me as hopeless as ever. I carry it -- that awful defiling thing -- with me, in me. How is this to be answered, Ecclesiastes? -- or what help to its answer dost thou give?...And there is silence alone for a reply.Once and only once was such a state possible. Adam, as he walked in his undefiled Eden, eating its fruit, rejoicing in the result of his labor, with no accusing conscience, God visiting him in the cool of the day and responding to all his joy, -- there is the picture of Ecclesiastes' "good that is fair." Where else in the old creation, and how long did that last? No; whilst it is refreshing and inspiring to mark the beautiful intelligence and exalted reasoning of Ecclesiastes, recognizing the true place of man in creation, dependent, and consciously dependent, on God for "life and breath and all things," as Paul spoke long afterwards, appealing to that in the heathen Athenians which even they were capable of responding to affirmatively; yet how he leaves us looking at a "good that is fair," but without a word as to how it is to be attained, in view of, and in spite of, sin. That one short word raises an impassable barrier between us and that fair good, and the more fair the

good, the more cruel the pain at being so utterly separated from it; but then, too, the more sweet and precious the love that removes the barrier entirely, and introduces us to a good that is as far fairer than Solomon's as Solomon's is above the beasts. For we, too, my dear readers, have our "good that is fair." Nor need we fear comparison with that of this wisest of men.Survey with me a fairer scene than any lighted by this old creation sun can show, and harken to God's own voice, in striking contrast to poor Solomon's portraying its lovely and entrancing beauties for our enjoyment."Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ, according as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will to the praise of the glory of His grace wherein He hath made us accepted in the Beloved: in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of His grace."Dwell a little on this our own fair good; mark its sevenfold perfection; go up and down the land with me. Let us press these grapes of Eshcol, and taste their excellence together.First: Chosen in Him before the foundation of the world. -- A threefold cord, that is, indeed, not soon broken. "Chosen," God's own love and wisdom is the fount and spring whence all flows. And that in blessed connection with the dearest object of His love -- "in Him." "Before the foundation of the world." In the stability and changelessness of Eternity, -- before that scene that is, and ever was, characterized by change, began, -- with its mirth and sorrow, sunshine and shadow, life and death. Blessed solid rock-foundation for all in God and Eternity.Second: To be Holy. -- Separated from all the defilement that should afterwards come in. Thus His electing love is always marked first by separation from all evil. It can never allow its object to be connected with the slightest defilement. The evil was allowed only that He might reveal Himself as Love and Light in dealing with it.Third: without blame. -- So thoroughly is all connected with past defilement met that not a memory of it remains to mar the present joy. The defilement of the old creation with which we were connected has left never a spot nor a stain on the person that could offend infinite holiness. Clean, every whit. Bless the Lord, oh my soul!Fourth: In love. -- Thus separated and cleansed from all defilement not mere complacency regards us. Not merely for his own pleasure, as men make a beautiful garden, and remove everything that would offend their taste, but active love in all its divine warmth encircles us. My reader, do you enjoy this fair good? If you be but the feeblest believer it is your own.Fifth: Adoption of Children. -- Closest kind of love, and that so implanted in the heart as to put that responsive home-cry of "Abba, Father," there, and on our lips. Yet nothing short of this was the "good pleasure of His will.Sixth. -- Taken into favor in the Beloved: the wondrous measure of acceptance "in the Beloved One." Look at Him again. All the glory He had in eternity He has now, and more added to it. Infinite complacency regards him. That, too, is the measure of our acceptance.Seventh. -- But no shirking that awful word, -- no overlooking the awful fact of sin's existence. No; the foundation of our enjoyment of our own fair good is well laid "in whom we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins."Sin, looked at in infinite holy Light, -- thoroughly looked at, -- and Blood, precious Blood, poured out in atonement for it, and thus put away forever in perfect righteousness.Now may the Lord grant us to realize more fully, as we progress in our book, the awful hopelessness that weighs on man's sad being, apart from the blessed and infinitely gracious revelation of God.

CHAPTER VI. Remembering how far the writer of our book excels all who have ever come after

Remembering how far the writer of our book excels all who have ever come after him, in ability, wisdom, or riches, his groans of disappointment shall have their true weight with us, and act as lighthouse beacons, warning us from danger, or from spending the one short fleeting life we have in treading the same profitless pathway of groaning. So chapter six opens, still on the same subject of wealth and its power to bless. A sore evil, and one that weighs heavily on man, has Solomon seen: riches, wealth, and honor, clustering thick on the head of one person, and yet God has withheld from him the power of enjoying it all. As our own poet, Browning, writes that apt illustration of King Saul: "A people is thine,

And all gifts, which the world offers singly, on one head combine! High ambition, and deeds which surpass it, fame crowning them all, Brought to blaze on the head of one creature -- King Saul." So sorrowful is this in our preacher's eyes, and so thoroughly does it bespeak a state of affairs under the sun in confusion, that Solomon ventures the strongest possible assertion. Better, he says, an untimely birth, that never saw light, than a thousand years twice told, thus spent in vanity, without real good having been found. How bitter life must show itself to lead to such an estimate! Better never to have been born than pass through life without finding something that can satisfy. But this is not looking at life simply in itself, for life in itself is good, as the same poet sings: "Oh, our manhood's prime vigor! No spirit feels waste, Not a muscle is stopped in its playing nor sinew unbraced. Oh, the wild joys of living! the leaping from rock up to rock, The strong rending of boughs from the fir-tree, the cool silver shock Of the plunge in a pool's living water!

How good is man's life -- the mere living! how fit to employ All the heart and the soul and the senses forever in joy!" It is because man has, of all the creation of God, an awful shadow hanging over him -- "death and darkness and the tomb," with the solemn, silent, unknown "beyond" lying before him, robbing him of rest. Angels have present pure delight, with no such shadow possible -- they die not. The beast may enjoy his pasture, for no thought of a coming death disturbs him. Life may be full of a kind of enjoyment to such; but man, poor man, when awake to the possibilities of his own being, as it surely becomes man to be (and that is just the point of this book -- we are not looking upon man as a mere animal, but as a reasoning creature, and as such he), is robbed of present rest and enjoyment by an inevitable fate to which he is hastening, and from which there is no possible escape. Do not all go to one place? -- that vague "Sheol," speaking of the grave, and yet the grave, not as the end, but an indefinite shadowy existence beyond? All, all go there; and with no light on that, better, indeed, "the untimely birth which came in vanity and departs in darkness;" for this, at least, has the more rest. Bitter groan this, indeed! For the Preacher continues: "Does man's labor satisfy him? Can he get what is really 'good' from it?" No. For never is his appetite filled so that it desires nothing more. The constant return of its thirst demands constant toil; and fool and wise must alike obey its call. This is not confined to bodily food, but covers that bitter hunger and thirst of the heart, as the use of the word soul (margin) shows. The

longings of the wise may be for a higher food. He may aim above the mere sensual, and seek to fill his soul with the refined, but he fails, as indeed do all, even "the poor man who knows to walk before the living;" that is, even the poor man who, with all the disadvantages of poverty, has wisdom enough to know how to live so as to command the respect of his fellows. Wise indeed must such be; but he, no more than the fool, has found the "good" that forever satisfies hunger and thirst, and calms to rest the wandering of the soul, which, like the restless swallow, is ever on the wing. Man is made up of desire, and one glimpse with the eyes, something seen, is at least something secured, and it is better than all mere longing, which is vanity and the pursuit of the wind. For everything has long ago been named from its own nature; and in this way its name shows what it is. Thus man, too, (Adam,) is, and ever has been, known from his name, from "adamah," earth; his name so showing his mortality. If thus he has been made by his Creator, how vain for him to hope to escape his fate, for with Him no contention is possible. What use, then, in many words (not things) since they afford no relief as against that end? they only increase vanity. Then the last sad wail of this subject: "Who knoweth what is really good -- satisfying for man -- during the few fleeting years of his vain life here, which he passes as a shadow; and when he is gone, who can tell him what shall be after him under the sun"? Let that wail sink down deep into our ears. It is the cry that has been passed, in ever increasing volume, from heart to heart -- every empty hollow heart of man echoing and re-echoing, "Who will show us any good?" Now turn and listen to One who came to answer that fully, and in His word to Mary, the sister of Lazarus, He does distinctly, in words, answer it. She had chosen the portion that He could call "good." And was that travail and toil, even in service for Himself? No, that was rather her sister's portion; but a seat -- expressive of rest -- (consider it), a listening ear, whilst the Lord ministered to her; -- and that is all that is needful! What a contrast between this poor rich king, communing with his own heart to find out what is that good portion for man; and the rich poor saint in blessed communion with infinite Love, infinite Wisdom, infinite Power, and resting satisfied! Surely, Solomon in all his glory had no throne to be compared to hers, as she sat lowly "at His feet." And mark carefully, for thy soul's good, that word of tender grace that the Lord said, This is "needful." He who had listened to the groan of man's heart through those long four thousand years, and knew its need fully and exactly, says that this good portion must not be regarded as any high attainment for the few, but as the very breath of life -- for all. If He knows that it is needful for thee, then, my soul, fear not but that He will approve thy taking the same place and claiming Mary's portion on the ground of thy need alone. Yes, but does this really answer the root cause of the groan in our chapter? Is the shadow of death dispelled by sitting at His feet! Is death no longer the dark unknown? Shall we learn lessons there that shall rob it of all its terrors, and replace the groan with song? Yes, truly, for look at the few significant foot-prints of that dear Mary's walk after this. See her at that supper made for the Lord at Bethany. Here Martha is serving with perfect acceptance -- no word of rebuke to her now; she has learned the lesson of that day spoken of in the tenth of Luke. But Mary still excels her, for, whilst sitting at His feet in that same day of tenth of Luke, she has heard some story that makes her come with precious spikenard to anoint His body for the burial! Strange act! And how could that affectionate heart force itself calmly to anoint the object of its love for burial? Ah! still a far sweeter story must she have heard "at His feet," and a bright light must have pierced the shadow of the tomb. For, look at that little company of devoted women around His cross, and you will find no trace of the no less devoted Mary, the sister of Lazarus, there. The other Marys may come, in tender affection, but in the dark ignorance of unbelief, to search for Him, in His

empty tomb on the third day. She, with no less tender affection surely, is not there. Is this silence of Scripture without significance, or are we to see the reason for it in that "good portion" she had chosen "at His feet"? -- and there did she hear, not only the solemn story of His cross leading her to anoint His body for the burial, but the joyful story of His resurrection, so that there was no need for her to seek "the living amongst the dead;" -- she knew that He was risen, and she, as long before, "sat still in the house"! Oh, blessed calm! Oh, holy peace! What is the secret of it? Wouldst thou learn it! Sit, then, too, "at His feet," in simple conscious emptiness and need. Give Him the still more blessed part of ministering to thee. So all shall be in order. Thou shalt have the good portion that shall dispel all clouds of death, and pour over thy being heaven's pure sunlight of resurrection; and, with that Light, song shall displace groan, whilst thy Lord shall have the still better part -- His own surely -- of giving; for "more blessed it is to give than to receive."

CHAPTER VII. But whilst the King has not that most blessed light

But whilst the King has not that most blessed light, yet there are some things in which he can discriminate; and here are seven comparisons in which his unaided wisdom can discern which is the better: -- 1. A good name is better than precious ointment.2. The day of death " " " the day of birth.3. The house of mourning " " " the house of feasting.4. Borrow " " " laughter.5. The rebuke of the wise " " " the song of fools.6. The end of a thing " " " the beginning.7. The patient in spirit " " " the proud in spirit. Lofty, indeed, is the level to which Solomon has attained by such unpopular conclusions, and it proves fully that we are listening in this book to man at his highest, best. Not a bitter, morbid, diseased mind, simply wailing over a lost life, and taking, therefore, highly colored and incorrect views of that life, as so many pious commentators say; but the calm, quiet result of the use of the highest powers of reasoning man, as man, possesses; and we have but to turn for a moment, and listen to Him who is greater than Solomon, to find His holy and infallible seal set upon the above conclusions. "Blessed are the pure in heart, -- they that mourn, -- and the meek," is surely in the same strain exactly; although reasons are there given for this blessedness of which Solomon, with all his wisdom, had never a glimpse. Let us take just one striking agreement, and note the contrasts: "It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart. Sorrow is better than laughter; for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth." That is, the loftiest purest wisdom of man recognizes a quality in sorrow itself that is purifying. "In the sadness of the face the heart becometh fair." In a scene where all is in confusion, -- where Death, as King of Terrors, reigns supreme over all, forcing his presence on us hourly, where wickedness and falsehood apparently prosper, and goodness and truth are forced to the wall, -- in such a scene of awful disorder, laughter and mirth are but discord, and grate upon the awakened spirit's ear with ghastly harshness. Whilst an honest acceptance of the truth of things as they are, looking Death itself full in the face, the house of mourning not shunned, but sought out; the sorrow within is at least in harmony with the sad state of matters without; the "ministration of death" has its effect, the spirit learns its lesson of humiliation; and this, says all wisdom, is "better." And yet this very level to which Reason can surely climb by her own unaided strength may become a foothold for Faith to go further. Unless Wrong, Discord, and Death, are the normal permanent condition of things, then sorrow, too, is not the normal permanent state of the heart; but this merely remains a question, and to its answer no reason helps us. Age after age has passed with no variation in the fell discord of its wails, tears, and groans. Generation has followed in the footsteps of generation, but with no rift in the gloomy shadow of death that has overhung and finally settled over each. Six thousand years of mourning leave unaided Reason with poor hope of any change in the future, -- of any expectation of true comfort. But then listen to that authoritative Voice proclaiming, as no "scribe" ever could, "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted." Ah, there is a bright light breaking in on the dark clouds, with no lightning-flash of added storm, but a mild and holy ray, -- the promise of a day yet to break o'er our sorrow-stricken earth, when there shall be no need for mourning, for death no more shall reign, but be swallowed up in victory. But turn over a few pages

more, and the contrast is still further heightened. The sun of divine revelation is now in mid-heaven; and not merely future, but present, comfort is revealed by its holy and blessed beam. Come, let us enter now into the "house of mourning," not merely to clasp hands with the mourners, and to sit there in the silence of Ecclesiastes' helplessness for the benefit of our own hearts, nor even to whisper the promise of a future comfort, but, full of the comfort of a present hope, to pour out words of comfort into the mourners' ears. Tears still are flowing, -- nor will we rebuke them. God would never blunt those tender sensibilities of the heart that thus speaks the Hand that made it; but He would take from the tears the bitterness of hopelessness, and would throw on them His own blessed Light, -- a new direct word of revelation from Himself, -- Love and Light as He is, -- till, like the clouds in the physical world, they shine with a glory that even the cloudless sky knows not.First, then, all must be grounded and based on faith in the Lord Jesus. We are talking to those who share with us in a common divine faith. We believe that Jesus died: but more, we believe that He rose again: and here alone is the foundation of true hope or comfort. They who believe not or know not this are as absolutely hopeless -- as comfortless -- as Ecclesiastes: they are "the rest which have no hope." True divine Hope is a rare sweet plant, whose root is found only in His empty tomb, whose flower and fruit are in heaven itself. Based on this, comforts abound; and in every step the living Lord Jesus is seen: His resurrection throws its blessed light everywhere. If One has actually risen from the dead, what glorious possibilities follow. For as to those who are falling asleep, is He insensible to that which moves us so deeply? Nay; He Himself has put them to sleep. They are fallen asleep [not "in," as our version says, but] through (dia) Jesus. He who so loved them has Himself put them to sleep. No matter what the outward, or apparent, causes of their departure to sight, faith sees the perfect love of the Lord Jesus giving "His beloved sleep." Sight may take note only of the flying stones as they crush the martyr's body; mark, with horror, the breaking bone, the bruised and bleeding flesh; hear the air filled with the confusion of shouts of imprecation, and mocking blasphemy; but to faith all is different: to her the spirit of the saint, in perfect calm, is enfolded to the bosom of Him who has loved and redeemed it, whilst the same Lord Jesus hushes the bruised and mangled form to sleep, as in the holy quiet of the sanctuary. Let our faith take firm hold of this blessed word, "fallen asleep through Jesus," for our comfort. So shall we be able to instil this comfort into the wounded hearts of others, -- comforting them with the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God. What would Solomon have given to have known this?Second, the mind must be gently loosened from occupation with itself and its own loss; and that by no rebuke or harsh word, so out of place with sorrow, but by the assumption, at least, that it is for the loss that the departed themselves suffer that we grieve. It is because we love them that our tears flow: but suppose we know beyond a question that they have suffered no loss by being taken away from this scene, would not that modify our sorrow? Yea; would it not change its character completely, extracting bitterness from it? So that blessed Lord Himself comforted His own on the eve of His departure: "If ye loved me, ye would rejoice because I go unto my Father, for my Father is greater than I." The more you love me, the less -- not the more -- will you sorrow. Nay; you would change the sorrow into actual joy. The measure of the comfort is exactly the measure of the love. That is surely divine. So here, "You are looking forward to the day when your rejected Lord Jesus shall be manifested in brightest glories: your beloved have not missed their share in that triumph. God will show them the same "path of life" He showed their Shepherd (Ps. xvi.), and will "bring them with Him" in the train of their victorious Lord.Third. But is that triumph, that joy, so far off that it can only be seen through the dim aisles and long vistas of many future

ages and generations? Must our comfort be greatly lessened by the thought that while that end is "sure," it is still "very far off," -- a thousand years may -- nay, some say, must -- have to intervene; and must we sorrowfully say, like the bereaved saint of old, "I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me"? Not at all. Better, far better than that. For Faith's cheerful and cheering voice is "we who are alive and remain." That day is so close ever to faith that there is nothing between us and it. No long weary waiting expected; and that very attitude -- that very hope -- takes away the "weariness" from the swift passing days. Those dear saints of old grasped and cherished this blessed hope that their saviour Lord would return even during their life. Did they lose anything by so cherishing it? Have we gained by our giving it up? Has the more "reasonable" expectation that, after all, the tomb shall be our lot as theirs, made our days brighter, happier, and so to speed more quickly? Has it made us more separate from the world, more heavenly in character, given us less in common with the worldling? Has this safe "reasoning" made us to abound in works of love, labors of faith, and in patience of hope, as did the "unreasonable" and "mistaken" hope of His immediate coming the dear Thessalonians of old? For look at the first chapter, and see how the "waiting for the Son from heaven" worked. Again I ask, have we improved on this? Can we improve upon it? Was it not far better, then, for them -- if these its happy accompaniments -- to hold fast, even to their last breath, that hope; and even to pass off this scene clasping it still fondly to their hearts, than our dimmed and dull faith with -- it may be boldly said -- all the sad loss that accompanies this? Hold it fast, my brethren, "We who are alive and remain." Let that be the only word in our mouths, the only hope in our hearts. It is a cup filled to the brim with comfort. How they ring with life and hope in contrast with the dull, heavy, deathful word of poor Ecclesiastes -- "For that is the end of all men"!Oh, spring up brighter in all our hearts, thou divinely given, divinely sustained Hope!Fourth. -- "For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first."Another sweet and holy word of comfort. We have seen Jesus putting His saints to sleep, as to their bodies; and here we see the same Lord Jesus Himself bidding them rise. No indiscriminate general resurrection this: "the dead in Christ" alone are concerned: they rise first. He who died for them knows them; and they, too, have known His voice in life: that same voice now awakens them, and bids them rise as easily as the little damsel at the "Talitha Cumi"! How precious is this glorious word of the Lord! How perfect the order! No awe-inspiring trumpet, "sounding long and waxing loud," as at Sinai of old, awakening the panic-stricken dead, and bidding them come to an awful judgment. Such the picture that man's dark unbelief and guilty conscience have drawn. Small comfort would we have for mourners were that true. God be thanked it is not. Their Saviour's well-known voice that our dead have loved shall awaken them, ringing full and true in every tone and note of it with the love He has borne them. Then the voice of the Archangel Michael, the great marshal of God's victorious hosts shall range our ranks. This accomplished, and all in the perfect divine order of victory, the trumpet shall sound and the redeemed shall begin their triumphant, blissful, upward flight.Fifth. -- But the Spirit of God desires us to get and to give the comfort of another precious word. In no strange unknown company shall we who are alive and remain start on that homeward journey, but "together with them." Who that has known the agony of broken heart-strings does not see the infinitely gracious tender comfort in those three words, "together with them"? There is reunion. Once more we shall be in very deed with those we love, with never a thought or fear of parting more to shadow the mutual joy. In view of those three words it were simple impertinence to question whether we shall recognize our dear saints who have preceded

us. Not only would such a question rob them of their beauty, but of their very meaning. They would be empty and absolutely meaningless in such case. Sure, beyond a peradventure, is it that our most cherished anticipations shall be far exceeded in that rapturous moment; for we can but reason from experience, whilst here the sweetest communion has ever been marred by that which there shall not be.How sweet the prospect, my sorrowing bereaved readers! We shall, as God is true, look once more into the very faces of those we have known and loved in the Lord on earth. They awake to recognition as Magdalene at the word "Mary;" not to a renewed earthly companionship, nor to a relationship as known in the flesh, as poor Mary thought, but to a sweeter, as well as higher; a warmer, as well as purer communion; for the tie that there shall bind us together is that which is stronger, sweeter than all others, even here, -- Jesus Christ the Lord.But stay! Does this really meet fully the present sorrow? Does it give a satisfying comfort? Is there not a lurking feeling of disappointment that certain relationships with their affections are never to be restored; therefore, in certain ways, "recognition" is not probable? For instance, a husband loses the companion of his life. He shall, it is true, meet and recognize with joy a saint whom he knew on earth, but never again his wife. That sweet, pure, human affection, is never to be renewed. Death's rude hand has chilled that warmth forever. The shock of death has extinguished it forevermore. Is that exactly true? Is that just as Scripture puts it? Let us see.We may justly reason that if, in the resurrection, relationships were exactly as here, sorrow would necessarily outweigh joy. To find broken families there would be a perpetuation of earth's keenest distresses. To know that that break was irreparable would cause a grief unutterable and altogether inconsistent with the joy of the new creation. Marriage there is not, and hence all relationships of earth we may safely gather are not there. But the natural affections of the soul of man have they absolutely come to nothing?That soul, connected as it is with that which is higher than itself -- the spirit -- is immortal, and its powers and attributes must be in activity beyond death. It is the seat of the affections here, and, surely, there too. Why, then, shall not these affections there have full unhindered play? Let us seek to gather something from analogy. Knowledge has its seat in the spirit of man, and here he exercises that faculty; nor does the spirit any more than the soul cease to exist; nor are its attributes therefore to be arrested. Yet we read of knowledge in that scene, "it shall vanish away." And why? Is it not because of the perfect light that there shines? Human knowledge is but a candle, and what worth is candlelight when the noonday sun shines? It is overwhelmed, swallowed up, by perfect light. It "vanishes away," -- is not extinguished, any more than is human knowledge, by the shock of death or change; but perfection of Light has done away with the very appearance of imperfection. Now is this not equally and exactly true of that other part of the divine nature -- Love? Here we both know in part and love in part. There the perfection of Love causes that which is imperfect -- the human affection of the soul -- to "vanish away." The greater swallows up the less. The infinite attraction of the Lord Jesus -- that "glory" which He prayed that we might see (John xvii.) -- overwhelms all lower affections with no rough rude shock as of death, but by the very superabundance of the bliss. His glory! What is it but the radiant outshining of His infinitely blessed, infinitely attractive, divine nature, -- Love and Light, Light and Love, -- each swallowing up in their respective spheres every inferior imperfect reflection of them that we have enjoyed here in this scene of imperfection, leaving nothing to be desired, nothing missed; allowing perfect play to every human faculty and affection, -- crushing, extinguishing none. Death has not been permitted to annul these faculties. The perfect love of the Lord Jesus has outstripped them, swallowed them up in warmer affections, sweeter communion. The coming of that precious Saviour is close: just as

close is the fulfillment of those words, "together with them." "He maketh the clouds His chariots," and in those chariots we are taken home "together."Sixth. -- "To meet the Lord in the air." Another word of divine comfort, again. How bold the assertion! Its very boldness is assurance of its truth. It becomes God, and God only, so to speak that His people may both recognize His voice in its majesty and rest on His word. No speculation; no argument; no deduction; no reasoning; but a bare, authoritative statement, startling in its boldness. Not a syllable of past Scripture on which to build and to give color to it; and yet when revealed, when spoken, in perfect harmony with the whole of Scripture. How absolutely impossible for any man to have conceived that the Lord's saints should be caught up to meet Him "in the air." Were it not true, its very boldness and apparent foolishness would be its refutation. And what must be the character of mind that would even seek to invent such a thought? What depths of awful wickedness it would bespeak! What cruelty thus to attempt to deceive the whole race! What corruption, thus to speak false in the holiest matters, attaching the Lord's name to a falsehood! The spring from which such a statement, if false, could rise must be corrupt indeed. But, oh, how different in fact! What severe righteousness! what depths of holiness! what elevated morality! what warmth of tender affection! what burning zeal, combined with the profoundest reasoning, characterize every word of the writer of this same statement! Every word that he has written testifies that he has not attempted to deceive.There is, perhaps, one other alternative: the writer may have believed himself thus inspired, and was thus self-deceived But in this case far gone in disease must his mind have been; nor could it fail constantly to give striking evidence of being thus unhinged in other parts of his writings. This is a subject with which unbalanced minds have shown their inability to be much occupied without the most sorrowful evidences of the disease under which they suffer. Let there be independence of the Scriptures (as there confessedly is in this case), and let man's mind work in connection with this subject of the Lord's second coming, and all history has but one testimony: such minds become unbalanced, and feverish disquietude evidences itself by constant recurrence to the one theme. Find, on the other hand, one single instance, if you can, in which such a mind makes mention once, and only once, of that subject that has so overmastered every other as to have deceived him into the belief that falsehood is truth, his own imagination is the inspiration of the Spirit of God!Have you not wondered why this wondrous word of revelation occurs thus in detail once and only once? Is it not one of the weapons of those who contend against this our hope that we base too much on this isolated Scripture text? Not that that is true, for all Scripture, as we have said, is in perfect harmony and accord with it; but what a perfect, complete, thorough answer, this fact gives to the other alternative -- that the writer was self-deceived. This is impossible; or, like every other self-deceived man that ever lived, he would have pressed his one theme in every letter, forced it on unwilling minds every time he opened his mouth or took up his pen."No wild enthusiast ever yet could rest

Till half mankind were like himself possessed."'Tis an attractive theme. Long could we linger here, but we must pass on; but before leaving, let us see if we were justified in saying that whilst this word is based on no previous Scripture, yet, when spoken, it is in harmony with all. First, then, is it not in perfect accord with the peculiar character and calling of the Church? Israel, as a nation, finds her final deliverance on the earth. Her calling and her hopes have ever been limited to this scene. Fitting then, indeed, it is that she be saved by her Deliverer's feet standing once more on the Mount of Olives (Zach. xiv.4), and the judgment of the living nations should then take place. But with the Church, how different: her blessings heavenly; her character heavenly; her calling

heavenly. Is it not, then, in accord with this that her meeting with her Lord should be literally heavenly, too? Israel, exponent of the righteous government of God, may rightly long to "dip her foot in the blood of the wicked." Nor can she expect or know of any deliverance except, as of old, in victories in the day of battle. The Church, exponent of the exceeding riches of His grace, is of another spirit; and our deliverance "in the air" permits -- nay, necessitates -- our echoing that gracious word of our Lord, "Father, forgive them."Then too, how beautifully this rapture follows the pattern of His whom the Lord's people now are following even to a dwelling that has no name nor place on earth (John i.38, 39). The clouds received Him: they, too, shall receive us. Unseen by the world He left the world, too busy with its occupations to note or care for the departure of Him who is its Light. So the poor feeble glimmer of the Lord's dear people now shall be lost, secretly, as it were, to the world in which they shine as lights, leaving it in awful gloomy darkness till the Day dawn and the Sun arise. Nor is illustration or type lacking. In Enoch, caught up before the judgment of the flood, surely we may see a figure of the rapture of the heavenly saints before the antitype of the flood, the tribulation that is to try "the dwellers upon the earth," as in Noah brought through that judgment, a picture of the earthly ones.In this connection, too, what could be more exquisitely harmonious than the way in which the Lord thus presents Himself to the expectant faith of His earthly and heavenly people? To the former the full plain Day is ushered in by the Sun of Righteousness arising with healing in His wings: for that Day they look. To the latter, who are watching through the long hours of the night, the Bright and Morning Star shining ere the first beams of the Sun are thrown upon the dark world is the object of faith and hope.Is not the word that believers shall, "meet the Lord in the air" in absolute accord with these different aspects of the Lord as Star and Sun? Most certainly it is.More than at any other time, a solid foundation for comfort is needed in times of deep grief. Then the hosts of darkness press round the dismayed spirit; clouds of darkness roll across the mental sky; the sun and all light is hidden; in the storm-wrack the fiery darts of the wicked one fall thick as rain. Every long-accepted truth is questioned; the very foundations seem to dissolve. A firm foothold, indeed, must we have on which to stand at such a time. Faith must be seen not at war with her poor blind -- or at least short-sighted -- sister Reason, but in perfect accord, leading her, with her feebler powers, by the hand. But here is where the world's efforts to comfort -- and, indeed, alas, the worldly Christians too -- lack. Sentimentalism abounds here; and the poor troubled heart is told to stand fast on airy speculations, and to distil comfort from wax-flowers, as it were, -- the creations of the imagination. How solid the comfort here given in contrast with all this. God speaks, and in the Light, that with clear yet gentle ray, exactly meets the needs of our present distress, -- in the Love that in its infinite tenderness and beautiful delicacy knows how to heal the wounded spirit, -- in the grand authority that rests on no other word or testimony for proof, -- and yet in the perfect, absolute harmony with the whole scope of His own holy word, we, His children, recognize again His voice; for never man could speak thus, and we are comforted, and may comfort one another.It is true. It is divine. We shall meet the Lord in the air. Happy journey that, in such a company to such a goal, -- to meet the Lord! Who can picture the joy of that upward flight? What words extract the comfort of that meeting, -- the Lord, -- our Lord, -- alone with Him, -- "together with them," -- in the quiet chambers of the air!Seventh. -- "And so shall we ever be with the Lord." There is an eternity of unmingled bliss. How short the time of separation, oh ye mourning ones, compared with this! The pain is but for a moment, whilst there is a far more exceeding and eternal weight of comfort.What a contrast! Death is the sad, gloomy, mysterious, unknown boundary for all, groans Ecclesiastes,

"for that is the end of all men." There is no end to the joy of the redeemed, says Revelation; and Faith sings "forever with the Lord." What deep need of Himself has this man's heart, that He has made. If in this sad scene we get one ray of true comfort it is when "with Him"; one thrill of true joy it is when "with Him"; one hour of true peace it is when "with Him." We were intended, meant, created, to need Him. Let us remember that, and then see the sweet comfort in that word, "so shall we ever be with the Lord." Man is at last, may it be said, in his element. His spirit gets the communion that it needs -- with Him forever; his soul, the love it needs, in Him forever; his body the perfection it needs -- like Him forever! Is not this revelation self-evidently of God -- worthy of Him -- possible only to Him?Again, let us ask what would Solomon have given for a song like this, instead of his mournful, groan "for death is the end of all men"! Alas, as he goes on, he finds that even this is not the case, except as regards the scene "under the sun." He finds it impossible to escape a conclusion, as startling as it is logical, that there is another scene to which death may introduce, from which there is no escape.Our writer, ignorant as he confessedly is of this glorious light of divine revelation, still speaks in praise of the feeble glimmer that human wisdom gives. From his point of view, wealth and wisdom are both good, -- are a "defense" or "shadow" to their possessors; but still that which men generally esteem the most -- wealth -- is given the second place; for knowledge, or wisdom, has in itself a positive virtue that money lacks. It "gives life to them that have it," animates, preserves in life, modifies, at least in measure, the evils from which it cannot altogether guard its possessor; and, by giving equanimity to a life of change and vicissitude, proves, in some sort, its own life-giving energy. How infinitely true this is with regard to Him who is absolute infinite Wisdom, and who is our Life, it is our health and joy to remember. The Preacher continues: Ponder the work of God, but you will find nothing in anything that you can see that shall enable you to forecast the future with any certainty. Adversity follows prosperity, and my counsel is to make the best use of both, -- enjoy this when it comes, and let that teach you that God's ways are inscrutable, nor can you straighten out the tangle of His providences. Evidently he intends these vicissitudes that still follow no definite rule, so that man may recognize his own ignorance and impotence. In one word, reason as you may from all that you can see, and your reason will throw no ray of light on God's future dealings. And there again, having brought us face to face with a dense, impenetrable cloud, Ecclesiastes leaves us.How awful that dark cloud is, it is difficult for us now to realize, so accustomed are we to the light God's word has given. But were it possible to blot out entirely from our minds all that Word has taught us, and place ourselves for a moment just by the side of our "Preacher," look alone through his eyes, recognize with him the existence of the Creator whose glorious Being is so fully shown in all His works, and yet with nothing whereby to judge of His disposition toward us except what we see, -- in the physical world the blasting storm sweeping over the landscape that but now spoke only in its beauties and bounties of His love and benevolence, leaving in its desolating track, not only ruined homesteads and blighted harvests; but, far worse, the destruction of all our hopes, of all the estimates we had formed of Him. In the world of providences the thoughts of His love, based on yesterday's peace and prosperity, all denied and swept away by to-day's sorrows and adversities, -- awful, agonizing uncertainty! And, since all is surely in His hand, to be compelled to recognize that He permits, at least, these alternations "to the end that (with that express purpose) man should find nothing of what shall be after Him"! Reason, or Intelligence, with all her highest powers, stands hopeless and helpless before that dark future, and wrings her hands in agony.But look, my beloved reader, at that man who speeds his way with fleet and steady footfall. His swift tread speaks no uncertainty

nor doubt of mind. Mark the earnest, concentrated, forward look. His eye is upward, and something he sees there is drawing him with powerful magnetic attraction quite contrary to the course or path of men at large. He presses against the stream: the multitude are floating in the other direction. As with the kine of Bethshemesh, some hidden power takes him in a course quite contrary to all the ties or calls of mere nature. Look at him, -- irrespective of anything else, the figure itself is a grand sight. The path he has chosen lies through the thorny shrubs of endurance, afflictions, necessities, distresses, stripes, imprisonments, tumults, labors, watchings, and fastings. No soft or winsome meadow-way this, nor one that any would choose, except he were under some strong conviction, -- whether true or false, -- that will surely be admitted. For men have at rare times suffered much even in the cause of error; but never for that which they themselves knew to be false, and which at the same time brought them no glory, -- nothing to feed their vanity, or pride, or exalt them in any way. Admit, then, for a moment, that he is self-deceived, under some strong delusion, and that the object of which he is in pursuit is but a phantom. Then mark the path in which that phantom leads: it has turned him from being a blasphemer, persecutor, and an insolent, overbearing man (1 Tim.1), into one of liveliest affections, most tender sympathies, a lowly servant of all; it has given him a joy that no wave of trouble can quench, a song that dungeons cannot silence, a transparent truthfulness which permits a lie nowhere; and all this results from that which is in itself a delusion, -- a lie! Oh, holy "delusion"! Oh, wondrous, truth-loving, wonder-working "lie"! Was ever such a miracle, that a falsehood works truth? -- that a delusion, instead of leading into marsh, or bog, or quicksand, as other will-o'-the-wisps ever and always have, leads along a morally elevated path where every footstep rings with the music of divine certainty, as though it trod upon a rock! Such a miracle, contrary to all reason, is worthy of acceptance only by the blind, childish, credulity of infidelity. Whatever the object before him, then, it is real; his convictions are soberly and well founded; he runs his race to no visionary, misty goal; but some actual reality is the lode-star of his life. Let us listen to his own explanation: "forgetting those things that are being, reaching forth unto those that are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." But Solomon, the wisest of the wise, groans no man can find out "that which shall come after him"; or, in other words, that future of which Paul sings: I have heard a voice that has called from heaven, and looking up I have seen a Light that has darkened every other. One in beauty and attraction infinite, -- to Him I press. He is before me, and not till Him I reach will I rest. Blessed contrast! Now, my dear reader, let us also seek to keep our eye on that same Object, for the man at whom we have been looking is one just like ourselves, with every passion that we have, and the One who drew him can draw you and me, -- Who satisfied him can satisfy us, for He who loved and died for him has loved and died for us.And since we are not now contemplating the wondrous cross, but His glory, let us sing together: -- Oh, my Saviour glorified!

Now the heavens opened wide

Show to Faith's exultant eye

One in beauteous majesty.Worthy of the sweetest praise

That my ransomed heart can raise,

Is that Man in whom alone

God Himself is fully known.For those clust'ring glories prove

That glad gospel "God is Love,"

Whilst those wounds, in glory bright,

Voice the solemn "God is Light."Holy Light, whose searching ray

Brings but into perfect day

Beauties that my heart must win

To the Sinless once made Sin.Hark, my soul! Thy Saviour sings;

Catch the joy that music brings;

And, with that sweet flood of song,

Pour thy whisp'ring praise along.For no film of shade above

Hides me now from perfect Love.

Deep assurance all is right

Gives me peace in perfect Light.Find I then on God's own breast

Holy, happy, perfect rest,

In the person of my Lord, --

"Ever be His name adored!"Oh, my Saviour glorified,

Turn my eye from all beside.

Let me but Thy beauty see, --

Other light is dark to me.But the Preacher's experiences of anomalies are by no means ended. These alternations of adversity and prosperity, he says, whilst there is no forecasting when they will come, so there seems to be no safeguard, even in righteousness and wisdom, against them. They are not meted out here at all on the lines of righteousness. The just man dies in his righteousness, whilst the wicked lives on in his wickedness: therefore be not righteous overmuch; do not abstain, or withdraw thyself, from the natural blessings of life, making it joyless and desolate; but then err not on the other side, going into folly and licentiousness, -- a course which naturally tends to cut off life itself. It is the narrow way of philosophy: as said the old Latins, "Medio tutissimus ibis," "midway is safety"; but Solomon is here again, as we have seen before, on a far higher moral elevation than any of the heathen philosophers, for he has one sheet-anchor for his soul from the evils of either extreme, in the fear of God.As for the despairing, hopeless groans of "vanity," we, with our God-given grace, learn to feel pity for our Author, so for his moral elevation do we admire him, whilst for his sincerity and love of truth we learn to respect and love him. See in the next few verses that clear, cold, true, reason of his, confessing the narrow limits of its powers, and yet the whole soul longs, as if it would burst all bars to attain to that which shall solve its perplexity. "Thus far have I attained by wisdom," he says, "and yet still I cry for wisdom. I see far off the place where earth can reach and touch the heavens; but when, by weary toil and labor, I

reach that spot, those heavens are as inimitably high above me as ever, and an equally long journey lies between me and the horizon where they meet. Oh, that I might be wise; but it was far from me."Now, in our version, the next verse reads very tamely and flat, in view of the strong emotion under which it is so clear that the whole of the book was written. "That which is far off and exceeding deep, who can find it out?" The Revised, both in text and margin, gives us a hint of another thought, "That which is, or hath been, is afar off," etc. But other scholars, in company with the Targum and many an old Jewish writer, lift the verse into harmony with the impassioned utterances of this noble man, as he expresses in broken ejaculatory phrase his longings and his powerlessness:"Far off, the past, -- what is it?

Deep, -- that deep! Ah, who can sound?

Then turned I, and my heart, to learn, explore.

To seek out wisdom, reason -- sin to know --

Presumption -- folly -- vain impiety.He must unravel the mystery, and turns thus, once more, with his sole companion, his own heart, to measure everything, -- even sin, folly, impiety, -- and more bitter even than that bitter death that has again and again darkened all his counsel and dashed his hopes, is one awful evil that he has found.One was nearest Adam in the old creation. Taken from his side, a living one, she was placed at his side to share with him his wide dominion over that fair, unsullied scene. Strong where he was weak, and weak where he was strong, how evidently was she meant of an all-gracious and all-wise Creator as a true helpmeet for him: his complement -- filling up his being. But that old creation is as a vessel reversed, so that the highest is now the lowest, -- the best has become the worst, -- the closest may be the most dangerous; and foes spring even from within households. Intensified disorder and confusion! When she who was so clearly intended by her strength of affection to call into rightful play the affections of man's heart, whose very weakness and dependence should call forth his strength -- alas, our writer has found that that heart is too often a snare and a net, and those hands drag down to ruin the one to whom they cling. It is the clearest sign of God's judgment to be taken by those nets and bands, as of his mercy, to escape them. Thus evil ever works, dual -- as is good -- in character. Opposed to the Light and Love of God we find a liar and murderer in Satan himself; corruption and violence in man, under Satan's power. The weaker vessel makes up for lack of strength by deception; and whilst the man of the earth expresses the violence, so the woman of the earth has become, ever and always, the expression of corruption and deceit, as here spoken of by our preacher, "her heart snares and nets; her hands as bands." But further in his search for wisdom, the Preacher has found but few indeed who would or could accompany him in his path. A man here and there, one in a thousand, would be his companion, but no single woman. This statement strongly evidences that the gospel is outside his sphere; the new creation is beyond his ken. He takes into no account the sovereign grace of God, that in itself can again restore, and more than restore, all to their normal conditions, and make the weaker vessel fully as much a vessel unto honor as the stronger, giving her a wide and blessed sphere of activity; in which love -- the divine nature within -- may find its happy exercise and rest. Naturally, and apart from this grace, the woman does not give herself to the same exercise of mind as does the man.But then, is it thus that man came from his Maker's hands? Has He, who stamped His own perfection on all His works, permitted an awful hideous exception in the moral nature of man? Does human reason admit such a possible incongruity? No,

indeed. Folly may claim license for its lusts in the plea of a nature received from a Creator. Haughty pride, on the other hand, may deny that nature altogether. The clearer, nobler, truer, philosophy of our writer justifies God, even in view of all the evil that makes him groan, and he says, "Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright, but they have sought out many inventions."Interesting as well as beautiful it is to hear this conclusion of man's reason, not at all in view of the exceeding riches of God's grace, but simply looking at facts, in the light that Nature gives. Man neither is, nor can be, an exception to the rule. God has made him upright. If not so now, it is because he has departed from this state, and his many inventions, or arts (as Luther translates the word significantly), his devices, his search after new things (but the word "inventions" expresses the thought of the original correctly), are so many proofs of dissatisfaction and unrest.He may, in that pride, which turns everything to its own glory, point to these very inventions as evidences of his progress; and in a certain way they do unquestionably speak his intelligence and immense superiority over the lower creation. Yet the very invention bespeaks need; for most truthful is the proverb, "Necessity is the mother of invention"; and surely in the way of Nature necessity is not a glory, but a shame. Let him glory in his inventions, then; and his glory is in his shame. Adam in his Eden of delights, upright, content, thought never of invention. He took from God's hand what God gave, with no need to make calls upon his own ingenuity to supply his longings. The fall introduces the inventive faculty, and human ingenuity begins to work to overcome the need, of which now, for the first time, man becomes aware; but we hear no singing in connection with that first invention of the apron of fig-leaves. That faculty has marked his path throughout the centuries. Not always at one level, or ever moving in one direction, -- it has risen and fallen, with flow and ebb, as the tides; now surging upward with skillful "artifice in brass and iron," and to the music of "harp and organ," until it aims at heaven itself, and the Lord again and again interposes and abases by flood and scattering, -- now ebbing, till apparently extinct in the low-sunken tribes of earth. Its activity is the accompaniment usually of the light that God gives, and which man takes, and turns to his own boasting, with no recognition of the Giver, calling it "civilization." The Lord's saints are not, for the most part, to be found amongst the line of inventors. The seed of Cain, and not the seed of Seth, produces them. The former make the earth their home, and naturally seek to beautify it, and make it comfortable. The latter, with deepest soul-thirst, quenched by rills of living water springing not here; with heart-longings satisfied by an infinite, tender, divine Love, pass through the earth strangers and pilgrims, to the Rest of God.Let us glance forward a little. The Church is not found on earth; but the earth still is the scene of man's invention; and with that surpassing boast "opposing and exalting himself above all that is called God, or is worshiped; so that he sitteth in the temple of God showing himself that he is God," he heads up his wickedness and ingenuity together, in calling down fire from heaven and in making "the image of the beast to breathe." (Rev. xiii.14, 15.) 'Tis his last crowning effort, -- his day is over, -- and the flood and the scattering of old shall have their awful antitype in an eternal judgment and everlasting abasing.But the heavenly saints have been caught up to their home. Is there invention there? Does human ingenuity still work? How can it, if every heart is fully satisfied, and nothing can be improved? But then is all at one dead level? No, surely; for "discovery" shall abide when "invention" has vanished away, -- constant, never-ceasing "discovery." The unfoldings, hour by hour, and age by age, of a Beauty that is infinite and inexhaustible, -- the tasting a new and entrancing perfection in a Love in which every moment shows some fresh attraction, some new sweet compulsion to praise! Discovery is already "ours," my reader -- not invention; and each day,

each hour, each moment, may be fruitful in discovery. Every difficulty met in the day's walk may prove but its handmaid; every trial in the day's path serve but to bring out new and happy discoveries. Nay, even grief and sorrow shall have their sweet discoveries, and open up to sight fountains of water hitherto altogether unknown, as with the outcast Egyptian mother in the wilderness of Paran, till we learn to glory in what hitherto was our sorrow, and to welcome infirmities and ignorance, for they show us a spring of infinite Strength and a fountain of unfathomable Wisdom, that eternal Love puts at our service! Oh, to grow in Faith's Discoveries!Philip had a grand opportunity for "discovery," in the sixth of John; but, poor man, he lost it; for he fell back on creature resources, or, in other words, "Invention." Brought face to face with difficulty, how good it would have been for him to have said, "Lord Jesus, I am empty of wisdom, nor have I any resources to meet this need; but my heart rests in Thee: I joy in this fresh opportunity for Thee to display Thy glory, for thou knowest what Thou wilt do." Oh, foolish Philip, to talk of every one having a little, in that Presence of infinite Love, infinite Power. Do I thus blame him? Then let this day see me looking upward at every difficulty, and saying "Lord, Thou knowest what Thou wilt do."The morning breaks, my heart awakes,

And many thoughts come crowding o'er me, --

What hopes or fears, what smiles or tears

Are waiting in that path before me?Am I to roam afar from home,

By Babel's streams, in gloom despondent?

On sorrow's tree must my harp be

To grief's sad gusts alone respondent?The mists hang dank, on front and flank,

My straining eye can naught discover;

But well I know that many a foe

Around that narrow path doth hover.Nor this alone would make me groan, --

Alas, a traitor dwells within me;

With hollow smile and heart of guile

The world without, too, plots to win me.Thus I'm beset with foes, and yet

I would not miss a single danger:

Each foe's a friend that makes me wend

My homeward way, -- on earth a stranger.For never haze dims upward gaze, --

Oh, glorious sight! for there above me

Upon God's throne there sitteth One

Who died to save -- who lives to love me!And like the dew each dayspring new

That tender love shall onward lead me:

My thirst shall slake, yet thirst awake

Till every breath shall pant: -- "I need Thee."No wisdom give; I'd rather live

In conscious lack dependent on Thee:

Each parting way I meet this day

Then proves my claim to call upon Thee.No strength I ask, for Thine the task

To bear Thine own on Shepherd-shoulder.

Then Faith may boast when helpless most,

And greater need make weakness bolder.Then Lord, thy breast is, too, my rest;

And there, as in my home, I'm hidden, --

Where quiet peace makes groanings cease,

And Zion's songs gush forth unbidden.Yes, e'en on earth may song have birth,

And music rise o'er Nature's groanings, --

Whilst Hope new born each springing morn

Dispel with joy my faithless moanings.

CHAPTER VIII. Still continues the praise of |wisdom.

Still continues the praise of "wisdom." For if, as the last verses of the previous chapters have shown, there be but very few that walk in her paths, she necessarily lifts those few far above the thoughtless mass of men; placing her distinguishing touch even on the features of her disciples, lighting them up with intelligence, and taking away the rudeness and pride that may be natural to them. "Man's wisdom lighteth up his face -- its aspect stern is changed." If this, then, the result, listen to her counsels: "Honor the king," nor be connected with any conspiracy against him. It is true that authorities are as much "out of joint" as everything else under the sun; and instead of being practically "ministers of God for good," are but too often causes of further misery upon poor man; yet wisdom teaches to wait and watch. Everything has a time and season; and instead of seeking to put matters right by conspiracy, await the turn of the wheel; for this is most sure, that nothing is absolutely permanent here -- the evil of a tyrant's life any more than good. His power shall not release him from paying the debt of nature; it helps him not to retain his spirit. This too I saw, -- 'twas when I gave my heart

To every work that's done beneath the sun, --

That there's a time when man rules over man to his own hurt. 'Twas when I saw the wicked dead interred,

And to and from the holy place (men) came and went. Then straight were they forgotten in the city of their deeds. Ah, this was vanity! Thus our Preacher describes the end of the tyrant. Death ends his tyranny, as it does, for the time being at least, the misery of those who were under it. Men follow him to his burial, to the holy place, return to their usual avocations -- all is over and forgotten. The splendor and power of monarchy now show their hollowness and vanity by so quickly disappearing, and even their memory vanishing, at the touch of death. And yet this retributive end is by no means speedy in every case. Sentence is often deferred, and the delay emboldens the heart of man to further wickedness. Still, he says, "I counsel to fear God, irrespective of present appearances. I am assured this is the better part: fear God, and, soon or late, the end will justify thy choice." Beautiful and interesting it is thus to see man's unaided reason, his own intelligence, carrying him to this conclusion: that there is nothing better than to "fear God;" and surely this approves itself to any intelligence. He has impressed the proofs of His glorious Being on every side of His creature, man. "Day unto day uttereth speech;" and the Sun, that rejoiceth as a strong man to run his race, voices aloud, in his wondrous adaptations to the needs of this creation on which he shines, His Being -- His eternal power and godhead. Not only light but warmth he brings, for "there is nothing hid from the heat thereof," and in this twofold benevolence testifies again to his Creator, who is Love and Light. Further, wherever he shines he manifests infinite testimonies to the same truth. From the tiny insect that balances or disports itself with the joy of life in his beams, to the grandeur of the everlasting hills, or the majesty of the broad flood of ocean -- all -- all -- with no dissentient, discordant voice, proclaim His being and utter His creative glory. Nor does darkness necessarily veil that glory: moon and stars take up the grand

and holy strain; and what man can look at all -- have all these witnesses reiterating day and night, with ever-fresh testimonies every season, the same refrain, "The Hand that made us is divine," and yet say, even in His heart, "There is no God!" Surely all reason, all wisdom, human or divine, says "Fool!" to such. Thus, step by step, human wisdom treads on, and, as here, in her most worthy representative, "the king," concludes that it is most reasonable to give that glorious Creator the reverence due, and to "fear" Him. But soon, very soon, poor reason has to stop, confounded. Something has come into the scene that throws her all astray: verse 14 -- "'Tis vanity, what's done upon the earth; for so it is, That there are righteous to whom it haps as to the vile; And sinners, too, whose lot is like the doings of the just. For surely this is vanity, I said." Yes, man's soul must be, if left to the light of nature, like that nature itself. If the sky be ever and always cloudless, then may a calm and unbroken faith be expected, when based on things seen. But it is not so. Storm and cloud again and again darken the light of nature, whether that light be physical or moral; and under these storms and clouds reason is swayed from her highest and best conclusions; and the contradictions without, are faithfully reflected within the soul."And so I commended mirth, because a man hath no better thing under the sun, than to eat, and to drink, and to be merry: for that shall abide with him of his labor the days of his life, which God giveth him under the sun." Here we get the heralds of a storm indeed. They are the first big drops that bespeak the coming flood that shall sweep our writer from all reason's moorings; the play of a lightning that shall blind man's wisdom to its own light; the sigh of a wind that soon shall develop into a very blast of despair.What a contradiction to the previous sober conclusion, "It shall be well with them that fear God"! Now, seeing that there is no apparent justice in the allotment of happiness here, and the fear of God is often followed by sorrow, while the lawless as often have the easy lot, -- looking on this scene, I say, "Eat, drink, and be merry;" get what good you can out of life itself; for all is one inextricable confusion.Oh, this awful tangle of providences! Everything is wrong! All is in confusion! There is law everywhere, and yet law-breaking everywhere. How is it? Why is it? Is not God the source of order and harmony? Whence, then, the discord? Is it all His retributive justice against sin? Why, then, the thoroughly unequal allotment? Here is a man born blind. Surely this cannot be because he sinned before his birth! But, then, is it on account of his parents' sinning? Why, then, do the guilty go comparatively free, and the guiltless suffer? Sin, surely, is the only cause of the infliction. So the disciples of old, brought face to face with exactly this same riddle, the same mystery, ask, "Master, who did sin -- this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?" "Neither." Another -- higher, happier, more glorious reason, Jesus gives: "Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him." So the afflicted parents weep over their sightless babe; so they nurse him through his helpless, darkened childhood, or guide him through his lonely youth, their hearts sorely tempted surely to rebel against the providence that has robbed their offspring of the light of heaven. Neighbors, too, can give but little comfort here. Why was he born blind? Who did the sin that brought this evident punishment?Oh wait, sorrowing parents! wait, foolish friends! One is even now on His glorious way who shall with a word unravel the mystery, ease your troubled hearts, quell each rebellious motion, till ye only sorrow that ever a disloyal thought of the God of Love and Light has been permitted; and, whilst overwhelming you with blessing, answer every question your hearts -- nay, even your intelligences -- could ask.Oh wait, my beloved readers, wait! We, too, look on a world still all in confusion. Nay, ourselves suffer with many an afflictive stroke, whose cause, too, seems hidden from us, and to contradict the very character of the God we know. One only is worthy to unlock this, as every other, sealed book --

wait! He must make Himself known; and, apart from things being wrong, this were impossible. "The works of God must be made manifest." Precious thought! Blessed words! Sightless eyes are allowed for a little season, that He -- God -- may manifest His work in giving them light -- accompanied by an everlasting light that knows no dimming. Tears may fall in time, that God's gentle and tender touch may dry them, and that for ever and ever. Nay, Death himself, with all his awful powers shall be made to serve the same end, and, a captive foe, be compelled to utter forth His glory. Lazarus is suffering, and the sisters are torn with anxiety; but the Lord abides "two days still in the same place where he" is. Death is allowed to have his way for a little space -- nay, grasp his victim, and shadow with his dark wing the home that Jesus loves; and still He moves not. Strange, mysterious patience! Does He not care? Is He calmly indifferent to the anguish in that far-off cottage? Has He forgotten to be gracious? or, most agonizing question of all, Has some inmate of that home sinned, and chilled thus His love? How questions throng at such a time! But -- patience! All shall be answered, every question settled -- every one; and the glorious end shall fully, perfectly justify His "waiting."Let Death have his way. The power and dignity of his Conqueror will not permit Him to hasten. For haste would bespeak anxiety as to the result; and that result is in no sense doubtful. The body of the brother shall even see corruption, and begin to crumble into dust, under the firm and crushing hand of Death. Many a tear shall the sisters shed, and poor human sympathy tell out its helplessness. But the Victor comes! In the calm of assured victory He comes. And the "express image of the substance" of the Living God stands face to face as Man with our awful foe, Death. And lo, He speaks but a word -- "Lazarus, come forth!" -- and the glory of God shines forth with exceeding brightness and beauty! Oh, joyous scene! oh, bright figure of that morn, so soon approaching, when once again that blessed Voice shall lift itself up in a "shout," that shall be heard, not in one, but in every tomb of His people, and once more the glory of God shall so shine in the ranks upon ranks of those myriads, that all shall again fully justify His "waiting"! It was indeed a blessed light that shone into the grave of Lazarus. Such was its glory, that our spirits may quietly rest forever; for we see our Lord and Eternal Lover is Conqueror and Lord of Death. Nor need we ask, with our modern poet, who sings sweetly, but too much in the spirit of Ecclesiastes,Where wert thou, brother, those four days?

There lives no record of reply,

Which, telling what it is to die,

Had surely added praise to praise.The resurrection of Lazarus does tell us what it isfor His redeemed to die. It tells that it is but a sleep for the body, till He come to awaken it, -- that those who thus sleep are not beyond His power, and that a glorious resurrection shall soon "add praise to praise" indeed.But do not these blessed words give us a hint, at least, of the answer to that most perplexing of all questions, Why was evil ever permitted to disturb the harmony and mar the beauty of God's primal creation, defile heaven itself, fill earth with corruption and violence, and still exist even in eternity? Ah, we tread on ground here where we need to be completely self-distrustful, and to cleave with absolute confidence and dependence to the revelation of Himself!The works of God must be manifested; and He is Light and Love, and nothing but Light and Love. Every work of His, then, must speak the source whence it comes, and be an expression of Light or Love; and the end, when He shall again -- finding everything very good -- rest from His work to enjoy that eternal sabbath, never to be broken, shall shew forth absolutely in heaven, in earth, and in hell, that He is Light and Love, and nothing but that.Light and Love! -- blending,

harmonizing, in perfect equal manifestation, in the cross of the Lord Jesus, and -- Light now approving Love's activity -- in the righteous eternal redemption of all who believe on Him; banishing from the new creation every trace of sin, and its companion, sorrow; whilst the Lake of Fire itself shall prove the necessity of its own existence to display that same nature of God, and naught else -- Love then approving the activity of Light, as we may say.As Isaiah shows, in the millennial earth, in those"Scenes surpassing fable, and yet true --

Scenes of accomplished bliss" -- there is still sorrowful necessity for an everlasting memorial of His righteousness in "the carcases of those men that have transgressed against me: for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched; and (mark well the sympathies of that scene) they shall be an abhorring to all flesh." Love rejected, mercy neglected, truth despised, or held in unrighteousness, grace slighted, -- nothing is left whereby the finally impenitent can justify their creation except in being everlasting testimonies to that side of God's nature, "Light," whilst "Love," and all who are in harmony therewith, unfeignedly approve. All shall be right. None shall then be perplexed because "there be just men, unto whom it happeneth according to the work of the wicked; again, there be wicked men to whom it happeneth according to the work of the righteous." All shall be absolutely right. No whisper shall be heard, even in hell itself, of the charges that men so boldly and blasphemously cast at His holy name now.God is all in all. His works are manifested; and whilst it is His strange work, yet Judgment is His work, as every age in Time has shown; as the Eternal age, too, shall show -- in time, this judgment is necessarily temporal; in eternity, where character, as all else, is fixed, it must as necessarily be eternal!Solemn, and perhaps unwelcome, but wholesome theme! We live in a time peculiarly characterized by a lack of reverence for all authority. It is the spirit of the times, and against that spirit the saint must ever watch and guard himself by meditation on these solemn truths. Fear is a godly sentiment, a just emotion, in view of the holy character of our God. "I will forewarn whom ye shall fear," said the Lord Jesus: "Fear him which, after he hath killed, hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, fear him." The first Christians, walking in the fear of the Lord as well as the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied; and when Annanias and Sapphira fell under God's judgment, great fear came on all the church; whilst apostasy is marked by men feeding, themselves without fear.All shall be "right." It is the wrong and disorder and unrighteous allotment prevailing here that caused the groans of our writer. Let us listen to them. Their doleful, despairing sound shall again add sweeter tone to the lovely music of God's revelation, speaking, as it does, of One who solves every mystery, answers every question, heals every hurt; yea, snatches His own from the very grasp of Death; for all is right, for all is light, where Jesus is, and He is coming. Patience! Wait!

CHAPTER IX. The last two verses of Chapter VIII.

The last two verses of Chapter VIII. connect with the opening words of this chapter. The more Ecclesiastes applies every faculty he has to solve the riddle under the sun, robbing himself of sleep and laboring with strong energy and will, he becomes only the more aware that that solution is altogether impossible. The contradictions of nature baffle the wisdom of nature. There is no assured sequence, he reiterates, between righteousness and happiness on the one hand, and sin and misery on the other. The whole confusion is in the sovereign hand of God, and the righteous and the wise must just leave the matter there, for "no man knoweth either love or hatred by all that is before them." What discrimination is there here? Do not all things happen alike to all? Yes, further, does not Time, unchecked by any higher power, sweep all relentlessly to one common end? Love cannot be inferred from the "end" of the righteous, nor hatred from the "end" of the sinner; for it is one and the same death that stops the course of each. Oh, this is indeed an "evil under the sun." Darker and darker the cloud settles over his spirit; denser and still more dense the fogs of helpless ignorance and perplexity enwrap his intelligence. For, worse still, do men recognize, and live at all reasonably in view of, that common mortality? Alas, madness is in their hearts while they live, and after that they go to the dead; and then all hope for them, as far as can be seen, is over forever. Dead! What does that mean? It means that every faculty, as far as can be seen, is stilled forever. The dead lion, whose majesty and strength, while living, would have even now struck me with awe, is less formidable as it lies there than a living dog. So with the dead among men: their hatred is no more to be feared, for it can harm nothing; their love is no more to be valued, for it can profit nothing; their zeal and energy are no more to be accounted of, for they can effect nothing; yea, all has come to an end forever under the sun. Oh, the awfulness of this darkness! "Then I will give," continues Ecclesiastes, "counsel for this vain life in conformity with the dense gloom of its close. Listen! Go eat with joy thy bread, and merrily drink thy wine; let never shade of sorrow mar thy short-lived pleasure; let no mourning on thy dress be seen, nor to thy head be oil of gladness lacking; merrily live with her whom thy affection has chosen as thy life-companion, and trouble not thyself as to God's acceptance of thy works -- that has been settled long ago; nor let a sensitive conscience disturb thee: whatsoever is in thy power to do, that do, without scruple or question;[1] for soon, but too soon, these days of thy vanity will close, and in the grave, whither thou surely goest, all opportunities for activity, of whatever character, are over, and that -- forever!" Strange counsel this, for sober and wise Ecclesiastes to give, is it not? Much has it puzzled many a commentator. Luther boldly says it is sober Christian advice, meant even now to be literally accepted, "lest you become like the monks, who would not have one look even at the sun." Hard labor indeed, however, is it to force it thus into harmony with the general tenor of God's word. But is not the counsel good and reasonable enough under certain conditions? And are not those conditions and premises clearly laid down for us in the context here? It is as if a whirlwind of awful perplexities had swept the writer with irresistible force away from his moorings, -- a black cloud filled with the terrors of darkness and death sweeps over his being, and out of the black and terrible storm he speaks -- "Man has but an hour to enjoy here, and I know nothing as to what comes after, except that death, impenetrable death, ends every generation of men, throws

down to the dust the good, the righteous, the sober, as well as the lawless, the false, and the profligate; ends in a moment all thought, knowledge, love, and hatred; -- then since I know nothing beyond this vain life, I can only say, Have thy fling; -- short, short thy life will be, and vain thou wilt find this short life; so get thy fill of pleasure here, for thou goest, and none can help thee, to where all activities cease, and love and hatred end forever." This, we may say, based on these premises, and excluding all other, is reasonable counsel. Does not our own apostle Paul confirm it? Does he not say, if this life be all, this life of vanity under the sun, then let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die? Yea, we who have turned aside from this path of present pleasures are of all men most miserable, if this vain life be all. And are we to expect poor unaided human wisdom to face these awful problems of infinite depth without finding the strongest evidence of its utter incapacity and helplessness? Like a feather in the blast, our kingly and wise preacher (beyond whom none can ever go) is whirled, for the time being, from his soberness, and, in sorrow akin to despair, gives counsel that is in itself revolting to all soberness and wisdom. Nothing could so powerfully speak the awful chaos of his soul; and -- mark it well -- in that same awful chaos would you and I be at any moment, my reader, if we thought at all, but for one inestimably precious fact. Black like unto the outer darkness is the storm-cloud we are looking at, and the wild, despairing, yet sad counsel, to "live merrily" is in strict harmony with the wild, awful darkness, like the sea-gull's scream in the tempest. Let us review a little the path of reasoning that has led our author to where he is; only we will walk it joyfully in the light of God. "No man knoweth love or hatred by all that is before him." We have looked upon a scene where a holy Victim -- infinitely holy -- bowed His head under the weight of a judgment that could not be measured. It was but a little while, and the very heavens could not contain themselves with delight at His perfect beauty, His perfect obedience; but again, and yet again, were they opened to express the pleasure of the Highest in this lowly Man. Now, not only are they closed in silence, but a horror seems to enwrap all creation. The sun, obscured by no earth-born cloud, gives out no spark nor ray of light; and in that solemn darkness every voice is strangely hushed. From nine till noon the air was filled with revilings and reproaches -- all leveled at the one sinless Sufferer; but now, for three hours, these have been absolutely silent, till at last one cry of agony breaks the stillness; and it is from Him who "was oppressed and afflicted, yet opened not His mouth; was brought as a lamb to the slaughter; and as a sheep before her shearer is dumb, so opened He not His mouth:" -- "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani" -- "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me!" There, my beloved readers, look there! Let that cross be before us, and then say, "No man knoweth love or hatred by all that is before them." Are not both revealed there as never before? Hatred! What caused the blessed God thus to change His attitude towards the One who so delighted Him that the heavens burst open, as it were, under the weight of that delight? There is but one answer to that question. Sin. Sin was there on that holiest Sufferer -- mine, yours, my reader. And God's great hatred of sin is fully revealed there. I know "hatred" when I see God looking at my sin on His infinitely holy, infinitely precious, infinitely beloved Son. * * * * Let us meditate upon, without multiplying words over this solemn theme, and turn to the Love that burns, too, so brightly there. Who can measure the infinity of love to us when, in order that that love might have its way unhindered, God forsakes the One who, for all the countless ages of the eternal past, had afforded Him perfect "daily" delight, was ever in His bosom -- the only one in that wide creation who could satisfy or respond, in the communion of equality, to His affections -- and turns away from Him; nay, "it pleased the Lord to bruise Him"; "He hath put Him to grief." Ponder these words; and in view of who that crucified Victim was, and His relationship with God, measure,

if you can, the love displayed there, the love in that one short word "so" -- "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son;" -- then, whilst viewing the cross, hear, coming down to us from the lips of the wise king, "No man knoweth love or hatred." Hush! Ecclesiastes, hush! Breathe no such word in such a scene as this. Pardonable it were in that day, when you looked only at the disjointed chaos and tangle under the sun; but looking at that cross, it were the most heinous sin, the most unpardonable disloyalty and treason, to say now, "No man knoweth love." Rather, adoringly, will we say, "In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. And we have known and believed the love that God has to us." Yea, now let "all things come alike to all:" -- that tender Love shall shed its light over this stormy scene, and enable the one that keeps it before him to walk the troubled waters of this life in quiet assurance and safety. Death still may play sad havoc with the most sensitive of affections; but that Love shall, as we have before seen, permit us to weep tears; but not bitter despairing tears. Further, it sheds over the spirit the glorious light of a coming Day, and we look forward, not to an awful impending gloom, but to a pathway of real light, that pierces into eternity. The Day! We are of the Day! The darkness passes, the true light already shines! Then listen, my fellow-pilgrims, to the Spirit's counsel: "But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore, let us not sleep, as do others, but let us watch and be sober. For they that sleep, sleep in the night; and they that are drunken, are drunken in the night. But let us who are of the Day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and for an helmet the hope of salvation." Our poor preacher, in the darkness of the cloud of death, counsels, "merrily drink thy wine." And not amiss, with such an outlook, is such advice. In the perfect Light of Revelation, lighting up present and a future eternity, well may we expect counsel as differing from this as the light in which it is given differs from the darkness. "The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk honestly, as in the Day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof." Amen and Amen.But once again our Preacher turns; and now he sees that it is not assuredly possible for the advice he has given to be followed, and that even in this life neither work, device, knowledge, nor wisdom, are effective in obtaining good or in shielding their possessor from life's vicissitudes. The swift -- does he always win the race? Are there no contingencies that more than counterbalance his swiftness? A slip, a fall, a turned muscle, and -- the race is not to the swift. The strong -- is he necessarily conqueror in the fight? Many an unforeseen and uncontrollable event has turned the tide of battle and surprised the world, till the "fortune of war" has passed into a proverb. The skillful may not be able at all times to secure even the necessaries of life; nor does abundance invariably accompany greater wisdom, whilst no amount of intelligence can secure constant and abiding good.[2]Time and doom hap alike to all, irrespective of man's purposes or proposings, and no man knows what his hap shall be, since no skill of any kind can avail to guide through the voyage of life without encountering its storms. From the unlooked-for quarter, too, do those storms burst on us. As the fishes suspect no danger till in the net they are taken, and as the birds fear nothing till ensnared, so we poor children of Adam, when our "evil time" comes round, are snared without warning.Absolutely true this is, if life be regarded solely by such light as human wisdom gives:

"Time and doom happen alike to all." The whole scene is like one vast, confused machine, amongst whose intricate wheels, that revolve with an irregularity that defies foresight, poor man is cast at his birth; and ever and anon, when he least expects it, he comes between these wheels; and then he is crushed by some "evil," which may make an end of him altogether or leave him for further sorrows. All things seem to work confusedly for evil, and this caps the climax of Ecclesiastes's misery.Here is the sequence of his reasoning:Firstly, There is no righteous allotment upon earth; the righteous suffer here, whilst the unjust escape. Nay,Secondly, There is an absolute lack of all discrimination in the death that ends all; and,Thirdly, So complete is that end, bringing all so exactly to one dead level, without the slightest difference; and so impenetrable is the tomb to which all go, that I counsel, in my despair, "Eat, drink, and be merry, irrespective of any future."Fourthly, But, alas! that, too, is impossible; for no "work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom," can assure freedom from the evil doom that haps, soon or late, to all.Intensified misery! awful darkness indeed! And our own souls tremble as we stand with Ecclesiastes under its shadow and respond to his groanings. For the same scene still spreads itself before us as before him. Mixed with the mad laughter and song of fools is the continued groan of sorrow, pain, and suffering, that still tells of "time and doom."A striking instance of this comes to my hand even as I write; and since its pathetic sadness makes it stand out even from the sorrows of this sad world, I would take it as a direct illustration of Ecclesiastes's groan. At Nyack on the Hudson a Christian family retire to rest after the happy services of last Lord's Day, the 21st of October -- an unbroken circle of seven children, with their parents. Early on the following morning, before it is light, a fire is raging in the house, and four of the little children are consumed in the conflagration. The account concludes: "The funeral took place at eleven o'clock to-day." That is, in a little more than twelve hours after retiring to sleep, four of the members of that family circle were in their graves! Here is an "evil time" that has fallen suddenly indeed; and the sad and awful incident enables us to realize just what our writer felt as he penned the words. With one stroke, in one moment, four children, who have had for years their parents' daily thought and care, meet an awful doom, and all that those parents themselves have believed receives a blow whose force it is hard to measure. Now listen, as the heathen cry, "Where is now their God?" Why was not His shield thrown about them? Had he not the power to warn the sleeping household of the impending danger? Is He so bound by some law of His own making as to forbid his interfering with its working? Worse still, was He indifferent to the awful catastrophe that was about to crush the joy out of that family circle? If His was the power, was His love lacking? Oh, awful questions when no answer can be given to them; -- and nature gives no answer. She is absolutely silent. No human wisdom, even though it be his who was gifted "with a wise and understanding heart, so that none was like him before him, neither after him should any arise like unto him," could give any answer to questions like these. And think you, my reader, that nature does not cry out for comfort, and feel about for light at such a time? Nor that the enemy of our souls is not quick in his malignant activity to suggest all kinds of awful doubt? Every form of darkness and unbelief is alive to seize such incidents, and make them the texts on which they may level their attacks against the Christian's God.But is there really no eye to pity? -- no heart to love? -- no arm to save? Are men really subject to blind law -- "time and doom"?Hark, my reader, and turn once more to that sweetest music that ever broke on distracted reason's ear. It comes not to charm with a false hope, but with the full authority of God. None but His Son who had lain so long in His Father's bosom that He knew its blessed heart-beats thoroughly, could speak such words -- "Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings." Here are poor

worthless things indeed that may be truly called creatures of chance. "Time and doom" must surely "hap" to these. Indeed no; "not one of them is forgotten before God." Ponder every precious word in simple faith. God's memory bears upon it the lot of every worthless sparrow; it may "fall to the ground," but not without Him. He controls their destiny and is interested in their very flight. If it be so with the sparrow, that may be bought for a single mite, shall the saint, who has been bought at a price infinitely beyond all the treasures of silver and gold in the universe, even at the cost of the precious blood of His dear Son, -- shall he be subject to "time and doom"? Shall his lot not be shaped by infinite love and wisdom? Yes, verily. Even the very hairs of his head are all numbered. No joy, no happiness, no disappointment, no perplexity, no sorrow, so infinitesimally small (let alone the greatest) but that the One who controls all worlds takes the closest interest therein, and turns, in His love, every thing to blessing, forcing "all to work together for good," and making the very storms of life obedient servants to speed His children to their Home.Faith alone triumphs here; but faith triumphs; and apart from such tests and trials, what opportunity would there be for faith to triumph? May we not bless God, then, (humbly enough, for we know how quickly we fail under trial,) that He does leave opportunity for faith to be in exercise and to get victories?God first reveals Himself, and then says, as it were, "Now let Me see if you have so learned what I am as to trust Me against all circumstances, against all that you see, feel, or suffer." And what virtue there must be in the Light of God, when so little of it is needed to sustain His child! Even in the dim early twilight of the dawning of divine revelation, Job, suffering under a very similar and fully equal "evil time," could say, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord:" accents sweet and refreshing to Him who values at an unknown price the confidence of this poor heart of man. And yet what did Job know of God? He had not seen the cross. He had not had anything of the display of tenderest unspeakable love that have we. It was but the dawn, as we may say, of revelation; but it was enough to enable that poor grief-wrung heart to cry, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him." Shall we, who enjoy the very meridian of revelation light; -- shall we, who have seen Him slain for us, say less? Nay, look at the wondrous possibilities of our calling, my reader, -- a song, nothing but a song will do now. Not quiet resignation only; but "strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, unto all patience and long-suffering with joyfulness," -- and that means a song.How rich, how very rich, is our portion! A goodly heritage is ours. For see what our considerations have brought out: a deep need universally felt; for none escape the sorrows, trials, and afflictions, that belong, in greater or less degree, to this life.The highest, truest, human wisdom can only recognize the need with a groan, for it finds no remedy for it -- time and doom hap alike to all.God shows Himself a little, and, lo! quiet, patience, and resignation take the place of groaning. The need is met.God reveals His whole heart fully, and no wave of sorrow, no billow of suffering, can extinguish the joy of His child who walks with Him. Nay, as thousands upon thousands could testify, the darkest hour of trial is made the sweetest with the sense of His love, and tears with song are mingled.Oh, for grace to enjoy our rich portion more.But to return to our book. Its author rarely proceeds far along any one line without meeting with that which compels him to return. So here; for he adds, in verses 13 to the end of the chapter, "And yet I have seen the very reverse of all this, when apparently an inevitable doom, an 'evil time,' was hanging over a small community, whose resources were altogether inadequate to meet the crisis -- when no way of escape from the impending destruction seemed possible -- then, at the moment of despair, a 'poor wise man' steps to the front (such the quality there is in wisdom), delivers the city, comes forth from his obscurity, shines for a moment, and, lo! the danger past, is again

forgotten, and sinks to the silence whence he came. But this the incident proved to me, that where strength is vain, there wisdom shows its excellence, even though men as a whole appreciate it so little as to call upon it only as a last resource. For let the fools finish their babbling, and their chief get to the end of his talking; then, in the silence that tells the limit of their powers, the quiet voice of wisdom is heard again, and that to effect. Thus is wisdom better even than weapons of war, although, sensitive quality that it is, a little folly easily taints it." Can we, my readers, fail to set our seal to the truth of all this? We, too, have known something much akin to that "little city with few men," and one Poor Man, the very embodiment of purest, perfect wisdom, who wrought alone a full deliverance in the crisis -- a deliverance in which wisdom shone divinely bright; and yet the mass of men remember Him not. A few, whose hearts grace has touched, may count Him the chief among ten thousand and the altogether lovely; but the world, though it may call itself by His name, counts other objects more worthy of its attention, and the poor wise man is forgotten "under the sun."Not so above the sun. There we see the Poor One, the Carpenter's Son, the Nazarene, the Reviled, the Smitten, the Spit-upon, the Crucified, seated, crowned with glory and honor, at the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens; and there, to a feeble few on earth, He sums up all wisdom and all worth, and they journey on in the one hope of seeing Him soon face to face, and being with Him and like Him forever.[1] I believe this is distinctly the bearing of these words, and not as in our version.[2] There seems lo be an intensive force to these words, constantly and in each phase becoming stronger, in evident antithesis to the "work, device, knowledge, and wisdom," that Ecclesiastes had just counseled to use to the utmost in order to obtain "good" in this life.

CHAPTER X. The climax of Ecclesiastes' exercises seems to have been reached in the previous chapter.

The climax of Ecclesiastes' exercises seems to have been reached in the previous chapter. The passionate storm is over, and now his thoughts ripple quietly along in proverb and wise saying. It is as if he said "I was altogether beyond my depth. Now I will confine myself only to the present life, without touching on the things unseen, and here I can pronounce with assurance the conclusion of wisdom, and sum up both its advantages and yet inadequacy." The proverbs that follow are apparently disjointed, and yet, when closely looked at, are all connected with this subject. He shows, in effect, that, take any view of life, and practically wisdom has manifold advantages. Ver.1. The least ingredient of folly spoils as with the corruption of death the greatest wisdom. (There is only One whose name is as ointment poured forth untainted.) Ver.2. The wise man's heart is where it should be. He is governed by his understanding, (for the heart in the Old Testament is the seat of the thought as well as of the affections, as the same word, "lehv," translated "wisdom" in the next verse shows), a fool is all askew in his own being. His heart is at his left hand. In other words, his judgment is dethroned. Ver.3. Nor can he hide what he really is for any length of time. "The way," with its tests, soon reveals him, and he proclaims to all his folly. Ver.4. Yielding to the powers above rather than rebelling against them, marks the path of wisdom. This may be an example of the testing of "the way" previously spoken of, for true wisdom shines brightly out in the presence of an angry ruler. Folly leaves its place, -- a form of expression tantamount to rebelling, and may throw some light on that stupendous primal folly when angels "left their place," or, as Jude writes, "kept not their first estate, but left their habitation," and thus broke into the folly of rebelling against the Highest. For let any leave their place, and it means necessarily confusion and disorder. If all has been arranged according to the will and wisdom of the Highest, he who steps out of the place assigned him rebels, and discord takes the place of harmony. The whole of the old creation is thus in disorder and confusion. All have "left their place." For God, the Creator of all, has been dethroned. It is the blessed work of One we know, once more to unite in the bonds of love and willing obedience all things in heaven and in earth, and to bind in such way all hearts to the throne of God, that never more shall one "leave his place." Vers.5-7. But rulers themselves under the sun are not free from folly, and this shows itself in the disorder that actually proceeds from them. Orders and ranks are not in harmony. Folly is exalted, and those with whom dignities accord are in lowly place. It is another view of the present confusion, and how fully the coming of the Highest showed it out! A stable, a manger, rejection, and the cross, were the portion under the sun of the King of kings. That fact rights everything even now, in one sense, to faith for the path closest to the King must be really necessarily the highest, though it be in the sight of man the lowest. Immanuel, the Son of David, walking as a servant up and down the land that was His own -- The Lord Jesus, The Son of Man, having less than the foxes or birds of the air, not even where to lay his head, -- Christ, the Son of God, wearied with His journey, on the well of Sychar, -- this has thrown a glory about the lowly path now, that makes all the grandeur of the great ones of the earth less than nothing. Let the light of His path shine on this scene, and no

longer shall we count it an evil under the sun for folly and lawlessness to have the highest place, as men speak, but rather count it greatest honor to be worthy to suffer for His name, for we are still in the kingdom and patience of the Lord Jesus Christ, -- not the Kingdom and Glory. That shall come soon. Vers.8-10. But then, Ecclesiastes continues, is there complete security in the humbler ranks of life? Nay, there is no occupation that has not its accompanying danger. Digging or hedging, quarrying or cleaving wood, -- all have their peculiar difficulties. Although there, too, wisdom is still evidently better than brute strength. Vers.11 to 15 turn to the same theme of comparison of wisdom and folly, only now with regard to the use of the tongue. The most gifted charmer (lit. master of the tongue) is of no worth after the serpent has bitten. The waters that flow commend the spring whence they issue. Grace speaks for the wise: folly, from beginning to end, proclaims the fool; and nowhere is that folly more manifested than in the boastfulness of assertion as to the future. "Predicting words he multiplies, yet man can never know "The thing that shall be; yea, what cometh after who shall tell? "Vain toil of fools! It wearieth him, -- this man who knoweth naught "That may befall his going to the city." This seems to be exactly in line with the apostle James: "Go to now, ye that say, To-day or to-morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy, and sell, and get gain: ye who know not what shall be on the morrow." Vers.16-18. The land is blessed or cursed according to her head. A well-marked principle in Scripture, which has evidently forced itself on the notice of human wisdom in the person of Ecclesiastes. A city flourishes under the wise diligence of her rulers, or goes to pieces under their neglect and sensual revelry. For the tendency to decay is everywhere under the sun, and no matter what the sphere, -- high or low, city or house, -- constant diligence alone offsets that tendency.Ver.19. The whole is greater than its part. Money can procure both the feast and the wine; but these are not, even in our preacher's view, the better things, but the poorer, as chapter vii. has shown us. We, too, know that which is infinitely higher than feasts and revelry of earth, and here money avails nothing. "Wine and milk," joy and food, are here to be bought without money and without price. The currency of that sphere is not corruptible gold nor silver, but the love that gives, -- sharing all it possesses. There it is love that answereth all things: -- the more excellent way, inasmuch as it covers and is the spring of all gifts and graces. Without love, the circulating medium of that new creation, a man is poor indeed, -- is worth nothing, nay, is nothing, (1 Cor. xiii.) He may have the most attractive and showy of gifts: the lack of love makes the silver tongue naught but empty sound, -- a lack of love makes the deepest understanding naught; and whilst he may be a very model of what the world falsely calls charity, giving of his goods to feed the poor, and even his body to be burned, it is love alone that gives life and substance to it all, -- lacking love it profits nothing. He who abounds most in loving, and consequent self-emptying, is the richest there. The words of the Lord Jesus in Luke xii. confirm this: "So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God." The two are in direct contrast. Rich here -- laying up treasure for one's self here -- is poverty there, and the love that gives is divine riches. For he who loves most has himself drunk deepest into the very nature of God, for God is Love, and his heart fully satisfied with that which alone in all the universe can ever satisfy the heart of man, filled up, -- surely, therefore, rich, -- pours forth its streams of bounty and blessing according to its ability to all about. How thoroughly the balances of the sanctuary reverse the estimation of the world.But, then, how may we become rich in that true, real sense? To obtain the money that "answereth all things" under the sun, men toil and plan. Perhaps as the balances of the sanctuary show that selfish accumulation here is poverty there, so the means of attaining true riches may be, in some sort, the

opposite to those prevailing for the false -- "quietness and confidence."The apostle, closing his beautiful description of charity, says: "Follow after charity." Ponder its value -- meditate on its beauties -- till your heart becomes fascinated, and you press with longing toward it. But as it is difficult to be occupied with "Love" in the abstract, can we find anywhere an embodiment of love? A person who illustrates it in its perfection, in whose character every glorious mark that the apostle depicts in this 13th chapter of Corinthians is shown in perfect moral beauty -- yea, who is in himself the one complete perfect expression of love. And, God be thanked, we know One such; and, as we read the sweet and precious attributes of Love, we recognize that the Holy Spirit has pictured every lineament of our Lord Jesus Christ. Wouldst thou be rich, then, my soul? Follow after, occupy thyself with, press toward, the Lord Jesus, till His beauties so attract as to take off thy heart from every other infinitely inferior attraction, and the kindling of His love shall warm thy heart with the same holy flame, and thou shalt seek love's ease -- love's rest -- in pouring out all thou hast in a world where need of all kinds is on every side, and thus be "rich toward God." So may it be for the writer, and every reader, to the praise of His grace. Amen.Where are we, in time, my readers? Are we left as shipwrecked sailors upon a raft, without chart or compass, and know not whether sunken wreck or cliff-bound coast shall next threaten us? No; a true divine chart and compass is in our hands, and we may place our finger upon the exact chronological latitude and longitude in which our lot is cast. Mark the long voyage of the professing Church past the quiet waters of Ephesus, where first love quickly cools and is lost; past the stormy waves of persecution which drive her onward to her desired haven, in Smyrna; caught in the dangerous eddy, and drifted to the whirlpool of the world in Pergamos, followed by the developed Papal hierarchy in Thyatira, with the false woman in full command of the ship; past Sardis, with its memories of a divine recovery in the Reformation of the sixteenth century: -- Philadelphia and Laodicea alone are left; and, with mutual contention and division largely in the place of brotherly love, who can question but that we have reached the last stage, and that there is every mark of Laodicea about us? This being so, mark the word of our Lord Jesus to the present state of the professing Church: "Thou sayest I am rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing, but knowest not that thou art poor, and blind, and naked, and wretched, and miserable." Yes, in the light of God, in the eyes of the Lord, in the judgment of the sanctuary, we live in a day of poverty. It is this which characterizes the day in which our lot is cast, -- a lack of all true riches, whilst the air is filled with boastings of wealth and attainment. Further, I can but believe that we whose eyes scan these lines are peculiarly in danger here. Thyatira goes on to the very end. Sardis is an offshoot from her. Sardis goes on to the end. Philadelphia is an offshoot from her. Philadelphia goes on to the end, and is thus the stock from whence the proud self-sufficiency of Laodicea springs. If we (you and I) have shared in any way in the blessings of Philadelphia, we share in the dangers of Laodicea. Yea, he who thinks he represents or has the characteristics of Philadelphia, is most open to the boast of Laodicea. Let us have to do -- have holy commerce -- with Him who speaks. Buy of Him the "gold purified by the fire." But how are we to buy? What can we give for that gold, when He says we are already poor? A poor man is a bad buyer. Yes, under the sun, where toil and self-dependency are the road to wealth; but above the sun quietness and confidence prevail, and the poor man is the best -- the only -- buyer. Look at that man in Mark's Gospel, chapter x., with every mark of Laodicea upon him. Blind, by nature; poor, for he sat and begged; naked, for he has thrown away his garment, and thus surely pitiable, miserable, now watch him buy of the Lord."What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?""Lord, that I might receive my sight.""Go thy way;

thy faith hath made thee whole."And the transaction is complete; the contract is settled; the buying is over. "Immediately he received his sight, and followed Jesus in the way." Yes; there is just one thing that that poor, naked, blind man has, that is of highest value even in the eyes of the Lord, and that is the quiet confidence of his poor heart. All Scripture shows that that is what God ever seeks, -- the heart of man to return and rest in Him. It is all that we can give in the purchase, but it buys all He has. "All things are possible to him that believeth." In having to do with the Lord Jesus we deal with the rich One whose very joy and rest it is to give; and it is surely easy buying from Him whose whole heart's desire is to give. Nothing is required but need and faith to complete the purchase."Need and Faith" are our "two mites." They are to us what the two mites were to the poor widow -- all our "living," all we have. Yet, casting them into the treasury, God counts them of far more value than all the boasted abundance of Laodicea. They are the servants, too, that open all doors to the Lord. They permit no barriers to keep Him at a distance. That gracious waiting Lord then may enter, and sweet communion follow as He sups with poor "Need and Faith" -- Himself providing all the provender for that supper-feast.

CHAPTER XI. We are drawing near the end, and to the highest conclusions of TRUE human wisdom

We are drawing near the end, and to the highest conclusions of true human wisdom; and full of deepest interest it is to mark the character of these conclusions. Reason speaks; that faculty that is rightly termed divine, for its possession marks those who are "the offspring of God." He is the Father of spirits, and it is in the spirit that Reason has her seat; whilst in our Preacher she is enthroned, and now with authority utters forth her counsels. Here we may listen to just how far she can attain, mark with deepest interest, and indeed admiration, the grand extent of her powers; and at the same time their sorrowful limit, -- note their happy harmony up to that limit, with her Creator; and then, when with baffled effort and conscious helplessness, in view of the deepest questions that ever stir the heart, she is able to find no answer to them, and groans her exceeding bitter cry of "Vanity," then to turn and listen to the grace and love of that Creator meeting those needs and answering those questions, -- this is inexpressibly precious; and with the light thus given we must let our spirits sing a new song, for we are nigh to God, and it is still true that "none enter the king's gate clothed with sackcloth." Joy and praise have their dwelling ever within those boundaries; for He inhabiteth the praises of His people. In the first eight verses of our chapter we shall thus find man's Reason running in a beautiful parallel with the divine, and yet in marked contrast with the narrow, selfish, short-sighted policy of the debased wisdom of this world. Their broad teaching is very clear; look forward, -- live not for the present; but instead of hoarding or laying up for the evil day, cast thy bread -- that staff of life, thy living -- boldly upon the waters, it shall not be lost. You have, in so doing, intrusted it to the care of Him who loseth nothing; and the future, though perhaps far off, shall give thee a full harvest for such sowing. But, to be more explicit, give with a free hand without carefully considering a limit to thy gifts ("a portion to seven and also to eight" would seem to have this bearing), for who knows when, in the future, an evil time to thee may make thee the recipient of others' bounty. Can we but admire the harmony, I say again, between the voice of poor, feeble, limited human wisdom and the perfect, absolute, limitless, divine wisdom of New Testament revelation: "For I mean not that other men be eased and ye burdened; but by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may be a supply for their want, that their abundance also may be a supply for your want: that there may be equality." This is very closely in the same line. But Solomon continues: Nay, see the lessons that Nature herself would teach (and he is no wise man, but distinctly and scripturally "a fool," who is deaf to her teachings, blind to her symbols). The full clouds find relief by emptying themselves on the parched earth, only to receive those same waters again from the full ocean, after they have fulfilled their benevolent mission; and it is a small matter to which side, north or south, the tree may fall, it is there for the good of whoever may need it there.[1] The accidental direction of the wind determines which way it falls; but either north or south it remains for the good of man. In like manner watch not for favorable winds; dispense on every side, north and south, of thy abundance; nor be too solicitous as to the worthiness of the recipients. He who waits for perfectly favorable conditions will never sow, consequently never reap. Results are with God. It is not thy care in sowing at exactly the right

moment that gives the harvest; all that is God's inscrutable work in nature, nor can man tell how those results are attained. Life in its commencements is as completely enshrouded in mystery now as then. No science, no human wisdom has, or -- it may be boldly added -- ever can throw the slightest glimmer of clear light upon it. Thy part is diligence in sowing, the harvest return is God's care. "In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thy hand" is wisdom's counsel here, just as a higher wisdom teaches "Preach the word: be instant in season and out of season." Thus human reason and divine wisdom "keep step" together till the former reaches its limit; and very soon, in looking forward, is that limit reached. For listen now to her advice, consequent on the foregoing. Therefore she says, Let not the enjoyment of the present blind thee to the future; for alas there stands that awful mysterious Exit from the scene that has again and again baffled the Preacher throughout the book. And here again no science or human reason ever has or ever can throw the faintest glimmer of clear light beyond it. That time is still, at the end of the book, the "days of darkness." As poor Job in the day of his trial wails: "I go whence I shall not return, even to the land of darkness and the shadow of death; a land of darkness as darkness itself, and of the shadow of death, without any order, and where the light is as darkness." So Ecclesiastes says, "let him remember the days of darkness, for they shall be many." Oh sad and gloomy counsel! Is this what life is? Its bright morning ever to be clouded, -- its day to be darkened with the thoughts of its end? Oh sorrowful irony to tell us to rejoice in the years of life, and yet ever to bear in mind that those years are surely, irresistibly, carrying us on to the many "days of darkness." Yes, this is where the highest intellect, the acutest reason, the purest wisdom of any man at any time has attained. But Where Reason fails, with all her powers,

There Faith prevails and Love adores. Where the darkness by reason's light is deepest, there Love -- Infinite and Eternal -- has thrown its brightest beam, and far from that time beyond the tomb being "the days of darkness," by New Testament revelation it is the one eternal blessed Day lit up with a Light that never dims; yes, even sun and moon unneeded for "The glory of God enlightens it, and the Lamb is the Light thereof." Think of a Christian with that blessed hope of the coming of his Saviour to take him to that well-lighted Home -- His Father's House -- with the sweet and holy anticipations of seeing His own blessed Face, -- once marred and smitten for him; of never grieving Him more, of sin never again to mar his communion with Him, of happy holy companionship for eternity with kindred hearts and minds all tuned to the one glorious harmony of exalting "Him that sits upon the throne and the Lamb," -- of loving Him perfectly, of serving Him perfectly, of enjoying Him perfectly, -- think of such a Christian saying, as He looks forward to this bliss, "All that cometh is vanity," and we may get some measure of the value of the precious word of God. But now with a stronger blow our writer strikes the same doleful chord: "Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thy heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment." One would think that there could be no possible misunderstanding the sorrowful irony of the counsel "to walk in the ways of thy heart, and in the sight of thine eyes," -- expressions invariably used in an evil sense (compare Num. xv.39; Isa. lvii.17); and yet, to be consistent with the interpretation to similar counsel in other parts of the book, expounders have sought to give them a Christian meaning, as if they were given in the light of revelation and not in the semi-darkness of nature. But here the concluding sentence, "know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment," is quite unmistakable. But here is indeed a startling assertion. Where has our writer learned, with such emphatic certainty, of a judgment to come? Have we

mistaken the standpoint whence our book was written? Has the writer, after all, been listening to another Voice that has taught him what is on the other side of the grave? Does Revelation make itself heard here at last? Or may, perhaps, even this be in perfect harmony with all that has gone before, and be one step further -- almost the last step -- along the path that unaided (but not depraved) human Reason may tread? In a word, does Nature herself give Reason sufficient light to enable her, when in right exercise, to discover a judgment-seat in the shadows of the future? This is surely a question of deepest -- yes, thrilling -- interest; and, we are confident, must be answered in the affirmative. It is to this point that our writer has been climbing, step by step. Nature has taught him that the future must be looked at rather than the present; or, rather, the present must be looked at in the light of the future; for that future corresponds in its character to the present, as the crop does to the seed, only exceeds it in intensity as the harvest exceeds the grain sown. Thus bread hoarded gives no harvest; or, in other words, he who lives for the present alone, necessarily, by the simplest and yet strongest law of Nature, must suffer loss: this is Judgment by Nature's law. This, too, is the keynote of every verse -- "the future," "the future"; and God, who is clearly discerned by Reason as behind Nature, "which is but the name for an effect whose Cause is God," -- God is clearly recognized as returning a harvest in the future, in strict and accurate accord with the sowing of the present. This is very clear. Then how simple and how certain that if this is God's irrefragable law in Nature, it must have its fulfillment too in the moral nature of man. It has been one of the chief sorrows of the book that neither wrong nor confusion is righted here, and those "days of darkness" to which all life tends are no discriminative judgment, nor is there anything of the kind in a scene where "all things come alike to all." Then surely, most surely, unless indeed man alone sows without reaping, -- alone breaks in as an exception to this law, -- a thought not consonant with reason, -- there must be to him also a harvest of reaping according to what has been sown: in other words a Judgment. Although still, let us mark, our writer does not assume to say anything as to where or when that shall be, or how brought about, this is all uncertain and indefinite: the fact is certain; and more clear will the outline of that judgment-seat stand out, as our writer's eyes become accustomed to the new light in which he is standing, -- the fact is already certain.Solemn, most solemn, is this; and yet how beautiful to see a true reason -- but let us emphasize again not depraved, but exercising her royal function of sovereignty over the flesh, not subject to it -- drawing such true and sure lessons from that which she sees of the law of God in Nature. It is a reasonable, although in view of sin, a fearful expectation; and with exactness is the word chosen in Acts: Paul reasoned of judgment to come; and reason, with conscience, recognized the force of the appeal, as "Felix trembled." Thus that solemn double appointment of man: death and judgment has been discerned by Nature's light, and counsel is given in view of each. We said that our writer had reached the climax of his perplexities in view of death in chap. ix. when he counseled us to "merrily drink our wine"; but now judgment discerned, death itself even not necessarily the end, at length soberness prevails; and with an evident solemn sincerity he counsels "Therefore remove sorrow from thy heart, and put away evil from thy flesh, for childhood and youth are vanity."[1] The current interpretation of this clause, that it speaks of the future state of man after death, seems hardly in keeping with the context, and certainly not at all in keeping with the character and scope of the book. Ecclesiastes everywhere confesses the strict limitation of his knowledge to the present scene. This is the cause of his deepest groanings that he cannot pierce beyond it; and it would be entirely contrary for him here, in this single instance, to assume to pronounce authoritatively of the nature of that place or state of which he says he knows nothing.

CHAPTER XII. Our last chapter concluded with the words, |For childhood and youth are vanity|

Our last chapter concluded with the words, "For childhood and youth are vanity": that is, childhood proves the emptiness of all "beneath the sun," as well as old age. The heart of the child has the same needs -- the same capacity in kind -- as that of the aged. It needs God. Unless it knows Him, and His love is there, it is empty; and, in its fleeting character, childhood proves its vanity. But this makes us quite sure that if childhood can feel the need, then God has, in His wide grace, met the need; nor is that early life to be debarred from the provision that He has made for it. There are then the same possibilities of filling the heart and life of the young child with that divine love that fills every void, and turns the cry of "Vanity" into the Song of Praise: "Yea, out of the mouth of babes and sucklings Thou hast perfected praise." But our writer is by no means able thus to touch any chord in the young heart that shall vibrate with the music of praise. Such as he has, however, he gives us: "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them." This counsel must not be separated from the context. It is based absolutely and altogether on what has now been discerned: for not only is our writer a man of the acutest intelligence, but he evidently possesses the highest qualities of moral courage. He shirks no question, closes his eyes to no fact, and least of all to that awful fact of man's compulsory departure from this scene which is called "death." But following on, he has found that even this cannot possibly be all; there must be a judgment that shall follow this present life. It is in view of this he counsels "Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth," whilst the effect of time is to mature, and not destroy, the powers He has given thee: for not forever will life's enjoyment last; old age comes surely, and He who made thee, holds thy spirit in His hand, so that whilst the body may return to dust, the spirit must return to Him who gave it. We will only pause for a moment again to admire the glorious elevation of this counsel. How good were it if the remembrance of a Creator-God, to whom all are accountable, could tone, with out quenching, the fire and energy of youthful years, and lead in the clean paths of righteousness. But, alas, how inadequate to meet the actual state of things. Solomon himself shall serve to illustrate the utter inadequacy of his own counsel. What comfort or hope could he extract from it? His were now already the years in which he must say "I have no pleasure in them." A more modern poet might have voiced his cry, -- "My age is in the yellow leaf,

The bud, the fruit of 'life,' is gone:

The worm, the canker, and the grief,

Remain alone!" His youth was no more: its bright days were forever past, never to be restored. What remains, then, for Solomon, and the myriads like him? What shall efface the memory of those wasted years, or what shall give a quiet peace, in view of the fast-coming harvest of that wild sowing? Can Reason -- can any human Wisdom -- find any satisfactory answer to these weighty questions? None! Verses 2 to 7 beautifully and poetically depict the fall of the city of man's body under the slow but sure siege of the forces of Time. Gradually, but without one moment's pause,

the trenches approach the walls. Outwork after outwork falls into the enemy's hands, until he is victor over all, and the citadel itself is taken. Verse 2. -- First, clouds come over the spirit: the joyousness of life is dulled, -- the exuberance of youth is quenched. Sorrow follows quickly on the heel of sorrow, -- "clouds return after rain." Those waves that youth's light bark rode gallantly and with exhilaration, now flood the laboring vessel and shut out the light -- the joy -- of life. Verse 3. -- Then the hands (the keepers of the house) tremble with weakness, and the once strong men (the knees) now feeble, bend under the weight of the body they have so long borne. The few teeth (grinders) that may remain fail to do their required service. Time's finger touches, too, those watchers from the turret-windows (the eyes): shade after shade falls over them; till, like slain sentinels that drop at their posts, they look out again never-more. Verse 4. -- Closer still the enemy presses, till the close-beleaguered fortress is shut out from all communication with the outer world; "the doors are shut in the streets"; the ears are dulled to all sounds. Even the grinding of the mill,[1] which in an eastern house rarely ceases, reaches him but as a low murmur, though it be really as loud as the shrill piping of a bird, and all the sweet melodies of song are no longer to be enjoyed. Verse 5. -- Time's sappers, too, are busily at work, although unseen, till the effect of their mining becomes evident in the alarm that is felt at the slightest need of exertion. The white head, too, tells its tale, and adds its testimony to the general decay. The least weight is as a heavy burden; nor can the failing appetite be again awakened. The man is going to his age-long home[2]; for now those four seats of life are invaded and broken up -- spinal-cord, brain, heart, and blood, -- till at length body and spirit part company, each going whence it came; -- that, to its kindred dust; this, to the God who gave it. Thus to the high wisdom of Solomon man is no mere beast, after all. He may not penetrate the Beyond to describe that "age-long home," but never of the beast would he say "the spirit to God who gave it." But his very wisdom again leads us to the most transcendent need of more. To tell us this, is to lead us up a mountain-height, to a bridgeless abyss which we have to cross, without having a plank or even a thread to help us. To God the spirit goes, -- to God who gave it, -- to Whom, then, it is responsible. But in what condition? Is it conscious still, or does it lose consciousness as in a deep sleep? Where does it now abide? How can it endure the searching Light -- the infinite holiness and purity -- of the God to whom it goes? How shall it give account for the wasted years? How answer for the myriad sins of life? How reap what has been sown? Silence here -- no answer here -- is awful indeed, -- is maddening; and if reason does still hold her seat, then "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity," is alone consistent with the fearful silence to such questions, and the scene is fitly ended by a groan.Deep even unto the shadow of death is the gloom. Every syllable of this last sad wail is as a funeral knell to all our hopes, tolling mournfully; and, like a passing bell, attending them, too, to their "age-long home"!Oh, well for us if we have heard a clearer Voice than that of poor feeble human Reason break in upon the silence, and, with a blessed, perfect, lovely combination of Wisdom and Love, of Authority and Tenderness, of Truth and Grace, give soul-satisfying answers to all our questionings.Then may we rejoice, if grace permit, with joy unspeakable; and, even in the gloom of this sad scene, lift heart and voice in a shout of victory. We, too, know what it is for the body thus to perish. We, too, though redeemed, still await the redemption of the body, which in the Christian is still subject to the same ravages of time, -- sickness, disease, pain, suffering, decay. But a gracious Revelation has taught us a secret that Ecclesiastes never guessed at; and we may sing, even with the fall of Nature's walls about us, "Though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day." Yea, every apparent victory of the enemy is now only to be answered with

a "new song" of joyful praise.It is true that, "under the sun," the clouds return after the rain; and, because it is true, we turn to that firmament of faith where our Lord Jesus is both Sun and Star, and where the light ever "shineth more and more unto perfect day."Let the keepers tremble, and the strong men bow themselves. We may now lean upon another and an everlasting Arm, and know another Strength which is even perfected in this very weakness.The grinders may cease because they are few; but their loss cannot prevent our feeding ever more and more heartily and to the fill on God's Bread of Life.Let those that look out of the windows be darkened: the inward eye becomes the more accustomed to another -- purer, clearer -- light; and we see "that which is invisible," and seeing, we hopefully sing -- "City of the pearl-bright portal,

City of the jasper wall,

City of the golden pavement,

Seat of endless festival, --

City of Jehovah, Salera,

City of eternity,

To thy bridal-hall of gladness,

From this prison would I flee, --

Heir of glory,

That shall be for thee and me!"Let doors be shut in the streets, and let all the daughters of music be brought low, so that the Babel of this world's discord be excluded, and so that the Lord Himself be on the inside of the closed door, we may the more undistractedly enjoy the supper of our life with Him, and He (the blessed, gracious One!) with us. Then naught can prevent His Voice being heard, whilst the more sweet and clear (though still ever faint, perhaps) may the echo to that Voice arise in melody within the heart, where God Himself is the gracious Listener!Let fears be in the way, we know a Love than can dispel all fear and give a new and holy boldness even in full view of all the solemn verities of eternity; for it is grounded on the perfect accepted work of a divine Redeemer -- the faithfulness of a divine Word.The very hoary head becomes not merely the witness of decay, and of a life fast passing; but the "almond-tree" has another, brighter meaning now: it is a figure of that "crown of life" which in the new-creation scene awaits the redeemed.If appetite fail here, the more the inward longing, and the satisfaction that ever goes hand in hand with it, may abound; and the inward man thus be strengthened and enlarged so as to have greater capacity for the enjoyment of those pleasures that are "at God's right hand for evermore."Till at length the earthly house of this tabernacle may be dissolved. Dust may still return to dust, and there await, what all Creation awaits -- the glorious resurrection, its redemption. Whilst the spirit -- yes, what of the spirit? To God who gave it? Ah, far better: to God who loved and redeemed it, -- to Him who has so cleansed it by His own blood, that the very Light of God can detect no stain of sin upon it, even though it be the chief of sinners. So amid the ruins of this earthly tabernacle may the triumphant song ascend above the snapping of cords, the breaking of golden bowls and pitchers, the very crash of nature's citadel: "Oh, death, where is thy sting? Oh, grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God that giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." This meets -- meets fully, meets satisfactorily -- the need.

Now none will deny that this need is deep, -- real. Hence it can be no mere sentiment, no airy speculation, no poetical imagination, no cunningly devised fable that can meet that need. The remedy must be as real as the disease, or it avails nothing. No phantom key may loosen so hard-closed a lock as this: it must be real, and be made for it. For suppose we find a lock of such delicate and complicated construction that no key that can be made will adapt itself to all its windings. Many skilled men have tried their hands and failed, -- till at length the wisest of all attempts it, and even he in despair cries "vanity." Then another key is put into our hands by One who claims to have made the very lock we have found. We apply it, and its intricacies meet every corresponding intricacy; its flanges fill every chamber, and we open it with perfect facility. What is the reasonable, necessary conclusion? We say -- and rightly, unavoidably say -- "He who made the lock must have made the key. His claim is just: they have been made by one maker."So by the perfect rest it brings to the awakened conscience -- by the quiet calm it brings to the troubled mind -- by the warm love that it reveals to the craving heart -- by the pure light that it sheds in satisfactory answer to all the deep questions of the spirit -- by the unceasing unfoldings of depths of perfect transcendent wisdom -- by its admirable unity in variety -- by the holy, righteous settlement of sin, worthy of a holy, righteous God -- by the peace it gives, even in view of wasted years and the wild sowing of the past -- by the joy it maintains even in view of the trials and sorrows of the present -- by the hope with which it inspires the future; -- by all these we know that our key (the precious Word that God has put into our hands) is a reality indeed, and as far above the powers of Reason as the heavens are above the earth, therefore necessarily -- incontestably -- DIVINE!This brings us to the concluding words of our book. Now who has been leading us all through these exercises? A disappointed sensualist? A gloomy stoic? A cynic -- selfish, depressed? Not at all. Distinctly a wise man; -- wise, for he gives that unequivocal proof of wisdom, in that he cares for others. It is the wise who ever seek to "win souls," "to turn many to righteousness." "Because the preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge." No cynic is Ecclesiastes. His sympathies are still keen; he knows well and truly the needs of those to whom he ministers: knows too, how man's wretched heart ever rejects its own blessing; so, in true wisdom, he seeks "acceptable words": endeavoring to sweeten the medicine he gives, clothes his counsel in "words of delight" (margin). Thus here we find all the "words of delight" that human wisdom can find, in view of life in all its aspects from youth to old age.For whilst it is certainly difficult satisfactorily to trace the order in detail in the book, -- and perhaps this is perfectly consistent with its character, -- yet there can be no question but that it begins by looking at, and testing, those sensual enjoyments that are peculiarly attractive to youth, and ends with the departure of all in old age, and, finally -- dissolution. There is, evidently, that much method. We may also, further, note that the body of the book is taken up with such themes as interest men who are between these two extremes: occupations, business, politics, and, as men speak, religion. All the various states and conditions of man are looked at: kings, princes, nobles, magistrates, rich and poor, are all taken up and discussed in this search for the one thing that true human reason can call absolutely "good" for man. Further method than this might perhaps be inconsistent with the confusion of the scene "under the sun" he is regarding, and his own inability to bring order out of the confusion. There would be thus true method in the absence of method, as the cry of "Vanity," doleful as it is, is alone in harmony with the failure of all his efforts. Yes, for whilst here he speaks of "words of delight," one can but wonder to what he can refer, unless it be to something still to come. Thus far, as he has taken up and dropped, with bitter discouragement, subject after

subject, his burdened, overcharged heart involuntarily has burst out with the cry, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity!" Words of delight! Find one in all that we have gone over that can be to a guilty sinner's ear a "word of delight" -- such as it can really take in as meeting its needs; for this seems to be the force of the word here translated "acceptable": so perfectly adapted to the needs of the heart it addresses that that heart springs joyfully to embrace it at once. We have surely, thus far, found none such. A Judge has been discerned in God; but small delight in this surely, if I am the sinner to be judged.Verses 11-14. Wisdom's words are not known by quantity, but quality. Not many books, with the consequent weary study; but the right word -- like a "goad": sharp, pointed, effective -- and on which may hang, as on a "nail," much quiet meditation. "Given, too, from one shepherd," hence not self-contradictory and confusing to the listeners. In this way Ecclesiastes would evidently direct our most earnest attention to what follows: "the conclusion of the whole matter." Here is absolutely the highest counsel of true human wisdom -- the climax of her reasonings -- the high-water-mark of her attainments -- the limit to which she can lead us: "Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil." Who will deny that this is indeed admirable? Is there not a glorious moral elevation in this conclusion? Note how it gives the Creator-God His rightful place; puts the creature, man, in the absolutely correct relationship of obedience, and speaks with perfect assurance of a discriminative judgment where every single work, yes, "secret thing," shall be shown out in its true character as it is good or evil in His holy sight: where everything that is wrong and distorted here shall be put right.It is truly much, but alas for man if this were indeed the end. Alas for one, conscious of having sinned already, and broken His commandments, whether those commandments be expressed in the ten words of the law, as given from Sinai, or in that other law which is common to all men, the work of which, "written in their hearts," they show -- conscience. There is no gleam of light, ray of hope, or grain of comfort here. A judgment to come, assured, can only be looked forward to, with, at the best, gloomy uncertainty, and awful misgiving -- if not with assured conviction of a fearful condemnation; and here our writer leaves us with the assurance that this is the "conclusion of the whole matter."Who can picture the terrors of this darkness in which such a conclusion leaves us? Guilty, trembling, with untold sins and wasted years behind; with the awful consciousness that my very being is the corrupt fountain whence those sins flowed, and yet with a certain judgment before in which no single thing is to escape a divinely searching examination: better had it been to have left us still asleep and unconscious of these things, and so to have permitted us to secure, at least, what pleasure we could out of this present life "under the sun," without the shadow of the future ever thrown over us; -- yea, such "conclusion" leaves us "of all men most miserable."I would, beloved reader, that we might by grace realize something of this. Nor let our minds be just touched by the passing thoughts, but pause for a few minutes, at least, and meditate on the scene at this last verse in the only book in our Bible in which man at his best and highest, in his richest and wisest, is heard telling us his exercises as he looks at this tangled state of affairs "under the sun" and gives us to see, as nowhere else can we see, the very utmost limit to which he, as such, can attain. If this sinks down into our hearts, we shall be the better prepared to apprehend and appreciate the grace that meets him there at the edge of that precipice to which Reason leads but which she cannot bridge. Oh, blessed grace! In the person of our royal Preacher we are here indeed at our "wit's end" in every sense of the word; but that is ever and always the place where another hand may lead us, where another Wisdom than poor feeble human Reason may find a

way of escape, and "deliver us out of our distresses."Then let us turn our ear and listen to another voice: "For we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad." But stay. Is this the promised grace of which even now we spoke? Is this the deliverance for which we hoped? A judgment-seat still? -- from which still no escape for any: and a "reception" according to the things done, whether they be good or bad! Wherein does this differ from Solomon's "conclusion of the whole matter"? In just two words only -- "Of Christ." It is now the "judgment-seat of Christ." Added terror, I admit, to His despisers and rejectors; but to you and me, dear fellow-believer, through grace the difference these two words make is infinity itself. For look at Him who sits upon the judgment-seat; -- be not afraid; regard Him patiently and well; He bears many a mark whereby you may know Him, and recognize in the Judge the very One who has Himself borne the full penalty of all your sins. See His hands and His feet, and behold His side! You stand before His judgment-seat. Remember, too, the word He spake long ago, but as true as ever, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that heareth my word, and believeth on Him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but is passed from death unto life" -- and as we thus remember both His word and His work, we may be fully assured, even as we stand here, that there must be a sense, and an important sense, in which judgment for us is passed forever. I may not be able to harmonize these Scriptures; but I will cleave, at least, to that which I clearly understand; in other words, to that which meets my present needs (for we only truly understand what meets our need); afterward, other needs may arise that shall make the other scriptures equally clear. He bore my sins -- the judgment of God has been upon Him, cannot, therefore, be upon me -- into that judgment I shall never come.Then why is it written we must all appear (or rather "be manifested," be clearly shown out in true light) before the judgment seat of Christ? There is just one thing I need before entering the joys of eternity. I am, as Jacob in Genesis xxxv., going up "to Bethel, to dwell there." I must know that everything is fully suited to the place to which I go. I need, I must have, everything out clearly. Yes, so clearly, that it will not do to trust even my own memory to bring it out. I need the Lord "who loved me and gave Himself for me" to do it. He will. How precious this is for the believer who keeps his eye on the Judge! How blessed for him that ere eternity begins full provision is made for the perfect security of its peace -- for a communion that may not be marred by a thought! Never after this shall a suspicion arise in our hearts, during the long ages that follow, that there is one thing -- one secret thing -- that has not been known and dealt with holily and righteously, according to the infinite purity of the Judgment Seat of Christ. Suppose that this were not so written; let alone for a moment that there never could be true discriminative rewards; might not memory be busy, and might not some evil thought allowed during the days of the life in the flesh, long, long forgotten, be suddenly remembered, and the awful question arise, "Is it possible that that particular evil thing has been overlooked? It was subsequent to the hour that I first accepted Him for my Saviour. I have had no thought of it since. I am not aware of ever having confessed it." Would not that silence the song of Heaven, embitter even its joy, and still leave tears to be wiped away? It shall not be. All shall be out first. All -- "every secret thing." Other Scriptures shall show us how these things are dealt with. "Every man's work shall be made manifest, for the day shall declare it, because it (that is, the day) shall be revealed in fire, and the fire shall try every man's work, of what sort it is. If any man's work abide, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burnt, he shall suffer loss, but he himself shall be saved, yet so as by fire. If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy." (1 Cor. iii.) That day is revealed in fire, (Divine

judgment,) and gold, silver, precious stones -- those works which are of God -- alone can stand the test. All others burn like "wood, hay, stubble."Look forward a little. In the light of these Scriptures, see one standing before that Judgment Seat. He once hung by the side of the Judge Himself upon a cross on earth. See his works being manifested. Is there one that can be found gold, silver, precious stones? Not one. They burn; they all burn: but mark carefully his countenance as his works burn. Mark the emotions that manifest themselves through the ever-deepening sense of the wondrous grace that could have snatched such an one as is there being manifested from the burning. Not a sign of terror. Not a question for a single instant as to his own salvation now. He has been with Christ, in the Judge's own company, for a long time already, and perfectly established is his heart, in the love that said to him long ago, "This day thou shalt be with me in Paradise." Now as all his works burn, the fire within burns too, and he is well prepared to sing "unto Him who loves us and washed us from our sins in His own blood." And yet stay: -- Here is something at the very last. It is his word, "Dost thou not fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation, and we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds, but this man hath done nothing amiss. Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom." Gold! gold at last! as we may say; and he too receives praise of God. Yes, not one that shall have the solemn joy of standing before that tribunal but has, in some measure, that praise. For is it not written, "then" (at that very time) "shall every one have praise of God." "This honor have all his saints."Where and when does this judgment of our works, then, take place? It must be subsequent to our rapture to the air of which we have spoken, and prior to our manifestation with Christ as sons of God. For by all the ways of God, through all the ages, those scenes could never be carried out before an unbelieving hostile world. Never has He exposed, never will He so expose His saints. All will be over when we come forth with Him to live and reign a thousand years. "The bride has made herself ready," and the robes in which she comes forth -- the white linen -- are indeed the righteousnesses of the saints, but these have been "washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb."But "all" must stand before Him; and not even yet has that been fulfilled. Cain and the long line of rejectors of mercy and light, ever broadening as time's sad ages have passed till their path has been called the "broad way," have not yet stood there. Has death saved them from judgment? No, for we read of the "resurrection of judgment" -- the judgment that comes necessarily after death, and includes the dead, and only the dead. "I saw a great white throne, and Him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heavens fled away, and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened, and another book was opened, which is the Book of Life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them, and they were judged every man according to their works, and death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire." Here, too, we see an exact, perfect, retributive, discriminating judgment. The Book of Life bears not the name of one here. There is that one broad distinction between the saved and the lost -- the "life-line," as we may call it. How carefully are we told at the very last of this Book of Life, that we may most clearly understand, for our comfort, that the feeblest touch of faith of but the hem of His garment -- perhaps not even directly His Person, but that which is seen surrounding His Person, as the visible creation may be said to do -- (Psalms cii.25, 6) let any have touched Him there, and life results. His name is found in the Book of Life, and he shall not see the second

death. Apart from this -- the second death: "the lake of fire!"And yet, whilst "darkness and wrath" are the common lot of the rejectors of "light and love," there is, necessarily, almost infinite difference in the degrees of that darkness and fierceness of that wrath, dependent exactly on the degree of rejection of light and love. As our Lord tells us, "he that knew his Lord's will, and prepared not himself, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given of him shall be much required; and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more." All is absolutely right. Nothing more now to be made right The ages of eternity may roll in unbroken peace; with God -- manifested in all the universe as light and love -- all in all. And now, dear readers, the time has come to say farewell for a season to our writer and to each other. Let this leave-taking not be with the groans of Ecclesiastes' helplessness in our ears. We have stood by his side and tested with him the sad unsatisfying pleasures connected with the senses under the sun. We have turned from them, and tried the purer, higher pleasures of the intellect and reason, and groaned to find them equally unsatisfying. We have looked through his wearied eyes at this scene, restless in its unending changes, and yet with nothing really new. We have felt a little, with his sensitive, sympathetic heart, for the oppressed and down-trodden "under the sun," and groaned in our helplessness to right their wrongs. We have groaned, too, at his and our inability to understand or solve the contradictory tangle of life that seemed to deny either the providence or the goodness of a clearly recognized Creator. We have followed with him along many a hopeful path till it led us to a tomb, and then we have bowed head with him, and groaned in our agonizing inability to pierce further. We have seen, too, with him that there is not the slightest discrimination in that ending of man's race, and worse, even than groans to our ears, has been the wild, sad counsel of despair, "Merrily drink thy wine." But quickly recovering from this, we have wondered with great admiration as our guide's clear reason led him, and us, still on and on to discern, a final harvest-judgment that follows all earth's sowings. But there, as we have stood beside him in spirit, before that awful judgment-seat to which he has led us, and turned to him for one word of light or comfort in view of our sin and wrong doings -- the deepest need of all -- we have been met with a silence too deeply agonizing, even for the groan of vanity. Groans, groans, nothing but groans, at every turn!And then with what relief -- oh, what relief, ever increasing as the needs increased -- have we turned to the Greater than the greatest of men "under the sun," and, placing the hand of faith in His, we have been led into other scenes, and have found every single need of our being fully, absolutely, satisfactorily met. Our body if now the seat of sin and suffering, yet we have learned to sing in the joyful hope of its soon being "like Him forever." Our soul's affections have in Him a satisfying object, whilst His love may fill the poor, empty, craving heart till it runs over with a song all unknown under the sun, -- our spirit's deep questions, as they have come up, have all been met and answered in such sort that each answer strikes a chord that sounds with the melody of delight; -- till at last death itself is despoiled of his terrors, and our song is still more sweet and clear in the tyrant's presence, for he is no longer a "king" over us, but our "servant." Even the deepest, most awful terror of all to sinners such as we -- the Judgment-seat -- has given us new cause for still more joyful singing; for we have in that pure clear light recognized in God -- our Creator-God, our Redeemer-God -- a love so full, so true, -- working with a wisdom so infinite, so pure, -- in perfect harmony with a righteousness so unbending, so inflexible, -- with a holiness not to be flecked or tarnished by a breath, -- all combining to put us at joyful ease in the very presence of judgment -- to find there, as nowhere else possible, all that is in God in His infinity

told out, ("love with us made perfect,") and that means that all the creatures' responsive love must find sweet relief in a song that it will take eternity itself to end. In our Father's House we only "begin to be merry," and end nevermore, as we sound the depths of a wisdom that is fathomless, know a "love that passeth knowledge"; -- singing, singing, nothing but singing, and ever a new song!May God, in His grace, make this the joyful experience of reader and writer, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.[1] This differs from the usual interpretation, which makes this verse a metaphor of the mouth and teeth. This has been rejected above, not only on account of the direct evidence of its faultiness, and the fanciful interpretation given to the "sound of grinding," but for the twofold reason that it would make the teeth to be alluded to twice, whilst all reference to the equally important sense of "hearing" would be omitted altogether. I have therefore followed Dr. Lewis's metrical version: -- "And closing are the doors that lead abroad,

When the hum of the mill is sounding low,

Though it rise to the sparrow's note,

And voices loudest in the song, do all to faintness sink."Although, I might here add, I cannot follow this writer in his view that Ecclesiastes is describing only the old age of the sensualist. Rather is it man as man, -- at his highest, -- but with only what he can find "under the sun" to enlighten him.[2] The word rendered above "age-long," in our authorized version "long," -- "man goeth to his long home" -- is one of those suggestive words with which the Hebrew Scriptures abound, and which are well worth pondering with interest. To transfer and not translate it into English we might call it "olamic," speaking of a cycle: having a limit, and yet a shadowy, undefined limit. The word therefore in itself beautifully and significantly expresses both the confidence, the faith of the speaker as well as his ignorance. Man's existence after death is distinctly predicated. The mere grave is not that olamic home; for the spirit would, in that case, be quite lost sight of; nor, indeed, is the spirit alone there, -- the man goes there. It appears to correspond very closely to the Greek word Hades, "the Unseen." Man has gone to that sphere beyond human ken, but when the purposes of God are fulfilled, his abode there shall have an end: it is for an "age," but only an "age." All this seems to be wrapped up, as it were, in that one phrase -- Beth-olam, the age-long home. How blessed for us the light that has since been shed on all this. In One case (and indeed already more than in that One) that "age" has already come to an end, and the first fruits of that harvest with which our earth is sown has even now been gathered. We await merely the completion of that harvest: "Christ the first fruits: afterwards they that are Christ's, at His coming." THE BIBLE TRUTH PRESS, 63 FOURTH AVENUE, NEW YORK.

Chapter 14

|ABOVE THE SUN.|

Cease, ye Saints, your occupation with the sorrow-scenes of earth; Let the ear of faith be opened, use the sight of second birth. Long your hearts have been acquainted with the tear-drop and the groan; These are weeds of foreign growing, seek the flowers that are your own. He who in the sandy desert looks for springs to quench his thirst Finds his fountains are but slime-pits such as Siddim's vale accursed; He who hopes to still the longing of the heart within his breast Must not search within a scene where naught is at one moment's rest. Lift your eyes above the heavens to a sphere as pure as fair; There, no spot of earth's defilement, never fleck of sin-stain there. Linger not to gaze on Angels, Principalities, nor Powers; Brighter visions yet shall greet you, higher dignities are ours. All night's golden constellations dimly shine as day draws on, And the moon must veil her beauties at the rising of the sun. Let the grove be wrapt in silence as the nightingale outflings Her unrivaled minstrelsy, th' eclipse of every bird that sings. Michael, Israel's Prince, is glorious, clad in panoply of war; *"Who is as the God of Israel" is his challenge near and far; But a higher still than Michael soon shall meet your raptured gaze, And ye shall forget his glories in your Captain's brighter rays. * "Michael" means "Who is as God." List a moment to the music of the mighty Gabriel's voice, With its message strange and tender, making Mary's heart rejoice. Then on-speed, for sweeter music soon expectant faith shall greet: His who chained another Mary willing captive at His feet. But, let mem'ry first glance backward to the scenes "beneath the sun," How the fairest earthly landscape echoed soon some dying groan. There the old-creation's story, shared between the dismal Three: Sin and Suffering and Sorrow summed that Babel's history. Now the contrast -- vain ye listen for one jarring note to fall; For each dweller in that scene's in perfect harmony with all. Joy has here expelled all sadness, perfect peace displaced all fears -- All around that central Throne makes the true "music of the spheres." Now upsoar ye on faith's pinion, leave all creature things behind, And approach yon throne of glory. Love in Light ye there shall find; For with thrill of joy behold One -- woman-born -- upon that Throne, And, with deepest self-abasement, in His beauties read your own. Joyful scan the glories sparkling from His gracious Head to Feet;, Never one that does not touch some tender chord of memory sweet; And e'en heaven's music lacks till blood-bought ones their voices raise High o'er feebler angel choirs; for richer grace wakes nobler praise. Vain the quest amongst the thronging of the heavenly angel band For one trace of human kinship, for one touch of human hand; 'Mongst those spirits bright, ethereal, "man" would stand a man alone; Higher must he seek for kinship -- thought amazing -- on God's Throne!Does it not attract your nature, is it not a rest to see One e'en there at glory's summit, yet with human form like thee? Form assumed when love compelled Him to take up your hopeless case, Form He never will relinquish; ever shall it voice His grace.Wondrous grace! thus making heaven but our Father's house prepared; Since, by One who tells God's love, in wounded human form 'tis shared. See, His Head is crowned with glory! yet a glory not distinct From an hour of deepest suffering, and a crown of thorns succinct.Draw still closer, with the rev'rence born of love and holy fear; Look into those tender eyes which have been dimmed with human tear -- Tears in which ye see a glory hidden from th' Angelic powers; Ours alone the state that caused them, their beauty then alone is ours.Look once more upon that Head: finds memory no attraction there

In the time when, homeless-wandering, night-dews filled that very hair? Brightest glories sparkle round it -- crowned with honor now; and yet, Once it found its only pillow on storm-tossed Gennesaret!See that Hand! it once grasped Peter's as he sank beneath the wave, -- Snatched the widow's son at Nain from the portal of the grave, -- Touched with healing grace the leper, gave the light to him born dark. Deeper love to you is spoken in that nail-print -- precious mark!Let your tender gaze now rest on those dear Feet that erstwhile trod All the weary, painful journey leading Him from God to God; Took Him in His gentle grace wherever need and suffering thronged, Or one lonely soul was found who for the living water longed.Those the very Feet once bathed with a pardoned sinner's tears, And anointed, too, with spikenard speaking Mary's love and fears; Took Him weary on His journey under Sychar's noontide heat, Till the thirsty quenched His thirsting, and the hungry gave Him meat.Blessed Feet! 'tis only sinners see the depth of beauty there; Angels never have bowed o'er them with a penitential tear. Angels may regard the nail-print, with a holy, reverent calm; Ye who read the love it tells of, must break forth with thankful psalm.Draw yet nearer, look more fondly; yea, e'en nestle and abide In that covert from the storm-blast, in the haven of His Side. That deep wound speaks man's great hatred, but His love surpassing great: There were focused, at one spear-point, all God's love and all man's hate!Rest, ye saints! your search is ended; ye have reached the source of peace. By the side of Jesus risen, earth's dull cares and sorrows cease. Here are Elim's wells and palm-trees, grateful shade and waters cool, Whilst in Christ's deep love there's healing far beyond Bethesda's pool.Closer, closer, cluster round Him, till the kindling of that Love Melt your hearts to like compassions whilst amid like scenes ye move. Only thus abiding in Him can ye fruitfulness expect, Or, 'mid old-creation sorrows, new-creation love reflect.Ever closer gather round Him, till "the glory of that Light" Dims the old creation glitter, proves earth's glare to be but -- night! Gaze upon Him till His beauties wing your feet as on ye run, Faith soon bursting into sight, in God's clear day "Above the Sun."F. C. J.

WORKS BY J. G. BELLETT.

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