Notes on Proverbs

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Proverbs

Proverbs 1

Beyond all others, David was the sweet Psalmist of Israel, though not a few worthy companions find a place in the divine collection of holy lyrics. Solomon stands in like pre-eminence for the utterance of the sententious wisdom of which the book of Proverbs is the chief expression, with Ecclesiastes when the sense of his own failure under unique circumstances of creature advantage gave a sad and penitent character to his experience in the power of the inspiring Spirit. It is the more striking when compared with the Song of Songs, which shows us the Jewish spouse restored to the love of the once-despised Messiah, and His adorable excellency and grace, after her long folly, manifold vicissitudes, and sore tribulation.

Every one of these compositions is stamped with the design of inspiration, and instinct with the power of the Holy Spirit in carrying out His design in each. But they are all in view of man on the earth, more especially the chosen people of God, passing through the vista of sin and shame and sorrow in the latter day to the kingdom which the true Son of David, the born Son of God (Ps. 2), will establish as Jehovah’s King in His holy hill of Zion, though far larger and higher things also, as we know. Hence these writings have a common governmental character, only that, in the Psalms especially, the rejection and the sufferings of Christ give occasion to glimpses of light above and to hints of brighter associations. But the full and proper manifestation of heavenly things was left for the rejected Christ to

announce in the gospels, and for the Holy Spirit sent down from on high to open out practically in the Acts, and doctrinally in the epistles, especially of the Apostle Paul. Any unfolding of a church character, or even of Christian relationship, it would be vain to look for in these constituent books or any others of the Old Testament.

The express aim of Proverbs, for example, is to furnish, from the one better fitted for the purpose than any man who ever lived, the light of wisdom in moral intelligence for the earthly path of man under Jehovah's eye. Being from "the king of Israel," it is also for the people he governed; and therefore with a slight exception (only six times it seems, easily accounted for) in known relationship with Jehovah, whose name pervades from first to last. See Proverbs 2:5, 17; Proverbs 3:4; Proverbs 25:2; Proverbs 30:5, 9. But being divinely inspired, it is a book for him that reads or hears to profit by at any time, for the Christian in particular as having by grace the mind of Christ. All Scripture is for our good and blessing, though most of it is not addressed to us, nor is it about us.

1 Kings 4:29-34 historically testifies to the unrivalled capacity conferred of God on Solomon, and a wisdom He would not let die. "And God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding exceeding much, and largeness of heart, even as the sand that is on the seashore. 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 spoke three thousand proverbs: and his songs were a thousand

and five. And he spoke of trees, from the cedar tree that is in Lebanon even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall: he spoke 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." "Three thousand proverbs" cover far more than the inspired collection, as the songs uttered far exceed those meant for permanency. Inspiration selected designedly.

We have remarked how "Jehovah" characterizes the book. In Ecclesiastes, on the contrary, the use of "God" or Elohim is constant, and flows solely and appropriately — one might even say, necessarily — from its subject matter. As the book of Proverbs is for the instruction of "men-brethren" (Israel), so there is the constant tenderness of "my son," or more rarely, "sons." But there is not nor could be, as in the New Testament, the basis of Christ's redemption, or the liberty of adoption in the Spirit; the groundwork there is in the cross, and the character is consistency with Christ glorified in heaven. Morally, too, God is revealed, and the Father's love made known in Christ to be enjoyed in the Spirit's power.

"Proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel: to know wisdom and instruction: to discern the words of understanding; to receive instruction in intelligence, righteousness, judgment and equity; to give prudence to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion. He that is wise will hear and increase learning, and the intelligent will attain to sound counsels: to understand a proverb and an allegory (or, interpretation), the words of the wise and their enigmas." vv. 1-6.

Proverbs 1:1-6 is the preface. It remains for its right appreciation to explain briefly terms which many readers fail to distinguish.

“Wisdom” here is derived from a word that means “practiced” or skilful, and applied very widely from arts of varied kinds to powers of mind and philosophy. The verb is used for being “wise” throughout the Hebrew scriptures; the adjective even more extensively and often; the substantive more frequently still. The “wise men” of Babylon are as a class correspondingly described in the Chaldee or Aramean. But the employment of the term is also general. It seems based on experience.

“Instruction,” connected with “wisdom,” is expressed by a word signifying also discipline, correction, or warning. The moral object is thus remarkably sustained, in contrast with mere exercise or displays of intellect.

Next comes in its place to “discern the words of understanding.” For this is of great value for the soul, understanding founded on adequate consideration so as to distinguish things that differ. The verb and noun occur plentifully in the Bible.

Then we have “to receive instruction in intelligence, righteousness, judgment and equity.” Here circumspection has a great place in the learning to behave with becoming propriety and tact, as David did when Saul was on the rack through jealousy.

“Prudence” in verse 4 may degenerate into cunning or wily ways, as in Exodus 21:14 and Joshua 9:4; but as in Proverbs 8:5 and 12, so here and in kindred forms, it has the fair meaning of practical good sense.

“Discretion” at the end of the verse is the opposite of heedlessness, but capable, like the last, of a bad application. Employed laudably, it means sagacity through reflection.

As the proverb is a compressed parable, or an expanded comparison, so it often borders on the riddle or enigma in order to fix attention. The same Hebrew word appears to mean both “proverb” and “parable,” which may in part if not wholly account for the former only in John’s Gospel, the latter in the Synoptists. There, too, the parable stands in contrast with speaking plainly (John 16:25, 29; compare also Matt. 13:34, 35).

Solomon then introduces himself in his known relation and position as the channel of these divinely given apothegms, not to glorify man like the seven sages of Greece, still less to magnify himself who bears witness to his own humiliation, but to exalt Jehovah in guarding him that heeds these words from folly and snare. For the declared end is the moral profit of man by what God gave to His glory — to knew wisdom and instruction, to discern, and receive. However precious for all, the first aim is to give prudence to the simple; so open to deception in this world, and knowledge and discretion to the young man, apt to be heady and rashly opinionated. But there is another result surely anticipated; “he that is wise will hear, and the intelligent will attain to sound counsel: to understand a proverb and an allegory, the words of the wise and their enigmas [or, dark sayings].” Who more in place to teach these things than the man then inspired of God?

The book begins with the foundation principle of the fear of God, but this in the special relation established

with His people Israel. It is therefore “the fear of Jehovah.” For as He deigned thus to be made known to them, so were they called to prize that name as their special privilege. Jehovah was God in Israel. though alone the true God, and Lord of all the earth. As Jehovah was God, who spoke through the prophets, and wrought wonders according to His word, so the people at a great crisis with heathenism cried (1 Kings 18), Jehovah, He is God, He is God. The usage of the abstract term, and of the relational name, has nothing in the least to do with imaginary legends or various writers; it is most instructive for the twofold truth that is set out.

“The fear of Jehovah (is) the beginning of knowledge: fools despise wisdom and instruction. My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law [or teaching] of thy mother; for they (shall be) a garland of grace for thy head, and chains about thy neck.” vv. 7-9.

In Psalm 111:10 the fear of Jehovah is declared to be the beginning of wisdom, as here of knowledge. Both are equally true, and each important in its place, though wisdom be the higher of the two, as built on the experience of the divine word and ways, which “knowledge” does not necessarily presuppose.

He who wrote for the reader’s instruction was pre-eminent in both, though in his case there was extraordinary divine favour in the communication, and the keenest ardour in improving opportunities without parallel. In this general part of the book we have “wisdom” introduced (Prov. 9:10), “the fear of Jehovah is the beginning of wisdom; and the knowledge of the holy [is] understanding.” This gives the moral side its just prominence in both; and so it is in. Job 28:28, where that

chapter, full of interest throughout, closes with “unto man He said, Behold, the fear of the Lord [Adonai, not Jehovah as such], that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding.” He is feared as the Sovereign Master, who cannot look on evil with the least allowance.

But even where external knowledge is pursued, what a safeguard is in the fear of God! Assuredly, the Creator would be remembered, not only in the days of youth, but in those of age. Who that had the least real knowledge of God could confound the creature with Him who created it? To him the heavens declare the glory of God, and the expanse shows the work of His hands. If he beheld the light when it shone, or the moon walking in brightness, it was but to own and adore the God who is above, unless a deceived heart had turned him aside, that he could not deliver his soul, nor say, Is there not a lie in my right hand? How, with Him before the mind, deny creation for an eternal matter under Fate or Chance? for a desolating Pantheism, where all men and things are god, and none is really God, where is neither sin nor its judgment, nor grace and truth with its blessedness in Christ for faith to life eternal? where all that appears to our senses is Maya (illusion) and the diabolical substitute, but real death of hope, is Nirvana (extinction)? How true it is that the foolish “despise wisdom and instruction”!

What again were his last words to his judges,1 of whom Westerners boast? “It is now time to depart — for me to die, for you to live; but which of us is going to a better state is unknown to everyone but God.” What a contrast with the Apostle! “To me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” Certainty on divine warrant, and the deepest enjoyment everywhere and always, the beginning of

which is the fear of God in Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

This fundamental deliverance is followed up by the usual appeal of affection, “my son.” For here the relationships God has made and sanctions are of as great value where His fear reigns, as they perpetuate sin and misery where it is not so. Parents are to be honoured and heard, the instruction of the father and the teaching of the mother. This the son first knows to form and direct obedience, if self-will oppose not; and they are his graceful ornament. How early they act on the heart, and how influential on the conduct and even character, many a son can testify. Alas, that men have forgotten the word of the wisest, and proved their folly, parents and children! And to this sad side we are now introduced.

“My son, if sinners entice thee, consent not. If they say, Come with us, let us lay wait for blood, let us lurk privily for the innocent without cause; let us swallow them up alive as Sheol, and whole as those that go down into the pit. We shall find all precious substance, we shall fill our houses with spoil: cast in thy lot among us; we will have all one purse. My son, walk not in the way with them, keep back thy foot from their path. For their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed blood. For in vain is the net spread in the eyes of a bird; and they lay wait for their own blood; they lurk privily for their own lives. So (are) the paths of every one that is greedy of gain: it taketh away the life of its owners.” vv. 10-19.

Here we have the soul warned against listening to the voice of enticement. For Satan has instruments, not a few, zealous to draw others into evil; and companionship is as natural as dangerous. “For also we were aforetime

foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another." Titus 3:3. And in this the least scrupulous lead — their mouth full of cursing and bitterness — their feet swift to shed blood. The word is, Walk not in the way with them, keep back thy foot from their path. Covetousness, and robbery to gratify it, are vividly drawn; violence follows lust, and one's own life the forfeit. The day comes for judgment without mercy, the judgment of the flesh. Listen, for in vain is the net spread in the eyes of any bird. In reality they wait for their own blood, as surely as God knows how to deliver. How many a one that is plotted against escapes, while those greedy of gain lose their own lives, the end in this world of their wicked schemes!

It is a characteristic of this book, and exactly in keeping with its contents, that we have "wisdom" personified from the first chapter, rising up (as is well known) to the Person of Christ in Proverbs 8:22-31. Even in this first introduction, though the form is plural, as in Proverbs 9:1, and in later occurrences, the cry does not fail as it goes on to assume the solemnity of a divine warning of inevitable judgment, so that it is difficult to sever it from the voice of God Himself, as in verse 24 if not in 23, and in those that follow. Compare in the New Testament Matthew 23:34 with Luke 11:49.

"Wisdom crieth without, she raiseth her voice in the broadways; she calleth at the head of the noisy (streets), at the entry of the gates; in the city she uttereth her words, How long, simple ones, will ye love simpleness, and scorners delight them in scorning, and fools hate wisdom? Turn you at my reproof: behold, I will pour

forth my spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you." vv. 20-23.

Under the law there was nothing that properly, still less that fully, answered to the grace of the gospel in extending to every land and tongue, to be preached, as the Apostle says, "in all creation that is under heaven." Yet when not only Israel fell as a whole, but Judah, revolted to the uttermost and was swept away to Babylon, yea, when the rejection of Messiah added incalculably to their older guilt of idolatry, and brought on still worse and wider and longer dispersion, the Holy Spirit inspired the prophet to write of the richest mercy which should surely dawn on their ruined estate. After the triple call to "hearken," followed by the triple summons to "awake" (Isa. 51 and Isa. 52), we hear the cheering outburst, "How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth glad tidings, that publisheth peace, that bringeth glad tidings of good, that publisheth salvation, saying to Zion, Thy God reigneth." So in due time will the kingdom be restored to Israel in God's mercy and sovereign grace. But as this is displayed in another and yet profounder way now in the gospel, the Apostle does not hesitate to apply these glowing words to those now sent to preach the gospel of God's indiscriminate goodness, alike to Jew and Greek. For now there is no difference, and the same Lord of all is rich unto all that call upon Him. But if Israel be yet deaf to the report of those that believe, the gospel goes out like the voice of those heavenly orbs whose sound cannot be confined to one people or country, but went out unto all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the habitable earth, as Psalm 19 suggests.

Still here where Jehovah's law ruled, wisdom was not confined to parental discipline. still less was it shut up in philosophic schools, but "cries without." She "raiseth her voice in the broadways" instead of seeking only the refined and exalted; she "calleth at the head of the noisy places of concourse, at the entry of the gates." The moral profit was sought assiduously of those that had most need, if culture despises the vulgar. Not in the calm and quiet of the country is she said to utter her words, but "in the city" where is far more to attract and distract the mass of mankind. "How long, simple ones," says she, "will ye love simpleness, and scorners delight them in scorning, and fools hate wisdom?" There is thus a climax in these classes of careless, ungodly souls. The simple are the many weak ones who, lacking all moral discernment and object, are exposed to evil on all sides and at each turn; and by this easy indifference they become a prey. The scorners manifest more positive pravity, and reject all appeals to conscience and reference to divine things by unseemly jest and insolent sneer. It is an ever growing moral disease, never so prevalent as in these last days. The fools that hate knowledge may be more godless still, and become openly atheist, as Scripture shows. For the apostasy must come, and the man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition who will set himself and be received as God, and this in the temple of God, where the affront is deepest.

But Jehovah gives wisdom's remonstrances, and, if heeded, her gracious encouragement. "Turn you at my reproof: behold, I will pour forth my spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you." It is an error, which goes beyond the purpose of the verse, to conceive

that the gift of the Holy Spirit is here promised. There is undoubtedly an inward blessing promised which is ever by the Spirit, and an intelligence of wisdom's words. This is much, and Jehovah made it true from the time the book was written. But it is dangerous either to exaggerate what God always was to His people, or to undervalue those privileges which awaited redemption through our Lord Jesus. The Holy Spirit was not poured out as at Pentecost till Christ was glorified. But whatever of blessing there ever was for man is by the Spirit, and this too is in knowing the words of divine wisdom; and here it is amply assured, where the reproof was heeded.

Here it is not the gospel which is thus shown, but the call of God in the government of man on the earth. Hence it does not pass beyond the judgment which will be executed in the day that is coming here below. This is the more important to heed, because Christendom is as unbelieving about the judgment of the quick that Christ will surely enforce on the habitable world, as the Jews were about the judgment of the dead in the resurrection state. Both were revealed in the written Word, and both are to be in the hands of Him who loved to call Himself "the Son of man." But if He came, the Son of man in grace to the lost, He will assuredly return, the Son of man in judgment of all who despise Him, whether alive or dead. Thus there is the judgment of the wicked living at the beginning of His kingdom and through it, no less than the judgment of the wicked dead at the end, before He delivers it up to Him who is God and Father. Now it is the former which is treated here, though commentators and preachers are apt to see in it only the judgment at the close.

“Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no one regarded; and ye have rejected all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity, I will mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as sudden destruction, and your calamity cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish come upon you. Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they will seek me diligently but shall not find me.” vv. 24-28.

It is sad when Jews do not rise above Gentile moralizing on the life that now is or the death that terminates it; but how much sadder still when Christians are content with similar platitudes! Christ is the only true Light which on coming into the world casts light on every man. He, and He alone, gives us the truth of every thing. The divine judgment of man thus acquires proper definiteness and its full solemnity; and the light of the New Testament is thus thrown back on the Old, besides revealing what belongs to itself pre-eminently if not exclusively.

Take the picture the Lord in Luke 17 draws of the kingdom of God, when it is no longer a hidden matter of faith or of mere profession as now; but the Son of man shall be in His day as the lightning which lightens out of the one part under the heaven and shines unto the other. It will be in truth as in the days of Noah or in those of Lot — unexpected, inevitable, and utter destruction of the ungodly, as they are in the midst of their busy pursuits. When the Son of man thus comes, shall He find faith on the earth? How far is it to be found now?

Take again the view He gives in Luke 21, not only of signs in the sun and in the moon and in the stars, but of

the moral state on the earth when the powers of heaven shall be shaken. It is not the end of the world, but of the age, when the Son of man is seen coming in a cloud, and the kingdom of God will be established manifestly and in power that will put down all opposition;

This “sudden destruction” is here before the inspiring Spirit, who maintains the edge of His sword unblunted by tradition and callous unbelief. The Word of God of old, all His Word, is good, wherein He calls man to hear; but He is refused. He stretched out His hand imploringly, but none regarded; His counsel was rejected, and His reproof no less. What remained possible under the law? Unsparing judgment. How terrible when Jehovah, patient and long-suffering, laughs at the calamity of those that despised Him, mocks the fears, distress, and anguish of those who mocked Him, and has no answer for their call, nor will He be found, though then sought diligently! To fear the judgment, especially when it falls, is not to fear Jehovah.

The warning of Jehovah was solemn, but not more solemn than sure. Impossible that He could lie. If faithful to His own in doing all He says to cheer them now, He is no less righteous in dealing with His enemies; He will recompense them.

“Because they hated knowledge and chose not the fear of Jehovah; they would none of my counsel, they despised all my reproof; therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their way, and be filled with their own devices. For the turning back of the simple shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them. But whoso hearkeneth unto me shall dwell safely and be at rest from fear of evil.” vv. 29-33.

Divine compassion is unfailing for the ignorant where it is not wilful. No less severe is the abhorrence of such as hate knowledge in the things of God, which of course is alone considered here. And what can be more sadly plain than to “choose not the fear of Jehovah”? It proves the enmity of the heart. Is He indifferent to man? It was only the vilest of the heathen who laid it down formally; but what was the general state of the Jews of old? What is that of professing Christendom in our own land and every other today?

Christ has shed better and perfect light, and the final revelation of God is fullness of grace and truth through Him. But what is the issue of slighting it and Him? It is more conspicuously true now than in Solomon’s time that “they would none of my counsel, they despised all my reproof.” When God came into the world in Christ’s Person, they turned Him out of it. They hated Him without a cause. His grace only made Him more despicable in their eyes. His counsel irritated. His reproof was a laughingstock. What will the end be?

Jehovah is not mocked with impunity. “Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their way and be filled with their own devices.” Sowing to the flesh must be reaping destruction. He does not execute judgment as yet; but it will come assuredly and soon — tribulation and anguish for man — indignation and wrath on His part who judges. It is easy to turn away from grace and truth, from righteousness at any time; but the backsliding of the simple will slay them, and the prosperity of the foolish shall lure them to perdition.

“Hear, and thy soul shall live.” So said the prophet Isaiah, and it is blessedly true under the gospel. “He

that heareth my word, and believeth him that sent me hath life eternal, and cometh not into judgment, but is passed from death unto life." So declared He who is the Truth, as He is the Way and the Life. Or, as it is written here, "Whoso hearkeneth unto me shall dwell safely, and shall be at rest from fear of evil." Is it not a goodly shelter in a world of evil and danger? Christ is it now to every one that believes on Him, not only rest from evil but from the fear of it by grace.

Proverbs 2

Here the Holy Spirit turns from the sad end of impious indifference and contempt, to enter on a new part of His design. He shows how the moral wisdom and right understanding is to be obtained, which consists in the fear of Jehovah and the knowledge of God, at least by the submissive and docile heart.

"My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and lay up my commandments with thee; so that thou wilt incline thine ear to wisdom, and apply thy heart to understanding; yea if thou cry after discernment, [and] lift up thy voice for understanding, if thou seek her as silver and search for her as for hid treasures; then shalt thou apprehend the fear of Jehovah, and find the knowledge of God. For Jehovah giveth wisdom; out of his mouth come knowledge and understanding. He layeth up sound wisdom for the upright, a shield to those that walk in integrity; guarding the paths of just judgment and keeping the way of his saints. Then thou shalt understand righteousness and judgment and equity — every good path." vv. 1-9.

As we are begotten of God's will by the word of truth, so to receive His words, and lay up His commandments

with one, is the constant condition of blessing. We see in Luke 10 our Lord deciding for Mary the good part which should not be taken from her. In this Martha complained of her sister's indifference. For she herself was wrong in judging Mary's sitting at His feet and hearing His word. It is really to incline the ear to wisdom, and to apply the heart to understanding. Yet this is not all, for at the beginning of Luke 11 our Lord shows the need and the value of earnest prayer also. So here to cry after discernment, to lift up the voice for understanding, follows according to God the reception of His words. We are called to dependence and to confidence in thus importunately looking up; for every good gift and every perfect giving is from the Father of lights, as Solomon could attest, who thus sought and found wisdom.

Our age can testify the zeal with which men seek silver and gold and other hidden treasures, as Solomon's day of magnificence and noble designs of an earthly sort was famous for its success; for that enterprise was conducted by his skill beyond any other monarch. Now it is the mere vulgar thirst for lucre to spend on vanity and self-indulgence to a degree without parallel in the breadth of its diffusion. But now, as then, the toils are immense, the dangers continual, the sufferings extreme, the experience full of bitter trial and frequent disappointment, the moral atmosphere shameless. But the quest demands in any case constancy and endurance and undaunted resolution; and thence does the Holy Spirit draw the lesson where no disappointment can be. "If thou seek her [wisdom] as silver, and search for her as for hid treasures, then shalt thou apprehend the fear of Jehovah and find the knowledge of God." Jehovah is full of goodness and mercy. So here He "giveth wisdom,"

when the heart is thus in earnest. It is the reversal of man's dream of education. Man is proud of his own acquisitions. "Jehovah giveth wisdom; out of his mouth [not of man's mind or heart] come knowledge and understanding." Where are we to find what "His mouth" gives out, but in His Word?

Solomon failed to maintain the brightness of his beginning; and old age found him foolish about his wives, and faithless about the glory of Him who had given him all that made him what he was at first. Still less could Solomon guarantee wisdom for the son that succeeded to his throne; none acted less wisely than Rehoboam, and his humiliation was not small. But "Jehovah giveth wisdom," He only and surely, to such as wait on Him with purpose of heart and diligently search into and value the treasures of that Word which He has magnified above all His name.

It is plain throughout that not intellectual activity is in question, but what is spiritual and for moral ends practically. Hence in verse 7 it is said, "He layeth up sound wisdom for the upright; a buckler [he is] to those that walk in integrity." There is assured a supply of what is valued most, and guardian care for those whose eye and heart are toward His revealed will in their ways. But it is wholesome to notice that He guards the path of just judgment; that is, His own chosen way, And He also preserves the way of His saints or godly ones. He knows the way which pleases Him, and He shows it to His own, who desire nothing more than to see and follow it. Christ it is who brought this out habitually and in manifold forms. See John 1:44; John 8:12; John 12:26; John 14:6. It is as real today as when He presented it in following Himself. Indeed the disciples far better knew

its blessedness when He went on high and the Spirit came to be in them, who abides for us to know it now. “Then thou shalt know righteousness and judgment and equity — every good path.” We ought to know it even better and in higher ways than a godly Israelite could.

The preservative power of wisdom is next shown in guarding from moral perils, whether of iniquity or of corruption.

“For wisdom shall enter into thy heart and knowledge be pleasant unto thy soul, discretion shall watch over thee, understanding shall keep thee: — to deliver thee from the way of evil, from the man that speaketh froward things; [from those] who forsake the paths of uprightness, to walk in the ways of darkness; who rejoice to do evil — delight in the frowardness of evil; who in their paths are crooked, and pervert in their course; — to deliver thee from the strange woman, from the stranger who flattereth with her words; who forsaketh the friend of her youth and forgetteth the covenant of her God. For her house inclineth unto death, and her paths unto the dead; none that go unto her return again, nor attain unto the paths of life; — that thou mayest walk in the way of the good and keep the paths of the righteous. For the upright shall dwell in the land, and the perfect shall remain in it. But the wicked shall be cut off from the land, and the treacherous shall be plucked out of it.” vv. 10-22.

How admirable is the wisdom Jehovah gives the heart! and not less on the negative or dark side than on the positive, especially where the knowledge that accompanies it is pleasant to the soul. Discretion and discernment follow with vigilance against an evil world.

Violence and greed are not the only dangers but the way of evil through deceitful speech. Silence is not always golden; but “the tongue of the just is choice silver” (Prov. 10:20); or, as the New Testament exhorts, “Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt.” How powerful is the soft and pure answer, not only to turn away wrath, but to check heat and pride and will! It is dangerous to hear froward things; it is wicked to speak them. How soon after this the paths of uprightness are forsaken to walk in the ways of darkness! — evil words allowed lead to a walk which God’s light never illumines. How sad the descent in rejoicing to do evil! — delighting in the frowardness, or deceits of evil! It is to glory in the worst shame — how crooked in their paths and perverse in their course! Truly their judgment is just.

But the discretion that flows from wisdom is no less efficacious to guard from “the strange woman” (v. 16) and her flattering words, where lust reigns, not love, and selfish passion, not true affection and tender regard. Debauchery is all that could be expected from her that forsakes the guide of her youth, and forgets the covenant of her God.

We do not hear the glad tidings of grace in this Book. There is no gospel call throughout. It addresses those who are under the law and the covenant, whoever else may profit by it. It is very excellent for any man that has ears, and those who know most of grace and heavenly privilege will most prize it; its voice direct is to the ancient people of God, to Israel. For them all flows simply and easily. There is no strain of a single sentence or word, no need of accommodation, no lending it a sense which it does not truly contain or convey. In it

therefore, “Jehovah” appears regularly, and “Elohim” rarely used has its exceptional force.

By the way, remark how the notion of various writers here or anywhere indicated by such designations is the shallowest of dreams. It may afford pleasant pastime to men who, not knowing God (or, at least, beguiled and blinded by such), find in its cultivation a field for imagination and ingenuity without truth, conscience, or love, a mere linguistic or intellectual tour de force whetted by the keen will to damage and deface every landmark of divine authority.

It is evident that corruption, especially when it takes the form of the violation of a holy relationship, is as hateful to God as it is destructive to man. See how Babylon and its counterpart is spoken of and dealt with in the Revelation. So here it is said that “her house inclineth unto death, and her path unto the dead.” This, Israel as a people had to prove before Christendom existed to follow the fatal wake. It is no less true of individuals. “None that go unto her [the corrupting woman] return again, nor attain unto the paths of life.”

Wisdom then from Jehovah it is that insures discretion to walk in the way of the good and to keep the paths of the righteous. So were led the faithful of old; but how much brighter is the light of life in following Him whose ways and words here below we know from God as of none else! Yet was Jehovah’s word, before He shone in this world of darkness, a lamp to their feet and a light to their path. And the day hastens when it will be made manifest to every eye that “the upright shall dwell in the land, and the perfect shall remain in it.” What was plainly attested in the days of David and Solomon is but

a witness to the full display of this truth in the coming kingdom, when “the wicked shall be cut off from the land, and the treacherous shall be plucked out of it.”

Proverbs 3

The opening chapters set out moral wisdom in the fear of Jehovah as the true and sure preservative in a world of self-will and its evils of violence and corruption. Redemption is not introduced any more than a new nature, but the duty primarily for the Israelite of subjection to divine instruction, with the consequent establishment in the land when the wicked perish out of it.

In verses 1-4 there is still more ample exhortation as well as admonition, that the discipline might issue in the happiest and most fruitful results.

“My son, forget not my teaching, but let thy heart keep my commandments: for length of days and years of life and peace shall they add to thee. Let not mercy and truth forsake thee: bind them about thy neck; write them upon the tablet of thy heart; and thou shalt find favour and good understanding in the sight of God and man.” vv. 1-4.

We thus learn how far the Old Testament was from casting the people of God on the sentiments, emotions, or reasonings of their own hearts. It was but an imperfect, or at least partial, revelation. “For the law made nothing perfect.” The first man was under process of trial; the Second had not yet appeared. There were dealings of God and testings of man; revelations from God, but not yet God revealed. For the Son of God had

not come nor given us an understanding that we might know Him that is True.

Yet even in the days when faith waited for its Object and His work, and the best blessing then lay in promise, the heart was formed by the positive teaching afforded, and trained in the observance of commandments which came from God. They might come through a parent; and such no doubt was the due order in Israel, as it has been marked from their father Abraham, as Jehovah deigned to express His pleasure in his commanding his children and his household, that they might keep the way of Jehovah, to do justice and judgment. But what gave divine value was that it was His teaching, and that the commandments enjoined were His. This alone sanctifies — obeying God, obeying His Word, the effect and proof of love, when any are in relationship with God. Nor do we forget but remember what we love and value.

So the Lord puts it in His matchless way to His disciples. “He that hath My commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me; and he that loveth Me shall be loved of My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself unto him.” John 14:21. What a contrast with dark superstition, forbidden to have His commandments through fear of making an ill use of them, and shut up to a sinful director, and to its tradition nobody knows whence, both human and precarious at best! What a contrast with the yet darker sin, which denies the authority of God to every scripture, and thereby would deprive His words of spirit and life!

Even a Jew was not so bereft of blessing. He was called not to forget what he had been taught, and his heart to observe commandments which were Jehovah’s only

through Moses or any other that communicated them. What a blessed picture Luke 2 sets before us of the Lord, thus obedient in the early days of His sojourn, subject to Joseph and Mary in Nazareth, yet conscious of a higher relationship and so occupied with His Father's things! And blessed were the fruits. Even then truly, as He said afterward, He kept His Father's commandments and abode in His love. So here it is written for the obedient Israelites, "length of days, and long life, and peace shall they add to thee."

But this is far from all. As we know that "grace and truth came by Jesus Christ," the Israelite was exhorted to cherish confidence in mercy, or loving-kindness, and truth. Let them "not forsake thee," is the word. He was entitled to believe and count on them habitually and evermore. "Bind them about thy neck, write them upon the tablet of thy heart." What ornament can compare with them? What inward lesson so cheering and invigorating! "And thou shalt find favour and good understanding [if this last be the shade of sense here meant] in the sight of God and man."

So we see in our perfect pattern. Our Lord assuredly found in His unequalled path of subjection "favour" with God and man, as we are told. Whether the word often rendered "good understanding" is not modified here, as sometimes elsewhere, may be questioned. But as it stands, it was a good and welcome stamp of divine approval through devotedness to God's will, without either self-seeking or men-pleasing. Happy, when as here, it comes as the answer without as well as on high, to grace and truth written on the heart! Now too one word, Christ, expresses all; and the Spirit of the living God is given to us who believe, that He may be written

truly and deeply on those tablets of flesh, our hearts. How rich the grace wherein we stand! For we all, contemplating with unveiled face the glory of the Lord, are being changed into the same image from glory to glory as by the Lord the Spirit.

Confidence in God, and in the relationship He forms for us with Him, is the fruit of faith. It is the next call here, and it is found ever the sure answer of His grace. It ought to be still more easy for the Christian, seeing that how many soever be the promises of God, in Christ is the Yea; wherefore also through Him is the Amen unto the glory of God through us. This is just as it should be for the saints passing through a wilderness world. If all were fulfilled in us, the changed state of glorification would be incompatible with the needed trial. But that they are fulfilled in Him, that in Him is the Yea, is the ground of peace and joy and comfort; and victory for us is exactly what the God of all grace meant that we should have in the fullest measure by the Holy Ghost given to us. For we have in Christ's redemption the remission of our sins, and only await His coming for adoption, the redemption of our bodies, having already the Spirit of the Son sent into our hearts crying, Abba, Father. What a power of deliverance from leaning upon our own understanding!

"Trust in Jehovah with all thy heart, and lean not unto thine own discernment; in all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall make straight thy paths. Be not wise in thine own eyes; fear Jehovah, and depart from evil; it shall be health for thy navel, and moisture for thy bones." vv. 5-8.

Worthily does the chapter open with the call to trust in Jehovah. As He, He only, is God, so was He the God of the fathers, the God of Israel. How blessed for the Israelite that he had Him to trust in! that He even demanded his trust! He was in no way exhorted to trust himself. He was but a creature whose breath is in his nostrils; what is he to be accounted of? It was wise to have done with man to lean on, wiser still to trust in Jehovah. Yes, He was and is the eternal God, merciful, gracious, slow to wrath, great in goodness and truth, keeping His goodness to thousands of generations, pardoning iniquity, transgression, and sin, yet holding no guilty one as innocent, but visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the sons and on the sons of sons, on the third and on the fourth generation. Not that this is His language to the Christian or the Church, but just His declaration of Himself to Moses the mediator for Israel, that they should know His governing character and principles.

Yes, it was good and right to trust in Jehovah with all the heart, and to lean not on one's own discernment, as the tempter always advises to ruin, sorrow, and shame. This is the divine counsel for the heart. But the Israelite needed also to "acknowledge Him" in all his ways. And the heart if loyal would prompt to honour Him thus. For practical inconsistency is a burden to the upright; and it is due to Jehovah to own Him where He is apt to be ignored or forgotten in each detail of walk, and in them all. Nor was it even without present fruit, for He could not be unmindful, who never slumbers or sleeps. "And He shall make straight thy paths." He is Lord of all, no less than He is the Eternal, and concerns Himself with

every obstacle and difficulty for such as would walk unswervingly according to His will.

The great danger for all, though for some of thought and experience more than others, is to seek counsel from within. Yet experience should have taught the reflecting a less flattering tale. All Scripture re-echoes what is here written, “Be not wise in thine own eyes.” The bait of Satan was to become so, and man has ever coveted it. How blessed when we learn our folly and find an incomparably better wisdom open to us! Certainly to the Christian, to them that are called both Jews and Greeks, the crucified Christ preached to us is God’s power and God’s wisdom. What they counted foolishness is wiser than men; and what looked the extremity of weakness is stronger than men. Of God are we in Christ Jesus, who from God was made to us wisdom and all things. Well may we glory in Him.

But there is a word for conscience as well as heart, and none the less now, but more when, having been purged once for all, we have no more conscience of sins. “Fear Jehovah, and depart from evil.” Was there ever true fear of Him without pardon? Certainly Psalm 130:4 makes clear that there is pardon with Him that He may be feared. Without it, what can the fear be but servile and tainted? This nerves the soul to “depart from evil.” We hate it, because He hates it; and such doubtless it is in itself, intrinsically evil. We turn away from what the serpent commands, trembling at His word. A son honours his father, a servant his master. His honour, His fear, are no longer light things to us. And the effect is wholesome and blessed. “It shall be health for thy navel, and moisture for thy bones.” The boast of altruism might perhaps in a way suit an angel, not a sinner nor a saint.

We need to be blessed that we may be a blessing to others; we need and have God in Christ the Lord and Saviour. We love Him because He first loved us. Is it a wonder that all then goes on well? How sad when it is not so!

Read Job 1:1-8; Job 2:3 and think what pleasure God takes in him that fears Himself and abstains from evil. He knew all the while the weak point and danger for Job; but Satan failed to reach it by his hostile measures. Jehovah did through Job's friends, though they were beyond comparison more faulty than Job, and indebted to his intercession to shield them from His dealing according to their folly, wise as they had thought themselves.

Prosperity and chastening are treated, each in the next pair of verses respectively. Let us hear the wise king, inspired now with the best wisdom for man on earth, and first in view of earthly blessing on the due recognition of the living God.

"Honour Jehovah with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase; so shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy vats shall overflow with new wine." vv. 9, 10.

Jehovah is precisely that designation of God which He gave to Israel that they might learn His ways and bear witness to Him in His earthly government. Things are sadly changed now, for His people played Him false, went after strange gods, and rejected His Anointed. But He abides the same, and will arise and have mercy on Zion; and when He does, the nations shall fear His name, and all the kings of the earth His glory. But when things looked fair, and Judah and Israel were many, and

the king made silver to be in Jerusalem as stones; and cedars as sycamores for abundance, this was the word: “honour Jehovah with thy substance, and with the first-fruits of thine increase.” It is always morally true, though then when the reality of direct divine judgment was being shown, the result was unfailing: “so shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy vats shall overflow with new wine.” The rejection of Christ brought in the revelation of heavenly hopes for believers, and sufferings, persecutions, etc., with better spiritual blessings even while they were here. The text speaks of normal results for the earth, and Israel on it.

But, man being as he is, there is another side, which brings out divine goodness yet more strikingly. “His eyes behold, his eyelids try the children of men.” Still more closely bearing on us, we read that “the eyes of Jehovah are upon the righteous, and his ears are toward their cry. The face of Jehovah is against them that do evil, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth”; as on the other hand, “Jehovah is nigh to those that are of a broken heart and saveth those that be of a contrite spirit.” Hence the need and the blessing of His ways with our ways.

“My son, despise not the instruction of Jehovah, neither be weary of his chastisement; for whom Jehovah loveth he chasteneth, even as a father the son in whom he delighteth.” vv. 11, 12.

There is, as always, another and more intimate kind of divine government, and this wholly independent of the public state of things. It was true when Solomon reigned and wrote; it is only more fully disclosed and deeply known under the gospel. There is ever a government of

souls, and here it is stated with all simplicity. How affectionate the call! “My son, despise not the instruction of Jehovah, neither be weary of his chastisement.” For these are the snares of the enemy — either to make light of His training on the one hand, or on the other to sink under His reproof, as if He dealt hardly with us.

The epistle to the Hebrews (Heb. 12:5, 6) appropriates this ancient order, and applies it to the Christian now, pointing out the love which acts unfailingly when we fail, as we too often do. Nor is the blessed object less which the Father of spirits has toward us; for it yields peaceable fruit in those thus exercised, though for the present it seems not joyous but grievous. There is therefore no ground in it for despondency, but the best reason for the lame that they be not turned out of the way, but rather be healed.

The first epistle of Peter (1 Peter 1:15-17) is no less plain. “As he who called you is holy, be ye also holy in all manner of living; because it is written, Be ye holy, for I am holy. And if ye call on him as Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to the work of each, pass the time of your sojourn in fear.” It is now that the Father judges His children in the love that will make us hate our every inconsistency; for His grace has through Christ and His work exempted us from that future judgment which is appointed for all that believe not, and walk in evil and darkness (John 5:23-28).

Even more explicit is the word in 1 Corinthians 11:29-32. The Apostle explains that in the sickness and death that fell on not a few saints at Corinth, the Lord was judging those who did not discern or discriminate

themselves, but walked carelessly, even as to the Lord's supper. But when thus judged now, "we are chastened [or, disciplined] of the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world." It is a present moral dealing which might go as far as cutting off; but even so, it was His chastisement in love, that the saints should not share the world's condemnation, as all unbelievers must.

The reason given in our text and cited in the New Testament bears out fully the love from which present chastening flows. "For whom Jehovah loveth he chasteneth, even as a father the son in whom he delighteth." It is not always however because of evil done; His chastening may be to guard us from evil. It may be preventive, as well as corrective. Shall we not, as children confiding in Him, accept it with thanksgiving? We have the distinct proof of His love. Let us never doubt, but believe and bow.

But chastening or discipline is far from all, proof though it be of Jehovah's love. There is positive blessing to reap, and of a high order.

"Blessed [is] the man [that] findeth wisdom, and the man [that] getteth understanding. For the gain thereof [is] better than the gain of silver, and her revenue than fine gold. She [is] more precious than rubies, and all the things thou canst desire are not equal to her. Length of days [is] in her right hand, in her left hand riches and honour. Her ways [are] ways of pleasantness, and all her paths [are] peace. She [is] a tree of life to them that lay hold on her; and blessed [is] he that retaineth her. Jehovah by wisdom founded the earth; by understanding he established the heavens. By his knowledge the depths

were broken up, and the skies drop down the dew." vv. 13-20.

It is God, we are told in a later revelation, that gives liberally to all, and without reproach. Yet He will be asked for it; not that any one adds to Him, or that He is beholden to man's hand. But He cannot deny Himself; and this it would be, if one found wisdom or got understanding elsewhere. The blessing comes through dependence on Him. Who of mankind knew this better than Solomon himself? Did not God say to him, "Because thou hast asked this thing, and hast not asked for thyself long life; neither hast asked riches for thyself, nor hast asked the life of thine enemies, but hast asked for thyself understanding to discern judgment; behold, I have done according to thy word." Nor is there another means; and "blessed" indeed is he that proves afresh that God is true and faithful, as He ever is. Even the beloved Son, when He in grace deigned to become man, even Jesus, so walked here below from tender years, and increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man. He received all as man from His Father.

If it was so with the Jew before Jehovah, is the blessedness less now that the Son of God is come, and has given us an understanding to know Him that is true? Is He less accessible, or less gracious, now that He is revealed as Christ's Father and our Father, His God and our God? Has He not abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence, and this of the highest character and largest hope, in accordance with our calling and inheritance? And if for the greatest things, does this kind of blessing fail for the least things day by day? How true that the gain thereof is better than the gain of silver, and the revenue than fine gold. Surely we can say

that the wisdom that comes down from above is more precious than rubies, and that all the things one can desire are not equal to the rich boon of divine favour.

Willingly do we bow to Jehovah's promise of wisdom to the Israelite, of "length of days" to be in her right hand, and of "riches and honour" in her left hand. He that died and rose again has brought us deeper grace and shown us a yet more excellent way; so that what things were gain, one has in one's measure counted loss for Christ, and it may be, as it surely ought to be, to count all things loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus the Lord — to count them dung that one may win Him and be found in Him in that heavenly glory where He is, renouncing all righteousness save what is through the faith of Him, the righteousness which is of God by faith. This is indeed Christian privilege — that we may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable to His death, if by any means, no matter how trying the way, one might attain unto the resurrection from among the dead, as Paul knew pre-eminently.

Not only is such experimental wisdom as the Apostle expresses in Philippians alien to all that flesh and blood values, but it rises unspeakably higher than all that was or could be revealed of old, as for instance in the Proverbs, or even the Psalms. It awaited the presence of the Son of God, the work of redemption, and the sending down of the Holy Spirit from the glorified Head. The wisdom and the understanding, of which this book treats, remain ever for man on the earth; and Jehovah will doubtless thus bless His people looking to Him for these good gifts in the day of power and glory; for the word He has spoken cannot fail, but shall stand

everlastingly. But man's evil, and the Jews' in particular, has given occasion for God to bring "some better thing" in every way. Of this we see the basis and substance and exemplar in Christ crucified, risen, and set in the highest glory, quite above all Old Testament expectations. And we know that "the wisdom of God in a mystery" is not confined to His heavenly and universal exaltation, but in God's sovereign purpose embraces us too who have believed in Him since the cross. It is the hidden wisdom, as the Apostle adds (1 Cor. 2:7), which God ordained before the world unto our glory; but a glory which now calls for, not length of days on earth, or riches or honour, but fellowship with Christ's sufferings, "always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh." It is just Christianity in contrast with all before, and its hope for the heavens in the day when the earth also shall be full of the knowledge of Jehovah as the waters cover the sea.

Still, whether the wisdom be of the general kind for the earth, or of that higher and heavenly kind which we now know in Christ, we can truly say that "her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace." When our Lord tasted rejection, and sufferings, the Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief beyond all, nonetheless was it His to say, "The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage"! It is ours thus to follow Him, living on account of Him, as He on account of the Father; but it can only be by making Him our constant food (John 6:57). So here wisdom is said to be "a tree of life to them that lay hold on her; and blessed is he that retaineth her." How much more can we boast of what He is to our souls by faith!

The oracle before us can add, “Jehovah by wisdom founded the earth; by understanding he established the heavens; by his knowledge the depths were broken up, and the skies drop down the dew” — blessed witness of His multifarious wisdom and unlimited understanding, as His knowledge directed the devastation of the deluge, and orders the kindly refreshings of a peaceful night. The one word, Christ, recalls to us heights and depths more wondrous far.

If Jehovah manifested wisdom, understanding, and knowledge in creation, and in its least things as well as the greatest, how vain in all to forego the quest, or the means open to them from on high!

“My son, let them not depart from thine eyes; keep true counsel and discretion: so shall they be life to thy soul, and grace to thy neck. Then shalt thou walk in thy way securely, and thy foot shall not stumble. When thou liest down, thou shalt not be afraid, but thou shalt lie down, and thy sleep shall be sweet. Be not afraid of sudden fear, nor of the desolation of the wicked when it cometh; for Jehovah shall be thy confidence, and shall keep thy foot from being taken.” vv. 21-26.

Change is a snare to the young especially; hence Jehovah’s wise ways were no more to depart from their eyes than they were to be wise in their own eyes; life inwardly, honour outwardly, would follow; the walk would be secure, the foot stumble not. Nor would the night bring fear, but sweet sleep. Nor would alarm surprise when the storm falls on the wicked, for Jehovah is the confidence against all snares and terrors.

“Withhold not good from those to whom it is due, when it is in the power of thy hand to do it. Say not unto thy

neighbour, Go and come again, and tomorrow I will give, when thou hast it by thee. Devise not evil against thy neighbour, seeing he dwelleth securely by thee. Strive not with a man without cause, if he have done thee no harm. Envy not the man of violence, and choose none of his ways. For the perverse [is] an abomination to Jehovah; but his secret [is] with the upright. The curse of Jehovah [is] in the house of the wicked; but he blesseth the habitation of the righteous. He indeed scorneth the scorners; but he giveth grace to the lowly. The wise shall inherit glory; but shame shall be the promotion of fools." vv. 27- 35.

The heart is deceitful as well as suspicious in a world of evil. Hence the importance of the simplehearted integrity which confiding in Him gives. He that gives (exhorted the Apostle) in simplicity, which is liberality. The lack of looking to Jehovah brings crookedness in dealing with man; the bowels of compassion are closed. The same lack may be even mischievous, and quarrelsome, instead of, if possible, as far as depends on us, living peaceably with all. And why envy the violent man, or choose any of his short-cuts? All these ways are turned aside from God's will, which alone is good, acceptable, perfect, and which alone makes happy him who learns it in Christ. The perverse is an abomination to Jehovah, as His secret is with the upright. "Shall I hide from Abraham the thing that I do?" So His curse is not only on the person, but on the house of the wicked, as He blesses the habitation of the righteous. Neither wealth can avert the one, nor poverty prevent the other.

Yet there is an evil even lower, and never did it abound so much as now in these closing days. Scorn or mocking is prevalent, and self reigns unblushingly in contempt of

all that is good and noble and generous, as well as holy and true. But “He indeed scorneth the scorners,” as surely as “He giveth grace to the lowly.” The wise shall understand, as Daniel assures; but, further, “the wise shall inherit glory,” whereas “shame shall be the promotion of the foolish,” whatever the deception of present appearances or of such as trust them. “Judge not according to sight [said the Lord], but judge righteous judgment.”

Proverbs 4

Much depends on the way in which instruction is given. We see its perfection in the great Teacher as depicted opening His mission in the synagogue at Nazareth (Luke 4:16-22). There He had been brought up, and there He read a prophecy which beyond doubt applied to Him alone, as soon appeared; and all bore Him witness and wondered at the words of grace which proceeded out of His mouth. Alas! they clashed with the will of man, and roused implacable anger, which showed itself even then murderously. But wisdom is justified of her children, whatever self-will may do or say. Let us then pursue the scripture before us.

“Hear, ye sons, the instruction of a father, and attend to know understanding; for I give you good doctrine: forsake ye not my law. For I was a son to my father, tender and an only one in the sight of my mother. And he taught me and said to me, Let thy heart retain my words; keep my commandments and live. Get wisdom, get understanding; forget not neither decline from the words of my mouth. Forsake her not, and she shall keep thee; love her, and she shall preserve thee. The beginning of wisdom [is], Get wisdom; and with all thy

getting get understanding. Exalt her, and she shall promote thee; she shall bring thee to honour, when thou dost embrace her. She shall give to thy head a garland of grace, a crown of glory shall she deliver to thee." vv. 1-9.

The form chosen is that of a father, not of a legislator. It is not therefore even a catechism of the "ten words," but parental instruction; and attention is called in order to intelligence or discernment. The same Spirit who took His part in creation, who gave skill for the glory of Jehovah, who wrought in all that was good and great and holy, would here engage the young heart to hear. For He assuredly has good doctrine to give, and would guard against forsaking His law or teaching. The instrument employed can speak of the loving care bestowed on his own early days, when he was "a son to his father, tender and only beloved in the sight of his mother." The affections are thus recalled to awaken the new duties. It was not only that the teacher had himself been taught, but that he did so appealed touchingly. "Let thy heart retain my words; keep my commandments and live."

It is not language or letters or science, but that education of which the fear of Jehovah is the foundation. It supposes neither a state of innocence, such as once was, nor a prohibitory test when fallen man thought himself quite able to do all that Jehovah spoke against the evil he was prone to. Mercy, divine mercy, deigned to supply what neither the individual nor the race possessed. It is true that man has a conscience; he knows good and evil, but only as a sinful creature, not doing the good that he would, but doing the evil that he would not — a truly miserable state, from which

redemption alone furnishes an adequate deliverance in the power of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus.

This deliverance, we all recognize, is not the subject handled here, but the instruction that is addressed to subject hearts, like the rest of the Old Testament, within the ancient people of God. But now it is for the Christian to profit by it to the uttermost, for “all things are ours.” The Book does not give the exalted Head nor the heavenly glory we are to share with Him as members of His body, nor the duties which flow from that relationship; but it does reveal divine wisdom for a saint here below, first in general moral principles (Proverbs 1-9), then in the greatest affluence of details to Proverbs 29, with a fitting close in Proverbs 30 and 31.

Thus the exhortation is, “Get wisdom, get understanding; forget not, neither decline from the words of my mouth.” Obedience, heart obedience, is sought. Could Jehovah be content with anything short of it? Could one of His people desire otherwise? Undoubtedly self-will is the great and constant hindrance; and the enemy would excite it, and shut out God by the objects without and the passions within. All the deeper is the need of instruction, and in the varied way just indicated, which divine goodness here supplies. Here we have a father’s authority urged, and the responsibility of sons claimed. This was always true for man here below, as the law long after recognized; and it holds good now that we are no longer under guidance as children.

They were not to forsake wisdom, which has preservative power to “love her, and she shall keep thee.” The beginning of wisdom, as we are forcibly told,

is to “get wisdom, and with all thy getting get understanding.” Those who are of God pass through a world of evil and need wisdom from above to keep them; for it is a wilderness where is no way, save that which grace provides for faith. Suffering there will be for Christ’s sake as well as for righteousness: but “exalt her [not self], and she shall promote thee; she shall bring thee to honour when thou dost embrace her, and she shall give to thy head a garland of grace: a crown of glory shall she deliver to thee.” How sure will all this be in due time! David in his earlier days was a fine example. He went at his father’s bidding in no pride or naughtiness of heart; and as he exalted wisdom in the fear of Jehovah, so was he promoted, and, embracing her, was brought to honour. He behaved himself wisely, so that his enemy was compelled to own him blessed — that he should both do great things and still prevail. Yet was he tried beyond most.

The way of wisdom is next contrasted with that of the wicked; and here the exhortation is individualized.

“Hear, my son, and receive my sayings, and the years of thy life shall be multiplied. I will teach thee in the way of wisdom; I will lead thee in the paths of uprightness. When thou goest, thy steps shall not be straitened; and when thou runnest, thou shalt not stumble. Take fast hold of instruction, let her not go; keep her, for she is thy life. Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not into the way of evil [men]; avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away. For they sleep not, except they have done mischief; and their sleep is taken away, unless they cause [some] to fall. For they eat the bread of wickedness and drink the wine of violence. But the path of the righteous is as the shining light going on and

brightening to the perfect day. The way of the wicked [is I as darkness: they know not at what they stumble." vv. 10-19.

It is not by the sight of the eyes nor by the activity of the mind, nor even by the cultivation of the affections, that the wisdom here commended comes. "Hear, and thy soul shall live," said Isaiah; and so the Apostle, "Faith [cometh] by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." No doubt the coming of the Son of God brought this truth and every other into an evidence before unknown. But the principle ever applied. Whoever obtained a good report, obtained it by faith; and faith rests on God's Word, as Christ is the main Object of it all, however much be corrective or disciplinary. Hence the word here is, "Hear, my son, and receive my sayings, and the years of thy life shall be multiplied." Nor is there uncertainty when Jehovah furnishes the means. "I will teach thee in the way of wisdom, I will lead thee in the paths of uprightness." The happy result is assured to such as believe that it is from Him, and doubt not His interest in His people and their blessing. "When thou goest, thy steps shall not be straitened; and when thou runnest, thou shalt not stumble." Nevertheless, earnestness of purpose is called for, and fidelity of heart. "Take fast hold of instruction, let her not go; keep her, for she is thy life."

Only we have to add that now the door of mercy is opened to those who have weighed money for that which is not bread. and earnings for that which satisfieth not — yea, have been children of folly, and have wallowed in sin. Grace can meet the deepest need, and Christ brings to God the most dark and distant. See wisdom in Luke 7, justified of all her children, eminently in one who might

have been deemed hopelessly corrupt. But is anything too hard for the Lord? He assuredly and openly vindicated the persistent soul who hid herself behind His love that owned hers coming by faith. Indeed it was faith which produced that love, and saved her, as He bade her go in peace, which His blood would make unfailing and unbreakable, all in due time.

But we have the opposite way not less clearly for warning — the way where one turns off from God and wanders anywhere else. “Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not into the way of evil [men]; avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away.” How urgent and importunate the voice of divine goodness and love! And it is none too loud, but most requisite; for the calls, and ties, and snares are many and manifold. But the word is unmistakably plain and pointed. And what a picture follows, of the zeal on the side of evil! “For they sleep not, except they have done mischief; and their sleep is taken away, unless they cause [some] to fall. For they eat the bread of wickedness and drink the wine of violence.” It is their life, nourishment, and joy, if joy it can be called, to mislead, injure, and destroy. But on the other hand, “the path of the righteous is as the shining light going on and brightening to the perfect day.” How we can bless God that Christ is this way; and there is but One in, but not of, this world; for He is the true light. “But the way of the wicked is as darkness,” and this so profound, and they so blind, that “they know not at what they stumble.” Grace alone calls and keeps by faith.

The 4th chapter concludes with a renewed call to heed a father’s words clothed with the authority of Jehovah.

“My son, attend to my words; incline thine ear to my sayings. Let them not depart from thine eyes; keep them in the midst of thy heart. For they are life to those that find them, and health to all their flesh. Keep thy heart more than all thou guardest; for out of it are the issues of life. Put away from thee perverseness of mouth, and corruption of lips put far from thee. Let thine eyes look right on, and thine eyelids look straight before thee. Ponder the path of thy feet, and be all thy ways well ordered. Turn not to the right hand nor to the left; remove thy foot from evil.” vv. 20-27.

As parental affection in the fear of Him who deigns to teach young no less than old would bring lessons of wisdom before the child, the listening ear, the attentive mind, cannot be dispensed with. Personal respect, however due, is not enough; the ears, the eyes, and above all, the heart, have their part to do. Such training is to be kept “in the midst” of the heart. What else is to be compared with what has Christ for its source, character, object, and aim? “In him was life, and the life was the light of men.” No wonder then that it can be added, “for they are life to those that find them and health to all their flesh”; or, as the Apostle says to his genuine son Timothy, “godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come. Faithful is the saying and worthy of all acceptation.” No doubt too Christianity has given immense accession to the truth by the coming of the Son of God. For “without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: he who was manifested in flesh, was justified in spirit, was seen of angels, was preached among Gentiles, was believed on in the world, was received up in glory.” Yes, the secret of piety is in Him thus known as

He is; and all else is but a fair show in the flesh, which flickers for a moment before it is extinguished forever.

Hence the call to “keep thy heart more than all thou guardest.” The utmost vigilance is needed and due; “for out of it are the issues of life.” Scripture ever and truly views the heart as the moral centre on which all outward conduct and walk depend. Hence the Lord in Luke 8 speaks of those who in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience; as in John 15 He said, “If ye abide in me. and my words abide in you. Ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done to you.” This indeed is piety: to abide in Him who is life and salvation and peace, to have His words, yea not only obeyed but constantly cherished, with prayers going up and answers coming down accordingly. No wonder then that His Father is glorified, much fruit borne, and the Lord Jesus not ashamed to own such as His disciples.

But there is meanwhile evil still allowed to go on around; and what is so trying, it is in our nature, the old man. That it was crucified with Christ in order that the body of sin might be annulled, so that we might no longer be slaves to sin, is our blessed knowledge by faith. This is no real reason that we should deny the existence of that evil thing in us but the best and most powerful ground why sin should not “reign” in our mortal body. For we are not under law but under grace. Hence, though this knowledge could not then be possessed, yet then as now the word is, “Put away from thee perverseness of mouth, and corruption of lips put far from thee.” The Epistle of James is the plain proof of the importance attached to this, and yet more pressed, if possible, than of old; but how deplorable the unbelief

that stood in doubt of its inspired authority and exceeding value in its own sphere! Nor did the Lord Himself slight the same need and danger when He taught — nor the great Apostle of the uncircumcision any more than those of the circumcision.

There is another call quite as urgent. “Let thine eyes look right on, and thine eyelids look straight before thee.” Christ ever was the object of faith, and He is now revealed as the way, no less than the truth and the life. But, morally speaking, the eye is of great moment, the state of our spiritual vision. As Christ gives us eyes who were born blind, so only He makes and keeps our vision clear. “The light of the body is the eye: therefore when thine eye is single, thy whole body also is full of light; but when it is evil, thy body also is full of darkness. Take heed therefore that the light which is in thee be not darkness” (Luke 11:34, 35). Let us not forget the searching word. Christ guides safely but by the single eye.

Nor are we left without direction in detail. “Ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be well-ordered.” Negligence is no more of faith than haste; and we slip in both ways through lack of dependence and attention to the Word of God.

The path of Christ is narrow, but direct through this world to Himself in glory. The saints were ever called to walk with God before their eyes; and His will is now declared thus to honour the Son. Hence, “Turn not to the right hand, nor to the left: remove thy foot from evil.” For evil lies on both sides.

Proverbs 5

The call of the son is to attend to “my wisdom,” before “a strange woman” is depicted vividly. Corruption demands and receives a yet deeper guard than violence.

“My son, attend to my wisdom, incline thine ear to mine understanding, that thou mayest keep reflection, and thy lips may preserve knowledge. For the lips of a strange woman drop honey, and her mouth [is] smoother than oil: but her end is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword. Her feet go down to death; her steps take hold on Sheol. Lest she should ponder the path of life, her ways are unstable, she knoweth [it] not. And now, children, hearken to me, and depart not from the words of my mouth. Remove thy way far from her, and come not nigh the door of her house; lest thou give thine honour to others, and thy years to the cruel; lest strangers be filled with thy wealth, and thy labours [go] to the house of an alien; and thou mourn in thine end, when thy flesh and thy body are consumed; and thou say, How have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof; and I have not obeyed the voice of my teachers, nor inclined mine ear to those that instructed me! I was well nigh in all evil in the midst of the congregation and assembly.” vv. 1-14.

Evil men were bad, a strange woman worse still. A higher wisdom is used, and an exercised understanding, that there may be discretion and knowledge so to apply the principle on the largest scale. The beast is lawless and shall perish utterly; but Babylon is even more loathsome, as to the Lord, so to all who seek His mind. There is nothing in nature so lovely as affection; but how ruinous and defiling, where the fear of God does not

guide it! He it is that puts and keeps us in our relationships which are the ground of our duties. But a strange woman is such because she ignores and forsakes them, and seeks to entice others. Fair words of flattery may be the beginning, sweet to the flesh; but her end is bitterness extreme, and frequently deep wounds. Nor is it loss of present happiness only, but the end of those things is death; and after death comes the judgment. Satan employs her to hinder all reflection, and to shut out all light from above. The strange woman abuses the quick perception of her sex to baffle moral discernment by such changes as none else can know. Thus will works without check, and conscience is more and more numbed by self-indulgence.

And what is the counsel here given? Prompt and thorough steering clear. “And now, children, hearken to me, and depart not from the words of my mouth. Remove thy way far from her, and come not nigh the door of her house.” So must every one act who would preserve moral purity. The path of life is far from her and her house. Christ alone gives life eternal and guides it; His word is for one in such a world as this, Follow Me. Is the warning not heeded? More follows to lay bare the paths of death. For there is a righteous government, whatever the complication in this life. Selfishness reaps its sad recompense. None can yield to it with impunity. Beware then of self-indulgence, “lest thou give thine honour to others, and thy years to the cruel; lest strangers be filled with thy wealth, and thy labours go to the house of an alien; and thou mourn in thine end, when thy flesh and thy body are consumed; and thou say, How have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof; and I have not obeyed the voice of my

teachers, nor inclined mine ear to those that instructed me! I was well nigh in all evil in the midst of the congregation and assembly." Bitter self-reproach is the end of the honey and oil which captivated at the beginning; and no wonder, after a career of sin and shame. It is a retrospect of guilty self-pleasing, the headiness that valued no authority, yielding neither respect nor obedience. "What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death." Nor is it the least painful reflection that all the evil committed was "in the midst of the congregation and assembly." This was no doubt that of Israel wherein all then revealed was by Jehovah. There was hypocrisy therefore covering the sins. How much more is the similar wickedness, when and where the fullest light of God is enjoyed!

In contrast with the fleshly lusts which war against the soul, and even here have no result but shame, Jehovah set up the holy relations of marriage in the sinless paradise of Eden. What a safeguard for man when an outcast through his own sin! What folly and ungodliness the dream of a Plato, which would dispense with the reality of one's own wife, one's own husband, one's own children in his ideal republic! Certainly there was no wisdom, nor understanding, in such a scheme. It is vagrancy of the most debasing kind. How gracious of Him to warn and guard weak passionate man from his own ruinous will!

"Drink waters out of thine own cistern, and running waters out of thine own well. Should thy fountains be dispersed abroad, and rivers of water in the broadways? Let them be only thine own, and not for strangers with thee. Let thy fountain be blessed; rejoice in the wife of

thy youth. A lovely hind and a graceful doe, let her breasts satisfy thee at all times; with her love be ravished continually. And why shouldest thou, my son, be ravished with a strange woman, and embrace the bosom of a stranger? For the ways of man are before Jehovah's eyes, and he pondereth all his paths. His own iniquities shall take the wicked, and he shall be holden with the cords of his sin. He shall die for lack of discipline; and in the greatness of his folly he shall go astray." vv. 15-23.

Two things become man that fears God. There is the outgoing of heart that loves his neighbour, or, as we Christians add, that loves our enemies in the spirit of the gospel. There is also the centring of the affections within the family. This last the father here would impress on his son. Here therefore the due place of the wife comes before us. It is the human relationship that survives from the beginning when sin was not; it is quite as essential now that the offence abounds. Wandering affections are selfish, carry their own shame, and have a permanent sting. As Jehovah instituted the sacred enclosure of the family round the parents, so He sanctions and enjoins warm affections in the head toward his counterpart. It is the most intimate bond of society at large as of the home circle. Heathenism, as we know, conceived its deities jealous of human happiness; it is easily understood; for as the Apostle tells us, they were but demons, fallen spiritual creatures that sought to drag the human race into their sin and misery, and to keep their victims from the love that delights in reconciling and saving them. There is but one that is good, even God; and He has now fully shown His best good, His grace, in His only-begotten Son for eternity as

well as the life that now is. But even before divine love thus shone out, the unmistakable goodness of Jehovah appears in these home precepts. “Drink waters out of thine own cistern, and running waters out of thine own well”; and all that follows is in keeping.

If verse 16 be rendered rightly in the Vatican Septuagint, it means, “Let not waters out of thy fountain be spilt by thee, but let thy waters go into the broadways.” The Alexandrian text goes with the Vulgate and the Authorized English Bible in omitting the negatives, yielding the sense that the children will reflect the parents according to the atmosphere they all breathed. The R.V. prefers the form of query, rather confirming the concentration of the verse preceding, and not adding the dispersion abroad intimated in the ordinary versions. It may not be easy to decide, but the R.V. has the effect of greater homogeneity, and more naturally falls in with verse 17, “Let them be only thine own, and not for strangers with thee.”

Then the passage becomes more narrowed to the partners of life. And very impressive it is that he who erred publicly in adding so many wives and concubines should be the one inspired to commend a single object of wedded love. “Let thy fountain be blessed; and rejoice in the wife of thy youth.” The words supplied by translators to introduce verse 19 are not only uncalled for, but enfeebling to the sense. To be cheerful abroad and morose at home, is to be thankless and unholy. “Let marriage,” exhorts the Apostle, “be honourable in all things.” As the A.V. stands, the words read as a stamp of warrant. It is really a call to hold the tie in honour, and this in every respect; and the warning follows there in accordance with verse 20 here.

Nor are the verses that succeed (21-23) to be disconnected. It is wholesome to remember that Jehovah not only honours His own institution for man, but watches over every transgression against it. Very grave is the admonition on His part in verse 21, too surely descriptive is the sketch in 22, 23 of the sinful folly that goes astray in this. It has been pointed out that the word “shall go astray” is the same word translated “ravished” in a good sense in verse 19 and in a bad sense in verse 20. This last prepares for what verse 23 requires, especially when we compare it with Proverbs 26:11, “a fool repeateth his folly.” It is a departure, ever going on from bad to worse.

Proverbs 6

From these grave moral dangers we are next directed to matters of a very different complexion. But if on the surface they seem much less serious, their consequences are often ruinous. How gracious of Jehovah to take notice of things which might seem beneath Him! Is it not due to His deep interest in His people?

“My son, if thou art become surety for thy neighbour (or friend), — hast thou stricken thy hand for a stranger, thou art snared with the words of thy mouth, thou art taken with the words of thy mouth. Do this now, my son, and deliver thyself since thou art come into the hand of thy neighbour; go, humble thyself, and importune thy neighbour. Give not sleep to thine eyes nor slumber to thine eyelids; deliver thyself from the [hunter’s] hand, and as a bird from the fowler’s hand.

“Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise: which having no chief, overseer, or ruler, provideth

her bread in the summer, [and] gathereth her food in the harvest. How long, sluggard, wilt thou lie down? When wilt thou arise out of thy sleep? A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to lie down! So shall thy poverty come as a rover, and thy want as an armed man." vv. 1-11.

It was the more notable that Jehovah should counsel His own, who might feel embarrassed by His command to love the neighbour as oneself. Instead of leaving it to human judgment or its conflict with amiable sentiment, He warns of the dangerous consequence in yielding to impulse. If the unwise step has been taken, it is right to acknowledge it, and wrong to break the words which have passed though to hurt. What then is becoming? "Go, humble thyself, and importune thy neighbour." This is painful, but wholesome. Jehovah will not fail to bless subjection to His word, and make a way of escape for both, though each may have to suffer for his own measure of fault in the transaction.

Does this word then absolutely prohibit such an act of kindness? It assuredly admonishes against the inconsiderate rashness which enters into such an engagement too often. If you are prepared before God to lose all that is at stake, and believe it His will, you are free. But apart even from the claims of nearer relationship, are you not a steward? Are you sure that the undertaking will bear the light? Is it for speculation? But supposing that your words have been spoken, and you wake up to see your folly, do not yield to pride or obstinacy, "deliver thyself"; and this, not by scolding your neighbour, but by confessing the simple truth of your own heedlessness. "Give not sleep to thine eyes nor slumber to thine eyelids" till this is done; He who thus

directs can give efficacy to His word, which is as wise as ours may be foolish.

In full contrast with the earnestness enjoined here is the indolent folly which is next portrayed vividly. The sluggard is sunk so low, that Jehovah bids him learn of the tiny “ant” as his sufficient monitor; so the lilies of the field are made in the New Testament to rebuke anxiety for raiment. Not a word is said of hoarding store for winter, as in fact like many animals they are then torpid for the most part. But their unceasing industry and good order and even care for others in the summer and harvest while activity is open to them, may well put to shame the self-indulgent slumberer. If moral weakness in its easygoing has exposed its prey to the hunter and the fowler, so on the listless and lazy, poverty comes like a tramp or an armed man that will not be denied. What goodness on Jehovah’s part to guard His people from both snares along their earthly pathway! How salutary for such as are called to higher things!

The Septuagint adds without warrant a lesson from the bee in verse 8, and gives a quite different turn to verse 11, making it a promise rather than a threat. One need not say that, however such words got into this Greek version, they are without warrant in the Hebrew. The Latin Vulgate follows the latter, not the former.

Unworthy as slothfulness is, bad and unwise for one to be idle, it is far worse to be active in evil, for this works mischief to others without end. The Holy Spirit first draws a portrait of the dangerous man in verses 12 to 15, and then presents the evils impersonally, save at the close, which are emphatically hateful to Jehovah in verses 16 to 19.

“A man of Belial, a wicked person, walketh with a perverse mouth. He winketh with his eyes; he speaketh with his feet; he teacheth with his fingers. Deceits [are] in his heart; he deviseth mischief at all times; he sendeth out discords. Therefore shall his calamity come suddenly, in a moment shall he be broken, and without remedy. Six [things] Jehovah hateth, yea, seven [are] an abomination of his soul; haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that are swift in running to mischief, a false witness breathing out lies, and he that sendeth out discords among brethren.” vv. 12-19.

The first term reveals the evil source, the second characterizes him humanly and in general, whatever his position. The tongue, given to praise God and to help our fellows, too surely indicates what he is; he walks with a froward and perverse mouth. It is not merely that he feels no affection, but he has only things awry to say. He likes to differ and to insinuate what is painful. Nor is there candour even in his perverse expression, “he winketh with his eyes, he speaketh with his feet, he teacheth with his fingers.” He plies his pertinacious and evil activity with the utmost skill. Not only practicing ill, but having pleasure in those that do it, he in an underhand way loves to make others his instruments; a wink of his eyes suffices for one; a shuffle with his feet influences another and even his restless fingers give a signal to the third. The evil has a root deeper than his perverse mouth; “deceits are in his heart.” Other bad men may seek money, pleasure, ambition. His heart has it in frowardness; and to gratify this perverse spirit is his business and life; “he deviseth mischief at all times.”

His pleasure is to set people by the ears; “he sendeth out, or soweth, discords.” He that bows to the written Word cannot doubt what will be the issue of a course so ungodly and malicious; but even now how often a blow falls on evil in this world! “Therefore shall his calamity come suddenly; in a moment shall he be broken, and without remedy.” The day of the Lord will display this judicial dealing publicly, and far and wide; but from time to time there may be a witness that God is not mocked.

To impress the abhorrence with which Jehovah regards malignant iniquity, we have special evil qualities. They are set forth in a more abstract style, which might not be in the same person, that in the mouth of these two divine testimonies every word should be the more established. “These six Jehovah hateth, yea, seven [are] an abomination to him.” Haughty eyes are first, or a proud look; what a contrast with Him who made heaven and earth, and all that in them is, when He deigned to become man here below! The dependent and obedient man, meek and lowly in heart, who ever looked up and did only what pleased His Father, full of compassion toward suffering man, ready to forgive the sinful. “A lying tongue” comes next; Jesus was not true only but the truth; He alone. Far from Him “hands that shed innocent blood,” Himself the holy sufferer to the utmost. But in man there may be worse still? “a heart that deviseth wicked imaginations,” in hateful and unmistakable resemblance to the evil one. What can be more opposed to Jehovah and His Anointed? “The counsel of peace shall be between them both.”

Do we read of men’s “feet swift and running to mischief”? The Son tells us of the father running to meet the prodigal. But man under Satan’s power, if he cannot

kill or injure physically, may inflict a worse wrong as “a false witness breathing out lies.” The goodness of God who discovers to us the truth about ourselves, leads to repentance; and He is the God of peace, in the fullest contrast with him “that sendeth out discords among brethren.” “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!” How hateful to Jehovah is he that soweth discords among brethren!

Proverbs 6:20-26 turns to another snare of more than usual danger, especially though by no means exclusively for the young. Hence the tenderness of the appeal to influence; hence memories, which did not fail to warn of so insidious a snare in the lusts of the flesh.

“My son, observe thy father’s commandment, and forsake not thy mother’s law. Bind them continually on thy heart, tie them about thy neck: when thou walkest, it shall lead thee; when thou sleepest, it shall keep thee; and [when] thou awakest, it shall talk with thee. For the commandment [is] a lamp, and the law a light, and reproofs of instruction the way of life: to keep thee from the evil woman, from the smoothness of the tongue of a strange woman. Lust not after her beauty in thy heart, nor let her take thee with her eyelids; for by means of a whorish woman [one cometh] to a piece of bread, and another’s wife doth hunt for the precious soul.”

When men bearing the Lord’s name are characteristically self-lovers, and disobedient to parents, it is the more urgent for the young and inexperienced to beware of the spirit of the age, and to recognize the place that Jehovah gave to a father’s command and a mother’s teaching. For those who fail in natural affection soon become implacable, slanderers, without self-

control, fierce; instead of love for good, they are traitors, headstrong, and puffed up, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God. If they hold a form of piety, they deny its power, and are to be promptly turned from.

Here the Son is exhorted to lay to heart those precepts to purity from early years, from the mother no less than the father. Indeed it falls to the mother most of all to form the bent of the young. Bind these words therefore "continually on thy heart, tie them about thy neck." They are both shield and ornament in a world as evil as is the fallen nature. When one walks, do we not need direction? When one sleeps, do we not need to be guarded? And when one awakes alone, is it not good and pleasant to have such a word shining and talking with us?

"For the commandment is a lamp, and the law (or teaching) a light." "A lamp" is excellent in a squalid place, as we are told of the prophetic word, which came when things went wrong, tells of even worse at hand, but assures of divine judgment when least expected. There we are also told of a still better light in the truth fully revealed and crowned by the blessed hope of Christ's coming for scenes more glorious. Here, if it rise not high, the teaching appears to exceed the commandment in breadth, positiveness, and intimacy too; how well then called a "light"! And we are reminded of "reproofs of instruction" as the way of life. How much do we not owe to that which, humbling as it is to our good opinion of ourselves, takes pains with us in love, and turns even our faults to profitable account!

At length comes the main point here — "to keep thee from the evil woman, from the smoothness of the tongue

of a strange woman." How many a one trusting himself has been decoyed! A little license rapidly betrays into shameful sin. "Lust not after her beauty in thy heart, nor let her take thee with her eye-lids." If the Jews were God's people, much closer is our relationship as His children, and bought with a price, which they in their blindness despised. We are not our own, and are called to beware of a whorish woman, and yet more of another's wife, an adulteress; for here the evil is still more heinous, ruin both of soul and body, object too of God's especial judgment.

Still more emphatic is the warning here given, which deals with a more aggravated and destructive evil. It is not only the evil woman, or a strange woman, or a whorish woman. It is the wife of another, as in the last clause; and the language rises in severity, for marriage is a divine tie; and God hates its breach and judges those who break it.

"Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his garments not be burned? Can one go upon hot coals, and his feet not be scorched? So he that goeth in to his neighbour's wife: whosoever toucheth her shall not be innocent. They do not despise a thief, if he steal to satisfy his soul when he is hungry; and [if] he be found, he shall restore sevenfold; he shall give all the substance of his house. Whoso committeth adultery with a woman is void of understanding; he [that] doeth it destroyeth his own soul. A wound and contempt shall he get; and his reproach shall not be wiped away. For jealousy [is] the rage of a man, and he will not spare in the day of vengeance; he will not regard any ransom, neither will he rest content though thou multiplieth gifts." vv. 27-35.

There is a baseness peculiar to itself, even among the dissolute, for a man to tamper with the wife of another. But lust is insidious on either side, and little beginnings, where that relationship subsists, are apt to go on to great evils. For Satan acts on the flesh, and leads souls which forget God's presence to venture in the vain hope of escape. But can a man take fire to his bosom, and his garments not be burned? Can one go upon hot coals and his feet not be scorched? That corruption will not escape the fire of human vengeance, how much less of divine judgment? Any approach, however small or passing, is dangerous and evil.

The inspired writer contrasts it with stealing even, though men are extremely sensitive of any loss in their property. If dire need were evident, men extenuate a thief when he steals a little rather than perish of starvation. But what is so senseless, no less than abominably sinful, as adulterous iniquity? Pity mingles with blame in the one case, but nothing can excuse the other. It is the foulest dishonour of the husband; it is the lifelong ruin of the entrapped wife; it is the shame of the house and of its connections; it is the abhorrence of God who judges it. And what must be his resentment who is chiefly wronged? No wonder that the evildoer is said to lack understanding or heart, and to destroy his own soul. The law laid down fines fourfold, fivefold, and sevenfold, for rising guilt in stealing; but death Moses commanded in Jehovah's name for adultery. If Christendom, pretending to judge the world, betrays its wicked levity by a lenient sentence, it tells its own tale of corruption, which will draw down the strong hand of the Lord God in judgment.

Even in this world, a wound and dishonour will the adulterer get, and his reproach shall not be wiped away, spite of the heathenism which dared to consecrate this enormity and every other — spite of Christendom which did once adopt heathen ways and seems now returning to them, even where Protestant zeal once chased them out in a large measure, though never up to the true Christian standard. Here it regards man's feelings. "For jealousy is the rage of a man: therefore he will not spare in the day of vengeance." The overture of any ransom is vain; to give many gifts, contents not him who cannot rest without wrong's condign punishment.

Proverbs 7

Chapter 7 opens with a fresh paternal appeal to his "son" individually (vv. 1-5). Then is drawn the graphic picture of a young man void of understanding drawn into the worst corruption by an adulterous woman (vv. 6-23). The close is a call to the "sons" generally — a terse, earnest, and solemn warning (vv. 24-27) of similar character, but deeper still.

"My son, keep my words, and lay up my commandments with thee. Keep my commandments and live; and my teaching as the apple of thine eye. Bind them upon thy fingers, write them upon the tables of thy heart. Say to wisdom, thou [art] my sister, and call intelligence kinswoman; that they may keep thee from the strange woman, from the stranger that flattereth with her words." vv. 1-5.

In this individual appeal, the value of the word is urged as the great preservative means. "My son, keep my words, and lay up my commandments with thee." There is not only the need of dependence on God when trial

comes, but the positive value of the truth and the divine will infusing one beforehand. Thus is the soul inwardly strengthened within against the snares without, which find the father's precepts in possession of the field. The words are therefore to be kept, and the commandments laid up.

Therein is the path of life; for it is not by bread alone that man lives, but by every word that proceeds from God's mouth. Hence here we read, "keep my commandments and live." Yet the teaching that comes from God, though alone nourishing, is easily injured by self- will, and needs to be vigilantly guarded from a world of evil where defilements abound. Therefore must the teaching be kept as the apple of one's eye. What more jealously prized as invaluable and irreparable? What more exposed to sudden damage?

Other figures are employed to impress the all-importance of heeding the words which express Jehovah's will. "Bind them upon thy fingers; write them upon the tables of thy heart." Old and New Testaments indicate that rings were worn for weighty use and high authority, not mere show or ornaments. Besides, the precepts here were to be written on the heart.

Nor does this suffice the care with which grace forearms those exposed to temptations suited to a fallen nature. In Old Testament times little was known of a new life from God. Still it was there, and implied if not clearly taught. Hence the new call: "Say to wisdom, Thou art my sister, and call intelligence kinswoman." For the reception of God's word made this true. In contrast with one born of the flesh, "that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." We are begotten by the word of truth, and thus

become a sort of first fruits of His creatures. Our new relationship is with wisdom and understanding, as near of kin, suited, beloved, and necessary.

Thus does God work in His goodness to keep one “from the strange woman, from the stranger that flattereth with her words.” That she was a “stranger” who sought familiarity is enough for any soul with the fear of God. So is man constituted that it should ever be a signal of danger. When formed originally, there was no strangership; but out of the man was she built who was meant to be his wife, his counterpart. How much greater the peril when, in a fallen condition, “the strange woman” abandons the propriety of her sex, and appeals with flattering words to the vanity, the pride, or the lusts of man!

In the closeness of the Christian relationship, where all are brought by the grace of Christ into the endearing tie of God’s children the danger is enormously increased. For the “neighbourhood’ of Israelites mutually was a comparatively distant connection, and a man’s “brethren” meant less in every way than “brethren” in a Christian’s life — a term that included sisters as well as brothers. Undoubtedly there are the deepest moral principles in the gospel, and the Church; where the law was partial, obscure, and feeble, truth is brought clearly and graciously to view in Christ Himself for those whose it is to walk in the light as God is in the light. But if we are not in the flesh through the deliverance Christ has wrought and given us, the flesh is still in us, and is ever ready by Satan’s wiles and the world’s influence to ensnare us into self-gratification. Only each walking in faith as having died and as crucified with Him, in continual self-judgment and lively sense of His loving me

and Himself given for me, are we kept by God's power. Where this has been forgotten, what dismal falls have been even to the strong! What sad gaps every now and then, where few know the dark histories which lie at their back!

Next is given a, graphic sketch of the evil against which the son is warned earnestly. It is a picture divinely drawn from life.

"For at the window of my house I looked forth from my lattice; and I beheld among the simple ones, I discerned among the sons, a young man void of understanding, passing through the street near her corner; and he went the way to her house, in the twilight, in the evening of the day, in the blackness of night and the darkness. And, behold, there met him a woman [in] the attire of a harlot, and subtle of heart. She [is] clamorous and ungovernable; her feet abide not in her house; now [she is] in the streets, now in the broadways, and lieth in wait at every corner. And she caught him and kissed him; with an impudent face she said to him, I have pence offerings; this day have I paid my vows. Therefore came I forth to meet thee, diligently to seek thy face; and I have found thee. My bed I have decked with tapestry coverings, with variegated cloths of yarn from Egypt. I have perfumed my couch with myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon. Come, let us revel in love until the morning; let us delight ourselves with loves. For the husband [is] not at home and he is gone a long journey; he hath taken the moneybag with him; he will come home at the day of full moon. With her much fair speech she beguiled him; with the flattery of her lips she constrained him. He goeth after suddenly, as an ox goeth to the slaughter, and as in fetters to his correction the fool; till an arrow

strike through his liver, as a bird hasteth to the snare, and knoweth not that [it is] for its life." vv. 6-23.

On the one side is a young man, idle and thoughtless rather than of evil or profligate habits; on the other is a woman given up to shameless immorality; and when a woman abandons all pretension to modesty, who can be so recklessly corrupt or seductive? But the warning impressed is all the more telling because in the youth there is no purpose of lust, any more than of passion in particular, no thought or room for sapping the moral principles generally, no old undermining of the barriers which warded off improper advances. A weak character, hitherto harmless, as men say, vain and self-pleasing, is seen in the way of temptation, and gradually verging near the point of danger, as the twilight grows and the darkness favours shameful deeds. For his youth and inexperience make him the more attractive prey to the woman who is sunk to the lowest depths, as regardless of human order as of God the Judge of all.

The "strange woman" has even the attire of a harlot, with a heart more subtle still, yet clamorous and ungovernable. Her house is no home; her unsatisfied will drives her feet into the streets and the broadways; and at every corner she lies in wait. The heedless youth fixes her choice; and giving him the fullest credit for a vacant heart, for a void of understanding, she scruples not at once to storm one so unarmed and unestablished. She caught and kissed him, and strengthening her face to the utmost effrontery, she tells him of her peace offerings, her vows paid that day. He was the delight of her eyes and soul. Him she came to meet (whom she probably never saw before); his face was diligently sought; and now she had found him. Providence smiled

on them, and the feast upon a sacrifice was a happy omen. None could deny that she was a religious woman; she must pay her vows duly when she ventured on a delicate affair of the heart. Yet she, the wanton, did not blush to speak of the utmost lengths without disguise. “I have decked my bed with tapestry coverings, with variegated cloths of yarn from Egypt; I have perfumed my couch with myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon. Come, let us revel in love until the morning; let us delight ourselves with loves.” How terrible and how true is this picture of ritualism and luxury in league, prostituting the name of love to illicit amours and debauchery more guilty than the most brutal!

Nor does she fail to quiet the fears which might cow even the most thoughtless and audacious. For she declares that the man, the husband, was away from home, gone on a long journey, provided with ample funds, and not to return before full moon. It was not a Joseph that listened, but a match for Potiphar’s wife that enticed. Who can wonder that the foolish youth, spite of conscience, surrendered! But oh, what pathos in the language which describes him giving himself to ruin of soul and body! “He goeth after her suddenly.” He does not dare to think of Jehovah, or of his own relation to Him, nor yet of father and mother, of brothers or sisters; of the irreparable wrong to the absent husband; of his own sin and crime, to say nothing of yielding to so vile a paramour, or of the affront to society, degraded and godless as it is. It is truly “as an ox goeth to the slaughter, and as in fetters to his correction the fool; till a dart strike through his liver, as a bird hasteth to the snare and knoweth not that it is for its life.”

The close of the 7th chapter is a short, touching, and solemn appeal.

“And now, sons, hearken to me, and attend to the words of my mouth. Let not thy heart decline to her ways; go not astray in her paths: for she hath cast down many wounded; and all slain by her are strong. Her house [is] the way to Sheol, going down to the chambers of death.” vv. 24-27.

Youth is prone to impulse and self-confidence, as we have seen the danger not for the depraved only, but for the idle, because of the corruption in the world through lust. Hence the earnestly affectionate summing up of what has gone before with a fresh warning of uncommon grace. “And now, sons, hearken to me, and attend to the words of my mouth.” A father’s call to heed his words in the face of inward propensity and outward seduction is entitled to the gravest attention. There is but one such friend in the nearest degree who has passed through like snares. His wise love no son can slight with impunity.

What then are the words of his mouth on that head? “Let not thy heart decline to her ways, go not astray in her path.” Joseph had no father near to counsel him when the temptation arose, and persistently, through his master’s wife. But he refused utterly her shameless blandishments as one seeing the Unseen. The ten words were not yet spoken; but he feared God, and he was jealous for his master’s honour. “How shall I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?” Good reason had a father to counsel sons to steer clear. If the whole world lies in wickedness, or in the wicked one, one needs dependence to pass through the streets safely,

and obedience with the worthy object in view. Emptiness exposes the soul for evil to enter and take possession. “Abide in me, and I in you.” “If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall come to pass to you”; so spoke the Holy, the True. Nor is there any other way of fruit agreeable to the Father. In this is He glorified that we bear much fruit, and not merely that we be kept from sin and shame and ruin. Evil begins not with the steps, but the heart declining to such ways; to follow them is to stray.

And who has lived a while here below without the saddest memories and most humbling sights in confirmation? “For she hath cast down many wounded, and all slain by her are strong.” Such seems the force of the latter clause, which is illegitimately rendered in the A.V., for “all” in such a sentence at least cannot be reduced to “many,” as in the former clause. But it is difficult to understand that “all” her slain should be strong. The R.V. suggests that “all her slain are a mighty host.” This, whether or not accepted, is assuredly true, and an advance on the words which preceded, according to the Hebrew style. No wonder that the words recall not only Samson, but even David, who if not slain himself, brought the sword on his house, and caused the enemies of Jehovah to blaspheme.

And how energetic the words that follow! “Her house is the way to Sheol, going down to the chambers of death.” They are words of truth and sobriety, so they exaggerate in nothing.

Proverbs 8

In full contrast with evil, which is folly to the utmost, is the description of wisdom's ways as here brought before us.

"Doth not wisdom cry, and understanding put forth her voice? On the top of high places by the way, where paths meet, she standeth; beside the gates, at the entry of the city, at the coming in at the doors, she crieth aloud. To you, O men, I call, and my voice [is] to the sons of man. O ye simple, understand prudence; and, ye foolish, be of understanding heart. Hear, for I will speak excellent things, and the opening of my lips [shall be] right things. For my palate shall meditate truth, and wickedness [is] an abomination to my lips. All the words of my mouth [are] in righteousness; [there is I nothing crooked or perverse in them. They [are] all plain to him that understandeth, and right to them that find knowledge. Receive my instruction, and not silver, and knowledge rather than choice gold; for wisdom [is] better than rubies, and all the things that may be desired are not comparable to her." vv. 1-11.

Here is no courting of the dark, no flattery of the heedless, no fair speech to seduce into foul deeds and illicit indulgence. The wisdom which has its root in the fear of Jehovah is aboveboard and earnest with man. "Doth not wisdom cry, and understanding put forth her voice? On the top of high places, where paths meet, she standeth; beside the gates, at the entry of the city, at the coming in at the doors, she crieth aloud." John the Baptist not only bore witness to Jesus, but "cried" (John 1:15). So did our Lord in the temple as He taught (John

7:28), and notably at the close of His rejected testimony (John 12:44) in importunate love.

How often in the Old Testament as in the New we are reminded of divine favour to mankind! Not with angels but with the human race does God plead, that they may hear and live. “The life was the light of men.” So it is here when wisdom cries aloud: “To you, O men, I call, and my voice is to the sons of men”; nay more, it beseeches the weak and the unwise. “O ye simple, understand wisdom, and ye fools, be of understanding heart.”

There are objects of desire in men’s eager eyes. Oh the ardour, when they learn that there is here a mine of silver, and a place for gold which they refine! Seas are crossed, deserts are penetrated, swamps and mountains drear are crossed, and heat or cold or famine is defied. And man puts an end to the darkness, and the utmost limit is explored. A shaft is opened far from human haunts; they are forgotten of the traveller, they hang afar from men, they swing to and fro. Out of the earth cometh bread, and underneath it is turned up as by fire. The stones of it are the place of sapphires; and it hath dust of gold; a path no bird of prey knows, nor vulture’s eye hath seen, nor sons of pride have trodden it, nor the fierce lion passed over it. The engineer puts forth his hands on the flints; he overturns mountains by the roots; he cuts out channels in the rocks; and his eye sees every precious thing. He binds the streams that they drip not, and the hidden things he brings forth to light. But wisdom, where shall it be found, and where is the place of understanding? Man knows not its value, neither is it found in the land of the living. The deep says, It is not with me; and the sea says, It is not with me. Neither

gold nor silver, nor precious stones as onyx, sapphire, ruby, topaz, with gold most fine, nor jewels can procure or equal it. Whence then comes it, and where is its place? For it is hidden from the eyes of all living and concealed from the birds of the heavens. Destruction and death say, We have heard its report with our ears. God understands its way, and He knows its place. And to man He said, “Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding” (Job 28). Christ alone is its fullness.

Our exhortation encourages souls. “Hear, for I will speak excellent things, and the opening of my lips shall be right things. For my palate shall meditate truth, and wickedness is an abomination to my lips.” Where else can this be found? Outside the inspired Word, religion makes men worse than if they had none, and substitutes demons for the true God. Here the writer can say with assurance, All the words of my mouth are in righteousness; there is nothing crooked or perverse in them. Man’s uncertainty and fallen nature expose him to both if he sets up to be an oracle. Whereas God’s words are all plain to him that understandeth, and right to him that findeth knowledge. Hence is the call. Receive my instruction, and not silver, and knowledge rather than choice gold; for wisdom is better than rubies; and all the things that may be desired are not comparable to her. We can go no farther, now that the Son of God is come and given to us to know Him that is true. For He Himself is the true God, no less than the Father; and He is eternal life. Compare John 17:3.

We are in a world dominated for the present by a subtle spirit of evil that has access to every heart. There is therefore constant need of a wisdom above man’s. For

the Christian it descends from above; it is Christ, God's wisdom no less than His power. Here, as being for Israel, the Holy Spirit presents wisdom for the earth. For the heaven and the earth belong to God, who in due time will expel the usurper and put all things under Him in fact and manifestation, as they are now in principle to faith. Meanwhile we have God occupying Himself with what is heavenly for His children, in the New Testament before the day arrives, as for His ancient people renewed to profit ere long by the Old Testament as here.

"I wisdom dwell in prudence, and find out knowledge of reflection. The fear of Jehovah [is] to hate evil: pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth do I hate. Counsel is mine, and sound wisdom: I [am] intelligence; I have strength. By me kings reign, and rulers make just decrees; by me princes rule, and nobles, all the judges of the earth. I love those that love me; and they that seek me early (or, diligently) shall find me. Riches and honour [are] with me; durable wealth and righteousness. My fruit [is] better than gold, yea than pure gold; and my revenue than choice silver. I walk in the way of righteousness, in the midst of the paths of judgment; that I may cause those that love me to inherit substance, and fill their treasuries." vv. 12-21.

The Christian, though a heavenly man, walks on earth; and both needs to, and can, avail himself of such words as these, coming under the moral government of God as his Father (1 Peter 1:17). Wisdom makes prudence its dwelling place, and there finds knowledge, if not of witty inventions, assuredly of reflections, a better thing. Thus are subtle adversaries met by a wisdom and its resources deeper than every snare. Its base is that fear of Jehovah which hates evil, for which intellectual

sharpness and craft are no match. For divine wisdom in the Word forms the godly in obedience, not in the cleverness that outwits craft by profounder craft; for this would only dishonour God and sully the soul. Hence pride and arrogance on the one hand, and on the other the evil way and the perverse mouth, are hateful to God and His people. They are the ways and the words of self, far from Him who leads in the path of obedience, and gives counsel and sound wisdom to those who wait on Him and keep His word and with Him is not only intelligence but strength — all we need in this tangled and shifty scene.

None need wisdom so much as those in authority, the monarch in particular. “By me kings reign, and rulers make just decrees; by me princes rule and nobles, all the judges of the earth.” But this very language aptly discriminates the difference between the Old Testament, and the New Testament, that is the entirely new state of things under the gospel as compared with the law. For there is instruction in the New Testament only for subjection to authority, in the Old Testament for those who wield it also. The Christian waits to reign with Christ, content meanwhile to suffer with Him and for Him. No exhortation, no principle, no fact supposes him exercising worldly power where Christ was rejected, till He appears to judge the world. It was quite another condition before the princes of this age crucified the Lord of glory. But it is now a time of great and growing unbelief, and it is a hard trial for most believers to forego present power and honour. Indeed, since the apostles passed away, the true heavenly glory of the Christian and the Church has been well nigh forgotten and ignored.

But wisdom goes out far beyond rulers and the great, even to all that seek and prize it. “I love those that love me; and those that seek me earnestly shall find me.” So it ever is in divine pursuits. Those that are of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham. God has no blanks for the real. Wisdom from Him secures riches and honour — not for the Christian of a material sort, but better far, durable wealth, truly, and righteousness. Its fruit is indeed superior to pure gold or choice silver. Wisdom walks in the way of righteousness. Not “leading” but “walking” is the point here. To reason, to common sense, it may seem utterly foolish; for it often entails loss, and sacrifice, and suffering. But “he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.” Christ to us is the way; and Him we follow whatever the case. Wisdom walks therefore in the midst of the paths of judgment, not outside them. And there only is blessing enjoyed, though it is not for the Christian in the basket and the store, in the bank or in stocks, but higher and unchanging.

From verses 22-31 we have the plainest and the brightest testimony of this Book to Christ’s glory. Who can fail to discern that He is here viewed as the Wisdom of God. The personality of His Wisdom is as marked here as of the Life in 1 John 1. This suits God if it does not man.

“Jehovah possessed me in the beginning of his ways, before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, before the earth was. When no depths were, I was brought forth, when there were no fountains abounding with water. Before the mountains were settled, before the hills was I brought forth, while as yet he had not made the earth, nor the fields, nor the beginning of the dust of the world. When he prepared

the heavens, I [was] there; when he set the circle upon the face of the deep; when he established the skies above; when the fountains of the deep became strong; when he imposed on the sea his decree, that the waters should not pass his commandment; when he appointed the foundations of the earth: then I was by him, a nursling [or artificer], and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him; rejoicing in the habitable world of his earth, and my delights [were] with the sons of men." vv. 22-31.

The remarkable truth here signalized is the Wisdom portrayed with Jehovah before creation, and not merely in that display of almighty power guided by wisdom and goodness. More than this attribution of eternal wisdom, as Jehovah's cherished companion before His works of old, a special object of His affection is carefully shown in mankind, even as He Himself was to Jehovah. This and this only explains why the earth should be so near and conspicuous an object to the love of God — often a theme of unbelieving wonder, if not for unworthy and thankless scorn.

"Jehovah possessed me in the beginning of his way." There was Wisdom, not simply in Him, but with Him, as is said of the Word in John 1:1: "the Word was with God," just as surely as He "is God"; and such too is the account of Him as Life in 1 John 1:2, before He was manifested in flesh. "I was set up [lit. anointed] from everlasting, from the beginning before the earth was." He was no creature of God, but was in being before His works. When depths were not nor fountains abounding with waters, He was brought forth; before mountains or hills were settled; while as yet He had not made the earth or the fields or the beginning of the dust of the

world. He was there for the making and ordering of all, as He was before any. Nor did He thus precede the lower scene only, but the heavens which contain all. When Jehovah prepared the heavens, Wisdom was there; when He set the circle upon the face the deep, when He established the skies above. When the fountains of the deep became strong, when He imposed on the sea its decree, that the waters should not pass His commandment; when He appointed the foundations of the earth: then was Wisdom by Him, a nursling [or artificer], and a delight He was, rejoicing always before Him, rejoicing in His habitable world; and His delights were with the sons of men. It is a grand, true, and highly poetic description, worthy of Him who was proclaimed in its season the Worthy One.

But whatever wisdom wrought on earth or sea, if the heavens declare the glory of God, and the expanse shows the work of His hands, there was a counsel deeper still, a love far beyond intelligence and power; and this we learn in the marvellous description. It is not the Wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom, which was ordained before the ages unto our glory (1 Cor. 2:7). Nothing do we find of God’s sovereign love in choosing out souls to partake of heavenly relationship. It is His good pleasure in men, to be effectuated another day by His Son becoming man, and in that redemption which secures His glory and opens the way for all His dealings of grace. What we have here is no revelation of the secret that was hid in God till Christ rejected went back to God, and the Holy Spirit was sent to reveal it. But we have the inestimable purpose of God’s goodness toward man plainly stated, and distinct from the election of Israel for the earth, or of the saints who compose the

Church for the heaven, and indeed for the universal inheritance with Christ.

Hence the force here of Wisdom being by Jehovah, His delight day by day, not only rejoicing always before Jehovah, but rejoicing Himself in the habitable parts of His earth, and His delights were with the sons of men. Though it be not Christ glorified on high, nor therefore our union with Him as His body, yet it is an expression of divine love in and toward man, far beyond what Israel ever realized, as it will be in the days of the kingdom here below when He reigns and all the families of the earth are blessed in Him. For it is divine delight in Him whose delights were and will be with the sons of men. Hence beautiful is the praise of the heavenly hosts at His birth heard by the lowly shepherds by night. ""Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill in men" beautiful in itself, and in their unjealous delight in His ways who made men, not angels, the especial object of His complacency.

The chapter concludes with a fatherly application to impress the blessedness of wisdom's ways on the young, but from Jehovah.

"And now, sons, hearken to me, and blessed are [those that] keep my ways: hear instruction and be wise, and refuse it not. Blessed [is] the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors. For whoso findeth me findeth life, and shall obtain favour of Jehovah. But he that sinneth against (or, misseth) me doeth violence to his own soul: all that hate me love death." vv. 32-36.

When He who was afterward to become flesh and dwell among us was brought (so distinctly for the Old

Testament) before the hearer of the written Word, we can understand that His grace makes itself deeply felt and calls special heed to communications meant to deal with the inner man. They rise far above ordinary obligation; they are not clothed with the thunder and lightning of Sinai, nor do they consist of typical pictures which illustrated the provision of divine mercy, when men failed and would own their sins suitably, the shadows of the good things to come. A divine personality (the daily delight to Jehovah, whose delights were with the sons of men who calls Himself, though set up from eternity, Wisdom dwelling with prudence) appeals peculiarly to heart and conscience. For who dues not feel the need of such guidance? Sons of men must be welcome to Him; and He, because He is divine, must be able to render Himself acceptable to them.

Doubtless the lack of known forgiveness and of life eternal in the Son of God left much to be desired, which we enjoy through the gospel. But what clearly appears in such a chapter as this was an immense favour; and none need wonder at the exhortation which follows it up, that the “sons” should hearken. But such words, like those of our Lord on the mount are meant to be done as well as heard. Indeed every one that hears and does them not can only be likened to a foolish man that built his house on the sand — great the fall when it comes — worse than if no house were built.

Here accordingly we are told that “blessed are those that keep my ways.” The glory and grace of Him who deigns to point out the ways of wisdom act on living faith and make it energetic through love. Where faith is not, all else fails ere long. “Hear instruction and be wise, and refuse it not.” How touchingly wisdom pleads while

we only are the gainers! What can we add to divine majesty? The love of God delights in blessing; but blessing cannot be for sinful man, but in hearing instruction from Him who was made to us wisdom from above.

Again we have it applied to the individual. “Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors.” Here we have the earnestness day by day and perseverance like a beggar in need that will not be denied, and waits in the face of what would discourage others less importunate. We find in the beginning of Luke 11 the value of prayer on His part who prayed as none else did, and led a disciple to seek of Him to teach them to pray. But the Spirit of God at the close of Luke 10 makes us know the need of His word antecedently — that we may not trust our own reasonings or imaginations, instead of all resting on the groundwork of divine truth received in faith. Of this the blessed sample is Mary, who also sat at the Lord’s feet and heard His word, and reaped endless and deep profit in comparison with her sister, Martha, who, loved of Him, and doubtless loving Him, was cumbered with much serving, and hence anxious and troubled about many things. Mary’s part is the good one which shall be taken away from none who value it.

“For (on the one hand) whoso findeth me findeth life and obtaineth favour of Jehovah.” So the prince of prophets writes: “Wherefore do ye weigh money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? Hearken diligently to me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear, and come to me; hear, and your soul shall live.” What better was known than “life” above that of nature

through the faith of the divine Word, and Jehovah's favour enjoyed also? It was not blessing in the city and in the field, or in the kine and in the flock, in the bucket and in the kneading-trough, nor even in being made the head rather than the tail. Old Testament believers knew and possessed by grace the blessing, though far from that fullness which we have now through and in Christ.

On the other hand. the way of self-will is ruinous for the life that now is, and for that which is to come. It is just the path of sin. "And he that sinneth against me (Wisdom) doeth violence to his own soul: all they that hate me love death." There is not, nor ever was, true living, living to God but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God Therefore it is that the just shall live by his faith. For faith comes of hearing, and hearing by the divine Word. Outside the path of faith on either side are the ways of death, and many are those who take them in the pursuit of man's thoughts or present objects, of human religion or human irreligion, apart from the true God and Him in whom He reveals Himself by His Word and Spirit.

Proverbs 9

In the beginning of chapter 9, it is not wisdom in eternal relations, or in founding and building up the earth, preparing the heavens, and imposing on the sea the decree that the waters pass not the prescribed limits, yet withal delighting in the sons of men. Here the fruit of these delights appears. Wisdom acts among men.

"Wisdom hath built her house; she hath hewn out her seven pillars; she hath slaughtered her slaughtering [or, sacrifice], she hath mingled her wine, she hath also furnished her table. She hath sent forth her maidens;

she crieth upon the summits of the high places of the city, Whoso [is] simple, let him turn in hither. To him that is void of understanding she saith, Come, eat ye of my bread, and drink of the wine I have mingled. Forsake follies [or, simplicities] and live, and go in the way of understanding." vv. 1-6.

We had wisdom's cry in the preceding chapter — her active testimony that her voice might be heard. Here we have much more, for Jehovah strenuously and elaborately adopted means for the well-being and true enjoyment of man, so ready to turn aside and perish in the ways of the destroyer.

Hence, and in Israel when in possession of the land under Solomon it was above all conspicuous, that Jehovah drew public attention to His commandments as the sole wisdom and condition of blessing on the earth. This is what Moses yearned for, as their entrance there approached, that the surrounding peoples might say, Verily this great nation is a wise and understanding people; for what great nation is there that hath God near to them, as Jehovah our God is in everything we call upon Him for? And what great nation is there that hath righteous statutes and ordinances, as all this law which I set before you this day?

Only more is said in Solomon's day, and by the king in this Book where wisdom is personified so admirably by the Spirit who had the Son of God in view. And who so well could introduce the figure of wisdom's house as he who was given to build the house for Jehovah's name! a settled place for Him to abide in forever? Yet how much the past or the present says to the contrary! as indeed

Jehovah warned was to be because of their apostasy, even to a proverb and a byword among all peoples.

“Wisdom hath built her house.” Nowhere on earth was there a suited habitation. She could find no dwelling, but has prepared one for herself; for wisdom had to promote the entire life and the most intimate relations and the habits of every day. Hence the necessity for “her house,” to which she liberally invites. “She hath hewn her seven pillars.” There is a completeness of support exhibited in no other, and due to the divine aim herein sought.

Then the provision is no less bountiful. “She hath slaughtered her slaughtering, she hath mingled her wine, she hath furnished her table.” How could it be otherwise if divine love undertake to entertain worthily of God? There is no more intelligible or common figure of communion than that which is expressed by eating and drinking under the same hospitable roof. So the Lord repeatedly set forth the welcome of grace in the gospel; so He signifies our feeding on Himself by faith to life eternal; so He instituted His supper for our habitual remembrance of Himself till He come. It is presented here that His people might know the pleasure Jehovah took in their enjoyment of wisdom as He revealed it.

But there is more. “She hath sent forth her maidens, she crieth upon the summits of the high places of the city, Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither.” Wisdom had her messengers, who are fitly represented as maidens whom she dispatched on the errand of loving-kindness. But she spares no pains personally; for there she stands on the loftiest vantage ground, whence she may invite. And who are the objects of her appeal? Not the rich or great; not the wise or prudent; but whoso is simple, let him

turn in hither.” God is ever the giving God when truly known. He may test man for a special purpose; but as God loves a cheerful giver, so is He the most liberal of all Himself; and so wisdom here makes known. “To him that is void of understanding she saith, Come, eat ye of my bread, and drink of the wine that I have mingled.” In the world that is, such generous unselfish love is unknown and hence the need and value of reiterated welcome.

Still in the same world admonition is requisite, and the word follows, “Forsake simplicities [or follies] and live; and go in the way of intelligence.” Wisdom does not admit of inconsistency. If received notwithstanding our folly, it is that we may become wise according to a wisdom above our own; and this is truly to “live” where all else is death, and, as living, to walk in the way of intelligence, looking up to Him who is above, and not as the beasts that look down and perish.

How blessed for us that to those that are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ is God’s power and God’s wisdom! And how fitting that he who was of old endowed with wisdom beyond all others should be the one to reveal in the Old Testament Him who is that Wisdom in His own eternal Person!

Chapter 9 began with wisdom, or the wise woman; the Holy Spirit turns aside to point out how disappointing it is to instruct the scorner — a very aggravated form of evil, though increasingly common as Christendom hastens in its unbelief and moral ruin to judgment.

“He that correcteth a scorner getteth to himself shame; and he that reproveth a wicked [man], a blot to himself. Reprove not a scorner, lest he hate thee; reprove a wise

[man], and he will love thee. Impart to a wise [man], and he will become yet wiser; teach a righteous [man], and he will increase learning. The fear of Jehovah [is] the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy [is] understanding. For by me thy days shall be multiplied, and years of life shall be added to thee. If thou art wise, thou shalt be wise for thyself; and [if] thou scornest, thou alone shalt bear [it].” vv. 7-12.

Every scripture, we know, is not more surely God-inspired than profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for discipline that is in righteousness; but we need wisdom to apply it. Faith needs not only the Word, but the God who gave it, to direct the heart and mouth livingly; and for this we have by grace the Holy Spirit’s guidance. So the Apostle commended those who watched over souls to God, as well as to the word of His grace. While the simple and unintelligent are invited, the foolish must be shunned and the way of understanding followed. Then freely we are warned against meddling with the scorner. To correct such! is vain; they willingly put on you shame. Let them alone, said the Lord to the disciples. You may only gain a blot in reproving a wicked person. They have a deeper need — to be born again. Where no life is, hatred is the result. There is no wisdom in reproving a scorner, more than in giving that which is holy to the dogs or in casting pearls before the swine. The upshot may be that they will trample the misdirected word under their feet, and turn and rend you.

Now the Christian has the gospel to urge on the heedless but this is the glad tidings of what God has done in Christ for him, wicked as he may be, to bring him to Himself. Thus all is harmonious. Correction and

reproof are for those who have an ear to hear, that they walk not inconsistently with their profession. Hence we are told here to “reprove a wise man, and he will love thee.” A wise man may not always pursue the path of wisdom; he may need reproof. A fool is one who never hears, though always ready to find fault. A wise man listens and weighs; when he recognizes what is of God, he will love you.

Another thing which distinguishes wisdom is the appreciation of what is good and helpful. Egoism is necessarily unwise and evil, because man is sinful, and God is unknown and untrusted. It is self-satisfied and refuses to learn, having no distrust of its own dark, selfish, and sinful state. On the other hand, “impart to a wise man, and he will be yet wiser, teach a righteous man, and he will increase learning.” It is not the great that are wise, nor does age of itself understand judgment. Every good giving and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom can be no variation nor shadow of turning. Dependence on God is our only right attitude habitually, and hearing from one another what approves itself to our consciences as His truth; for we are members of one another; and He despiseth not any, let him be ever so lowly. But He hateth the proud and will punish the scorner.

The secret of it all is plain. “The fear of Jehovah is the beginning of wisdom; and the knowledge of the Holy is understanding.” Creature intelligence is of no value for the soul, for eternity, for relationship with God. It begins, and must begin with fearing Him, the True and the Good, the Righteous and the Holy. There is repentance no less than faith, and therefore trembling at

His Word, the direct reverse of judging it and trusting in self, justifying ourselves instead of God. But growth belongs to life in our present condition; and growth is by the right knowledge of God, who has communicated it in His Word for this purpose. The Christian readily knows why “Holy” should be in the plural, without allowing that it means “holy things.” The knowledge of such things is not the intelligence that grows from the enlarging knowledge of God.

The pious Jew addressed looked for long life here below, through divine favour. As things were, much might come in to modify this, as we see in Josiah and many another. But when divine principles have their just and unimpeded result, every word will be fulfilled, as when Christ reigns over all the earth. We Christians have a far different calling new, and look for a higher glory. Nevertheless, we can say and do believe that piety is profitable for everything, having promise of life — of the present one, and of that to come.

It remains true also that “if thou art wise, thou shalt be wise for thyself; and if thou scornest, thou alone shalt bear it.” God remains in changeless majesty; but in His righteous judgment, each shall bear his own burden, and reap as he sows, from the flesh corruption, from the Spirit life everlasting.

In full contrast with wisdom, and quite distinct from the scorner, is “the foolish woman.” Here we have the picture of herself and her ways, her guests, and their end. Only we must not think that the folly in question means a feeble intellect, but rather the absence of care or thought, of heart or conscience, toward God, which Satan fosters in benighted man. “The fool hath said in

his heart, There is no God," and therefore neither seeks nor calls on Him. This at the last is antichrist. Here it is "the foolish woman," the state of things that entices, fleshly corruption rather than the haughty antagonist that sets it up.

"The foolish woman [is] clamorous; senseless (or, simplicity), and knoweth nothing. And she sitteth at the door of her house, on a seat in the high places of the city, to call those that pass by who go right on their ways. Whoso [is] simple, let him turn in hither. And to him that is void of understanding she saith, Stolen waters are sweet, and the bread of secrecy is pleasant. But he knoweth not that the dead [are] there, [that] her guests [are] in the depths of Sheol." vv. 13-18.

Wisdom pleads for Jehovah and therefore in the true interests of man, no less than for the divine glory. The foolish woman is zealous only for the indulgence of sinful pleasure, regardless of all consequences. Yet it is remarkable how similar are the thoughts and words the Holy Spirit uses in speaking of each. Not that wisdom is "clamorous" as is folly; but she does cry and put forth her voice, for understanding is hers, and the immense value she has to communicate from God and for Him, no less than to man. She does not sit on a seat or throne at the door of her house. But she yet more than folly stands in the top of high places by the way, a cheerful giver, who knows the ample resources for all that come. Not so the foolish woman. What house had she built? No pillars had she hewn out. She had neither beasts to kill, nor had she mingled wine, nor furnished her table, like wisdom with a heart delighting in good and in doing good where need abounded and dangers are without end and evil without measure.

Wisdom had her maidens to send forth, as she herself cried; for she was earnest to win for Jehovah and warn from Him, and sought the highest places of the city. Folly had no such maidens, any more than the generous provision of wisdom. Maidens indeed! She might well be ashamed and blush if she could before maidens, as they would assuredly blush for her words and ways. Yet both are represented as making appeal in terms of strong resemblance, but how opposite their wish and aim! "Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither" (vv. 4 and 16). And it is to be remarked, that the foolish woman in particular addresses her call to those that pass by, who go right on their ways. What malicious pleasure to lead such astray!

The difference comes out strongly in what wisdom, as compared with folly, says to him that is void of understanding. "Come, eat ye of my bread, and drink of the wine which I have mingled. Forsake follies, and live; and go in the way of understanding." All was open, sound, holy, and unselfish on wisdom's part. How sinister the speech of the foolish woman! "Stolen waters are sweet, and pleasant is the bread of secrecy." But the appeal of wisdom needs grace to make it palatable; her rival's invitation is just suited to the dark heart of man as he is. He enjoys what is prohibited, and can only be snatched guilefully or by cunning; he suspects what is given freely, and cannot understand the greatest good as a matter of grace. Wisdom's gifts are therefore distrusted and despised; folly's call to stolen waters is as sweet to fallen nature as to drink them, and the bread of secrecy is as pleasant in prospect as to the taste.

How solemn when the curtain is drawn enough to let us see the dread reality! "But he knoweth not that the dead

(or departed, shades) [are] there; that her guests [are] in the depths of Sheol." As the language about wisdom rose in the chapter before into a living and glorious person, an incomparable object of delight to Jehovah, and with no less incomparable delight of love going out to the sons of men, so here chapter 9 ends with a more awful view than is at all usual in the Old Testament of the lot that befalls those that lend their ear, and follow the tempting words of the foolish woman. What a contrast with leaving off folly and going on the way of intelligence!

Proverbs 10

Chapter 10 begins with the less consecutive communications of the Book, after the rich presentation of sententious wisdom of more general character seen in the previous nine. We are now introduced to those detached and pithy moral axioms given to instruct the mind and fasten on the memory for profit day by day.

"The proverbs of Solomon. A wise son maketh a glad father; but a foolish son [is] the grief of his mother.

"Treasures of wickedness profit nothing; but righteousness delivereth from death.

"Jehovah suffereth not the soul of the righteous to famish; but he repelleth the craving of the wicked.

"He cometh to want that dealeth [with] a slack hand; but the hand of the diligent maketh rich.

"He that gathereth in summer [is] a wise son; he that sleepeth in harvest [is] a son that causeth shame.

"Blessings [are] on the head of the righteous; but violence covereth the mouth of the wicked.

“The memory of the righteous [is] blessed; but the name of the wicked shall rot.

“The wise in heart receiveth commandments; but the foolish of lips shall fall.

“He that walketh in integrity walketh securely; but he that perverteth his ways shall be known.

“He that winketh with the eye causeth grief; but the foolish of lips shall fall.” vv. 1-10.

In the first verse is stated the importance of cultivating wisdom in a son, not the acquisition of such knowledge as distinguishes among men, or promotes the interests of the family or of himself. Vanity and pride, selfishness and greed, are thus guarded against. That is commended which cannot be without the fear of Jehovah. How sad if God’s people were as indifferent as the Gentiles that know Him not! Is Christendom really better new? Is wisdom the aim of the school board or the education council? It makes “a glad father”; as its absence cannot but fall as grief to the “mother” especially. How many sons, bright, applauded, and successful, end in shame and ruin!

The second carries out the warning of the first verse. “Treasures of wickedness profit nothing.” They may dazzle, and furnish the amplest means of self-gratification. But the end of these things is death; and God is not mocked, who will judge by Him in whom was no sin, but only obedience in love. Righteousness is consistency with our relationships, the first of which is with Him who is out of sight and forgotten. Now, as Solomon owned publicly when at the height of his earthly blessing, “there is no man that sinneth not”; righteousness cannot be for any man without looking out

of himself to Him whom God ever meant to send, as all that feared Him knew. The prophets here but emphasized what the faithful acted on from the beginning. To be self-satisfied, or indifferent, is to be unrighteous radically. To believe God and look for the Saviour is alone right. He gives one to be righteous as well as justified; “he shall live by his faith”; and there is no other way. Righteousness, therefore, it is that “delivereth from death.”

Verse 3 appropriately adds the comforting assurance that Jehovah, who tries the righteous for their good in an evil age, “will not suffer the righteous to famish; but he repelleth the craving (or, the desire) of the wicked.” There is a righteous government in the midst of all sorts of difficulties, snares, and moral contradictions, the most wilful finds himself checked, as the most tried is sustained and cared for.

In verses 4 and 5, heedlessness is shown to work ruin, no less than more pronounced evil. It was not for such indifference that God made man in His image after His likeness; and when he fell, he got a conscience to know good and evil, as was not nor could be in a state of innocence. So we have, “He cometh to want that dealeth with a slack hand; but the hand of the diligent maketh rich.” As man, it is good for him to eat bread in the sweat of his face. An idler is open to evil as well as poverty; the diligent works not in vain. Again, when all is bright and abundant, folly takes its ease and enjoyment; but he is a wise son that gathereth in summer. Thus, he that sleeps when he ought to reap diligently, must inevitably cause shame, whatever the love of those who are nearest.

Then verses 6 and 7 contrast the portion and the memory of the righteous with the wicked. While blessings are upon the head of a righteous man, to adorn and protect him, the mouth of the wicked is covered by violence, or violence covers it. They proceed farther in ungodliness, and their folly at length becomes evident. Whereas the memory of the righteous man lives as blessed, and the very name of the wicked shall rot.

Wisdom is manifested in lowly obedience (vv. 8, 9). “The wise in heart receiveth commandments; but the foolish of lips (the marked contrast) shall fall.” Man’s true elevation is in looking up to Him who deigns to guide the needy by His counsel. The foolish of lips proves that he neither knows whence wisdom comes, nor distrusts his own emptiness; and therefore shall he fall. But wisdom of heart does not stop at hearing, but receives to obey, and is blessed in his doing; and so we are told here, “he that walketh in integrity walketh securely; but he that perverteth his ways shall be known.” He may be sly, and hope to lie concealed; but He who sees all discloses the evildoer even in the dark day or night.

Very pregnant is verse 10. “He that winketh with the eye causeth grief.” He may be ever so on his guard, he may not go beyond a sign of his evil eyes; but he “causeth grief,” and without defining it farther. It may be grief to himself as well as to others. As before, here it is added that the foolish of lips shall fall. He is not a crafty dissembler, but falls through his outspoken folly.

In the verses that immediately follow, “the mouth” has a predominant place for good will, though labour or its fruit is noticed by the way, no less than heed to instruction, as in verses 15-17.

“The mouth of a righteous one [is] a fountain of life; but the mouth of the wicked covereth violence.

“Hatred stirreth up strifes; but love covereth all transgress ions.

“In the lips of one intelligent wisdom is found; but a rod [is] for the back of him that is void of understanding (or, heart).

“The wise lay up knowledge; but the mouth of the fool [is] near destruction.

“The rich one’s wealth [is] his strong city; the poor’s destruction [is] their poverty.

“The labour of righteousness [tendeth] to life, the revenue of wickedness to sin.

“Keeping instruction [is] life’s path; but he that forsaketh reproof erreth.

“He that covereth hatred hath lying lips, and he that uttereth slander [is] a food (or, vile).

“In the multitude of words there wanteth not transgression; but he that restraineth his lips doeth wisely.

“The tongue of the righteous [is as] choice silver; the heart of a wicked one [is] little worth.

“The lips of the righteous feed many; but fools die for want of understanding.” vv. 11-21.

The mouth has a widely different intent and character in man from the beast, where it expresses animal need, innocuous or baneful to others. Man’s mouth has a nobler purpose and unique, as the means of expressing his inner nature in relationship, not with the realm of

nature which he is set to rule, but, in subjection, with God whom he represents, or, alas! misrepresents. Here it is the mouth of a righteous man, and is said to be a fountain of life; for this is the divine mind as to such a one in the desert world. He is not merely seen of God providentially as Hagar by a fountain of water in the wilderness, which was called accordingly. He endures as seeing Him who is invisible. He becomes thereby an active source of blessing to others, and of blessing toward that nature which has in it now the taint of death through the sin of man, its first typical head, before the second Man (the unfailing and true Head) restores all things as He surely will in due time. Meantime the righteous man's mouth by grace is a fountain of life. He is a witness of God in Christ; and as he believes therefore so he speaks. With the wicked it is wholly otherwise. His mouth not only utters the violence of self-will and ungodliness, but does yet worse in covering the violence he feels, which if disclosed might lead to wholesome caution or restraint and solemn warning.

"Hatred" is next brought before us, the precise reverse of God in His love, the transcript of Satan in his malice. So evident is its association, that it is needless to state its parentage; it is "as Cain," who was of the evil one, and slew his brother. But, even if in its lightest form, it "stirreth up strifes," resenting all interference with man's will, as God is nowhere in its thoughts. "But love covereth all transgressions." Such is the deep feeling of the divine nature in a man of God. Personal resentment is far from the heart. He is pleased to forgive and forget. So the Apostle repeats (1 Peter 4:8) that love covers a multitude of sins, as James similarly concludes his epistle. Yet even Israel, not Christians only, were to be

holy; and if a false witness rose up and was convicted, when both stood before Jehovah, then, instead of covering, they were bound to do to him as he meant against his brother, and so put the evil away from among them. Any other course is Satan's work by setting one scripture to annul another, instead of obeying all. To bring human feeling into such a case is as contrary to the gospel as it was to the law. "Do ye not judge them that are within?" "Holiness becometh thy house, O Jehovah, for ever." This is as inalienable as love's privilege to cover all transgressions personally. When our Lord on the mount taught His disciples not to resist evil (Matt. 5:38- 42) according to the law of retaliation, it was for Christian life in its individual walk. The same Lord insisted on unsparing judgment of evil in the Church. So we all know how wrong it is to efface 1 Corinthians 5 in practice by forbidding the uprooting of the tares in Matthew 13:29. How unintelligent and blind!

Again, we are told that "in the lips of one intelligent, wisdom is found; but a rod is for the back of him that is void of heart" (or, understanding). How true is this, and evident experimentally! It is not only that every intelligent man has wisdom, but in his lips it is found. How self is betrayed in seeking it otherwise! Who would look for wisdom elsewhere unless he (perhaps unconsciously) wanted his own way? On the other hand, he that lacks heart in the moral sense deserves the rod for his own chastening. If his eye were single, he could not want light.

Another blessing comes to wisdom. It does not lose what it has' but grows by grace. "The wise lay up wisdom." Acuteness or originality may not and often does not turn

to profit the most brilliant and useful ideas; but wisdom keeps and uses what is given from above. Just as the fool's mouth, however voluble, utters nothing of real value, but has ever at hand ample elements for mischief and "near destruction."

The next couplet seems to state this simple fact, and not without irony. "The rich man's wealth is his strong city; the destruction of the poor is their poverty." So they think, and others say; yet riches have wings and may fly away; as the poor, if godly and content with the will of God, have great gain.

Compared with the rich, we have now "a righteous man's labour," which has the stamp on it of tending "to life." On the other hand, "the revenue" (it is not said, the labour) of a wicked man tendeth "to sin." How cheering for him who accepts the portion, though it be in a ruined world, of eating bread in the sweat of his face! and how sorrowful is the course of a revenue, were it ever so abundant, flowing into sin!

Then follows the practical test: "Keeping instruction is the path of life," as surely as "he that forsaketh reproof erreth." For not to hear only, but to keep instruction, is of great price; whereas to dislike, and so forsake, the "reproof" of our manifold faults, is the way to go astray, one knows not how far.

Next, we hear the yet more solemn warning against hypocritical ill will, its character and natural issue, and God's judgment of it, whatever men say. "He that covereth hatred hath lying lips; and he that uttereth slander is a fool." So He says who searcheth reins and hearts, which we cannot do and so need to profit by His word. Malevolent lies, when laid bare, thus prove hatred

that was covered up, and the sending forth of slander evinces the fool. The divine oracle does not stoop to the deceiving politeness of society, but speaks out that all saints may hear, whether for comfort or for admonition.

Further, we are cautioned against overmuch speaking, as our Lord denounced vain repetitions in prayer like the Gentiles, and long prayers in public like the Jews. It is well at all times to watch and refrain, save in peremptory duty. “In the multitude of words there wanteth not transgression; but he that restraineth his lips doeth wisely.” Let us not fail then to ask the Lord to set a watch before our mouth, and keep the door of our lips, as in Psalm 141:3. Our evil nature is too ready to watch our neighbour’s mouth to the shame of faith and love.

The tongue of the righteous, as we are told in verse 20, is as choice silver. This is apposite and suggestive. We might have thought other metals might have suited not less well. Many a tongue that is not righteous cuts like the brightest and sharpest steel. But as silver in sanctuary associations pointed to grace, and gold to righteousness divine, so in usage among men silver is specially adapted for probing wounds without corrosion or festering. So is the tongue of the just, always with grace, seasoned with salt. Hence the apostolic call on “the spiritual” to restore one overtaken in any trespass; the unspiritual is apt to be severe, the carnal would be careless and resent true judgment.

The following verse (21) pursues and defines the positive blessing. “The lips of a righteous man feed many.” On another side we hear, “but fools die for want of understanding.” The bread which Jesus made and

gave through His disciples fed the multitude, with more at the end than at the beginning; and this is what the righteous soul finds in Him for many in their many wants and in a thousand ways. Him they are called to testify, and their “lips” will as certainly “feed many.” Just as certainly do foals who believe not in Him, though they may hear with their ears, “die for want of understanding.” His flesh, which the Son of man gave us to eat, and His blood to drink, is the most precious grace on His part, and the most needed truth on ours; but upon this many of His disciples went back and walked no more with Him. How true and sad to say that “fools die for want of understanding”! It is the perverse heart, insensible alike to its own sinfulness and to the goodness of God, who in Christ went down to all depths to save the lost at all cost.

To the end of the chapter we have the blessing of Jehovah in contrast with the fool, the wicked, and the sluggard, in their respective paths; the fear of Jehovah, and again the way of Jehovah, and the effects compared with the opposed evil.

“The blessing of Jehovah. it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow to it.

“[It is] as sport to a fool to do wickedness; but a man of understanding hath wisdom.

“The fear of the wicked, it shall come upon him; but the desire of the righteous shall be granted.

“As a whirlwind passeth, so [is] the wicked no I more]; but the righteous [is] an everlasting foundation.

“As vinegar to the teeth, and as smoke to the eyes, so [is] the sluggard to those that send him.

“The fear of Jehovah prolongeth days; but the years of the wicked shall be shortened.

“The hope of the righteous [is] joy; but the expectation of the wicked shall perish.

“The way of Jehovah [is] strength to the upright one; but destruction to the workers of iniquity.

“The righteous one shall never be removed; but the wicked shall not dwell in the earth (or, land).

“The mouth of the righteous one putteth forth wisdom; but the froward tongue shall be cut off.

“The lips of a righteous one know what is acceptable; but the mouth of the wicked [is] frowardness.” vv. 22-32.

The Israelites were here called to remember that their God, Jehovah, the only unerring moral governor, is the blesser, and that His blessing makes rich. The day comes when Messiah shall reign in righteousness, and princes shall reign in judgment. In that day, as the role, false appearances shall not flourish. The vile person or fool shall be no more called liberal, nor the churl said to be bountiful. The work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness quietness and confidence forever. The very wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad; and no wonder, when He reigns who made all very good, before the sin of man brought in confusion and every evil work. But then shall the wolf dwell with the lamb, and the leopard lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp (or adder), and the weaned child shall put his hand on

the viper's den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain. In that day will it be seen by every eye that the blessing of Jehovah makes rich, and He adds no sorrow to it. But even in this day of man when sin still reigns in death, godliness with contentment is great gain, whatever be the outward circumstances.

On the other hand, the lively pleasure of moral folly is to do wickedness for a little while. What is the end of such sport, but death as part wages, and judgment as full? A man of understanding has wisdom, and the fear of Jehovah is his constant part as well as beginning. Moreover, the fear of the wicked is far from groundless, and if it heed not the goodness of God that leads to repentance, the suspended blow falls, "it shall come upon him." Just so, even while it is still the evil day, the desire of the righteous shall be granted; for he asks of God what is according to His will, judging himself where, seeking more or otherwise, he yielded to vain thoughts. Why should he doubt care and mercy in any trial from Him whose grace justified the ungodly? No doubt, even now there are hours of exceeding pressure, here compared to a whirlwind. When it passes, where is the wicked? "No more." The very distress which overwhelms him discloses that "the righteous is an everlasting foundation." "Sluggishness" may not have the dark character of "wickedness" or of "folly" in the moral sense; but it is a twofold wrong of no small dimensions. It is unworthy in itself, and dishonours the failing man by its purposeless ease; it is as vexatious to others "that send him" "as vinegar to the teeth, and as smoke to the eyes." How sad when lack of heed and diligence in a Christian exposes his Master's name to be ill spoken of!

The Apostle Peter cites a word kindred in substance to verse 27 from Psalm 34, though the form differs. The fear of Jehovah is the source of strength and security for the weak in a world of evil and anxiety and danger. It "prolongeth days" for him who trembles at His word, not at the enemy; as "the years of the wicked" who has no such fear "shall be shortened." For the same reason "the hope of the righteous is joy" now as well as at the end; whereas "the expectation of the wicked shall perish." Not only is there the wearing chagrin and worry of disappointment to shorten his days, but he cannot shut out his dread of inevitable judgment; and his mockery of perdition ends in the blackest despair.

In bright light shines out verse 29. "The way of Jehovah is strength to the upright, but destruction to the workers of iniquity." It is not here His "end" as in James 5:11, but His "way"; though they are alike worthy of Him, and also the reliance and comfort of faith, as His Word reveals both. Oh, what patience and long-suffering in His way, however dark and afflicting it seemed to Job and his friends! but what was the end? Could Satan deny its compassion and mercy? But His way corrected error for the upright, while its forbearance gives occasion to the destruction of such as work iniquity. They shall no more inhabit the earth, than the righteous be removed, in the judgment. They may foam out their own shames now; but "the froward tongue shall be cut out," as surely as "the mouth of the righteous putteth forth wisdom." It is the single eye to the Lord that gives the lips to know what is acceptable to God as well as man. The mouth of the wicked speaks frowardness according to the abundance of his heart; the good man speaks out of his good treasure, and this is Christ Himself.

Proverbs 11

The saving grace of God instructs us to live righteously in the present age. It is far from all that He looks for in a saint. Sobriety He claims, and godliness also. But honesty in our dealings with men is indispensable, the lack of which wholly discredits any profession of piety. It betrays a covetous man, whom the Holy Spirit brands as an idolater (Eph. 5:5), and without inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. How hateful it was to Him of old, we see in the opening of our chapter.

"A false balance [is] abomination to Jehovah, but a just weight his delight.

"Pride cometh, then cometh shame; but with the lowly [is] wisdom.

"The integrity of the upright guideth them; but the crookedness of the treacherous destroyeth them.

"Wealth profiteth not in the day of wrath; but righteousness delivereth from death.

"The righteousness of the perfect maketh plain his way; but the wicked falleth by his own wickedness.

"The righteousness of the upright delivereth them; but the treacherous are taken in their own craving.

"When a wicked man dieth, expectation shall perish; and the hope of evil ones perisheth.

"The righteous is delivered out of trouble, and the wicked cometh in his stead.

"With the mouth a hypocrite destroyeth his neighbour; but through knowledge are the righteous delivered." vv. 1-9.

“A false balance” is much more than an act of dishonesty; it implies the pretension to integrity, and withal deliberate purpose to cheat. It is therefore an abomination to Him whose eyes behold, whose eyelids try the children of men, as a just weight is His delight. Trickery in trade is a corroding evil, most of all fatal to such as gain a sullied or a seared conscience.

Pride readily comes in this poor world, where man poses as something when he is nothing and worse. But its shadow is close at hand; “shame cometh”; and this even here, before the judgment. For God resists the proud, and proclaims their abasement. But with the lowly is wisdom. He is not ever on the tenterhooks of self. He looks above the petty ways of men, and refuses to be irritated even if wronged. The wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, without hypocrisy.

It is not only unworthy devices in trade, or a self-exalting spirit, that we need to watch against, but perverseness in our heart and ways. Christ could designate Himself as “the truth.” He was absolutely what He also spoke. His ways and His words perfectly agreed. Are we begotten by the word of truth, and sanctified by the Spirit? Let us follow Him, finding it is our sin and shame if we turn aside in aught. How blessed to be truthful in love! “The integrity of the upright shall guide them; but the crookedness of the treacherous destroyeth them.” A tortuous path ends in ruin.

Nor can “riches” avail to avert or stay God’s displeasure, however they may shield and deliver in man’s day.

“Riches profit not in the day of wrath; but righteousness delivereth from death.” The just have a special resurrection (Luke 14:14). “Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: over these the second death hath no power.” Death is now our servant (Rom. 8:38; 1 Cor. 3:22).

Nor is it only that righteousness delivers from death; “the righteousness of the perfect shall direct his way; but the wicked shall fall by his own wickedness.” The man to whom grace has given a single eye sees the way straight before him, while the wicked needs no executioner, as he shall die by his own evil.

Death ruins the flattering expectation of a wicked person. In hades he lifts up his eyes, being in torments; they had been closed before, save to the lie of the enemy. “When a wicked man dieth, expectation shall perish; and the hope of evil ones perisheth.” “Thou fool” is then heard and felt in his despair.

How different is the lot of the just! “The righteous is delivered out of trouble, and the wicked cometh in his stead.” Even here the believer proves that God is his great Deliverer; how much more when the morning dawns without clouds! The wicked even here are not without evidence that God’s eye is on them, to let them taste the fruit of their own way. “In the net which they hid is their own foot taken.”

“With the mouth a hypocrite (or, impious one) destroyeth his neighbour; but through knowledge are the righteous delivered.” Violence is not so dangerous as deceit, and no deceit is so evil as that which clothes itself with the name of the Lord and His Word. But God causes all things to work together for those that love

Him, and this “through knowledge,” through that which faith is now to learn, because God gives it in His grace. Thus is the righteous kept, yea garrisoned, by God’s power, whatever ill will may plot to destroy.

The use and abuse of the mouth has a large place in the verses which come into review. Yet how small is the circle pursued compared with the vast range which Scripture touches elsewhere! There is much in the Old Testament which sets forth its evil; but in the New Testament it is exposed more deeply still, and in no part so much as the epistle of James.

“When it goeth well with the righteous, the city rejoiceth; and when the wicked perish, [there is] shouting.

“By the blessing of the upright the city is exalted; but it is overthrown by the mouth of the wicked.

“He that despiseth his neighbour is void of heart; but a man of understanding holdeth his peace.

“He that goeth about tale-bearing revealeth secrets; but he that is of a faithful spirit concealeth the matter.

“Where no advice [is] the people fall; but in the multitude of counsellors [there is] safety.

“It goeth ill with him that is surety for a stranger; but he that hateth suretyship is secure.” vv. 10-15.

The impious person of verse 9 described as ruining his neighbour with his mouth must have been as deceitful as mischievous. We can understand therefore why it should be narrowed to “a hypocrite.” (“Hypocrite” here and elsewhere seems defined unduly. The cognate verb is rendered to “profane,” “defile,” “pollute.” Why should another force be given to the appellative?) Certainly he

covers his neighbour with his defiling imputation so as to injure and destroy, as far as his intention could. But God takes care of the righteous in their unsuspecting simplicity, and gives knowledge, so that they are delivered.

Again, whatever may be the ill will of men provoked by a course of life which silently condemns them, conscience is forced to justify the truehearted. Hence, when it goes well with the righteous, the city rejoices. Compare Esther 8:15-17. Just so, when downfall comes to the notoriously wicked, men cannot disguise their loud satisfaction.

Further, good fruit is expected to others from the upright. “By the blessing of the upright the city is exalted, but it is overthrown by the mouth of the wicked.” Here the public ruin is attributed to the same source as that which destroys private reputation. A veil of piety but adds to the iniquity and to the mischief.

Next, we are told where silence is golden, both by contrast and directly: “He that despiseth his neighbour is void of heart.” Where is his sense, where is propriety, to say nothing of the love and fear of God? It is certain that the Highest despises not any. What can a creature’s state be who forgets either the body made of dust, or the soul from the inbreathing of Jehovah Elohim? Least of all does it suit Him who died to save the lost. “A man of understanding holdeth his peace” in such a case, unless there be a divine obligation to speak out. “He that is of a faithful spirit concealeth the matter; whereas he that goeth about as a slanderer revealeth secrets.” To receive nothing so said, and to reprove the talebearer, will soon

check and put such to shame; to repeat slanderous tales is to share the guilt and the mischief.

On the other hand there are those whom God sets as watchmen, and who are therefore bound to warn; as again the humble rejoice to be helped in their difficulties, instead of decrying those who have more discernment than themselves. “Where no advice is, the people fall; but in the multitude of counsellors there is safety.” Whatever the haughty spirit of independence may aspire to, there are chief men, or guides, among God’s people; and none can ignore or slight them but to their own loss. The Holy Spirit does not lead to self-conceit, but to unfeigned humility and to cordial value for fellowship.

But to be surety for another is quite another thing from either giving or taking counsel. “It goeth ill with him that is surety for a stranger; but he that hateth suretyship is secure.” Yet He who was best and wisest deigned to be surety for us where suffering followed to the uttermost; but as He knew beforehand, so He endured it all for us to God’s glory. In our way and measure we too may incur the risk; but we should do it only where we are prepared to stand the forfeit, and can do it considerately and honourably. Otherwise it is right as well as safe to refuse. But speculation without or beyond means is wholly unjustifiable; it is not kindness, but rather dishonesty.

The next verses open with a contrast, a gracious rather than graceful woman, and violent men; but in verse 22 it is the very different image of a fair woman without discretion with its painful incongruity.

“A gracious woman retaineth honour, and the violent retain riches.

“The merciful man doeth good to his own soul, but the cruel troubleth his own flesh.

“The wicked earneth deceitful wages, but he that soweth righteousness a sure reward.

“As righteousness [tendeth] to life, so to death he that pursueth evil.

“The perverse in heart [are] abomination to Jehovah, but the upright in way [are] his delight.

“Hand in (or, for) hand, evil man shall not be unpunished; but the seed of the righteous shall be delivered.

“As a gold ring in a swine’s snout [is] a woman fair and indiscreet.

“The desire of the righteous [is] only good; the wicked’s expectation [is] wrath (or, arrogance).” vv. 16-23.

The spirit that is “virtuous” is quite distinct from “gracious”; but the picture given in the latter part of Proverbs 31 is of a woman of whom the latter might be predicated as the former is. They are but different aspects of the same person. How can there be found a more vivid answer to one who seeks the meaning of her retaining honour? In fact it is well illustrated in the history of Abigail the Carmelite, as her husband Nabal shows how the violent retain riches. For the one a meek and quiet spirit is not only of great price in God’s sight, but a blessing that endures; whereas what are the stoutest in holding their wealth before death? There is no discharge in that war.

It is obvious to everyone how blessed mercy is to the needy and wretched. Here is shown the good it does to the man's own soul. Who that reflects can dispute this, or its moral importance? On the other hand, equally certain it is that the cruel person does trouble not only his victims but his own flesh. Far from meaning it, he becomes in divine retribution a self-tormentor even now.

The force of verse 18 seems to be not only the deceitful work that the wicked man does, but the kindred and disappointing wages he earns. It deceives himself as much or more than those he injures. But he that walks consistently with his relationship to God and man sows and reaps accordingly. He has a sure reward. How fully the New Testament bears both out, is evident from Romans 8 and Galatians 6.

This is carried farther in terms still more general but no less sure and weighty in the verse that follows. Righteousness certainly tends to life, as he that pursues evil to his own death. The devil is not only a liar but a murderer from the beginning till his end come; and those who are swayed by him must share his doom, as they reject the Righteous One who alone gives life to those that believe.

Then we hear of a class whose aggravated evil makes them offensive to God. For the froward or perverse in heart are declared to be "an abomination to Jehovah." But it is a comfort to know from Himself that such as are perfect (or, upright) in way are His delight. It was man, independent and rebellious, that departed from Jehovah Elohim, before He drove him from the earthly paradise. Yet does His goodness lead the guilty to repentance, and by revealed grace render him upright and guileless, but

this only through His Son becoming not only the pattern man, but the sacrifice for our sins. What a joy to the believer that His complacency in man is beyond doubt, and according to His Word! Yes, He delights in those whose way is marked by integrity.

“Hand to hand,” here and in Proverbs 16, is a phrase open to a variety of explanations. Even, to all generations, and certainly, have been suggested by some, while another refers it to terms in making a bargain. Whichever it be, an evil person shall not be scatheless in one version; in the other, not only the righteous but their seed shall be delivered. Israel, as they have been, attest the one; Israel, as they shall be, will be the plain proof of the other. Jehovah can by redemption forget iniquities, but will remember and bless for the fathers’ sake; in Christ He can afford to do so.

But how unseemly a sight is a fair woman without that discretion which the weaker vessel needs in the world and the race as they are! Truly a jewel of gold in a swine’s snout — a phrase purposely framed to convey incongruity and disgust.

Again, the desire of the righteous is only good. Begotten as they are of incorruptible seed through God’s word, their affections flow from that new life. They have another nature prone to evil; but this they judge before God who watches over His husbandry for good and the repression of evil. The expectation of the wicked is according to their unremoved evil and their deadly opposition to God, which only vexes them to wrath, and must end in outer darkness with its weeping and gnashing of teeth. Who can wonder that in chapter 11

we read, “the hope of the righteous shall be granted,” and that the fear of the wicked shall come upon him no less than his expectation?

A deathblow seems struck at selfishness in the following verses. They open with a maxim expressly framed to startle souls and call for reflection. But the more the words are weighed, their certainty appears all the clearer and the more important.

“There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is right, but only to want.

“The blessing soul shall be made fat; and he that watereth shall be watered also himself.

“He that withholdeth corn, the people curse him; but blessing [shall be] upon the head of him that selleth [it].

“He that is earnest after good seeketh favour; but he that searcheth after mischief, it shall come upon him.

“He that trusteth in his riches shall fall; but the righteous shall flourish as a green leaf.

“He that troubleth his own house shall inherit wind; and the fool [shall be] servant to the wise of heart.

“The fruit of the righteous [is] as a tree of life; but the wise winneth souls.

“Behold, the righteous shall be requited on the earth: how much more the wicked and the sinner!” vv. 24-31.

Even agriculture, trade, and commerce illustrate faith in the unseen, however severed from that sovereign grace which is the spring of blessing in the spiritual realm. But increase as the result cannot be without judgment along the way. On the other hand, niggardliness and fear cannot ward off want, nor do they deserve it. He who is

alone worthy of all trust, and even in a scene of confusion, holds the reins, is entitled to form and guide the heart, and He loves a cheerful giver.

Hence the blessing or liberal one is richly blessed; and the waterer of others, according to this expressive figure, gets watered himself. Have we not known it here and there, if we have not proved it as we ought? See its perfection in Him who at the well of Sychar touched the core of the fatal evil, that the Spirit might act as the fountain of His living water springing up to life eternal, Himself finding His food in doing the will of the One who sent Him.

Next we hear the people, on the other side, cursing the withholder of corn in the time of want and suffering to enrich himself, as surely as blessing does not fail to be on his head that fairly disposes of it. See it in the beautiful tale of Joseph during Egypt's years of famine. Alas! the sad story prevails today too often where the glad one should be heard.

Now we are shown a larger and higher application. He that is earnest, or rises early, after good seeks favour, nor does he fail as the rule to procure it. How pleasant it is in His eyes who alone is absolutely and essentially good! But what can one look for in divine government, but that mischief shall come upon him that is industrious in devising it? What a solemn and sudden witness of it in Haman, the Jews' enemy, during their servitude to the Gentile, as of no less favour is in Mordecai!

Precarious indeed is confidence in riches, as we are next told; for they certainly make for themselves wings and flee away as an eagle toward heaven. No wonder then that he that trusts in them shall fall. On the other hand,

righteousness endures, whatever comes from without; so the wise man can say that the righteous shall flourish as the branch or green leaf. He, as David sang, is like a tree planted by rivers of water, that brings forth fruit in season, and with leaf also that withers not. “Your bones,” said the prophet, “shall flourish like the tender grass.” For the Christian, this is through abiding in Christ.

Verse 29 brings before us the man “that troubleth his own house.” This might be by one or other of the aforesaid objectionable ways — undue scattering, or undue withholding. By either course, not only is his own house made a scene of vexation, but the end for himself is the wind, a heritage of nothing but disappointment. “The fool” seems to sink still lower, and becomes servant to those who are “wise of heart,” the very reverse of his own heartless inconsiderateness.

How contrasted with persons so failing in righteous wisdom is that which is next set before us. “The fruit of the righteous is as a tree of life; and the wise winneth souls.” A tree is a noble object in the landscape, but the fruit of the righteous is far beyond such a comparison; it is as “a tree of life.” They are blessed and a blessing. But the wise rises yet higher, and wins souls; or he that wins souls is wise — a work impossible without divine love constraining, a divine fear communicated by the Word and Spirit of God. How richly the gospel of His grace now produces both! How sad where it does not!

The chapter closes with a vivid call to “behold”, and what then? A cardinal principle for Israel: “the righteous shall be requited on the earth: how much more the wicked and the sinner!” It has been but imperfectly

seen, for rulers and subjects have alike fallen short. For a full witness it awaits His kingdom who will come in power and glory, whose right it is. He has spoken, and He will do it. And the time is short; the end of all things is at hand.

Proverbs 12

We have next the contrast distinctly drawn between the course, character, and end of those that are open to divine discipline, and of such as refuse it; of him that obtains Jehovah's favour, of the malicious too, and of the righteous unmoved by that which sweeps away the wicked. Nor is the woman of worth unnoticed any more than the one who makes ashamed. The thoughts and words of both classes are confronted with the dread issue.

"Whoso loveth correction loveth knowledge, but he that hateth reproof [is] brutish.

"A good [man] obtaineth favour of Jehovah, but a man of mischievous devices will he condemn.

"A man shall not be established by wickedness, but the root of the righteous shall never be moved.

"A woman of worth [is] a crown to her husband, but she that maketh ashamed [is] as rottenness in his bones.

"The thoughts of the righteous [are] judgment, the counsels of the wicked deceit.

"The words of the wicked [are] a lying-in-wait for blood, but the mouth of the upright shall deliver them.

"Overthrow the wicked, and they [are] no more; but the house of the righteous shall stand." Prov. 12:1-7.

As original uprightness was lost in the fall, even if there be a new nature by grace, soul discipline is ever needed, and blessed in the genuine humility that values knowledge from on high. Pride and vanity are alike disdainful of reproof, and therefore go from bad to worse. Those unwilling to own their faults or to submit to faithful dealing sink below humanity.

He that is good in his measure (Rom. 6:7) has been so formed by his faith in Jehovah's loving-kindness, and obtains fresh favour, whereas He condemns the man who yielding to his evil nature lives in spiteful devices.

Nor is it in the nature of wickedness to establish a man, for it makes slippery the high place he may reach; but the righteous have a root which, however assailed, shall not be moved.

If you wish a full-length portrait of a woman of worth, it is furnished in the last chapter of this Book. Such a woman is not only a blessing but "a crown" to her husband. For even if naturally or spiritually beyond him, she will not fail to hide herself behind and help efficiently under him as her head, to the good order of children and servants, as well as in the circle of their friends or foes. On the other hand, what a curse is she that makes ashamed, however it may be! It is an evil ever felt to be hopeless in itself. How truly described as "rottenness in his bones"!

As righteousness means consistency with our relationships to God and man, "the thoughts" are a main part of it. Self-righteousness is really its opposite, and consists of outward observances if there be any pretence of ground for it. What value can these have, where the heart is far from Jehovah proving it by

disregard of His Anointed, and by hopes resting on their own ways according to the precept of men? True righteousness is inseparable from being begotten of God; and thus the thoughts are right, as being the inward effect of a new life which comes from God's object of faith on whom they rest. The counsels of the wicked, who know Him not, are deceit; for they flow from an evil nature assuming to be good.

And what are "the words" of the wicked but, as they are here characterized, "a lying-in-wait for blood"? If they have not life in Christ, they are the habitual prey of him who is from the beginning a liar and a murderer. "My soul," says the Psalmist, "is in the midst of lions; I lie down among those that breathe out flames, the sons of Adam, whose teeth are spears and arrows, and their tongue a sharp sword." Smooth was the milk of his mouth, but his heart was war; his words were softer than oil, yet are they drawn swords. On the other hand the mouth of the upright speaks to the conscience and heart, and God knows how to give it effect so that it shall deliver them.

As the wicked build on the sand, overthrow comes and is fatal; but the house of the righteous, being built on the rock, shall stand. Rain may descend, and floods come, and winds blow, but only to prove that it is founded and preserved. So is he who hears and obeys the Word.

There is no danger that besets men, and even the righteous, more than too keen a regard to their reputation. Here we begin with the secret of that which gives a quiet spirit, and of what calls forth contempt.

“A man shall be commended according to his judgment (or, wisdom), but he that is perverse of heart shall be despised.

“Better [is] he that is lightly esteemed, and hath a servant, than he that aimeth after honour and lacketh bread.

“A righteous [man] regardeth the life of his beast; but the tender mercies of the wicked [are] cruelty.

“He that tilleth his ground shall be satisfied with bread; but he that followeth worthless [persons] is devoid of sense.

“The wicked desireth the net of evil [men]; but the rout of the righteous yieldeth [fruit].

“In the transgression of the lips is an evil snare; but a righteous [man] shall come out of trouble.

“A man shall be satisfied with good by the fruit of the mouth; and the doings of a man’s hands shall be rendered to him.” vv. 8-14.

If the eye be single, the whole body shall be full of light, said the Lord. This gives a man to have a godly aim, and to seek it by faithful means. The same spirit imparts a sound judgment, which commends itself and him who makes it. A perverse heart leaves God, likes to oppose, and seeks self only. Such a one only makes difficulties and stumbling blocks, and gets despised in spite of his vain efforts to rise.

As the rule, man walks in a vain show, and this deceives many. Hence he who despises appearances often gets despised, though of weight in a lowly way and able to relieve his labour by the help of a servant; while he who

strains in paying honour to himself outwardly may come to want necessaries.

Next we find men tested by their treatment of the creation which God put into subjection to the race. Indifference to one's beast is unworthy; cruelty is worse. Hence the righteous is concerned for his beast's life, while even the wicked's tender mercies are cruelty. Jehovah's tender mercies are over all His works, and the day comes when everything that has breath shall praise Him.

We turn then to the contrast of diligence in one's duty with the companionship of idlers. He that tills his land shall have plenty of bread; whereas the follower of the worthless betrays his want of sense. In a fallen condition it is a mercy to eat bread in the sweat of the face. Idleness is not only profitless but a misery.

Verse 12 confronts the desire of the wicked with the righteous in this, that the former yearns after the net, or prey, of men still more wicked, for his own advantage; but the latter has a root of stability which does not fail to produce good fruit in its season.

Words too as well as doings have their just place in moral government here below. The transgression of the lips is not only a great offence in God's sight; it is an evil snare to the guilty (v. 13). Boast as they may that their tongues are their own, they learn to their cost that neither God nor man will suffer it. The righteous know what trouble is; but, instead of being snared by it, they come out of it. So of the Christian it is written that through many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God.

On the other hand, the fruit of the mouth is of real account, not only for the good of others but for him who is enabled thus to speak. Giving of thanks becomes him who knows the Lord Jesus. It is no wonder if those who never speak for the use of edifying decry the communication of grace and truth. If it be so with our words, how much shall the excellent doings of a man be recompensed to him? God assuredly concerns Himself with our ways and our words. Let each of us please his neighbour for that which is good unto edifying. For Christ pleased not Himself; but as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached Thee fell upon Me. Hence the need of patience, and the value of the comfort of the Scriptures, while we wait for the fruition of our hope. The other side is no less sure; evil ways and words God will bring into judgment.

A fool's way and a fool's vexation introduce the verses which now claim our heed, where the utterance of truth and wisdom follows with weighty instruction in righteousness.

"The way of a fool [is] right in his own eyes; but he that is wise hearkeneth to counsel.

"The vexation of the fool is known presently (in that day); but he that concealeth shame is prudent.

"One uttering truth showeth forth righteousness, but a false witness deceit.

"There is that babbleth like the piercings of a sword; but the tongue of the wise [is] health.

"The lip of truth shall be established for ever; but a lying tongue [is] but for a moment.

“Deceit [is] in the heart of those that devise evil; but to the counsellors of peace [is] joy.

“No evil shall happen to the righteous; but the wicked shall be filled with mischief.

“Lying lips [are] an abomination to Jehovah; but those that deal truly are his delight.” vv. 15-22.

For man with a fallen nature and in a fallen world to confide in himself is to play the fool. God is not in any of his thoughts. He is sure he needs no advice; he is right in his own eyes. What can his eyes do but help him to judge according to sight, which the Lord contrasts with judging righteous judgment? and what so dangerous as every question of self? For there is nothing a man dislikes more than thinking ill of himself, unless it is of believing good of God. Truly the way of a fool is right in his own eyes. He that is wise distrusts himself and hearkens to counsel; nor does he cheat God and his conscience by seeking counsel of the weak and easy-going, but of the godly.

The vexation of the fool breaks out in immediate and uncontrollable anger. He forgets God, himself, and everybody else. On the other hand, he is prudent who conceals rather than exposes shame; he feels the insult, instead of despising his brother, and steeling his own breast in worldly pride. But his quiet spirit adds no fuel to the flame, and helps the offender perhaps to judge his unbridled impropriety. How prudent to ignore such provocations, to conceal shame not only from others but from ourselves!

To utter truth simply and characteristically in a world where men walk in a vain show, is a real display of righteousness, and the righteous Jehovah loves

righteousness. There may be higher and deeper truth now that the Son of God is come and has given us understanding to know Him that is true. But righteousness is indispensable; without it, pretension to grace is a delusion. Again, a false witness is an evident slave of Satan. To mistake we are all liable; but deceit is quite a different and a most evil thing, as mischievous to man as offensive to God.

Babbling or rash speaking is compared most aptly to the piercings of a sword; it inflicts wounds and pain; it flows from levity if not malice, and it has no aim of good. The tongue of the wise carries conviction to every upright heart. It may smite if duty call for it righteously, but it is a kindness; such wounds heal, as they prove and remove what only harms. The tongue of the wise is health.

The lip of truth may be gainsaid and disliked by such as have reason to dread it, but it shall stand forever. There is no need therefore to spend time in defending it or exposing those that are its adversaries. If one waits quietly, the more will its reality and importance appear; whereas a lying tongue is but for a moment save among such as love it, and where will the end be?

Of falsehood deceit is the essence; and here it is written that it is in the heart of those that devise evil. Thus it is equally akin to malice as to untruth. How awful that the heart that should be the spring of affection is really given up to devise evil! If others are deceived, still more is that heart. “But to the counsellors of peace is joy.” Blessed are they, said the Lord; they shall be called sons of God. Theirs is joy now — theirs to enter into their Lord’s joy by-and-by.

How triumphant is the Christian answer in Romans 8, to verse 21! “No evil shall happen to the righteous.” Suppose “tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? But in all these things we more than conquer through Him that loved us.” Christ has changed all things to us. How terrible to reject, despise, or even neglect Him! For then all our evil falls on our own heads. Truly the wicked are not fuller of mischief now than of misery in that day and forever.

Jehovah concerns Himself about every lie. Lying lips are an abomination to Him, even as an idol that is set up to rival and ruin His glory. So those that not only speak but deal truly are His delight. How precious to Him was the One who when asked, Who art Thou? could answer, “Absolutely what I also speak to you” (John 8:25). He is the truth.

In this group of moral maxims we have the value of prudence, and of diligence; depression compared with even a good word, the righteous contrasted with the wicked, the slothful with diligence; and the way of righteousness all through.

“A prudent man concealeth knowledge; but the heart of the foolish proclaimeth folly.

“The hand of the diligent shall bear rule; but the slothful [hand] shall be under tribute.

“Heaviness in the heart of man makes it stoop; but a good word maketh it glad.

“The righteous guideth his neighbour; but the way of the wicked misleadeth them.

“The slothful roasteth not what he took in hunting; but man’s precious substance [is] diligence.

“In the path of righteousness [is] life; and in its pathway is no death.” vv. 23-28.

Few things betray the lack of common sense more than the habit of displaying any bit of knowledge one may have. But it meets just as habitually with a sharp and disagreeable corrective; for those who knew more fully are apt to expose its shallowness and vanity. Ostentation characterizes such as have a smattering which often lets out how little is really known. The fault is more serious in a Christian, whose standard is, and ought to be, Christ the Truth.

The attention that takes pains is far more important and reliable than any ability where that is lacking. Ruling is the consequence without being sought. But the slothful neglect their duty and alienate their friends, gaining contempt and distrust on all sides, while sinking ever lower and lower. Who can wonder?

Heaviness in the heart renders the hand powerless, and hinders the eye from seeing the opportunities which God takes care to present. A good word gladdens the heart in the midst of manifold trials; and what an unfailing supply does Scripture afford! If it be so with the Old Testament, characterized as it is by the law, how much is it with the New Testament where the gospel gives the tone! The very word means glad tidings; and this is truly beyond question, save to such as, believing in their wretched and guilty selves, have no faith in God. Its blessedness is not only that it comes forth from the infinite love of God, giving His only begotten Son and in Him life eternal, but that He as Son of man meets all

that could hinder or disable, in the cross where God made the sinless One sin for us. It is therefore directly and expressly for those who have neither goodness nor strength, but are sinners and enemies, breaking their hard hearts with grace, to fill them with His light and love. As He said who told it out with matchless simplicity and fullness, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.” “Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.”

Righteousness has great weight to man’s conscience, aware if honest of his own failure, and keenly alive to its absence where he fondly expected it. For moral consistency is rare. Hence the righteous, not the bright, still less the crafty, guides his neighbour. It inspires confidence when a dilemma arrives or a danger threatens. But the way of the wicked does not impose on those who discern it. They may seek to flatter themselves, because it is easy, that it will pass and give them their desired ends. It misleads themselves, who often wake up to their own deceitful folly and sin too late.

Another trait of the slothful man is here pointed out. He may be active in the pursuit of his pleasure, but his sloth prevents his turning what he may have gained to any good account. He roasts not what he took in hunting, and has to sponge on others, whereas the precious substance of men is diligence. This is what avails in the long run, where the means and the opportunities may be ever so small.

But industrious diligence, though it may go with righteousness, is not always righteous, and often misses what is still better. “In the way of righteousness is life.”

Therefore said the Lord, Take heed and keep yourselves from all covetousness; for not because a man is in abundance is his life in the things which he possesses. We cannot serve God and mammon. Therefore He bade us not be anxious about our life, what to eat, and what to drink, or what to put on. The very birds of the sky and the lilies of the field teach men a weighty lesson; yet the birds have no consciousness of God, though beholden to His continual care; and not a sparrow falls to the ground without Him.

Hence there must be total deadness toward God and His Word, heart indifference to Him whom God has sent, if there be not a life beyond the creaturely existence of the day and the earth; and it is in the way of righteousness, not merely at its end, though it will have a glorious character above the present shifting scenes. Its pathway has no death. We cannot talk of its end; or, if we do, we can say it is life eternal. The end of unrighteousness is death; and its pathway is strewn every stop with those things whereof men who take note must be thoroughly ashamed. And how many souls has grace led by their sorrows to think of their sins, and to find in the Lord Jesus their Deliverer and joy, while awaiting another and enduring scene which has nothing to darken it!

Proverbs 13

In chapter 13:1-6, we have the temper, the means, and the traits of blessing in contrast with those of evil and shame; and we do well to weigh the words of Jehovah.

“A wise son [hath] his father’s instruction; but a scorner heareth not rebuke.

“A man shall eat good by the mouth’s fruit; but the soul of the treacherous [is for] violence.

“He that guardeth his mouth keepeth his soul; he that openeth wide his lips [shall have] destruction.

“A sluggard’s soul desireth, and hath nothing; but the soul of the diligent shall be made fat.

“A righteous one hateth lying; but the wicked maketh himself odious and cometh to shame.

“Righteousness guardeth him that is upright in the way; but wickedness overthroweth the sinner.” vv. 1-6.

A wise son bows thankfully to the divine provision of the family circle, and heeds his father’s correction, and the more when forced to feel folly is bound up with a child’s heart, not excepting his own. But what hope can there be of a scorner? of one who cannot conceive himself to blame, and counts him as an enemy who is faithful enough to tell him the truth?

The next case is not the duty of receiving, but the privilege of communicating good. Yet here too a man shall eat good by the fruit of a mouth that utters what is good to the use of edifying. And Jehovah of old impressed this on Israel by Moses, and on their sons. “Thou shalt talk of them [his words] when thou sittest in thy house, and when thou goest on the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign on thy hand, and they shall be for frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and upon thy gates.” Deut. 6:7-9. Were any words to compare with His? If this were irksome, what a tale it tells! The soul of transgressors

brooks no superior, no restraint. Violence is its issue; and what can its end be?

But there is a bridle needed also. Hence he that guardeth his mouth keepeth his soul. As a good man said, one should think twice before speaking once. If any offend not in word, he is a perfect man (of thorough integrity), able to bridle the whole body also. How much of sorrow and shame he spares himself, and others who avenge a little folly by despising the wisdom they themselves lack! On the other hand, he that goes about blatant, opening his lips wide to tell all he thinks, feels, or hears of others, shall have the destruction which his malicious folly deserves.

Then we have the person too indolent to take trouble for good or ill, the sluggard. “A sluggard’s soul desires, and hath nothing.” All begins and ends in wishes, with which the Apostle dealt trenchantly in 2 Thessalonians 3:10. How different the lot of the diligent! They shall be made fat, says the wise man. In every sphere it is true in the main — unfailingly so in the things of God who raises above many a mistake, and values purpose of heart and ways.

There are men of the world who would be ashamed to lie in daily life, and are severe against it in others; yet they blink at it in politics and — religion! But “the righteous hateth lying” wherever it may be, and most of all in that which concerns Him who is the Truth. Nor can one wonder, seeing that “he is begotten by the word of truth,” is sanctified by the truth, and grows by it day by day, as he is set here in the responsible testimony of the truth. Yet no one is more tempted by Satan to betray the truth. Never was there a more pernicious cheat than to

fancy that a Christian has immunity from falsehood, and is sure to speak the truth always. Still he is called to be truthful in love. This goes much farther. He that does not hate lying is a wicked person, “maketh himself odious” to all right-minded souls, “and cometh to shame.”

“Righteousness guardeth the upright in the way.” Such a one is not only bold as a lion, for what is man to be accounted of? Consistency in his relationship with God and man is the shield which Satan assails in vain; yet, as a Christian, he loves to be kept by God’s power through faith, for grace is dear to his soul, and he knows well that he is indebted to Him for all. On the contrary, “wickedness overthroweth the sinner.” Self and sin are all that he takes pleasure in; and the end of those things is death. No one is so terrible to him as God, no name hated so much as Christ, if he only told out the secret of his heart. The more he hears of Him, the more he hates his Judge, and spurns the hand meanwhile stretched out to save even him.

Walking in a vain show is natural to man as he is, but it does not always put on the same mask. The most prevailing snare is to pretend to have more than one possesses; but we must be prepared also for some pretending to have less than they have, in order to escape a duty, or from other selfish motives.

“There is that feigneth himself rich, and [hath] nothing; [there is] that feigneth himself poor, and [hath] great wealth.

“The ransom of a man’s life [is] his riches; but the poor heareth no threatening.

“The light of the righteous rejoiceth; but the lamp of the wicked shall be put out.

“By pride cometh only contention; but with the well-advised [is] wisdom.

“Wealth [gotten] by vanity diminisheth; but he that gathereth with the hand shall have increase.

“Hope deferred maketh the heart sick; but a desire [that] cometh to pass [is] a tree of life.” vv. 7-12.

The knowledge of Christ who is the Truth is the only sure means of making the believer truthful in deed as in word. But even he has no force beyond the constant dependence of faith. To be content with the fact that one believed is a snare and may be ruinous; faith is unreal, if it be not a living faith and a believing life.

The richest and wisest of men was a fitting oracle to tell men how greatly they err that count riches to be happiness. They make him envied and plotted against; so a rich man’s life, even if otherwise well spent, is one of exposure to dangers and deceits, and hence of no little uneasiness to the sensitive. What a sad use of riches to be the ransom of one’s life! Here at least the poor man lives in peace. To the wicked, it is aimless to threaten him who has nothing to lose, nothing to excite the covetous. He that has mercy on the poor, happy is he; while he that oppresses them, reproaches his Maker, and shall give account of his ways. When Christ reigns, He will satisfy the poor with bread. Even in the evil day his poverty protects him largely, while the rich man is proportionately exposed.

What a true and striking contrast between “the light” of the righteous, and “the lamp” of the wicked! Their course and end are according to their source. There is no real righteousness in God’s estimate apart from Him who revealed Himself and justifies us by the faith of

Christ. The light of the righteous therefore rejoiceth, as in it sins are effaced, and sorrows turned into profit and consolation. The lamp of the wicked may flare widely for a while during the pleasures of sin for a season; but ere long it dims, flickers, and shall be quenched.

Pride is the root of contention. What is emptier than self-applause and self-seeking? What so rules, not only those who affect great things in high life, but among the most debased of mankind? So it works in every circle of the world, and still more disgustingly in the Church, to which Christ has given the exemplar of what perfectly pleases God and edifies man by love in the truth. Pride leads to confusion, contention, and every evil work. The old man is ever proud in one way or another, being as self-sufficient as he is regardless and forgetful of Christ. Faith alone makes a man “well- advised” in a divine sense. With those led of the Spirit is wisdom, for Christ is before their eyes and their heart. He indeed from God is made to us wisdom, and all else we need; yet, whatever we have, what do we not need?

Then again we are reminded how wealth goes as it came. If got by light, unworthy, or dishonest ways, how it flies! For in such a case it has wings, not weight, and vanishes by no less vanity than it appeared for awhile. “But he that gathereth with the hand shall have increase.” God honours industry; and some that are great lords add lustre to their rank by being more truly working men than those who live by it and are too apt to boast of it. Such should every believer be, and put to shame those that eat without work! How happy too when “increase” enables one to give to the needy! how sad that any should take advantage of grace, instead of seeking to eat their own bread!

Next we are told of the blight created by disappointment, and the cheer given by receiving what the heart sought. “Hope deferred maketh the heart sick; but [when] desire cometh, it is a tree of life.” Some may have proved both experiences, and know how true it is. But we do well in the things of this life to judge our thoughts and desires before God by His Word, and ever to say in truth, “Thy will be done.”

Slighting the Word is of the most serious import. It is near akin to unbelief in the Lord, and its commonest occasion is also akin. For men doubt the deity of the Lord, because in His grace He deigned to become man; and they, because they see Him to be man, refuse Him to be God. This is heinous iniquity; for it takes advantage of His love, in glorifying God and thereby saving our souls by His redemption by suffering for our sins, to dishonour Himself and deny His personal glory as the Son. Similarly, the word comes through the human vessel from Moses to the Apostle John; and men lay hold of the human element to deny the divine, thus depriving it, as far as the hostile will can, of its divine authority.

“Whoso despiseth the word destroyeth himself; but he that feareth the commandment shall be rewarded.

“The teaching of the wise [is] a fountain of life, to turn away from the snares of death.

“Good understanding procureth favour; but the way of the treacherous [is] rugged.

“Every prudent one acteth with knowledge; but the foolish layeth open folly.

“A wicked messenger falleth into evil; but a faithful ambassador [is] health.

“Poverty and shame [shall be to] him that refuseth instruction; but he that regardeth reproof shall be honoured.” vv. 13-18.

Verse 13 admits of an alternative rendering, though in effect it may come to the same sense. But competent persons understand the opening clause to mean “shall be held accountable” or “fall in debt to it.” The Septuagint strangely translates the verse, and adds to it: “He that slighteth a matter shall be slighted by it; but he that feareth a command hath health. To a crafty son there shall be nothing good; but a wise servant shall have prosperous doings, and his way shall be directed aright.” The Latin Vulgate departs still more widely from the Hebrew and hardly calls for citation save in a note.2 What God exalts above all His name man despises at the peril of his own ruin; but to stand in awe of injunction is to insure recompense in due time. What a man sows he assuredly reaps.

The word lends to and forms the teaching of the wise man, which is here described as a fountain of life. Such teaching refreshes as well as quickens, and guards from the destructive temptations which beset the path.

Again, the value of “good understanding” makes itself felt in a scene where folly abounds and the levity which so often veils our happiness. It procures favour, because it morally commends itself without an effort; whereas the way of the treacherous is indeed “hard” or rugged, as they themselves, and all that are ensnared by them. Fidelity is a jewel in a world of pitfall through deceit.

But “knowledge” has its use as well as a good understanding; and every prudent man works with it, instead of trusting himself unaided by it, or being

content to go forward blindly. The foolish one spreads out folly; what else has he to lay bare? How blessed for Christians that, whatever be the personal deficiency of each, of God are they in Christ, who was made to them wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption! Yet no man is so foolish as one professing the Lord's name, who depends on and seeks himself to the dishonour of his Master.

Next, we have the strongly drawn opposition between "a wicked messenger," and "a faithful ambassador." The one comprehends the widest class of varying degree; but even its most insignificant member falls into evil, and he can do nothing but mischief. The other is not only a messenger of the highest rank, but discharges his office with integrity, as "a faithful ambassador." If the former by his wickedness can but fall into evil by his wickedness, the latter "is health" wherever he goes in a world of sin and misery.

Verse 18 contrasts the refusal of instruction with the readiness to take reproof to heart — a rare and precious trait in anyone. Poverty and shame must be his who has no ear for the instruction which enriches all, and which all need. But what honour falls to the wise and lowly mind that welcomes and weighs reproof! Grace alone can make it real.

As hope deferred makes the heart sick, so the fruition of what is desired is pleasant, but not unless the desire be governed by the fear of God. Without His will, not anything is wise, good, or sweet. Hence we read what follows.

"The desire accomplished is sweet to the soul; but [it is] abomination to the foolish to depart from evil.

“He that walketh with wise [men] becometh wise; but a companion of the foolish will be destroyed.

“Evil pursueth sinners; but to the righteous good shall be repaid.

“A good [man] leaveth an inheritance to his children’s children; but the sinner’s wealth [is] laid up for the righteous.

“Much food [is in] the tillage of the poor; but there is [that is] lost through injustice [or, want of judgment].

“He that spareth his rod hateth his son; but he that loveth him seeketh him early with discipline.

“The righteous eateth to satisfy his desire; but the belly of the wicked shall want.” vv. 19-25.

There is no sweetness for the soul at God’s expense. He it is that is looked to, instead of leaving Him out. But when He leads and sanctions, sweet is the accomplishment of what is desired. If He chastens what is wrong or leads to it, He has pleasure in gratifying His children beyond any earthly father. But to the natural heart, foolish in excluding Him and His will, what is so repulsive as to depart from evil?

As the fear of Jehovah is the beginning of wisdom, so the heart values the company and counsel of the wise; and walking with them furnishes good lessons. But a companion of the foolish too surely proves where his heart is, cannot avoid being depraved by their evil communications, and unless delivered shall be destroyed.

For who can evade the witness that “evil pursueth sinners,” whatever their apparent prosperity for awhile? The leaving them for a season only precipitates and

makes more terrible the end of unavailing sorrow and despair. How truly shall good be repaid to the righteous? God will be no man's debtor. The Christian without doubt is called to share Christ's sufferings, not perhaps for Him, but assuredly with Him. No such earthly prosperity is promised him as was to the pious Jew. On the contrary, they that desire to live piously in Christ Jesus must endure persecution. But the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to compare with the coming glory to be revealed unto us. In every way and time good shall be repaid to the righteous. God can never cease to be God.

A good man resembles Him who found him evil, and by grace made him a partaker of a divine nature, escaping the corruption that is in the world through lust. Blessed of God, he leaves an inheritance, if not of gold and silver, better still, and abiding to his children's children. The wealth of the sinner, great as it may seem, is laid up for the just. Ungodliness may prepare, devise, and entail; but God cares for those who serve Him. Thus the just shall put on the clothing meant for others, and the innocent shall divide the silver if He think fit.

Again, how true it is, in God's ways, that "much food is in the tillage of the poor"! The soul that looks to Him does not murmur nor aspire after greater things. The little that is given is accepted with thankfulness: and diligent labour is applied, with the result of "much food." On the other hand who does not know of great possessions squandered for want of judgment, if not for actual injustice? There is that is destroyed for lack of judgment. The language is divinely accurate, and in no way exaggerated. It may not as yet appear always; but it is the fact, and often plain enough to warn the heedless.

There is another form of following God's ways in the due correction of the family. How many of the godly have spared the rod, and thus failed in love to their sons! Here is laid down the warning and the sort of love: "He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him, or seeketh him early with discipline." To spare is really to please oneself, and harm deeply one's son.

Further, the little things of daily life test whether we have God and His will before us. "The righteous eateth to satisfy his desire [or, soul]; but the belly of the wicked shall want," as the retribution even here of this selfish indulgence. "Whether then ye eat or drink, do all things to God's glory." This keeps us and pleases Him.

Proverbs 14

Here it is mainly a contrast between wisdom and folly in varied points of view, with no little instruction for such as fear the Lord and desire abiding fruit.

"The wisdom of woman buildeth the house; but folly plucketh it down with her hands.

"He that walketh in his uprightness feareth Jehovah; but the perverted in his ways despiseth him.

"In the fool's mouth [is] a rod of pride; but the lips of the wise shall preserve them.

"Where no oxen [are], the crib [is] clean; but much increase [is] by the strength of the ox.

"A faithful witness will not lie; but a false witness breatheth out lies.

"A scorner seeketh wisdom; and [there is] none for him; but knowledge [is] easy to the intelligent.

“Go away from a foolish man, in whom thou perceivest not the lips of knowledge.

“The wisdom of the prudent [is] to understand his way; but the folly of fools [is] deceit.

“Fools make a mock at trespass; but among the upright [is] favour.” Chap. 14:1-9.

If man has his place in authority and external activity, not less real is that of the woman, and especially in the “home” of which she is the chief bond. Yet there is even there the need of a better foundation than man can lay, else it will surely fail, and it cannot be the house that the wisdom of woman builds. Keeping at home is good; working at home, as in the critical reading of Titus 2:5, is still better. And how true that folly plucks down the house with her hands!

Though wisdom be not expressly named in verse 2, yet does it underlie all walking in uprightness. As the fear of Jehovah is the beginning of knowledge, so he that walks in his uprightness, which is its fruit, does fear Him, out of whose mouth is knowledge and understanding, as He lays up sound wisdom for the upright. On the other hand, where there is perversity in ways, will be found despising of Him. To lean to our own intelligence is the very reverse of knowing Him in all our ways, who alone can and will make our paths plain.

Then we have to remember how large a part the mouth has in the display of folly as well as of wisdom. “In the fool’s mouth is a rod of pride.” Haughty as it may be in its self-indulgence, what retribution for the fool’s back! The lips of the wise, as they help others, shall preserve themselves from strife, dangers, and difficulties.

No credit is due to the cleanness which attends idleness and shirking labour. “Where no oxen are the crib is clean”; but what of that? It is mercy, as well as a judgment, that a man is to eat bread in the sweat of his face. Not only is labour, but sorrow, and suffering, better than sin. Pride, fullness of bread, and careless ease lead to ruin and judgment, as industry, using means, such as the strength of the ox, brings in much increase; so God ordains for man that wisely hears and obeys.

Next, how often a person seeks to be thought wise by his independent spirit and detraction, which constantly expose himself to exaggeration and falsehood! It is folly and mischief all the while. Our own business is to do God’s will; and “a faithful witness will not lie” to exalt self or to disparage others. But a false one breathes out lies — a remarkable and frequent phrase in Scripture. To breathe out lies is more effective and ensnaring than vehement denunciation, which would arrest attention and insure speedy refutation. But breathing them out spreads the malice effectively and widely too, through imposed-on confidants, while the maligned are kept ignorant of the mischief. It is a picture of utter corruption.

A scorner is more boldly evil and presumptuous; he “seeketh wisdom,” but in his own way (which is as far as possible from the Lord), and hence, as is here said, there is none for him. “For Jehovah giveth wisdom” (Prov. 2:6); and blessed is he that finds it (Prov. 3:13). Even God Himself is no exception. “Jehovah by wisdom founded the earth; by understanding He established the heavens. By his knowledge the deeps were broken up, and the skies drop down the dew.” He indeed scorns the scorners and gives grace to the lowly; the wise shall

inherit glory, but shame shall be the promotion of fools. Had not Verulam this sounding to his heart, when he wrote, “He that comes to seek after knowledge, with a mind to scorn and censure, shall be sure to find matter enough for his humour, but none for his instruction.” How true on the other hand, “that knowledge is easy to the intelligent”!

What is one to do when in presence of a foolish man “in whom thou perceivest not the lips of knowledge”? Get away. He can do you no good and may do you no little harm. He will receive no reproof, and you risk provocation and loss of temper.

“The wisdom of the prudent” is not in lofty claims or unproved theories, but “to discern his way”; the pretended wisdom but real “folly of fools is deceit.” For as there is no power, it lies in ever changing devices and tricks to evade.

The end, if not beginning, of such a path is that “fools make a mock of trespass,” the road to destruction; whereas “among the upright is favour.” It is the upright only who have true pity as well as horror of transgression. Grace alone made them upright, after being far from God; and they turn to Him, not only for the favour they need and have found, but to seek it for others too insensible to judge themselves.

At verse 10 we begin with moral truth as to the heart, and thence come to manifested words and ways.

“The heart knoweth its own bitterness, and a stranger intermeddleth not with its joy.

“The house of the wicked shall be overthrown, but the tent of the upright shall flourish.

“There is a way that seemeth right to a man, but the end thereof [is] the ways of death.” vv. 10-12.

It is an evil age, the world far from God and knowing Him not; and man, its chief, chief in guilt and pride, yet liable to wrongs and vexations without end. How exposed then is the heart, whatever the position, to bitterness, unknown to others! So too it refuses a share in its joys to a stranger. Yet if grief before God isolates to God, “every family apart and the wives apart,” joy overflows willingly to congenial souls, as the man and the woman in the parables of Luke 15 call friends and neighbours to rejoice on regaining what was lost.

In verse 11 it is not “the heart” but “the house” which may rise aloft from deep foundations. But the wicked dwell there, and no security can be for them or theirs in the moral government of God. It shall be overthrown, though the fear of God would not hasten the moment. On the other hand, how exposed to wind and rain is “the tent of the upright”! Yet the unseen hand protects, and it shall flourish.

Next we come to man’s “ways,” and the danger of trusting his own estimate of it. If it seems right to him, men say, Why blame him? He is sincere; and none is entitled to judge him wrong. Is there then no divine standard by which we may try our thoughts, no means of forming a sound and sure judgment? Why did God then reveal His Word, and early enough in an experimental shape? And why did His Son as man tabernacle long enough among men to reveal his nature and relationship in living perfection to such as have eyes to see and ears to hear? No; man is accountable for his thoughts and his feelings no less than his words and his ways; “and the

end thereof is the ways of death." Man departed far from God and disliked Him, as Christ fully proved. Though He never was far from each one of us, God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, for which the world gave Christ the cross. Man is accountable, whatever he thinks.

It is truly a dreary world of grief, where man seeks pleasure and mirth in lieu of a happiness which cannot be where the conscience is not purged after a divine sort, and the heart has not Christ before it — God's object, as ours too.

"Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful, and the end of mirth [is] sadness.

"The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways, and the good man from himself.

"The simple believeth every word, but the prudent heedeth his going.

"The wise one feareth and departeth from evil; but the foolish is overbearing and confident.

"One soon angry dealeth foolishly, and a man of mischievous devices is hated.

"The simple inherit folly; but the prudent are crowned with knowledge.

"The evil bow before the good, and the wicked at the gates of the righteous.

"The poor is hated even of his own neighbour; but the rich have many lovers.

"He that despiseth his neighbour sinneth; but he that is gracious to the afflicted [or, meek] happy [is] he.

“Do they not err that devise evil? But mercy and truth [are] for those that devise good.

“In all labour there is profit; but the talk of the lips [is] only to want.

“The crown of the wise [is] their riches; the folly of the fools [is] folly.

“A true witness delivereth souls; but deceit uttereth lies.

“In the fear of Jehovah [is] strong confidence; and his children shall have a place of refuge.

“The fear of Jehovah [is] a fountain of life, to turn away from the snares of death.” vv. 13-27.

“Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful, and the end of mirth [is] sadness.” So it is till man receives Christ. All otherwise is hollow, and the passing levity leaves its sting. “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 God will bring thee into judgment.”

Still darker is “the backslider in heart.” Terrible is the promise to him: he “shall be filled with his own ways”; and all the more terrible because he had outwardly known the lines in pleasant places, and the way of peace. On the other hand, “the good man” by grace shall have his boast in what belongs to himself alone, and not what belongs to another. He shall be filled from himself. God has freely given him all he values most the unseen and eternal in the promised One.

In such a world as this, few greater follies can be than credulity. Believing God is the effectual safeguard. “The simple believeth every word; but the prudent heedeth

his going." We are exhorted to "prove all things," but to hold fast the good (the comely).

Next, it is for us to use "fear and depart from evil," as a wise man does; to be "overbearing and confident" is arrant folly. "honour all," says not the least of the apostles; as a greater still loved to style himself, and in truth was, "a 'bondman' of Jesus Christ."

And what folly to be soon angry? Even a wise man "deals foolishly" who is easily provoked; but "a man of mischievous devices" makes himself odious when found out as he is.

"The simple" again "inherit folly." This is what descends to man naturally. "The prudent" are lowly enough to receive and learn from the Highest; and theirs it is to be "crowned with knowledge." "He giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to those that know understanding."

Here we have not the simple or the foolish, but the evil and the wicked (v. 19); and their failure even before a King shall reign in righteousness, and princes rule in judgment. God is never without a testimony in the evil day, if it be only here and there, now and then. Yet things are as yet far from what they ought, and are, to be.

What men sow they reap, and soon sometimes. Nor are the evil without conscience, so that they bow to the good, as the wicked court the favour and the help of a righteous man.

Poverty is dreaded more than sin; and hence the poor is hated even by his own neighbour, while the rich man has many who make up to him. Such is the covetousness of the heart, and the hollowness of the world.

To despise one's neighbour, what a sin in His sight who despises not any? Let us lay to heart what Christ was to needy men, women, and children. What an example to us! Who ever showed such kindness to the afflicted? May we have the happiness found in grace like His!

Yet proud heartlessness may go to greater evil in despising evil, but not escape His eyes who sees cunning mischief and every secret of the heart. How profound and fatal the error! For judgment slumbers not, any more than His mercy and truth fail for those that devise good unobtrusively.

For man as he is, labour is as useful as idleness is worthless. Hence we are told here that in all labour is profit, while the talk of the lips tends to want.

The crown, not of the foolish, but of the wise, is their riches, for these turn their wealth to the account of unselfish goodness and the relief of human misery, and the furtherance of God's will and glory. They would be rich toward God. The folly of fools on the contrary is folly. God is in none of their thoughts, and all they express or do is folly all the more seen, if they have riches to attract a crowd of witnesses.

We pass through a world of evil and error. Hence the value of a true witness in delivering souls open otherwise to be mistaken and misrepresented by the false. But not many are willing to speak out at all cost. One there was who never failed, the Faithful and True Witness, and He the great Deliverer of souls. May we cleave to Him, and represent Him in this! But deceit, what can it utter but lies? It were sad to think that there could be no repentance for a deceiver; but it must be hard for a deceiver to gain credit for his self-judgment.

Nevertheless, if real, God would not fail to vindicate what His grace effects.

So we read next, that in the fear of Jehovah is strong confidence. For this fear takes away all other fear, and becomes a tower of strength; and it avails for others who tremble at His word, especially His children. What place of refuge so sure and near?

But the fear of Jehovah is much more than a protection from enemies. It is a fountain of life — not a well that may fail when most needed, but a perennial spring of enjoyment to strengthen the heart, ever so timid and dejected without it, to turn away from the snares of death with which Satan overspreads the world, and which are dangerously nigh to every heart of man.

Next follow maxims, public and private, of great weight (vv. 28- 35).

“In the multitude of people [is] the King’s glory; but in the lack of people [is] the ruler’s downfall.

“One slow to anger [is] of great understanding; but the hasty of spirit holdeth up folly.

“A sound (or, tranquil) heart [is] the life of the flesh, but envy the rottenness of the bones.

“He that oppresseth the poor reproacheth his Maker; but he that honoureth him is merciful to the needy.

“The wicked is thrust down by his evil doings; but in his death the righteous trusteth.

“Wisdom resteth in the heart of the intelligent; but [what is] in the inwards of foals is made known.

“Righteousness exalteth a nation; but sin [is] a reproach to peoples.

“The King’s favour [is] toward a wise servant, but his wrath to him that causeth shame.”

To have a numerous population is the king’s glory; but David made it his pride, and persisted in a tainted public measure, notwithstanding the earnest protest of his chief servant, a mere worldling, to his own sin, shame, and chastening in the very point of his glorying. Yes, David who owed everything to God’s favour, not to an arm of flesh! But a dwindling people prepares for a ruler’s destruction.

Again, it is a sure sign of a great understanding morally to cultivate slowness of anger, though never to be angry before the Lord evinces total want of right feeling in the presence of evil. How slow was He Himself, yet could and did He kindle to God’s glory. The hasty of spirit only exposes his own folly.

Then again, a sound or placid heart is a general healing power, just as envy rots even the bones — a corroding evil, without doubt.

And what is it to oppress the poor, but to reproach Him that made him and his lot? Whereas he honours the faithful Creator, that shows compassion to the needy.

It is his own evil that expels or thrusts down the wicked, while even in his death the righteous retains his confidence. Even if a feeble believer be before us, there is no moment in his life so happy as his departure to be with Christ. Gloom, on the other hand, is unbelief.

The intelligence here commended began with the fear of Jehovah, and grew by hearing and gaining wise counsels which fools despise. Wisdom accordingly rests not on the tongue merely, but in the heart which prizes it.

In the foolish, even when deeply wounded, is nothing to make known but lack of sense. Jehovah, God, is nowhere within such a spirit.

On the other hand, it is not only a man but a nation which righteousness exalts; and righteousness is a just sense of relationship to God and man, the very reverse of absorption in our own interest which ere long ruins those blindly devoted to it. Sin is a real reproach to peoples as well as to men.

It is also no small contribution to national well-being that the king should not forget, but heed and honour, a wise servant, no less than frown on him that causes shame.

Proverbs 15

The chapter opens with the great moment of our words in a variety of ways, under the controlling sense of Jehovah's eyes, or indifference to Him.

"A soft answer turneth away fury; but a grievous word stirreth up anger.

"The tongue of the wise useth knowledge aright; but the mouth of fools sputtereth out folly.

"In every place [are] the eyes of Jehovah, keeping watch upon the evil and the good.

"The healing of the tongue [is] a tree of life; but perverseness therein [is l a breaking of the spirit.

"A fool despiseth his father's correction, but he that regardeth reproof becometh prudent.

"In the house of a righteous one [is] much treasure; but in the revenues of a wicked one is trouble.

“The lips of the wise disperse knowledge, but not so the heart of the foolish.” vv. 1-7.

In the first case fury is presupposed. As this dishonours God and misbecomes man, a soft answer disarms it. On the contrary, a grievous or mortifying word excites anger. Christ is our example, into whose lips grace was poured; and, when reviled, He reviled not again. Yet who so withering to the proud and hypocritical (Matt. 23)? Who so unsparing even of an apostle when a stumbling block (Matt. 16:23)?

Next, wisdom is requisite for the tongue in order to use knowledge aright or make it acceptable; whereas, what can be expected from the foolish but to sputter out folly? Such is the contemptuous rebuke. They should escape censure if they held their peace.

But there is a far mightier and worthier principle to guide wise or foolish — the realizing of Jehovah’s eyes, which without an effort act on every place, beholding the bad and the good. How cheering to those that are wise! How solemn for the foolish evildoer!

Then benignity, or healing, of the tongue is a fruitful source in a world of death. How many pitfalls does it not save from, and rough places smooth? But perversity or crookedness in the tongue is provocative of griefs and wounds without end. How truly a breaking of the spirit!

God ordered the parental relationship to regulate the family; and as a father is responsible to instruct his children, so is he a fool who ignores his responsibility and despises that instruction. To regard reproof, though painful to self-love, is to get prudence. It is not confined to a father’s reproof, and where incurred, to heed it is a real gain morally.

A righteous man secures much treasure, not in himself alone, but in his house; for it brings far better than much of this world's goods. A just sense and carrying out of relationship to God and man is the righteousness here intended, and never fails of blessing, even in the midst of trials however keen. On the other hand, what can the revenue of a wicked man be but trouble that disturbs and denies godly order and comfort?

Again, the lips of the wise not only exhibit and use knowledge, but disperse it in a world where it is as needed as rare. What a blessing to others! Far beyond the lavish giving of silver and gold, which might bring with it a curse. But the heart of the foolish, to say nothing of his lips, has nothing of the sort to bestow.

In verses 8-17 we have admonition of still graver character.

"The sacrifice of the wicked [is] an abomination to Jehovah, but the prayer of the upright [is] his delight.

"The way of the wicked [is] an abomination to Jehovah; but him that pursueth righteousness he loveth.

"Grievous correction [is] for him that forsaketh the path; he that hateth reproof shall die.

"Sheol and destruction [are] before Jehovah; how much more then the hearts of the children of men!

"A scorner loveth not that one reprove him; unto the wise he will not go.

"A joyful heart maketh a cheerful countenance; but by sorrow of heart the spirit is broken.

"The heart of the intelligent [one] seeketh knowledge; but the mouth of the foolish feedeth on folly.

“All the days of the afflicted [are] evil; but a cheerful heart [hath] a continual feast.

“Better [is] little with the fear of Jehovah than great treasure and disquiet therewith.

“Better [is; a meal of herbs where love is, than a fatted ox and hatred therewith.”

It was natural and a plain duty for a Jew, in case of a transgression, to bring the appointed offering to Jehovah. But this however was not only unavailing for the godless, but added fresh insult to God, unless with self-judgment before Him, and that hatred of the evil committed which would work deeper care and vigilance against repeating it. If it were only to get rid of uneasiness, the man would be weaker than before, and more ready to sin afresh, and offer his sacrifice again. Integrity of repentance was indispensable. Accordingly, the heinousness of such self-deception as compounding with God for sin is here strongly pointed out. “The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to Jehovah.” This is as certain as that He has delight and favour in the prayer of the upright. He looks into the heart.

Nor is it only the perversion of a religious duty that is abominable in His eyes, but “the way of the wicked” in general; whereas He loves one that pursues righteousness, that is, practical consistency with his relation to God and man. This never was nor can be for fallen man unless he be born of God. Such were those that looked on to the Messiah. Blessed are all those who have their trust in Him, said Psalm 2:12; and only those.

Meanwhile there is a righteous government of God who ever concerns Himself with the state, and not only the delinquencies and iniquities, of His own, even if not

within the Abrahamic covenant. This and its present consequences even the patient and pious Job had to learn, and yet more his three “comforters of distress” and “physicians of no value.” He disciplines those He loves for their good. Here we read of “grievous correction for him that forsaketh the path,” leaving the time and way rather indefinite; but all is plain for him that hateth instruction — he “shall die.”

It is indeed a serious thing, but withal blessed if in faith, to have to do with a living God who searches, as the Lord Jesus does, the reins and the heart. When His grace is really known, it is a joy to welcome His search against unconscious self-love or levity; and one can plead, Search me, O God. and know my heart; prove me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any grievous (or idolatrous) way in me; and lead me in the way everlasting. Here it does not go so far as Psalm 139, but says, “Sheol and destruction [Abaddon] are before Jehovah: how much more then the hearts of the children of men!” All things are naked and laid bare to His eyes with whom we have to do.

A scorner is a bolder sinner against God and his own soul. He loves not to be reproved; “unto the wise he will not go.” Self is his aim and practically his God, and folly his life, which makes him a contemptuous refuser of all wisdom from above.

But next we read that a joyful heart maketh a cheerful countenance, just as the spirit is depressed or broken by sorrow of heart. Otherwise life is hollow, and a vain show. There can be no reality in the joy, and no rising above sorrow of heart, unless we are open and right with God. He would have us depend on Him with

confidence — in His mercy and favour in Christ. We wrong Him if we so yield to the sorrow as to break the spirit.

Then, how true it is that a man of understanding seeks knowledge! He knows his shortcoming, and desires to fill the gap. But the mouth of the foolish feeds on folly, as he has no care for, and no perception of, wisdom.

There is danger for the afflicted to give up all their days to their grief; but this is to occupy one with nothing but circumstances of sadness. How wise to turn to Him who makes all things work together for good! This makes the heart cheerful, which is or has a continual feast.

Then one proves that “better is little with the fear of Jehovah than great treasure and disquiet therewith”; and “better a meal of herbs where love is than a fatted ox and hatred therewith.” The fear of Jehovah is the beginning of wisdom; and many waters cannot quench “love,” neither do the floods drown it. Love, as the N.T. pronounces, is the bond of perfectness.

God is the God of peace, and Christ will be Prince of peace when He shall have taken His great power and reigned. Meanwhile He has made peace through the blood of His cross, that the believer should have peace with God and walk in the spirit of peace, whatever the turmoil of man. Nor need one wonder that man, in the misery and selfishness of sin unjudged and unforgiven, should be swift to speak and swift to wrath.

“A furious man stirreth up contention; but one slow to anger appeaseth strife.

“The way of the sluggard is as a hedge of thorns; but the path of the upright is made a causeway.

“A wise son maketh a glad father; but a foolish man despiseth his mother.

“Folly is joy to him that is void of heart; but a man of understanding maketh his walk straight.

“Without counsel purposes are disappointed; but in the multitude of counsellors they are established.

“A man hath joy in the answer of his mouth, and a word in season, how good it is!

“The path of life [is] upward for the wise, that he may depart from Sheol beneath.

“Jehovah plucketh up the house of the proud, but he establisheth the border of the widow.” vv. 18-25.

Whence come wars and whence fightings among you? asks James the Just. Is it not thence — from your pleasures which war in your members? Ye lust and have not; ye kill and are full of envy, and cannot obtain; ye fight and war; ye have not because ye ask not. Ye ask and receive not because ye ask amiss that ye may spend it in your pleasures. How truly a furious man stirreth up contentions! Whereas one slow to anger not only gives no occasion to strife, but appeases it. Peacemaking begins in the heart bowing to God in Christ through grace, and characterizes the spirit and walk.

The slothful fear a painful obstacle in their way, put off their duty, and seek not grace for seasonable help, if it were even a real difficulty or trial. The upright see a plain road, because the eye is single in obedience.

So in family life a father’s heart is gladdened by a son who begins and goes on in the fear of the Lord. A foolish one shows what he is by despising her who bore him and

watched over his years of weakness, who wastes his strength on himself or what is no better.

Again, how sad yet certain it is that folly is joy to the senseless heart, Not even a brute lives so despicably. A man of understanding looks up and walks straight with purpose in his heart.

Hence the importance of counsel (v. 22); for where there is none, purposes are disappointed. It is wise to be swift to hear, for in the multitude of counsellors purposes are established. Self-confidence is a sorry guide.

Thus too one learns to help others, when speech is well considered, timely, and sought for. “A man hath joy (not pride) in the answer of his mouth.” Others too reap the profit, as he desires; for “a word in season, how good is it!”

Nor does the good end in this life; for “the path of life is upward for the wise, that he may depart from Sheol beneath.” The end is life everlasting, as all saints knew, though none could forecast that life now quickening the soul here below. This Christ revealed as clearly as a future hour when the body shall be instinct with the same life at His coming.

Jehovah is righteous and good in His ways; for He will pluck up the house of the proud who scorn Him, and will establish the border of the widow whom He compassionates in her sorrow and defends in her weakness and exposure.

Outward as was the life of an Israelite compared with that of a Christian, which had its first pattern and fullness in Christ Himself, God did not leave His people without the light of deeper things. So we find here in the

first maxim (v. 26), and not less may we discern elsewhere on fitting occasion.

“Evil thoughts [or, devices are] an abomination to Jehovah; but pure words [are] pleasant.

“He that is greedy of gain troubleth his own house; but he that hateth gifts shall live.

“The heart of the righteous studieth to answer; but the mouth of the wicked poureth out evil things.

“Jehovah [is] far from the wicked; but he heareth the prayer of the righteous.

“That which enlighteneth the eyes rejoiceth the heart; good tidings make the bones fat.

“The ear that heareth the reproof of life shall abide among the wise.

“He that refuseth instruction despiseth his own soul; but he that heareth reproof getteth heart [or, sense].

“The fear of Jehovah [is] the instruction of wisdom; and before honour [goeth] humility.” vv. 26-33.

It is sad enough when evil appears, and we cannot but recognize it. But evil thoughts without a ground for them are the deepest offence to Him before whom all is manifest, and who will have His people simple concerning it, and confiding in Himself. Pure words contrariwise are pleasant not to Him only, but to all save the wicked.

Greed of gain troubles everyone with whom it comes in contact, and especially those nearest him that indulge it, his own house. He that hates gifts, instead of looking out for them, has chosen the good part. It is the path of faith, pleases God, and awaits another, a better, day.

Our answers need divine wisdom, for around us is an evil world; and neither Law, Psalms, nor Prophets failed to warn of a nature prone to evil, though only the gospel pronounces us lost. Hence the need for the righteous that the heart should study to answer, lest a wrong or deceitful word should provoke a hasty word or elicit no better. Where fear of God controls not, from the mouth of the wicked flows a stream of evil things.

As the wicked has no thought of Jehovah, so is He far from such; but how precious and sure is His ear in listening to the prayers of the righteous!

Even before as well as after this, how much, how constantly, He supplies words of goodness to cheer and guide! Thus are the eyes enlightened from above and the heart rejoiced; good tidings make the bones fat, as is said here, without any counterpart of evil to warn.

And so it is in the next adage. Very great is the blessing to the love that welcomes, instead of disdaining, the reproof of life; it ensures abiding among the wise. Otherwise it is an easy thing to turn, and turn again, to folly.

On the other hand, great is the danger and the sin of refusing instruction; but he that hears it even in the painful form of reproof acquires heart, which is surely better than silver and gold.

Then the fear of Jehovah is the instruction of wisdom. What can exceed or equal its gain? With it goes humility' and from it honour; as we read in the instructive trial of Job who had to unlearn every good thought of himself, and in the humiliation of his friends who trusted in their evil thoughts, based on appearances, and unrighteous. Thus let him that glories glory in the Lord.

Proverbs 16

The maxims brought together in verses 1-8 fitly follow up the fear of Jehovah as the discipline of wisdom, and the path of humility before honour. Heart and ways are alike affected thereby.

“The preparations (or plans) of the heart [are] of man, but the answer of the tongue [is] from Jehovah.

“All the ways of a man [are] clean in his own eyes; but Jehovah weigheth the spirits.

“Commit thy works to Jehovah, and thy thoughts shall be established.

“Jehovah hath wrought every thing for his (or, its) own end yea, even the wicked for the day of evil.

“Every proud heart [is] an abomination to Jehovah, hand in (or, for) hand (or, certainly) he shall not be held innocent (or, go unpunished).

“By mercy and truth iniquity is purged, and by the fear of Jehovah they depart from evil.

“When a man’s ways please Jehovah, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him.

“Better [is] a little with righteousness than great revenues without righteousness.” vv. 1-8.

Too well we know how readily the heart devises this way or that, and how constantly this fails to meet the difficulty. Happy he that waits on Him who sees the end from the beginning, and deigns to guide aright when the need arises. Then one can speak the right words in peace, and humbly; but the answer of the tongue is from Jehovah.

The same reference to Him delivers from the bias that regards all the ways of a man as clean in his own eyes. Jehovah weighs the spirit; who but He? Dependence on Him and confidence in Him are indispensable to judge, as for all else.

What a comfort that it is He who bids one to commit his works to Himself (literally, roll them upon Him), “and thy thoughts (not merely thy works) shall be established”! His goodness answers to our trusting Him with what is outward, and graciously establishes our “thoughts,” so apt to vacillate and pass away. How slow are even His own to learn the loving interest He takes in those that confide in Him!

Next is set before us the solemn truth, easily overlooked in the busy world of man, that Jehovah has wrought everything for His, or its, own end. Yet, is anything more certain? Is it not His reign? for evil abounds and the righteous suffer. Still His moral government is unfailing, whatever appearance may promise for awhile. The day will declare all. This is so true that He can add, “yea even the wicked for the day of evil.” How manifest all this will be in the coming judgment!

But even now He would have His people feel how offensive “every proud heart” is to Him — “an abomination,” and nothing less, to Jehovah. Yet how common pride is, and how little do men believe that God hates it, and will judge accordingly! The Highest despises not any. Hence, whatever the seeming support or the delay, beyond doubt one who so lives shall not be held innocent.

The next word is striking as only to be understood aright when a brighter light shone. Even before then no

believer would have allowed that the mercy and truth were on man's part to atone for his sins. It is in Christ and especially in His cross that they meet for the purging of the guilty and defiled. Anywhere else they are irreconcilable. Men plead "mercy" to escape the condemnation of "truth"; but if truth pronounce the just judgment of the wicked, what can mercy do to arrest the execution? The Lord Jesus alone bore the curse in all its truth, that the iniquities might be blotted out in the richest mercy. The grace of God appeared in Christ that His merciful remission of our sins might be His righteousness new manifested in the gospel. Truly, by the fear of Him is departure from evil.

This is it which, by a new nature as well as redemption, teaches those who believe to walk so as to please God, worthily of His calling and kingdom. In spite of natural enmity, the fruit of righteousness tells on conscience, so that even adversaries are made to be at peace with them.

Plain it is then that even here "better is a little with righteousness than great revenues without right." Much more when the veil was lifted by Christ to let in the light of the eternal day on the present scene of flesh and world, alike enmity against God.

In verses 9-15 are given a fresh cluster of apothegms, in which we start with Jehovah as the sole power of directing the Israelite's steps, and of maintaining equity in daily life. But there is next withal a striking enforcement of the honour due to the king.

"The heart of man deviseth his way, but Jehovah directeth his steps.

“An oracle is on the lips of the king; his mouth will not err in judgment.

“The just balance and scales [are I of Jehovah; all the weights of the bag [are] his work.

“[It is] an abomination to kings to commit wickedness; for the throne is established by righteousness.

“Righteous lips [are] the delight of kings; and they love him that speaketh aright.

“The fury of a king [is as] messengers of death; but a wise man will pacify it.

“In the light of the king’s countenance [is] life, and his favour [is] as a cloud of the latter rain.”

The heart of man away from God is lawless; and, shaking off the restraint of Him to whom he belongs and must give account, is fruitful of devices. As he loves his own way, so he changes it according to the object before him, or, it may be, some passing fancy. Jehovah alone can direct his steps; but this supposes dependence on Him and obedience to His Word, when it is His way, and not the man’s own. So Moses (Ex. 23:13), when Israel forsook him and bowed down to the golden calf, prays, Show me Thy way.

Jehovah would have His people honour the king, especially in Israel, and to look for a wise and righteous decision. “An oracle is on the lips of a king.” It was no less a remembrancer to the king, that it should be said of him, his mouth will not err in judgment. How often alas! both king and people failed utterly. But a morning comes without clouds, when One of that very house shall rule over men righteously and in the fear of God; for man He is, though infinitely more. But David’s house

was not so with God, either when he lived, or after his death when succeeded even by the favoured son who wrote these words. Judgment must act as well as sovereign grace, before Jehovah will make it grow. All honour to Him who once for all suffered for sins, and has given us life eternal, and will reign righteously.

Properly subjoined is that equity in the least things which Jehovah will have. “The just balance and scales are of Jehovah; all the weights of the bag are his work.” If Jehovah showed His interest in instructing man aright, when it was even the details of the fitches and the cummin, of the barley and the wheat, and not in the sowing only but in their due treatment at the harvest, so did He feel for the constant administration of every day’s exchange among men, to ensure right and guard against wrong. How much more does He feel their readiness to overlook sin and judgment for eternity!

Again would He set before all, that to commit wickedness is an abomination not to Himself only but to kings. What a standing rebuke if the throne were not established by righteousness! What an exposure if the king indulged in wickedness himself, instead of abhorring it in others! It is throughout here assumed that the king recognizes his place before Jehovah as His anointed.

Further we hear that kings take pleasure in those who in their speech vindicate what is right. “Righteous lips are the delight of kings; and they love him that speaketh right.” Flattery is natural at court, but contemptible to him that rules in the fear of God. Righteous lips may not always speak agreeably; but righteous kings appreciate the man who cleaves to justice and sound principle.

Just as terrible is the wrath of a king. He holdeth not the sword in vain. That he is incensed “as messengers of death,” especially to such as have reason to fear. “But a wise man will pacify it.” So we see in both Jonathan and David, who appealed not in vain to the monarch, even though unjust in his anger.

On the other hand, no less powerful is the effect of the king’s favour after alienation. “In the light of the king’s countenance is life, and his favour is as the cloud of the latter rain.” But what is any such privilege to compare with the place of stable nearness and grace which the believer even now enjoys through the Saviour, and looks on in assured hope of His glory! “Being therefore justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ; through whom also we have had the access by faith into this grace wherein we stand; and we boast in hope of the glory of God.” Rom. 5:1, 2.

The precepts and warnings impressed on us in verses 17-24 are of a wider range and a more general moral character. The upright, the humble, the heedful, the wise, the pleasant of speech are pointed out and encouraged, with grave admonition to those who are otherwise.

“The highway of the upright [is] to depart from evil: he that taketh heed to his way keepeth his soul.

“Pride [goeth] before destruction; and a haughty spirit before a fall.

“Better [is it to be] a humble spirit with the poor [or, meek], than to divide the spoil with the strong (or, proud).

“He that giveth heed to the word shall find good; and whoso confideth in Jehovah, happy [is] he.

“The wise in heart is called intelligent (or, prudent), and the sweetness of the lips increaseth learning.

“Wisdom [is] a fountain of life for him that hath it; but the instruction of fools [is] folly.

“The heart of the wise instructeth his mouth, and addeth learning to his lips.

“Pleasant words [are as] a honey-comb, sweet to the soul, and health to the bones.”

In a world of evil, and the multitude following evil, it is no small thing to depart from evil. For the believer was once like the rest; and it is the grace of God which acts on conscience through Christ, in whom was no sin, and who died for us and our sins, that we might be forgiven and delivered. It is indeed the highway of the upright to depart from evil; but there is the positive side too: he that taketh heed to his way (and Christ is the way to the Christian) keepeth his soul.

Pride on the other hand is most offensive to Jehovah, and dangerous, yea, destructive, to man; and he is apt to be most lifted up when the blow falls; as we may see throughout Scripture, a haughty spirit before a fall. So Nebuchadnezzar, where mercy interceded; so Haman, where was only judgment.

Next we have the good portion of the humble spirit with the meek; just as the Lord pronounced such souls blessed whether for the kingdom of the heavens, or inheriting the earth when the Heir of all things takes it, even He then sharing with the great, and dividing spoil

with the strong. For it is the inauguration of the King reigning in righteousness, in contrast with this evil age.

Then we have a fine climax. He that gives heed to the word without a doubt shall find good; but if he also confide in Jehovah, which is better, happy is he.

The wise in heart is called intelligent; and so he is, and inspires confidence. It differs much from what men call a long head, feared rather than trusted. And the sweetness of lips which accompanies that wisdom increases learning all round.

Wisdom is truly a fountain of life to him that has it, as he begrudges not its waters for those that have it not. The instruction of fools can be nothing but folly, and is fully exposed, because of the vain assumption to teach.

How different when the heart of the wise instructs his mouth, as it does, and adds learning to his lips. For there is not only profit but growth.

Such are indeed “pleasant words,” and they are as a honeycomb, sweet inwardly, and strengthening outwardly.

Verses 25-33. The first of these apothegms we have had before, in Proverbs 14:12. The repetition indicates its importance, and our aptness to forget it. We may therefore consider it again.

“There is a way that seemeth right to a man, but the end thereof [is] the ways of death.

“The appetite (or, soul) of the labouring man laboureth for him, for his mouth urgeth him on.

“A man of Belial diggeth evil, and on his lips [is] as a scorching fire.

“A froward (or, false) man soweth contention; and a talebearer separateth chief friends.

“A violent man enticeth his neighbour, and leadeth him a way [that is] not good.

“He that shutteth his eyes, [it is] to devise froward things; he that biteth his lips bringeth evil to pass.

“The hoary head [is] a crown of glory; it is found in the way of righteousness.

“The slow to anger [is] better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city.

“The lot is cast into the lap, but the decision [is] of Jehovah.”

Self-love and self-will lead into self-deception, whatever be the honesty that would oppose a conscious wrong. We need therefore to look to Him who is greater than our heart, that we be guided by a wisdom above ourselves. How terrible to have trusted what one should have judged, lest, to one following a way that seemed right, its end should he only a way of death! He that hears and knows and follows the voice of Jesus finds Him not only the way but the truth and the life. Nor can one be too simple in listening to His words open to all. This is the Christian highway, and therefore is peace and joy, whatever the suffering and danger.

Humanly speaking, as idleness is a peril and misery, labour is good for a man as he is. He that is truly a working man has a need that impels him on his course of daily toil. His soul (appetite, or life) has wants that call for supply, or, as it is here put, “his mouth urgeth him on.” Others understand that “the soul of him that is

troublesome shall suffer trouble; for his mouth turneth it on him."

Verse 27 vividly sketches the ungodly. Not content with what appears on the surface, a man of Belial diggeth up evil, and on his lips is as a scorching fire. As James says of the tongue, it sets on fire all the course of nature, and is itself inflamed by hell. What can one think of the comment by a learned Romanist expositor (Maldonat), which Bishop Patrick cites? — "This is apparent by the example of the Spanish Inquisition, whereby he who speaks anything rashly against the faith is deservedly delivered to the fire, which I wish were done everywhere." Romanism ignores and reverses Christianity.

The next form of mischief is a perverse or froward man sowing contention, and a talebearer separating chief friends. May we have grace not only to refuse such a spirit, but to reprove it, whenever it betrays its injurious and often insinuating way.

The violent man may not be so insidious; but the openness of his course, with apparent honesty, may entice his neighbour, and lead him into a way that is not good, possibly beyond his misleader.

The picture in verse 30 describes one of those that shut the eyes in their evil work; but it is to devise froward things, and one biting his lips, that he may bring evil to pass.

Nor must one be deceived by age, though it claims reverence. But how deplorable if it help on evil! "The hoary head is a crown of glory; it is (or, if it be) found in the way of righteousness."

What a testimony to the patient and the self-restrained in verse 32! If he walk in the light, as every Christian does, even more than this should flow freely. Yet slowness to anger and self-control are admirable in their place.

The Jew resorted to the lot (v. 33), till the Spirit was given the believer in the gospel. But he was reminded that Jehovah directed. Christianity in this, as in all things, shows God providing some "better thing," faithful though God was of old, and is still, now that in Christ He is far more intimately revealed and known.

Proverbs 17

The blessing of quietness at home, the value of wisdom there and elsewhere, the hearts tried by Jehovah, the evildoer's heeding wicked lips, and falsehood listening to mischief, the reproach done to the Maker by mocking the poor, the mutual honour of parents and children in their due place, and the congruity of speech with those who speak, are here (Prov. 17:1-7) severally dealt with.

"Better [is] a piece of dry bread and quietness therewith than a house full of the sacrifices of strife.

"A servant that dealeth wisely shall have rule over a son that causeth shame, and shall have part in the inheritance among the brethren.

"The crucible [is] for silver and the furnace for gold; but Jehovah trieth the hearts.

"An evil-doer heedeth iniquitous lips; falsehood listeneth to a mischievous tongue.

"Whoso mocketh a poor [man] reproacheth his Maker; he that is glad at calamity shall not be held innocent.

“Children’s children [are] the crown of old men; and the glory of children [are] their fathers.

“Excellent speech becometh not a fool: much less do lying lips a prince!” vv. 1-7.

The opening word contrasts the immense superiority of a peaceful household with hard fare, over one where plenty is found, embittered by contention, or, as is here energetically said, “full of the sacrifices of strife.” Love and peace may abound through Christ where is little else; only unhappiness abides where He is unknown, were all there that wealth can supply.

Then again, who has not known one from the lowliest place promoted for his wisdom over a son that bringeth shame, and even to share the inheritance of the family? A son crushes the family with his disgrace; a wise servant, especially in such circumstances, acquires love, respect, and honour with his full share.

But there is a moral government ever carried on by Him who is alone capable of trying the hearts, with a goodness and wisdom and patience not wanted for refining silver and gold, which man can do. For the Christian it is as Father; for the Jew it was and will be Jehovah, the one true God.

There is also no small trial from those who wish and do evil; and we are here shown how close is the connection between malice and falsehood. If an evildoer heeds false and unjust lips, falsehood listens to a mischievous tongue. Such is mankind without God, each in his own way, but all astray and malicious.

Nor is Jehovah indifferent to the pride that mocks the poor out of an overweening value for the passing

advantages of this life. It is to reproach, if not to blaspheme, his Maker. There is another ill feeling hateful to God — gladness at calamities not our own. He that indulges in such heartlessness shall not remain unpunished.

Quite different from these is what follows, where family relations are maintained as Jehovah intended. “Children’s children are the crown of old men, and the glory of children are their fathers.” How blessed when the aged feel their descendants an honour, and they no less delight in their parents!

The last of these verses glances at a twofold moral incongruity: when a fool (in the serious light of that word according to Scripture) utters “excellent speech” out of all harmony with his character and life; and when a prince or noble, instead of being a pattern of probity in his exalted position, gives himself up to shameless deception. Yet such stumbling blocks occur in this evil day. What a contrast with Christ who is the truth, and came to do the will of God!

But it is not a question of speech only, excellent or deceptive. Acts are still more serious and influential; and to this we are now led on.

“A gift [is] a precious stone in the eyes of the possessor; whithersoever it turneth, it prospereth.

“He that covereth a transgression seeketh love; but he that bringeth a matter up again separateth chief friends.

“A reproof entereth more deeply into him that hath understanding than a hundred stripes into a fool.

“The evil seeketh only rebellion; but a cruel messenger shall be sent against him.

“Let a bear robbed of her whelps meet a man rather than a fool in his folly.

“Whoso rewardeth evil for good, evil shall not depart from his house.

“The beginning of contention is [as] when one letteth out water; therefore leave off strife before it become vehement.” vv. 8-14.

The law and the later Old Testament writings, the gospels and the epistles, bear ample witness to God’s love of liberal and cheerful giving. But there may be a gift when it becomes a bribe, and even the law loudly warns in this case. Accordingly here its influence is asserted to be as a precious stone in the eyes of him that obtains it, as the giver too knows its power, where Jehovah was not before the soul.

But in a world of contrariety and evil, there is a mightier power and of a higher source. “He that covereth transgression seeketh” not a bribe, but “love”; as on the other hand, “He that bringeth up a matter again,” without any motive higher than idle talk, with no positive aim of edification, “separateth chief friends.” Love is not at work.

There might be error or evil, and this continued. In such a case to be indifferent for the sake of peace is a sin; and reproof is called for, especially where a man of sense was concerned. For a reproof penetrates such a one more than a hundred stripes would a fool. How timid even Christians are in this office of love, even when a worldly mind does not make them unfeeling!

It is an evil man that indulges a spirit of revolt; for rebellion is hateful to God, and His Word gives it no

quarter. Circumstances on earth yield constant opportunity, and hence such a one “seeketh only rebellion.” It gives an unhappy self-importance, which to vanity is irresistible. But God is not mocked, though it be the acceptable year, and not yet the day of His vengeance; and a “cruel messenger” will not fail to be “sent against him.” Even now is there moral government.

But a fool in his folly goes a great deal farther and bursts through all bounds. To be met by a she-bear robbed of her cubs is a dangerous thing for any man; but a fool in his folly is worse still, as not the wise alone know to their cost. It is difficult also for the considerate to conceive what a fool may dare in his folly.

Ingratitude too is an evil of no small magnitude, and the face of God is set against such sheer baseness as rewarding evil for good. If one be thus guilty, evil shall not depart from his house. Even if it were but the snare of Satan for the highest in the land, himself most generous habitually, Jehovah did and could not overlook it; the sword departed not from his house, who gratified his passion at the cost too of a faithful servant’s blood to hide his own sin. How Solomon must have felt as he remembered this!

And who has not seen to what a blaze a little spark may come, if godliness and grace do not role? It is as the letting out of water when one begins contention; mere drops trickling at first till the opening enlarges for a flow that sweeps all before it. “Therefore leave off strife before it become vehement.”

There is an evil still worse than the selfish love of contradiction or contest, bad as this is in itself and its consequences. Unrighteousness is ungodly.

“He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the righteous, even they both are abomination to Jehovah.

“Wherefore [is there] a price in the hand of a fool to get wisdom, seeing [he is] void of sense (or, hath no heart)?

“The friend loveth at all times and is a brother born for adversity.

“A man void of sense striketh hands, becoming surety for his friend.

“He loveth transgression that loveth a quarrel: he that raiseth high his gate seeketh destruction.

“He that hath a perverse heart findeth no good; and he that shifteth about with his tongue falleth into evil.

“He that begetteth a fool [doeth it] to his sorrow; and the father of a vile [man] hath no joy.” vv. 15-21.

On either side the guilt described in verse 15 is grievous in Jehovah’s eyes. Not only is it sympathy with evil men and heartlessness as to the righteous, but direct antagonism to every principle of divine government. For men are put to the test in this life by the concrete facts of the wicked man here and the righteous there. To judge only in the abstract is to deceive oneself, injure others, and be an abomination to Jehovah on both sides.

Jehovah is a God full of compassion and gracious, slow to anger and plenteous in mercy, even when man is under law. Thus He does not fail to put purchase money in a fool’s hand. How kind to the unthankful and the

indifferent, the infatuated and evil! To what purpose is it but that such may acquire wisdom? Seeing he is devoid of sense draws out his pity. What folly to frustrate all goodness by slighting Him who alone is good, and trusting the old serpent, the evil one!

Fine is the description of the friend and precious just as far as it is realized. He loves at all times; sad the blank of not having one uncapricious and constant, whatever the changes of this passing scene, nearer still of a brother born for adversity, where the strain is greatest! None fills up the sketch to perfection but our Lord Jesus, who indeed in His infiniteness went beyond what lips can utter or heart conceive.

Man's capacity and resources are so limited, and the changes of human life so frequent and fast, that it would be hard to name a more dangerous error than a rash pledge or suretyship. Grace no doubt is free to lose indefinitely for another, but not thereby to dishonour the Lord by one's own debt, or to injure others, whether one's family or strangers. This were indeed to play the part of a senseless man, not of a brother born for adversity.

How blind men are to their own spirit that love a quarrel under the plea of faithfulness to truth, right, or custom! He loves transgression that loves a quarrel, says the Word. It betrays itself in little and outward things, and stops not of ending in the ditch. Near akin to it is the aspiring spirit which seeks self-exaltation, or, as is here the figure, raiseth high his gate. In God's sight it is to seek destruction. So was the angel that, inflated with pride, fell, and became the devil.

Again, it is the just lot of him who has a perverse heart, so that, as he looks for evil, he finds no good; and he whose tongue shifts about in like perversity is doomed to fall into real evil. God is not mocked by bad thoughts or words, and he that indulges in either will surely have to eat the bitter fruit of his own ways.

Solomon had not to look beyond his father's house or his own in order to prove the truth of verse 21. Jehovah took pleasure in the families of His people. So we read in a well-known Song of degrees, "Lo, children are an heritage from Jehovah, the fruit of the womb a reward. As arrows in a mighty man's hand, so are the children of youth. Happy the man that hath his quiver full of them; they shall not be ashamed, when they speak with their enemies in the gate." Yet did David taste of bitter sorrow when he set his heart overmuch on them. What irony in the issue of him whom he called "Father of peace," who rose up as a vain and unscrupulous pretender against himself and to his own destruction? Nor was he by any means the only one that yielded a crop of sin and shame and blood. Yes, "he that begetteth a fool doeth it to his sorrow: and the father of a vile man hath no joy." Whether the father of such a one be prince or pauper makes little difference, save that the eminence of degree makes the grief more conspicuous and perhaps more poignant. Only he who is begotten of God has life everlasting.

In verses 21-28, folly, wisdom, and righteousness are compared in their effects on the heart and life of man.

"He that begetteth a fool [doeth it] to his sorrow; and the father of a fool hath no joy.

“A joyful heart causeth good healing; but a broken spirit drieth up the bones.

“A wicked [person] taketh a gift out of the bosom to pervert the ways of judgment.

“Wisdom [is] before the face of him that hath understanding; but the eyes of a fool [are] in the ends of the earth.

“A foolish son [is] a grief to his father, and bitterness to her that bore him.

“Also to punish the righteous [is] not good; [nor] to strike nobles for uprightness.

“He that hath knowledge spareth his words; a man of understanding [is] of a cool spirit.

“Even a fool when he holdeth his peace is reckoned wise, he that shutteth his lips is prudent.”

The inspired writer has seen, without looking far afield or minutely, the humbling truth of which verse 21 reminds us. It received a manifest verification among his own brethren, especially those two who wrought sin and folly in Israel, and came to an end no less violent than disgraceful to themselves, and full of anguish to his father and theirs. He was spared the witness of its repetition in his own son and successor, whose folly rent the kingdom, never to be reunited till He comes to reign, who is the repairer of breaches, the bearer of sins upon the tree, whose name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Father of eternity, Prince of peace. For increase of the government and peace shall be no end, upon the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish and uphold it with judgment and

with righteousness henceforth and forever. The zeal of Jehovah will perform this.

It is His purpose to glorify the Christ who at all cost glorified Him to His own shame and suffering, but moral glory, and this on earth, and especially the land where He was put to the death of the cross. It was God's wisdom in Christ, the blessed contrast of sin-stricken man, even in the highest place, who has so often to endure the pain of a fool begotten to his sorrow. But if here the responsibility is traced, and the father knew the reverse of the joy that a man was born into the world, because of his foolish son, the rejected Christ to his faith turns the temporary sorrow into a joy that never ends, though this was not the place or season to speak of it.

On the other hand, a joyful (not a vain or thoughtless) heart is an excellent medicine in this world of aches and bruises; as surely as a spirit shattered by affliction and charged with grief and fear dries up the bones, making one a skeleton rather than a human being (v. 22). Man lives not by bread alone, still less bitter herbs, but by God's Word that reveals His grace in Christ.

A gift to pervert the ways of judgment blinds the eyes, and betrays as a wicked man him who takes it, no less than him that gives it (v. 23). To take it "out of the bosom" ought to be a signal of danger. No other eye of man sees, but God who abhors the wrong is not mocked.

The wisdom here spoken of (v. 24) is that of a single eye, and is before the face of him that has understanding; for he has God in his thoughts, not persons or things to govern him, but all subjected to divine light. On the contrary, the eyes of a fool are in the ends of the earth and liable to fluctuation under every breeze of influence.

How blessed those to whom Christ is made to us wisdom from God, not the least of Christian privileges for present need, saving, and joy.

Again, in verse 25, is “a foolish son” brought before us; but here it is not only a grief to the father, but a bitterness to her who bore him; the father’s authority thwarted and despised, the mother’s affection tried and abused. How little such a son feels their anguish!

The next maxim bears on more public matters, and supposes a totally different fault, to which “also” appears to be the link of transition. Those who bear the character of just men must incur obloquy, and should be esteemed. To punish such in any respect is not good; to smite the noble for uprightness exhibits an unworthy spirit; it is a man forsaking his own mercy, and base enough to lower what is above himself. Men, not some only but as a class, are senseless, as we read in 1 Peter 2:15. Sin breeds independence, which chafes and blames, rails and rebels, against excellence and authority, formal or moral.

The chapter closes with two verses which show the value of that silence which is said to be golden, and even of that which is but leaden, not positive but merely negative or seeming. He that has knowledge spares his words, aware of what is far better; the man of understanding is of a cool spirit, knowing the mischief of inconsiderateness and impetuosity. And this is so true, that even a fool, when by his experience of many a buffet profits to hold his tongue, gains credit for wisdom he does not deserve; as he that shuts his lips habitually is counted prudent. The day is not yet come for the earth when a king, the King, shall reign in righteousness, and

princes rule in judgment. Then a man, for indeed there is but One on whose shoulder the weight of such government rests, shall be as a hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land. Then the fool shall no more be called noble, nor the crafty said to be bountiful. But the day is at hand, dark as its dawn must be and terrible for the ungodly, Jews, Gentiles, and above all those that now name the Lord's name in vain.

Proverbs 18

The first verse seems difficult, and certainly has been rendered differently. The sense in the A.V. does not resemble that given by the revisers any more than the ancients. The Septuagint and the Vulgate construct alike, but Leeser has another view.

"He that separateth himself seeketh pleasure, he rageth against all wisdom.

"A fool hath no delight in understanding, but only that his heart may reveal itself.

"When the wicked cometh, there cometh also contempt, and with ignominy reproach.

"The words of a man's mouth [are] deep waters, the fountain of wisdom [is] a gushing brook.

"To accept the person of the wicked is not good, — to wrong the righteous in judgment.

"A fool's lips enter into contention, and his mouth calleth for blows.

"A fool's mouth [is] his destruction, and his lips [are] a snare to his soul.

“The words of a tale-bearer [are] as dainty morsels, and they go down to the chambers of the belly.

“He also that is slack in his work is brother to him that is a destroyer.

“The name of Jehovah [is] a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is set in a high retreat.

“The rich man’s wealth [is] his strong city, and as a high wall in his own imagination.

“Before destruction the heart of a man is haughty, and before honour [is] humility.” vv. 1-12.

The separation with which the chapter opens is in no way from evil, but rather from others to indulge his own desire and pleasure. Such selfishness enrages him against all wisdom.

This is confirmed by the verse that follows. For such a one is pronounced to be a fool, and to have no delight in understanding, but only that his heart may reveal itself. How far he is from knowing himself! His heart is the chief seat of his folly.

But there is worse among men than vanity; for it is truly said, “when the wicked cometh, there cometh also contempt, and with ignominy reproach.” God despiseth not any; but what care they for God? They have only contempt for their betters, and ensure it for themselves, or, as it is here said, “with ignominy reproach.”

The contrast appears next. “The words of a man’s mouth are deep waters, the fountain of wisdom a gushing brook.” Here it is a man who has looked up and learned wisdom, instead of trusting himself. His words are therefore deep waters; and they are fresh as well as

deep, even as a gushing brook. For Jehovah is the living God, and man under the power of death.

But there are dangers too even for the wise. It is not good to favour the person of the wicked, and just as bad to subvert the righteous in judgment. Strict integrity is a jewel. Prejudice must not be allowed, any more than partiality. Our sufficiency is of God.

There is another way in which folly displays itself. “A fool’s lips enter into (or, with) contention, and his mouth calleth for blows.” The way of pence is unknown. His words are for war, and his mouth therefore calleth for blows, even if he escape sometimes. But it is all the worse for him in the long run; for “a fool’s mouth is his destruction, and his lips the snare of his soul.” Had he profited by rebuke and other humiliations, it might have been otherwise (vv. 6, 7).

Quite as evil as the foolish talker is the tale-bearer, of whom we next hear. “The words of a tale-bearer [are] as wounds, and they go down to the chambers of the belly.” Even if they were strictly true, which is rarely the case, they are in every respect injurious, and fall under the censure of evil speaking. They wholly lack a moral object or a loving way. It is at best gossip, and for the most part the mere indulgence of talking of things which right feeling would rather conceal. The issue is to inflict wounds which pierce very deep, and where they are least curable.

Then we have a maxim of great force in verse 9. The slothful also, or slack in his work, is near akin to the destroyer, or great waster. Both arrive at the same end of misery, one by idling, the other by careless prodigality. See the blessed contrast of Christ as Mark

traces His service; “and straightway,” “and immediately,” “and forthwith.”

What a resource in such dangers, and in all others, is the name of Jehovah! A strong tower truly, whither the righteous betakes himself and is secure (v. 10). For the enemy is still in power, and those who return to God need protection.

How poor in comparison is the rich man’s wealth (v. 11)! He thinks it a strong city, and a high wall in his own conceit. But it will fail him utterly when his need is extreme.

So when the heart of man is haughty, destruction is nigh; whereas humility is the pathway to honour that lasts (v. 12). Here Christ is the blessed Exemplar. For He, as high as the Highest, took the lowly place of bondman to obey, and having gone down so low that none could follow to the utmost, is now indeed exalted. The Christian is called to follow; and on none did the Lord lay it more than on the apostles who by grace were faithful.

The weakness and need, the dangers and difficulties, as well as the helps, of man are here remarkably set out (vv. 13-24).

“He that giveth answer before he heareth, it [is] folly and shame to him.

“The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity; but a wounded spirit who can bear (or, raise up)?

“The heart of the intelligent getteth knowledge, and the ear of the wise seeketh knowledge.

“A man’s gift maketh room for him, and bringeth him before great men.

“He that pleadeth first in his own cause [seemeth] just; but his neighbour cometh and searcheth him.

“The lot causeth contentions to cease, and parteth between the mighty.

“A brother offended (or, injured) is [harder to be won] than a strong city; and contentions [are] as the bars of a castle.

“A man’s belly is satisfied with the fruit of his mouth with the increase of his lips is he satisfied.

“Death and life [are] in the power of the tongue; and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof.

“[Whoso] findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour from Jehovah.

“The poor speaketh supplications, but the rich answereth roughly.

“A man of friends cometh to ruin; but there is a lover sticking closer than a brother.”

Haste or vanity leads men to confide in themselves and to slight what others have to say. Thus it is that they get the discredit of folly and shame to their surprise and pain.

When one is enabled to bear up courageously in conscious integrity, it is all well; but when the spirit is broken, despair is apt to ensue, and all is over, while that lasts.

Everyone can see that those who lack intelligence ought to get knowledge, and that the unwise should seek it. But in truth the reverse is the fact as here. The intelligent have it at heart to get knowledge, as the wise do seek it. So the Lord assured when here: Ask, and it

shall be given to you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you. Who seeks of God in vain for our real good?

But now we hear of the way of a man with men, and without God, as we heard in the chapter before. Gifts go far with most, and make way for the least honourable before great men, who are often, like those who court them, neither good nor wise. There are marked exceptions.

The next apothegm is a sort of converse to verse 13. It is a man first in his own cause; what can be plainer than its justification? But his neighbour comes and searches him; and how does the matter look then?

There are cases however where both sides have so much to plead, that a fair decision is beyond men, who if stiff give themselves over to contention, as there are those outside the dispute whose sad interest it is to keep it up. The Israelite had the resource of the lot, no matter how mighty the contenders might be; for Jehovah did not fail to decide thereby. But the Christian is entitled to look to his Father in Christ's name, and never without an answer of grace if he wait on Him. How great the value of the written Word and of free intercourse with Him who is higher than the highest!

But there is as there ever was a great difficulty here; and it might seem strange, if we were not too familiar with the fact, that it is with a brother offended. How unapproachable and unreasonable! Yes, he is harder to win than a strong city; and such contentions are as the bars of a castle. What strength is needed to break through!

“The belly” has a bad name in both Old Testament and New; but not always, as John 7:38 conclusively proves. And so it may be here, where it seems employed in its twofold application for the innermost affections, good or evil. The mouth indicates the heart, as the Lord tells us both of the good man and of the wicked. Out of its abundance the mouth speaks. Here it is the other side — a man’s inwards satisfied with the fruit of his mouth, with the increase of his lips. How weighty then our every word if we bring in God! But if this satisfies man, the child of God can be satisfied with nothing less than God’s Word and grace. Hence too are life and death said to be in the power of the tongue, and so the issues in both good and evil. All Scripture declares it; all experience confirms and illustrates it.

Does the finding of good in a wife, in one worthy of that name, join on to this? Certainly no one has such opportunity of intimate knowledge and of giving help. She can avail as none else; and if for God, what a treasure to her husband, who might resent fidelity in another! What a favour from Jehovah!

The poor naturally resort to supplication, the rich as naturally answer roughly. Grace exalts the one, and abases the other, to the happiness of faith, and to the Lord’s pleasure who sees and weighs all.

A man who depends on many friends pays for it to his own ruin; but One is become more than a friend, a lover beyond all others, that sticketh closer than a brother. Well we know Him; yet how little, alas!

Proverbs 19

Chapter 19:1-7. In a general way these maxims of divine wisdom are meant to comfort the upright and considerate poor, apt to be despised by others of less moral worth. They are instructive to all who have the fear of God, and to the Christian especially, who is told to honour all men as such (1 Peter 2:17). There is nothing akin to the assertion of man's rights and the exclusion of God's, seeking one's own will, advantage' honour, and power.

"Better [is] the poor that walketh in his integrity than one perverse in his lips (and) who is a fool.

"Also a soul (person) without knowledge [is] not good; and he that hasteth with [his] feet maketh false steps.

"The folly of a man perverteth his way; and his heart fretteth against Jehovah.

"Wealth bringeth many friends; but the poor is separated from his friend.

"A false witness shall not be unpunished, and an utterer of lies shall not escape.

"Many court the favour of a prince; and every one [is] a friend to him that giveth "All the brothers of the poor hate him; how much more do his friends go far from him? he pursueth [with] words: they are not (or, these hath he not)." vv. 1-7.

To walk in integrity is the fruit of divine grace. Faith alone can thus enable anyone in a world of vain show and with a nature corrupt or false, and vain or proud, either way given to self-complacency and open to self-conceit. If ever so poor, how much better is the upright

walker than the man however rich that talks crookedly and is a fool (v. 1).

There is no excuse for anyone who hears the Scriptures to be without knowledge, and knowledge of the deepest value, perfectly reliable and accessible. What is to be compared with the written Word of God, even when it was but partially given? To be without that knowledge was not good but evil in an Israelite; how much more in a professing Christian! Without knowledge, one is apt to act precipitately and fall into sin — how often through haste! Man needs to weigh his words and ways (v. 2).

The foolishness of a man exposes him to evil ways; and all the more, because the more foolish, the less is there self-judgment. If one but felt his folly before God, and therefore looked up for wisdom, how surely He would give it without upbraiding, if he trust himself, he perverts his way more and more. What is worse still, his heart frets or rages against Jehovah. His folly grows impious at length even to casting the blame on Him who only is absolutely wise and has never done him harm but good. It is a common case (v. 3).

The covetousness of man betrays itself in the eagerness of men in general to be friends of the wealthy; nor less in the coolness that separates the poor man from his neighbour’s interest and care (v. 4). How little is God in their thoughts! Yet withal they may flatter themselves with loving God and man. Let them think of the good Samaritan.

False witness is a heinous sin in Jehovah’s eyes, who pledges Himself that it shall not go without punishment, and that the untruthful man shall not escape. A Jew was no doubt more guilty than a heathen if he thus boldly

ignored Him who hears every word; and much more inexcusable is the Christian, now that Christ has come, the true and faithful Witness. Israel was called to be the arena of Jehovah's government; but it utterly failed through their forgetting the ground of promise to faith, and resting all on their own obedience of the law. No sinful man, nor indeed any, can stand on such a tenure. For as many as are of law-works are under curse, as it had been so strikingly anticipated in Deuteronomy 27 where the Spirit records the curses on Ebal, and does not notice the blessings on Gerizim, though no doubt proclamation was made historically on the latter as much as on the former. But all men who take this ground of their obedience reap not blessing, but curse. Blessing for a sinful man can come only by faith. And we find men after the law even more heedless of truth than they were before the law, yea, even saints. But in Christianity we have not only the truth, but truthfulness consequently, as never before.

The selfishness of human nature is shown out in verses 6 and 7. "Many court (or, entreat) the favour of a prince; and every man is a friend to him that giveth" (v. 6). It is not all that can get the ear of a prince to curry favour. But a liberal man is as the rule easy to reach and ready to listen. No doubt it is a temptation even to a Christian in distress. But why forget that He whose is the earth and its fullness has His heart ever open to his cry? How comely then it is to be anxious for nothing; to let our gentleness be known to all men, self-assertion to none; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving to make our requests known to God!

What a graphic picture verse 7 presents in following up hateful self-seeking! "All the brothers of the poor hate

him; how much: more do his friends go far from him! he pursueth with words: they are not." Even the nearest ties of relationship break before the needy one. Still less are friends faithful to him who sinks into poverty. The very sight of such a one is a bore, and a signal to be off. In vain the debtor pursues with his words of appeal. The old friends disappear, and all fails. Such the prodigal found the world, when his profusion left him nothing more to spend; no man gave to him. God is the gracious giver, and the only One changeless and effectual, when every resource is gone, and the sinner bows to Him, though he have nothing but sins. But for him, however ruined, that believes, God has Jesus and with Him freely gives all things, as the day will manifest. It is of importance to realize this by faith now, that we may honour Him in thanksgiving and praise, and in willing service, as it becomes every Christian to do.

The value of right feeling ("heart" literally, or sense) is enforced and contrasted with the folly and evil of deceit, both for the life that is, and for that to come; the uncomeliness of self-indulgence, and the admirableness of forbearance; the comfort of royal favour, as against the fear of its displeasure; the grief where family relationship is in disorder, and the manifest blessing where she who shares the guidance walks and judges wisely.

"He that getteth sense loveth his own soul; he that keepeth understanding shall find good.

"A false witness shall not be held innocent, and one uttering lies shall perish.

"Luxury is not seemly for a fool; much less for a servant to have rule over princes.

“The discretion of a man maketh him slow to anger; and [it is] his glory to pass over a transgression.

“The king’s wrath [is] as a lion’s roaring; but his favour [is] as dew upon the grass.

“A foolish son [is] the calamity of his father; and the contentions of a wife [are] a continual dropping.

“House and riches [are] an inheritance from fathers; but a prudent wife [is] from Jehovah.” vv. 8-14.

It is not only lax and dissolute ways that lead to ruin. How many perish by the indifference which gives a loose rein to folly! There is no fear of God in either; and where this fear is lacking, all must be wrong. Before, we were told that the fear of Jehovah is the beginning of wisdom, as it also tends to life. This may be even now before peace with God is enjoyed; for such peace comes only through the faith which rests on Christ and His work. But it remains true, that he that heareth reproof getteth sense; and he that getteth sense loveth his own soul. The other word that accompanies this is of great value — “he that keepeth understanding shall find good,” and good better than silver or gold. It is well to get, and better still to keep, what is so excellent.

Those who hear and say much have to lay to heart the next solemn warning: “a false witness shall not be held innocent, and one uttering lies shall (not merely be punished, but) perish.” It is most hateful to God and most injurious to man. No one can say where the evil may spread, or how it may end here, but we do know how the Lord judges it forever.

Luxury is good for none; but it is above all unseemly for the fool who makes it his enjoyment and his god. The

wise man was given to add that worse still is it for a servant to have rule over princes: who so vain and tyrannical?

To indulge in anger hastily is ever a danger, as it is true discretion to be slow in yielding to it. Better still is it to pass over an offence however real. It is his glory. He that is higher than the highest sets the pattern of grace.

On kings it is peculiarly incumbent how they dispense their censure or their favour. If they mistake either way (and there is no small danger of it), the effect is pernicious beyond measure. How happy for the believer to have to do readily and directly with the Highest who never errs, though we are so prone to make mistakes.

The next words take up the afflictions of family life, and give us salutary judgment. It is not merely a fool here, but “a foolish son,” and he surely is “the calamity of his father.” There is another who brings the calamity nearer still and more constantly, a contentious wife. Her cross and fractious spirit is a continual dropping. Not a spot in the house is safe from her turmoil.

Hence the importance of so looking to the Lord for a gracious and faithful counterpart. If house and wealth are an inheritance of fathers, as it generally was in Israel. a prudent wife was from Jehovah. What were the rest, however choice or abundant, where the meekness of wisdom failed in her who shared it all? If all else materially lacked, what comfort and happiness in having one from Jehovah who had His light within and around her!

Dangers and helps are plainly pointed out; for the fallen earth is full of the one, and Jehovah fails not for the

other. There is a great need of vigilance, and man is shortsighted, to say the least.

“Slothfulness casteth into a deep sleep; and the idle soul shall suffer hunger.

“He that keepeth the commandment keepeth his soul; he that despiseth his ways shall die.

“He that hath pity on the poor lendeth to Jehovah; and his bestowal will he pay him again.

“Chasten thy son, seeing there is hope; and let not thy heart cause him to die.

“A man of great wrath shall suffer punishment; for if thou deliver [him], thou must do it yet again.

“Hear counsel and receive instruction, that thou mayest be wise in thy latter end.

“Many thoughts [are] in a man’s heart, but the counsel of Jehovah, that shall stand.

“The charm of a man [is] his kindness, and a poor man [is] better than a liar.” vv. 15-22.

Even when man was unfallen, he had responsibility. He was called to till and keep the garden, planted exceptionally by Jehovah Elohim with every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. When fallen, as the ground was cursed on his account, he had to eat of it all the days of his life with toil. Thorns and thistles it yielded unbidden, so that man had to eat bread in the sweat of his face all his diminishing life. Slothfulness therefore ill became his position, and all the more when he faced adversity through his own fault. The sun arises, and the wild beasts get away to their dens, but man goeth forth to his work till the evening; and, as he is, it

is well ordered for him. But slothfulness traverses all, and casts into a deep sleep while it is day, and pays the penalty. If any will not work, neither let him eat. The idle soul shall suffer hanger.

Man was made in God's image, after His likeness. He had dominion given him over fish and fowl, cattle and reptile, and over all the earth too. Yet was he put under commandment. And "he that keepeth the commandment keepeth his soul; as he that despiseth," or is reckless of, "his ways shall die." So Adam proved, and no less Adam's race. Even when no open sin was, man must bow to God. To seek independency of God is his ruin. To look up in gratitude and obey Him is not only the first of human duties, but vital to man whose breath is in his nostrils, and his life but a vapour. When sin entered and death through sin, how very evident and urgent it was that he should be dependent on that God who forthwith held out a Deliverer from the power of evil before banishing him from the paradise he had lost by his disobedience!

In such a world of disorder, of violence and corruption, we have always with us the poor, whom no man that has eyes or ears can fail to meet. This tests the heart practically; for to say, Go in peace, be ye warmed and filled, and to give them not the things needful for the body, is to cheat ourselves quite as much as them. Man was to represent God who loves a cheerful giver in a wilderness world, and here encourages the man to pity those that have not. "He that pitieth," or is gracious to, "the poor lendeth to Jehovah," as He deigns to count it; "and what he bestoweth He will pay him again." What security can match this? Think too of the honour of being creditor to Him!

But there is also another duty in which a parent ought to resemble Him, care for his offspring. “Chasten thy son, seeing there is hope.” The young twig is pliant, and may be bent aright or pruned to bear fruit. Love is not indifferent but takes pains, and chastening is a greater sorrow to a father than to the son that needs it. To allow evil, whatever the plea, is to set one’s soul on causing “him to die.” We, Christians on earth, endure for chastening, which, though painful for the moment, afterward yields peaceful fruits of righteousness to those exercised thereby.

Look next at one not accustomed to bear the yoke in his youth. He is “a man of great wrath,” overcome by any word or work which does not please his rash mind; what is the result? He “shall suffer punishment”; and the sad thing is that neither he nor anyone else can say what may come next. Love him as you may, his hasty temper is constant danger. “For if thou deliver, thou must do it yet again.” Christ is the sole adequate Deliverer, and this not only by His redemption but by the virtue of abiding in Him. “If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall come to pass for you.”

Very fitting accordingly is the next word: “Hear counsel, and receive instruction, that thou mayest be wise in thy latter end.” What counsel can compare with that which God gives; what instruction equals the Scriptures? Speculative men talk of the Bible as fragmentary and occasional; but under such an appearance there is the completest provision, and suited to every need that ever did or can arise. Men of faith find it out to their everlasting comfort, and are responsible to show its treasures to those who fail to see; but they reap the

blessing in wisdom from the first to their latter end, as every believer proves.

Outside the field of divine teaching is the perplexity of man's thoughts, let him be ever so abundant in ideas or devices. "Many thoughts are in a man's heart, but the counsel of Jehovah, that shall stand." This is what makes wise; and firm as well as happy is he who learns and cleaves to His counsel. It is the great lie to deny the truth; and Christ the Personal Word, Scripture the written Word, is the truth, which the Holy Spirit makes a living thing to the believer.

Nor is this all the comfort he enjoys. "The charm of a man (or that which maketh a man to be desired) is his kindness." There too he is privileged to follow in the wake of God, who is good and doeth good. For this reason its claim too often is substituted for the reality; and good words usurp the place of good deeds. Nor do any fail more than those whose large purse accompanies a narrow heart and a polite tongue. Hence we have the pithy adage that "a poor man is better than a liar." It is God's Word which strips men of their robes and lays bare their true character. May we have grace to be truthful and loving, without pretension.

As it has been already laid down that the fear of Jehovah is the beginning and the discipline of wisdom, so does it prolong days, whereas the years of the wicked shall be shortened. Here (vv. 23-29) we have more said of its virtue.

"The fear of Jehovah [tendeth] to life; and he shall abide satisfied; he shall not be visited with evil.

"A sluggard burieth his hand in the dish, and will not even bring it to his mouth again.

“Smite a scorner, and the simple will become prudent; and reprove the intelligent, he will understand knowledge.

“He that ruineth a father [and] chaseth away a mother is a son that causeth shame and bringeth reproach.

“Cease, my son, to hear instruction [causing] to err from the words of knowledge.

“A witness of Belial scorneth judgment, and the mouth of the wicked swalloweth iniquity.

“Judgments are prepared for scorners, and stripes for the back of the foolish.” vv. 23-29.

Now that we know the manifestation of life eternal in Christ and its gifts to the believer, how greatly is the maxim enhanced! What satisfaction can there be outside Him? “He that hath the Son hath life”; and Christ is the food of that life, both as the true bread out of heaven, giving life to the world, and not to Israel only, by faith, and in raising up at the last day. But there is the further privilege since His death, even to eat His flesh and drink His blood, and thus to dwell with Him, as He dwells in the Christian. He is the Deliverer; what shall man or Satan do to hurt? How shall not God also with Him freely give us all things?

The faith that fears Jehovah is earnest. The sluggard on the contrary is so besotted to self as to bury his hand in the dish, and will not so much as raise it to his mouth again. So he lives, dies, and perishes.

To smite a scorner may and will be lost on him; but the simple take heed, gather profit, and become prudent. The man of intelligence lays admonition to heart, and

apprehends a knowledge before unknown. Thus simple and wise are gainers.

As a scorner is worse than a sluggard, more guilty still is the son that plunders a father and chaseth away a mother and her loving appeals. What shame and dishonour he brings!

In such a world of sin the enemy finds no lack of mischievous men and women, who not only stray away from the words of knowledge, but take pleasure to misguide the unwary. Cease, my son, to hear such fetal instruction.

Still more daring a witness of Belial is he that mocks at judgment; and the mouth of the wicked drinks down iniquity. But soon or late God is not mocked, if man is deceived; for whatsoever a man shall sow, that also shall he reap.

Therefore it is true that “judgments are prepared for scorners, and stripes for the back of the foolish.” It is not that God desires any man to be reprobate; but what if He, willing to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much long-suffering vessels of wrath fitted unto destruction? They gave themselves up to their own will, which is nothing but sin, and had a ready helper in the arch enemy who makes them his slaves. But that God might make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, He in His grace prepared them before for glory. All the sin is in and of the creature; all the good is of God. This is the truth as to both God and man, whose only resource is by grace in Christ.

Proverbs 20

Here are brought together the great danger of certain follies on the one hand, and the value of wisdom and fidelity on the other.

“Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler; and whoso erreth thereby is not wise.

“The terror of a king is as a lion’s roaring; he that provoketh him to anger sinneth against his own soul.

“It is for a man’s honour to keep aloof from strife; but every fool will rush in.

“The slothful will not plow by reason of the winter: in harvest shall he beg and have nothing.

“Counsel in man’s heart [is] deep water; and a man of understanding draweth it out.

“Most men will proclaim every one his own kindness; but a faithful man who can find?

“A righteous one walketh in his integrity: blessed [are] his children after him.” vv. 1-7.

There is no creature of God which has not an important place if used aright. But men blind to His will seek their pleasure heedlessly, and are thus enticed to open sin and grievous hurt. This is eminently the case with wine and strong drink; the one deceives, the other maddens. The warnings are so many and evident on every side, that such as err thereby have only to blame their own folly and self-will.

Rulers are not a terror to good work but to the evil. Nor does the king bear the sword in vain. He is ordained as God’s servant, an avenger for wrath to him that does evil. The terror he inspires is therefore as a lion’s roar.

To provoke his anger is to sin against one's own soul. That again is sheer folly and wrong. Would you then have no fear of an authority so able to punish? Do that which is good, and you shall have praise from it.

Nor is there a more common snare than meddling where we have no business or duty. To this the self-sufficient are prone. Their vanity leads them to accredit others with failure, and themselves with wisdom. They are the men of common sense and of righteousness, if others are more brilliant. Hence in their folly they rush into that strife from which the right-minded hold aloof to their honour.

But there is also danger from one's own slothfulness, which is exemplified in its paralyzing the ordinary call to labour. It is ordered of God as the rule that plowing time should not be when things grow, and still less when they ripen. But a sluggard finds an excuse for putting off his duty in the cold weather which invites him to strenuous industry. Does he plead the winter against plowing? Then shall he beg in harvest and have nothing.

If there be thus from laziness danger of neglect in the proper season, and from officious vanity whenever a thorny question arises, it all goes to show the worth of intelligence, and the need of taking pains in order to arrive at it. For the truly wise are not superficial; but counsel in their heart is "deep water," instead of bubbling over on every occasion, however slight. And few things mark a man of understanding more than discerning ability to draw it out.

It is the common failing of men to affect a world-wide benevolence, and to cheat themselves into the belief that their talk and tears over the widow and the orphan

are real kindness of no ordinary sort. Let us beware of walking in so vain a show, and remember that the Word of God raises the question whether the reality is in deed and truth. “A faithful man who shall find?”

Such souls however there are in a world where faith is rare, and most love glory from men rather than glory from God, though the one be as evanescent as it is vain, and the other as everlasting as it is substantial. “The righteous walketh in his integrity: blessed [are] his children after him.” God is a rewarder of them that seek Him out; nor is it only the blessing of a good conscience in his walk; but God does not forget his children after him. So even King David could not but feel toward Chimham, if Barzillai sought nothing for himself.

In verses 8-14 we have maxims laid down from the king on his throne down to the commonest trickery of life in everyday transactions, with moral cautions salutary to all.

“A king that sitteth in the throne of judgment scattereth away all evil with his eyes.

“Who can say, I have cleansed my heart, I am pure from my sin?

“Divers weights (a stone and a stone), divers measures (an ephah and an ephah), both of them [are] alike abomination to Jehovah.

“Even a child is known by his doings, whether his work [be] pure, and whether right.

“The hearing ear, and the seeing eye, Jehovah made even both of them.

“Love not sleep lest thou come to poverty; open thine eyes — thou shalt be satisfied with bread.

“Naught, naught, saith the buyer; but when he is gone his way, then he boasteth.” vv. 8-14.

If ever there was a king sitting on the throne, whose eyes in large measure scattered away all evil, it was he who wrote these words in the Spirit. Yet we have the sad tale of failure, so characteristic of man, and his eyes at length sanctioning evil most dishonouring to Jehovah and destructive to Israel. But He that inspired Solomon has ever a greater in view. “Behold, a king shall reign in righteousness, and princes shall rule in judgment.” The time hastens.

Righteous souls may and do meanwhile groan; but they murmur not, still less resist the power, which is God’s ordinance, nor plead conscience to evade law, but contrariwise are willing to suffer in obeying God. They know what man’s state is, and that none can truly say, I have cleansed my heart, I am pure from my sin. Their boast is in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom they now received the reconciliation.

But there is no excuse for cheating; against which high and low, poor and rich, yea, and dishonest no less than honest, exclaim loudly. What is more than all, such deliberate roguery is an abomination to Jehovah, who is infinitely removed from all selfish feeling.

Evil may for a time be hidden under many a plea or cloak. But good needs no commendation. Even a child is known by his doings; a pure or a right work is plain.

The hearing ear is a wonderfully beneficent mechanism, the seeing eye of still wider scope for the race in matters of this life. How humbling is the unbelief of the would-be wise who try to persuade themselves and others that Jehovah made neither! Even a heathen like

Galen felt and confessed that the hand which made them was divine. If Gnosticism is impious pride, Agnosticism is man sinking to the brute, yet boastful withal.

If man has no heart to thank God for his rest by night, and to seek His guidance and blessing by day, the very sun that performs His bidding calls man to go forth to his work till the evening, as much as he chases the beasts of the forest into their dens. To be an idler, a sleeper, during the hours of light, is to court poverty. To open one's eyes fittingly; that is, for work, is to be satisfied with bread. None needs to beg if in earnest.

How low is the effort to deceive the seller by depreciation! How false to boast of the mean advantage, if it succeed (v. 14)! But such are the ways of covetousness, as common a snare as can be found for the heart of man, and most hateful to the God of all grace.

In verses 16-23 we are shown what is of real value, far beyond gold, the object of most men, and rubies, the desired prize of rich folk.

"There is gold, and a multitude of rubies; but the lips of knowledge [are] a precious jewel.

"Take his garment that is become surety [for] another, and hold him in pledge for a strange woman.

"Bread of falsehood [is] sweet to man, but afterward his mouth shall be filled with gravel.

"Purpose is established by counsel, and with wise guidance make war.

"He that goeth about tale-bearing revealeth secrets: therefore meddle not with him that openeth (enticeth with) his lips.

“Whoso curseth his father or his mother, his lamp shall be put out in the blackest darkness.

“An inheritance hastily gotten at the beginning will not be blessed at the end.

“Say not, I will recompense evil: wait on Jehovah, and he will save thee.

“Divers weights [are] an abomination to Jehovah; and a false balance [is] not good.”

Never was there a day in the world’s annals when men might more easily possess themselves of gold than when Solomon reigned, never one when precious stones so freely poured than then into Jerusalem. But knowledge duly expressed was far rarer and yet more valuable; and so it is still.

Inconsiderateness is a direct road to ruin, even if one listens to spendthrifts of one’s family. But what happens when a man is so weak as to become surety for a stranger? Yet worse is it, when he listens to a strange woman. You may relieve him of his raiment at once.

Again, if one eat the bread of deceit, and instead of trembling at the sin, find it sweet, what will the end be? Surely to fill the mouth with gravel; God is not mocked.

Counsel is requisite to form and execute a purpose, and especially if one go to war. But if one needs wise guidance, what more dangerous than to listen to an active talebearer, unless it be to a flatterer?

To honour one’s parents was the first commandment with promise; what can be the issue but deepest darkness to him that curses either?

So too the hastily gotten inheritance is apt to slip soon, having no blessing from God.

But it is a dangerous thing to keep a grudge, and hope to repay it. God is jealous, but withal gracious. On Him let one wait and prove His saving mercy, as David did.

Cheating is His abomination, and a balance of deceit is not good, but for destruction.

It is very certain that dependence on God alone secures a clean or righteous walk. So it was of old; so it is now. Man needs direction from above, and grace too, that in this world of pitfalls and confusion his ways may please the Lord. This is most impressively pointed out in verses 24-30.

“The steps of a man [are] from Jehovah; and how can a man understand his own way?

“[It is] a snare to a man rashly to say, [It is] holy, and after vows to make inquiry.

“A wise king scattereth the wicked, and bringeth the wheel over them.

“Man’s spirit [is] Jehovah’s lamp, searching all the chambers of the belly.

“Mercy and truth preserve the king, and his throne is upholden by mercy.

“The glory of young men [is] their strength; and the beauty of old men the hoary head.

“Wounding stripes purge away evil, and strokes [purge] the chambers of the belly.”

It is not a weak one’s goings but a strong man’s which are here said to be from Jehovah; how blessed, as well

as necessary to know Him who knows the end from the beginning to whom the night shines as the day, and the darkness is as the light! Him faith can count on to direct the steps.

Jephthah was rash in the vow he made, but he stood to it and bore the consequence. Not so Ananias and Sapphira; but their deception did not shield them from death. We are bound to weigh seriously what we say before God, and not to retract for selfish reasons.

A wise ruler is not one who is too amiable to punish the wicked. The very aim and reason of his office is to be God's minister in externals, and a terror not to a good work, but to an evil one. It is the more imperative, if men conspire, to scatter them and crush their power fearlessly.

Man's spirit is Jehovah's lamp, and so, far beyond that of a beast that goes downward. But it is going beyond Scripture to boast of the great soul of man, and against Scripture to say that it is the light which lighteth every man. For this is Christ alone; and the real meaning of John 1:9 is, that the True Light is that which, coming into the world, lightens, or sheds light on, every man. It had been another state before He came thus. The Incarnate Word so deals with every man, high or low, Jew or Gentile. Conscience is a solemn inward monitor for God against sin. Christ when He came did incomparably more — made every one and thing manifest in due character. Divines for ages are apt to talk like the Friends or the heathen; how little they have learned Christ!

Here again we learn that the king is preserved, not by inflexible firmness against the wicked, but by "mercy

and truth." Negative qualities fail to sustain. "His throne is upholden by mercy" — a godlike prerogative. He needs love as well as fear, not only for the people's happiness, but for the stability of his rule.

It is folly and blindness to set young against old, instead of helping them to profit by an experience of great value which they lack. Let the old admire the energy of the young, and the young fail not to own the beauty of the grey head.

Stripes that wound, we all need from time to time, for nothing less probes and cleanses the hidden evil that is at work. The deeper the mischief, the more painful the corrective that must pierce to its core. Such a chastening is not pleasant, but causes grief. Afterward it yields peaceful fruit of righteousness to those exercised thereby.

Proverbs 21

In Jehovah's hand is here (chap. 21:1-8) shown to be the heart, whether of the highest or of the least; then what pleases and displeases Him, with the issues, for the evil or for the good.

"The king's heart in Jehovah's hand [is] brooks of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will.

"Every way of a man [is] straight in his own eyes; but Jehovah weigheth the hearts.

"To exercise justice and judgment [is] more acceptable to Jehovah than sacrifice.

"A high look and a proud heart, the lamp (or, tillage) of the wicked [is] sin.

“The thoughts (or, plans) of the diligent [tend] only to plenteousness; but every hasty one only to want.

“The getting of treasures by a lying tongue [is] a fleeting breath of them that seek death.

“The robbery of the wicked sweepeth them away, because they refuse to do judgment.

“Very crooked [is] a guilty man’s way; but [as for] the pure, his work [is] right.” vv. 1-8.

Of all men a king’s heart from his position and duty might instinctively seem reserved and inflexible, but who resisteth Him that secretly rules as He will, even in the worst of circumstances? He will reign righteously and for the largest blessing, when the world kingdom is taken. But even now the king’s heart is in His hand whom he may not know, or disdain. Little as he thinks it, he subserves Him, as brooks of water the man who controls every rill for his gardens, his vineyards, or his fields. It is turned as He pleases.

It is natural to man as he is to count right every way of his, but the solemn truth for everyone is that Jehovah weighs not the acts only, but the heart. All things are naked and laid bare to His eyes with whom we have to do; let us never forget it.

Unless men be reprobate, they are apt to be religious after a sort and a measure; and their sacrifices are a resource too often for indulgence in sin. The sacrifice to God who gave Christ to suffer for our sins is a wholly different matter, the resting place of faith, and the start of holiness. To do judgment and justice flows from it, and is indeed acceptable to God if with faith; as sacrifice without faith is nauseous and presumptuous.

Haughty eyes, and a proud heart, how abhorrent to God and unbecoming in man! It is sin unequivocally; the tillage of the wicked, their business or their glory; their lamp or sinful field. The meek shall inherit the earth; Christ's time is their time. The present is the evil age.

Diligence, directed by thought or plan, tends to plenteousness, as haste destines everyone that so acts only to want; for haste leads to mistake, and mistake to loss, and loss to ruin.

On the other hand, the getting of treasure by a tongue of falsehood, even if it succeed for a while, as it may, ends in worse ruin, like the fleeting breath of those that seek death, happy neither here nor hereafter. Truly they seek death without knowing it.

Others, who are bolder than to deceive, resort to robbery in their wickedness; because they refuse to do judgment, their end is destruction. It will drag or sweep them away whence is no return. Christ is the only true and safe way; and we can now say He, the Son, is the way to the Father.

The guilty man's way is not evil only, but perverse or strange; for he does not stick at anything. The pure man, on the contrary, is upright in his work, carrying conscience with it, and pleasing God. Blessed are the pure in heart; for they shall see God.

Next we have the vivid sketch of one who has to do with a helpmate whose wilful temper is the source of continual chagrin and shame. Yet the word of wisdom gives good counsel to relieve and comfort, notwithstanding such a calamity.

“Better to dwell in a corner of the housetop than with a contentious woman in a wide house [or, house of society].

“The soul of the wicked desireth evil, his neighbour findeth no favour in his eyes.

“When the scorner is punished, the simple becometh wise; and when the wise is instructed, he receiveth knowledge.

“The righteous considereth the house of the wicked; the wicked are overthrown to ruin.

“Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he also shall cry and not be heard.

“A gift in secret pacifieth anger; and a present in the bosom, vehement wrath.

“[It is] joy to the righteous to do justice, but destruction to the doers of iniquity.” vv. 9-15.

A contentious woman is of necessity a trial to every member of the household, but most of all to her husband. The house may be roomy, but only jars follow her; and if visitors call, it is but to increase his pain. No better place is there for him than to find a corner in the housetop; there can quiet be found, and, for piety, access to the Highest.

The soul is the living man’s centre; it is himself, the seat of his will. If this be unrenewed by grace, and therefore under the enemy’s dominion, he has pleasure in evil, not only himself doing things worthy of death, but enjoying the evil of others. What room is there in such a heart for loving another, whatever his need or distress? There is no favour in his eyes, even for the nearest neighbour.

The scorner has not only no respect for what is excellent, but affects to despise it and actively hates it. When such a one meets an exemplary retribution, it is a wholesome lesson to the simple who takes warning against that wicked way. But the wise, when he is instructed, receives positive knowledge for good.

So again the righteous is not merely grieved at the house of the wicked but considers it to solemn profit. And no wonder; for the wicked are overthrown to ruin, even in this world.

Then the world is full of want, suffering, and misery. Is anyone disposed to stop his ears at the cry of the poor? God is not mocked, but resents hardness of heart; for "he also shall cry, and shall not be heard."

On the other hand, even the angry are not insensible to a gift if it be in secret. It would be resented if others saw or knew, or if the donor were prominent, or talked. It is not only bad men whose anger is thereby pacified. See the effect on David when Abigail brought to his bosom a reward that exercised his conscience.

To the righteous, it is their life and joy to do what is right, as it is a great sorrow when through any lack of care they may fail. But nothing is so uncongenial to the workers of iniquity, ever in quest of gain through wrong. And destruction must be their portion. For there is not a creature unapparent before God, but all things are naked and laid bare to His eyes.

In verses 16-23, a cluster of observations are found, of divine value for warning and wisdom in practical life.

“The man that wandereth out of the way of intelligence shall rest in the congregation of the departed (or, shades).

“He that loveth pleasure (or, mirth) [shall be] a poor man; he that loveth wine and oil shall not be rich.

“The wicked [is] a ransom for the righteous, and the treacherous in the stead of the upright.

“[It is] better to dwell in a desert land, than with a contentious and irritable woman.

“[There is] a desirable store and oil in the dwelling of the wise one; but a foolish man swalloweth it up.

“He that followeth after righteousness and mercy findeth life, righteousness, and honour.

“A wise one scaleth the city of the mighty, and casteth down the strength of its confidence.

“Whoso guardeth his mouth and his tongue guardeth his soul from troubles.”

The goodness of God leads to repentance, and the fear of Jehovah is the beginning of wisdom. Christ attracts the heart the one Mediator between God and men. He is the way, the truth, and the life, always the Object of faith to the believer. Here is the way of wisdom, and the man that wanders out of that way shall abide in the congregation of the dead, far from God (v. 16).

Next, we have the man that, loving mirth or pleasure, and wasting life’s time and work in that vain pursuit, must pay the penalty of indigence. Just so he that devotes himself to wine and oil, or enjoyable living, cannot acquire wealth for any worthy or legitimate end (v. 17). Present indulgence forbids future profit.

Then a still more pronounced character comes before us — a wicked person as such. Even in the then and present evil age, when the divine government is not yet in manifested power, who but the blind can fail to see in the downfall of the wicked a ransom for the righteous from destruction, and the transgressor laid in the pit he dug for the upright? Everyone acquainted with Scripture will remember how its history teems with such proofs. But outside its range, and in rather modern times (little beyond two centuries ago), take the return of the cruelly banished Waldenses, who were enabled to make their way back to their fatherland, few in number and with no external military aid, against French and Italian armies of disciplined soldiers, against the Pope, the priesthood, their Romanist countrymen, and even their own sovereign of Savoy, till he was ashamed to destroy the bravest and most loyal of his own subjects. Not that I for one defend fighting for rights; but God pities the oppressed that cry to Him, even if mistaken like most of their fellow-Christians (v. 18).

Further, we hear of the sad hindrance to peace and comfort in the home from the presence of a contentious and irritable woman. Who has not seen the misery of having to do with such a one presiding? To dwell with a termagant of this kind is worse than living in a desert land (v. 19).

Next, we are told of what is good and wise, and the advantages which ensue. The wise, as the rule, lack no good thing, even in their earthly dwelling; for they aspire not nor covet, contrary to wisdom and the fear of Jehovah. The foolish live in ease, and swallow all up; and who is to blame but themselves (v. 20)?

Again, he that pursues righteousness and mercy (that is, faithfulness in relation to Jehovah and to mankind according to their true place, as well as kindness also), finds “life, righteousness, and honour” — his own at compound interest. “His own,” did I say? say rather God’s excellent gift. For none can so walk without faith in God and pleasing Him (v. 21).

Nor is it only that the dwelling of the wise has a desirable treasure therein; but if danger threaten, a wise man surmounts all opposed — scales the city of the mighty, and cuts down the strength of the confidence thereof. What can force avail against wisdom (v. 22)?

Moreover, valuable a faculty as good speech is, it is wise to spare the tongue as well as the mouth. The time, the tone, the way, and the end, have all to be considered, lest a fair intention might not only fail, but provoke. As the mouth has to beware of taking in beyond what is right and good, so the tongue of letting out what is not edifying. To keep one’s mouth and tongue as in God’s presence is to keep the soul from troubles without end (v. 23).

We have seen that “slow to speak” is a safeguard against troubles; we now hear how evil it is to be swift to wrath and its expression (vv. 24-31).

“A proud [and] arrogant one, scorner [is] his name, dealeth in haughtiness of pride.

“The longing of the sluggard killeth him; for his hands refuse to work.

“He longeth greedily all the day; but the righteous giveth and withholdeth not.

“The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination; how much more [when] he bringeth it with a wicked purpose!

“A false witness shall perish; but the man that heareth shall speak enduringly.

“A wicked man hardeneth his face; but the upright, he ordered (or, considereth) his way.

“ [There is] no wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against Jehovah.

“The horse [is] prepared for the day of battle, but deliverance [is] of Jehovah.”

If self-control in speech protects from many a trouble, how different is the scorner’s lot and reputation! For pride and arrogance can brook no difference — haughty to superiors and disdainful where they can dare it. O what a blessed relief to learn of Him who was meek and lowly in heart! Yet He was the Son of the Highest, who bowed absolutely to His will, when despised, rejected, and loathed of men. “Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight”!

Honest labour has its duty, its interests, and its satisfaction. Sloth, which shirks from the work of the hands, leaves all the more room for carking care, because of its fruitless desires, disappointed even to death.

The empty longing fills the day, in vain for the man himself and everyone else. The righteous on the contrary, with a conscience exercised in the duties of his relationship, has the means through his diligence to open both heart and hand ungrudgingly to the need around him.

Jehovah has respect to the person before his offering. If it be a wicked person, how could his sacrifice be other than an abomination? So in Isaiah 66:1-4 we read of the apostate Jews in the latter day; they may trust in the temple they build, where once the Lord of glory filled it; they may sacrifice a lamb, and offer an oblation, and present a memorial of incense; but they are no better than a dog's neck or swine's blood, or blessing an idol, in His eyes who looks for and to the afflicted and contrite that tremble at His word. Worse still it is to bring a sacrifice with wicked aim, as superstition does.

Witness-bearing is the more solemn, because done with deliberate purpose, and before God avowedly as well as man. To be false thus is indeed ruinous; but to hear the call and speak the truth is to honour God and serve man, and such a one speaks unchallenged and abidingly.

A wicked man has no shame; he acts and speaks with no restraint. Not so the upright, who looks up for the direction of his way, and considers well his steps.

No axiom so sure as that every claim to wisdom, understanding, or counsel against Jehovah, is utter folly. Only destruction can be the end of such a policy.

And vain it is to trust in ordinary means without Him. The horse may be prepared for the battle, but the victory is with neither the rider nor his horse. Deliverance is of Jehovah.

Proverbs 22

Even in a day when Israel was under probation and the earthly government of Jehovah with present results for good or ill, there could not but be the working of great

moral principles in those that feared His name, far beyond what the natural man covets.

“A name [is] rather to be chosen than great riches, loving favour rather than silver and gold.

“Rich and poor meet together: Jehovah [is] the maker of them all.

“A prudent one seeth the evil and hideth himself; but the simple pass on and are punished.

“The reward of humility, the fear of Jehovah, [is] riches and honour, and life.

“Thorns, snares, are in the way of a perverse one; he that guardeth his soul keepeth far from them.

“Train up the child in accordance with his course, and when he is old, he will not depart from it.

“The rich ruleth over the poor, and the borrower [is] servant of the lender.” vv. 1-7.

It is usual to supply the word “good” in the version of the opening clause of the 22nd chapter. But this is so necessarily implied as to seem needless. For who could suppose that a false pretension is of any value? One’s name in Scripture is the manifestation of what one is; the object of the heart determines the character; and here it is supposed to be what is excellent in God’s eyes as well as man’s. Hence, loving favour accompanies it, which is far from due to silver and gold, often the portion of the worthless.

In the essentials, how little is the difference! Alike they come into the world, and alike they stand when the world passes away. “Rich and poor meet together; Jehovah is the maker of them all.” This the poor man is

entitled to remember, and the rich man ought not to forget. Job had it distinctly before him: “If I despised the cause of my bondman or of my bondmaid, when they contended with me, what then should I do when God riseth up? and if he visited, what should I answer him? Did not he that made me in the womb make him? and did not one fashion us in the womb?”

The value of prudence in a world like this is next urged. The circumspect sees the evil and seeks timely shelter; the heedless goes boldly forward and suffers the consequence.

Humility of a true sort, the fear of Jehovah, has its reward in riches and honour and life, which greater ability misses for the lack of it.

The crooked or perverse man finds painful experience on his way, thorns, snares; whereas he that guards his soul keeps aloof from all such trials.

Early training, whatever the exceptions, has its good result. Train up the lad according to his course; and when he is old, he will not depart from it. So it was with Isaac thus trained by his father. Solomon’s course was a much more chequered one, though we may hope there was repentance.

It is a difficult thing for a man of money to avoid airs with him that has none, and particularly if the latter puts himself under obligation to him. But faith delivers from this snare, and still more when there is a real living Christ.

In verses 8-14 we have an alternating series of characteristics to strive against or to cherish, with only evils following, which call for our attention.

“He that soweth unrighteousness shall reap vanity; and the rod of his wrath shall have an end.

“He that hath a bountiful eye shall be blessed, for he giveth of his bread to the poor.

“Cast out the scorner, and contention shall go out, and strife and ignominy shall cease.

“He that loveth pureness of heart [with I grace of his lips, the king [shall be] his friend.

“The eyes of Jehovah preserve knowledge, but he overthroweth the words of the treacherous.

“The sluggard saith, A lion without, I shall be killed in the streets!

“The mouth of strange women [is] a deep ditch; he with whom Jehovah is indignant shall fall therein.”

To begin with here, injustice is to end with mischief and disappointment; yet if this sours the temper and leads to wrath, its effect is neither great nor long. It is the Old Testament analogue to Galatians 6:7, 8: “Be not deceived. God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his own flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth unto the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life eternal.”

The bountiful eye, on the contrary, does not wait for the appeals of want, but looks out for it in this world of disorder and distress; and his hand and heart go with the good will of his eye, for he giveth of his bread to the poor. And such a one is and shall be blessed.

The scorner is not only ungodly and a sinner, but a source of mischief where he enters. Would you have

contention to disappear, you must get rid of his presence; for it surely brings strife and shame along with it.

How different with a man who joins love of a pure heart to grace on his lips! He is a treasure, not only in private but for public complications. The king seeks such a one for his friend. It is the combination that is so rare.

Even in a world of deception, before the king shall reign in righteousness, when eyes are dim and ears dull, where the vile is called liberal and the churl bountiful, the eyes of Jehovah preserve knowledge, which otherwise would perish from the earth; and He overthrows the words of the treacherous, were they as high as Haman in the eyes of Ahasuerus.

Again, the sluggard who likes to lie abed says in his foolish fancy, A lion is without. I shall be killed in the streets! He is blind to the worst enemy that besets his chamber and enchains his soul.

But the mouth of strange women is yet more dangerous to the unwary, “a deep ditch” for such as yield to her snares. He who falls therein is apt to sink indeed to utter ruin; or, in the energetic phrase of this book, he is one against whom Jehovah hath indignation.

These brief moral axioms here (vv. 15-21) close with the following pair — the thoughtless child, and the calculating adult — which we do well to lay to heart.

“Folly [is] bound in the heart of a child: the rod of correction shall drive it far from him.

“He that oppresseth the poor to increase his [wealth], he that giveth to the rich, surely [cometh] only to want.

“Incline thine ear, and hear the words of the wise, and apply thy heart unto my knowledge.

“For [it is] a pleasant thing if thou keep them within thee: they shall be together fitted to thy lips.

“That thy trust may be in Jehovah, I have made [them] known to thee this day, even to thee.

“Have not I written to thee excellent things in counsels and knowledge “That I might make thee know the certainty of the words of truth; that thou mightest report words of truth to them that send thee?” vv. 15-21.

It is a sure and solemn thing that folly is no calamity from without, but bound in the heart, and this not only when in the conflicts of busy life, but from our early days, departed as all now are from God by nature. “Folly is bound in the heart of a child”; exemption there is none from the most tender age. Nor does the utmost love or care adequately restrain folly. There is the rod of correction to drive it far away by Jehovah’s prescription and with His blessing. It is the folly of a father or mother to think their way better than God’s.

With the grownup another snare is too common: to oppress the poor in any form of increasing one’s means — very especially to commend oneself to the rich by gifts they do not need. God’s eye is on this folly too; and such “come to want” as such selfishness deserves.

To give heed to the words of the wise is itself a wise thing — to apply the heart as well as the ear to such as know better than ourselves. How sad the self-sufficiency that doubts it!

These words, if kept within, give satisfaction and pleasure; whereas all else palls and becomes distasteful,

if not a shame. Nor is this all. They contribute to our own growth and the help of others by the help they render and the confidence they inspire. Thus do they become “together fitted to thy lips.”

But there is a better effect still, “that thy trust may be in Jehovah.” Therefore are such words made known, for who otherwise is sufficient for them? and what good is there that we have not received? Surely we do well to mark precisely the debt of each of us, “this day, even to thee.”

Further, let us not overlook the enhanced value of “excellent things in counsels and knowledge” by their being “written” to us. However good oral instruction, there is no small danger of mistake in the hearer, and still more of letting slip even what we understand. But we can read again and again what is written, and make it our own more fully. Hence the signal profit of Scripture as the permanent Word of God to our souls, as nothing else can be.

A similar advantage. here noted next. Scripture possesses, is “that I might make thee know the certainty of the words of truth.” Pure science has nothing moral in it, still less an affection, and least of all makes God known to the soul, and in His true relationship to me. This is just what His Word does communicate in all certainty, for His Word is truth of that spiritual kind. Unbelief makes the truth of God the most uncertain of all things, like heathenism with its gods many and lords many, but the one true and living God unknown.

How good too is the fruit resulting to others! “That thou mightest report words of truth, to them that send thee” as a trusty representative, or that “send to thee” for

advice in difficulty. Does not God give songs in the night, who teaches us more than the beasts of the earth, and makes us wiser than the birds of heaven?

The apothegms in verses 22-29 all have a prohibitory character, save the last, which is a positive example to be followed and honoured.

“Rob not the poor, because he [is] poor, neither oppress the afflicted in the gate; for Jehovah will plead their cause, and despoil the soul of those that despoil them.

“Make no friendship with an angry man, and go not with a furious man; lest thou learn his paths, and get a snare to thy soul.

“Be not of those that strike hands, of those that are sureties for debts; if thou hast nothing to pay, why should he take away thy bed from under thee?

“Remove not the ancient landmark which thy fathers have set.”

“Hast thou seen a man diligent in his work? He shall stand before kings, he shall not stand before the obscure.” vv. 22-29.

It may seem singular to say, “Rob not the poor,” and in particular “because he is poor”; but it is a warning especially, so base, selfish, and cruel as human nature is now. The rich who might appear the more inviting prey to the unscrupulous are able to take care of themselves in ways that the poor would or could not essay. Hence, bad men flatter the rich for gain, while they also rob or oppress those who ought to be objects of pity. But Jehovah has His eye on such villainy, at the very gate whence justice should flow, pleads the cause of the poor

and the afflicted, and repays heavily those who despoil them.

With one given to anger, it is hard to keep friends, and unsafe to make a friend; and to go with a furious soul is to run the risk of learning his ways, and thus to get a snare instead of a deterrent. Let not the sun go down upon your wrath, says the Apostle; not to hear him in this is to give place to the devil. Even if we have grave reason, the only right Christian feeling is to forgive; and if you forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your heavenly Father forgive your trespasses. You who are slow to forget your wrongs, perhaps imaginary, do you believe Christ's words?

If one realized the duty of having to pay, in any bargain that is made, or suretyship which one agrees to, there would be a serious consideration whether God approves and leads the way. But as drowning men catch at a straw for life, so the imprudent lose their own means, and then seek to draw to their help their trusting friends, even if these have little or nothing to spare. It is a trifle, say they, or a mere form without risk; for it is sure to answer. The sanguine and the improvident thus ensnare themselves into their own ruin. How homely and pungent the hint! If thou hast nothing to pay, why should he take away the bed from under thee?

Another dishonesty is then held up to censure, in which men are apt to cheat craftily rather than with open violence. The ancient landmark set by thy fathers is to be kept contentedly, and without allowing a covetous desire.

Last, it is well to regard a man diligent in his work in a world where so many begrudge their time, care, and

labour. No wonder that one who does his business with conscience despatch, and skill, makes himself at length an object for the king's honour if not need, leaving behind the obscure with whose company he began. Those who rule value industrial integrity.

Proverbs 23

In chapter 23:1-8 we have the cautions of wisdom against self-gratification and seeking the riches which furnish its means.

"When thou sittest to eat with a ruler, consider well who is before thee, and put a knife to thy throat, if thou [be] a man given to appetite. Be not desirous of his dainties; for they fare] deceitful food.

"Weary not thyself to become rich; cease from thine own intelligence. Wilt thou set thine eyes upon what is not? For indeed it maketh itself wings, and it flieth away, as an eagle toward the heavens.

"Eat thou not the meat of [him that hath] an evil eye, nor desire his dainties. For as he thinketh in his soul, so [is] he. Eat and drink, saith he to thee; but his heart [is] not with thee. The morsel thou hast eaten thou shalt vomit up, and waste thy sweet words."

In Luke 16 our Lord depicts the easygoing gentleman — not an infidel, but orthodox — who lived to indulge himself, clothed in purple and fine linen, and making good cheer in splendour every day. But, dead and buried, in Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torments, the immediate consequence of living to self and not to God. But here it is rather the danger to one not used to luxury; and he is told to consider what or who is before him, and to put a knife to his throat rather than yield to

self-indulgence. “Give us this day our sufficient (or necessary) bread,” as the Lord told His disciples to pray. Dainties are deceitful food even for a Jew, how much more for a Christian!

If possible, more insidious and absorbing is the danger of seeking and setting the mind on being rich. Here it is not the mere appetite one has to guard against, but to cease from one’s own understanding, so apt to find good reasons for an evil and selfish thing. The Apostle declares that those who desire to be rich, even if they avoid by-paths to it, fall into temptation and snare, and many unwise and hurtful lusts which plunge men into destruction and ruin. For the love of money is a root of every evil, after which some having aspired have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. Hence it is their uncertainty, as well as our own self-confidence, that is graphically described. Our wisdom is to set our mind on the eternal weight of glory where Christ is, and to look not on the things that are seen; for how transitory these are, while the unseen are eternal. Wealth, says the wise man, does indeed make itself wings and fly away as the eagle to the skies.

There appears to be a link of connection between the counsel in verse 6, not to eat the bread of one that has an evil eye, with setting the mind on what is not in a covetous way, as in verse 5. And this tends to bind up verse 4 both with what precedes and with what follows. For the desire for money is far less commonly for its own sake than in order to enjoy with more ease the things of the world and of human life. And the table forms no small part of these in general. But the point here pressed is to beware of accepting the hospitality of the

insincere, who really begrudges the guest what he eats or drinks while with his lips urging him to partake freely of his store. Far otherwise is such a host as he thinks in his soul. He says to thee, Eat and drink; but his heart is not with thee. The prophet Isaiah, looking to the King's reign in righteousness, lets us know that so it will not be in that future day of bliss for the earth. The vile person or fool, like Nabal, shall no more be called liberal, nor the churl or crafty be said to be bountiful. The wicked now strive to appear what they are not, and not to manifest what they are. For at heart men are ashamed of what they know themselves to be.

Can any discovery among professed friends be more sickening than to find that one's welcome was a vain show, after being taken in by it? This is here represented energetically in verse 8. The morsel thou hast eaten thou shalt vomit up, and thou shalt waste thy sweet words: that is, the thanks you expressed when you thought his invitations were as cordial as kind. From ordinary life up to the most solemn acts of reverent faith and love, to eat and drink together is regarded as an act of hearts united. So much the more painful when one finds it wholly insincere.

In verses 9-18 we hear maxims of wisdom and probity; then of the value of instruction for oneself, and of discipline for the child; next of joy over the wise heart and lips; last, of guarding against envy and cherishing the fear of Jehovah.

"Speak not in the ears of a fool, for he will despise the wisdom of thy words.

“Remove not the ancient landmark, and enter not into the fields of the fatherless; for their redeemer [is] strong; he will plead their cause against thee.

“Apply thy heart unto instruction, and thy ears to the words of knowledge.

“Withhold not correction from the child: if thou beat him with the rod, he shall not die; thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from Sheol.

“My son, if thy heart be wise, my heart shall rejoice, even mine; and my reins shall exult, when thy lips speak right things.

“Let not thy heart envy sinners; but [be thou] in the fear of Jehovah all the day; for surely there is a [latter] end, and thy hope shall not be cut off.”

If grace has given us wisdom, inseparable from Christ who is God’s wisdom no less than His power, who from God is made to us wisdom, it is vain and unseemly to speak its words in the ears of a foolish man. He needs to judge himself instead of listening to words which his folly prevents him from understanding, and exposes him to the sin of despising. The Lord put the same mistake in a still more pungent form when He told His disciples not to cast the holy thing to the dogs, nor to cast pearls before the swine.

Heartless dishonesty toward any and especially the fatherless draws out a far graver warning. It matters not whether it take the crafty shape of removing the ancient landmark, or the open boldness of entering into the fields of the fatherless. If they have no father, they need no lawyer any more than taking the law into their own

hands. Their Kinsman, their Redeemer, is strong; He will plead their cause against the rogue, high or low.

Again, if instruction can be had, it needs application, and the application of the heart, without which the head avails not. When right affection guides and governs, the ears profit by the words of knowledge, instead of knowledge puffing up.

Then comes the serious question of training, and not merely teaching the young; and the word is, “Withhold not correction from the child.” But if he needs chastening for moral delinquency, there must be self-restraint as well as holy resoluteness. He is not to be beaten with a scourge to his great pain or injury, but “with the rod.” So beaten, “he shall not die,” but live the better. On the other hand, the parent must not shirk pain to natural feeling — “thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell.” Let the father fear the end of laxity, and look for blessing on a godly beginning.

Hear the touching encouragement, if the child bow dutifully. “My son, if thy heart be wise, my heart shall rejoice, even mine; and my reins shall exult, when thy lips speak right things.” Thus the fruit of righteousness in peace is sown for those that make peace.

But let no saint’s heart envy sinners; whatever their appearance, they are set in slippery places, and cast down to destruction as in a moment. To be in the fear of Jehovah all the day is the true, safe, and happy place. “For surely there is a latter end,” and the saint’s “hope shall not be cut off.” “Cast not away therefore your confidence which hath great recompense of reward. For ye have need of endurance, that, having done the will of

God, ye may receive the promise. For yet a very little while he that cometh will come and will not tarry."

In Proverbs 23:19-28, the wise man begins with warning his son against association with the self-indulgent in drinking and eating. Next he commends heed to parents. Then he counsels to truth and understanding through it, with the joy it gives to the father and mother. Last, he warns against corruption as utterly ruinous on all sides.

"Thou, my son, hear and be wise, and direct thy heart in the way.

"Be not among wine-bibbers, among gluttonous eaters of flesh.

"For the drunkard and the glutton shall come to poverty, and drowsiness shall clothe with rags.

"Hearken unto thy father that begot thee, and despise not thy mother when she is old.

"Buy the truth, and sell [it] not — wisdom and instruction and understanding.

"The father of the righteous one shall greatly rejoice, and he that begetteth a wise [child] shall have joy of him.

"Let thy father and thy mother be glad, and let her that bore thee rejoice.

"My son give me thy heart, and let thine eyes observe my ways.

"For a whore [is] a deep ditch; and a strange woman [is] a narrow pit:

"She also lieth in wait as a robber, and increaseth the treacherous among men."

The first part consists of parental advice against social dangers (vv. 19-25). The second (26-28) rises to Jehovah who warns of a still deeper personal danger. All opens with an affectionate appeal of a general kind.

“Thou, my son, hear and be wise, and direct thy heart in the way.” Not talking but hearing is the path to wisdom, and the heart is as much concerned at least as the ears.

Love of company outside, and free from home proprieties, is no little snare. Hence it is said, “Be not among wine-bibbers, among gluttonous enters of flesh” — a temptation to the fast growth of youth, apt to be impatient of restraint, and full of impetuous energy.

Both eating and drinking expose to lack of moderation, especially if either become a habit. “For the drunkard and the glutton shall come to poverty, and drowsiness shall clothe with rags.” Shame and suffering must be the end of so unworthy a way; and where is the fear of Jehovah in it?

Hence the more earnest expostulation of verse 22, and from both sides. “Hearken to thy father that begot thee, and despise not thy mother when she is old.” How sad to fail in reverence to parents, and especially to the one who had the chief care and love unfailing when the child most needed both! Oh! the shame of despising one’s mother when she is old, and ought to have still more honour!

Then comes weighty counsel, and in particular at the start of public life. “Buy the truth, and sell it not, — wisdom, and instruction, and understanding.” No money, it is true, can buy the truth, but the heart’s desire and waiting on Him who gives freely and upbraids not. But there are many temptations to sell it for fleshly and

worldly attractions, from which He alone can preserve. We may observe how truth leads to and is shown in the practical shape of wisdom, instruction, and understanding.

How emphatic too is the effect on the father's heart when this is so! "The father of a righteous one shall greatly rejoice, and he that begetteth a wise one shall have joy over him."

This is repeated, and yet more, in verse 25: "Let thy father and thy mother be glad, and let her that bore thee rejoice." How happy too for the child!

But verse 26 brings in Jehovah, it would seem, who claims the heart unreservedly. "My son, give me thy heart, and let thine eyes observe (or, delight in) my ways." He, rather than the natural father, can speak thus without limit; and where the heart is thus given to Him, the eyes do verily delight in His ways; for they are goodness and mercy, truth and faithfulness.

On the other hand, the snare from a harlot is perilous indeed. Lost to shame, her intrigues are subtle and varied. She "is a deep ditch," as "a strange woman in a narrow pit," out of which extrication can only be through divine mercy and power.

The peril is further pointed out in verse 28. "She also lieth in wait as a robber, and increaseth the treacherous among men." It is not only that she has her insatiable ends, but that it leads on the other side to no end of wicked advantage and demoralization in every form.

Now follows (vv. 29-35) the picture of him who loves strong drink to the life, aye, and the death.

“Who hath (or, oh!) woe? Who hath (or, alas!) sorrow? Who hath contentions? Who hath complaining? Who hath wounds without cause? Who hath redness (or, darkness) of eyes?

“They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to try mixed wine.

“Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it sparkleth in the cup, when it goeth down smoothly.

“At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder.

“Thine eyes shall behold strange women, and thy heart shall utter froward things.

“Yea, thou shalt be as he that lieth down in the midst of the sea, and as he that lieth down on the top of a mast.

“They have smitten me [thou wilt say], I am not sore; they have beaten me, I felt not: when shall I awake? I will seek it yet again.”

As the chapter began with the evil of self-indulgence in eating, especially in a ruler’s house, so it ends with the still more evident danger of hard drinking, no matter where it may be. How graphic is the wise man’s sketch!

Of all the lusts of the flesh, none from first to last exposes so much to shame and grief as intoxication. Others may be fatally ruinous to oneself or to our partners, but this is more stupefying, insensate, and disposed alike to folly and violence. “Who hath woe? Who hath sorrow? Who hath contentions? Who hath complaining? Who hath wounds without cause? Who hath redness of eyes?” The question is readily answered: “They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek out (or, try) mixed wine.” For intemperance ever seeks

more and stronger incentives, till the thirst after them becomes overpowering.

No less wise is the advice given to nip the inclination in the bud. “Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it sparkleth (or, giveth its colour) in the cup, when it goeth down smoothly (or, moveth itself aright).” Resist the beginnings; be not caught by the attractive look. “Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away.” “The wine of violence” is not the only danger, but the bright and the agreeable also.

What is the end in this world, of which the preacher here warns? “At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder.” As this is true of all our own will, so it particularly is the effect of yielding to this debasing gratification. What bodily anguish it entails, what self-reproach for conscience!

The follies too, which are among its results, are so stupid as to expose the victims to derision, as well as to excited feelings and expressions alien to them at ordinary times. “Thine eyes shall behold strange women, and thy heart shall utter froward things” — conduct which they themselves deplore when sober, hardly believing that they can have committed themselves to such disgrace.

But this is not all. “Yea, thou shalt be as he that lieth down in the midst of the sea” — all sense of danger is gone in this temporary madness, only exceeded by an opposite peril, “and as he that lieth down on the top of a mast.”

The talk too is no less idiotic: “They have smitten me”; yet, “I am not sore”; “They have beaten me”, yet, “I felt not”; “When shall I awake?” they babble out, but even

so, they are not ashamed to say, “I will seek it yet again.”

Proverbs 24

The value of wisdom is the main topic in chapter 24:1-9; but here, not as we have already seen, in the fear of Jehovah, but as the strength of the faithful in the midst of evil men given to destruction and mischief. Why should any envy their lot or like their company?

“Be not thou envious of (or, against) evil men, neither desire to be with them; for their heart studieth destruction, and their lips talk of mischief.

“Through wisdom is a house built, and by understanding it is established; and by knowledge are the chambers filled with all precious and pleasant wealth.

“A wise man [is] in strength, and a man of knowledge increaseth strength. For with wise counsels thou shalt make thy war; and in the multitude of counsellors [is] safety (or, victory).

“Wisdom [is] too high for a fool: he will not open his mouth in a gate. He that deviseth to do evil shall be called a master of intrigues.

“The thought of foolishness [is] sin, and the scorner [is] an abomination to men.”

Men may be clever and interesting; but what of these qualities, if they are “evil”? They may flourish for a while; but they are enemies of God, and just objects of horror, but pity too, and no more to be envied in any respect than their company to be sought. Underneath wit on the surface is their study of destruction, so that their lips cannot conceal the mischief they talk.

It is wholly different with the wisdom that begins with fearing Jehovah, which instead of active mischief builds up a house for family use, and by understanding establishes it. And as He prospered the wise in their projects, so He gave knowledge to furnish richly and pleasantly. For this book contemplates His people on earth, not present suffering with Christ and glory on high. How different Christ's part here below, and the lot of His faithful ones!

A wise man is strong, we are told. It is moral strength, the reverse of Samson's physical strength with moral weakness and folly. Hence too a man of knowledge increaseth strength, instead of losing its advantage by heedlessness. As it is prospered in peace, so wise counsel is of the greatest weight in war (v. 6), where, as danger thickens, safety is in multitude of counsellors, not in self-confidence.

How well it is said that "wisdom is too high for a fool!" He is self- satisfied, knows not his emptiness, and asks not of God what he lacks. So far, he does well not to open his mouth where counsel is sought; for what could a fool say?

But there is a man more to be dreaded and avoided than the senseless — such as devises evil doings. Hence he earns the character of a master of intrigues. These men are truly mischievous.

To a godly soul another consideration arises still more serious: "the thought of foolishness is sin, and the scorner is an abomination to men." It is not only the carrying out of mischief, but the thought of foolishness is sin. How sad when the heart allows it, instead of fleeing at once to God against it! But the scorner is

odious above all, as one who is not only evil in mind and heart, but he takes pleasure in lowering and maligning the righteous.

Courage is tested in the day of trouble, which gives the occasion to show its worth. But it shines better in delivering those who are in it; and this with integrity before Him who sees, to whom each owes his preservation, and who takes account of man according to his work. He would have one to enjoy the good He gives, but consider wisdom and the issue. A wicked man is warned against lying in wait against the righteous man, who, if he fall, will surely rise, while his enemy stumbles into ruin. Nor does it become one to rejoice at the fall even of an adversary, lest Jehovah see it, and not for nothing.

“[If] thou losest courage in the day of trouble, thy strength [is] small.

“Deliver those taken forth to death, and withdraw not from them that stagger to slaughter.

“If thou sayest, Behold, we knew it not, will not he that weigheth the hearts consider it?

“And he that preserveth thy soul, he knoweth [it]; and he rendereth to man according to his work.

“Eat honey, my son, for [it is] good; and a honeycomb [is] sweet to thy taste.

“So consider wisdom for thy soul; if thou hast found [it], there shall be a result, and thine expectation shall not be cut off.

“Lay not wait, wicked [man], against the dwelling of the righteous; lay not waste his resting place.

“For a righteous man falleth seven times, and riseth up again; but the wicked stumble into disaster.

“Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth, and let not thy heart be glad when he stumbleth;

“Lest Jehovah see [it], and it be evil in his sight, and he turn away his anger from him.” vv. 10-18.

A day of trouble naturally alarms and bewilders one who has not faith and hope in God. Even the believer, distressed after the word of Christ emboldened him to join his Master on the sea, “when he saw the wind boisterous,” was afraid and began to sink. Had he looked off to Jesus, his strength had been great, for there only it lay. Little faith is little strength. Jesus is the same to us whatever the sea or the wind; and Peter apart from looking to Jesus would have sunk equally on the smoothest sea without a puff of wind.

To use strength for ourselves has no worth; but to deliver those who are in peril of death unjustly, from whatever source, public or private, becomes a righteous soul. It is a duty independent of either friendship or neighbourly claim. The Samaritan was the Lord’s answer to the lawyer’s question, Who is my neighbour? Without the least thought of justifying himself, he becomes neighbour to the sufferer who needed his help.

In vain did the priest and the Levite say of the man lying half dead on the opposite side of the road, We knew it not: Jehovah considered it.

The conviction that He preserves one’s soul brings His knowledge of all before the heart, as we may believe it moved the Samaritan to mercy, besides the certainty that He renders to man according to his work.

Honey is a good thing naturally where God made all things good, nor did He begrudge the honeycomb sweet to the taste in a land flowing with milk and honey. He had pleasure in providing good things freely for man, though He knew man would abuse them all.

But what is wisdom to thy soul? The communications of Jehovah are sweeter still, says Psalm 19. If thou hast so found it, “there shall be a result, and thine expectation shall not be cut off.” He that does the will of God abides forever.

The next is a warning to a wicked man to beware of craft or violence against the house of the righteous. Does not Jehovah see?

It is true that the righteous may fall ever so often — “seven times” — yet he riseth again; as the wicked do not stumble into disaster. Look on the one hand at David; at Shimei, Ahithophel, Absalom, and Joab on the other.

How selfish and base to rejoice in the fall of an enemy! It may please the subtle enemy and the flesh too; but let not your heart be glad that he stumbles, else Jehovah will surely see and be displeased, and turn away His anger from him. And to whom? Let your conscience answer.

In order to walk righteously before Jehovah, both faith and hope are very requisite. Present results are no real standard of judgment, and too apt to do harm to our spirits as well as to deceive others. And what does He see fitting?

“Fret not thyself because of evil-doers, be not envious of the wicked;

“For there shall be no future (or, reward) to the evil [man]; the lamp of the wicked shall be put out.

“My son, fear Jehovah and the king; meddle not with those that are given to change;

“For their calamity shall rise suddenly; and who knoweth the destruction of them both (or, of their years)?

“These [things] also [are] of the wise.

“To have respect of persons in judgment is not good.

“He that saith to the wicked, Thou [art] righteous, peoples shall curse him, nations shall abhor him;

“But to those that rebuke [him] shall be delight, and a good blessing cometh upon them.

“He kisseth the lips who giveth a right answer.” vv. 19-26.

It is a great thing for a believer to occupy himself and his lips with the good, especially now that God has revealed Himself in the Son incarnate, that he may not be overcome of evil, but overcome it with good. The Jew was expressly separated from the Gentile, devoted as he was to his gods that were in no sense God. But the Christian who is surrounded by evil men and impostors is called to bear witness to Him who came in grace and truth, a divine Person as truly as He was manifested in flesh, and this that his soul might receive of His fullness. He is thus enabled to pity and seek the blessing of the wicked instead of envying them.

The awful end of rejecting the Saviour to his own ruin is present to one’s own spirit, humbled by the known grace

of God who will send the Lord Jesus shortly to execute a judgment which will extinguish the lamp of the wicked.

Therefore all the more does the believer fear God and the king in the form of honouring him who is His representative in earthly things, and to be obeyed in all things save to the dishonour of God and His Word. Even then he is to suffer the consequences, never to resist or rebel like those given to meddling and change. For even here their calamity rises suddenly when they least expect it; and who knows the ruin that impends till it falls far and wide? “Fear God, honour the king,” says 1 Peter 2:17.

In a sort of appendix that follows the opening maxim is the value and duty of impartiality in judgment, which with respect of persons is but a mockery. But this undue favour assumes its worst form when the wicked person is complimented as righteous. Such a reversal of equity provokes whole peoples to curse the perpetrator, and draws out the abhorrence of the nations in hasty likes and dislikes.

Honest rebuke of the wicked, or of any unprincipled favour shown them, as the rule, wins delight and the cordial desire for a blessing upon such. It draws out the strongest mark, not only of respect but affection, when a right answer is given, whereas self curries favour by compromise.

Verses 27-34 counsel practical wisdom in postponing one’s comforts to the providing things honest outwardly, forbid unkindness and deceit in testimony, and denounce paying off old scores of ill feeling, as they portray graphically the issue of the slothful at the close.

“Prepare thy work without, and make it ready for thee in the field, and afterwards build thy house.

“Be not a witness against thy neighbour without cause, neither deceive with thy lips.

“Say not, I will do so to him as he hath done to me; I will render to the man according to his work.

“I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding; and, behold, it was all grown over with thorns: nettles had covered its face, and the stone wall thereof was broken down.

“Then I beheld with set heart; I saw [and] received instruction.

“A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep;

“So shall thy poverty come, [as] a robber; and thy want as a man in armour.”

Consideration of others and personal honesty are entitled to have a place superior to providing personal or family comfort.

How often too the question of a neighbour comes up, and the danger of a prejudice! But the word is distinct: “be not a witness against thy neighbour without cause.” Things might not be as one would desire, but “deceive not with thy lips.” As the Lord put it, “All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them; for this is the law and the prophets.” He makes it positive duty, even if the neighbour failed on his side.

Still less should a righteous person venture on retribution. Who is he to assume God’s place, and say, I

will do to him as he has done to me? How awful if He only rendered to us what we deserved!

The slothful man is an object of pity as well as censure. He might be estimable this way or that, but his field and his vineyard proclaim the fault, and presage his ruin. Thorns and nettles hold the field where the good grain should wave; and the wall is so broken down as to invite injurious man and beast. Is it not an objective lesson to him that beholds all with the least attention? Certainly it is no example, but a serious warning. The outward discloses the inward. The heedless man lives to sleep his life away: “a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep.” He may be innocent of strong drink, or of sensual pleasure, or of wasteful company. His laziness ensures his ruin. “So shall thy poverty come as a robber and thy want as a man in armour.”

The true remedy is not industry for self, or activity in the world and the things of the world, but Christ the life eternal and sole propitiation for our sins to God’s glory, the Lord of all, saints or sinners, the fullness of blessing and pattern of service.

Proverbs 25

Avowedly here (chap. 25:1-7) is a supplement of “proverbs of Solomon” not contained in the preceding collection. What is there in this to demur to? Those we have had abide in their excellence. If more be added of no less divine excellence, why be ungrateful to God? Is our eye evil because He is good? Let us not be faithless, but believing.

“There also [are] proverbs of Solomon which the men of Hezekiah king of Judah copied out.

“[It is] the glory of God to conceal a thing; but the glory of kings [is] to search out a matter.

“The heaven for height, and the earth for depth, and the heart of kings [is] unsearchable.

“Take away dross from the silver, and there cometh forth a vessel for the finer.

“Take away the wicked [from] before the king, and his throne shall be established in righteousness.

“Put not thyself forward in the presence of the king, and stand not in the place of great [men].

“For better [is it] that it be said to thee, Come up hither, than that thou shouldest be put lower in the presence of the prince whom thine eyes have seen.”

What an illustration of God’s glory in concealing is that which the Apostle Paul has unveiled at last by the Spirit when the fit moment arrived for its revelation! A great mystery, truly, for it concerned Christ, and with Him the Church as His body. It was hid in God from the ages and generations when God was dealing first with individuals, then with His ancient people, while the great experiment was made in every way whether man by himself could be- brought to God or worthily represent Him. The end of such dispensations was the rejection of Christ on the cross, which His grace made the ground of salvation by the gospel. Nor this only, but setting the risen and glorified Christ in the new and unparalleled glory of Head over all things heavenly and earthly, and uniting with Him those who now believe, in the closest union of His body, would show His love in the Father’s house, and His glory at His appearing. It is a most wonderful proof that it is His glory to conceal a thing;

but the principle applies widely, that we may be exercised in all dependence on what He alone can impart in His ways with us.

With kings it is the other side of sifting out, on behalf of their subjects, good or evil to reward or punish it. They are ordained by God and alike are the fountain of earthly honour, and bear the sword not in vain to punish evildoers. Hence the need of searching out a matter.

No sovereign better than Solomon exemplifies that the heart of kings is unsearchable. See his decision of the dispute between the mothers, whose was the dead child, and whose the living one. Was there one soul that penetrated his heart when he asked for a sword and said, Divide the living child in two, and give half to the one and half to the other? The false mother was as willing as the true was not, but who could have anticipated it but the king? What sounded cruel, turned out wise and kind. “The heaven for height and the earth for depth, and the heart of kings is unsearchable.”

All the more important, if there be precious metal, that the base alloy be taken away. Then only comes forth a thing of beauty and for use.

So is it that the wicked should not enjoy court favours. Righteous repudiation of evil ones establishes a throne in men’s consciences.

But there is another moral element of great moment there and everywhere else — not self-seeking, but a truly humble mind. As our Lord said, If it were but about a place at a feast, go and take the last, that when the host comes he may say, Friend, go up higher. So here, “Put not thyself forward in the presence of the king nor in the place of great [men].” What a reproof of vanity to

be thrust lower, and in the prince's presence too! Let us not forget Him who lived what He said, and said for our edification, "everyone that exalteth himself shall be abased, and he that abaseth himself shall be exalted."

Nor is it only the self-conceit which pushes forward among the great that is reproved, lest a greater humiliation befall one. A contentious spirit is also to be shunned.

"Go not forth hastily to strive, lest [thou know not] what to do in the end thereof, when thy neighbour hath put thee to shame.

"Debate thy cause with thy neighbour, but reveal not the secret of another;

"Lest he that heareth disgrace thee, and thine ill report turn not away.

"Apples of gold in baskets (or, pictures) of silver [is] a word spoken in season (or, fitly).

"An earring of gold and an ornament of fine gold [is] a wise reprover on an attentive ear.

"As the cold of snow in the time of harvest [is] a faithful messenger to those that send him; for he refresheth the soul of his masters.

"Clouds and wind without rain is whoso boasteth of a false gift." vv. 8-14.

Haste exposes to all sorts of mistakes, especially when it takes the form of strife with another, who can soon convict of error where it was least suspected, to the shame of the too confident censor, when he looks in vain for a retreat and hiding place.

One may discuss with a neighbour what concerns us deeply, but must beware of betraying what is somehow learned to his injury.

Otherwise its disclosure will disgrace him that spreads it, so that the ill effect will long abide.

On the other hand, a word spoken to the point, or in season, is here compared to apples of gold in baskets of silver — fruit of divine righteousness served up with befitting grace.

Nor is it so with so blessed a display of what is precious; for a wise reprover on an attentive ear is a prized object and an ornament of great value.

Again, a faithful messenger in a world of unfaithfulness is an exceeding comfort to those that send him, here compared to the cold of snow in the time of harvest. He does indeed refresh the soul of his masters.

Whereas he who boasts of a false gift, or falsely giving, convicts himself as a sham, like clouds and wind without rain.

These painful, mischievous, and disappointing qualities are among the still more numerous evil ways of the first man. Whatever the good things set in contrast, they are seen in full perfection in the Lord Jesus, the second Man. And they are the exercises and manifestations of the new life in the believer, which our Father would have us diligently to cultivate.

In verses 15-20 we are reminded of the great profit in a patient spirit and a gentle tongue, even with men of high authority.

“By long forbearing is a ruler persuaded, and a soft tongue breaketh the bone.

“Hast thou found honey? Eat so much as is sufficient for thee, lest thou be surfeited therewith, and vomit it.

“Let thy foot be seldom in thy neighbour’s house, lest he be full of thee and hate thee.

“A man that beareth false witness against his neighbour [is] a maul, and a sword, and a sharp arrow.

“Confidence in an unfaithful man in time of trouble is a broken tooth and a foot out of joint.

“One that taketh off a garment in cold weather, vinegar on nitre, so is he that singeth songs to a sad heart.”

That a ruler should be hard to move from his resolve, one easily understands. Yet by long forbearing he is persuaded, where opposition would only fix his will. More generally still a soft tongue breaks the bone. Though proverbially, as men say, Hard words break no bone, gentle ones bend and break the strongest.

Sweetness is not all; one may have too much of it. A little honey is excellent; but if you have found it, eat enough and no more, lest you prove it an untoward feast, and sickness ensues, disagreeable to others no less than to yourself. But honey, or natural sweetness, must not enter an offering to the Lord. In divine things, seasoning with salt is essential, not sweetening to suit the natural palate.

Neighbourly kindness becomes us, and promotes good will. But here again danger lurks, if one overdo. It is apt to degenerate into a thoughtless or a meddlesome habit; and instead of love, hatred ensues. We must not give occasion, especially to those that seek it.

But false witness against a neighbour is quite another thing, and extremely heinous. He that bears it is here

said to be mischievous in ever so many different ways — a maul to crush, a sword to pierce when the object is at hand, and an arrow to wound at a distance.

Confidence in an unfaithful man is a fault altogether opposed, especially if it be in time of trouble, when you reckon on the support you had vainly expected. It fails your spirit as a broken tooth does the mouth, or a foot out of joint the body.

Then, again, what is it to remove a wrap in cold weather? Does it not aggravate the chill? as vinegar acts on nitre, not to soothe but to irritate. So are both like him “that singeth songs to a sad heart.” Prayer is seasonable for the afflicted, sympathy is suited; but singing songs is for the merry, not the sad. Mirth and its outflow must jar, as being wholly incongruous.

In verses 21-28, is a miscellaneous group of weighty counsel or observation.

“If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink;

“For thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head; and Jehovah shall reward thee.

“The north wind bringeth forth rain; and an angry countenance a secret (or, backbiting) tongue.

“Better to dwell in a corner of the housetop, than with a contentious woman and a house in common.

“Cold waters to a thirsty soul — so good news from a far country.

“A troubled fountain and a defiled well [is] a righteous one that tottereth before the wicked.

“To eat much honey [is] not good; and to search weighty things [is] a weight.

“He that [hath] no rule over his own spirit [is] a city broken down, without wall.”

The first of these maxims must have startled an Israelite ordinarily; it rises above nature and law which deals with the evil feeling and ways as they deserve. Here it is “the kindness of God,” and His call to act on a goodness which is seen in Him and can only flow from Him. We see it literally acted and on a large scale when divine power drew a Syrian host, sent to apprehend Elisha, blindfolded into the capital city of Israel, and the king asked the prophet, Shall I smite? shall I smite? But the mouthpiece of God said, No; “set bread and water before them, that they may eat and drink and go to their master.” No wonder that the bands of Syria came no more into the land of Israel. What was strange then, and always must have been to man’s mind, is now so congenial to the Christian that the Apostle was led to cite the words as a rule for any and every day. “Therefore, if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink; for in so doing, thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head.” Rom. 12:20. It was God in Christ, it is God in the Christian. Is it obsolete in Christendom? May it not be in Christians? It is too precious to lose.

Verse 23 has elicited very different senses from translators, as we may see in the text and the margin of the A.V. Even here the converse of the last clause seems preferable — that as the north wind brings forth rain, so an angry countenance provokes a secret or backbiting tongue. If this be right, it is a call to gentleness even in

the look, and a warning of the consequence of failure in that respect.

The next verse expresses the wretchedness of having to share a house with a contentious woman, which made a corner of the housetop an agreeable escape from such a din.

On the other hand, good news from a far country is no less refreshing than cold waters to a thirsty soul. One looks for pleasant sounds at home, instead of noisy strife or murmurs. But if one receives good news from a far land, it is all the sweeter.

There is a report or a fact, however, that is calculated to give pain and to stumble — when a righteous one totters before the wicked. Thence one hoped for a fountain springing up, and a clear river flowing out perhaps. How sad that one can find only a troubled fountain, and a defiled well!

To eat too freely of what is sweet to the palate is not good, as we may have proved to our cost through lack of subjection to the Word; but there is the opposite danger of excessive search after weighty things, which is a weight instead of a pleasure or profit. The Hebrew word translated glory, as is well known, means also weight. As the retention of the sense “glory” does not yield any result of a satisfactory nature, and requires even a negative strangely forced to give any good meaning, the other rendering is here adopted which seems to supply easily what seemingly is wanted.

There remains the last warning of wisdom, to beware of an ungoverned spirit. He that has no control over his own spirit exposes himself to all sorts of surprise,

inroad, and ruin. Is he not like a city broken down and without a wall?

Proverbs 26

“The fool” has an unenviably large place in the first part of this chapter; that such as are not unwise may take warning, steer clear of thoughtlessness, and know how to act toward such a one.

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

“As the sparrow in wandering, as the swallow in flying, so a curse causeless cometh not.

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

“Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest thou also be like him.

“Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes.

“He that sendeth a message by the hand of a fool cutteth off [his own] feet [and] drinketh damage.

“The legs of the lame hang loose: so [is] a proverb in the mouth of fools.” vv. 1-7.

There is an evil that I have seen under the sun, says the royal preacher (Eccles. 10:6, 7), as an error that proceedeth from a ruler; folly is set in great dignities, but the rich sit in a low place. I have seen bondmen upon horses, and princes walking as bondmen upon the earth. But both sights are unseemly, as anomalous as snow in summer or rain in harvest.

Next, the figure is taken from the restless change of the sparrow, and the seemingly aimless flights of the swallow, to express the emptiness of the folly that indulges in undeserved curse.

Again, the horse and the ass which need the whip and the bridle are taken to show that a rod is no less requisite to chastise fools if nothing less can restrain them.

But verses 4 and 5 are strikingly instructive save for those who know not to look for a guidance which is. above appearances, and guides according to the realities in eyes that see where man cannot. To man's mind it is a contradiction; and no wonder, for he eschews a divine Master, who owns one that may be called to act rightly but provides a standard like Himself, and deals with the senseless in apparent inconsistency. In one case he leaves folly without notice, as it deserves; in another he exposes it, if he may convince even a foal of his folly, or caution another too easily imposed on, a thing not uncommon in this world.

Even to send a message through a foolish person is to incur such certainty of error that it is nothing short of cutting off one's own feet, which had better have undertaken the trouble — and well if it be not also to drink damage. It risks harm as well as total failure.

A parable is a wise saying, but it demands wisdom in its application. In the mouth of a fool, it is as incongruous as a cripple's legs which hang about or do not match.

Admonition is continued, how to deal with the senseless; and it is the more needed as such men abound, and wisdom from above is requisite to deal with them for good. Nor are sluggards left unnoticed.

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

“A thorn that goeth up into the hand of a drunkard, so is a proverb in the mouth of fools.

“An archer that woundeth all, so is he that hireth the fool, and he that hireth them that pass by.3 “As a dog that returneth to his vomit, a fool returneth to his folly.

“Hast thou seen a man wise in his own eyes? More hope of a fool than of him.

“The sluggard saith, A lion in the way; a lion in the streets!

“The door turneth on its hinges, so the sluggard on his bed.

“The sluggard burieth his hand in [a] dish; it wearieth him to bring it again to his mouth.

“The sluggard [is] wiser in his own eyes than seven that answer discreetly.” vv. 8-16.

As one devoid of sense is unfit for trust and incapable, so is he unworthy of honour, and as much out of place as a bag of gems in a heap of stones — or, as the A.V. renders it, a stone bound up in a sling, a danger to those at hand.

Again, a pointedly wise saying, a proverb in the mouth of the senseless, is as a thorn going up into a drunkard’s hand. Instead of instructing others, it torments himself to no profit.

So also he that hires the fool or untried casual, is as an archer that wounds everyone, instead of hitting the mark. He is a source of hurt and danger to all.

Nor is there any hope of better things, unless the fool repent and learn wisdom from above. Left to himself, he is as a dog that returns to his vomit, so he to his folly.

The wise are lowly and dependent on the only wise God. The foolish man is wise in his own eyes; he who only adds conceit to folly is the most hopeless of men.

But slothfulness is an evil to be dreaded, even if a man be far from a fool. And it is no uncommon thing for one in other respects wise to be apprehending a peril where there is none. It is because he is a sluggard, and because he shirks a duty to be done; he sees imminent danger, and cries, A lion in the way! a lion in the streets!

And what more graphic of the sluggard on his bed of ease than the door turning on his hinges! The believer has his new nature of Him, apart from whom no sparrow falls, and who counts the very hairs of his own head. The sluggard yields to the nothingarianism of self-pleasing in its lowest form.

Another vivid likeness is of the sluggard when he rises to take his meals. In his listlessness he buries his hand, not in his bosom but in a dish; and he is weary of so much as lifting it to his mouth. From such a one, who could look for gratitude to God or kindness to a suffering fellow man?

And the sluggard, like the fool, does not fail to be wise in his own eyes, yea, to count himself wiser than seven men that answer with discretion. He is so satisfied with himself that he avoids any diligence to learn, which is all well for men, but needless for him! He is a genius, and can afford to take his unfailing siesta. So it is that self-conceit flatters those who dislike work and are ambitious of a position only due to those who do not

shirk labour, which is a wholesome discipline for man as he is; but it generally ends in their own ruin and the trial of those related to them.

Sluggishness is not the only fault to be shunned. There may be activity to dread of a still more mischievous sort, and it is graphically set out in verses 17-22. We have to beware of being meddlesome, or in sympathy with such ways.

“He that passingly vexes himself with strife not [belonging] to him is one that taketh a dog by the ears.

“As a madman who casteth firebrands, arrows and death;

“So the man [that] deceiveth his neighbour and saith, Am I not in sport?

“Where no wood is, the fire goeth out, and where no whisperer, the strife ceaseth.

“[As] coals to hot embers, and wood to fire, so a contentious man to kindle strife.

“A whisperer’s words [are] as dainty morsels, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly.”

The New Testament reveals Christ for the lost soul’s salvation by faith, for the heavenly privileges of the Christian and for the communion with God and His Son that we are called to, as well as the walk on earth befitting those who are so blessed. But there is the utmost care to urge vigilance against busybodiness, that working quietly we may eat our own bread. and be diligent too so as to help others also. But to trouble ourselves with other people’s quarrels where no duty of ours lies, is like taking a dog by the ears, which either

threatens a bite when he is loosed, or keeps us indefinitely to avoid it. And who is to blame?

Such uncalled-for activity grows the more it is indulged in, and is likely to end in playing the madman casting combustibles and causes of wound and even death, while he deceives his neighbour by the pretence that he meant no more than jest.

But there is a very insidious form of evil, and if possible more mischievous still, where the harm is done slyly by evilly affecting others. What worse than the whisperer or talebearer here compared to the wood that acts as fuel to the fire? So we are told, where no wood is, the fire goes out; and where is no whisperer, strife ceaseth.

On the other hand, coals to hot embers, and wood to fire, is a contentious man to inflame strife. How often have we not known it to our pain! Happy is he who hates it so as to shun its beginning by dwelling in love!

For such is the flesh even in believers, as to make the whisperer's insinuations too easy and welcome; and once received, instead of being rejected, they go down and take possession of our souls to the innermost. It is a grievous danger when the guard sleeps at wisdom's gate; and our very simplicity exposes us to be misled cruelly.

To the end of the chapter are denunciations of like mischief under the guise of fair speech and flattery. It is deceit in various forms, against which we are energetically put on our guard — a needful caution in this evil age, especially for the Christian who walks in grace and refuses to avenge himself "Ardent lips, and a wicked heart fare] an earthen vessel overlaid with silver dross.

“He that hateth dissembleth with his lips, but he layeth up deceit within him:

“When his voice is gracious, believe him not, for [there are] seven abominations in his heart.

“Though hatred is covered by dissimulation, his wickedness shall be made manifest in the congregation.

“Whoso diggeth a pit shall fall therein; and he that rolleth a stone, it shall return upon him.

“A lying tongue hateth the injured by it, and a flattering mouth worketh ruin.” vv. 23-28.

There is no real difficulty, no sufficient reason to doubt the force of the opening words of verse 23. They do not in the least imply in this connection the heat of wrath, which might well go with “a wicked heart” ordinarily; but here is meant the extraordinary combination of expressing ardent affection with the desire to do evil. This, not that, is fitly compared to an earthen vessel overlaid not with silver, but its “dross.”

So the hatred (v. 24) which is eminently dangerous is not what explodes in violent words, but would work out unawares, and therefore dissembles with the lips. The benevolent words only conceal the deceit within the man.

Therefore (v. 25), when such a one’s voice is gracious, there is the strongest reason not to believe; for there is no sure faith, save in a testimony altogether reliable. Hence the blessedness to a Christian, that his faith and hope too are in the God who cannot lie, who has spoken to us in His Son, come in love as sure as the truth. But as to fallen man, how different! “for there are seven abominations in his heart.” It is filled with every evil of

corruption no less than violence, as the Saviour testified. Jehovah did not fail to make hidden evil manifest in the most public way.

“Dissimulations” (v. 26) may succeed among men for a season; but even before the kingdom of God appears in displayed power. He knows how to check Satan and expose malicious craft during the evil day. Thus from time to time is the covering stripped from hatred, and “wickedness made manifest in the congregation.”

Again, when mischievous man (v. 27) digs a pit for others, therein he is caused to fall; and where he rolls a stone for the head of his neighbour, it recoils on himself. Even the heathen expressed their sense of such retribution here below, though they knew not God.

The last verse tells us of the extreme wickedness of fallen man, that is not content with deceiving; “a lying tongue hateth those injured by it”; and “a flattering mouth worketh ruin” for subject as well as object. “Let the righteous smite me, it is a kindness; and let him reprove me, it is an excellent oil which my head shall not refuse.” This is to humble oneself under God’s mighty hand and be exalted in due time.

Proverbs 27

The group of counsels before us in chapter 27:1-6 is levelled at self-confidence, which takes the place of dependence on God, the first principle of the life of faith which the enemy seeks to annul, whether for earth, in Messiah’s kingdom by-and-by, or for heaven as with Christians. Yet we need also to be on guard against folly and ill feeling, and to welcome the plain truth as real kindness.

“Boast not thyself of tomorrow, for thou knewest not what a day may bring forth.

“Let another praise thee and not thine own mouth, a stranger and not thine own lips.

“A stone [is] heavy and the sand weighty; but a fool’s vexation [is] heavier than them both.

“Wrath [is] cruel, and anger outrageous; but who [is] able to stand before jealousy?

“Open rebuke [is] better than hidden love.

“Faithful [are] a friend’s wounds; but an enemy’s kisses are profuse.” vv. 1-6.

Very vivid is the word in James 4:13-16 in its appeal to beware of similar boasting. “Go to now ye that say, To-day and to-morrow we will go into this city and spend a year there, and trade and make gain, yet that know not what [shall be] on the morrow. What [is] your life? For ye are a vapour, appearing for a little while, and then vanishing away; instead of your saying, If the Lord will, and we live, we shall also do this or that. But now ye glory in your boastings: all such glorying is evil.” In these moral matters both the Old Testament and the New bring in the Lord to judge and displace self.

Then again the Old Testament saint knew quite enough of his failure and of his need of sovereign grace to banish high thoughts of himself, and to attribute every right word to God. How inconsistent to sound his own praise! how becoming to be silent as to any good on his part. If a stranger praised him, it was more than he deserved. Here too the New Testament reveals the truth more deeply in Christ for lowliness of mind, esteeming

one another as more excellent than ourselves, not as a sentiment but as a living truth of faith.

There is however the other side to try our hearts. We can not, ought not regard “a fool’s vexation” with complacency, but feel its grievous impropriety. “A stone is heavy, and the sand weighty,” little as its particles be. But that, groundless as it is, exceeds both in its dead weight and intolerable unbecomingness.

Nor has one to face before God such frivolous complaints only, but also the cruelty of wrath and the outrageousness of anger; for surely the sun ought not to set on either outburst or reserve in this way. But there is another evil feeling still more unworthy and dangerous: “Who is able to stand before jealousy?” Let us look up for grace to value anything good in another, and the more if conscious that we claim not that particular good ourselves. To allow jealousy in ourselves, or to let others insinuate it, is to give room to the great enemy.

It is the property of real love, to prove its activity; if it abide hidden when called to speak or work according to the heart, it betrays self rather than true affection. Even if there is a faultiness, love is bound to give “open rebuke.” Indifference passes for much in this world, but it is the reverse of love, and cares for self, when it hides to spare danger and yet pretends affection.

A friend’s wounds, on the contrary, are faithful, for God’s will is thus done, even though misunderstood and resented for a while. An enemy betrays himself by the very profuseness of his kisses. God is not in such a display, but too often no more than partisanship in a human cause.

The group before us in verses 7-13 pursues the warning against dangers from our own selves, as well as from without.

“The full soul trampleth on (or, loatheth) a honeycomb; but to the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet.

“As a bird that wandereth from her nest, so [is] a man that wandereth from his place.

“Ointment and perfume rejoice the heart; so the sweetness of a man’s friend from hearty counsel.

“Thine own friend, and thy father’s friend, forsake not; and go not to thy brother’s house in the day of thy calamity: better [is] a neighbour near than a brother far off.

“My son, be wise, and make my heart glad, that I may answer him that reproacheth me.

“A prudent [man] seeth the evil [and] hideth himself; the simple pass on [and] suffer for it.

“Take his garment that is surety for a stranger, and hold him in pledge [that is surety] for a strange woman.”

Whatever be the means of one who fears God, self-indulgence is unworthy of one who now lives in a scene where we have the poor always with us, and many and sudden reverses to call forth special compassion. What a lesson for the Christian when on the two occasions the Lord fed the multitude miraculously, it was on barley loaves and small fishes. How far from show or appetizing! And the prayer taught the disciples to ask for “sufficient bread.” The full soul is unworthy of His name, and the honeycomb he loathes convicts him of following the Lord of glory afar off. It is happy when one

is hungry enough to relish every bitter thing put before us by our God and Father.

When God pronounced Cain a fugitive and a vagabond because he slew his righteous and accepted brother, well for him to have heeded the word of the Lord, but there is no such call for one ordinarily. The family is the place appointed as the rule in the world as it is. Even the bird owns the attraction of her nest. Wandering from either is a picture of wretchedness.

God has constituted the earth and man, that the very desert does not refuse to produce unguent and perfume, which singularly refresh the heart when depressed, not merely there but in lands where abundance reigns. But no less sweet-is the hearty counsel from one's friend.

Yet more should one make of one's own friend, of one's father's friend also, in a world of forgetfulness. Nevertheless, in the day of one's calamity, it is unwise to rush for sympathy, even to one's brother. A neighbour near one is apt to prove better than a brother afar off. Claim irritates; love is free and holy.

When a son walks wisely, what joy to a parent's heart! It is the best answer to the reproach which watchfulness must expect from such as are lax.

Prudence sees evil beforehand and hides from it; the simple is blind, goes forward and suffers.

None should become surety unless he be prepared to lose; and this, true in case of a man, is still more dangerous for a strange woman.

(Concluded)

1 I put Socrates at his best, without dwelling on his last words to his friends, "Crito, we owe a cock to

Aesculapius; pay it, therefore, and do not neglect it." And this was the end of the best wisest. and most just of all men known to Plato.

2 "He that disparageth anything bindeth himself for the future but he that feareth the commandment shall dwell in peace. Deceitful souls go astray in sins: the just are merciful, and show mercy."

3 This verse is by others rendered, "A master roughly worketh every one; he both hireth the fool and hireth passers-by." Nor are these the only varieties.